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## Media Empowers Brave Girls to be Global Activists

By Gayle Kimball<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

A surprising way to silence young women globally, in addition to overly protective families, is by scholars of youth studies and development professionals. Ageism against youth is rarely discussed, so this article reveals this academic bias that ignores or discounts youth voices—especially young women. However, in the safe space of their bedrooms, the Internet and the cell phone enable young women to express their voices, even to organize uprisings. They can get around family restrictions and desires to protect them by speaking publicly from a private space. Some media provide empowering images for young women activists and informative networks of support. Readers probably don't know about young women who led uprisings, so the article will name Generation Y and Z women activists who led revolutions in this century using social media.

*Keywords:* Feminism; ageism; sexism; media studies; girls' studies; youth studies; cyberfeminism; women's studies, public vs., private; activism; Arab Spring; bloggers; social media; street protests, Millennials, Generations Y and Z, youth movements; gender differences; rap music; street demonstrations

### Ageism and Sexism in Youth Studies

Rarely discussed, one way to silence young women, in addition to restrictive families, is by scholars of youth studies. My book *Ageism in Youth Studies: Generation Maligned* proves this bias. British sociologist Robert Hollands concurs that even in studies of youth their voices are usually omitted.<sup>2</sup> He calls for the inclusion of the thoughts of young activists. Researching global youth issues for over a decade, I found not only neglect of youth voices but also disparagement and fear of “moral panics” associated with youth. To counter this problem of silence about youth viewpoints, I surveyed over 4,000 young people from 88 countries and interviewed some of them in the Youth SpeakOut study, as recorded on video available on YouTube and analyzed in four recent books including *Brave: Young Women's Global Revolution*. The media and access to education empowers some young women like Swede Greta Thunberg to be changemakers on the public streets as well as from home. But even in the field of media studies, “In this new century, where political apathy is rife, where social media is the newest form of political organizing and where gender-mainstreaming has taken over as ‘the way’ to gender equality, research on the experiences of young women and gender equity activism is missing,” according to an Australian report.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Hollands, “There is No Alternative?” *Journal of Youth Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2012, pp. 546-564. <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/research/publication/190848>

<sup>3</sup> “50/50: From Girls to Men: Social Attitudes to Gender Equality in Australia,” 2030 Foundation, p. 17. <http://www.broadagenda.com.au/assets/reports/documents/From-Girls-to-Men.pdf>

Some universities like the University of Minnesota offer a major in Youth Studies, but despite this interest, “youth-centered definitions of their lives remain largely absent. Young people have not been enfranchised by the research conducted on their lives.”<sup>4</sup> Iranian-American Asef Bayat points out that although studies of youth issues have multiplied, the focus is not on youth: “Youth as a social category has curiously been absent from the prevalent social movement debates. In general, scholarly attempts to conceptualize the meanings and modalities of youth movements remain rare,” other than analyzing their problems or subcultures.<sup>5</sup>

Articles on Youth Studies have been published in *The Journal of Youth and Adolescence* since 1972, followed by *Youth Studies* in 1998, the *Journal of Youth Studies* in 2000, and *Youth Voice Journal* since 2010, as well as other journals listed by the Children’s Research Network.<sup>6</sup> International Monetary Fund research confirmed that although the 1.8 billion young people ages 15 to 24 are powerful change agents and their numbers will increase for several decades (especially in Africa), they’re the most overlooked age group, ignored by researchers, business thinkers, and policy analysts.<sup>7</sup> Despite their potential power, “The world’s 1.2 billion adolescents and young adults are probably the most neglected—by policy analysts, business thinkers, and academic researchers—of all the age groups,” agreed Harvard professor David Bloom.<sup>8</sup>

“The young are never okay,” in *Youth Studies*, according to Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt, the editors of *Keywords in Youth Studies* (2012). The deficit model focuses on youth problems of “social exclusion, poverty, school underachievement, school violence, gang activity, sexuality, health,” drug abuse, as well as use of the media and Internet.<sup>9</sup> Australian professor Anita Harris also criticized *Youth Studies* for having “a long history of the construction of ‘problem youth,’ and has become a field of study primarily by creating this very category of young people, who can then be researched, analyzed, categorized, and assisted or punished.”<sup>10</sup> Harris notes this bias continues, as in British and Australian programs to increase youth citizenship participation, which fault youth for political apathy rather than tackling the social and economic problems that make them disillusioned with corrupt governments influenced by lobbyists. Harris suggests that the focus on youth apathy serves as a scapegoat to “divert attention from the dwindling public sphere and the disengagement of adults.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<http://www.youthpolicy.org/research/journals/>

<http://arcyp.ca/archives/2421>

- *Journal of Research on Adolescence*
- *Journal of Adolescence*
- *Journal of Adolescent Research*
- *Youth & Society*
- *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*
- *Journal of Youth Development*

<sup>5</sup> Asef Bayat. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, 2013, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> <https://childrensresearchnetwork.org/knowledge/resources/overview-of-academic-journals-with-a-focus-on-youth>

<sup>7</sup> David Bloom, “Youth in the Balance,” IMF’s *Finance and Development*, March 2012, Vol. 49, No. 1.

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2012/03/bloom.htm>

<sup>8</sup> David Bloom, “Youth in the Balance,” IMF’s *Finance and Development*, March 2012, Vol. 49, No. 1.

<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2012/03/bloom.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt, eds. *Keywords in Youth Studies: Tracing Affects, Movements, Knowledges*. Routledge, 2011, p. 281, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Anita Harris in Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>11</sup> Anita Harris, ed. *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism*. Routledge, 2008, p. 232.

In the West, young people are often referred to as fragile tea cups, snowflakes, narcissistic, anxious, apathetic and apolitical with controlling helicopter, snowplow or lawn mower parents. Millennials in the United States are “the most maligned generation in decades,” states Pennsylvania State University professor Sophia McClennen.<sup>12</sup> She defends her college students against charges that they’re lazy, clueless, and selfish. She quotes scholar Russell Dalton who believes they may be the most attacked generation ever, although they do more paid work while in college, volunteer more than their elders, and are more socially aware and engaged than Baby Boomers were at the same age. They also have lower rates of crime and sexual activity, but higher rates of anxiety.

Since the 1990s, Girls’ Studies includes courses, an international association, online faculty discussion group, and *Girlhood Studies* (founded in 2008) and *Girls Studies* journals, with especially active researchers in the British Commonwealth.<sup>13</sup> However, Mary Celeste Kearney pointed out that despite awareness of intersectionality in Girls’ Studies, “non-white, non-Western girls remain vastly understudied as a result of such research being conducted primarily in Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Northern Europe, and the United States.”<sup>14</sup> Black Girlhood Studies developed recently to correct this white bias.

Global development organizations for girls include the Young Feminist Activism (YFA) program at the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) and its Young Feminist Wire; Advocates’ Youth Activist Network; Plan International’s Because I am a Girl; FRIDA: The Young Feminist Fund. Corporate foundations such as the Nike and NoVo Foundations developed programs for girls in developing countries, such as “The Girl Effect.” These programs are criticized for idealizing the “can-do” entrepreneurial girl as a modern version of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Horatio Alger story of the self-made man. This individualistic approach ignores structural poverty issues that make pulling yourself up by your boot straps impossible, since you’re lucky to have plastic sandals. Various United Nations organizations include Global UNiTE Youth Forum to end violence against women, Girl Up, and Girls’ Education Initiative.

Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock, authors of *Youth Rising?* (2015), fault popular new theories that aim to explain the recent so-called youth rebellions for either glorifying or dismissing youth as “revolutionary actors.”<sup>15</sup> They charge that these theories of youth-led uprisings keep the focus on youth rather than the real problems caused by neoliberal capitalist policies, thereby preventing radical change. The centrality of individuals using social media ignores “questions of ideology, social and economic structure and position, collective social organization and strategic, planned action.”<sup>16</sup> Scholars like Canadian James Côté also emphasize the negative impact of neoliberal capitalism and growing inequality with high youth un- or under-employment. Along this line, British scholars like Alan France and Steven Roberts think class is an important determinant of youth issues rather than generational differences.

