Chapter 1

Defining Participatory Culture

Introduction by Henry Jenkins

More and more organizations, institutions, and businesses have embraced a rhetoric of participation, yet it is abundantly clear that not all forms of participation are equally meaningful or empowering. Many of the core debates of our time center around the terms of our participation: whether meaningful participation can occur under corporately controlled circumstances, when our ability to create and share content is divorced from our capacity to participate in the governance of the platforms through which that content circulates. Does participation become exploitation when it takes place on commercial platforms where others are making money off our participation and where we often do not even own the culture we are producing?

I first used the phrase "participatory culture" in *Textual Poachers* (Jenkins 1992), when I was contrasting participation with spectatorship; I was really only making descriptive claims about the cultural logic of fandom. *Poachers* described fans (in this case, mostly female fans of science fiction and other genre television programs) not simply as consumers of mass-produced content but also as a creative community that took its raw materials from commercial entertainment texts and appropriated and remixed them as the basis for their own creative culture. My book showcased the relationship between fans, texts, and producers but also the social relations that emerged within fandom as fans created a shared space where their own creative and critical

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interventions could be appropriately valued. This account of fan culture drew heavily on my own experiences of almost twenty years, at that point, of involvement in fan communities.

My ideas about culture come from Raymond Williams (1958), who defines culture as "ordinary," the "sum total of human experience," as everything that we as humans create or do together, from the most mundane aspects of our everyday lives to the most cherished expression of our artistic accomplishments or sacred beliefs. So, for me, a participatory culture describes what are sometimes very ordinary aspects of our lives in the digital age. A participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other – one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices.

My initial use of "participatory culture" to refer to fandom (Jenkins 1992) relied on a not fully conscious blurring between forms of cultural production and forms of social exchange; fans understood fandom to be an informal "community" defined around notions of equality, reciprocity, sociality, and diversity. The fans had a clear and (largely) shared understanding of what they were participating in and how their production and circulation of media content contributed to their shared well-being. And there was a clear tension between their culture and that of the commercial industries from which they took their raw materials. In this context, there are strong links between interpretation, production, curation, and circulation as potentially meaningful forms of participation.

The world I described in *Textual Poachers* was undergoing transition, as a community based on photocopiers, the postal service, and face-to-face encounters was giving way to electronically networked communications. At the same time, I was undergoing my own transition, starting work at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 1989 during the first phases of the digital revolution. My work on fandom came out, for example, alongside Howard Rheingold's early

writings about virtual communities (Rheingold 1993). At MIT, I had
a ringside seat for debates about the role of new media in education,
the promises of digital democracy, and the creative potentials of
hypertext and interactive games. More and more people were using
the concept of participatory culture to describe the new forms of
cultural production and media-sharing that were taking shape in the
early days of the internet. Much of what I was seeing in the emerging
cyberculture reminded me of my own experiences in fandom. Critics
of *Convergence Culture* (2006) have argued that I saw the new media
landscape as fandom writ large, and I suspect this is a more or less fair
criticism of where I was at when I wrote the book. I was not wrong to
see fandom as one important element shaping contemporary partici-
patory culture. Fans were often early adopters of new media platforms
and practices and experimenters with modes of media-making. They
were historically among the first to interact within geographically dis-
persed communities of interest. But they were simply one among many
different kinds of communities that had been struggling throughout
the twentieth century to gain greater access to the means of cultural
production and circulation.

By the time I became involved in the MacArthur Digital Media and
Learning initiative in 2005, my thinking about participatory culture
operated on a much different scope and scale. I saw us entering an era
when the public, at least in the developed world, would have access
to much greater communicative capacity than ever before, where a
growing number of institutions were embracing more participatory
practices, and where the skills and knowledge to participate meaning-
fully were unevenly distributed. I examined a range of different sites of
participatory culture in order to identify the ways they were supporting
peer-to-peer mentorship and were encouraging and scaffolding par-
ticipants as they refined their skills and developed greater confidence
in their own voices. The white paper *Confronting the Challenges of
a Participatory Culture* (Jenkins et al. 2007), written for MacArthur,
was addressed to educators and adopted a definition of participatory
culture that places a strong emphasis on its pedagogical potentials:

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A participatory culture is a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

Embracing Participatory Culture

Mimi: I was very influenced by Henry's work on fandom and his early writing on gaming when I was doing my dissertation work on children's software. It empowered me to pursue work on the participatory dimensions of media culture at a time when digital and online media were still emergent and not the focus of much scholarly attention. Back then, I wouldn't have positioned Henry as a researcher in my field of learning sciences, but I already saw the relevance. I was thrilled when he started doing more and more work that was explicitly educational, looking to participatory culture for a set of positive values for learning and literacy. It was probably overdetermined by our backgrounds and interests, but Henry, Howard Rheingold, and I found ourselves seeing similar kinds of opportunities for participation and learning emerging from new digital and networked media. Where Henry focused on fans, I've tended to focus on geeks, but it feels part of a similar family and a shared tendency to celebrate certain kinds of activated media engagements.

Unlike Henry, however, I came at these issues through the learning sciences, not media studies. As a graduate student at Stanford, I worked out of the Institute for Research on Learning (IRL), where Lave and Wenger (1991) had written their *Situated Learning* book together. IRL was a research institute that focused on social and cultural studies of learning. Unlike traditional views of learning, which

focus on pouring content into the heads of kids in a standardized and individualized way, this approach sees learning as an act of participation in communities of shared culture and practice. These theories of learning and participation grew out of anthropological work in settings where learning is embedded in the everyday life of communities rather than sequestered into educational institutions, and it's not accidental that we've all found ourselves working at a similar intersection. And we've benefited from the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning initiative giving us a context and resources for working together.

danah: I was first exposed to the notion of "participatory culture" when I took classes from Henry in graduate school at MIT. Then I moved to San Francisco in January 2003 and embedded myself within a network of entrepreneurs and geeks who would go on to form the startups that became the backbone of what is now described as "Web 2.0." The emic language used in these crowds was that of "user-generated content." As I listened to what they were envisioning and what they were trying to create, I realized that the startup scene was imagining many of the same things that Henry had turned me on to. Initially, this crowd had many of the same sensibilities as the fan communities that Henry encountered – subcultural resistance mixed with the particular narratives of liberty that Biella Coleman (2013) picks up on in *Coding Freedom*, where there was a political desire to have software be free as in freedom, not free as in beer. But a lot of this is now forgotten. Where we're sitting now – with Facebook having become a public company, marketers trying to make memes go viral, and social media being a worldwide phenomenon – it's hard to remember what San Francisco was like even a few years ago.

