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Unconventional Avenues for Public Participation: A Case Study from Rural Egypt

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When traditional avenues for learning and participation become inaccessible for less-advantaged people to learn and participate, people tend to develop other unconventional avenues to learn and participate in decisions that affect their lives. There are two distinct research approaches in the study of political participation. One approach, which had been historically predominant, focuses on individual characteristics such as education level, income and class, and the other, social network approach focuses on the influence of context and social networks in the political socialization and mobilization of men and women in democracies and authoritarian polities. This paper fits into the second approach and makes a contribution to it. The paper turns the focus of public participation away from classical, formal Tocquevillian understandings to the unconventional avenues of participation that have remained outside of the scope of some research. It examines how young women in authoritarian contexts utilize self-created social networks as unconventional avenues to learn and advance their political participation. It uniquely places the question of the pedagogical and political consequences of social capital into an analysis of women's social interactions within social networks.

Utilizing constructivist qualitative research conducted in three rural villages in Egypt, this study penetrates disadvantaged women's realities and capture their unique forms of political participation and sets the groundwork for future study to examine political participation beyond the conventional civic and political activities aimed at marginalized groups in developing democracies around the globe.

Keywords: democracy, social capital, pedagogy, social networks, social movements, political change.

There are two distinct research approaches in the study of political participation: one, which had been predominant historically, focuses on individual socioeconomic status (SES)—education, income, and class—as an explanatory model of behavior to understand public participation. The second focuses on the influence of context, relationships and social networks (Campbell, 2013).. While the first approach does help to explain some participation, this paper fits into the second approach and makes a contribution to it. A long history of studies, including those by Milbrath and Goel (1977) provides some empirical evidence on the relationship between class and participation. Other studies, including Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) have concluded that education, as a component of SES, is one of the best indicators of public participation. In addition, Downs (1957) argues there is cost of participation that entails the time and effort required by an individual to learn about politics in order to make an informed decision. In this vein, Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) argue that educated individuals are more likely to possess the intellectual, cognitive, knowledge and skills required to navigate the complexity of the political process. Their study concludes the higher the education level, the lower the participation cost that supports the higher level of participation. While Brady, Verba, and Schlozman's explanatory SES model may help assess people's participation in conventional activities (i.e., voting), it fails to capture other

forms of public participation such as involvement in community work and everyday life of local society and widely neglects less-advantaged groups who fall outside of the selected variables used to determine participation. Alternatively, studies that focus on relationships and social networks have provided empirical evidence on the importance of social networks to help to explain how people in different groups, including poor and marginalized groups, are socialized politically and mobilized for action (see Campbell, 2013; Gallo-Cruz, 2021; and Staggenborg, 2021). This study falls into the second approach and critiques the notion of SES as indicative of political participation of rural young women. The findings of this study show how less-advantaged young women with low socioeconomic status are involved in different activities in private and public political domains in Egypt; and how this involvement is yet beyond the capture of research that applies SES as determinant of political participation.

In authoritarian contexts like Egypt, schooling may not play the same role as it does in most democratic societies (Baraka, 2008). The value and weight given to education in authoritarian contexts is downgraded by authoritarian regimes, where "investments in human capital are influenced in important ways by the type of regime in power" (Baum & Lake, 2003, p. 336). One example is the focus of most authoritative regimes is on the access and enrolment rather than quality and attainment. Nevertheless, the popularity of using SES and traditional schooling as major underpinning determinants of public participation contributes to the paucity of scholarship on other, less formal types of education and may not provide evidence of role that informal learning has in promoting public participation.

Another challenge to understanding this topic is the lack of research and diverse methodological stances capable of examining women's participation in rural Egypt. The limited research available focuses heavily on measuring women's participation in state-organized political activities (e.g., voting, affiliation with political institutions) while failing to consider the role that everyday, lived experiences plays in their societies. According to Abu-Lughod (2017), research in the field of women's participation has mostly focused on whether there is a deficit of democracy in the macro-context of the Arab region with little attention given to questions of local communities and how women practice citizenship. Additionally, despite the emergence of recent literature on the organizational and civic capacity of groups, the focus of much research on the phenomenon of public participation in political socialization and political psychology is rooted in the study of the behavior of discrete individuals. Such research tradition tends to cut individuals off from their social context where their engagement and behavior can better be understood as a part of their networks of social interaction (Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998).

