CHAPTER 2

The Ideal of a Human Rights Campus

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When I accepted my first faculty position in 2010, I saw my new status as an Assistant Professor of International Human Rights as an opportunity to promote human rights education (HRE) and to help create a "human rights campus" at my university. I aspired to infuse the curriculum with human rights learning and promote respect for rights at all levels of the university, even though so many of my students had never heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) at the start of the semester. "Widespread adoption of university-level HRE could transform students into critical consumers of rights who are central to building a human rights consciousness," I argued. "By encouraging HRE in the classroom and around campus, universities may help transmit knowledge and create socially responsible citizens" (Kingston 2012, 79). Of course, I acknowledged that this requires strategic planning and training to be effective—including identifying human rights scholars within the campus community, offering human rights courses as part of the general education program, developing cocurricular opportunities for interdisciplinary study, and building local projects and partnerships to highlight social injustices at home (Kingston 2012, 80–81). Noting that the ideal of a

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human rights campus requires universities to "practice what you preach," I asserted: "If educators are to uphold the ideals of a liberal education, the universities have a responsibility to foster a sense of social responsibility in their students" (Kingston 2012, 82).

By the time I earned tenure and promotion to Associate Professor in 2016, the goal of creating a human rights campus had taken on a new sense of urgency. For myself and my colleagues—and indeed, for educators throughout the United States and beyond—2016 was a year marked by far-right rhetoric against refugees and immigrants, the dramatic growth of U.S. hate groups (see Southern Poverty Law Center 2017), and a troubling disregard for human rights norms such as the rights to asylum, freedoms from discrimination and torture, equality before the law, and freedom of expression. As scholars grappled with how to respond to these trends in our classrooms, they also faced increasing pressure to give equal weight to competing political perspectives during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign and after the election—even when some perspectives blatantly ignored or sought to violate norms of international human rights law. (Consider, for instance, then-presidential nominee Donald Trump's repeated calls for the U.S. military to carry out the extrajudicial killings of terrorists' families; Matharu 2016.) Conservative pundit Frank Luntz bemoaned a "lost" generation of voters at the 2016 Republican National Convention, repeating the popular notion that university campuses are recruiting grounds for liberal academics.[1] "Capitol Hill matters, yes, politics matter, but a whole generation is being taught by professors who voted for Bernie Sanders," Luntz said. "That's a problem that begs for a solution" (quoted in Flaherty 2016, para 5). Growing mistrust of academics committed to social justice ideals occurred alongside the spread of "fake news" and misinformation online, leaving many students unsure about who or what to believe. Fake news, including the deliberate spread of false information to influence elections, was fast becoming an "insidious" global trend aimed at undermining a variety of progressive causes and politicians (see Connolly et al. 2016). In the United States, fake news that spread by social media has plagued both the political right and left, serving to further polarize American politics (Meyer 2017). Together, these factors created a crisis in higher education that necessitated an even stronger dedication to HRE on our campuses and within our communities.

Reflecting on my aspirations to create a human rights campus at Webster University in Saint Louis—particularly in the wake of the 2016

U.S. presidential election—I offer this chapter as part of an ongoing discussion about social justice on American college campuses. Central to the ideal of the human rights campus is setting an academic foundation based on critical thinking and social engagement. Despite the polarization of American politics, I argue that HRE provides a path toward acknowledging privilege, allowing space for differing perspectives, and combating hate speech and discrimination. From this foundation, educators have the opportunity to foster inclusiveness on campus—despite the challenges of divisive rhetoric, stereotypes, and preexisting prejudices. I contend that universities offer a site of learning where we can put HRE principles into practice, supporting social justice on an everyday level. Indeed, I end this chapter with a range of examples from my own institution that I hope will inspire others to develop forward-thinking programs and resources on their own campuses.

