Section 1

I AM FLUID

I AM FLUID
If you want to spot fluidity out in the wild, consider this your field guide. These are the characteristics that fluid people, things, experiences, and systems possess. To be clear, it does not mean they have all of them. But they must have a few.
Protests & Movements

EXPERIENCE

What: Black Lives Matter (US), Fees Must Fall (South Africa), March for Our Lives (US), Rhodes Must Fall (South Africa), The Safe Zone Project (URL), The Trevor Project (US).

Why: Fundamental to fluidity is challenging rigid systems, fighting for an equitable world, and building organizational structures that find power in the We as much as the Me. Pretty much the definition of movement building and protest.

People say that Gen Zs are anti-hierarchy or that they want flat organizational structures. This is reductive and inaccurate. Gen Zs love collectives and a solid collaboration, but only as long as their individuality is able to thrive. They want their organizations to support both the Me and the We, the parts and the whole.

Of course, with their identities built upon a dynamic of multiplicity and equipoise, disparate micro-identities coexisting in harmony to form a singular “me,” wouldn’t you expect their organizations to do the same?

Look at March for Our Lives. There are co-founders, but the year-old movement is quickly transcending them and, in fact, with their blessing. The Parkland kids are creating a movement is quickly transcending how to expand the conversation while still maintaining its original mission. Through building an ecosystem and acknowledging the intersectionality of issues at play, you’ve been able to expand your focus, meaning March for Our Lives becomes something much bigger.

SARAH CHADWICK: I mean, when you look at Gen Z as a whole, we all have a political opinion no matter what. If they don’t, then they’re just not paying attention and it’s more or less just ignorance. Personally, I’ve always had a very strong opinion on politics, so I think it came naturally. We’re so in tune with what’s going on in the world just because we were born into these things. I was born in 2001, Columbine happened in 1999. Sandy Hook happened when I was in sixth grade. To quote Cameron, “I was born into mass shootings.” Gen Z can relate to March For Our Lives as a whole, because we are the ones who know what it’s like to grow up constantly in fear. Whether it be on the streets or sitting in school, or wherever, because gun violence has been at the forefront of our lives. It’s not older people trying to relate to the youth. We’re more accessible, we’re more relatable in the fact that we’ve been through it and we know what it’s like.

IRREGULAR REPORT: When I look at what you all have done and what you continue to do, it’s incredibly sophisticated. Obviously, March For Our Lives grew out of a specific and horrific event, so it was tied to a very clear issue. But you seem to have instinctively understood how to expand the conversation while still maintaining its original mission. Through building an ecosystem and acknowledging the intersectionality of issues at play, you’ve been able to expand your focus, meaning March for Our Lives becomes something much bigger.

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SC: So this past March, we had our March For Our Lives. It was huge and it was one of a kind, to be honest. Not one of a kind in the sense that it was singular—obviously there have been thousands of marches—but it was one of a kind, to us and our issue. And we just felt that having another march wouldn’t do anything.
Instead of just having another march for the sake of having another march, we wanted to take what we’ve gained since and use that to help organize and generate new activism, and help uplift voices of people who haven’t been heard and people that don’t have access to larger resources. We want to be able to put that into different communities and help our generation by teaching them how to plan and how to organize. Because I think that will do a lot more good than just having another march.

IR: Definitely, in my opinion, you are redefining what activism is. Historically, you march, you congregate, you attend and that’s what activism is to your average person. What’s so interesting to me about what you have done since the March is that you all had a kind of a kickstart that you all are exploring what activism looks like for your generation and what the new activism will be. You’re saying: we are going to take everything we’ve learned and all the resources that we’ve worked hard to push us forward. And also become more inclusive. How do you think that you, as Gen Z and as March For Our Lives, are starting to change the definition of activism? What do you think are the critical ingredients for evolving activism in order to be more effective?

SC: In my opinion, marching is more than just building awareness for issues you want to build awareness for. We were marching for common sense gun laws. But politicians are already aware that common sense gun laws are important and that people want them. It’s just that they’re not doing anything about it because they favor their money more than our lives. So they’re aware of what’s going on, it’s just a question of how are we going to push them into creating and implementing preventative measures. We can’t take measures after something has happened. So instead of bringing awareness after something has happened, it’s how are we going to make sure that politicians stop it before it’s happened.

IR: What do you feel is the most important thing for the thing that most motivates your generation to take action? To move from just posting on social media and getting excited and doing it. What have you found to be most effective in inspiring Gen Zs to get out there?

SC: A lot of Gen Zs just don’t know how activism helps them, or how it affects them. And so that’s what we’ve tried to do: really educate Gen Zs on what activism truly does. And there are so many more people out there organizing now. I see it all the time—and it’s not even just because my friend group is more involved in these issues. But, in fact, I see it everywhere. And I honestly think that our generation had it in us all along to go out and participate, but we were scared and we didn’t know how to do it.

IR: So it’s important for us to give them a push and show what it accomplishes. Trump getting elected, I do think that’s an example of a failure of the sense that people wake up about the rampant bigotry that’s been happening here. Social media can’t accomplish everything. A tweet getting 10,000 re-tweets isn’t going to pass legislation. So we are realizing more and more, even though social media is our weapon of choice, it’s not solving everything. Being there physically and actually screaming into megaphones is what’s going to make a difference. Actually talking to people and making connections is what’s going to make a difference.

IR: After the midterms, I was worried. Your generation has been fighting and working so hard, and those who can vote are showing up to vote. But then, to have a luke warm election result terrified me, because I thought we would have all of these discouraged and disappointed young people. Did you worry about that or have you found that it actually further emboldened and energized you and your peers?

SC: Yeah. That’s something I was extremely worried about. That’s when you’re in the tools and the workshops and the tool kits and education. And not only teaching suburban white communities or big cities. We want to bring this to all communities. Because sometimes those communities are the ones that need it the most.

IR: What do you feel is the most important thing for the thing that most motivates your generation about an issue and then decide to take it to the streets and decide to do whatever they’re going to do about it.

IR: Absolutely. But for so many young people, you are inspiring them to take action in their own communities. One girl told us that she became politically active this last year because she “emotionally connected to the March for Our Lives founders” on social media.

IR: That is great. What you’re actually doing is giving advice to somebody young who wants to start something but might feel like, “Oh, but I can’t. I don’t have the access to what you March for Our Lives have.”

SC: Absolutely. But for so many young people, my advice to people who don’t have the resources, but still want to participate and just don’t think that they could make a change: local activism always leads to something greater, just like local elections do. A lot of people don’t think that local elections are important, but if you just show up, it will affect your local election, if anything, affects your life most directly. And so, with local activism, you might not see a change in the nation, but you’ll definitely see a change in your community and in yourself. And I think that’s the most important part of it because that just goes to show that you’re truly passionate about this issue, and there’s nothing in the background that’s playing into it. It’s truly you, it’s truly authentic. It’s pure anger and energy and passion.

IR: That is great. What you’re actually becoming is something that’s both accessible and inspiring. That comment about emotionally connecting, I just felt it was so critical to your power with your peers. You all should be really proud of yourselves. Not that you need me to tell you that.

