

Editorial



Welcome to this inaugural issue of
Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal (GHS).

Claudia Mitchell, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, Jackie Kirk

It is a moment of collective memory work. The three of us—Claudia, Jacqui and Jackie—try to remember when and where the idea for a *Girlhood Studies* journal came from in the first place. We think that probably the precise moment (or event) was the “A New Girl Order: Young Women and the Future of Feminist Inquiry” Conference convened by Anita Harris and colleagues at Monash University and held at King’s College, London, from November 14 to 16 2001. Although we had individually attended conferences related to girls and girlhood, it was for the three of us the first time that we had been to an event that focused on girlhood in ways that went beyond disciplinary boundaries of, say, girls in science or girls in development. There was something quite different emerging—a new area that combined advocacy, interdisciplinarity, and of course the voices of girls themselves—and it somehow gave a new imperative to exploring girlhood in all its possible manifestations. That was 2001 and now it is 2008. It has taken us seven years to make *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* a reality with this inaugural issue. Now we try to remember why it took us so long, or what it was that gave us the kickstart to finally do it!

CLAUDIA: For me it was the day Jacqui and I signed on to edit a two-volume *Girl Culture* encyclopedia. Somehow, being in touch with so many girlhood scholars out there was very exciting. We can’t stop with the encyclopedia, I thought. I think I always thought someone else might come along and do it—and then we could just contribute articles. And then when I was contacted about the *Journal of Boyhood Studies*, I realized that if we were ever going to start a journal on girlhood studies (as opposed to gender and childhood studies, for example) this was the moment to do it.

JACQUI: The young feminisms conference was indeed a milestone in our study of girls and girlhood but our interest in girls culture and girlhood



studies as feminists stretches back even further to the 1990s when we gave conference papers and published articles on Nancy Drew, Barbie, *Seventeen* magazine, catalogues and so on. The move from studying specific aspects of girls and girls' popular culture to being interested in girlhood occurred in 1998 when we organized a panel session called "Who cares about girls? Mapping Girlhood as a Cultural Space" with Marilyn Blaeser and Ann Smith at the International Institute of the Canadian Association for the Study of Women and Education in Ottawa, Ontario, at the end of May 1998. While we continued to study specific aspects of girls and girls' culture it was not until the 2001 conference where we met and heard speak leading girlhood scholars that we started to think about girlhood studies as a diverse and multidisciplinary field needing its own research apparatus such as a journal. Sharing a small London hotel room the three of us brainstormed ideas for this initiative—something which has now paid off, and we are very pleased that the editors at Berghahn share our keen interest and commitment to the area; "conference talk" into practice!

JACKIE: My Mum also joined us at the girlhood conference back in 2001, reinforcing for me how much my own work on girls' education and girlhood in development contexts was not and could not be entirely separated from my own experience of girlhood and daughterhood. As we talked and confirmed over again that there really was a "space" for our journal idea to be developed within, I felt excited about the possibilities of a journal devoted to girlhood in which researchers could explore these personal and professional intersections that I was particularly aware of at the time. I had just spent a couple of weeks supporting the study of "girl child education" in Uganda of a close colleague and fellow PhD student who was six months pregnant at the time. I hoped that she would be able to write about her amazing experience of doing girl child education research whilst pregnant with what everyone assumed to be another girl—but which actually turned out to be a boy! Of course, after leaving London and going off in our different directions it took some time to activate our plans, and especially to figure out exactly how one starts a journal. We had all three contributed to many journals, even edited special issues, but none of us had started a journal from scratch. So yes, time passed as we developed proposals—but Claudia's invitation to be on board on a boyhood journal was the boost we needed to reenergize our efforts and really get the project off the ground. Berghahn was interested in our tentative enquiries and we then had to follow through and come up with more detailed plans, schedules, an editorial board and so on.

Coming out of these generative moments then is this journal. Defining and mapping out what girlhood means, what it encompasses in different interconnected cultures in the twenty-first century and how we might research the field constitutes a challenging endeavor. But this is a challenge to which the journal is committed. *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* will cover a broad range of topics related to girls and girlhood as lived and experienced in different countries and contexts but with the core themes of methodology and interdisciplinarity, as they relate to girls and girlhood. Articles for the proposed journal would take a critical perspective on the interplay of age, cultural context, sex and gender so that issues of the cultural construction of girlhoods are at the centre of inquiry.