Building on the Academic Foundations of HRE: Critical Thinking and Social Engagement

For many social justice-inclined academics, the polarized state of American politics and the worrying growth of far-right causes have fostered a dire need for teaching critical thinking and promoting social engagement—even while those educational practices could make professors vulnerable to backlash. Web sites such as the Professor Watchlist (n.d.), for instance, aim to "expose and document college professors who discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda in the classroom" (para 1). Critics argue that such a Web site constitutes a new form of McCarthyism that seeks to "mark, shame, and silence" those deemed disloyal to the American republic—a process all the more threatening for scholars of color, who already face social discrimination in a variety of contexts (Yancy 2016, para 4 and 7). George Yancy (2016), a philosophy professor at Emory University, garnered widespread support for his refusal to remain silent in the face of racism, sexism, militarism, xenophobia, homophobia, discrimination, and violence. In his oft-shared *The New York Times* op-ed, Yancy (2016) wrote: "Well, if it is dangerous to teach my students to love their neighbors, to think and rethink constructively and ethically about who their neighbors are, and how they have been taught to see themselves as disconnected and neoliberal subjects, then, yes, I am dangerous, and what I teach is dangerous" (para 17). Indeed, a number of academic organizations

reaffirmed their commitments to human rights and social justice following the 2016 election. In a December 2 e-mail to the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP) list serve, for instance, Executive Director Héctor L. Delgado and President Donileen R. Loseke (2016) wrote:

> We would argue that as social justice scholars and activists we have a responsibility to continue the work of civil and human rights activists that preceded us. We must address instances of racism, xenophobia, religious bigotry, misogyny, and other social problems in ways that invite healthy and constructive dialogue to gain resolutions of these problems. We must educate ourselves and others where and when we can, both in and outside of our classrooms and campuses. (para 3)

A part of the task at hand is to provide the academic and cocurricular resources necessary to facilitate HRE on campus, thus promoting vital critical thinking and engagement. At the curricular level, universities may offer human rights courses as part of their general education programs, consider the creation of undergraduate programs, and provide faculty with the resources necessary to include HRE within a diverse range of courses. At Webster, for instance, we offer an undergraduate major, minor, and certificate option in HRTS. Two courses—"Introduction to Human Rights" and "Current Issues in Human Rights"—are coded for our Global Citizenship Program (GCP), our general education program that stresses goals such as "global understanding" and "ethical reasoning." My experiences teaching GCP-coded human rights courses is that many students begin with very limited knowledge of human rights norms, but their first encounter with HRE often inspires them to take additional classes or commit to a program of study. Even those who do not further their human rights education are at least going forth into their future studies and careers with foundational knowledge that (I hope) will help them make decisions that are respectful of human rights. Without that knowledge base—and indeed, many students begin their first class without being able to actually define human rights, despite common usage of the term—students are ill-equipped to advocate for the rights of themselves or others. "More troubling still," I wrote years before the 2016 presidential election, "they may vote for elected officials and influence government policy without fully understanding the human rights ramifications of their actions and opinions"

(Kingston 2012, 79). Ideally, resources can also be provided to help an interdisciplinary range of faculty infuse human rights norms within their existing courses. Recommended reading lists, faculty "brown bag" lectures and workshops, campus "teach-ins" and "know your rights" discussion forums, team teaching opportunities, and carefully coordinated campus events all offer opportunities to educate faculty on human rights issues and include HRE in a range of classes—including those that fall outside the scope of "usual suspects" for HRE, such as business, communications, or biology. (Sometimes those connections translate into more long-term study. Notably, Webster offers human rights electives such as "Human Rights and Business," "Media and Social Justice," and "Bioethics.") Librarians are also an often underutilized resource for teaching students about how to locate and evaluate research materials—a skill set that is even more important in the face of "fake news" and the spread of misinformation online.

For educators working in the Global North, critical thinking and social engagement require us to acknowledge our own privilege, as well as to recognize the human rights abuses happening at home. As many institutions (including my own) strive to foster a sense of social responsibility among students and develop "global citizenship" in an interconnected world, critics argue that only an elite class of young people enjoy a full array of protected rights and the ability to exercise true global citizenship. From this perspective, such citizenship belongs to a privileged and select few; "the global North and South are not only divided by wealth gaps, but they are divided by rights gaps, as well" (Kingston 2012, 79). While I believe this criticism is well-founded, I also contend that HRE offers the possibility to bridge some of those gaps and to stimulate positive change. At the same time, the simplified division between the Global North and South ignores hierarchies that are built into the fabric of societies around the world, including American society. In my human rights classes and in the cocurricular events that I help coordinate, I strive to emphasize how violations of fundamental rights happen everywhere, including in our own backyards, and that such abuses are facilitated by the underlying structures of discrimination and structural inequalities. In Saint Louis, many White students were confronted with their own privilege for the first time during human rights-based discussions related to the 2014 police killing of Michael Brown in nearby Ferguson, Missouri. In class discussions and campus events, including an Annual Human Rights Conference (AHRC) on the theme of "Equality