Mimi: Ideas about participatory culture and communities of practice have spread and morphed radically in the years since I was in graduate school. What was once a set of theories at the margins of academia is now part of a common vocabulary in some sectors of the industry and in much of media studies and the learning sciences. As a more wide-ranging set of players started to engage with these ideas,

it has forced a set of conversations about what counts as participatory culture or a community of practice. For example, many of the early studies of situated learning and communities of practice centered on relatively defined, face-to-face professional communities, such as tailors (Lave 2011), butchers (Lave and Wenger 1991), and copier technicians (Orr 1996). What does it mean to apply these ideas about learning and participation to classrooms, online communities, and large corporate work teams? Now an acronym, "CoPs," communities of practice have become a familiar buzzword among managers seeking to build cohesion and sharing in work teams. These shifts have been a source of consternation to some of the pioneers in situated learning theory who feel the ideas have been watered down or misappropriated. It's heartening to see these frameworks resonate more broadly, but they've also fallen victim to their own success. Can we hold onto the core values that animated the early years of situated learning theory and participatory culture while also appreciating how they have spread and evolved?

Henry: I came to Lave and Wenger and the other CoP thinkers somewhat later. My own initial thinking about education and participation was influenced early on by one of my MIT colleagues, Seymour Papert. Papert (1975) had written about his visit to a samba school in Rio. The samba schools were informal gathering places where people living in a community developed their performances for next year's carnival. Papert stressed the informal circumstances through which dancers of very different levels of experience collaborated to construct collective performances. He asked whether educators might incorporate some of those same processes into the design and practice of schooling. Papert celebrated these moments of collective creativity, in part because his whole constructivist education paradigm emphasizes active participation and de-emphasizes formalized teaching.

When I went to Rio a few years ago, I visited one of the samba schools and I came away with a clearer sense of what Papert was talking about. At any given moment, there are many different modes of engagement: some are watching and observing, waiting to participate, while others

are on the floor dancing and others are much more peripheral, watching from the balcony and texting their friends. There are announcers on a sound system actively soliciting participation, coaxing shy community members onto the dance floor. At one point, a group of people in what looked like police or military uniforms step-marched through the space, grabbing people they suspected of not contributing to the collective effort. Eager to avoid being "arrested," I asked my host what to do, and he suggested putting on a festive T-shirt we had been given at the door. He figured that, even if I couldn't dance, I could at least be decorative. This was a great reminder both of the many different ways participants might contribute and of the need sometimes to invite, encourage, and, in this case, even coerce participation rather than take it for granted.

Mimi: Most forms of learning are much more integrated with the dynamic life of communities than our current formal education system. The samba school is a nice example of that. Even in our post-industrial society, most learning is still seamless with everyday life and sociability, whether it is picking up our first language, learning to cook, or figuring out how to build a house in Minecraft. The challenge is when these different modes of learning collide. Kids fail in their studies or get left out from collective practices because they don't have the necessary cultural knowledge or experience. Most educational settings aren't as successful as the samba school at meeting learners where they are and inviting different contributions. Whether it is in a classroom or a professional community of practice, we often see exclusion and marginality operating in less friendly ways when different ways of doing things butt up against one another. Often those dynamics that promote the cohesion of the "in" group are also barriers to entry for learners and newcomers.

Henry: As the samba school example reminds us, many core principles of participatory learning might have been understood by previous generations of folk artists. My grandmother was a remix artist: she was a quilter. She would take bits of remaindered cloth from the local textile mills and use them to create something new. She

was able to express herself meaningfully through the appropriation and recombination of borrowed materials. She would have learned these skills informally, observing the community of quilting women as they worked, gradually trying her own hands at the craft and learning through doing. Skills, knowledge, and traditions were passed from generation to generation.

These forms of creative expression were woven into the practices of everyday life. Yet, she was living in a society that was segregated by class and race and, in this case, also by gender. For her, quilting would have been her entry into a white, working-class, female culture, a source of solidarity with others in her community, but hardly open to all. And it is hard to visit the samba schools and not see them in relation to the economic and educational poverty and often racial segregation that surrounds them. So, in some ways, our goal of more diverse and inclusive communities of practice sets higher standards than anyone had achieved in the past.

That said, we might see the samba schools as an example of the ways aspects of traditional folk cultures persist in the eras of mass media and digital culture. As I suggested in *Convergence Culture* (Jenkins 2006), folk culture was disrupted by the rise of mass spectator culture across the twentieth century, but some aspects are returning in an age of digital culture. I am often asked whether all cultures are participatory, and the answer is that different configurations of culture invite or enable different degrees of participation. With digital culture, more people are making media and sharing what they made with each other. Grassroots and amateur forms of expression gained much greater visibility. Just as my grandmother took bits of cloth from the textile mills and remixed them, my friends and students take bits of media and stitch them together to create something new.

Right now, folk culture, mass culture, and digital culture co-exist. If we go back to the samba school, carnival takes on many of the traits of mass culture when it is broadcast on national television, thus shifting the focus from the yearlong process of getting ready to the specific event that is consumed as a product. You suddenly have many more

consumers and potentially fewer participants, and the event gets inserted into a state or commercial context.

