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Allyship in the Academy: The Girlhood Project and Redefining Girlhood

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Running head: ALLYSHIP IN THE ACADEMY

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CAPSTONE PAPER SIGNATURE PAGE

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Abstract

The emerging field of Girl Studies reflects increasing interest in social justice programming and research in higher education. Yet much girl-centered work has tied the concept of allyship to traditional service models, without examining the power structures reinforced by top-down service practices. Academia, social movements, and larger society have historically failed to center the voices of girls or the diversity of girlhood(s). In partnership with The Girlhood Project, this project utilizes practice rooted in theory to deconstruct those power systems which reinforce hegemonic identity and deny agency. Using qualitative data from co-constructive discussions about allyship and girlhoods, "Allyship in the Academy" examines enacted themes of identity, relationship, and oppressive social norms.

Executive Summary

Girl-centered service and research has traditionally left unexamined its own enforcement of hegemonic identity and oppressive power structures, even when utilizing the concept of allyship. "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center" is a conference hosted by The Girlhood Project (Cambridge, MA) and serves as a programmatic frame of exploration in how the field of Girls' Studies and girl service can utilize Critical Race Theory, Queer Theory, and Positive Youth Development to center marginalized identities and knowledge.

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The relationship between activism and academia has a complex history. Women's studies, now more commonly referred to as Gender Studies, has transformed the academic landscape through curricula, research, and the legitimization of gender theory as an intellectual framework (Lipkin, 2009). However, it also has a history of playing into the hierarchical structures of academia (Collins, 2002). Like the Women's Movement of the 1960's and 1970's that inspired the discipline, Gender Studies has struggled with a reputation of elitism and racism. While women of many marginalized identities (such as women of color, queer women, poor women, etc.) were early revolutionaries in these movements, their contributions are often attributed to their more privileged White counterparts who were more acceptable to a broad mainstream audience (Collins, 2002). This trend followed feminists and civil rights activists from community work into academia.

Yet those within higher education are uniquely placed to engage with social justice action. The exposure to multiple disciplines of thought, intellectual and social resources, and access to individual and institutional expertise are incredible resources for those who want to deeply understand social issues and actions. It is a highly privileged thing to be academically respected (or to be associated with a respected academic institution), and privilege comes with the responsibility of allyship (Freire 2014). The study of gender in a sociological framework is fundamentally about identity, and further about the ways that different identities are situated within a social context. The fields of sociology, social movements, and feminist theory approach this examination with the ultimate value of promoting equality across identities and therefore is rooted in social justice action, not merely in analysis. Because of this foundational value, it is

important that the discipline and its sub-disciplines remain intersectional and impact focused by utilizing allyship perspectives both in content of curricula and in facilitation and organizational structure.

The field of Girls' Studies is an extension of Gender Studies with a raised focus on how girls and young women experience their identities (Lipkin, 2009). While this emerging field has centered a group marginalized for both oppressed gender and age, it has often excluded the specific experiences of girls of color, Indigenous girls, LGBTQIA+ individuals, girls with disabilities, and girls from immigrant families or backgrounds. Even within an academic field dedicated to egalitarian spaces, one can see manifestations of oppression. It is with this history and potential in mind that I submit this exploration of research and action with The Girlhood Project.

The Girlhood Project (TGP) is the public name of a six-credit service-learning class (Girlhood, Identity, and Girl Culture) at Lesley University, located in Cambridge Massachusetts. TGP utilizes intensive academic work studying feminist pedagogy and intersectional Girlhood Studies. It uses a positive youth development model and team-based approach with a group of Teaching Assistants, a class of Lesley University undergraduate students, and a cohort of middle school aged girls from Somerville Public Schools (and for the first time in 2018, a cohort of students from Belmont High School). TGP is at a transitional point in its development and is looking to restructure within the next year. As a part of this initiative, TGP hosted a one-day conference titled "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center", where girl-serving organizations, professionals, and students gathered to collaboratively learn about our ever-evolving understandings of girlhood. Using feminist pedagogy and co-construction of knowledge, I and the TGP team collaborated with Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley (Dean of Faculty,

Professor and principal investigator of the course) in building this conference on the theories

used in TGP (including Positive Youth Development, Feminist Pedagogy, and Intersectional

Identity Development). One of the foundational threads connecting these theories is that of

allyship. This is the area where I propose TGP does particularly important and effective work:

training future allies with a focus on accountability across multiple identities. Grassroots

activism has been doing this work for a long time (Yee, 2011). If academia is to truly implement

social justice education through curricula and programming a heavy focus must be placed on

examining the inherent privilege in higher education and on providing opportunities to develop

allyship skills. In order for academic and activist work to effectively and ethically combine,

people and groups need to understand concepts of oppression and privilege beyond simple

recognition of terminology. Too often service professionals operate under a Savior complex or

other unexamined motivations (Davis, 2006) and continue to perpetuate systems of exploitation,

often without being aware they are doing so or denying negative impact. Understanding socially

constructed norms, the history of service and education, and the questions one must ask of these

structures allows educators and students to pursue social justice work with a deeper sense of

ethical responsibility.

       In this paper I will be exploring the themes of The Girlhood Project through literature

review as well as project implementation for the conference "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin

to Center". In particular, I will be focusing on allyship within academic and service contexts and

creating opportunities for discussion on the importance of grounding programs like TGP in

social justice values.

Literature Review

The 1980's and 90's saw an increase of research and literature focusing on girls' adolescent development and educational experiences. The majority of literature studying girls has often been based in the experiences of White girls in suburban, middle class settings, as their needs and identities fit fairly easily into traditional frameworks and methods of research. This has allowed the field of Girl Studies to recently emerge as a legitimate academic discipline yet contributes to continued erasure of girls who did not fit within those identities (Collins, 2002). People of color, people with disabilities, women, those with low or minimal income, youth, and LGBTQIA+ people are often excluded from academic respect, and this marginalization can be observed not only in which girls are studied but how adults have determined girls can best be aided through their perceived challenges (Brown, 2009; Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016).