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<sup>12</sup> Sophia McClennen, “Students Suck, Professors Don’t Care and Other Myths You Shouldn’t Let Ruin the Start of the School Year,” *Salon*, August 28, 2016. <http://www.salon.com/2016/08/28/students-suck-professors-do-not-care-and-other-myths-you-should-not-let-ruin-the-start-of-the-school-year/>

<sup>13</sup> [www.uleth.ca/conreg/icys/call-for-papers](http://www.uleth.ca/conreg/icys/call-for-papers)

<sup>14</sup> Mary Celeste Kearney, “Coalescing: The Development of Girls’ Studies,” *National Women’s Studies Association*, Vol. 21, No. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Sukarieh and Tannock, pp. 104-109, p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Despite the increasing interest in Girls' Studies over the last two decades, Emily Bent found that "the research on girls and politics is surprisingly incomplete" and invisible.<sup>17</sup> Most of the interest in Girls' Studies, Youth Studies, and children's rights is in interest in their future impact on politics when they can vote rather than girls' current activism. However, several international studies cited by Bent found that girls valued political participation as much or more than boys, although some view it as a masculine arena. Girls were more likely to imagine themselves becoming politically involved in the future if the media discussed women politicians. Anita Harris points out that some girls are interested in politics but consider the traditional forms of government corrupt and dismissive of their views, similar to my Youth SpeakOut results. An editor of *We Got Issues! A Young Woman's Guide to a Bold, Courageous and Empowered Life* (2006), reported, "Young women in this country [the United States] expect to be ignored. Most young women believe that people don't really want to know what we think."<sup>18</sup>

Few studies of youth civic engagement focus on activism, such as movements for global justice or environmental movements; rather, most scholars look at individual actions such as voting or a girl leading an environmental campaign.<sup>19</sup> Few adult-centric researchers look at "youth as being political actors in their own right" in the present. Even studies of social movements ignore youth movements and generally "youth remains accidental or at best peripheral to the central focus of these studies" of AIDS, new media, music, conflict, marginalization, etc.<sup>20</sup> Research shows that social movement organizations also tend to leave out youth, many of whom turn instead to informal and local activities such as volunteering.<sup>21</sup> The organization websites with the most outreach to youth target LGBTQ and labor issues, but tension often occurs between youth and adult leaders. Youth are more likely to be involved when they can interact with other users and post their own content. Author Hava Rachel Gordon reported after conducting studies of high school activist groups in Oakland, California and Portland, Oregon, "There is a notable silence in the social science literatures on adolescence and political action," assuming that social movement activists are adults.<sup>22</sup> She adds that ageism "plays a major role in constructing youth political alienation," viewing youth activism only in terms of their consumption practices.

Youth movements are "mostly invisible, within the broader context of systematic misrepresentation of youth throughout the globalized media system," according to MIT media professor Sasha Costanza-Chock.<sup>23</sup> She explained that when positive media coverage does occur, it usually features an individual rather than youth in social movements. Other scholars agree that, "Few researchers have investigated actual protest organizations and/or spoken with actual

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<sup>17</sup> Emily Bent, "The Boundaries of Girls' Political Participation: A Critical Exploration of Girls' Experiences as Delegates to the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women," *Global Studies of Childhood*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2013, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup> Rha Goddess and JLove Calderón. *We Got Issues! A Young Woman's Guide to a Bold, Courageous and Empowered Life*. Inner Ocean Publishing, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Maesy Angelina, "Beyond the Digital," Research paper for the International Institute of Social Studies in the Netherlands, December 2010.  
[https://www.academia.edu/820146/Beyond\\_the\\_Digital\\_Understanding\\_Contemporary\\_Forms\\_of\\_Youth\\_Activism\\_-\\_The\\_Case\\_of\\_Blank\\_Noise\\_in\\_Urban\\_India](https://www.academia.edu/820146/Beyond_the_Digital_Understanding_Contemporary_Forms_of_Youth_Activism_-_The_Case_of_Blank_Noise_in_Urban_India)

<sup>20</sup> Linda Herrera and Asef Bayat, eds. *Being Young and Muslim*. Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Elliott and Jennifer Earl, "Organizing the Next Generation: Youth Engagement with Activism Inside and Outside of Organizations," *Social Media + Society*, Vol. 4, No. 1, January 1, 2018.  
DOI: 10.1177/2056305117750722

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup> Sasha Costanza-Chock, "Youth and Social Movements," *The Kinder and Braver World Project*, December 17, 2012.

demonstrators” in the Global Justice or anti-globalization movement.<sup>24</sup> My recent books and Paolo Gerbaudo’s are an exception: In *The Mask and The Flag: the Rise of Anarchopopulism in Global Protest* (2016) he reports on interviews with activists of various ages. Western media generally treats youth movements as if they were spontaneous emotional outbursts rather than organized strategies, when in fact their campaigns use sophisticated advertising branding techniques.

The editors of a book on *Student Activism in Asia* (2012), like the few other researchers on youth activism, complain that despite the visibility of student protests and their vanguard actions, because it is so common, “It seems to require no explanation.”<sup>25</sup> They point out the lack of comparative research on the causes and effects of student activism, with the exception of some interest in specific local uprisings in the 1960s and 70s. They observed that it’s remarkable how the important role of students in the Asian region is “poorly chronicled and understood.”<sup>26</sup> I wondered about their lack of mention of young women’s roles or feminism. Editor Meredith Weiss kindly emailed me in 2015, “You will find women involved alongside men in activism in all states in the region, across periods, but I can’t think off-hand of any Asian (or other) state in which feminism per se has been a guiding frame or objective for student mobilization overall.” In the United States, the *Signs* journal issue titled *Feminist Resources for #TheResistance* against Trump Administration policies didn’t include ageism or young women’s issues in its list of problems to be tackled by feminists: sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia.

Academics report, “There is not much research exploring leadership development and civic participation among youth, and even less among young women,” even though research suggests that women leaders are more likely to collaborate rather than dictate.<sup>27</sup> Feminist and queer scholars point out “the near total absence of any references to women or feminism” in scholarly analyses of globalization.<sup>28</sup> Girls’ media activism in Australia, England and the US is discussed in *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism* (2008), edited by Harris. She states, “Very little has been said about either the political participation or nonparticipation of young women in particular,” with the exception of feminist “generation wars” and criticisms of the quieter political activism of Third Wave feminists. Similar to Harris, Jessica Taft reported in *Rebel Girls* that, “Despite their activism, girls are rarely considered and written about as significant political actors. They appear but do not speak.”<sup>29</sup> They’re left out of academic research on youth movements and Taft added that the focus is on college students rather than secondary school teens.

### **Few Gender Differences in Actual Youth Viewpoints**

To correct this scholarly deficit, I surveyed 4,149 young people (57% girls, 43% boys) from 2004 to 2018 and interviewed some of them, available on YouTube videos.<sup>30</sup> The 12 open-

<sup>24</sup> Lauren Langman and Dougals Morris, “Internet Mediation: A Theory of Alternative Globalization Movements,” paper, 2006. <http://www.csudh.edu/dearhabermas/langmanbk01.htm>

<sup>25</sup> Meredith Weiss and Edward Aspinall, eds. *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 295.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Rorem and Monisha Bajaj, “Cultivating Young Women’s Leadership for a Kinder, Braver World,” The Kinder and Braver World Project: Research Series, Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, December 17, 2012.

[https://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/KBWCultivatingYoungWomensLeadership2012\\_0.pdf](https://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/KBWCultivatingYoungWomensLeadership2012_0.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner, eds. *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*. Columbia University Press, 2012, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Jessica Taft. *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*. NYU Press, 2010

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheGlobalyouth>

ended survey questions, main answers, and list of the 88 countries represented in the surveys are listed in *Global Youth Transforming Our Future* and the Global Youth SpeakOut webpage.<sup>31</sup> I aimed to survey people under age 20 because of their frankness and to compensate for that age group being the least studied. I also interviewed activists in their 20s. The surveys and interviews indicate that the new generation is uniquely altruistic, committed to peace and collaboration, and interconnected. Despite stereotypes about gender differences, the survey indicated few differences between boys and girls in the SpeakOut study. As boys gravitate indoors to play videogames and as parents fear for the safety of both their girls and doors outside the home and girls take to the virtual streets on the Internet, their viewpoints are very similar, according to the SpeakOut study. Other surveys find that girls are more liberal politically in the United States, as in surveys of first-year college students. In a 2017 report, “An all-time high of 41% of women self-identify as ‘liberal’ or ‘far left’ with respect to their political views compared to 28.9% of men.”<sup>32</sup>

Here are responses to three of the 12 open-ended questions. (The percentages are small because there were many replies, rather than a few multiple-choice answers.)

Why do you think you're here on earth; what's your purpose?

**Girls**

Good works 41.5%  
Personal goals 19%  
Help family or country 15%  
Worship God 15%  
Don't know 10%

**Boys**

Good works 38%  
Personal goals 19%  
Help family or country 15%  
Worship God 16%  
Don't know 8%

What work would you like to do when you're an adult?

**Girls**

Medical 14%  
Business 11%  
Teacher 10%  
Social work 7%  
Do good 6%

**Boys**

Medical 14%  
Teacher 12%  
Do good 9%  
Social work 8%  
Business 8%

If you were the leader of your country, what changes would you make?