The recent nationwide Survey of Young People in Egypt (SYPE*) used quantitative approaches and SES determinants to examine the political participation of 15,000 young people. Relying on SES determinants, SYPE examined individuals in isolation from the social fabric that connects them to their world. SYPE reported that, in general, public participation is low among Egyptians, with only 3.6% of the entire population reporting that they ever volunteered. Young women ages 15 to 25 in rural Egypt, in particular, are underrepresented in civic activities. Furthermore, SYPE concluded that there is a substantial gender gap in participation of rural women with only 1.5% of young women participating, as opposed to 13.1% of young men. In assessing the level of public participation, SYPE measures the participation in activities such as voting, participation in political events, reading about politics, affiliation with civil society, volunteering in civil and political institutions, and internet and media use.

This study, however, argued that low engagement of young women in rural areas in Egypt, as reported by SYPE, aligns with two epistemological challenges to the study of public participation: the focus on SES and its quantitative methodological stances. Furthermore, applying western concepts to assess local participation by these kinds of survey may not provide a comprehensive picture. Such concepts (e.g., participation in political events, affiliation or volunteering with civil society) assume that a particular mode of engagement makes sense or resonates irrespective of context where mistakenly assuming that volunteering is universally indicative of civic engagement. While using these indicatives may be useful in other contexts, it may not be viable in an authoritarian and highly surveilled space. Such "globalized localism" as argued by de Sousa Santos (2006) contributes to a fact that "local conditions are disintegrated, oppressed, excluded, de-structured, and, eventually, restructured as subordinate inclusion." (p. 397). The reliance of SYPE on SES and using volunteerism as a universal marker of civic engagement is in a sense projecting what counts as 'civic' in one setting and assuming it has universal coherence and apply it to assess civic engagement of young women in rural Egypt. This study, therefore, troubled SYPE and SES to challenge the quantitative methodological approach usually used to examine public participation of rural women in Egypt.

Examining women's participation in rural Egypt
The education and public engagement of Egyptians in general and of young women in rural Egypt in particular must be understood within the context of the country's history. Like most countries in the Middle East, Egypt is an established authoritarian state (Albrecht, 2013). Contextualizing this study in its authoritarian context provides an understanding of how and why existing hegemonic approaches to political participation do not account for how young women engage in public life in Egypt. This study aimed to advance an understanding of how less-advantaged young women in rural Egypt conceptualize their experience of informal social networks in the development of their public participation. The study attempted to generate a deeper understanding of the nature of the pedagogical role played by social networks in fostering civic knowledge and skills. It is also considered how this civic learning within informal social networks, particularly those individually constructed by women, contributes to advancing the participation of these women. Finally, the study also aimed to advance an understanding of informal civic learning through social networks as it relates to women's civic engagement in rural Egypt. Several factors were considered in selecting the geographic location for this study and the participants. My selection of Egypt as the location of this research stems not only from my background as an Egyptian, but also from Egypt's rural nature, which is relevant to this study. The Fayoum governorate is one of the most impoverished regions in Egypt with a high percentage of marginalized young women with little access to economic opportunities. Fayoum is located about 100 miles southwest of Cairo, with a total population of 2,111,589 as of January 2017. Among females in Fayoum, 36.8% are illiterate (mainly in rural villages of Fayoum) and 38.7% are between the ages of 15 and 25 (State Information Service, 2017). The following conceptual framework shows how this study is grounded in and guided by relevant theories.

Conceptual framework
As discussed earlier, research traditionally examines public participation through a socioeconomic approach that is framed through the lens of the SES of a discrete individual as predictor of engagement. Rather than cutting the individual out of their social fabric, this study considered the

relationship between discrete individuals and their social interactions. From this perspective, it was possible to see how women weave together their learning and engagement. By troubling the notion of SES and the epistemological stance of SYPE, this analytical framework incorporates social interactions, social capital, and social networks together to conceptualize women's political participation in rural Egypt. While most of the political participation studies adopt SES to predict people involvement and since most social capital definitions are taken from an understanding of SES, this study offered different way to assess public participation of less-advantaged young women. The study highlights the way less-advantaged women with low SES benefit from and generate social capital through their everyday interactions within their self-created networks to advance their civic learning and political participation. The study is guided by two research questions. First, how women develop and use their social capital as a means and end generated within social networks in relation to their political participation? Second, how do the experiences of these women then compare with mainstream accounts of public participation and political change in Egypt?