Now, consider what happens when we insert some of the mechanisms of the samba schools into a digital context. We are seeing street dancers, either individuals or in groups, across Brazil, create short YouTube videos demonstrating their moves to each other across a much more dispersed geography. Dance moves travel from one community to another with high speed and fluidity – indeed, the videos can travel to places where the dancers themselves could not safely go. The performers may well be dancing to mass-produced songs, and they may well be distributing their work through commercially owned platforms. But the ways they are producing these videos do not radically differ from earlier folk practices, except in the scope and scale of their circulation.

danah: As more corporations capitalize on people's practices, we've seen a significant shift in power. Although Henry's original work was intended to recognize and celebrate the practices of fans in response to media companies, the new media companies are now capitalizing directly on people's participation. This, in turn, angers many cultural critics, who reject the term "participatory culture" as outright capitalistic, failing to recognize the very cultural logic underpinning people's activities in the first place. As time has passed, my experiences with – and understanding of – participatory culture have become wrapped up in the tensions brought about by commercialization, even as I watch youth engage for personal, educational, political, and social reasons.

I've come to think that the making of culture is inherently participatory, but I appreciate Henry's efforts to point out that this continues to be true in a media-saturated world where many people think that we are passive consumers of culture. (This was certainly true for TV and, to a lesser degree, the early internet.) Part of my struggle with the term itself is that Henry and Mimi both did a phenomenal job of illustrating this through many rarified practices (e.g., fan fiction, machinima) in ways that resulted in the concept of participatory culture being tied to those practices. I see mainstream practices – such as taking selfies

for Instagram (or even more challenging practices like collectively producing a how-to-be-anorexic guide) – as deeply engaged cultural production too, but these are not the kinds of things that normally get labeled as "participatory culture," even if you would see them as such. This is one of the challenges of intending one thing when constructing a concept and then having it repurposed by others in unexpected ways. As a result, for better or worse, my general tendency is to avoid the phrase except when speaking specifically about your work on specific participatory culture activities.

Henry: I have no problem in thinking of taking selfies (or participating in online forums, regardless of the topics) as "ordinary" forms of participatory culture. I don't think the term refers simply to sub-cultures structured around specific forms of participation; it would certainly include more routine practices like taking selfies, though to be participatory these activities have to involve meaningful connections to some larger community (even if only the cohort of classmates at the local school). Part of the nature of networked culture is that even forms of expression that might have had a very limited audience in the past now travel through networks and thus have bigger social consequences.

I also do not assume that participatory culture always has positive effects, so pro-ana sites are a great example of a community that probably meets all of my criteria for participatory culture but does not necessarily make the world a better place.

Participatory Media Platforms?

Mimi: As we see the term "participatory culture" migrate to other uses, such as logging clicks on a social network site, it's important to be clearer about its meaning. Henry, you say the concept of participation involves a cluster of characteristics that we took for granted. If we look at your pre-digital work on fan culture, or Lave and Wenger's work on participation, it is about being part of shared social practices, not just

engaging with an online platform or piece of content. Looked at this way, participation doesn't just mean being active, it is also about being part of a shared practice and culture. Many technology-centric uses of the term implicitly define participation through the use of a platform, or a site, rather than a shared practice or culture. This is a critical distinction in what we mean by participatory culture versus how the term can often get used in the technology world. Henry's early work on fandom is a good example of strongly shared practice and culture that relied on conventions, snail mail, and non-digital media. I wouldn't say that today's more digital fandoms are more participatory, but the new technology has made it easier to access longstanding fan practices of the sort the Henry looked at in the 1980s.

Henry: There's been a tendency in some high-tech circles to act as if participatory culture originated with YouTube or social networking with Facebook. Instead, we need to place these practices in a larger historical context. My grandmother's quilting was grounded in her lived realities, in the ways she worked, worshiped, and socialized with people in her immediate geographic vicinity. She and the other women were linked by a complex set of ties, including shared experience of poverty, which made it essential for them to construct their lives together. Such deep ties may or may not be experienced by those who are producing and sharing media content in today's online communities. Certainly, many teens associate online with people they encounter face to face in their own neighborhoods; others form strong emotional bonds with people they regularly encounter online. But there is an option simply to walk away from many of the communities we encounter online, which make them different from the world my grandmother grew up in as a poor dirt farmer in the American South, or from the favela residents in Rio's samba schools.

Though the term is often ascribed to me, I avoid the phrase "participatory media." I do not think technologies are participatory; cultures are. Technologies may be interactive in their design; they may facilitate many-to-many communications; they may be accessible and adaptable to multiple kinds of users; and they may encode certain values

through their terms of use and through their interfaces. But, ultimately, those technologies get embraced and deployed by people who are operating in cultural contexts that may be more or less participatory. I do not think of platforms like Facebook or YouTube as participatory cultures. Rather, they are tools participatory communities sometimes use as means of maintaining social contact or sharing their cultural productions with each other.

We might understand what I mean by participation in contrast to the term "interactivity," with which it is often confused. Interactivity refers to the properties of technologies that are designed to enable users to make meaningful choices (as in a game) or choices that may personalize the experience (as in an app). Participation, on the other hand, refers to properties of the culture, where groups collectively and individually make decisions that have an impact on their shared experiences. We participate *in* something; we interact *with* something. There is clearly some overlap between the two, so, when someone clicks a button on a social media site, the interface is designed to enable their interactivity, whereas what they post might contribute to a larger process of deliberation and participation within the community.