before the Law" (see Chapter 11), students grappled with the reality that many American citizens are denied rights such as freedom from discrimination, rights to political participation and a fair trial, and freedom of expression. Yet we also have uncomfortable but vital conversations about our roles in rights abuses abroad, ranging from foreign policy decisions made by our government to the impacts of our consumption habits and choices. From this perspective, we truly are interconnected—to our neighbors next door and down the street, as well as to fellow human beings on the other side of the planet. This perspective is often powerfully reinforced by student participation in HRE study abroad to countries such as Rwanda (see Chapter 7) and carefully organized poverty simulations (see Chapter 6), as well as in partnership with community organizations and service learning projects (see Chapters 12 and 13).

Another critical task is to build a critical HRE pedagogy that allows space for different perspectives—and for dissenting voices. Fuad Al-Daraweesh and Dale T. Snauwaert (2015), for instance, argue that educational processes require context and that "in order to realize the whole, one needs to recognize and comprehend the parts" (155). For human rights educators, this perspective requires us to "dwell on the relationship between human rights and the isomorphic equivalents of human rights in other cultures. Thus, human rights education is to expand its source, instead of relying on one tradition" (155). A good starting point is to consider frameworks for human rights that extend beyond the traditional UDHR. For instance, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Banjul Charter) and the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam offer non-Western perspectives that can stimulate important discussions about cultural differences and their impacts on human rights norms. Yet it is also important to remember that cultural differences exist not only across international borders and world religions, but also within local communities where students—on the surface, at least—are members of the same identity groups. In my Saint Louis classrooms, for instance, shared perspectives on human rights often come to a crashing halt with any mention of reproductive rights. Some students (and faculty) see access to contraption and abortion as vital for women's rights and health rights, while others see such measures as an affront to the right to life. Rather than wading into the emotionally fraught abortion debate with my students, I look for the possible areas of agreement and cooperation. If the goal is to prevent

unwanted and/or unhealthy pregnancies, for instance, what protections and services can we agree are necessary? Are there points made by "the other side" that are reasonable or understandable, if we consider a different point-of-view? The purpose of considering alternative perspectives is not necessarily changing opinions, but rather broadening our understanding of this complex political landscape—and respecting the human dignity of those we disagree with, or are in some way different from, in the process.

It is important to note that welcoming diversity of opinion is far different than tolerating hate speech in class, which includes advocating for human rights violations. Universities continue to grapple with this tension as they consider requests to host controversial speakers and events. In August 2017, for instance, Michigan State University refused to rent campus space to a White supremacist group, the National Policy Institute. MSU administrators cited safety concerns, rather than the Institute's message, as its motivation for refusing the space request (Jesse 2017). Indeed, the Institute President and Director Richard Spencer helped organize a gathering of White nationalists in Charlottesville, Virginia, earlier that summer; the event garnered international headlines for its troubling images of White supremacists marching on the University of Virginia campus with lit torches—and for ensuing violence the following day, which included the death of counter-protestor Heather Heyer. Controversy over such ultraconservative speakers raise the important question: How do we leave space for dissent without wavering from our commitment to human rights norms? I will not pretend to have all the answers to this question, but I believe that HRE offers us a path forward. If we agree that our academic foundations include a deep commitment to human rights, then those norms help to determine what is (and is not) acceptable in our classrooms and on our campuses. The incitement of violence—which includes human rights violations targeted at a particular person or group of people—should not be protected speech within our academic communities. Yes, let us talk about the economic impacts of immigration and the changing demographics of American society—but let us not allow our universities to legitimize views that scapegoat minorities and preach the biological superiority of certain racial groups. Educators who use human rights norms as their guide will certainly face pushback, but critical engagement is necessary for enacting positive change on campus and ultimately beyond.