Social capital
In the past few decades, the concept of social capital has been applied by an increasingly large number of scholars in various fields to explain outcomes such as educational attainment, health status, economic prosperity, and democratic participation. Social capital represents one approach to understanding the effects of informal social networks through the patterns of interdependence and social interactions. The conceptualization of social capital by the American sociologist J. S. Coleman (1988) is widely used in the literature of education, political science, and sociology since early 1980s. Coleman's conceptualization of social capital in the creation of human capital becomes one of the most salient concepts used in education and social sciences, and it generally refers to the norms that social structures develop to facilitate cooperation and to provide resources for persons that help achieve certain goals. Coleman argues that there is a relationship between level of social capital of young people and their educational outcomes, where social capital can be used as a determining factor of educational outcomes. Using family as an example of social structure, Coleman adds that the stronger the network relations, the less the disparity in educational outcomes where young people with strong family ties and a more stable family do better than their counterparts with weak family ties, where parents may be divorced. Coleman's assertion describes the networks as resources where personal networks serve as a means of production of better conditions of life for their members. Similarly, R. D. Putnam (2000) defines social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit" (p. 67). This definition illustrates the three main components of social capital: trust, social norms, and social networks. Coleman notes that all social relations facilitate some form of social capital, especially in certain kinds of social structures (e.g., social networks).

Informal learning
The concept of informal learning can be intertwined with several other understandings of learning. For example, theorists have used different terms to refer to informal learning such as incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), spontaneous learning (Williams, 2007), experiential learning (Dewey, 1938), transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), tacit learning (Polanyi, 1967), informal learning (Wolfe, 2021). While these and other scholars address the concept of informal learning across different contexts and disciplines, they tend to agree that it can be defined as "any activity

involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions, or the courses or workshops offered by educational or social agencies" (Livingstone, 1999, p. 51). Informal learning is a distinct process different from formal and non-formal education. In informal learning, Wolfe (2021) asserts, there is no activity that is deliberately set aside specifically to educate members of a social gathering; rather it is based on their ability to interact within social gatherings to acquire basic skills, values, and attitudes on their own. Informal learning is often used interchangeably with non-formal education. Non-formal education, however, is not a synonym for informal learning. Non-formal education refers to educational activities that also take place outside school but usually in an organized intended manner (Wolfe, 2021). Informal learning may include internal types, such as self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization, that distinguish it from formal and non-formal education (Schugurensky, 2008).