Mimi: Prior to working on anime fandom, my work centered on games, online groups, and learning. I didn't use the term "participatory culture" to describe those practices. I used the term "interactive media" to designate the difference between games and multimedia that I was studying at the time and media forms such as books and television. This is similar to how Henry has described interactivity, in that it is a property of media technology, not practice. I was also studying online, networked groups and used the term "network communities" to designate the groups we were studying such as forums and online gamers. My conceptual vocabulary has tended to lean towards building distinctions between networked social forms and non-networked forms to answer the question of what is "new" about today's media. By contrast, the term "participatory culture" raises the question of what constitutes different levels or forms of engagement. It's important not to conflate the two by assuming that new interactive and networked

media are always more participatory or engaging. The term "participa-
tory culture" is valuable in helping us distinguish between different
forms of engagement with similar media. It's not whether it is books
or television or games that matters for participatory culture, but how
people are engaging with those media. I would also agree that taking
selfies or being part of a pro-ana forum are examples of participatory
culture. While there is a clear history of being associated with more
nerdy content communities, I don't see any reason why the term needs
to be restricted to them.

Participation is inherent in all forms of social practice. I would not
want our use of "participatory culture" to imply that there are forms of
culture that don't involve participation. I saw a similar dynamic with
the term "situated learning," which was intended to signify how all
learning is situated in culture and social practice. Often people would
talk about how classroom learning was "not situated learning" when,
in my view, even the most traditional classroom learning is situated,
just in a different set of contexts than what you see in kids' peer culture
or in the home.

Participation and Resistance

Henry: Going back to danah's experience in early 2000s San Francisco,
any understanding of participatory culture today has to factor in the
wave of commercialization that has impacted contemporary digital
culture. Because some of the ideals of participatory cultures got so
encoded into the language of the digital industries, it is increasingly
difficult to imagine what a more "authentic" form of participation
might look like. At the start, writers in the cultural studies tradition
(see, for example, Cherny and Weise 1996) were drawn towards the
internet for models of cultural resistance – ways that alternative online
communities might challenge the control of powerful institutions or
might pose critiques of the ideologies being circulated within com-
mercial culture. My work, from the start, sought to describe a complex

relationship between fans and the culture around them. Fandom is born out of fascination and some frustration. If you weren't fascinated, you wouldn't continue to engage as a fan. If you weren't frustrated, you often wouldn't continue to rewrite and reinvent.

In *Spreadable Media* (Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013), we make the argument that, today, an emphasis on participation has displaced this focus on resistance. There can be no easy separation between fans and producers; more and more, media producers embrace our participation as a means of increasing engagement in a highly competitive media system. Yet they also seek to shape and direct our participation into forms that they see as serving their own interests. I think the language shift from resistance to participation comes with some implications. Resistance to what? Participation in what? Participation implies some notion of affiliation, collective identity, membership, but, beyond that, we have much to figure out if we are going to continue to apply this framework to contemporary digital culture.

danah: We're all personally and politically drawn to communities that are resistant, but I want to take Henry's notion of "Resistant to what?" seriously. Does participatory culture have to be resistant to the status quo? And do communities have to form out of participatory culture or can people be a part of participatory culture without developing the deep connections that both of you highlight in your work?

Henry: My understanding of the term "resistance" comes from the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (Hall and Jefferson 1993). It goes back to their original work on subcultures and appropriation. They were writing about the punk movement and the manner in which it appropriated and remixed symbols belonging to the dominant culture, often in ways that signaled their opposition to core institutions and values of their parents' generation. So, Dick Hebdidge (1979) and Stuart Hall (1981) use the example of the swastika, which, for the punks, was chosen not because they were Nazis (many of them were strongly anti-fascist) but because they knew that their parents had survived the Blitz and that this symbol was thus sure to set their mums'

and dads' teeth on edge. Hall argues that, if this highly charged symbol can be up for grabs, then any and all signs can be appropriated and reworked for expressive purposes.

Over time, the term "resistance" came to refer to symbolic gestures that questioned or challenged the values of the status quo. So, we might talk about feminist or queer appropriations of materials from mass media that encouraged the questioning of patriarchy or allowed for the expression of alternative sexual politics. These forms of resistance might be oppositional in the ways that media is produced and distributed, participating in an alternative economy which rejected the profit motive or refused to accept constraints on its use of intellectual property. These groups could be oppositional in the sense that they encouraged alternative social structures based on equality, diversity, and reciprocity or a refusal to make money off other community members. They could be oppositional in terms of the symbols used, the meanings their work evoked, or the ways their media practices pushed against censorship norms and taboos of the culture. Historically, subcultures defined their identities in opposition to their parent cultures. This focus on opposition differs from the ways I write about the samba schools, where we are seeing forms of folk production that are normative in Brazilian culture, or the ways we might now talk about niche culture, which may be distinctive to a particular group but positively valued within the creative economy.

I am not sure that digital cultures, of the kinds we are discussing as participatory culture, are necessarily oppositional or resistant in the same way that the British Cultural Studies writers discussed the teddy boys or the punks (Hebdidge 1979; McRobbie 1991). For one thing, these earlier writers had a much clearer sense of a dominant or mainstream culture against which to define these subcultures, whereas a growing body of research (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2004) suggests the fragmentation of contemporary culture and the emergence of niche communities. There may no longer be a unified mainstream culture against which subcultures can define themselves. So, when we talk about niches, we may be describing

divisions in a commercial market as much as or more than divisions in the culture.

That said, these communities may represent alternatives which, for young people, frequently get defined in relation to school, family life, their work lives, etc. Often, they are alternative in that they represent different structures of knowledge, status and reputation, or norms and values. Someone who has very little power at home might emerge as a guild leader in an online game world. Someone who is a poor student at school may be seen as an expert in their online community. Someone with limited freedom at work may be respected as a fan fiction writer. These are not resistant in that they overturn existing structures. But they may be alternative in that they provide participants with the social capital or self-esteem needed to survive other constraints they confront.

danah: My usage of the term "resistance" is rooted in this exact history, including more modern work that builds off this trajectory such as analyses of goth subcultures (Hodkinson 2002) and queer counterpublics (Warner 2002). But I also think of it in terms of agency and power in relation to technological artifacts and their creators. I don't see technologies as predicting behavior, but I do see technology creators as trying to corral users into a narrow range of acceptable activities. And I love watching youth recognize this and push back, reorient, repurpose, or otherwise resist the system designers' expectations.