SC: Thank you so much.
Hashtag Activism

**NETWORK**

**What:** #builtbygirls, # changetheratio, # metoo, # neveragain, # saggyboobsmatter.

**Why:** Movement building by way of hashtag, welcome to the future. No longer do marginalized groups need to wait for permission or work within systems that often refuse to give them a seat at the table. Particularly if you are a teen who lives in a world that says no more than yes, smiling at your suggestions but rarely taking them seriously. As we witnessed with #MeToo, one post from an ally or advocate can unleash community driven change.

In 2017, when Raya Sarkar and other DBA (Dalit Bahujan Advasis) women released LoSha (List of Sexual Harassment Accused), their methods were criticized and weren’t supported. Their list was deemed as inauthentic, while tweets and accounts from 2018 are being termed as cathartic, revolutionary and necessary—which isn’t wrong, but is unfair when considering many denounced the same tactic when DBA women used it the year before.

In the current wave of #MeToo, workplace harassment prevention measures were taken up by the government. These included setting up an email address by the The National Commission for Women to receive complaints, circulating lists with job openings in case women wanted to leave their old companies, etc. While these are great provisions to build safer spaces for working women, it doesn’t do much for women who aren’t upper caste, who don’t have access to technology or whose work is a part of the unorganized sector—women working at construction sites, households, small shops, etc. They have little to no access to online spaces for support or legal aid.

Additionally, even among the upper middle class women, the ones with more power have had a greater reach, and an army of supporters after coming out with their accounts, as opposed to other women with less power who weren’t heard or backed up despite trying to call out their abusers earlier. While I’m grateful for popular women who choose to use their platforms to voice or put out stories of women who choose to confide in them, it’s important to receive all accounts without bias regardless of caste, class, popularity, wealth, etc., and offer them the same support that we would to the hegemonic. India also saw #MeToo circles being organized in various cities that would serve as cathartic spaces where women only (without men and press) would come together physically to share stories, talk about healing, stand in solidarity with one another and offer unconditional support to each other in their own capacity without victimizing. One of these meetings was organized at an upscale art gallery where attendees had to RSVP to confirm their attendance, but even the organizers were made to realize how this set-up was rooted in privilege and wasn’t accessible to everyone. The venue was then changed to a public ground and women were asked to simply show up without confirming online. People in other cities, too, then discussed accessibility and awareness before organizing similar events.

Through an online feminist platform, Smash Board, I was also made to realize how little I knew about cases that weren’t about Savarna women, while rape cases and stories that had to do with upper caste privileged women were being discussed nationally and made it to the headlines of all leading newspapers. Thus, it is an important responsibility of the media, in every form, to represent and cover stories of women of all backgrounds or orientations. It is on us to listen to stories of women of less privilege without victimizing them, and actively coming up with provisions that make space for them both in our conversation and redressal.

We need to step up and try to individually acknowledge and inform ourselves of our privilege, everyone’s needs, our responsibilities towards the usage of our resources to benefit and include not just women of influence, but every woman irrespective of her socio-economic status. #MeToo started with a sense of liberating privileged women, but it doesn’t need to end there. We need to make amends, and open our arms wider than we already have.
**Soft Mas Fashion**

**BRAND**

What: Harris Reed (UK), Marine Serre (France), Paloma Spain (Spain), Wales Bonner (UK).

Why: These young designers think men’s fashion needs to embrace its softer side. Not exactly gender neutral, each make clothing for men that refuses to subscribe to binaries and their associated sartorial rules and regulations.

How does influence flow in a fluid world? Well, if you read our last report, definitely not rectilinearly. Influence is an exchange and much more meme-like in its behavior—iterative and collaborative. We spoke with the 22-year-old fashion designer, Harris Reed, and their entrepreneur mother, Lynette Reed, about the increasing elasticity around the parent/child dynamic.

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LULA OSOSKI: This is such an amazing opportunity to have two generations that are creatively and personally intertwined and, I suspect, interdependent. First off, you are mother and child, but you are also both building creative businesses that are embracing our fluid future. So let’s start with the basics: what does fluidity mean to both of you?

HARRIS REED: Wow, for me that’s such a big question. I think it can really span across different things from sexuality to how you identify as a being and how you identify as a creative. I think it’s someone who finds beauty within the fluid. A person who feels they don’t fit into preconceived gender norms and who completely knows who they are, what they stand for and knowing that that doesn’t fit into what the current status quo of gender is.

LYNETTE REED: I think fluidity is just about letting people be people, and not be labeled or having to tick a certain box. Just being able to be free to be who you are. You know, having a son who when he was three-years-old wore princess dresses and boas—I think I was very influenced by Harris and by raising him.

LO: Definitely. Harris, how do you think your upbringing has shaped who you are as well as how you are building your brand?

HR: My upbringing definitely shaped who I am today. I think having parents who have been super open for me to fully express who I am, and creating space for me to challenge and explore myself. I think that, in contrast with moving around so much. We moved a lot, and when I was younger I was fascinated by how people may view someone who doesn’t fit into what is preconceived as male or female, or “normal” or “not normal.” There was this really beautiful, harmonious contrast of having really accepting parents wanting me to embrace who I was, clashing with sometimes being in environments where people really had...
an issue with the way that I was choosing to present myself. I think those

two things have influenced where I am now. Everything comes from my
depth of passion with how clothing can really shape the way someone feels, both someone who’s wearing the garments and also the person who’s looking at them.

Lo Lynette, you talk about how Harris has inspired your work. It is quite amazing to see a parent so open and curious as to let their child influence their business. How do you think this dynamic of influence works?

LR As much as I feel like we taught Harris, he’s also taught me. I learn from him every day, and he and we consider each other best friends. He lived with his stepdad and I for most of his upbringing and spent summers with his father who’s the same, very open and accepting. We did everything we could to keep him in a safe environment where he would always be free to be who he was. I’ve been in the perfumery and fragrance business forever, and when I went to do Fluid Fragrances it was a lot to do with Harris and watching him blossom. But it wasn’t just a blossom, it was more like an explosion. Watching him really become a blossom, it was more like an explosion. Watching him really become who he is has just been a complete inspiration for me in every single way. I don’t like the word “unisex,” because again that’s labeling those two sexes. That’s why I named it Fluid Fragrances, because, first of all, it’s liquid, it’s a fluid; and perfume has a fluid quality in how it opens the top notes and then transitions into the heart notes, and then changes to the base notes so it’s really like a fluid journey. And mainly, it’s for anybody.

Lo What do you think is the most important thing that you’ve learned from each other?

HR I think one of the biggest things I’ve learned from my mother is just to be who I am. I try to try to stay as ambiguous as I can, and obviously that can get hard because sometimes there have to be labels to be able to fight for something. But aside from that, what I think I’ve learned the most from my mother is that no matter what life throws at you, you just pick yourself up and keep going forward. Use every little experience to push you forward, whether that’s in passing on the street or a project that didn’t go how you wanted. I’ve definitely been lucky enough to see the positive results of that.