The methodology for my phenomenological, qualitative study was guided by a naturalistic research paradigm where women actively constructed their own meanings and experience of social networks, learning, and participation, and where "meaning arise[s] out of social situations and is handled through interpretive processes" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 137). The approach was helpful in understanding public participation of rural women from their perspective, rather than from the perspective of the researcher. Thus, I employed phenomenological methods that helped the women to reflect on their lived experiences and that provided me with the opportunity to uncover these lived experiences. Forty-nine women from three rural villages in Upper-Egypt participated in this study. All 49 participants were interviewed in their locations, in the author's language, Arabic, during 2017 and 2018. The process of recruiting participants for this study was guided by my goal to provide an in-depth examination of women's lived experience with social networks as spaces for informal civic learning. To select participants, I used a purposeful sample framework that took educational background and socioeconomic variables into consideration, as I was only interested in interviewing marginalized women. The mode of inquiry of this study employed open-ended techniques to ensure emic, thick description of participants' situations. The open-ended techniques allowed for prolonged engagement with participants in the field and were consistent with the qualitative nature of this study and its phenomenological and ethnographic considerations. Names of participants and villages used in this paper are pseudonyms for the actual names.
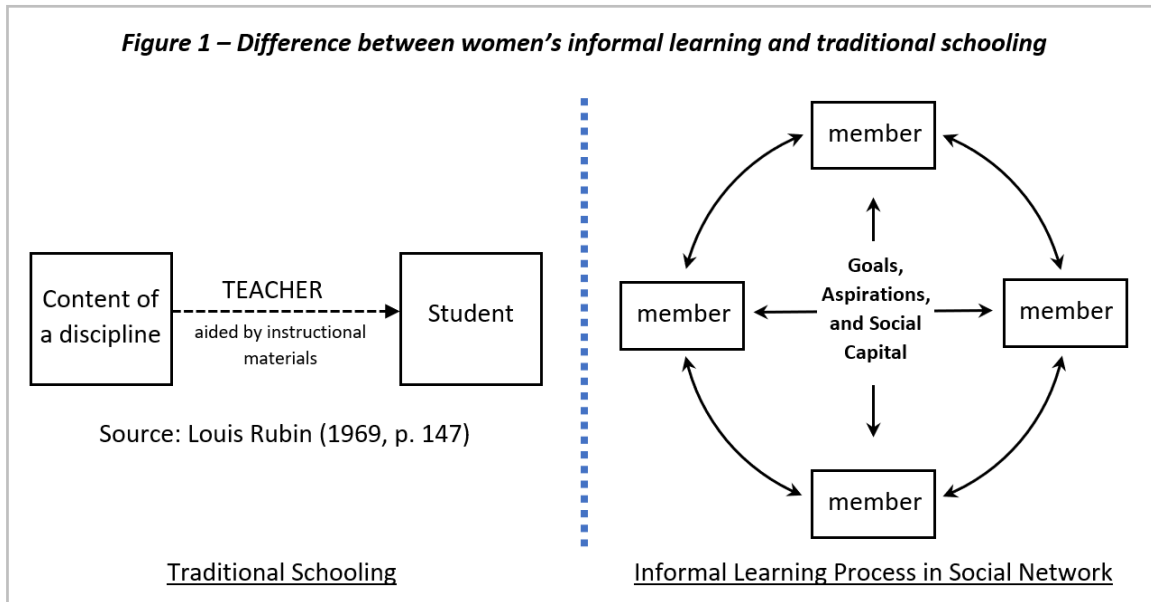
Findings and analysis
The data reveal that women's social interactions, such as conversation, storytelling, and deliberation, functioned as a pedagogical pathway where their self-created social networks served as avenues of learning. While most women appeared to be unaware of the learning that happens through social interactions, they were able to notice and report on it when I asked for their reflections. Throughout the interviews, participants mentioned several forms of individually constructed social networks that allowed for gathering outside the home and for time to chat, interact, learn, and have fun. In these self-created groups, women typically talk about problems encountered in their daily lives that are of importance to them, including: their marriage, livelihood, family planning, child rearing, households, clothing, and makeup. Women also spoke of their thirst for more information outside the confines of their home sphere. These self-created groups represent a form of informal social networks. Four examples of these self-created groups were frequently mentioned by women:

- ***Women baking together*** is a weekly event where women come together to chat, interact, and banter while baking bread.
- ***Peanut picking and separation*** is another event in rural societies that is associated with women where they come together to harvest and separate the nut from the root of the peanut plant—the major crop of their village.
- ***Halaqa***, or "circle" in Arabic, is another form of a self-created group where women come together to recite and memorize the Quran.
- ***Sardine gathering*** is another self-created group where women come together to eat sardines. Egyptians, especially those living in rural communities, use the term "sardine" to refer to one way of eating preserved fish. Similar to the Swedish concept of *surströmming*, sardine refers to any fish that has been fermented for a long time by adding salt to prevent rotting. In Egypt, sardine is usually accompanied by green onions, and have been eaten during the Easter season since Ancient Egyptian times. Participants mentioned that sardine gathering, which regularly happened at one of the women's homes or farms, was one way they have maintained their social network for a long time. Women ranked sardine gathering as the event with the highest turnout. Participants described this self-created group as a place where they had fun, played games, and talked about topics ranging from community happenings to health and microbusiness. Women explained that even though they may sometimes choose to replace sardines with another dish, they still maintained the term sardine to describe the gathering whatever the type of the dish. Finally, in these groups, women share the cost of the meal, including: the main dish, dessert, fruit, drinks and *lib*– the Egyptian snack that is roughly the equivalent of roasted and salted sunflower seeds.

Rural women do not have the luxury of time, especially as they are frequently overwhelmed with seemingly unending household activities. The data suggested that women used numerous strategies to ensure that their group meetings accomplished household activities while also allowing for highly desired time together to converse and learn (Mohamed, 2017). Women disclosed that this strategy is important for them not only because they can accomplish some work while chatting, but also because it legitimizes the time they spend away from family. Some of those activities included crocheting clothes for their kids, preparing vegetables for same-day meals, putting on makeup, or preparing vegetables to dry and preserve for later use (e.g., cleaning and trimming okra to string and dry under the sun for later use).