For example, I enjoyed watching teenagers when they started to realize that Facebook's news feed algorithm resulted in their not seeing everything their friends posted. They worked out – accurately or not – that posting brand names or links to Buzzfeed articles resulted in their postings appearing to be more likely to show up on their friends' feeds. So you'd see posts like "Yo wazzup? Nike. I'm bored." They were "tricking" the algorithm to get what they wanted out of the system. I see this as an act of resistance or an effort to reclaim power and control within a socio-technical context in which that is often taken away.

Mimi: I also see "resistance" as a relational term that is predicated on there being a perceived or structural kind of dominance. In the case

of subcultures that are defined in opposition to mainstream culture, yes, I would call that resistant. Like Henry, I study a lot of cultural forms that are niche but not "resistant," because they don't have that stance of opposition. Environmentalism, geek culture, fan culture, and other "alternative" cultural movements and identities are often defined as explicitly distinct from a mainstream culture but are also not explicitly resistant to that culture. In otaku culture, for example, I would not call kids who make fan manga about a mainstream franchise like Naruto "resistant," but I would say some of the young women who depict alternative narratives that explicitly challenge gender norms are resistant. Similarly I would say a lot of gaming culture is niche and participatory but not resistant. When young people are pushing back against parental or school authority, I would call that resistant because it is a response to institutionalized power and inequity. And technology operates in a similar way because it can occupy a position of structural dominance.

Henry: The digital did not make fandom more participatory, but the digital did dramatically expand who got to participate in fandom. Fandom has a culture of participation that spans 150 years. So we could go back to the toy printing press movement of the mid-nineteenth century, where kids were hand-setting type to create newsletters and other kinds of publications – what we might today call zines. These spread across an informal and national network of people who shared common passions but who might never have met face to face. Some of those same people also became part of the amateur radio movement in the early twentieth century. Out of amateur radio emerged the beginnings of science fiction fandom, which borrowed terminology, practices, and infrastructure from the National Amateur Press Association. Skip forward a few years and some of these people contributed to the underground newspapers, the people's radio, and the underground comics of the 1960s counterculture. Many helped to define the ideals of participatory democracy which were very much part of the student movements of that era. And then, in the 1980s, we might point to the emergence of the camcorder and local access television as a site of grassroots cultural production and a platform for

alternative politics. DIY culture, more broadly, was associated with the counterculture going back to the beatniks of the 1950s. These same impulses helped to define the early internet culture – the culture of amateurs, hackers, and home brew.

I am discussing this in terms of fans, because I know of generations within the same family that map these movements across different sites of popular media production, and I know that some of the terminology associated with the Amateur Press Association (LOL, for example) still functions as part of the language of contemporary digital culture. In practice, though, many groups followed similar paths, struggling to find channels of communication through which they could express their political and cultural perspectives.

So, when we look at YouTube today, we see various forms of media production which have a much older history within diverse cultural and subcultural communities. YouTube offers them certain affordances for sharing their media with each other, but the participatory practices originated elsewhere. YouTube might be seen as simply one point in the much longer trajectory towards a more participatory culture.

For some, YouTube functions as an informal and personal archive, with videos being seen by relatively few other people. For others, YouTube, as Sarah Banet-Wiser (2012) has suggested, represents a vehicle for personal branding, where the goal is to get noticed by as many people as possible. For yet others, though, YouTube is a site of exchange within a particular subcultural community using video-making to contribute to the group's ongoing conversation among the group's members. Beyond this, YouTube and the other Web 2.0 platforms are what Yochai Benkler (2007) might describe as hybrid media ecologies, where media producers with many different goals – amateur, commercial, semiprofessional, activist, educational, religious, governmental – operate side by side. Media practices move fluidly from one community to another within this shared space. Media producers learn from each other and build on each other's work.

Mimi: YouTube is part of a whole ecology of openly networked platforms supporting the spread of amateur and noncommercial media

production and sharing communities. What's interesting about the communities being built through openly networked platforms is that anyone can potentially contribute and have a voice, but what you actually see is people creating new kinds of boundaries and status hierarchies. People find ways of signaling status and difference even within a very flat and peer-to-peer structure. In fact, these two dimensions are interrelated. Because these platforms have reduced the barriers to initial entry and participation, communities that care about shared norms and quality of work need to develop ways of signaling expectations and status. As a result, one irony is that exclusionary forms of social and cultural capital, your identity and who you know, become much more important than traditional institutional status. People find ways of defining who belongs by culture, style, and social networks, and it can be harder to break into the "elite" of a group than into a purely market-based or more transparent institutional hierarchy or status system. This is one of the new dangers with how participatory communities define who is in or out.

I've been looking at otaku culture, or fandoms centered around Japanese popular media, as another instance of these cases (Ito, Okabe, and Tsuji 2012). Interesting things happen when a longstanding fandom moves into the digital era. What you've seen is a huge expansion of overseas fans of anime into an international subculture – what Clay Shirky (2006) has described as a mega-niche. In many ways this has broadened the base and enriched the fandom. For US fans of anime, for example, it used to be really hard to get access to the media content, and it took a certain intensity and commitment to be part of the fandom. But now anime is on cable, and anyone can watch it streaming on the internet, and suddenly what used to be insider knowledge and cult media have become much more accessible. This has also meant that old-timers and highly expert fans have developed new ways of signaling subcultural capital, to differentiate themselves from the newer, younger, and less sophisticated fans (Ito 2012a). We've seen similar dynamics at play with Wikipedians maintaining quality standards (Swartz 2006) or how reputation works among players who

modify games (modders), and the open source programming scene (e.g., Kow and Nardi 2010; Lakhani and Wolf 2005; Weber 2005). It's a good lesson as to how, even with very open, participatory cultures with low barriers to entry, people find ways of maintaining status and distinction.

danah: Your examples highlight the subcultural roots of this practice, where a small group of people – e.g., fans – are able to create ways of engaging deeply. I think it's important to celebrate such spaces, but does it make sense for this to go mainstream? What is gained and what is lost when these practices "jump the shark" or become commonplace? Will the aspects of participatory culture that you relish actually translate well into the mainstream? Or will things get distorted in uncomfortable ways? Can technologies drive participatory culture or does it require a particular mindset? For example, I would argue that sites like Facebook and YouTube can be used by people engaged in participatory culture but, by and large, engagement on these sites – including "user-generated content" – is nothing more than mediated sociality.