**Girls**

Youth issues 21%  
Develop economy & infrastructure 16%  
Poverty 12%  
Corruption 11%

**Boys**

Youth issues 22%  
Poverty 13%  
Economy 10.5%  
Corruption 10%

The few differences are girls are more critical of adult bad behavior and want them to be more understanding. Boys are more likely to mention wanting self-esteem (5% vs. 3%) and less likely to say they wouldn't change anything about themselves. Girls are more likely to mention sports, which includes bike riding and walking. Girls are more likely to feel loved for their successes and when helped in difficult times like illness.

<sup>31</sup> <https://globalyouthbook.wordpress.com/2014/04/25/top-4-responses-to-global-youth-survey/>

<sup>32</sup> Kevin Eagan, et al., “The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2016,” Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, 2017, p. 4. <https://www.heri.ucla.edu/monographs/TheAmericanFreshman2016.pdf>

## Media Enables Brave Girls to Be Global Activists

Every woman needs a room of her own in order to write and be heard, declared Virginia Woolf in 1929. We still assume that means a private domestic space rather than an office in the work world. In the safe space of their bedrooms, the Internet and the cell phone enable young women to express their voices, perhaps using a pseudonym, even to organize uprisings. They can get around family restrictions and desires to protect them by speaking publicly from a private space. Feminist scholars like Angela McRobbie had to correct the focus on the more visible public subcultures of working class boys by academics at the influential Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s, pointing out that girls created subcultures from the private domestic sphere in that era as well.<sup>33</sup> Two researchers reported, “In girlhood studies, where the focus has been on girls’ own spaces, virtual spaces have been recognized as extensions of girls’ private rooms as ‘virtual streets’” of activism and being heard.<sup>34</sup> Some “undutiful daughters” may put aside being “nice girls” as they speak out.

The term *cyberfeminist* was first used in the early 1990s to refer to feminist activists analyzing and using the Internet and other new media. The group “Global Girl Media” was set up by women broadcasters and journalists to assist girls in “under-served communities” to become journalists to correct the problem that “young women pass silently under the radar” of mainstream reporting.<sup>35</sup> Their webpage includes videos by girls. The Women’s Rights Campaign put together an “Info-Activism Toolkit” to teach how to create a successful campaign by telling a story, inspiring action, and grabbing attention.<sup>36</sup>

Examples of bedroom activism are young women like Asmaa Mahfouz who was called the “Leader of the Revolution” in the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, as she used the Internet to call Egyptians to march to Tahrir Square. Also posting from her room, a New York University student, 18-year old Rachel Brown, took a break from studying for final exams in 2015 to create a fake Facebook page to protest Chicago police shooting of Laquan McDonald, age 17. They shot him 16 times. Her page stated, “Citywide walkout! Rahm Emanuel’s [mayor] and Anita Alvarez’s [the first Latinx state attorney for Cook County] resignation party!” She photoshopped a photo of them waving goodbye together. She invited “tons of people” to attend the event at the Civic Center, thinking it would be a viral joke, but almost 3,000 people posted acceptance. The actual protest rallies that resulted while she was sleeping in her dorm made national news and led to more calls for Mayor Emanuel to resign. Another girl who organized a large demonstration, Hebh Jamal (age 17) led a mass student walk-out in New York City in 2017 to protest President Donald Trump’s travel ban against people from Muslim-majority countries.

In her study of bloggers in Egypt’s Tahrir Square and in Occupy Oakland in 2011, Melody Ng found that almost all of the female bloggers were as active in street protests as they were commenting on social media.<sup>37</sup> In Egypt, bloggers reported that male demonstrators praised the

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<sup>33</sup> Angela McRobbie, “Settling Accounts with Subculture. A Feminist Critique,” 1980.

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-21168-5\_2

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288347616\\_Settling\\_Accounts\\_with\\_Subculture\\_A\\_Feminist\\_Critique](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/288347616_Settling_Accounts_with_Subculture_A_Feminist_Critique)

<sup>34</sup> Yen Mai and Sofia Laine, “Blogging Activism of Young Educated and Global Women in Tunisia and Vietnam,” *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*, November 15, 2016, p. 900.

DOI: 10.1285/120356609v9i3p893

<sup>35</sup> <http://globalgirlmedia.org/about-us/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://womensrights.informationactivism.org/>

<sup>37</sup> Melody Ng, “Contemporary Female Activism: Female Activist and Social Movement in the Cyber-Era,” Master’s Thesis, University of California Berkeley, Spring 2012, p. 33.

[http://legalstudies.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ng\\_Melody\\_Honors-Thesis.pdf](http://legalstudies.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ng_Melody_Honors-Thesis.pdf)

women on the front lines of battle by commenting “you are such a man.” These reports suggest increasing activism on the part of young women in public as well as private advocacy spaces. It’s time that scholars and social movement organizations remedy ageism and include the voices of actual young people, female as well as male.

### Examples of Empowering Media Images

Around the world, kids with access to TVs and movie theaters watched cartoons and *Harry Potter* films where the young hero defies authority. Harry Potter films are unusual blockbuster films for their positive role-models like smart Hermione and helpful and compassionate boy Neville. SpeakOut student Yara, 17, lives near Cairo. She said that Hogwarts (Harry Potter’s school imagined by series author JK Rowling) was “my safe place, a sanctuary. It was the world I could go to by closing my eyes when the here-and-now had too many conflicts, arguments, confusion and noise. I never really felt I’d fit into the real world.” Young people like Yara grew up identifying with heroes in movies and books like those about Harry Potter and Hermione Granger who smartly challenge the powerful bad guys. The Parkland, Florida organizers of the 2018 Never Again movement for gun control privately called Governor Rick Scott “Voldemort,” the Dark Lord villain of the Harry Potter series and may see themselves as Dumbledore’s army for good. Egyptian activist Esraa Abdel Fattah said that as a child she watched animated movies where the hero takes on the power structure: “I loved *The Lion King*, *Finding Nemo*, and *Antz*; I was always wondering why we weren’t doing this in Egypt.”<sup>38</sup> Egyptian rebels who ousted President Mubarak said they were raised with video games so death doesn’t scare them. Their cautious and fearful parents remarked on young rebels’ courage.

Fictional heroines that inspired young women who posted on Emma Watson’s feminist book club on Goodreads included Hermione Granger and Ginny Weasley, Catwoman, Princess Leia, Disney princesses Jasmine and Merida, and less famous ones: Luna Lovegood, Melody Brooks, Furiosa, Minerva McGonagall, Skeeter Phelan, and Arwen. However, despite feminist criticism of male dominance in films, women were only 29% of major characters in the top-selling Hollywood films of 2013, were only 30% of characters who said something, and were more likely to be identified by their marital status than men.<sup>39</sup> Only 28% of characters in family films were women. In children’s PG movies, only 17% of the people were female with very little progress over the last two decades.<sup>40</sup>

Yet traditional gender roles are challenged by female heroines in action movies such as the *Hunger Games* trilogy thereby outdating literary critic’s Leslie Fielder’s conclusion that the “The mythic America is boyhood.” Role reversal occurs with kind boys like Peeta in *Hunger Games* who accepts heroine’s Katniss’ strengths. Other revolutionary teen girls star in *V for Vendetta* (2005) and *Divergent* (2014). The former is the most influential in the recent global uprisings. It describes an anarchist rising up against totalitarianism in a future England, the inspiration for demonstrators who wear the Guy Fawkes mask. The masked hero, called V, says, “Ideas are bulletproof” and “People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid

<sup>38</sup> Katherine Zoepf, “A Troubled Revolution in Egypt,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2011.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/21/world/middleeast/a-troubled-revolution-in-egypt.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>39</sup> Martah Lauzen, “It’s a Man’s (Celluloid) World,” *The Guardian*, March 11, 2014.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/11/mans-celluloid-world-study-finds-women-under-represented-film>

<sup>40</sup> [http://www.seejane.org/downloads/GDIGM\\_Gender\\_Stereotypes.pdf](http://www.seejane.org/downloads/GDIGM_Gender_Stereotypes.pdf)

of their people.” He does not advocate peaceful resistance. His protégé is Evey, age 16, the young woman who leads the insurrection after V is killed.

For the first time in the *Star Wars* series, the action hero of episodes VII (2015) and VIII (2017) is a young woman. Rey is played by Daisy Ridley who stars with a black hero played by John Boyega—both British and 22. Fans were angry that she was left out of the Hasbro *Star Wars* Monopoly game that included Darth Vader, who wasn’t even in *The Force Awakens*. They started a Twitter campaign called #WhereisRae? that succeeded in adding Rae to the game in 2016. Other important female characters in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* are Carrie Fisher’s character General Leia, and a small wise woman over 1,000 years old named Maz Kanata who replaces Yoda.