Young women learn about civics informally through their social interactions as they converse and interact in their women's groups. Throughout the interviews, women explained that they learned to participate in civic activities not only from their interactions within women's groups, but also through their civic action. This learning process does not imitate the linear structure of traditional teaching of content, nor does it rely on its three main components (i.e., curriculum, teacher, student; Rubin, 1969); rather, it is a social process through which young women construct their own knowledge and learn through interaction and experience as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Difference between women's informal learning and traditional schooling

Traditional Schooling: Content of a discipline — TEACHER aided by instructional materials → Student
Source: Louis Rubin (1969, p. 147)

Informal Learning Process in Social Network: member, member, member, member — Goals, Aspirations, and Social Capital

Data suggest that experience and conversation are central to young women's civic learning where they create meaning and construct knowledge from the real activities of their everyday lives. From this perspective, women's groups might be understood as places of relationships and interactions, and as such, are avenues of authentic and informal learning. Traditional theories of learning posit that knowledge emerges from abstract and out-of-context experiences; however, women's groups, as specific, contextualized spaces, are places where young women can tap into their prior knowledge and experiences to challenge the social injustice of their societies. Young women recounted that, the informal civic learning that occurs through spontaneous discussions as young women interact when they meet in their self-created women's groups differs from the formal top-down civic education provided by school. An important distinction made by women is that their informal civic learning generated through spontaneous discussions facilitates their public engagement, collective action, and leads to effective practice of citizenship.

Throughout the interviews, the young women explained that participating in conversation within the network facilitated the evolution of their consciousness, which in turn increased their capacity for constructing meaning out of what they were doing. For example, Ola, a 20-year-old woman from Hope village who happened to be illiterate (couldn't read or write basic sentences), explained how her full engagement in interaction with other women in her social network facilitated her civic learning:

> One day and while I was meeting with other women in our sardine group, we had to decide on what dish we would bring for the next meeting. I recommended a dish that I make reallywell, as all other women say, and there were two other recommendations by two other women, my peers. While we were deliberating which dish to bring next time, some said that they wanted my dish, but the rest were divided between the other two dishes. One of the women, who knows a lot because she is educated and finished high school, said we should vote for the dish for next time to solve this dilemma. Then she took a blank piece of paper from her daughter's notebook, cut it into small pieces, and distributed them to all of us, one each. Then she asked all of us to write down the dish that we wanted for next

time, and she emphasized that we should each only write one dish. Because I cannot write, she whispered to me, asking about my favorite dish of the three. I chose mine, and she wrote it down on my paper and gave it back to me. After all women finished their choices, she collected the pieces of paper and read them loudly before she announced the winning dish that we will prepare for the next meeting. I learned about elections and voted for the first time in my life. And, guess what? I also won the voting as my recommended dish received the highest number of votes. I was so happy, not only because my dish won the election, but also because I learned and voted for the first time, and if I have an ID, I will go vote in the coming elections.

This quote from Ola shows how her incidental learning, as a byproduct of her spontaneous social interactions with peer women in the sardine group, was a form of informal learning where the women's group served as an avenue of learning. Although Ola is illiterate, she was able to practice the mechanism of the election to express her opinion and understand the election process as a form of civic knowledge. Ola's experiences can also be explained through Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory, which argues that an important role of learning is played by legitimate peripheral participation. From this perspective, individuals indirectly learn a great deal from their legitimate position on the periphery, even if they are not taking part in a particular activity. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) refer to this form of learning as a process of cognitive apprenticeship and enculturation; learners, like Ola, have the "chance to observe and practice *in situ* the behavior of members of a culture, ... pick up relevant jargon, imitate behavior, and gradually start to act" (emphasis in the original, p. 34). In addition, Ola's narrative highlights the key role of social capital generated within women's group. Women's interaction within the group (e.g., to deliberate what meal to bring for their next meeting) facilitated the generation of social capital where one of them shared her knowledge about election with the rest of the members to use free of charge. Sharing one's knowledge with other members of a social network is what constitutes the relation between social capital and human capital as discussed above by Coleman (1988). In sum, according to the young women of this study, women's self-created groups, as avenues of learning, generate social capital and facilitate different forms of informal civic learning.