Mimi: The subcultural origins of the term are incredibly important for signaling the relationship between, say, fans and industry. I don't feel that the participatory culture has to be subcultural to be valuable, though, particularly when we consider learning. When you think about what is important for learning and development, it's the act of creation and contribution to a shared purpose that is most important, not whether the culture is mainstream or subcultural.

It's worth thinking too of how so-called mainstream cultures also have participatory elements. For example, Henry, you look at fandoms that have grown around very broad-based commercial media content such as *American Idol*. I tend to get some raised eyebrows when I talk about a case that one of our team members is currently looking at, centered on the fans of the hugely popular boy band One Direction (Korobkova 2013). While the more participatory elements of such fandoms may push back on the more top-down and commercially defined notions of audience participation, I am not sure I would describe these

fandoms as oppositional or even "alternative," though they exhibit elements of participatory culture.

Henry: I would make two points. First, you are right that mainstream media are increasingly adopting participatory practices in hopes of intensifying audience engagement with their properties. As a consequence, cultural activities that once seemed "alternative" are becoming part of the dominant logic through which media industries operate. So, "voting" for *American Idol* is a form of participation that cannot be described as resistant or alternative but is also highly regulated and controlled from above.

Second, within such dominant or mainstream practices, there are nevertheless forms of participation that do constitute space for alternative interests. In the case of *American Idol*, one geeky bunch of people are trying to figure out whether the voting is rigged. There is another even more oppositional group – Vote for the Worst – that seeks to throw their collective weight behind "bad singers" in order to force the producers to keep them on the air longer and thus undermine Fox's commercial interests. Neither of these groups would be described as dominant or mainstream, even if they direct their energies towards a property that was among the highest-rated television series for most of the decade. They are also not in a strong sense oppositional; we might describe them perhaps as disruptive or critical but, nevertheless, negotiating a space for their interests within the commercial culture. No matter how participatory culture is pulled towards dominant practices, it cannot close off space for other, less mainstream interests if it is going to remain truly participatory.

Towards a More Participatory Culture

danah: I definitely see the power of participatory culture for more alternative communities, but the rhetoric surrounding social media often highlights that technology is an equal opportunity platform; "everyone" supposedly has the ability to have their voice heard. I think

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that this is seriously deceptive. I would argue that true participation requires many qualities: agency, the ability to understand a social situation well enough to engage constructively, the skills to contribute effectively, connections with others to help build an audience, emotional resilience to handle negative feedback, and enough social status to speak without consequences. The barrier to participation is not the technology but the kinds of privilege that are often ignored in meritocratic discourse. I do think that technology has opened up new doors to some people – and especially those who are marginalized but self-empowered (a.k.a. the alternative/resistant folks you're describing) – but it's important to recognize the ways in which it also reinforces other forms of inequalities that make it harder for some people to engage.

Henry: This is in part why I see participation more and more in relational rather than absolute terms – a matter of degree rather than of difference. So, yes, all culture is in some sense participatory, but the more hierarchical a culture is, the less participatory it becomes. I am today more likely to talk about a shift towards "a more participatory culture." It would be easy to assume that I'm saying that we already live in a fully participatory culture. We might instead see participatory culture as a set of ideals, a kind of social structure we are collectively striving to achieve, a collection of aspirations about what a better cultural configuration might look like. There are both social and technological obstacles to full participation at the current moment.

Talking about a movement towards a more participatory culture allows us to acknowledge the ongoing struggle of many different groups to gain greater access to the means of cultural production and circulation. It allows us to take stock of the ground we've made but also to acknowledge that many people are not able to participate meaningfully. And we are still struggling over the terms of our participation. There is always a risk that the more participatory dimensions of our culture may not survive.

Even if these new media platforms offer us affordances that can be used in support of a more participatory culture, they also often impose

constraints on how they can be used or erect barriers to equal and meaningful participation. This new culture is porous, meaning that media move from one community to another, often bringing into contact people who have no history of interacting with each other – what danah often discusses as context collapse. As a result, there are often serious conflicts that further marginalize some people while increasing the visibility enjoyed by more dominant groups. We do not yet have well-defined norms, or shared values, that allow us to deal with some of these situations – and perhaps we never will. For me, a commitment to participatory culture demands a commitment to overcome these various participation gaps.

What's at Stake?

danah: Part of what I love about participatory culture is that it shifts the locus of control and destabilizes systems of power, but I wouldn't go as far as calling it inherently democratizing. New sources of power, status, and control emerge and introduce new forms of inequality. This is a serious source of concern for those who have seen their positions of power undermined, particularly when they see problematic dynamics bubble up. And, while the activist punk in me wants to stick out my tongue and offer my middle finger, I'm also aware that anarchy doesn't always result in positive outcomes. I can't help but reflect on cases where participatory culture has resulted in negative outcomes for individuals, communities, and public life – where misinformation can go unchecked and be widely disseminated to mislead, manipulate, or induce fear, where hate speech proliferates and has serious consequences. This is not to say that these issues are unique to participatory culture. Propaganda and the Ku Klux Klan certainly pre-date participatory culture. Still, I'd argue that participatory culture enables – if not empowers – disturbing practices alongside positive ones. I believe in participatory culture because of its potential, and I don't want to see negative outcomes or fears being used to justify centralized control

or censorship – but nor do I want the hopeful vision to gloss over or otherwise ignore the darker side of things. You have to grapple with the ugliness to make sure that naysayers don't stifle the potential.