Fostering Inclusiveness on Campus

Evidence suggests that the polarization of American politics and growing discrimination against minorities has adverse effects on inclusiveness, beginning in grade school. In its analysis of hate crimes during and following the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, for instance, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) warned against the impacts of "the Trump effect" within the U.S. educational system (Potok 2017). SPLC Senior Fellow Mark Potok (2017) argues that Trump's campaign language sparked hate violence and bullying, including hatred against people of color, Muslims, migrants, Jews, LGBT individuals, and women, and that those impacts have been greatly felt in American schools. A survey of 10,000 educators found that 80% of educators reported fears on the part of their minority students (Potok 2017, para 23). "This is my twenty-first year of teaching," said a Georgia elementary school teacher. "This is the first time I've had a student call another student the 'n' word. This incident occurred the day after a conference with the offender's mother. During the conference, the mother made her support of Trump known and expressed her hope that 'the blacks' would soon know their place again" (quoted in Potok 2017, para 25). And while "Twitter trolls and hateful anonymous comments" are not a new phenomenon, advocates argue that the 2016 election brought online hate speech to the fore (see Corke et al. 2016). For students who frequently use social media to gather their news and communicate with peers, online hate speech has become a pervasive phenomenon that promotes intolerance and bullying (Keen and Georgescu 2014).[2]

College campuses must inherit these prejudices with every incoming freshman class, tasked with building inclusive academic communities among students whose views on human rights and social justice may be ill-informed and/or nonexistent. While social interactions in college are often transformative, they can also be incredibly difficult. In my years working with freshmen as part of a first-year learning community (which was dedicated to "social engagement"), I helped counsel students through a variety of disputes with classmates and roommates. One socially conservative student, for instance, was horrified when his roommate announced—one week after moving into their shared dorm room—that he was gay. On the one hand I was trying to support the roommate, who for the first time felt safe enough to "come out" to his peers, yet my other student had been raised on the belief

that homosexuality was a despicable sin and now felt uncomfortable in his own living space. Navigating these complex situations requires us to consider diverse perspectives and foster dialogue; telling my conservative student that he was "wrong" or "homophobic" would not mend this roommate relationship or result in any sort of positive outcome. At the end, both young men wanted to discuss their feelings without being judged or excluded from our learning community—and while that sometimes led to tense conversations, ultimately the roommates found common ground and the LC remained a tight-knit group for the duration of the academic year. "I've never had a gay friend before," the conservative student admitted. "I dunno, he seems OK. I mean, I just wasn't expecting it. This wasn't what I expected [when I moved in]."

At the start of the 2017–2018 year, my university launched its "We Are All Webster" campaign in response to growing political polarization and hateful rhetoric. While these sorts of campaigns might be dismissed as mere public relations fodder if words are not paired with concrete action, the principles of #WeAreAllWebster are worthy of our attention:

> As a member of the Webster University community,
> I promise to consciously promote acceptance and demonstrate respect.
> I will dedicate myself to actively listen to each person's story.
> I promise to learn from and embrace differences among identities.
> I will recognize commonalities and shared experiences.
> I will practice inclusive language and be open to learning.
> I promise to educate others to foster an inclusive community that treats every person with dignity and respect.
> I will honor this commitment in my classes, workplace, personal life, and all other pursuits on and off campus. I pledge to make everyone feel safe, valued, and part of our global community.

These are all good concepts in principle, but of course the challenge is to transform these commitments into sustained action to foster inclusiveness on campus. My university is a "work in progress" in this regard—as are we all. Luckily, there is a growing body of scholarship aimed at making the university a more inclusive site of social engagement and learning. Barbara Allan (2016), for instance, argues that we must consider different ways of working with diverse student populations. She cites international students, students with disabilities, part-time

students, and those with nontraditional learning styles as groups who may not always fit into our models of student learning. Part-time students, for example, tend to be older and female (although younger part-time students tend to be from underrepresented groups); they are more likely than full-time students to come from areas where higher education is uncommon, and they often have family responsibilities such as caring for relatives or small children (Allan 2016, 26). Being aware of these different lived experiences if vital for meeting the needs of our student population—particularly since traditional university models of academic advising and assessment, for instance, may fail to recognize glaring needs and allow students to fall through the cracks. At my university, this awareness includes attention to supporting students of color, who identify as LGBTQ, and/or who have irregular legal status as undocumented migrants. Since Saint Louis is also a hub of refugee resettlement, many of our students also have personal or family histories that include trauma from war, rights abuses, and the challenges of starting over in a foreign country (see Chapter 5 for more on supporting inclusive campus communities).