A Pakistani TV cartoon series called *Burka Avenger* spread to India and other countries in 2015. The heroine is a teacher named Jiya who wears a burka as a disguise to fight the prejudice against girls going to school, attacks on polio health workers by Taliban extremists, child labor, environmental destruction and other current issues.<sup>41</sup> Most Western TV cartoons include nonconformists or at least problem solvers like Dora the Explorer and Doc McStuffins. Most of the children’s TV shows I’ve seen feature disrespectful and argumentative characters like SpongeBob SquarePants, which feeds disrespect for authority. For little girls, TV series feature girls as superheroes like the *Powerpuff Girls* (beginning in 1998), Latina *Dora the Explorer* (since 2000), *WordGirl* (2006), and African-American *Doc McStuffins* (2012). However, In British children’s TV, 44 out of 50 television shows shown from 1950 to 2013 had only male or mostly male characters.<sup>42</sup>

A website called Girl-Wonder.org documents positive female comic characters. The Marvel comic titled *Ms. Marvel* features a Pakistani-American teenager called Kamal Khan, the first Muslim girl hero in mainstream comics, collected in a book by G. Willow Wilson (2014). In the comic, Kamal talks about women’s rights with the imam at her local mosque in Jersey City. Marvel’s Riri Williams took over from Iron Man. She’s a science genius who went to MIT age 15. The first Latina superhero called La Borinqueña was created by Puerto Rican artist Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez.<sup>43</sup> Also at DC Comics, Beth Ross is the first female and teen president in *Pres*, where she is portrayed as getting elected on Twitter in 2036.<sup>44</sup>

Music can also be empowering, as when rock stars like Beyoncé embrace the feminist label, or in the riot grrrl movement in North America. Since the late 1980s, punk girl bands produced their own albums and sang about feminist topics in feminist music subcultures.<sup>45</sup> The Riot Grrrl movement was led by punk bands like Bikini Kill and Bratmobile whose songs discussed rape, sexual harassment, eating disorders and other young women’s issues. Girls created their own media with feminist zines (homemade magazines) and independent punk rock music

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<sup>41</sup> FP Staff, “Burka Avenger Cartoon Series Coming to India to Empower Girls,” *First Post*, April 15, 2015. <http://www.firstpost.com/india/pakistans-burka-avenger-cartoon-series-coming-india-empower-girls-2197218.html>

<sup>42</sup> Viv Groskop, “Is UK Children’s TV Really Sexist?” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2014/jun/05/is-uk-childrens-tv-sexist>

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.laborinquena.somosarte.com/>

<sup>44</sup> Tim Beedle, “Are You Ready for Prez’s Mark Russell?” *DC Comics*, August 27, 2015. <http://www.dccomics.com/blog/2015/08/27/are-you-ready-for-prezs-mark-russell>

<sup>45</sup> Angela Wilson, “After the Riot: Taking New Feminist Youth Subcultures Seriously,” Master’s thesis, McGill University, Montreal, August 2004. [http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1534022384002~684](http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1534022384002~684)

albums in the 80s and early 90s, as documented in *Grrlyshow*.<sup>46</sup> Bikini Kill band was led by lead singer Kathleen Hanna, with its Riot Grrrl Manifesto published in 1991 and movies about the band.<sup>47</sup> Their goals were “creating non-hierarchical ways of being AND making music, friends, and scenes based on communication + understanding, instead of competition + good/bad categorizations.” The Manifesto stated that grrrls hate capitalism and are “angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.”

Feminist rap and hip-hop singers include artists like Queen Latifah, Salt-n-Pepa, and TLC in the US and Pussy Riot in Russia. Female rappers like Angel Haze attack sexism in the US, although she describes herself as a “real-ass bitch.”<sup>48</sup> The Swedish group Femtastic produced tracks like “FATTA” to expose stories of sexual violence and rape. Two Pussy Riot members were jailed for their “Punk Virgin” song filmed in an orthodox cathedral in Moscow but continued to criticize the Russian state and church. They created an anti-Trump English-language video in 2016 titled “Make America Great Again” that included clips of the presidential candidate.<sup>49</sup> Around the same time they put their “Straight Outta Vagina” rap song on YouTube and released a video performance about Russian corruption, titled “Chaika,” in support Russian opposition to Putin’s corrupt government. An English version came out the following year.

A rap song saved an Afghan girl from early marriage. While living in Iran where it is illegal for women to sing in public, Sonita Alizadeh’s parents told her when she was 14 that they needed her dowry money to pay for her brother’s wedding. To protest, she made a music video called “Brides for Sale.”<sup>50</sup> She dressed as a bride with a bruised face and a barcode on her forehead. Her parents got the message and backed down. She advocates “girls need to have hope for their future, even if it is hard. If a girl loses hope, she’ll feel dead inside, and this is the worst thing.” Her music led to a scholarship to attend high school in the US.<sup>51</sup>

### Media Enables Activism

The widespread use of cell phones with cameras, even in regions without electricity, expands access to information and makes it difficult to hide abuses because of the Internet. Global youth are better informed about problems of inequality and the 1% wealthy elite who are responsible for them. Motivated by a sense of justice and human rights, young activists draw strength and information from international support groups on social media. Many have Internet “friends” from around the world and are empowered by seeing YouTube videos of women in the front line of demonstrations, facing off masked police armed with tear gas and water cannons. High school students’ use of social media for local activism is discussed in *Young People and the Future of News: Social Media and the Rise of Connective Journalism* (2017) by Lynn Schofield Clark and Regina Marchi. Even very young girls lead campaigns on Twitter, such as 10-year-old Amariyanna Copeny who fights for clean water in Flint, Michigan.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.grrlyshow.com/description.htm>

<sup>47</sup> [http://onewarart.org/riot\\_grrrl\\_manifesto.htm](http://onewarart.org/riot_grrrl_manifesto.htm)

*The Punk Singer*, 2013, a feature length film about Kathleen Hanna.

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7BeH2PC1Hc>

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-bKFo30o2o&feature=youtu.be>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp-KeVBNz0A>

<sup>50</sup> <http://bit.ly/1QVetXD>

<sup>51</sup> Shuka Kalantari, “Afghan Rapper Escaped Teen Marriage by Singing About It,” *PRI*, May 12, 2015.

<http://www.pri.org/stories/2015-05-12/afghan-rapper-escaped-teen-marriage-singing-about-it>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n65w1DU8cGU>

Anita Harris argues in *Next Wave Cultures* (2007) that activism in Third Wave feminism is different in a neoliberal global culture that values individualism, consumer citizenship and a breakdown of class identification. She views girl media creators as part of Third Wave feminism that expanded the definition of resistance to the patriarchal system to blogging and other use of social media. Arab women—mainly young—sent about a third of the Twitter messages during the 2011 Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt and were a large presence on Facebook (41% in Tunisia and 36% in Egypt).<sup>52</sup> During the uprisings in 2011, over two-thirds of the Internet users in Egypt and Tunisia were under age 34. A Bahraini civil rights activist, Esra’a Al Shafei founded the online forum Mideast Youth in 2006 when she was 20. Her project includes CrowdVoice.org to provide a platform for social justice movements and Ahwaa.org for LGBT people to discuss their issues in countries where their sexual orientation is illegal and punishable by death and stoning. Mideast Tunes provides a platform for underground musicians.

Social media is used by young feminists, such as the Twitter Youth Feminist Army--#TYFA--organized by British 15-year-old Lili Evans and two of her friends. She and a friend also organized a blog to connect young feminists.<sup>53</sup> Her goals include better sex education and contraception information for young people. Cyberfeminist girls write Internet blogs and make videos about their issues, as posted on Young Feminist Wire (YFW), created in by 300 English-speakers in 2010 at the Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID).<sup>54</sup> Sites like UK Feminista teach activist skills.<sup>55</sup> “Girl vlog” refers to personal video blogs posted on YouTube or other video-sharing sites like Vine. Blogging can provide girls with a safe space to create “new belonging and strengthen their identity formation” that encourages their public voice as part of a “global youth identity,” when otherwise they may be silenced by their families.<sup>56</sup> Californian vlogger Brittany Jayne Furlan, born in 1986, has nearly nine million followers on Vine where she posts six second videos. *TIME Magazine* named her as one of the most influential Internet personalities. Bloggers usually ask for comments and interaction: examples are on YouTube.<sup>57</sup> Blogs can be looked at as creating a public self and a room of one’s own for girls who feel excluded by what Mary Celeste Kearney called the “adult-centric approach taken by mainstream feminism.”