Recently there has been a stronger focus in both academic Girls' Studies and community-based girls' programming on letting girls speak for themselves and involving girls as central agents in their own problem solving. Identity development is foundational to navigating solutions and goal setting, yet many (if not most) girls are exposed to a very narrow definition of girlhood. One dimensional "girl-ness" does not map authentically onto real girls, who are incredibly complex and exist in intersections of many identities. Being able to explore, develop, appreciate, and name their identities as they process them gives girls a foundation from which to best navigate a society that dismisses and targets them. Without opportunities to do so, girls are often forced to cobble together identities from socially approved or enforced hegemonic ideals (Brown, 2009; Lipkin, 2009). Research and programming which aims to uplift girls, but which does not center the voices of girls themselves risks perpetuating stereotypical and harmful assumptions of girlhood (Collins, 2002), and in fact denies the agency supposedly promoted.

In particular, 1990's research on girls focused on the needs and challenges of the experience of girlhood. This included issues such as lack of self-esteem, "shrinking" through disordered eating or social withdrawal and assimilation, and inability to set sexual boundaries in relationships with boys (Lipkin, 2009 & Brown 2009). As this line of research progressed, it also began recognizing the presence of anger and aggression in girls, especially in communities of girls who did not identify with the White, suburban, middle-class, cis-heterosexual model previously studied. That aggression often "manifested in anti-girl ways, reflecting an internalized belief that girls deserve or should expect violent or humiliating treatment" (Lipkin, 2009, p. 113). Generally, this has been interpreted to mean that girls with observable aggressive behaviors are manifesting anti-girl and essentially self-hatred belief systems. This is certainly true in some cases, but never in such a simple way. Research using a primarily deficit-based approach does not typically explore the complexity or potentiality in girls expressing anger. Confrontational behaviors were generally classified as aggressive behaviors, and simply as additional problems that girls experience. The socio-political environments girls live within are rarely positioned as threats which cause defensive reactions in girls and young women.

As activism and research has progressed, there is increasing interest in what girls are expressing when these behaviors are present (and what they are achieving, such as speaking up for themselves, setting boundaries, advocating for each other, etc). Some girls live in a reality that demands bold defensive measures to physically and emotionally protect themselves, and it is sometimes argued that the label of "aggressive" is simply an outsider's interpretation of a girl's "assertive" (Harper, Katsulis, Lopez, & Gillis, 2013). The complexity is clear: it is still true that some defensive constructs can impede a girl's ability to thrive as she grows and can in some cases perpetuate risk to her wellbeing. Girls (and all young people) are whole beings, and their

defenses should be examined as potential strengths that they and their adult allies can develop
and evolve.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) takes a strength-based perspective on youth and their
potential. Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, and Nakkula (2016) outline an approach to PYD that
intentionally centers the experiences and identities of girls of color, and therefore utilize an
intersectional framework. A focus of this model is the "developmental period of adolescence and
the identity sense-making that occurs as girls of color become more aware of the significance of
their different identities and related statuses in society" (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, & Nakkula, 2016,
p. 99). This is a time of opportunity for young people, if they have access to support, respect, and
resources to explore cultural meaning and social identities (Dejong & Love, 2016). PYD is also
informed by Critical Race Feminism, which critiques "additive conceptions of the identities of
women of color, which view women of color as being women + people of color" (Clonan-Roy et
al., 2016, p. 98). While well intentioned, work that focuses solely on the hardships and
challenges of girls of color contributes to defining them by their oppression and contributes to a
simplistic understanding of girls and girl culture. Therefore, it contributes their dehumanization.

Dehumanization is the process by which the essential human-ness of a person or group of
people is ignored or made invisible. It allows people (and, let us not forget, girls are people) to
be treated as something between "less human than me/us" and an object (Kilbourne, 2014).
Many of us are familiar with girls and women being objectified through violence and
harassment, but this process can make girls into objects to be saved as well (Brown, 2009).
Again, despite the good intentions present in this objectification, the impact is a diminished
understanding of girls and girlhood. Girls of color have a complex and multifaceted experience
of oppression and have typically been the subjects of deficit-based study, if they are studied at

all. PYD provides a framework that encourages strategies and tools for resistance for girls that push past "resisting for survival" and towards "resisting for liberation" (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016, p. 113) by celebrating their strengths and experiences (Brown, 2009).

Social Justice in the Academy

Definitions of girlhood, academic success, and service need to be constantly open to questioning and evolution, while still remaining rooted in the best practices of engaged participation. Freire (2014, p.19) writes that while there is an expectation that teachers "know" and students "do not know", there is a constant exchange of learning and teaching from all directions. Where human beings are present, there is culture, socialization, and transference. Entering a classroom does not remove biases or scripts present in the larger culture (Collins, 2002).

While the content of TGP (The Girlhood Project) centers egalitarian and social justice informed pedagogy, it cannot be removed from its environment: the academy. Institutions of higher education are all unique and operate with different social values. And as with all institutions, there are structural reflections of social and cultural norms. There is a history of oppression and exclusion in academia that needs to be addressed, especially (but not only) in fields where individuals are being primed for community and direct service work (Lipkin, 2009 & Yee, 2011). If the work of TGP and other similar programs are to proceed effectively, ethically, and intentionally, the flaws of academia need to be examined openly within the classroom (Hill, 2016). Students with privileged identities are more likely to gain admittance to competitive four-year colleges or universities, making students with marginalized identities frequently isolated or actively excluded in higher education (Carnevale, A. & Strohl, J., 2013). Privileged students therefore do not have learning opportunities to confront their implicit biases

and students with more marginalized identities are not given equal educational and networking

opportunities. This is a cycle of privilege seen across systems, and although academia has made

efforts to increase accessibility, the culture of privilege is hard to shake. In the book *Feminism*

For Real; Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism, Yee uses poetry to

explore the frustration of studying feminist theory and social justice work in a higher education

institution:

> "Feminism in academia -- OWN UP TO YOURSELF
>
> Do not pretend to be the godsend intellectually paving the revolution...
>
> ...Some of us need to engage with feminist theory
>
> So we can ground it in our community activist work
>
> Our creative works
>
> Our personal relationships
>
> For our families, communities and histories
>
> For our own fucking deserved peace of minds
>
> Maybe we need to know how to make sense of oppression
>
> Because we're so heartbroken" (2011, p. 27)

In this excerpt, Yee calls on academic feminism to be more than an intellectual venture.