LR One of the things I admire more than anything is how positive he is. It’s funny because I’ve sort of learned the same from him as what he has learned from me. But with Harris, I see him acting so proactively on that. He’s so positive and so focused, and so he’s helping me learn to keep my thinking in that direction.

Lo That’s great to hear how you feed off of each other in that way. I think that’s really powerful. The equity in your relationship is incredible, but obviously being from two generations, your experience growing up was different. When you look at each other, is there anything that you envy?

LR Well, growing up for me, my father was a police officer and my mom was very conservative, they had very traditional roles. I was always kind of the black sheep of the family. They were so conservative and I wasn’t, and I don’t know why or how. But for whatever reason, I always had a much more open mind than my family. I liked people who were different and a bit outside of the box. I thought them more interesting. But that’s not how my family saw things. I think it was hard for my parents when Harris was younger. My dad would tell me when Harris was little “Get him in football. Get him into baseball,” and I would see that he didn’t want it. He wanted to take sewing class, so I put him in sewing class and ballet and drawing and anything he wanted to do. I think what I admire about people from Harris’s generation is they are more accepting and open than mine as a whole. But that isn’t to say there still aren’t a lot of very closed-minded young people and a lot of very open-minded older people. I actually hate generalizations.

Lo Harris, is there anything that you envy from your mom’s generation? Even though we’re very lucky being from the time we’re in with more openness, you and your work seems to be inspired by icons like David Bowie or Mick Jagger.

HR I feel very lucky and content to be born in a time right now where this is something we are talking about on the phone. Not that it is super normalized yet, but it does feel like a normal thing to talk about, and I definitely wouldn’t have wanted to be born any other time. However, of course, the ’70s and ’80s, Studio 54 and Warhol. Those are the things that I envy, strictly for inspiration. A lot of brands are now using words like “androgynous,” which really bothers me because it’s becoming commercialized. But I think at the time, those people like Bowie were just being who they were; there was no label even saying if it was fluid or if it was this or that. They were just people with a very genuine sense of who they were, and a vacancy of binary or category. Those people were almost the purest form of fluidity.

Lo Do you think our generation is having an impact on previous generations’ mindsets?

LR I think for people whose minds are open. I’m in my mid 50s and I have friends all the way down in their 20s to up in their 70s. Like my friend Joan, who is older than I am and every bit as open-minded, and then I have young friends who aren’t. I think people are beginning to open their eyes, yet I think so many people don’t know how to, they don’t want to or they are just not going to. I don’t know why, I don’t understand.

HR Of course I’m someone who constantly looks to history and the past to learn and grow. I ask my mom about her life experiences to help me shape my own decisions and choices today. Same is to be said for me informing my mother of the way our generation sees and views the world and the political and mental landscape. I think the more we embrace our individuality of today’s beings, we are a visual representation of tomorrow and change. We have an obligation as youth to make as much of a difference in today’s society as humanly, and well sometimes even spiritually, possible.

Fluidity can flow across generations. While a teen is still a teen and will push against their parent, Gen Zs have their eyes on the ball. So they might put up a solidly sullen front, but they are smart enough to know that someday older (even their parent) has valuable insights and skills to share. Vice versa for the open-minded adult. Ultimately, as the exchange of influence between parent and child becomes more supple, the familial system and structure will most likely transform.
In her award-winning and genre-defying graphic novels, Tillie Walden has created many worlds. She deftly moves between space, earth, and everywhere in between. She navigates cities (A City Inside), palaces (The End of Summer) and small towns (I Love This Part). Her stories are of queer love, of fluidity, of exploration of self. They are important because they refuse to comport with rules written by others. Nicolaia Rips chats with Tillie about boxes, representation, and the future of publishing in a fluid world.

Nicolaia Rips: I was reading some interviews you did about The End of Summer and you have a quote where you talk about falling in and letting the story affect the layout. How do you find your medium affects the narratives you write? What do you look for when you’re creating a world? Does the freedom of fiction ever daunt you?

Tillie Walden: It’s not exactly the freedom of fiction that daunts me. Sometimes just making a book is a little overwhelming. It’s a huge task and once you make it, it’s sort of around forever. That part of it is a little crazy. But the idea of fiction and of this endless possibility of creating a world, is always very exciting because what happens when you work on a book is, you have an idea, get really excited about it just like when you’re in an early relationship with someone. Everything is new. And then you’re like, oh okay this has been going on for awhile. I’m still here. We’re still doing this. And it gets tiresome. So whenever I have the opportunity to create a new world, as I come up with an idea, it’s a blast. I always try and come up with world elements that are things that I really enjoy drawing because with a graphic novel we have to draw something thousands of times. I really love drawing nature. I really like architecture. I’m constantly sort of shoving those elements into my book just because they’re fun to draw for me.

NR: On the subject of architecture and space—how does space, both literally but also figuratively, play into your work?

TW: A lot of times people see that element as a background in a comic. I teach comics, and I’m always telling my students to think not of your world as a background, but as another character. It’s this really special element that cartoonists get to have. In a movie, if you’re experiencing a really cool space, the shot is gonna change, and you’re going to go somewhere else. You can’t pause and put a finger on it, but you can do that in a comic. So, it’s even more important to make the space somewhere that the reader wants to see more of, and wants to be sort of invited into. I’m so obsessed with that. I always think about obstructing the reader’s view. Like partially open doors or stairways to make the reader want to go further into a room.
NR: Graphic novels are this interesting fluid medium, but you really took that a step further by publishing On A Sunbeam as a webcomic in its first iteration. Why did you do this instead of opting for maybe a more traditional form of publishing?
TW: I could publish On A Sunbeam as a webcomic because I had some financial stability from my previous books. This gave me some power in deciding what I wanted to do with my graphic novels. And books are expensive. Most of my audience are teenagers and, sure, some of them have money for that book but lots of them don’t. There is a barrier in the publishing world and in what I do. My books are only in libraries sometimes, but almost everyone now has an internet connection or a device. I was really proud of Sunbeam. I felt that the story was so important for all kinds of people to read that I thought the best way was just to make sure the whole thing was free to read online, even now that it’s been published in print.

NR: Do you see more of this popping up in the future? Do you think the internet is going to change publishing even more than it already has?
TW: I think so. I’m not one of those people who thinks that print books are dying and they’re going to go away. I think print books will always be with us. Possibly even more so in the years to come as the internet gets more tiresome. But I think what we’ll see more of probably is this marriage of the industry. And not really seeing the internet as a separate entity from publishing, but that is something that can work with the publishing of books. So that what’s going on with Sunbeam, right? It is a book. I am selling books, but it is also a webcomic. And they work very well together and that sort of freaks publishers out. We’ll be seeing more of that in the future.

NR: I love the idea of it existing in many forms. All the forms.
TW: Absolutely. Get it out there.