In 2009, teenager Julie Zeilinger started writing the *FBomb* blog, which she says was the first blog for teen feminists.<sup>58</sup> Her blog reached girls in over 190 countries, including a Middle Eastern girl who reported that she was able to read about feminism online without her parents’ knowing. A 17-year-old girl, Natalie, wrote to *FBomb*, “The first challenge for teen feminists is community—finding a supportive environment, and that’s where things like the *FBomb* come in,” filling in for what feminist girls’ zines used to provide. Zeilinger explained how she came to feminism: “When I was a freshman in high school, I read Jessica Valenti’s book *Full Frontal Feminism* and it changed my life. It’s what sent me to *Feministing*, which introduced me to the

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<sup>52</sup> Phillip Howard, et al., “Opening Closed Regimes: What was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?” Project on Information Technology and Political Islam, Working Paper 2011.

[www.piTPI.org](http://www.piTPI.org).

<sup>53</sup> [jellyandlilipop.wordpress.com](http://jellyandlilipop.wordpress.com)

<sup>54</sup> <http://yfa.awid.org/about-us/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/take-action/>

<sup>56</sup> Yen Mai and Sofia Laine, “Blogging Activism of Young Educated and Global Women in Tunisia and Vietnam,” *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*, November 15, 2016.

DOI: 10.1285/120356609v9i3p893

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/marinashutup>

<http://womenofyoutube.tumblr.com/>

<sup>58</sup> <http://thefbomb.org/category/feminism/>

feminist blogosphere, which in turn inspired me to start a blog for teenage feminists” (her blog includes resource lists). Zeilinger wrote a book for teens, *A Little F'd Up: Why Feminism Is Not a Dirty Word* (2012), which Seal Press claims is the first such handbook written by a teenager.

An international network of bloggers called Girls' Globe is headquartered in Sweden. Their website lists some of their feminist bloggers including: Ripple Effect about the effect of climate change on poor women, Akili Dada leadership training for young African women, Girl Pride Circle (also for African girls), Honor Diaries about Muslim women's activism, Education for Equality International, and Educate Girls in India.<sup>59</sup> Outstanding women bloggers from around the world are recommended in an article.<sup>60</sup> “Culture jamming” manipulates corporate advertising with “spoof sites” like PinkLovesConsent.com, which seemed to feature Victoria's Secret underwear printed with anti-rape slogans advocating consent (other spoof ads are shown online.<sup>61</sup>)

Social media is a mixed blessing. As well as a means to learn, organize and gain support, media is linked to increased anxiety among girls worried about reactions to their posts. Also, media consumerism may promote unhealthy body images and emphasis on expensive brands to establish identity. On the other hand, many females don't have access to the Internet, perhaps just local radio shows. Because about 250 million fewer women are online than men, UN Women started a program called EQUALS to connect women and girls to ICT in 2016.<sup>62</sup> Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg commissioned *The Economist* magazine to carry out a global study of Internet users in 2016:

*While connectivity is improving around the world, the gender gap is widening: Women make up a smaller proportion of Internet users today than in 2013. The data shows that women in developing countries are not only less likely to have data-capable phones than men but are also less likely to have even heard of the Internet. By definition if women are not online, the Internet is not inclusive, and more needs to be done to decrease the gender gap in connectivity.*<sup>63</sup>

SpeakOut student Ninni, 22, explains the influence of the global media on her family's activities and values as seen in our video interview in New Delhi, India:

*We've been influenced by Western culture, because of the media. Youth are not as reserved due to Westernization. We have the freedom to go out and study and establish a profession, while my mother's generation married at 20. More women are aware of women's rights. They know more about health but don't use the word feminist. TV shows educate and motivate women. We're more money-oriented, instead of values. We're influenced by the Internet. As kids, we were more likely to go out and play and now kids use iPod and Xbox and gain weight. Little kids know the world because of the Internet. We hardly see family because we're so busy,*

<sup>59</sup> <http://girlsglobe.org/featured-organizations/>

<sup>60</sup> <http://suggestive.com/15-amazing-women-you-should-follow-on-social-media/15/>

Bloggers from US, UK, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ghana,

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.adbusters.org/spoofads/>

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/9/press-release-itu-and-un-women-announce-global-partnership-for-gender-equality-in-the-digital-age>

<sup>63</sup> Facebook & Mark Zuckerberg, “State of Connectivity 2016: Using Data to Move Towards a More Inclusive Internet,” February 28, 2017. <https://info.internet.org/en/blog/2017/02/28/state-of-connectivity-2016-using-data-to-move-towards-a-more-inclusive-internet/>

*although my father tries to get the family together every weekend [all three siblings live at home; the two in their 20s work and take classes].*

In Saudi Arabia, Manal al-Sharif (born in 1979) is an example of someone who radically changed her worldview because of media and the internet, as she explained in a TED video and her dramatic book *Daring to Drive* (2017). She was so fundamentalist in her religious views, she burned her paintings of people and her brother's music tapes for violating Islam. She covered herself because fundamentalists view women as seductive and sinful, including their names, voices, and faces. Women are thus called mother of Mr. X or wife of Mr. Y, because men can't control their instincts, not a flattering view of males. A revolution in her thinking was sparked by the introduction of the Internet in 2000. She said, "It was the first door to the outside world for youth. I realized how small a box I was in and my phobia about getting my purity polluted. I was 21 when for the first time I allowed myself to listen to a song, as music was Satan's Flute and the path to adultery."<sup>64</sup> The first song she heard was by the Backstreet Boys and it seemed sweet and innocent to her. Watching the TV video of the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 made her realize, "No religion on earth can accept such cruelty. My heroes were nothing but bloody terrorists."

Al-Sharif was inspired by news coverage of the Arab Spring to start a campaign called Drive Your Own Life on June 17, 2011. She recorded a video revealing her name and face to explain the campaign and show herself driving. Her Facebook video got 700,000 views the first day she posted it and she was jailed the next day in a horrendous crowded room with many other women in cots crawling with cockroaches, although 100 other women drivers weren't arrested. Some of these leaders in the driving campaign were arrested in 2018 when it became legal for women to drive because the ruling Prince Mohammad Bin Salman (known as MBS) didn't want to encourage other women's rights campaigns such as ending the guardianship system.<sup>65</sup> MBS' ruthlessness was demonstrated by his alleged association with the horrendous dismemberment of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, which silenced many former activists.

The most prominent women's social media campaign is against sexual harassment and violence against women. #Everyday Sexism was started by Laura Bates in England in 2012 to share experiences with sexism. Her website collected over 100,000 responses, reported on in Bates' book *Everyday Sexism* 2016. The #YesAllWomen campaign began in response to the murder of six women students at the University of California at Santa Barbara in 2014; it generated a million tweets in just one day. The hashtag was used again in India when women were groped during New Year's celebrations. Two years before the #MeToo campaign in the US, Brazilian feminists started #MyFirstHarassment (*#MeuPrimeiroAssedio*), which spread around Latin America.

The phrase "MeToo" was first used by civil rights activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to raise awareness about sexual abuse--especially against women of color--as she describes in her book *Where the Light Enters* (2019), written with Asha Bandele. The second wave of the movement began on October 5, 2017 when the *New York Times* published a report of Harvey Weinstein's

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0PXXNK-3zQ4>  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Teach-me-how-to-drive-Lets-all-support-the-Saudi-women-basic-rights/221552737857010>

<sup>65</sup> Peter Beaumont, "Further Arrests of Saudi Women's Rights Activists in Escalating Crackdown," *The Guardian*, May 21, 2018.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/may/21/further-arrests-saudi-arabia-womens-rights-activists-driving-ban>

harassment of Ashley Judd. In response, other actresses told their stories, including Alyssa Milano who tweeted on October 15, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet," which reignited the recent #MeToo movement. It received millions of responses from women reporting sexual assault or harassment--more than six million hashtags were posted from October to December. Over 300 women prominent in the entertainment industry, featuring women of color like Shonda Rhimes, Eva Longoria, and America Ferrera, developed the "Time's Up" campaign announced on January 1, 2018. They secured \$13 million in donations to their Legal Defense Fund to help blue-collar women file charges against their harassers, promote legislation to penalize companies with ongoing harassment, and push for gender equality in the entertainment industry. They provide a webpage with resources.<sup>66</sup>

The #MeToo Twitter campaign raised public awareness around the world, as shown on Google's #MeTooRising. It reported searches for #MeToo in every country. The hashtag has been tweeted millions of times from 83 countries.<sup>67</sup> Women joined #MeToo to post their stories on social media, including in Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, South Korea, India, and Japan.<sup>68</sup> Alt-right leader Stephen Bannon told journalist Josh Green, author of *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (2017), that movements like the international #MeToo movement are a powerful political force that will "undo ten thousand years of recorded history of patriarchy."<sup>69</sup> He predicted, "The time has come. Women are gonna take charge of society. And they couldn't juxtapose a better villain than Trump. He is the patriarch."