Feminism (defined by bell hooks (2000) as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and

oppression) is not really feminism without the concept of praxis (education paired with action),

an intentional approach to pedagogy, and a vision of deconstructing oppressive power systems.

Feminist Pedagogy

Feminist pedagogy is the use of feminist principles to intentionally and collaboratively

approach education, construction of knowledge, action, and group process (The Girlhood

Project, n.d.). This approach directly confronts internalized colonialist concepts of individualism

and meritocracy, which believes that I am an individual making decisions on my own that impact

only myself, and how cleverly I make those decisions (or how diligently I work towards realizing

them) is the sole indicator of my worth. But as Love (2013) asserts, no single human can be

charged with the responsibility or capability to create, or indeed destroy, the oppressive systems

in place today. This is not to say that single individuals cannot make great impact or be an

impetus of great change. Rather, people or ideas in isolation do not make or break a culture's

systems (though they do maintain them). So how do we work against the systems limiting girls

in our culture? And how do we educate other adult allies to value girls' contributions in this

work?

Paulo Freire's classic work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, demanded that the pedagogy of

the oppressed be created with, not for, the oppressed (1970). TGP uses a similar philosophy by

centering the intersectional voices of girls through active deconstruction of traditional

hierarchical group processes (The Girlhood Project, n.d.). Girls have a multiplicity of

marginalized identities and have historically had little influence over the direction or

interpretation of their lives. Even with the emergence of Girls' Studies as an academic field, girls

have still been repeatedly excluded from active participation in research which objectified them

and their experiences. Simply put, girls have rarely had the chance to tell their own stories. This

replication of oppressive structures within social justice work is not unusual, and results from a

faulty understanding of liberation. Again, Freire writes that "Oppressors...cannot find in [their]

power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves…" and an attempt to do so

"almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity...in order to have the continued

opportunity to express their 'generosity,' the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well" (1970,

p.29). As a community of social justice activists and academics, we are still working on how to

use privilege towards liberation, or whether utilizing privilege (even "for good"), simply

strengthens power systems. A vital starting point is keeping space and building access for

marginalized individuals and communities to lead their own liberation movements and

narratives.

Intentional Service

More recently than Freire, Adam Davis (2006) wrote on the potential pitfalls of an

unexamined pursuit of service. The industry of service (non-profit organizations, college service

learning courses such as TGP, traditional volunteering, etc.) is growing, and many of us do not

pause to consider why we are serving, who is truly benefiting from that service, or what the long

term impacts of service work are.

Davis also makes the argument that while service, like any human activity, can be good,

bad, or both, it is not simple: "...the belief that service is good should not mean that we blind

ourselves to the complexity of service" (2006, p. 4). The service ideal is so beautifully presented

that there is minimal incentive to approach it critically. Yet in order to ethically pursue work that

is often defined as "service", we must examine that work with the knowledge that while it can do

good, it can also be a mere bandage to much more pressing issues. It can also serve to reinforce

the gap between those who receive service and those who want to serve (also known as allies).

The Ethical Ally

For those of us dedicated to pursuing social justice work, these issues explored by Davis

become tangible when our intersectional identities move between environments. The privileged

identities that we hold mean that we have certain blind spots, and if we want to create change, we

must work on acting an ally (Johnson, 2001; Lamont, n.d.) and not merely claiming it as an

identity. An ally is somebody who does not experience a certain manifestation of oppression, but who struggles against it alongside those who do. The same challenges that Davis explores in his writing about service work can be applied to allyship. There are many harmful ways to pursue one's work as an ally, such as speaking over those I am trying to support, policing the expression or tone of an oppressed person or movement, and taking credit for the work done by others less visible than I (Lamont). Allies however remain vital to the sustainability of social movements. For girls, allies are crucial in order for their voices to emerge from the layers of sexism and ageism, not to mention potential layers of racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, ableism, and more (Dejong & Love, 2016; Clonan-Roy et. al, 2016). Both ageism and sexism work to trivialize those who are female, feminine, or young by discrediting their identities as inherently silly, immature, hysterical, or petulant (Brown, 2009; Chase et. al, 2016; & Dejong & Love, 2016). In reality, girls are experts on their experiences, and it is the responsibility of their allies to validate and uplift them.

Enacted Allyship

Social justice education is about liberation; liberation from ignorance towards action against oppression. While the path it offers comes with a great deal of responsibility, liberation is about choice, which is unavailable to us when we are unaware (Collins, 2002; Freire 2014; Hill, 2016; hooks, 2000; & Love, 2013). Therefore, educators must incorporate social justice into facilitation, and not be contented with describing how it operates outside of the classroom in the "real world". The classroom, as many Black Feminists such as Dominique Hill and Patricia Hill Collins have said, is a social setting, with the same biases, identities, and histories as any social location in our lives. One way that programs (and academic courses) are turning their attention internally is through direct interaction with the social scripts, identities, and assumptions present

within a group (academic or otherwise). Again, I will cite Dominique Hill, a leading educator on

social justice and cultural identities, who asks: "How do we utilize both social identities and our

reading of them as productive and educative tools?" (2016, p. 4). If academic settings are social

contexts just as much as any other setting, then they can either perpetuate social norms or

provide opportunities to deconstruct those norms. Hill elaborates: "Situating the classroom as a

cultural site allows it to be understood as an interactive and contextually located space where

bodies, people, and power relations intermingle" (2016, p. 8).

Awareness does not inevitably lead to action. This is why educational approaches to

liberation and justice must be based on praxis, or the combination of intellectual work and action

(The Girlhood Project, n.d.; Freire, 1970; Bell, Goodman, & Oullett, 2016; Love, 2013; & Yee,

2011). Once a student begins a process of critical consciousness (Love, 2013), they can either

commit to action or regress into guilt and denial. Educators have a responsibility to provide tools

and opportunities for practice in the work of social justice. As previously discussed, unexamined

engagement with a marginalized community can (and usually does) perpetuate power dynamics

found in the greater culture. "…it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to

reason. Whoever lacks this trust will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and

communication" (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Girls must influence their own progress and be trusted to

express their identities and experiences in their own voices.