NR: Speaking of barriers, in On A Sunbeam you work within science fiction. That’s a genre typically dominated by cishet men and by a lot of rules and certain kinds of restraints. Where do you see the future of science fiction going? Do you think that genre is even going to stick around?
TW: I have no idea. The funny thing is, even though I did publish a sci-fi book, I know very little about sci-fi or science at all. I mean it. Just thinking about the future is terrifying. It’s not even something that I feel like I have the knowledge or understanding to really speak on eloquently. The genre will always stick around because the marketing people made it. Genre, people always forget that, it’s not really for the creator. It’s for people who are finding books, because if you are looking for a book and you want to read something about space, then these categories are going to really help you out. But as a writer, I’m not sitting down and saying, “Oh, I want to make something within this little box that someone else has created.” You just make a story, at the end, when the story is done, that’s when someone in the marketing team is like, “Oh, I think this is science fiction.” And I’m like, “Okay, fine. Do whatever you need to do.” But I always try and create without thinking of genres because then I’ll get trapped in there. And I think we should be able make stories much more creatively.

NR: You also finished your memoir last year, 2017, when you were 22. When I wrote my memoir I got a lot of older people and interviewers asking me what I had to write about. Like, I was so young. I had lived so little. What is there to write a memoir about? Do you think there’s something important about getting young narratives out there?
TW: I think there’s something important about getting any narrative out there. I don’t care if your 15 or 50, or white, or black, or gay or straight. And interviewers always do that. They try and get you into these little categories again where it’s like, “Is this the young prodigy that I’m talking to? Who is this?” I don’t think any of that matters. I think people should just have the time and the freedom to tell stories in any capacity. But the problem is that no one has the money or the time. And so what I’m hoping I can do more of as I continue and make more money is to support artists who don’t have the freedom to sit down and take some time to write down their story. I don’t think that age matters. I don’t think any of that stuff matters.

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NR: Do you have any other advice for young authors?
TW: Yeah, one of the best pieces of advice I got when I was in school and I was making comics because, I think it was my teacher, James, who told me to finish everything I start. Even if I start something that I don’t like halfway through. You learn as you get that skill to learn to finish things, then you actually have a shot at doing it. But if you can only ever write the beginning of a novel, you’ll never be a novelist. So learn to finish. Learn to work through that self doubt and fear. Because you get that real inspiration and that real high of creativity when you take something all the way to the finish line.
Travis Alabanza is a London-based poet, performance artist, and activist whose work has been featured in numerous publications including Huffington Post, PAPER, and HUCK. They have appeared in makeup campaigns, given hundreds of talks and performances, self-published a book of poetry, and even found time to publicly call out Topshop’s fitting room policy. Alabanza spins tales of transfemme survival into magic: an incident of street harassment that ended with a burger being thrown at their head was turned into the (aptly titled) live theatre performance Burgerz. Journalist Micha Frazer-Carroll sat down with them to dig deep into the commercialization of fluidity, everyday violence, desirability politics, and blue lipstick, of course.
MICA FRAZER-CARROLL. So we’re chatting about fluidity, but you might agree that “fluidity,” in many ways is a broad term that’s open to interpretation—what does it mean to you?

TRAVIS ALABANZA. I kind of cringe when “fluidity” is written about now, because I think people have started to place it solely on trans and gender nonconforming people, whereas, really, fluidity is the most natural concept ever. We’re constantly flowing in and out of our emotions, in and out of states—like I was tired today, and I’m not today—“fluid” isn’t this new concept. To me, fluidity is just a basic human thing. We are constantly shifting and changing, and with regards to gender, for me, it’s kind of just what I see as the natural state of our gender anyway. But what’s happening is we’re told that we have to be constrained, so then “fluid” means a new thing. But I think it’s the O.G.

MFC. Do you think fluidity is political?

TA. I guess around gender, I think it shouldn’t be. But to be fluid in your presentation of gender, to let gender flow from something that’s not stagnant and be something that’s constantly shifting, unfortunately it is political—or, rather, politicized. I think the way that gender continues to succeed as something that’s reinforcing capitalism, reinforcing racism, and reinforcing patriarchy, is that it makes us say we’re the same every day and makes us stay still, as a way to continue to keep us down. So thus, to say, “fuck that, I’m not this,” is a political act.

MFC. Do you think fluidity is becoming more important for upcoming generations?

TA. Obviously, we have had this boom of visibility towards it, recognition towards it, and there are more examples of fluidity. But you know me, I’m a bit cynical of it all, because I just think it’s always existed, it’s always been here. Just because the West, and even this kind of media report, are suddenly recognizing fluidity, doesn’t mean it hasn’t always been here. And actually, I’m trying to reshift my idea of acceptance away from whether or not, say, Conde Nast (a reference to Vogue who recently ran a video on trans visibility), and those people are accepting me. We were accepted in lots of different ways before, it’s just that now the mainstream west and pop culture are “accepting” us.

But you know me, I’m always critical of it all, I think it’s still a certain type of fluidity that is accepted. And if you take away the campaigns, take away the perfume bottles, going out on the street, if you are expressing gender-fluidity you’re going to get bashed, you’re going to get hurt, you’re going to get shouted at, you’re going to be stopped by violence.

MFC. What would you say to people who believe gender-fluidity is a concept only accessible to specific, privileged groups, e.g. just people who are middle class or educated at university?

TA. It’s a tactic of oppression that everyone always uses. But whenever people say that about me, I’m like, “Girl, I don’t have a fucking university degree.” Sure, this is language that we’re using for these concepts now, but the ideas and the people have always existed. All you need to do is watch Paris is Burning to see that this black, working class, vogue ball thing is long-established. No, they’re not using the word “non-binary,” but language changes.

I do think that what happens is we think something is new when whiteness accepts it. Like it’s new because white people are suddenly giving money to it. When actually, if you take the US as an example, when white people came over and found native people who were expressing their genders in fluid and nonconforming ways, white people killed that off. Now suddenly, hundreds of years later, they’re like, “This new thing that we have got!” It’s bullshit.

I think something doesn’t have to be new for it to still be seen as amazing. I feel like we’re creating a strange narrative, where every piece of media coverage on gender-fluidity starts with a tagline like: “(Mock TV presenter) Caitlyn Jenner, 2017/18, gender has exploded into the mainstream.” I’m like, something doesn’t have to be “exploding into the mainstream” for it to be valid.

And do you think this makes people think gender-fluidity is an exclusively “young,” millennial or Gen Z thing, limited to young people who “don’t know the ways of the world” yet?

TA. Yes. It’s painted as a fad, it’s painted as this trendy thing. But doing Tranz Talks and Burgerz for the last month, I met lots of older people, like 65+, and if you looked at them on the street you would say they were gender conforming. But then, if you actually speak to them, they say “I used to dress like you, and then I got exhausted from how hard it was, and now I conform.” And I feel like that demonstrates how much we lack nuance in talking about fluidity—a lot of people would choose to be more fluid in their gender expression if the world was safe for them to do so. We can’t always judge the visuals to tell us how many people are gender-fluid. And we don’t necessarily know what a gender-fluid person looks like, because it’s not safe to be gender-fluid at the moment.

And then people minimize the conversation, and flatten it out to make it look like we’re talking about one thing. If they make us look like we’re obsessing over a pronoun and nothing else, then we become this...
fantasy of a group of what they think we look like. When actually, we’re not just talking about those things. For me, I don’t even just use the word non-binary, being gender nonconforming. The reality is that, most of the day what is causing me violence isn’t the issue that they’re calling “snowflake” issues, like pronouns or bathrooms, which are really violent issues too. What’s causing me violence is having shit thrown at me, and being shouted at, and my friends being hurt. And they don’t ever want to talk about or think how these choices go beyond just an identity for a lot of us. It actually translates into a real systematic expression of violence against us.