### Young Women Lead Uprisings

Recent youth activism reflects Generation Z's values: belief in gender and ethnic equality, righteous anger about destruction of our environment, impatience with adults and brave and outspoken criticism of them for inaction. Used to instant posting on the internet, they expect quick results. Many of them believe they're leading a revolution. Pakistani Malala Yousafzai is the most famous youth activist of modern times, the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner (born in 1997), with her focus on education for girls. The newest star is Swedish environmentalist Greta Thunberg who gained fame when she was 15 for initiating student strikes from school on Fridays to protest adult inaction to stop climate change.

A literature review of contemporary young women's activism in 2012 by Melody Ng found, "The small body of literature there is about contemporary young women's activism does not speak directly about female activism and gender-identity, but to related issues, such as legal consciousness in politically active females."<sup>70</sup> Surprisingly few books and articles feature young women activists. The few include *Feminist Voices for a New Generation* (2005), an anthology written by transnational feminists in their late 20s and early 30s.<sup>71</sup> They emphasize international human rights law as the key to women's liberation. The same year, in *Defending Our Dreams:*

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.timesupnow.com>

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/blog/women-week-sexual-violence-india>

<sup>68</sup> <https://globalvoices.org/2018/02/11/an-introduction-to-metoo-in-japan/print/>

<sup>69</sup> Oliver Darcy, "Bannon: 'Anti-Patriarchy Movement,'" CNN Media, February 10, 2018.

<http://money.cnn.com/2018/02/09/media/steve-bannon-times-up-movement-devils-bargain/index.html>

<sup>70</sup> Melody Ng, "Contemporary Female Activism: Female Activist and Social Movement in the Cyber-Era," Master's Thesis, University of California Berkeley, Spring 2012.

[http://legalstudies.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ng\\_Melody\\_Honors-Thesis.pdf](http://legalstudies.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Ng_Melody_Honors-Thesis.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Shamillah Wilson, Anasuya Sengupta, Kristy Evans, eds. *Defending Our Dreams: Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation*. Zed Books and AWID, 2005.

*Global Feminist Voices for a New Generation*, the authors Shamillah Wilson, Anasuya Sengupta, and Kristy Evans outline the goals of a new era of feminist activism in both the North and South. *Imagining Ourselves: Global Voices from a New Generation of Women* (2006) is another collection of international young women's essays and art.

*Wonder Girls: Changing Our World* tells the story of 90 girls interviewed by Paola Gianturco's 11-year-old granddaughter. The girls are international changemakers working on issues like the environment and child marriage. Books by and about Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai and Iranian Marjane Satrapi's graphic novels about life in Islamic Iran are an exception to the lack of public attention to outspoken girls. *Rad Girls Can: Stories of Bold, Brave, and Brilliant Young Women* (2018) by Kate Schatz and Miriam Klein Stahl was written for girls as young as elementary school.

An anthology by young feminists who were part of the Third Wave Foundation headquartered in New York City (2004), *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* was edited by Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin about their activism. *Bitch Magazine* was founded by Third Wave feminists to comment on popular culture, also in the US.<sup>72</sup> The three founders, two young women and a man, were recent college graduates in 1996 who described themselves as "pop culture obsessives." They wanted to do fun feminist analyses of sexism in the media. A compilation of their favorite articles is called *Bitchiest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine* (2006). Their website is titled "Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture."

Other US feminists report on their activism in Mary Trigg, editor, *Leading the Way: Young Women's Activism for Social Change* (2010). *Young Revolutionary: A Teen's Guide to Activism* (2018) was written by teenage Chanice Lee for other teens. Three books interviewed urban youth activists in the Americas before the wave of youth-led global uprisings that begin at 2011: Jessica Taft, *Rebel Girls: Youth Activism and Social Change Across the Americas*, 2010; Hava Rachel Gordon, *We Fight to Win: Inequality and the Politics of Youth Activism* (2010); and Maria De Los Angeles Torres, Irene Rizzini, and Norma Del Rio, *Citizens in the Present: Youth Civic Engagement in the Americas* (2013). A timeline of activism by youth of color is compiled by journalists with photographs in "Too Young to Vote, Old Enough to take Action: A Brief History of Powerful Youth-Led Movements."<sup>73</sup>

Black Lives Matter and immigrant Dreamers used social media to protest violence against youth of color like Trayvon Martin and to prevent deportation of undocumented Dreamers. The author of *Girls Make Media* (2006) believes the greatest advance in girls' media is the increased activity of young girls of color in zines like *Evolution of a Race Riot*, films like *Share Our World* (about three Muslim girls in New York City), and websites like *C/SDistro*, although their numbers remain too few.<sup>74</sup> Blogs include *Black Girl Dangerous*. Young women and girls create peer-to-peer learning with websites like *Shawty got Skillz Skillshare*.<sup>75</sup>

One of the best-known young women, Asmaa Mahfouz, 26, is called the Leader of the Revolution because of her famous video appealing to men's honor to come to Cairo's Tahrir

<sup>72</sup> <http://bitchmagazine.org/blogs/social-commentary>

<sup>73</sup>

<https://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=1Gb0pxJvQFAMoalixYPzljrM2iCTysEkOwV3rJBbA97A>

<sup>74</sup> Mary Celeste Kearney. *Girls Make Media*. Routledge, 2006, p. 292.

<sup>75</sup> "Queer, Black Geeks, Unite!" QWOCMedia,

<http://www.qwoc.org/2012/06/queer-black-geeks-unite-moya-bailey-leads-women-of-color-digital-skill-sharing-collective-shawty-got-skillz/>

Square on January 25. Her parents forbade her to demonstrate on the street or use the Internet, so she used her phone to organize from her bedroom. This illustrates the importance of electronic media in enabling women to be powerful activists around the world from the safety of their homes. Mahfouz called Egyptians to come to Tahrir Square for their human rights, their honor and dignity, on a viral Facebook video.<sup>76</sup> Wearing hijab and speaking from home, she said, "If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25<sup>th</sup>." Mahfouz reported that Mubarak's officials threatened her if she left her home and, "Women participated, no different from men, in all aspects of the revolution. Women fought with police in Tahrir Square throughout the 18-day rebellion and have continued to take part in street activism into the post-Mubarak era."<sup>77</sup> Women participated from the first day on the front lines, in the streets, and as planners and organizers, as seen in videos and reports.<sup>78</sup>

Middle Eastern young women are especially brave because they face so many restrictions. In Egypt's Arab Spring that ousted President Hosni Mubarak in only 18 days in 2011, revolutionary Socialist Gigi Ibrahim was a voice of the revolution for Western news shows with her excellent command of English because she grew up in California. She was one of a group of youth activists on the cover of TIME magazine, February 2011. Her blog "The Angry Egyptian" is widely read. Leil Zahara Mortada was another blogger who kept the world informed, like Zeinobia. One of the most famous bloggers in Egypt, she posts "everything that happens" on her "Egyptian Chronicles." She describes herself on the blog; "I am just an Egyptian girl who lives in the present with the glories of the past and hopes in a better future for herself and for her country."<sup>79</sup>

Post-revolution, women are "re/making and re/mapping urban Egypt" in a "version of 'revolution' as the continual live-streaming of creative energy" in the cultural and social worlds, observed Margo Badran.<sup>80</sup> The Internet group Girls' Revolution organized the "We Will Wear Dresses" campaign in 2012 in response to blaming women for inviting sexual harassment by wearing the wrong clothes. The following year they campaigned for women to ride bicycles (similar to an earlier cycling campaign in Turkey). They demonstrated outside the Saudi embassy in Cairo in 2017 to support the Saudi "Photograph Your Legs" campaign to protest the Saudi arrest of a young woman wearing "indecent clothing," viewed in a Snapchat video of her walking in a short skirt. The Egyptian women said they wanted to confront "patriarchal attempts to dominate women's bodies." Egyptians are also part of the transnational #MeToo movement to voice sexual harassment, explained in an article about how OpAntiSH tries to protect women under assault in the streets.<sup>81</sup>

Based in Alexandria, Menna Mosbah is the founder of YEFL, the Young Egyptian Feminists League in 2015.<sup>82</sup> At 27, she already has a decade of experience working for development and women's groups including a UN Women youth citizenship program and the

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgjIgMdsEuk>

<sup>77</sup> Morrow, A. & Moussa al-Omrani, K. (2012). Women fight for rights in new Egypt. IDN-InDepth News. <http://www.indepthnews.info/index.php/global-issues/human-rights/1100-women-fight-for-rights-in-new-egypt>

<sup>78</sup> Videos of women in the 2011 revolution. <https://wp.me/p47Q76-Jw>  
Mosireen Collective posted hundreds of videos about the revolution on 858.ma/  
Also see <https://www.planusa.org/how-cairo-s-girls-are-fighting-back>

Prince, M. *Revolution is My Name: An Egyptian Woman's Diary from Eighteen Days in Tahrir*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2014, p. 143

<sup>79</sup> [www.egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com](http://www.egyptianchronicles.blogspot.com)

<sup>80</sup> "Women Driving Positive Change in the Middle East," Wilson Center, March 8, 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Yasmin El-Rifae, "What the Egyptian Revolution Can Offer #MeToo," *The Nation*, January 22, 2018. <https://www.thenation.com/article/what-the-egyptian-revolution-can-offer-metoo/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/YEFLeague/>

United Nation's Development Program. At age 20 she was inspired by what she considers the first and only revolution in Egyptian history: "Everything changed." In 2011 women like her were free to raise their voices and felt safe in the occupied squares. They felt they were changing their destiny by opposing corruption, but although the people in power changed, the system hasn't. Women's freedom didn't last as sexual harassment and oppression increased. When I interviewed Mosbah in 2018 she defined the difference between YEFL and most current women's groups, which have to abide by government supervision and its ability to limit foreign funding is the former aim for human rights.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, unfettered feminists aim for "gender equality" with measurable standards, spelled out in the OECD's (the economic association of 35 developed countries) gender indicators.<sup>84</sup> It aims to empower women and to change the culture, not just inform them about their rights. When I asked Mosbah about the most active current organizing, she pointed to Nazra for Feminist Studies as the most feminist, as in its effort to pass a law against sexual harassment and to form a feminist alliance.