Educators and practitioners should continue to explore the intersections of Girls' Studies,

social justice in academia, and in feminist pedagogy within higher education and service

learning. This will remain a vital framework for how we serve girls and those who support them,

especially as our definitions of "girlhood" continue to evolve past a binary framework. "As

researchers and adult allies, we cannot measure girls' success or resilience against only the

dominant, neoliberal, and positivistic scripts for success: we must consider the local, contextual

factors that shape their decisions and life trajectories." (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016, p. 115).

Deconstructing traditional hierarchies within academic and service contexts through feminist

pedagogy and positive youth development can create space for girls to be active participants in

the programs that serve them.

Project Plan

In collaboration with The Girlhood Project, I contributed to a day-long Girls' Studies

conference hosted at Lesley University titled "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center".

Through co-construction and the active centering of marginalized identities, we aimed to explore

intersectional girlhood and confront difficult realities of allyship and social justice work.

Situation Statement

Girls, women, and gender non-binary/gender non-conforming folks have been and

continue to be targeted by overt and covert oppression. As a result, those within these identities

are at increased risks for violence, abuse, exclusion from opportunity, and general

dehumanization (Chase, Catalano, & Griffin, 2016). Adding youthfulness to these identities

means that individuals are less able to advocate for themselves without the support of adult

allies, and are therefore in need of respectful and strength based support (Clonan-Roy, Jacobs, &

Nakkula, 2016; DeJong & Love, 2016). Social Justice Education and the creation of

collaborative spaces create opportunities for community building and identity exploration in an

affirming context. These spaces also allow for aspiring or current allies to examine their own

biases, intents and impacts, and goals for change.

Conference Message

In TGP's first ever conference, "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center" we explored the many identities and cultures of girlhood through "celebration, co-creation, community, and critique" (The Girlhood Project). Through hosting this conference, we sought to inform our communities on the theories and actions of TGP by facilitating an event with an intentionally intersectional perspective on identities, direct service work, and academic understandings of girlhood. We believe that mindful dedication to dialogue allows frequently silenced voices to be heard and leads to an increase in the knowledge and skills necessary for people to engage ethically in their work with others. The very concept of Girlhood is ever-evolving, and in order to best make space and to advocate for girls, we need to be open to learning from a diversity of experiences. While well intentioned, academic and programmatic initiatives have made harmful mistakes in the past by promoting a singular understanding of girls and women. When we are afraid or unwilling to be inclusive of complexity, we perpetuate the silencing of marginalized identities and contribute to a cultural system of oppression. This impact happens regardless of intent (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). "Redefining Girlhood" allowed us to share what we've learned, challenge ourselves, and support others doing excellent work with and on behalf of girls, young women, and the many invisible shades of girlhood.

Project Goals

Goal 1: Coordinate a day-long conference, including the following elements:

- 6-8 breakout workshop sessions, geared around the philosophies and academic content of TGP

- Engaged workshop facilitators (internal and external to TGP) and keynote speakers

- Community Building opportunities

   o Tabling from community organizations doing work to enrich the lives of

    marginalized identities from a social justice lens

   o Networking and socializing time

Goal 2: Evaluate impact of sessions and overall conference experience. Participants will increase

their knowledge of feminist pedagogy and co-construction of knowledge, and to utilize those

theories in their work.

Goal 3: Incorporate foundational themes from the course into the conference through structure,

facilitation, and content including feminist pedagogy, social justice praxis, and intersectional

identity development

   Techniques for evaluation of these goals are described in following Assessment section.

Target Audience and Stakeholders

Lesley University undergraduate students

   The students enrolled in the TGP's 6 credit course dedicate a great deal of time to the

   class during their semester. We want to provide opportunities for them to network with

   those doing this work professionally, and to learn from as many perspectives as possible.

   This conference was the first day of the weekend intensive which begins their TGP

   experience, and we aimed to create a foundational context for their academic and action-

   oriented work. Teaching Assistants and other student representatives also promoted the

   conference in additional classes and student groups.

Community Organizations

   Community organizations and initiatives that support the field TGP operates in (social

   justice, education, youth work, gender justice, etc.) were invited to participate in several

   capacities during the conference. Organizations had opportunities to educate, provide

engagement opportunities with their work, and to learn from each other and TGP. The

community organizations we invited include the following: BAGLY (Boston Area Gay

Lesbian Youth), BARCC (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center), Big Sister Association of

Greater Boston, Boston's Children Hospital: Center for Young Women's Health, Boston

Glow, Breakthrough Greater Boston, East End House, Girls' Angle: A Math Club for

Girls, Girls Develop It, Girls' Inc, Girls' Leap, Girls Rock Campaign Boston, Girls on the

Run Boston, Girl Scouts of Eastern Mass, Girls Who Code, Keshet, Margaret Fuller

Neighborhood House, Pink & Black, Planned Parenthood, Science Club for Girls, Strong

Women Strong Girls, SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice), Tutoring Plus, Title IX

Girls' Running Club, YWCA Boston, ZUMIX

Academic Researchers

We were also interested in those involved in research about the experiences, strengths,

and needs of girls and young women, intergenerational education, and feminist pedagogy.

Some educators were invited to deliver workshops, and we hope to engage this group in

future TGP initiatives and projects. For the most part these individuals were recruited

through our program director, Amy Rutstein-Riley.

Program Messaging

Messaging for the conference included the following description:

The Girlhood Project (TGP) at Lesley University is celebrating ten years of

transformative teaching, learning, service and feminist scholarship. We're bringing together

Girlhood scholars, Girl-serving organizations, Girl-centered change makers, TGP alumni and

friends for a one-of-a-kind conference experience. Please join Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley and TGP

Community for a day of Celebration, Co-Creation, Community, and Critique!

Please see Appendix A for a copy of the conference flyer.

Incentives for Engagement

Kickoff: TGP has been operating for a full decade, and this conference served to celebrate that work as well as our "kickoff" of our next phase of work. Attending this conference allowed people and organizations to give input towards TGP's goals and engage in an initiative with the potential for growth.

Academic credit: Students enrolled in the course attended the conference as a class requirement, and other Lesley University students were able to attend for extra credit (according to professorial discretion).

Networking: As this conference was open to students, the university community, and the public, there were many opportunities for people to connect with peers and with those outside of their current social/professional sphere. Workshops, meals, and designated networking breaks provided either open networking or structured conversation.

Food: We provided free light breakfast, lunch, and coffee during the conference.