MFC I loved your tweet about blue lipstick. I feel like it perfectly encapsulated this misguided conception that being gender nonconforming is some sort of funky new fashion statement.

TA There are so many blogs on Mumnet-Munroe Bergdorf is talked about in horrible ways too. There is a lot of oversexualization. But then for me, they will be like, “This weirdo with the blue lipstick?” I’m like, “Girl, let me move on from my fashion choices.” I did used to wear blue lipstick all the time. They’ll be like, “This non-binary man thinks that they’re non-binary because they bought a blue lipstick...” and I’m like, “No girl, I just love the lip.”

MFC And beyond the media, do you feel you see the concept of fluidity being commercialized by brands?

TA Yes, it has already happened. But it’s not as simple as just saying all of this commercialization is bad. I think that celebrities, people in the public eye, can play around, and I think that’s what gets lost in conversations where people say that all media coverage of this is bad and commercial. Because actually, in my world, everyone would be allowed to say they’re gender-fluid and play in and play out, and it wouldn’t be a huge deal.

But what I do think is happening is, unfortunately, we’re still basing our ideas of gender nonconformity on our standards of who we find attractive, who’s pretty, and who we want to sleep with. It’s still falling into those categories, so they’re mostly white, or they’re going to be light-skinned, they’re going to have muscles...it’s interesting to see that the assigned male at birth non-binary people who are lifted to model status still have a six pack, still have tattoos, still appear desirability. And that is not their fault. Their gender is still valid, it doesn’t cross them off—it’s just that I wish we could move away from only lifting people up if we desire them.

MFC And only lifting up people who are seen to be “successfully” performing a certain gender.

TA And that means that fat people, dark-skinned people, disabled people are left behind. I play into it too, and sometimes I wonder what would happen if I wasn’t dressing in a certain way. I know that people are interested in my clothes. But would people be as interested in my queerness otherwise? I’m not sexualized, but I have to be fashionable.

I had the most interesting conversation in my own head two years ago when I realized, like, “Oh, my fashion is what’s getting people’s attention”—which is still linked up to desire.

And that means that the people that are really fucked up in the street, who are getting fucked up because of what it means to be gender nonconforming, aren’t being lifted up, aren’t being given two-thousand pounds to do a makeup campaign or something. I don’t think these campaigns are going to kill us. I’m not going to hang anyone who has done one out to dry (I have done one too), but I just think that I’ll cross it as well. We should ask for more, it’s not enough that these media places say “look how good we are, we’ve hired a non-binary person.” This isn’t badass anymore—I want to ask, “Are you actually contributing to their income, their growth and structural changes?”

MFC Are you seeing any brands that are doing allyship well?

Lush Cosmetics often gets mentioned.

TA Lush is cool, because they’re hiring the girls too (what I mean by “the girls” is non-binary people, the femmes, the gender nonconforming people—the girls). They’re giving them money, and they’re giving them creative control. They’re not just going to have you for one session when it’s “in,” they’re actually implementing us into their business model.

Stonewall are also really important to note, because four years ago they didn’t have a good rep for trans shit, they weren’t doing a lot to support trans people, and they know it. But I’m really proud that I was so vocal about that, because now I can be vocal and say Stonewall are doing really great. It’s really cool to see that they have grown and taken responsibility. What they’re now choosing to do is not just telling the non-binary and gender-fluid stories that are easy, they’re saying that this community, like any other community, is varied, is nuanced, has people that are messy, and they’re showing the nuances of that.

I also think the Vogue thing was iconic. I’m not just saying that because I’m in it. I’m saying it because they didn’t just choose one type of trans person, and I think that’s what can be dangerous at the moment—that we are consistently shown in one type of way. But the Vogue video said fuck that, I’m bringing in lots of different types of ways to be trans and non-binary, to show that we’re varied.

MFC What do you think is the most important thing for us to remember when talking about fluidity?

TA We have to link it to the structural violence that is happening—including how gender nonconforming people experience rape and sexual assault, how we’re treated in prison, those who have mental health issues because they can’t be gender nonconforming in their everyday life. The conversation shouldn’t just stay at “Travis put on some lipstick, isn’t it good that they can be free,” it needs to go further. We need to decentrize media narratives and look at what it means to be gender nonconforming in everyday life.
Gen Z: Reclaiming Labels, Living Intersectionalities, and Redefining Identity Politics

Gen Zs don’t just want their identities to be respected. They also want the overlapping, complex, shifting intersectionalities that they occupy to be understood and celebrated. Here, Sage Grace Dolan-Sandrino takes a look at the power of labels and the (positive) potential of identity politics.

by Sage, 19, Washington D.C.

I am growing into myself and shedding what society has told me my identity should be.

ANNE, 22, NEW YORK

“I think basically anything / everything makes up someone’s identity. I think my identity can consist of: queer, nonbinary, a lover of botany, an artist, a camp counselor, Portland born-and-raised, former catholic, folk-punk enthusiast, chai latex lover, student.”

NAT, 18, CHICAGO

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a newscaster asked me when interviewing me for a segment.

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ACTION & ACTIVISM

WITH ADAM ELI

by

Nicolaia, 20,
New York City

B

efore I spoke to Adam Eli, I had spotted his neck on my explore page. Resting lightly on it was a pearl choker, a chain with Hebrew lettering and a Star of David. Already in love, I fell eagerly into his Instagram page, wide-eyed at the bright rainbow array of colors, beautiful community of friends, and his message of resistance.

In this age of social platforms, online activism is omnipresent, and political engagement often ends where it begins—with a lone tweet or Instagram story. Adam stands above with his commitment to real world action. Adam is the founder of Vioce4 ("When you mess with one queer, you mess with us all.") and before that, was a crucial part of Gays Against Guns. He has marched, organized, lectured, and empowered on a daily basis, reaching over 32.6k people. His Instagram platform is an extension of the energy he lectured, and empowered on a daily basis, reaching over 32.6k people. His Instagram platform is an extension of the energy he has in life, a powerful hope coupled with immense strength. I spoke with him about how to start a movement and how to avoid falling into clicktivism.

NICOLAIA RIPS

What does it mean to be an activist in today’s world?

ADAM ELI

I believe that people care and want to show up but just don’t know how to do it. For this reason, whenever I post on social media, I’m trying to make action accessible. For example, right after Orlando [Pulse shooting], I posted on Instagram saying, "if you’re feeling angry or desperate meet me at my apartment and together we can head to the Memorial Rally." About 30 people showed up just from that Instagram post!

"An activist is someone who actively goes out of their way to evoke change. That means constantly going to rallies, marches, meetings, etc."

ARIELLE, 17, NEW YORK

NR Do you have any advice for young people trying to be activists? It’s so easy to become overwhelmed by the world. How do you weaponize your emotion in an authentic and productive way?