In recent years, Webster has also sought out "first-generation" professors—that is, professors who were the first person in their family to attend university—and included them in networking and mentorship experiences with current "First Gen" students. In my experience as a first-generation college graduate myself, this recognition is valuable for identifying unique needs and for combating the "imposter syndrome" that often plagues first-generation students. Many First Gen students are not sure where to turn for advice on study habits, roommate conflicts, navigating financial aid, selecting classes, studying abroad, finding internships, and other fundamentals of college; students whose parents have attended college often take their advice and experience for granted. Perhaps more importantly, first-generation students face the daunting challenging of "being first"; they know that a lot of familial pride and tuition money is riding on their success, and they do not necessarily have the confidence to know that they can, in fact, make it to graduation. For instance, an intelligent but less-than-fully-confident student recently stayed behind after class to chat with me about attending law school—a goal he was not sure he could attain. "I don't have a bunch of degrees like you do," he told me sheepishly. "I'm the first person in my family to go to college." With a smile, I responded: "So am I. You have time to earn all those degrees." (And then we high-fived.) Sometimes the best motivation is simply someone telling you: I did this and you can, too.

Supporting Social Justice, Every Day

Students are often eager to put their HRE into practice, but they sometimes cling to the belief that their college campuses and their home communities are immune to serious human rights challenges. While empathy for people in other countries is powerful and encouraging, the inability to look inward can fuel dangerous narratives about American exceptionalism and Western "saviors" while ignoring immediate needs all around us. In reality, university students can gain important experience serving their own communities before working overseas (if that is what they choose to do). Several years ago, for instance, an exasperated sophomore told me that she was tired of learning about human rights from books and wanted to go overseas to provide aid in a famine-stricken country. When we sat down to discuss volunteer opportunities—and to identify the resources and skills she brought to the table—she was frustrated by how little she felt qualified to do. She quickly realized that she needed to improve her foreign language skills and possibly take supplemental classes about nutrition and counseling. We also brainstormed ideas for local internships where she could learn how to prepare and distribute food to the homeless, assess the needs of vulnerable city residents, identify available resources from state and non-profit agencies, and even build temporary shelters. In her quest to build her own skill sets, my student discovered a variety of immediate needs within a 15-minute drive of her dormitory. Her experience was a good reminder that human rights issues are not only limited to far-away places, but are also right here at home. Supporting human rights and social justice every day—as part of your community, rather than activities separate from "regular" life—is an important part of university-level HRE.

Specific needs and opportunities will vary by institution, but here are a few ways that students have recently engaged in issues of social justice on my campus. My hope is that these short summaries will help others brainstorm possibilities at their own institutions:

Our campus chapter of Amnesty International (AI) organizes advocacy events, hosts letter-writing campaigns in support of political prisoners, and meets regularly to discuss human rights issues in the United States and around the world. Composed of student members and a faculty sponsor, Webster's Amnesty chapter offers the opportunity to gain advocacy experience while supporting one of the world's leading human rights organizations. Every December, for instance, students participate in Amnesty's "Write 4 Writes" letter-writing campaign in conjunction

with our "Human Rights Day" anniversary celebration for the UDHR, which was adopted on December 10, 1948. (Imagine students and faculty, spread out along classroom tables and even the floor, penning letters while eating homemade birthday cake or delicious Middle Eastern food.)

Partnerships with local organizations bring grassroots organizers to campus, often for advocacy events and service opportunities. Members of the volunteer-led group STL Winter Outreach, for instance, speak on Webster's campus about homelessness and food insecurity in the city of Saint Louis. Students have the option of participating in outreach activities, including going on team patrols when winter temperatures dip below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. On campus, volunteers prepare kits of food, hand/feet warmers, socks, scarves, toiletries, and other essential items. These connections not only offer on-campus service opportunities, but also put students in contact with local activists and organizers who undertake vital social justice work.