Location: TGP's conference was held in University Hall at Lesley University. Clearly this is convenient for Lesley University students but was also an accessible location for those commuting (the building is located next to the Porter Square stop on the MBTA Red Line, by several bus lines, and has parking available).

Speakers: In addition to the workshop facilitators, who have a great deal of expertise, our two invited plenary speakers are highly respected and well known. Dr. Dominique Hill is, as described in her professional bio:

"A body-lyricist, disrupter, Black girl celebrator, and ethnographer committed to inciting questions that foreground voices, bodies, and knowledges of often disappeared and/or

silenced populations. Her work situates the body as a pivotal vessel for research, teaching/learning processes, and generating collective action. She is currently a visiting assistant professor of Black Studies at Amherst College."

Our closing plenary speaker was the first and only Black woman of the Boston City Council, Ayanna Pressley, who has just announced her campaign to run for Congress. Her professional bio follows:

"Ayanna Pressley's career has been marked by history-making campaigns and a relentless determination to advance a policy agenda focused on girls and women, breaking cycles of poverty and all forms of violence, and reducing trauma in our communities. Pressley was first elected to the Boston City Council on November 3, 2009, becoming the first woman of color ever to do so. In 2011, she became the first woman in 30 years and the first person of color ever to top the ticket. On the trail and in office, Pressley doesn't shy away from sharing her story as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault as a college student. Pressley founded and Chairs the City Council's Committee on Healthy, Women, Families, and Communities and has built broad and diverse coalitions to advance lasting, meaningful reforms to complex social issues like teen pregnancy and trauma. Pressley is an Aspen-Rodel Fellow in Public Leadership (2012)."

Outreach Methods

Personal contacts and networks: I did outreach via phone and email to colleagues of mine from girl serving organizations (both those who I worked with directly and community partners I have developed relationships with), and others on the planning team did the same.

Emailed invitations: Two people on the planning team created invitations to distribute to personal contacts, alumna of TGP, and broader communities.

In person pitches to classes: One person on the planning team, who also teaches at Lesley University, as well as the TA team made in-class pitches to current Lesley students and faculty. As this is a method and a target contained within the university, it did not need aggressive outreach.

Social media: One person on the planning team created an Eventbrite, which we circulated on TGP's social media and through our own social media platforms.

Responsibilities Chart

NAME	RESPONSIBILITIES	CONTACT INFORMATION
Emily Welden	– Organize and coordinate workshop proposals and presenters – Evaluation of data – Workshop content reflected in conference themes – Co-facilitate the workshop "Queering Identity: Breaking the Binary of Girlhood" – Keynote outreach – Particular focus on outreach to Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley – Outreach to community partners	Phone: Email:
Amy Rutstein-Riley	– Faculty Director – Overall course directing	Phone: Email:

	– Liaison with LU (space, coursework, faculty coordination, etc) – Coordinate TA team – Keynote outreach: Dominique Hill – Academic network outreach – Delivery of opening keynote	
Sarah V.	– Community outreach – Outreach to LU students and alum – Invitation letter creation – Coordination with Lesley University food and building services	Phone: Email:
Cheryl W.	– LU Faculty and former graduate research assistant – Budgeting – Student Outreach	Phone: Email:
Kathryn V.	– Meeting minutes – Task organization – Workshop content reflected in conference themes – Craft conference invitation copy – Lead lunch discussion session	Phone: Email:
Blu T.	– Design of invitations and recruitment materials – Co-facilitation of "Queering Identity: Breaking the Binary of Girlhood" – Set up of registration (including fees)	Phone: Email:

TA Team	– Student coordination and outreach – Conference invitation graphic design – Panel moderating – Setting up, registration, directing participants, breakdown of event space	Phone: Email:

Tools/Measure to Assess Progress

Several assessment tools were developed for this project, although only one was fully implemented. Survey questions were created with input from TGP's conference team, and Dr. Rutstein-Riley gave permission for all data to be used in this project. The questions included:

- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate this workshop?

- What was your favorite part of this workshop?

- What suggestion would you make to improve the workshop?

- What will you take away from this workshop to use in your personal, professional, or academic life?

Surveys were collected after each workshop by facilitators or volunteers. They were intended to assess the successes and areas for improvement of each workshop, which included:

- The Personal is Political: Engaging Girls in Political Advocacy: Goals included networking, education on current advocacy strategies, and awareness of political activism accessible to youth

- TGP Alum Panel - Professional Pathways: Goals included networking, awareness of community work, and career planning

- The Girlhood Project Toolbox: Goals included educating on the common activities used in TGP around media literacy and identity exploration

- An Enthusiastic Yes: Goals included educating about consent, sexual rights and autonomy, and common barriers to healthy sexual relationships

- Ethical Allyship for Intersectional Girlhoods: Goals included educating on the basic concepts of privilege and oppression, and creating skills around advocating as an ally

- Zine Making for Social Change: The Lesley University library team has particular expertise in zines as artistic expression and activist tradition. Goals included collaboration between participants and expression of individual stories.

- Queering Identity: Breaking the Binary of Girlhood: Goals included educating participants on LGBTIA+ identities and common misconceptions around those identities, and building awareness of the need to expand our definitions of "girlhood"

Attendees were also encouraged to write on an index card anonymously to tell us about their takeaways, learning moments, or suggestions while still in the conference space. This allowed in-the-moment reflection to be captured.

The final tool of assessment (and the one most pertinent to this project) was the co-constructive lunch discussion. Participants were encouraged to discuss questions at their tables. They wrote and drew on paper "tablecloths", which were then used as data and feedback. Terms such as "ally" were explained during facilitation to ensure participants understood the questions being asked. Discussions were based on the following questions:

- What does girl / girlhood mean to you? How do we need to expand our understanding of girls / girlhood?

- As an adult ally to youth, how are you showing up for them? If you are youth, what do you most want and need from your adult allies?