AE My rule is “Don’t post unless it is hopeful or a direct call to action.” The goal for everything I post on social media is for it to have an equal reaction outside of social media, meaning it has to generate action or hope offline as well. People dismiss clicktivism as something useless or something that doesn’t generate change, but social media is a huge platform and in terms of accessibility, it’s where everyone looks.

NR Can you define clicktivism?

AE It’s all of the sharing and posting activism, sign this petition or share this link. Clicktivism alone isn’t enough. Sharing a link around the internet probably won’t translate into change. Of course, if you can go to a rally/protest and post about it, you absolutely should. It’s a privilege. There are so many people who can’t go to protests because they’re undocumented or not out to their family or in a place where it’s just not safe to protest. If you’re able to post about protests you attend, absolutely post about them. You’ll never know who you will inspire!

NR How do you navigate the contradictions in your life? Personally, I know that a lot of times my faith (Judaism) doesn’t align with my queer identity. How does Judaism play a role in your activism?

AE I used to hate being Jewish and love being gay. One day, I sat down and made a list of all the things I love about being gay—the community, the history, the perseverance—and realized that I had all of the same things in my Judaism.

This isn’t something I acknowledged overnight though. It’s taken a long time to figure things out and get here. This is just my experience; I don’t want to generalize and speak to anybody else’s. That said, one of the best parts about being gay is that you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Whatever you’re trying to do, chances are someone has already confronted it, fought with it, and worked their way through it. I’m always looking back at my queer heroes. For example, I recently posted about Willem Arondeus on my Instagram. Arondeus was an out gay man [a writer, poet, and artist] who spent his life fighting the Nazis. He wasn’t Jewish, yet he was willing to risk his life to protect others.

It wasn’t that I woke up one day and felt like posting something and then contrived something to post about. I had already known about Arondeus and wanted to offer him as guide to others. Everything has to be authentic.

NR In addition to hope, calls to action, and authenticity, what are your other central beliefs?

AE I have [three more] that I try to practice every day:

1. The biggest misconception about activism is that people do not care. People want to show up and fight for what they believe in, they just do not always know how. As an activist I seek to provide easily accessible ways for people to take action and contribute. Then I use social media to publicize these opportunities. I never convince, persuade or cajole. I simply try to create a space for action.

2. The LGBTQIA+ community has two responsibilities: to show up for each other and other persecuted groups. It is imperative that we leverage whatever privilege we have to help less privileged members of our own community. I am my brother, sister, and gender non-conforming siblings’ keeper.

3. “There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” —Elie Wiesel

Successful social movements aren’t just about what might be seen as an end goal eg. a policy change, but success such as building up a collective of people, or raising awareness.

MARY-JANE, 21, LONDON

NR Do you know anyone who embodies the way you try to conduct activism?

AE Yes, there’s this guy on Instagram named Arondeus. He was a gay Dutch Jew who spent his life fighting the Nazis. He wasn’t Jewish, yet he was willing to risk his life to protect others.

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emotions (specifically rage, anger, and frustration) are messy and fluid, but can they be a secret weapon for change? Gen Zs think so. They look to people like Serena Williams at the U.S. Open or the women outside Sen. Flake’s office during the Kavanaugh hearing. All of whom, rather than containing themselves, let their tears flow, and it had power. Youth activist Tanya Compas looks at how feelings fuel her political (and personal) resistance.
“Irregular Report” is a phrase I have heard throughout my life. It’s a badge that I have been given by friends, family, past partners, and even in my job as a youth worker. It’s one that I have always worn with pride and honor—up until now that is. When you are labelled as strong, it feels like your pass to be vulnerable, to be sad, or to cry gets revoked. To remain “strong,” I’ve suppressed and dismissed my own emotional needs and feelings. The internal dialogue between my head and heart is one in which my head always seems to come on top. “Don’t be a cry baby,” it commands. “Strong people don’t cry. We need you.”

Crying is something that seems to be so easy for white women, but something that black women have had to fight against, and for. The same empathy offered to white women is not offered to black women. Our blackness negates our femininity and therefore our right to be emotionally vulnerable in the eyes of society. Out of fear that our emotions will be interpreted as tropes of anger or aggression, we police how we express them everywhere. I do it even in my own home.

I am a fluid, masculine-presenting, queer, mixed-race woman born to a white mother and black father. I am the middle of three sisters, and growing up I was considered the “sporty one” and the tomboy. Labels that I now know are intrinsically linked to masculinity and thus, due to the patriarchal and toxic masculine society we live in, further reduced my right to emotional expression.

I was never taught to cry. I was never told it was okay. From a young age, I believed that my tears would invalidate my strength and that in order to maintain my label of “the strong one” and fulfill my role as the protector of my family, I had to negate and repress my own emotions.

This is something that now as a 26-year-old woman, I am beginning to unlearn with the help of therapy. I have learned that, as a black woman, my tears are political. Without even meaning to, she made a statement. She received backlash and was racially discriminated against for showing her emotions. One Australian newspaper even depicted her as a black, ape-like baby throwing a “cry baby” tantrum on the court. To me it was freeing. She showed me and so many other black women that our emotions matter. If it makes other people uncomfortable, then so be it.

Gen Zs respect emotional outbursts, displays of feelings, and vulnerability. They see them as potent political tools, underutilized, maligned, and “feminized” by the old (aka male) guard. They believe that political change and marginalized groups’ ability to drive it can be furthered by weaponizing emotions. So yes, politicians and activists, you can wear your hearts on your sleeves. That goes for brands too. Don’t be afraid to show your emotional cards. It will only humanize your brand, winning Gen Zs’ trust.
Emotions are powerful tools, and Gen Zs know it. At the age of 15, Sonita Alizadeh was living in Afghanistan about to be married off to a man almost three times her age. Rather than saying “I do,” Sonita said “hell no,” with her tears and one powerful tune, “Brides For Sale.” The music video became a YouTube viral sensation, attracting the attention of an organization in the U.S., which got Sonita out of Afghanistan and well on her way to building a foundation that fights for the rights of girls like herself around the world.

Spoken word poet and Irregular Labs partner, Priyal Thakkar, speaks to Sonita about how she is now building a movement off of the strength and softness of a global community of girls.
PRITAL TRARKAR

Hi Sonita! First off, I'd like to thank you for your strength and courage and inspiring countless other girls! Moving to a different continent is never easy, and to navigate it alone and in your circumstances, I can't begin to imagine the hardships you must've conquered. Often people tend to clump together the system of oppression and the people who are equally victim to them. The women in Afghanistan who partake in this tradition of child marriage, like your mother, do it because that is the only way they know, and they truly believe it is what's best for you under the circumstances. Which is why voices like yours are even more important! They not only draw attention to this inhuman distinction but are also the best at navigating them to a solution.

OK, let's get to it. How did you get into rap music in a country where the mere act of listening to it would've landed you in trouble with the authorities, and what has it meant to you?