Offering an optimistic view, in her book *Fifty Million Rising: The New Generation of Working Women Transforming the Muslim World (2018)*, Pakistani researcher Saadia Zahidi makes the case that revolution follows the increasing number of educated and employed women with access to smartphones, and the large percentage of young adults in these countries. The tipping point for change is 30 percent of women employed, she reports. We know that having models of people like you who achieve their goals is empowering. Most of us have never heard of the young women leaders of political uprisings in our century, so it's useful to name them. (More information about them is found in *Brave: Young Women's Global Revolution*.)

## Young Women Rebel Leaders You Probably Don't Know About

### 2005 Lebanon

Cedar Revolution protesters blamed Syrians for the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri on February 14 and protested against the 15,000 Syrian troops stationed in their country. Well-connected and media savvy young people including Asma Andraos, age 34, organized large demonstrations resulting in the withdrawal of Syrian troops, the resignation of the government, and the first free parliamentary elections since 1972 (see photos).<sup>1</sup> Andraos said about the assassination, "I got so angry, I have never been so angry in my life, I couldn't just sit anymore and do nothing."<sup>85</sup>

### 2011 Tunisia

In Tunisia, Lina Ben Mhenni is a 27-year-old cyber activist whose blog "A Tunisian Girl" and photographs kept people informed about the Tunisian uprising.<sup>86</sup> She was nominated for the Nobel peace prize. Tunisian's ousted their despot, President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who stepped down in January 2011, after weeks of protests.

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<sup>83</sup> Gayle Kimball chapter "Silencing Women's Voices in Egypt and Globally," in Zaleskii, Enrile, Wang, and Weiss, eds. *Women's Journey to Empowerment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Oxford University Press, 2019

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/43041409.pdf>

<http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/43041409.pdf>

<sup>85</sup> Rym Ghazai, "Asma Andraos Honored as 'Hero of Change,'" *The Daily Star Lebanon*, October 14, 2005.

<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2005/Oct-14/5620-asma-andraos-honored-as-hero-of-change.ashx#axzz2rwuHshon>

<sup>86</sup> AfricaMe Team, "Activist Lina Ben Mhenni Continues to Fight for Tunisian Democracy," *Africa Middle East News*, February 21, 2018.

<http://africa-me.com/activist-lina-ben-mhenni-tunisian-democracy/>

### *Egypt*

The revolution in Tahrir Square began on January 25. President Hosni Mubarak resigned only 18 days later. Asmaa Mahfouz (age 26) called Egyptians to come to Tahrir Square on January 25 for their human rights, their honor and dignity, on a viral Facebook video seen in the endnote.<sup>87</sup>

### *Yemen*

In January demonstrations against President Ali Abdullah Saleh were led by a journalist named Tawakkol Karman who uncovered her face.<sup>88</sup> Saleh resigned in November but continued to manipulate behind the scenes.

### *Bahrain*

Protests began on February 17 against the royal family's monopoly on the economy and government. Sunni Muslim King Hamad brought in Saudi Sunni troops against the majority Shia population. A viral photo shows Zainab al-Khawaja standing in front of a tank to stop it.<sup>89</sup> She was sentenced to three years in prison for tearing up a photo of the king during a court hearing. Her sister, Maryam al-Khawaja, age 23, was another leader in the Pearl Roundabout protests in February 2011.

### *Morocco*

On February 20, demonstrators took to the streets to limit some of the powers of the monarchy. What was called the February 20th movement was initiated by Amina Boughalbi, a 20-year-old journalism student, similar to Asmaa Mahfouz' call for protest in Tahrir Square in Egypt the previous month.<sup>90</sup>

### *Israel*

A September tent occupation of Tel Aviv's ritzy Rothschild Boulevard demanded social justice. It was triggered by the high cost of housing and high taxes for the middle class. Daphni Leef, 25, was tired of high rents, so she used to Facebook to ask other young people to join her on the streets. Similar to other initiators, she was surprised by the hundreds of thousands who joined her in Tel Aviv and then in other cities across Israel. A 2019 video about her is titled "Daphni Leef: Leading Israel's Biggest Protest."<sup>91</sup>

### *2012 Canada*

In February's Maple Spring, in the *casseroles* (banging pots and pans) protest movement, Quebec students voted to walkout to protest tuition hikes. The strike lasted for 100 days (photos and video online).<sup>92</sup> Martine Desjardins chaired the largest student group in Quebec, the Student University Federation of Quebec from 2012 to 2013.<sup>93</sup> She also served as a political commentator

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<sup>87</sup> [http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/25/from\\_tahrir\\_to\\_wall\\_street\\_egyptian](http://www.democracynow.org/2011/10/25/from_tahrir_to_wall_street_egyptian)

<sup>88</sup> Her webpage is <https://www.tawakkolkarman.net/en/news>

<sup>89</sup> Jessica Salter, "The Family that Protests Against Bahrain's Brutal Regime," *The Telegraph*, November 1, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/bahrain/11196656/The-family-that-protests-against-Bahrains-brutal-regime.html>

<sup>90</sup> Her Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/amina.boughalbi>

<sup>91</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-kg\\_u2z-xA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-kg_u2z-xA)

<sup>92</sup> <http://wp.me/p47Q76-DF>

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Martine Desjardins, CPAC, by Pierre Donais, nd. <http://www.cpac.ca/en/programs/tete-a-tete/episodes/24729660>

and columnist and ran for provincial office in 2014 but lost. Later in the year, Idle No More was started by three indigenous women and a non-native woman to protest proposed changes in environmental protection laws.

### *Hong Kong*

In May, secondary students formed an activist group called Scholarism to protest the mainland's efforts to impose patriotic education in schools. Agnes Chow led demonstrations against Beijing's influence in 2014.<sup>94</sup> She went on to co-found a new youth political party called Demosisto in 2016 and run for the legislature, although Beijing disqualified her due to her activism for Hong Kong autonomy.

### *2014 Bosnian Spring*

Women led social movements against corruption and inequality in the "Bosnian Spring," using active Internet sites written by women.<sup>95</sup> "For the first twenty days, it was all women. Then the men started slowly seeping in," reported Italian feminist Valentina Pelizzer. She started a feminist portal to discuss current issues. Journalist Paulina Janusz explained that Bosnian women were outspoken, such as about the government's inadequate response to floods, because, "They're not predefined in their roles like men are," and live outside the patriarchal structure.

### *United States*

Black Lives Matter protests against police violence against young black people started in Florida when George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of black teen Trayvon Martin. Queer black young women founders were Patrisse Khan-Cullors (born in 1984), Alicia Garza (born in 1981), and Opal Tometi (born in 1984).<sup>96</sup>

### *2016 North Dakota, United States*

Standing Rock Sioux "water protector" Native Americans and allies occupied camps to protest an oil pipeline in North Dakota in the Spring of 2016, in the largest gathering of Native Americans in a century. Indigenous Youth Council members, with allies like actor Shailene Woodley (age 25), were often on the front lines. The One Mind Youth Movement was active in the protest, co-founded by Jasilyn Charger. An indigenous spokeswoman and media coordinator at Standing Rock, Erynn Wise explained that in a matriarchal society, "We've always led these movements, and been the brains behind a lot of things, as most women are."<sup>97</sup> In British Columbia, "Coast Protectors" resisted the construction of the Kinder Morgan trans-mountain pipeline expansion in a 2018 movement called Protect the Inlet. Women organized building tiny houses with wheels placed on the path of the pipeline in the Tiny House Warriors project

<sup>94</sup> "Benjamin Haas, "Enemy of the State? Agnes Chow, the 21-year-old Activist Who has China Worried," *The Guardian*, February 4, 2018.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/04/agnes-chow-hong-kong-activist-who-has-china-worried-democracy>

<sup>95</sup> Nedim Hadrovic, "Women are at the Forefront of Grassroots Movements in Bosnia," *Muftah*, October 20, 2014. <http://muftah.org/women-forefront-grassroots-movements-bosnia/#.VHP7z1XF-Ak>

<sup>96</sup> Liz Pleasant, "Meet the Women Behind #BlackLivesMatter," *Yes!* May 1, 2015.

