

Erinne
Paisley

CAN YOUR

SMARTPHONE

CHANGE THE

WORLD?



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Erinne Paisley

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Summary: This work of nonfiction, in the PopActivism series for teens, looks at how you can use a smartphone as a tool for social justice.



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To my parents



Share!

Sms

BL

Like

Social

POST

SEA

chat

conversations

Mail

Login

Hello

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: The Girl in the Paper Dress	1
CHAPTER TWO: How Smart is Your Smartphone?	17
CHAPTER THREE: A Boy Scout, an Artist and a Rapper	33
CHAPTER FOUR: Can YouTube Change the World?	49
CHAPTER FIVE: Can Your #Insta Change the World?	67
CHAPTER SIX: Can Your Tweet Change the World?	83
CHAPTER SEVEN: Social Media Champions	97
CHAPTER EIGHT: Action Now!	113
GLOSSARY	129
RESOURCES	131
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	132

ACTIVISM

The creation of social and/or
political change.

POPACTIVISM

Activism fused with
pop culture.



“What is interesting is
the power and the impact
of social media...So we
must try to use social
media in a good way.”

—*Malala Yousafzai*



1

THE GIRL IN THE PAPER DRESS

IN MAY OF 2015, my brother took a few pictures of me and my friends at our senior prom. There were the usual group pictures, the candid laughing shots and, of course, the artistic snaps of corsages. My graduation weekend was filled with hugs, tears, reflections on the last four years of high school, and daydreams of future plans. People always say high school goes by quickly, but you never quite realize how true that is until you're up on stage, reaching for your diploma and having a mini panic attack

about what's coming next. Throw in a celebration involving as many friends and family members as possible, and you get one intense weekend. On Monday morning I was happy to wake up to memories of the weekend—and a whole slew of photos posted for the world to see online.

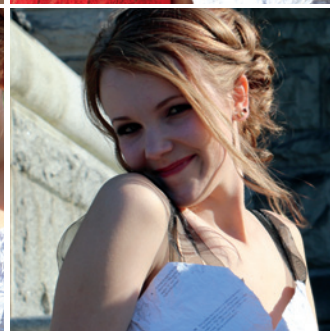
I've always loved the thrill of the little notification that pops up on your screen when you get "tagged" or someone "likes" or comments on a photo.

**SOMETHING
EXTRAORDINARY
WAS HAPPENING:
MY STORY WAS
GOING VIRAL.**

Maybe it's the anticipation mixed with a bit of fear. You never know what could be waiting on the other side—an unflattering mid-speech photo, a cute group shot. There's a leap of faith involved in allowing your life to be

displayed online. The notifications came in a few at a time, but in the hours and days that followed, these notifications quickly ballooned from one or two,

Graduation day! My best friend had to keep tape in her purse just in case fixes were needed! STUART PAISLEY





I've received my ei
Not every woman

A.A.L.A.ORG

With my friend Amadea Gareau on the steps of the British Columbia Parliament Buildings.
STUART PAISLEY

to one or two hundred, to one or two thousand. Something extraordinary was happening: my story was going viral.

PAPER, TAPE AND A RED PEN

So what happened on my graduation weekend that made me “trend in style” on MTV.com above Kim Kardashian, Willow Smith and Rihanna? I wasn’t wearing the most cutting-edge, high-fashion Louis Vuitton dress. In fact, I was wearing a dress that cost me zero dollars and was made in my living room. I built my prom dress out of old math homework, Scotch tape and a bit of black satin. With a red felt-tip pen (the same kind teachers use to mark tests) I wrote *I’ve received my education. Not every woman has that right. Malala.org*. Then I donated the money I would have spent on a prom dress to the Malala Fund.

In my hometown of Victoria, British Columbia, the story took off like wildfire. I was getting photo requests from local newspapers, and radio stations were calling to interview the “girl in the paper dress.”

I was ready to talk about my creation, but that's not all I wanted to talk about. I knew people would be listening, and I wanted them to know that my reason for making the dress was not just because it looked cool.