SONIA ALIZADEH

I started to learn music when I was attending classes at the local NGO for undocumented Afghan refugees in Iran. First I wrote poetry, then I tried rap music, but my message was too powerful. One day while I was cleaning an office building, I heard Eminem over the speakers. I couldn't understand anything that he was saying, but I noticed that it was fast and powerful. I thought, "I can do that." I started practicing, and I loved it. I started to make my music and someone helped me with the recording of the video. When I was making the music video “Brides for Sale,” I didn’t expect the rap getting the public reaction that it did. I knew about the consequences of speaking up but I had to express my pain. My biggest goal was for my family to understand how I felt. Even though I knew it was dangerous, and of course it was scary, my hopes, my beliefs, and my goals were bigger than my fears.

PT Did you ever imagine that the mere act of personal expression could lead to such gigantic changes to your life? How did you overcome any fears about arising social consequences when asserting your voice and claiming your agency?

SA When my mother told me that I’d be getting married soon, I was devastated. My heart broke and it was very hard to imagine marrying someone I didn’t know. I didn’t want to get married and someone helped me with the recording of the video. When I was making the music video “Brides for Sale,” I didn’t expect the rap getting the public reaction that it did. I knew about the consequences of speaking up but I had to express my pain. My biggest goal was for my family to understand how I felt. Even though I knew it was dangerous, and of course it was scary, my hopes, my beliefs, and my goals were bigger than my fears.

PT For many girls and women, this tradition of gender based systemic oppression results in submission and acceptance. But for you, it became a battle cry. How, at the age of sixteen, did this seemingly inevitable reality instead spark subversive action and revolution?

SA Every year, twelve million girls get married before they turn eighteen. That’s a huge number and each number is a real person. By the time I was sixteen, I had personally seen what child marriage does to girls, through my older sisters and friends. I didn’t want that for myself. I wanted a different life. I had developed a dream and a vision for my life. According to my culture, I was destined to be married, serve my husband and have children. But I knew inside myself that I could do more. That’s why I did not give up on my dreams. Today I have achieved many of those goals, and I keep adding to my dreams book everyday. It has been a reminder for me to not give up and keep working for what I want.

PT You clearly feel a responsibility to help girls who do not have the same tenacity and fight as you. How important is community in fighting oppression and creating real change in the world?

SA Oppression cannot be fought without the power of community. In order to solve problems, we have to work together. Many youth who are working to end child marriage know this.

My friend Joanita in Uganda started the Rainbow Smiles Foundation. They work to prevent child marriage by educating the community and reintegrating girls who are escaping their marriages back into their families and communities and hard work. They work with parents, teachers and schools, and community leaders. The program looks at the girl’s whole context; her community, her family, whole context of child marriage.

They know that unless the community understands and believes in the freedom, rights, and possibility of a girl, her situation will never truly change. It is slow but important work. I know several young women who work with religious leaders to help them understand the harm of child marriage. Religious leaders are often very important parts of communities. They can play a big role in changing bad traditions and fighting oppression.

PT I know you look at the issue of child marriage in a more holistic way, understanding that it is not isolated and instead intersects with things like education, mental health, economic parity, and so on. Will you begin to expand the issues you address?

SA Yes! Child marriage is not an isolated
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SECTION 3

issue. Health, mental health, education, the economy are all factors that impact and/or are impacted by child marriage. Even climate change is related: Ending child marriage is actually the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5.3. But if we don’t end child marriage, we can’t achieve EIGHT of the other SDGs.

Let me give you some examples.

When a girl marries young, she’s almost always taken out of school. Being uneducated has so many consequences, but one is that girl is less likely to get a good job, which can then help her family rise above poverty. Girls without education are three times as likely to marry by eighteen as those with a secondary or higher education.

Girls who are married young also have babies before their bodies are ready. That causes so many medical problems for the girls—I have seen this in my friends—and the babies suffer too. They get sick and die, malnutrition is a big problem. Newborn deaths are 50% higher for girls under twenty, than for those who are older. And then there is mental health. One of my friends got married when she was twelve. On the day of her marriage she discovered that her mother was wondering where she was all day but couldn’t find her. The father was worried about his honor. At the end of the day her mom found her under their bed. She was sitting on the side of the bed all curled up. Her husband had slapped her after some argument. We saw her blood on the wall the next day, and her face was bruised. For most of these girls marriage is a traumatic experience. Imagine their health.

Child marriage is also a refugee issue. Parents often think that their daughters will be safer with a husband. They want to know someone will protect and feed her. Since rape is common during war, they want to know that her honor will be upheld, so they marry her off. But the consequences are actually devastating. Right now the numbers of child brides who are Syrian refugees is rising, and that is just what is reported. I know this can be very overwhelming, but I also think that it is an opportunity. If we see these relationships, we can understand the problem better and see so many more possible solutions. We can all work on ending child marriage, but do something. You have always led big social change. I hope that young people take their beliefs and visions for a better world into their adulthood. I have faith that my generation will.

PT What advice would you give to young girls facing a lack of agency, much like you did?
SA: Really want women to know and feel that they have power. I want girls and women to know that they can hold a vision for themselves, believe in themselves, and be strong. There will always be hurdles and challenges in the way of what they want to achieve. It was almost impossible for me to get to where I am if I did not have a vision and did not believe in myself. Therefore, it is very, very important for girls themselves to believe in who they are and to believe that they can become something great. To hold this hope and vision in their heads and their hearts, and work really hard to achieve that.

PT What’s next for you and how can people help?
SA: There are so many exciting possibilities! I have a beautiful image of this world in mind—everyone can dream big dreams, no child is forced to marry, and everyone is able to go to school—and I believe it can be created. So what’s next for me will always involve working toward this goal. Right now it is important that I continue my education. I didn’t ever go to school until I arrived in America in 2015. Now I am a high school graduate and I plan to go to college next year. I have been very lucky to be able to share my thoughts, ideas, story, and messages, especially about child marriage, with the world.

But my story is just one story. And every year twelve million new girls are forced to marry. Even though there are similarities, there are also so many differences. I want more of their stories, messages, thoughts, and ideas to be taken seriously. I want the young people everywhere who are doing the brave and bold work to end child marriage to be supported and heard, because they are the ones who understand the problem and have the creative, interesting and new ideas. I am raising funds for them through this site. I hope you’ll join me.

I will also always continue to write new music. I am working on a few new songs right now. My music will always be about what matters to me, both the problems and solutions that the world needs to see. Ultimately, I want to keep making music and be a catalyst for change.

PT And importantly, what are your top five favourite rap songs?
SA: “When I’m Gone” by Eminem “La Puissance” by MHD “Humble” by Kendrick Lamar “U.N.I.T.Y” by Queen Latifah “Bodak Yellow” by Cardi B

To me activism has an almost negative connotation. Today it is not just people protesting (in the physical sense) against what is wrong in the world. Activism in the form of protests have become synonymous with violence and destruction of property. While online activism has developed into a culture of keyboard warriors who will not voice their criticisms in real life, and tend to make a mountain of a molehill while overlooking the actual mountain.”
March For Our Lives is the model for future movements because its run by the actual young people who experienced trauma and are pushing for real change.