Data from the participants suggested that informal learning within their women's group might take different forms. Schugurensky (2008) developed a taxonomy that uses intentionality and consciousness as two main categories that identify three forms of informal learning (i.e., self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization). According to Schugurensky's taxonomy, Ola's learning about voting was unintentional, but conscious, because her learning experience occurred when she did not have any preconceived intention to learn about voting; rather, it was suggested by her peers through their social interactions. After the experience with peers in her sardine group, Ola became aware of and appreciated what she had learned incidentally about voting. Her new attitude about participating in a public election (if she would have obtained an ID) reflects another form of informal learning, *socialization*.

The study found that women also learn from their action. Learning from action, however, is largely unacknowledged. Unlike formal and non-formal education, informal learning through action is frequently invisible and mostly results in tacit knowledge (Schugurensky, 2008). However, for one of the participants, Rasha, and her groupmates, informal learning was a result of civic action. For

Rasha's group, several months passed before they narrated their experiences of recognition with me in interviews.

Rasha, a 24-year-old woman from Hope village who is married with three children, explained how she and her peers utilized the knowledge and skills they acquired from their everyday experiences and group interactions to take civic action. Rasha's narrative shows how civic action is instrumental for further civic learning. During one of the meetings of Rasha's sardine group, the topic of discussion was the recent announcement by the governor that his governorate had completely eradicated bird-flu from the area. Rasha and several other women in her village are still on a long waiting list to receive vaccine for their home-grown poultry, a fact that prompted her reaction: "I got furiously annoyed when I heard women talking about that announcement." She explained that she was angry because she had been visiting the only veterinary clinic in the village twice a week for the last two months, asking for a vaccine for her stricken poultry. The only answer she received was "we are still running out of vaccine, and there are several people ahead of you on the waiting list." Rasha added:

> I convinced all the women that we must go complain at the Local Council in the nearby village and ask for clarification as to why the governor had announced that Fayoum is free of bird flu…On the agreed-upon day, I went from door-to-door to gather women. We all went to the office of the chairman of the Local Council. His assistant refused to let us in because he was busy, but we waited until he came to us asking what we needed, and why we were there. He never let us in to his office. We told him that the nine of us had been on the waiting list to receive the vaccine for more than two months, and the folks at the clinic told us last week that there are a lot of people ahead of us on the waiting list. We told him that last week the governor announced that Fayoum no longer had any cases of bird flu. I asked him to tell us who we should trust--the governor or the officials at the clinic? He immediately asked me to lower my voice and to come to his office to avoid disturbing other people …While in his office, he asked us our names and wrote them down. Then he called the officials at the clinic, telling them that the nine of us would be coming to the clinic tomorrow to receive our vaccine. He walked us to the door, gave the list of our names to his assistant, and asked him to follow up with the clinic to make sure that we receive the vaccine. We went [to the clinic] the next day, and we all received the vaccine as he had promised. As women, we were all happy when we met again in our group. We talked about the entire situation and how we succeeded to get our rights. Other women were curious to learn about what we had done.

Rasha's narrative illustrates the link between women's social interaction within their informal groups and their civic engagement. Her story explains the civic knowledge and skills they acquired through their informal group. First, the women followed and shared the news about the governor's announcement as freely available public information. This was a way that women are civically engaged as they keep themselves updated with public news; it is also one of the measures employed by SYPE to assess civic engagement of young people in Egypt. SYPE, however, employed a generic question to assess young people's civic engagement (i.e., knowing the name of the governor) and neglected such public concerns that affect the everyday lives of young people. Second, while the women's action was to great extent motivated by the governor's announcement, they still do not know the name of the governor, and they are not even interested in learning what

it might be. Third, the action itself represents learning by doing as a predominant learning modality (Schugurensky, 2008).

Reflection is an important learning event for the women's action. According to Rasha, "We all were happy when we met again in our group and talked about the entire situation and how we succeeded." Reflecting on the event is what led Rasha and her peers to realize and learn that if they did not mobilize and force government and elected officials to release the vaccine, it would not get done. From this experience, the women learned how to deal with government agencies and elected officials. Reflection on their action led the women to also realize that their everyday lived experiences facilitate the development of a political identity that enables learning about the larger political system and world. This aligns with Joplin's (1981) assertion that "experience alone is insufficient to be called experiential education, and it is the reflection process which turns experience into experiential education" (p. 17).