More than 130 million girls in the world are out of school. Let's make it zero. This is the first sentence you see when clicking on malala.org. This is the fact that inspired me to make the dress. Malala Yousafzai was born in 1997, the same year as me, in the Swat Valley, Pakistan. She has an immense passion for learning, and she believed in everyone's right to an education. In 2009 the Taliban's military presence in the Swat Valley created fear about girls going to school, and Malala spoke out about it. In an anonymous blog she wrote for the BBC, Malala talked about her fears of a military attack on her school, the bans on music and television, the restrictions being placed on women, and many other realities she was facing. As her voice grew stronger and her story became more and more well known, the Taliban decided to silence her.

In 2011 they pledged to murder her. On October 9, 2012, Malala was shot on a school bus on her way



Malala Yousafzai is the same age as I am. If we had been born in the same place, we could have been in the same school classroom.

JSTONE /SHUTTERSTOCK.COM



Women who receive an education are much less likely to be victims of child marriage and more likely to give back to their communities.

TRAVEL STOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

to class. She survived and was flown to the United Kingdom for intensive care. In the weeks after the attack, over two million people signed a right-to-education *petition*, and the National Assembly of Pakistan swiftly ratified Pakistan's first Right to Free and Compulsory Education Bill. Malala's story was the top news worldwide, and since then her voice has only continued to grow stronger and stronger. She founded the Malala Fund, wrote the bestselling book *I Am Malala*, starred and wrote for the documentary *He Named Me Malala*, and even received the Nobel Peace Prize.

EDUCATION IS A RIGHT

I made my paper dress because millions of girls around the world have had their right to an education taken away from them, and I had taken this right for granted. The only difference between those girls and me is that I was born in Canada.

In many ways, prom is a time to celebrate high school achievements and anticipate newly available opportunities such as further education,

work or travel. When I thought about this, it made sense to use the money and attention that goes into grad to improve educational opportunities for those

***I DID INTERVIEWS
FROM MY RED
HONDA CIVIC AS
MY BEST FRIEND
DROVE ME TO LIVE
NEWS INTERVIEWS.***

who are denied that right. The Malala Fund works to provide twelve years of free education for every girl in the world. It has built a girls' school in Lebanon, established alternative learning programs for out-of-school and

married girls in Nigeria, and provided former female domestic laborers with education in Pakistan.

After a few radio interviews I returned to school (trying not to skip a lot of classes—that would be too ironic). I was ecstatic to receive messages from people saying they would donate to the fund, and I assumed that was about as far as my story would spread. Then my cell phone rang during English class: it was someone calling from the CBC, the main broadcasting network in Canada. The following

MTV.COM
TEENVOGUE.COM
TODAY STYLE
CTV NEWS
KISS 103.1
BUZZFEED NEWS
DAILYMIL.CO.UK
GLOBAL NEWS
COSMOPOLITAN.COM
THE GLOBE AND MAIL
HUFFINGTON POST
SEVENTEEN.COM
HELLOGIGGLES.COM
NYMAG.COM



three days were a complete blur. I did interviews from my red Honda Civic as my best friend, Emily, drove me to live news interviews. I emailed images to countries I'd never been to, and I received thousands of messages from people all around the world saying my story had affected them and they were going to donate. I spoke out about women's rights over the

**AS YOU CAN
TELL, I'M A BIT
OF A MALALA
FAN GIRL.**

phone in the school bathroom, and heard people say that my story had encouraged them to reflect on their own lives.

My newsfeed was full of links to *Teen Vogue* images of the dress and BuzzFeed articles on “the teen standing up for women's rights.” Soon the Malala Fund contacted me directly, and I was honored to be asked to write an article on women's rights for Malala's website. When I emailed the article to the Fund, I couldn't help but ask *Will Malala ever read this?* When someone responded with *She always checks it :D*, I squealed. As you can tell, I'm a bit of a Malala fan girl.



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Chaudhry Faisal Mushtaq, founder of the Roots National Institute of Teacher Training and Education, presents Malala with a scholarship for studies at Roots Millennium Schools worldwide. [BITES85/WIKIPEDIA.COM](https://www.bites85.com/wiki/pedia/ma)

A woman wearing a bright pink headscarf and a matching pink sash over an orange pleated skirt is seen from the back, looking at a display. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a museum or gallery setting with other people and displays.

“Let us
remember:
One book,
one pen, one
child, and
one teacher
can change
the world.”

—*Malala Yousafzai*

Array Mohamed looks at
her copy of *I am Malala* in
Denver, Colorado, where
Malala spoke about her life
and inspired young girls.
BRENT LEWIS/GETTY IMAGES