In addition to undertaking incredible pro bono legal work (see Chapter 12), *the WILLOW Project runs a food pantry on Webster's home campus to assist students facing food insecurity*. Indeed, a growing body of research that the problem of campus hunger is far more serious than many administrators recognize (Kolowich 2015). Webster joins a growing list of institutions that offer food resources for students struggling to afford groceries and basic necessities (see Cady 2016).

Undergraduate research initiatives offer another avenue for supporting social justice. Small faculty–student research grants at my institution have recently funded projects on gender and statelessness, the impacts of social businesses, and homelessness in downtown Saint Louis. As discussed in Chapter 4, the Research Across Disciplines (RAD) Conference highlights undergraduate research, while courses with a research component are increasingly used to build student research skills and faculty scholarship. Webster's *Righting Wrongs: A Journal of Human Rights*—a journal that I founded and serve as faculty editor for—publishes undergraduate research and book reviews on human rights issues; the May issue is open to all undergraduates, while the December issue highlights work from Webster seniors. Lastly, our human rights institute is also expanding opportunities for a competitive student fellowship program that teams undergraduates with faculty members, thereby creating teams focused on specific human rights research, advocacy, or service goals.

Perhaps less popular with upper administration are *activities aimed at supporting social justice within the university itself*. Organizations such as

United Students Against Sweatshops advocate for raising wages and providing health care for campus workers such as those who staff cafeterias, bookstores, and departmental offices. In Saint Louis, pressure has been building to provide a $10 minimum wage even though it is not required by law; a Missouri state law rolled back the city's minimum wage, which had been raised to $10 for a mere three months, to $7.70 in August 2017 (Graham 2017). Tuition-paying students have the political power to influence university administrators, as well as to support their professors' efforts to push for workers' rights—and that certainly includes fair compensation for adjunct faculty members, who teach classes for miniscule wages and lack benefits such as health insurance. Students supported (unsuccessful) union organizing attempts on my campus several years ago, and the issue of adjunct wages continues to appear on student government agendas.

Students continue to demand social justice in relation to campus sexual violence, harassment, and discrimination. Webster's LGBTQ Alliance is an active student organization for our campus LGBTQ community and its allies, for instance. Growing student interest in LGBTQ rights and identities has helped grow our Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program. Students intern and volunteer with a variety of organizations, including Saint Louis' Metro Trans Umbrella Group, and sustained activism has led to culture shifts throughout our campus community. For example, faculty members are increasingly creating space for students to self-identify their preferred pronouns—signally growing recognition and acceptance of identities that extend beyond traditional, binary gender categories. As a former member of my university's Sexual Offense Hearing Board, I also see cultural shifts leading to better faculty/staff training to identify and report abuse, increased student resources, and more campus discussion of issues such as consent and stalking.

These points all represent promising steps forward, yet I acknowledge that my institution—and indeed, all of higher education—has a long way to go. HRE provides the foundation for supporting social justice on campus, every day, in a sustained and conscious effort to uphold human rights norms in our own communities. Webster students have identified a number of rights issues within our Saint Louis community and taken action in pursuit of social justice. This work is hardly finished, but these actions help create a human rights community on campus and build practical capabilities in the process.

Notes

1. In a 2016 *Inside Higher Ed* piece, Colleen Flaherty offers a literature review negating such claims. Data suggests that college-age Americans continue to support free market systems and that students are not likely to be indoctrinated by professors—liberal or conservative. In their study of student perceptions of a professor's political views, for instance, April Kelly-Woessner and Matthew C. Woessner (2006) found that students do not passively accept disparate political messages but tend to push back against faculty members they perceive as presenting hostile points of view. Amy J. Binder and Kate Wood (2013) learned that most professors don't proselytize liberal views, and conservative beliefs are sometimes strengthened when it does happen.
2. The persistence of hate speech online, particularly among young people, prompted the creation of a manual specifically targeting hate speech through the use of HRE during The Council of Europe's 2013–2015 Youth Campaign for Human Rights Online. "The manual is based on the firm belief that online space is public space, and hence, all principles of democratic society can and should apply online," write Ellie Keen and Mara Georgescu (2014). "In this context, the role of young people online is extremely important in combating hate speech. Young people are citizens online, which means they can express their aspirations and concerns online, take action, and hold accountable those who violate human rights online. What's more, they can be human rights defenders online" (8).

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