While the action they took provided an experience that can facilitate an understanding of purpose and encourage observation of a situation, these activities do not, in and of themselves, lead to knowledge. Reflection is the key component. Through their reflections, the women allowed themselves a space to learn and make connections between their actual experience and the knowledge they drew from this experience. The civic action taken by Rasha and her peers served as a trigger event that caused them to question the social norms and the socially constructed gender roles in their village. As Cranton (1994) contends, "when contradictory information is found, it may provoke reflection on the currently held knowledge and may even lead to reflection on epistemic meaning perspectives" (p. 78). The women realized that their civic action could facilitate the reconstruction of the repressive social norms that limit women's roles to the household and domestic sphere. Thus, the women saw that action was likely to involve values and facts that may contradict the socially constructed authoritative and patriarchal knowledge that they had previously accepted without question.

Learning occurred when the women reflected on their action. Rasha later said that, "now we know how to get our rights, and we learned that if we leave it up to them [the government] we would never receive the vaccine. We will go there whenever they abuse our rights or do not do their job; and next time we will go twenty of us or more, not just nine." Though Rasha and her peers were not conscious at the time of the magnitude of their action, their engagement held the officials accountable. Of particular importance is Rasha's expectation that the chairman of the Local Council tells the women the truth about the bird flu epidemic, as a matter of public importance. Finally, the women tacitly internalized the value of accountability when they held the officials to their word; however, they may not have been aware that they had learned these skills until after they had a chance for reflection.

The actions taken by Rasha and her peers are not only an example of civic engagement, but also a demonstration of the classic understanding of citizenship. According to Marshall (1950), the elements of citizenship can be organized into one of three core elements: civil rights, social rights, and political rights. From this understanding of citizenship, Rasha and her peer's decision to speak out and question the inaccurate rhetoric of the governor (the highest government official in their governorate) was an exercise of speech, one of their civil rights. By influencing two government agencies and compelling action to address a public health threat, the women were practicing their

political rights. Finally, by securing the vaccine, the women were expecting the government to act in ways that preserved economic welfare and security for its citizens, or social rights. Another framework that is useful for analyzing the actions of the women is Ekman and Amna's (2012) typology. From this perspective, Rasha and her peers were manifesting political activism by contacting government representatives and elected official, and interacting with the formal political structures of the governorate.

Conclusion
The preceding discussion shows how the young women in this study take what they have learned in their self-created social networks and apply it to the real world. The findings further the argument that the individual-focused SES political and public participation model falls short in their capacity to predict and explain women's unconventional public participation. Women's vivid civic examples introduced above highlight the failure of the individual-focused SES model to provide insight into how some social groups (e.g., less-advantaged young rural women) participate at much higher rates than others.

While the focus of those Tocquevillian models (e.g., SES) is on the individuals' level of education and income to predict their engagement, they neglect people's agency to transform their low socioeconomic status and other forms of exclusion into a catalyst for greater civic engagement when they come together. Furthermore, this body of existing research relies on Tocquevillian indicators and the SES model and tends to connect public participation to predictors such as levels of educational attainment, as defined by traditional schooling models. The focus on traditional schooling as a determinant of public participation contributes to the paucity of scholarship on other forms of learning and may not provide leverage to the contribution of informal learning to public participation. By relying on SES models, scholars have perhaps underestimated the influence that informal learning has on political participation. As this study has shown, in practice, political participation is more dynamic and complex than the individual-focused SES models have suggested. My research supports the social network model that sees the importance of relationships rather than only individual SES characteristics for social and political education and participation. The action of Rasha and her peers has shown the importance of understanding the acts of young women's everyday lives as an unconventional form of participation and its role in political change. My research supports the social network model

This study does not downplay the importance of individual characteristics, nor does it discard the strong theoretical grounding offered through SES Models; rather, it shows that these models should be troubled and problematized. The paper expands current debates about informal and unconventional participation theories and the attendant methodological considerations that emerge when attempting to understand ways of learning and participation that are less visible. It improves our understanding of how less-advantaged young women acquire skills and resources to advance their participation in public life and political change.

Endnotes

* SYPE is a national survey conducted in Egypt 2012 – 2017 and covers five major areas, including education and civic engagement. With the purpose of updating the state of knowledge on youth in Egypt, SYPE was carried out by the Population Council, the Center for the Study of Youth and Political Conflict of the University of Tennessee, and the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics in Egypt (Population Council, 2018).

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