Implementation Timeline

September 2017	September 9: Brainstorming September 27: Role assignments
October 2017	October 23: Content brainstorming
November 2017	November 3: Emily and Sarah: Conference structure and agenda November 8: Workshop content and conference themes November 20: Budgeting and Outreach: Release invitation letters
December 2017	December 13: Team update meeting, finalizing outreach materials and speakers December 16: Full day retreat - Conference planning - TGP 2018-2019 programming strategy
January 2018	January 20th: Finalization of speakers and scheduling January 29th: Final outreach to attendees and day-of details sent to speakers
February 2018	February 2: Conference February 3&4: Weekend intensive class

TGP Conference Agenda: February 2nd, 2018

8:30-9:00 Breakfast and Registration

9:00-9:30 Welcome and Intros

9:30-10:30 TGP Presentation from Amy Rutstein-Riley

10:30-11:30 Morning Keynote from Dominique Hill

11:30-11:45 Break

11:45-12:45 Workshop sessions I

12:45-1:00 Break/Transition

1:00-1:45 Lunch (table discussions)

1:45-2:00 Break/transition

2:00-3:00 Workshop sessions II

3:00-3:30 Break/networking/community partners tabling

3:30-4:30 Closing Keynote with Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressely

4:30-5:00 Break down event space

Logical Framework

We will

Host a day-long conference centering on the pedagogy used in The Girlhood Project. The focus will be the field of Girls' Studies, the use of feminist praxis, and the work of Girl Serving Organizations.

So that

We can bring together community members, social justice organizations and activists, and those involved in girls' studies research and programming.

So that

We can co-construct knowledge and goals for girls' programming and social justice education and promote engagement in TGP (as well as other related work).

So that

We can educate new TGP students, youth, other professionals, and ourselves on the intersectional experiences and identities within the concept of "Girlhood".

So that

Additional perspectives can inform our curriculum and approaches to youth work and social justice praxis.

So that (Impact Outcome)

> TGP and connected groups continue to evolve in ways that reflect the girls we serve and to utilize the most progressive activism and theory in our communities

Impacts Reflected in Logic Model

Individual Impacts

- Feeling of community and connection to an important project

- Education on the work of TGP as well as topics covered by workshops and panels

- Collaboration with other scholars and activists

Community Impacts

- Networking between social change groups

- Contribution from larger community to creation of TGP community

- Further establish TGP as a unique and noteworthy part of the Lesley University Community

Structural Impacts

- Provide skills and motivation for students and activists to continue social change work

- Create a conference space that counters traditional academic hierarchy and structure

- Raise typically silenced and marginalized identities and voices

Methodology

As this project's logic model explains, the main impact goal of the "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center" conference was to use The Girlhood Project's practice of "celebration, co-creation, community, and critique" (The Girlhood Project) to incorporate multiple identities and perspectives into our conversations about girlhood. The goal impact for this action is to

continue de-centering traditional power structures usually present in gender justice and youth
programs and research.

Participants

Participants for this project involved several demographics. TGP's approach to group
process meant that each person present for the conference and workshops was a contributor to
this process, as feminist theory emphasizes co-construction and narrative data. The main
participants can be separated into the following categories:

- Lesley University Undergraduate Students: The students enrolled in the TGP's 6 credit
  course attended the conference as the first day of their weekend intensive requirement.

- Nonprofit practitioners: Community organizations and initiatives that support the field
  TGP operates in (social justice, education, youth work, gender justice, etc.) were invited
  to participate in several capacities during the conference. They were invited to set up
  outreach tables of their own and some were asked to participate in workshop delivery.
  The community organizations who participated include the following:

  - BARCC (Boston Area Rape Crisis Center)

  - Big Sister Association of Greater Boston

  - Girls' Inc

  - Girls' Leap

  - Girls Rock Campaign Boston

  - Planned Parenthood

- Researchers and Educators: We intentionally reached out to educators interested in the
  experiences, strengths, and needs of girls and young women, intergenerational education,

and feminist pedagogy. Some were invited to deliver workshops and we hope to engage this group in future TGP initiatives and projects.

In addition to these originally intended participants, the following groups provided great value to the conference and provided data:

- Boston Area Youth: Middle school students from East Somerville Middle School and high school students from Belmont High School were invited to attend, as students from both schools are involved with TGP programs this semester. Faculty from Fenway High School reach out to TGP asking to bring students as well. In all about 40 youth attended the conference, along with staff from each school.

- Lesley University Alumni (specifically TGP Alumni): Most alumni of TGP were invited to attend the conference and were involved in workshop facilitation as well. Many are currently in human service, education, or policy fields of work, and bring knowledge from previous years of TGP.

Also present were a small number of nonprofit and youth work professionals otherwise unaffiliated with Lesley University or TGP, and the team of volunteers who coordinated the event (those volunteers will be a source of data explored in a following section).

Materials

As described in the above section "Tools/Measure to Assess Progress", materials such as surveys, observations, and written discussion were collected during the conference. Particular focus was placed on post-workshop surveys, engaged feedback cards, and the "chalk talk" style lunch session, which was this project's primary source of data collection.

During lunch, large sheets of paper and markers were laid out on each table. Also, on each table were two cards with the following questions: 1) What does Girl / Girlhood mean to

you? Where do we most need to widen our lens in defining Girl / Girlhood in 2018? 2) As an

adult ally to youth, how are you showing up? OR, if you are youth, what do you most need from

your adult allies?

Post-conference written reflections from leadership team and volunteers were requested

via email, asking for their top takeaways, recommendations for improving the experience, and

how they feel the conference was aligned (or not) with TGP's goals and values.

Procedure

In order to create the dialogue and co-construction of knowledge that is central to TGP's

work, we dedicated our lunch session to conversation about how we define and interact with

girlhood. This not only created opportunities for community connection and exploration of ideas

but provided written and visual data. Using coding methods for qualitative research, I analyzed

the responses and determined categories of content (body, community, power, etc.). While

analyzing the responses and categories I pulled out three connective themes: Identity,

Relationship, and Social Norms. Using these thematic connections, I explored how participant

responses to our lunch chalk talk prompts reinforces or adds new information to TGP's

understandings of girlhood and allyship.

Engaged Feedback Cards were distributed and explained at the registration desk and

mentioned by facilitators throughout the conference.

Surveys were distributed by workshop facilitators after their workshops. While each

workshop was provided with surveys and asked to leave 5 minutes at the end of their session for

participants to complete them, there were fewer handed in than anticipated.