<https://www.nfg.org/news/meet-woman-behind-blacklivesmatter-hashtag-became-civil-rights-movement>

<sup>97</sup> Erynn Wise, Frank Barat, and Vidal Cuervo, "Indigenous Rights and the Fight for Life at Standing Rock," *ROAR Magazine*, December 9, 2016. <https://roarmag.org/essays/standing-rock-interview-erynn-wise/>

### *2018 Florida, United States*

The leadership of the Never Again high school movement for gun control includes Emma Gonzales, Jaclyn Corin, Sarah Chadwick, and Lauren Hogg and other media-savvy girls from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High who are not afraid to call BS to adults who failed to protect them from a school shooter. Gonzales' speech written on her AP government notes galvanized the movement a few days after the tragic school shooting at Douglas High at Valentine's Day. Gonzales quickly started a Twitter account and gained more followers than the NRA. She joked with the other organizers about "seizing the memes of production," a play on Marx's "means of production," and added, "Adults like us when we have strong test scores, but they hate us when we have strong opinions." In an article in the March 23 *Teen Vogue*, Gonzales wrote, "We have taken the media by storm through appearances and interviews, met with state and federal lawmakers to beg them to enact much stricter gun control laws, and been joined in protest by students around the nation and the world who've held school walkouts and demonstrations that exhibit the energy and power of young people in full force."<sup>98</sup> (For more about this movement, see the Facebook page "Never Again," and my *Resist: Goals and Tactics for Changemakers*.)

### *Armenia*

Young people led demonstrations that ousted the prime minister and put Nikol Pashinyan in power. Young women leaders included Avik Melikyan, 22, and Lilith Baghdasaryan, 23.<sup>99</sup>

### *Saudi Arabia*

Women continued their campaign to be able to drive and some were arrested just before the Prince Mohammed bin Salman made it legal, like Loujain al-Hathloul, 28.<sup>100</sup> Activists continued their campaign to reform the guardianship system which gives women the status of children but had reason to be fearful of the ruthless prince.

### *2019 Sweden and Globally*

Swede Greta Thunberg (born in 2003) inspired other girls to lead the School Strike for Climate movement in Europe, the US, and Australia and over 100 other countries. When she was 15, Thunberg started the "climate revolution" with her first school strike in August 2018 in front of the Swedish parliament building in Stockholm. "Unite behind the science, that is our demand," Thunberg said, calling climate the biggest crisis in human history. The young activists inspired by her want to keep global warming from going higher than 1.5 Celsius.

Building on her fame, in December, Thunberg spoke to the UN Climate Change conference in Poland and continued to address major conferences such as the World Economic Forum. (She doesn't fly but takes the more environmentally sound train.) Of course, the climate activists make good use of social media to gain supporters. Her Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts each have well over 200,000 followers. The young activists communicate using WhatsApp, Discord server chat group, and weekly conference calls using Zoom. A booklet of her speeches is published as "No One Too Small to Make a Difference," published by Penguin in 2019.

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<sup>98</sup> Emma Gonzales, "Emma Gonzales on Why This Generation Needs Gun Control," *Teen Vogue*, March 23, 2018. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/emma-gonzalez-parkland-gun-control-cover>

<sup>99</sup> "The Women Behind Armenia's 'Velvet Revolution,'" *Global Voices*, July 1, 2018. A video is included. <https://globalvoices.org/2018/07/01/the-women-behind-armenias-velvet-revolution/>

<sup>100</sup> Sarah Leah Whitson, "Loujain al-Hathloul," *TIME Magazine*, April 16, 2019. <https://time.com/collection-post/5567677/loujain-al-hathloul/>

The student strikes paid off quickly when early in 2019 The European Commission pledged more than \$1.13 trillion over the next seven years to fight climate change. Thunberg stood by the side of Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels as he made the announcement and praised her and the hundreds of thousands of youth who had led weekly climate strikes since December. He said, “I am glad to see that young people are taking to the streets in Europe to raise visibility of the issue of climate change.”<sup>101</sup> Thunberg responded by pointing out that a minimum of 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 is needed, not the 40% proposed reduction. She can be sarcastic as in her response to adults who say youth will save the world: “It would be helpful if you could help us just a little bit.” She faults politicians for 30 years of inaction.

Despite being diagnosed as on the autism spectrum, suffering from depression when she was 11 (partly because of pictures she saw of the suffering of polar bears and other animals hurt by global warming), and hate mail from critics, she confidently addresses large groups, a small girl with her hair in long braids and no makeup. She commented, “All my life I’ve been invisible, the invisible girl in the back who doesn’t say anything,” so it’s hard to suddenly get so much attention but gratifying to see some results. The strikes spread to about 400 cities with tens of thousands of students participating in the #FridaysForFuture.<sup>102</sup>

In Belgium, Anuna De Weever, 17, is a leader of the strikes, inspired by a video of Thunberg. De Weever identifies herself as “gender-fluid,” which she explained gives her a viewpoint different from the mainstream and is therefore unable to ignore real problems, so “I start to have my own values, own principles.”<sup>103</sup> In Germany Luisa Neubauer, 22, leads the climate strike, and girls are also leaders in the Netherlands, the UK’s Student Climate Network (leader Anna Taylor, 17, was backed by the head teachers' union), France, Australia, and the US. The UK Student Climate Network organizes the Youth Strike and call on the government to declare a climate emergency.

Students in the US (where emissions are increasing) joined international protests on March 15, 2019, led by Zero Hour.<sup>104</sup> The group was founded by Jamie Margolin, age 17, who said the group is mainly led by young women of color. Their goal is the Green New Deal, a legislative platform to create green jobs and a healthy environment. They wrote, “We stand in solidarity with Greta Thunberg and all youth strikers worldwide as we demand action on this issue. We are running out of time, and we won’t be silent any longer.” Inspired by Thunberg, in 2019 Alexandria Villaseñor, age 13, started protesting in front of the UN every Friday because “adults have failed my generation” Her sign reads, “School Strike 4 Climate.” She said, “To quote Greta, change is coming whether you like it or not.” She is a leader of the Youth Climate Strike Movement,<sup>105</sup> sharing organizing with two other girls: Isra Hirsi, 15, in Minneapolis and Haven Coleman, 12, in Denver. The latter tweeted, “Most kids pick a sport or instrument, instead I chose to save the world.

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<sup>101</sup> Julie Conley, “Kicking Ass for Her Generation,” *Common Dreams*, February 21, 2019.

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/02/21/kicking-ass-her-generation-applause-16-year-old-greta-thunberg-eu-chief-pledges-1>

<sup>102</sup> Jeff Beradelli and Haley Ott, “Meet the Teens Leading a Global Movement to Ditch School and Fight Climate Change,” *CBS News*, February 22, 2019.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/greta-thunberg-alexandria-villaseñor-teens-leading-global-movement-ditch-school-fight-climate-change/>

<sup>103</sup> J. Lester Feder, “A Huge Climate Change Movement Led by Teenage Girls is Sweeping Europe,” *BuzzFeed*, February 11, 2019.

<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/lesterfeder/europe-climate-change-protests-teens>

<sup>104</sup> <http://thisiszerohour.org/>

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.youthclimatestrikeus.org/about>

Who is with me? We're almost out of time." Florida March for Our Lives activists helped publicize the Youth Climate Strike, and the three girls work with local chapters of Zero Hour and with the Sunrise Movement.

We've seen that although adults, including scholars and development professionals, too often disparage, ignore, or use unrealistic images of the entrepreneurial girl, media empowers young activists. The Internet and cell phones provide young women with a private and safe way to lead insurrections (especially in Muslim countries where girls often are not supposed to publicly interact closely with boys), provide supportive and informative networks of activist inspiration, and models of bold young women. A recent example is how TV and Internet videos of one 15-year-old girl, Greta Thunberg sitting in front of the Swedish Parliament inspired youth strikes for climate in over 100 countries. The other side of the coin is the association of social media with the increase in adolescent girls' anxiety levels in the United States. Youth activists in the climate and gun control movements are increasingly vocal in their criticism of adult lack of action. These youth don't see themselves as future leaders but as young women and men taking necessary action now to compensate for adult failures.