

The Important Activism of Kids These Days

By Katie Rose Guest Pryal

This column is the first in a new series I'm writing for *WIHE* on how the personal is both public and political, all within the context of education and learning. Each essay takes as its starting point a public event, examining those stakes in a personal fashion and then politicizing those stakes for us all. This essay takes as its starting point the Parkland high school shooting in February 2018, which left 17 students and faculty members dead, and the student-led anti-gun activism that followed.

Hangin' Hopes on the Parkland Kids

As I wrote this article, high school student Cameron Kasky, one of the survivors of the recent Parkland school shooting, [tweeted at Dana Loesch on Twitter](#), "I understand that all the Dalmatians escaped your clutches, but you really need to get over that." The tweet was funny, witty and reveals the savviness with which the Parkland activists have deployed social media. After all, Dana Loesch is a spokesperson for the National Rifle Association and has taken an active role in fighting against the movement the Parkland kids have started with #neveragain and #marchforourlives.

The Parkland shooting was as horrific as the 1999 shooting in Columbine, Colorado, which created a new paradigm of school shootings in our modern age. (Few of us still talk about the sniper at the University of Texas back in 1966.) I was in Boulder CO, standing in a Wells Fargo bank when Columbine happened. I stood with the others, staring at television screens mounted to the wall, watching live as kids not much younger than I was were flinging themselves out of windows. It felt like the world was changing that day.

It didn't. It didn't change at all.

On Dec. 14, 2012, when Newtown happened, I'd just had my second baby, and I was working in my home office. I called my husband on the phone in a panic. "How can we let them be in this world?" I demanded. "How can we let them?" I flipped over to Facebook, and [Honest Toddler](#) had posted a single line: "So many angels. Can you see them?"

The world didn't change then, either.

But today, when I see [the still image of Emma González](#), Parkland survivor, staring stone-faced at Dana Loesch on CNN, looking as though nothing could scare her, I feel hope, finally. González survived a massacre. Loesch is a mouthpiece. González looks ready to tear down the world and build a better one in its place, and she's only a teenager.

Finally.

Stop Trashing Teens

I see lots of praise online of the Parkland kids. But a lot of the praise makes me think of how much derogatory language I hear launched toward teens the rest of the time. It's true that González and her team are doing amazing things. But it is also true that they are teens like any other teens. They're kids with big ideas and big hopes and dreams, and not a lot of fears (undeveloped brains and all). The things that make teens act like teens can be both annoying and incredible. If you love them, you have to love it all.

But usually, adults can't resist trashing teens (and teen girls in particular). As a former professor, I was constantly

seeing fellow teachers talk about their students online, complaining about students' inability to send a proper email or to address a professor in a professional fashion. The vitriol was—and is—astounding. If we want to empower our students to lead the world, we can't tear them down like that, even in our own minds. Especially on Facebook. We have to teach them instead.

And it's not just teachers. Remember when the *Twilight* book series first came out? It was wildly popular (like, over 100 million copies sold popular). And the reason it was popular, in large part, was teen girls. But the books—and their readers—were mocked mercilessly in popular media. For example, [Wired writes](#), "From a male point of view, the only redeeming feature of the Twilight books and movies is the ammunition they provide against female claims of innate moral superiority over men." (Way to lead with a straw man, Wired.) The writer then lists a host of reasons why he thinks the books are stupid. Curiously, [The New Yorker seemed to get it](#) in its review of the first film made from the books. *Twilight* is fantasy, yes, and it is ideal teen girl fantasy for one very profound reason: Bella isn't constantly fighting off Edward's desire to sleep with her. Teen girls are complicated in many ways, but I can guarantee that they're simple in one way: they don't want to be sexually assaulted.

If we believe teens deserve to be ridiculed for the books they like, how they speak or the clothes they wear, then we will never see teens and young people for the incredible gift to our society that they are. Teens will stumble. They'll make mistakes. They'll still have the fierceness to stand up to the Loesches of the world, if we don't tear them down for their teenager imperfections.

Not Created Equal

After the Parkland protests began, author **Roxane Gay** tweeted, "It is interesting to note the difference in support for the kids in FL versus the kids in Black Lives Matter. I say that with full admiration for the kids in FL, to survive such a trauma and fight for everyone to be safer. But that's also what was happening in Ferguson and beyond." Gay makes an important point—not all activist groups get the same support, and that difference in support is because of racism. She continues: "I started to think about this after George Clooney's announcement. And it isn't divisive to observe the difference in support from the media, from celebrities, etc. I think the FL kids are f[—] awesome but so are the kids in Ferguson and Baltimore and Chicago and more." Gay refers to massive donations to the Parkland activists from the Clooneys (\$500,000), [which has since been matched](#) by Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and more.