Leadership Team Written Reflections gathered the observations of those who were

involved in coordinating and facilitating this conference, as they were able to gather verbal and

behavioral responses from participants as they experienced workshops, community building, and

plenaries. I will also be utilizing my own observations from the overall conference experience

and from my co-facilitation role in the workshop "Queering Identity: Breaking the Binary of

Girlhood".

In addition, I will use quantitative data to explore the outreach success of the conference.

Demographic representation will be contrasted with TGP's group process methods in

determining whether this event adequately incorporated values of collaboration, intersectionality,

and deconstruction of power dynamics.

Results

During the planning stages of this event, we had anticipated Lesley University students

and The Girlhood Project (TGP) alum to make up the majority of attendees. We were pleasantly

surprised to receive interest from many K-12 students and communities as well. Out of 177

registered attendees, 22.6% were youth from Belmont High School, Fenway High School, and

Somerville Middle School. 23.7% were current college students (primarily undergraduates), and

14.1% were TGP alum. This means that approximately 60% of attendees were what we call

"emerging girlhood scholars" and future participants.

Figure 1: Age of Attendees
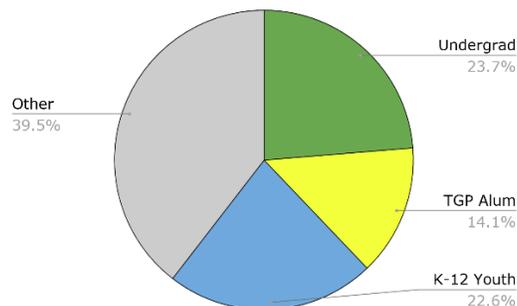
The majority of data gathered from this project was qualitative and narrative in nature. While surveys and engaged feedback cards were distributed, not enough of them were completed to be a significant source of information about the conference generally or about specific workshops. The following data was collected from the collaborative lunch discussion.

At each table, attendees wrote their thoughts, associations, experiences, and ideas down. Collaboratively the participants, presenters, and leaders of the "Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center" conference contributed approximately 240 pieces of data through this activity. This session followed the two morning plenary speakers, Dr. Amy Rutstein Riley and Dr. Dominique Hill, as well as the three morning workshops ("The Girlhood Project Toolbox: Activities for Engaging our Whole Selves"; "An Enthusiastic Yes: Healthy Relationships and Consent"; and "The Personal is Political: Engaging Girls in Political Advocacy"), all of which potentially gave common language and frameworks for these discussions.

The written documentation of these discussions were coded into three general themes, which emerged after categorization: Identity, Relationship, and Social Norms. The categories of comments and recorded reflections were power imbalance, body, sexuality, media, identity, social expectation, leadership, age, power, race, expression, relationship, community, confidence, insecurity, celebration, environment, autonomy, and queerness. The most prevalent categories were power imbalance, identity, allyship, social expectation, relationship, and body. The thematic focus leaned slightly towards Identity and Relationship (present in around 75% of responses), although a still significant 28% of responses involved the theme Social Norms. Responses involving the category of allyship were mostly associated with the theme of Relationship, with Social Norms being second most associated and Identity third most associated.

Discussion

The experience of girlhood is described in this data on a continuum of power imbalance and autonomy, from "restrictive" and "hypersexualized" to "non-binary" and "queendom". Frequently discussions about girlhood focus exclusively on needs and traumas or on a "girl power" type of surface level positivity. Focusing solely on one end of this spectrum of experience is a powerful method for enforcing a single hegemonic girlhood. When one considers the origins of Girl Studies as an academic field, this trend is not surprising (Brown, 2009; Lipkin, 2009). Hegemony is powerful when considered in the context of any identity, as it is both enforcement of power and psychological normalization of oppression. One participant claimed the spirit of our event's name: "Redefining Girlhood" in their response: "changing the definition of girlhood" While redefining identity was not the most common category, many responses reflected an interest in the concept: "Pushing boundaries"; "Curiosity"; "widen the lens to include trans girls/Black girls". These and other responses utilized the theory and practice of TGP.

The high percentage of youth and undergraduate college students (as well as returning alum who were involved with TGP as students) speaks to the program's intentionality around researching with youth as opposed to about youth. As we attempt to deconstruct traditional power structures present in Girls' Studies, adult allies involved with TGP have had to relearn how we relate to and interpret the experiences of youth. Nearly 50 responses were categorized under allyship, with content including "Just listen"; "Adults need to meet students where they are"; "Adult allies need to listen and support us"; "We need to apologize to kids more, own up to our mistakes"; and "from our adult allies, I would want them to take us more seriously". These responses (which are from both adults and youth) show that young people often feel unheard,

invisible, and dismissed by those who claim to advocate and ally with them. Equally as prevalent as allyship was the category of relationship. This implies that participants in the conference were reflecting on the power of relationship, especially relationship that is not pre-scripted by traditional power dynamics. Dr. Dominique Hill spoke in the opening plenary about her practice of "Undressing in Public" (Hill, 2016), or radical vulnerability in the service of group building and student growth. This was referenced generally and specifically in responses, indicating that it resonated with participants.

In analyzing this data, a trend concerning allyship emerged. While "ally" is used in daily conversation to indicate a type of person (an identity), the responses received in this project were more likely to correlate to themes of Relationship and Social Norms than to Identity. Many of these responses (as described in the above paragraph) were concerned with the actions and impacts of allies, not their identification with the term or with their intentions. This reinforces the concept of impact versus intent frequently stressed by marginalized communities (Lamont, n.d.; Indigenous Action Media, 2014; Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, et. Al., 2014).

As one might expect from data that is collaboratively created, responses were as diverse as those who provided them. However, this does not mean we have all the information we need. Many responses were questions themselves, such as:

1) "how do we help girls develop resilience?"

2) "Questioning: who am I?"

3) "How do we determine who is and is not included?"

The dialogic nature of this activity also provided responses to these questions:

1) "having meaningful discussions and relationships"

2) "stumbling onto pieces of yourself"

3) "girls don't need to have the anatomy"

In creating space and common language for this discussion, even for a short period of time, we were able to co-construct meaning and complexity in our collective understanding of girlhoods.