Mimi: Participation is part of a broader value set associated with network culture, which includes other values like transparency and openness. The three of us have somewhat different voices in these debates, even while we're all looking towards the similar positive future. I appreciate voices saying, "Look, here are the limits of transparency, here are the negative outcomes of participation." I don't see those voices as at all hostile to the world that I want to see, but also want to keep the positive value set in view as an ideal. We can celebrate the human agency, inclusiveness, and accessibility that come with participatory values, even as we need to recognize costs and unanticipated consequences.

danah: Recognizing that I share your values and goals, help me understand something. From your perspective, what's the cost of *not* promoting participatory culture?

Mimi: We've been experiencing the cost of non-participatory systems, which center on inequitable access to the means of cultural production and distribution, which in turn are tied in important ways to social and political empowerment. When creating knowledge and culture is associated with elites, it tracks in troubling ways to historical forms of stratification based on things like socio-economic status and race. It means that certain populations have fewer avenues to contribute meaningfully to public life and culture and find a fulfilling place for themselves in society. I see this most concretely in learning and literacy, where privileged young people are given more opportunities to take on influential forms of cultural production and public participation tied to institutionalized power and wealth. This can be through success in schooling as well as through the whole host of enrichment activities in athletics, arts, and other areas of interest. All young people have agency and voice, but not everyone has the opportunity to connect this agency and voice to a broader public stage and to sites of power. This is where I think participatory and network culture has the potential to address some of this inequity.

Henry: For me, the value of a participatory culture is bound up with two core concepts. Both can be empty signifiers, overused to the point of banality, but they may also be the most significant things we could fight for. One is democracy; the other is diversity. If we enable all citizens to have a voice in their society, then there's a fundamental shift in governance. Ensuring that all those voices are heard is the best mechanism for dealing with the multiplicity and diversity of a global society. Those are the two values that drive me to fight for participation. How do we ensure that citizens have greater voice in the decision-making that impacts their life, and how do we ensure that people of diverse perspectives are heard by each other and benefit from each other's insights?

Right now, we are at a moment of transition. For many of us, we are experiencing a significant expansion of our communicative capacities within a networked culture, yet very little in our past has taught us how to use those expanded capacities responsibly or constructively. If that transition takes place, it's bound to be enormously disruptive. It's confusing, there are ethical dilemmas, none of us know how to use that power. I always quote what Uncle Ben tells his nephew Peter Parker in the *Spider-Man* comics: "With great power comes great responsibility."

Ideally, we are developing personal and collective ethics. We're thinking through the implication of our communicative acts. We are learning to take ownership over misinformation or malicious speech. We are starting to call each other out for the ways in which one group silences another. We can't say participation is good in and of itself. As we make these lurches towards using that power responsibly, we as a society make mistakes. There are people abusing this emerging freedom and groups that have trouble communicating to each other. It's a messy business. The only way forward is to ask the hard questions, to confront the bad along with the good, to challenges the inequalities and the abuses.

There has been a regrettable tendency for some critics of participatory culture (Janissary Collective 2012) to read these self-policing functions of communities largely in negative terms ("public shaming,"

"coercive participation," "surveillance culture", "governmentality") – as somehow oppositional to the "freedom" of their individual members. While such shared norms can manifest themselves as, for example, heteronormativity or privilege, and we thus need to critically question norms as they start to emerge, I still feel that shared ethical norms may be the most effective way of ensuring both a culture that respects the contributions of diverse participants and that the group can work towards mutual goals. Given the degree to which progressive politics has always rested on some notion of the collective interest, it seems dangerous to define individualism as the only viable source of freedom. It can also seem circular, since the critique of neoliberalism often rests on the belief that it reduces society to a collection of self-interested individuals.

danah: I wholeheartedly agree with your goals of diversity and democracy, but I think that you allude to another tension at play here. On the one hand, you have the liberal commitment to the public good and, on the other, a form of hyper-individualism that is often antithetical to collective narratives. Consider Alice Marwick's (2013) work investigating the rhetoric and norms of tech industry players at the onset of "Web 2.0." She argues that the values embedded in many of the technologies of participatory culture stem from meritocratic, libertarian, neoliberal beliefs. In other words, these tools are designed to empower – and value – individuals at the expense of the public good. This is instantiated in many technologies. For example, YouTube's mantra is "Broadcast Yourself." The emphasis is on valuing the individual and their right to self-expression, regardless of how that act affects others or of the costs for the public. The focus is on individual participation through performing, not through listening.

Henry: Many media platforms that describe themselves as participatory do not encourage the development of any collective understanding of cultural production. Sites like YouTube can be meeting grounds where multiple subcultures intersect, each bringing pre-existing media-making practices with them (Burgess and Green 2009), each learning from the other, but YouTube itself generates no

shared identities or values, as is witnessed by the ruthless comments around YouTube posts. For many, there is no investment in building long-term relationships between participants. There's some argument to be made that video-blogging has started to emerge as a participatory community with strong social ties and collective interests (Lange 2014), but it is not clear that this community is bound to, or originates from, YouTube as a platform. Its practices have been strongly informed by grassroots, alternative media-production traditions of all kinds. And, through gatherings such as VidCon, we are seeing some subset of YouTubers start to work together towards larger civic, political, economic, and cultural goals. So, YouTube can be seen as a moving target in some senses, yet for many it is a place they go to consume videos (as if it were a broadcast channel), and they do not see themselves as having any real stakes in its community-like functions.

danah: I too believe that working out a shared vision of society by developing shared norms is tremendously valuable. And I believe that this *can* be done through technology. But I also believe that many of the systems that are widely used make it very difficult to see beyond a narrowly defined world. I've been fascinated by how the Trending Topics on Twitter often expose people to conversations and worlds outside of their network. But this can also backfire. Consider, for example, what happened in 2009 when all of the Trending Topics were icons of the black community during the Black Entertainment Television Awards. It was stunning how many white Twitter users responded to the appearance of black celebrities with racist commentary. These white users weren't used to seeing black users on Twitter. Rather than working to find common ground, they responded with hateful messages, preferring to live in their own white bubbles. If everyone today gets to build their own gated community because they can consume only the content of people like them and create their own communities of people who share their values, then what? How do we educate people about cultural differences? How do we get people to engage with communities that are different than theirs? Even education seems to be moving in the direction of individualism.