The BLM kids are alright, but white America has a really hard time seeing it. Why? According to expert **Mariame Kaba**, put simply, [white people hate \(black\) protests](#). According to various polls, most white Americans disapprove of BLM, while most black Americans approve. For example, according to a July 2017 Harvard-Harris poll, 35 percent of white Americans had a favorable view of BLM, but 83 percent of black Americans had a favorable view. That's quite a spread.

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include in her work and that is to “make sure survivors’ voices are heard.” “It’s always a privilege to speak out and to be in a place where you don’t have to worry about speaking out,” says Clark. 📖

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And yet, despite the negative opinion of most Americans, BLM has changed the world. They’ve deployed social media and brought attention to social injustice. But they’ve had to fight an even fiercer foe: state-sanctioned gun violence against black children *and* adults. Nearly all of the killings of black people by the state that BLM has drawn attention to led to no arrests, no indictments and no convictions. In fact, usually the opposite is true—the (white) public rallies around the killer and demonizes the dead. Contrast that reaction to Parkland. No one claimed the Parkland shooter was justified in his murder of 17 people, the way so many did about the killers of Tamir Rice and Trayvon Martin.

Use this time of unprecedented student activism to expand your appreciation to BLM, too. The kids, all of the kids, are more than alright. They’re incredible, and they are working hard to make our world better. 📖

Women on the Move, *continued from page 10*

the Office of Human Resources at Clemson University SC.

- **Dr. Gillian Wilson** becomes senior associate vice chancellor for research and economic development at the University of California, Riverside, in addition to her previous duties as professor of physics and astronomy.

- **Dr. Wendy Wolford** becomes vice provost for international affairs at Cornell University NY, in addition to her previous duties as the Robert A. and Ruth E. Polson Professor of Global Development.

- **Dr. Elisabeth Young** becomes VP for health affairs and dean of the College of Medicine at the Northeast Ohio Medical University after serving as interim in these roles.

- **Dr. Anisa Zvonkovic** moves from professor and chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech to dean of the College of Health and Human Performance at East Carolina University NC, beginning July 1. 📖

PROFILE: Nursing Educator Builds Future Generations, *continued from page 12*

with untenured faculty every semester to talk about their progress and give them ideas. She also meets with tenured faculty who are interested in promotion.

Pace introduced a PhD program this academic year to help prepare nurse educators. There are 11 students in this first class and approximately 12 qualified applicants for next year.

“We have a pipeline that we are quickly establishing,” says Feldman, who looks forward to seeing these graduates becoming faculty at many nursing schools. “Our hope is to build the field.” 📖

Newswatch, *continued from page 4*

women PhDs can earn. Which makes the possibility of pay equity for women in academia with PhDs more of a struggle than it already is.

One dramatic example of the pay gap in higher ed is a lawsuit against the University of Cincinnati OH. A retired professor of geography, Dr. Colleen McTague, sued the school for denying her equal pay, after discovering that she was paid half of what men professors were for the same job. When she retired, women professors at UC were making, on average, \$17,000 less than men professors. McTague won her suit and received a settlement of \$200,000 from the school.

The pay gap remains a chronic problem for women both within and outside the ivory tower, and Newswatch wonders why equal pay for equal work remains such a radical notion.

—*Diverse Education* on Feb. 27, 2018, and *Cincinnati* on Feb. 27, 2018

Remembering Pauli Murray’s Role in Title IX

While many commemorate the birth of Title IX 46 years ago, there’s less attention to the legacy of black women organizers who laid the groundwork for Title IX. Pauli Murray was an activist and an attorney who fought against segregation in higher ed, business and public transportation, as well as one of the founders of the National Organization for Women, which eventually made the push for Title IX. Relying on the language of civil rights and pay equity laws, Murray helped create the language for Title IX, and she is an important example of the activism of black women that led to changes in our legal system. *Rewire.News* notes, “Black women also have achieved justice through civil disobedience, mutual support systems, public education, mass communication, coalition building, and storytelling. As race, gender, and class have combined to disenfranchise and disempower them, Black women have made advocacy for civil rights and women’s rights a natural convergence.” More important, the news outlet makes the case that we should use Title IX to protect the rights of black girls, women and gender-nonconforming folks today.

—*Rewire.News* on Feb. 28, 2018

Reimagining How We Punish Campus Sexual Assault

In *The New York Times*, student activist Sofie Karasek explains that student activists, who helped lay the groundwork for #metoo, are interested in a new method of handling sexual assault on campus. She writes, “Over time, many student activists have become disillusioned with an emphasis on punitive justice—firings, expulsions and in some cases, prison sentences. We’ve seen firsthand how rarely it works for survivors. It’s not designed to provide validation, acknowledgment or closure. It also does not guarantee that those who harmed will not act again.” She makes the case for institutional approaches that emphasize justice and healing, together, not just punishment, by pointing to truth and reconciliation practices and restorative justice. Her op-ed is a must-read because it’s a careful consideration of a huge problem for campuses and a move away from carceral forms of feminism.

—*The New York Times* on Feb. 23, 2018 📖

—KJB