Limitations

While there was intention to gather information through surveys and feedback cards to examine the successes of specific workshops, there was not enough data collected through these materials to contribute to an evaluation of workshop sessions. In the future, a more rigorous structure for distributing and collecting these materials will be a part of the planning process earlier on (placing prepared volunteers in each session, prepping facilitators to leave 5-10 minutes for survey completion, setting aside plenary time for engaged feedback cards, etc.).

The analysis of the qualitative data collected during this event is primarily the work of one individual's perspective. As we continue to gather data in the TGP method, we will find ways to ensure the co-construction of not only the original data but of its interpretation as well. TGP is still building its reputation in communities outside of Lesley University and our community partners, and in future events we hope to strengthen ties with other activists, experts in social justice facilitation, and academics.

Implications

The main focus of my project has been allyship, specifically that of White adults in institutions of higher education working with intersectional girlhoods. Yet the concept of "ally" has evolved so drastically over recent years that it seems no longer effective as a way to communicate a specific concept. There is a wide variety of meanings and actions associated with the term ally, from a casual agreement with a social cause to daily anti-supremacy practices.

Even within the responses categorized under Allyship, responses ranged from "leave space for their [girls'] thoughts and opinions", which is a necessary and challenging yet passive allyship role, to "doing the pre-work to showing up", which expresses the need for allies to do their own personal and community development. As social movements become increasingly accessible through both social media and professional pathways (including degree programs), more people come across and utilize the concept of ally. I believe there is opportunity for further exploration on how individuals and communities relate to the term ally, and about the process of navigating the space between being an ally and being an accomplice (Matias, 2014).

In Girl Studies specifically, allyship has historically fallen short through the enforcement of white supremacy and cis-heteronormativity. Black girls and girls of color have especially be excluded from interpretations of girlhood (Collins, 2002), as have queer girls, immigrant and indigenous girls, and girls with many other marginalized identities..

> *Because white imagination was maintained by the possessive investment in whiteness (Lipsitz, 2006) and hegemonic invisibility, it acted as a determiner—he who feels entitled to make decisions on behalf of others—of what is and is not truth (Matias, Viesca, Garrison-Wade, Tandon, Galliano, 2014, p. 290).*

Matias (2014) and Tatum (2003) write that not only does hegemonic whiteness utilize denial of its existence to assert power, white allies who become aware of racial supremacy must move beyond guilt. Fixation on racial guilt is a deterrent to authentic relationship and therefore to allyship (Davis, 2006; Freire, 2014; Lamont, n.d.; Hill, 2016; Matias, 2014; & Tatum, 2003). Much literature on allyship focuses on this major barrier to becoming an ally or training allies. And yet we see in social movements and projects such as TGP, moving past guilt into action is not the culminating moment of achieving the identity of ally. In true commitment to liberation

and deconstruction of oppressive power systems (racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and transphobia, xenophobia, classism, etc.), a new relationship between oppressed and privileged identities needs to be explored. "Meaningful alliances aren't imposed, they are consented upon" (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). To create meaningful alliances and to live as an "accomplice" to liberation, those with privileged identities can begin by deconstructing the traditional power systems used in academic and youth programmatic spaces. Then, as we co-construct knowledge of others and, most importantly, ourselves, we can rebuild an intersectional foundation from which to do the work.

"Be strong, be proud, show your insecurities, and educate yourself."

Redefining Girlhood 2018 Participant

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Appendix A: Conference Promotional Flyer

Save the Date!
Redefining Girlhood: From Margin to Center

GIRLHOOD PROJECT

02/02/18
University Hall, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA
1815 Massachusetts Avenue, Second floor
8:30am - 4:30pm

The Girlhood Project (TGP) at Lesley University is celebrating ten years of transformative teaching, learning, service and feminist scholarship. We're bringing together Girlhood scholars, Girl-serving organizations, Girl-centered change makers, TGP alumni and friends for a one-of-a-kind conference experience.
Please join Dr. Amy Rutstein-Riley and TGP Community for a day of **Celebration, Co-Creation, Community, and Critique!**

Conference Plenary Presentations:
- Dr. Dominique C. Hill, Amherst College

Dr. Dominique C. Hill is a body-lyricist, disrupter, Black girl celebrator, and ethnographer committed to inciting questions that foreground voices, bodies, and knowledges of often disappeared and/or silenced populations. Her work situates the body as a pivotal vessel for research, teaching/learning processes, and generating collective action. She is currently a visiting assistant professor of Black Studies at Amherst College.

- Councilor Ayanna Pressley

Ayanna Pressley's career has been marked by history-making campaigns and a relentless determination to advance a policy agenda focused on girls and women, breaking cycles of poverty and all forms of violence, and reducing trauma in our communities. Pressley was first elected to the Boston City Council on November 3, 2009, becoming the first woman of color ever to do so. In 2011, she became the first woman in 30 years and the first person of color ever to top the ticket. On the trail and in office, Pressley doesn't shy away from sharing her story as a survivor of childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault as a college student. Pressley founded and Chairs the City Council's Committee on Healthy, Women, Families, and Communities and has built broad and diverse coalitions to advance lasting, meaningful reforms to complex social issues like teen pregnancy and trauma. Pressley is an Aspen-Rodel Fellow in Public Leadership (2012).

Find us at: thegirlhoodproject.org

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Appendix B: Author's Background and Philosophy of Education

As an undergraduate at Lesley University, I took the Girlhood, Identity, and Girl Culture (the affiliated course of TGP) after completing several other sociology classes. It was one of several experiences that clarified my interest in working with girls and young women. Specifically I found a passion for doing this work in a non-traditional educational setting with the goal of collaboratively and transparently developing our identities and awareness of social justice issues. It was after completing this program that I began an internship at Girls' LEAP Self Defense, an organization with similar ethics of service and education, and was hired as Program Director after graduation. Through these and other experiences, I have worked with girls, adolescents, and college women and supervised new direct service professionals. I care deeply about creating safe environments for young people to explore themselves and their beliefs without imposing goals or interpretations onto them. Providing education and training for college students interested in this work is a high professional priority of mine, as many people do not have opportunities to confront the well-intentioned but harmful potentials of non-profit, education, and service work. My foundational belief in working with other people is that they are they expert in their own experiences. In particular, girls, young people of color, and queer folks are often discouraged from expressing or even believing their own stories. When given the space and tools to do so many are able to clarify who they are and what needs to change in the world for them to thrive.