Networked Individualism?

danah: I want to believe that networks result in healthier communities, but I also think that they promote a form of egocentrism. Consider Barry Wellman's (1999) notion of "networked individualism." He uses that term in opposition to such traditional social structures as hierarchical organizations, families, neighborhoods, and peer groups. Unlike earlier technologies meant to organize people around groups, many social media tools allow people to cultivate networks. While there is overlap, my network on Twitter is different than yours, allowing us to define our own sense of community. This is super convenient, but it is also seriously narcissistic. What constitutes the public when we're each living in our personalized world? How do we engender public-good outcomes when our tools steer us towards individualism?

Henry: I grant you that the industry's discourse often stresses individualism. Neoliberalism is very much bound up with the notion of every person for themselves. But if we go back to fan culture, it's about collective ownership of stories, about sharing economies, about forming collective identities. Many traditional forms of participatory culture have embedded values focused around the collective good: go back to the quilting circles and the gifting practices that grew up around them. I don't want to over-romanticize them. As I've already acknowledged, there were structural inequalities in who got to participate. But there was a shared ethic about participation – at least among those they perceived as belonging to "their" community. Networks are more than simply clusters of individuals; they are enterprises formed around shared goals and values; they require us to learn to work together to help others achieve their ambitions, even as we extract value from the community towards our own ends.

Mimi: Social media can be used in individualistic and narcissistic ways, but I question whether the tools themselves determine a value set. It gets back to what we were talking about earlier – that, for me, participatory culture is defined by shared culture, practice, and purpose and isn't simply about a toolset or a platform. So, when we are in the

mode of promoting a particular set of values, or participatory culture, I don't think it is about promoting social media or a particular platform. I think Twitter can be used for very individualized and egocentric purposes, but I've also seen it as a tool for collective action.

We can't blame the tools, only ourselves for not taking them up in ways that conform to our values. It's the values of the folks creating the tools, which get embedded in the design, as well as the values of the folks who take up the tools that determine the broader societal outcomes.

danah: I don't think that technology forces people to be individualistic, but I do think that many of the major social media sites are designed for and expect people to be individualistically minded. Groups and collaboration often form a secondary feature, an afterthought. People can indeed use these tools to galvanize others, but the defaults are still egocentric. And the rhetoric and norms among the tools' creators are generally about empowering individuals.

Henry: For me, there's something paradoxical or even oxymoronic about the concept of "networked individualism," even though I understand the critique that certain kinds of social networking platforms encourage the emergence of egocentric networks, especially when compared to older forms of online communities. One of the reasons I am drawn towards the work of Pierre Levy (1999) on collective intelligence is that he's found a balance, I think, between communalism and individualism that makes sense for a networked society. He's essentially arguing that every person needs to develop their own voice and expertise so that they can contribute to the shared production of knowledge and culture.

Levy rejects the idea that a more collective culture requires a hive-mind mentality – forcing everyone to think the same way and know the same things (not that hives actually work that way!). Quite the opposite: he argues that diversity is a central value within a knowledge community – the more diverse the contributions, the richer the solutions the community will develop around common problems and concerns. So, there is a strong focus on exploring personal passions

and developing individual expertise, but there's also a strong focus on identifying shared goals and developing an ethical framework based on sharing what you know with others, valuing diversity, and taking ownership over the quality of information you spread. The result is a balance between the individual and the community, between "personalization" and "socialization," which can be difficult in practice, but which represents a meaningful set of goals to work towards within any given group.

Mimi: This whole issue of opposing the individual to a collective is a uniquely Western preoccupation that gets in the way of productive conversations about social change. As someone who identifies culturally as more Japanese, I never really understood why the fulfillment of the collective is thought of as a sacrifice of the individual or individuality. Aren't we fundamentally social beings who thrive when our communities and people we care about and connect with thrive as well? How can we possibly succeed as individuals without contributing to shared culture and goals? Doesn't systemic reform require collective commitment?

We are living through an interesting moment when there's a whole host of trends that are pushing people cross-culturally to recognize concepts like hive mind and network intelligence – that the individual and the collective are inseparable. It's even filtering into the US mindset, which has been so committed to seeing individual and collective interests as inherently in conflict. The challenge, though, is that it takes much more than simply pointing out the fact that we are interconnected and are co-constructing culture and society. We need to take seriously the stakes that existing collectives have in holding onto existing sources of power and difference, as well as the defensive and reactionary moves that accompany encounters across boundaries.

Henry: Given what Mimi just said, I return to my idea that we should be talking about steps "towards a more participatory culture." We have made significant progress over the past two decades in terms of developing new social and technological structures that can sustain collaboration and support creativity across diverse and dispersed

publics. We are developing pedagogical practices that can help indi-
viduals and groups to acquire the skills they need to participate
meaningfully. There is a growing understanding that greater participa-
tion in the means of cultural production and circulation are positive
values. Yet, the path from here is not going to be easy. There are still
many inequalities in terms of access to both technologies and skills;
there are still many forces (political and economic) that might seek
to contain and commodify the popular desire for participation; there
are, as danah notes, aspects of technological design and corporate
policy which encourage us to act in individualistic rather than collec-
tive ways; and there is much we still do not understand very well about
dealing with the diversity of a networked culture.