SIERRA, 18, FLORIDA

What are the ingredients for building and running sustainable movements in a fluid future? Where will they live—online, offline or a combo of both? And, what are the necessary ingredients? For Gen Zs, who are fairly resource poor, it means leaning on each other for community and connections, borrowing from various sources, and collaging their way to change. Gen Zs tap into the same principles of creative production (p.226) when building movements and architecting anarchism for a better world.

We spoke to two young activists from Kyrgyzstan and London who are doing exactly this and got some tips on how Gen Zs DIY their way to world domination.

17-year-old Zhanna Zharmatova is part of a youth collective in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan that, through the collective Teenages and Youth for Equality and Justice as well as their platform Boktukorgon Magazine, fights for gender equality and justice. Their collective is built upon the principles of “collective emancipation, solidarity, mutual support, equal decision-making, and non-violence,” so we asked Zhanna to tell us how to build an inclusive movement when resistance is plenty and resources are not.

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Many people say that Gen Zs do not like hierarchies and only want collectives. All about the “We” over the “Me.” But in a fluid world where there are no absolutes, this feels inaccurate. If you look at the US in the last two years, there are three templates for movement building: Women’s March (hierarchical), Black Lives Matter (hybrid of hierarchy and decenralized) and #MeToo (totally decentralized). Women’s March has been very top down with little opportunity for the larger community to feel like they have a voice in defining the movement. Black Lives Matter is more decentralized but still with a core team guiding it while still allowing local chapters to organize as they see fit. And #MeToo is the total opposite. Being totally decentralized, it has taken on a life of its own.

Do you think any of these look like what you see movement building in the future? If so, why, and if not, what do you see?

All feminist movements should be decentralized, inclusive, and intersectional. Using a patriarchal, hierarchical system to break the violence and stereotypes creates other violence and stereotypes. We already understand that this system doesn’t work properly. We need to escape it. Otherwise, we are no different than old NGO workers who call themselves “women’s rights defenders” and not feminists. Bringing in horizontal decision making is very difficult, especially for older activists, but that’s exactly what we should aim for.

Online life definitely takes a big part in our lives and actions. According to our experience, street actions and physical actions are the most influential, and at the same time the most dangerous. We have both positive and negative experiences with that. Last March we had reached a lot of people online and offline, and there were equal amounts of people who thought our ideas were important and helpful, and then people who threatened us.

What is an example of a current movement (big or small) that feels like it has the DNA of Gen Z and fluidity? Something that could be a new model for movement building in the future.

The future is small, self-organized groups, moving locally.

The most used language in Kyrgyzstan is Kyrgyz. The most used languages in most Commonwealth countries are English and Russian, so many old, whitewashed organizations are no different than old NGO workers of your movement. This is why there are so many old, whitewashed organizations doing work that they are not qualified to do, because they have the funds, and/or they have the network to access the funding and resources needed to run programs they have no knowledge or background in.

When building something from nothing, you need passion; your passion for change should speak before you do. Utilize social media and create content that communicates the work that you do and your passion, whether that is Twitter threads to raise awareness or video content of the things you do and why you do it. Be active and present. Build your network, utilize your community, connect with people who are doing similar work, and translate the online relationships to IRL relationships. Understand that in our capitalist society, projects and movements need money. Lean on the community you have developed to hopefully point you in the right direction or actually help fund your work.

Activism means action, quite literally. A group of people coming together to drive measurable change. Often awareness raising is a critical first step and, in the past, took the form of physical protests. But, without organized and focused calls to action, is this enough? Is something like Women’s March, which has mainly been an awareness raising effort, effective or is it an old model that needs to be rethought?

Once in 2015, during street action, one BFI activist was attacked and bitten. That is why we are very concerned about our safety and, confidentiality, whether we work from our offices, which is how most women NGOs work in Kyrgyzstan. They tell us to stay in our offices and make changes from there. According to our experience, street actions and physical actions are the most influential, and at the same time the most dangerous. We have both positive and negative experiences with that. Last March we had reached a lot of people online and offline, and there were equal amounts of people who thought our ideas were important and helpful, and then people who threatened us.

What is an example of a current movement (big or small) that feels like it has the DNA of Gen Z and fluidity? Something that could be a new model for movement building in the future.

The future is small, self-organized groups, moving locally.
There is something regrettably wrong with our society. The juxtaposition of a world filled with people who now work alongside one another and a world in which we are separated by, and almost constantly referring to, these same people as being "hierarchies and only want collectives. All about the "We" over the "Me." But in a fluid world where there are no absolutes, this feels inaccurate. If you look at the US in the last two years, there are three templates for movement building: Women's March (hierarchical), Black Lives Matter (hybrid of hierarchy and decentralized), and Me Too (totally decentralized). Women's March has been very top down with little opportunity for the larger community to feel like they have a voice in defining the movement. Black Lives Matter is more decentralized but still with a core team guiding it while also allowing local chapters to organize as they see fit. And #MeToo is the total opposite. Being totally decentralized, it has taken on a life of its own. Do you think any of these look like you see movement building being in the future? If so, why, and if not, what do you see?

I believe the future of movement building lies in community. Whilst it may take one person to initiate a movement, the success and impact of said movement is thanks to the community efforts to support, raise awareness, and build the movement itself. I believe it is through genuine connections, reflections, and sharing the successes or failures of movements that we will actually be able to see tangible change. I believe Black Lives Matter has the foundation for a great movement. Started by three queer black women, BLM has inspired the creation of many different factions throughout the US and the world, each of which can adapt and change the movement to fit specifically with the needs of the area, which is important.

Back to #MeToo. It is one of the most successful movements built online having grown from Tarana Burke in NYC to something global. Clearly it is incredibly important and empowering for individuals, but, with it being so unregulated and decentralized, perhaps not ultimately effective in terms of changing laws, etc. (also dangerous in that it can be misused and manipulated in problematic directions). What do you think works and could/should be changed about this as a way to build a movement?

I believe this, again, is where it's important for there to be a real sense of community offered within the movement, where there are people from different industries, professions, and backgrounds involved and working together to help offer guidance and support to those who want to work towards bringing change in the form of changing laws, etc. With #MeToo, a lot of people have unfortunately become victims of sexual violence and assault. It is the total opposite. Decentralized, #MeToo (big or small) that feels like its has the DNA of structure, otherwise the movement itself can potentially become quite triggering and manipulative in problematic directions.

I think to an extent movements can be inspired and failures for building a movement? The three most important ingredients are community, passion, and vision. You may not start with all three, and you may not always have all three at the same time, but if you aim to get there, I guarantee your movement will not only be more successful but more fulfilling. For when you have lost your vision, your community will gather to remind you of why you started, and when you can’t find community, your passion will bring the community to you or you to them.

I think to an extent movements can be inspired by the phrase “where there’s a will, there’s a way.” Their activism is such an integral part of their DNA that they will muscle their movements from the ground up with little resources or support. Often by relying on decentralized, local communities (both online and off) to create change.

However, they will gladly accept your help so that they can maximize their potential and reach. As a brand, offering money, time, expertise, physical space, and other resources to political organizations (and your young leaders) will be gratefully and gladly accepted. These collabs, built on mutual respect and support, are usually a win-win in Gen Z’s eyes.