Rather than being a representation of an already defined field, the journal will first and foremost be a space in which to explore critical questions relating to the emerging field of girlhood studies. Self-reflective articles are encouraged which challenge the very idea of a “separate” field or even a separate journal. What is “girlhood studies”? How do we do girlhood studies? What is the relationship between women’s studies and girlhood studies? What is the relationship between girlhood studies and boyhood and masculinity studies? These are critical questions for the journal’s articles to address. At the same time, the journal will also address very concrete issues such as girls and gender based violence, girls and HIV and AIDS, and girls’ access to quality education. The various issues will be considered from various methodological perspectives, with a constant question around the value of working within an interdisciplinary approach. How can girls’ health issues be addressed through education sector responses? How can understandings of girls’ lives gained through reading fictional and historical accounts of girlhood inform contemporary actions related to girls’ lived experiences?

The journal will also be, we hope, a venue to describe, discuss, and further develop notions of “girl method”—or appropriate methodologies for working with girls and for exploring girl-related topics and issues. We believe that this extends the ideas of feminist scholars such as Ann Oakley and Michelle Fine who problematize the act of women researching other women (see for example Ann Oakley’s now famous “Interviewing Women: A Contradictions in Terms” 1981 article), to the act of younger and older adults researching girls of different ages,

cultures and geographic locations and the inherent inequalities this entails. Like many other girlhood researchers we are arguing against the tendency of “lumping” girls into one group or category. What we are seeing as key to avoiding this homogenizing is to develop methodologies that incorporate (and indeed emphasize) the politics of girlhood within girlhood studies.

There is increasing interest in participatory, arts-based and visual methodologies, using, for example, photos, video and collage, and these interests and experiences will be reflected in the articles published. Such processes and approaches have relevance to many different issues and may be appropriate—or quite inappropriate in different cultural contexts. Discussion of such issues, for example of the complexities and contradictions inherent in trying to work with pre-pubescent girls in India through the medium of film, will also be of interest to the journal.

Finally, the journal is meant to be not only interdisciplinary and intergenerational, but also international in scope. While not aiming for a discourse of a universalized girlhood, we do want to recognize, interrogate and critique the global discourses that have an impact on girls’ lives, ranging from the Millennium Development Goals to Web 2.0 to sex trafficking, and we have been excited by the interest from Girlhood Studies scholars in many different countries.

About *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*

Working out what an interdisciplinary journal on girlhood should look like brings its own challenges—starting with the cover. We knew we wanted to find visual images that spoke to the range of ages, experiences and even geographic locations of girls so we worked closely with Berghahn to work out how the cover could and should look. We know that the cover is not all-inclusive, but its images suggest that girlhood is not monolithic, but rather diverse and multiple. It has also been very exciting to envision ways of capturing practices that we wanted to see in a journal: the visual, girls’ voices, and articles that speak to a range of girlhoods and not just Western girlhoods.

As we finalized the articles for this inaugural issue we realized that authors were coming from several different backgrounds—Develop-

ment studies, Cultural Studies, Literary Studies, Communication Studies and so on. Finding reviewers who were willing and able to leap from their own disciplinary area of referencing to appraise critically an article in another field was just one challenge. But we also wanted to draw on the different experiences and perspectives of those involved in implementing girlhood related projects and so we have configured the journal to include reviews and project-related articles as well as more conventional formats for journal articles. Through these shorter, more action oriented articles, and through articles by and with girls and in different media forms—word or image—we felt the journal could contribute to both dissemination of, and reflection on, participatory methodologies for working with girls and on girlhood issues, on “good practices” and on lessons learned. In this way the journal could further its aim of drawing together programming, policy and research perspectives and engaging a variety of voices in ongoing dialogue. In this first issue we offer articles that cover a range of themes and issues. We anticipate that at least some of our subsequent issues will be thematically organized according to specific topics such as “coming of age,” girl-method, sexualities and so on.

About This Inaugural Issue of *Girlhood Studies*

The journal starts with two invitational articles from authors whose work has been critical in helping to shape *Girlhood Studies*: Lyn Mikel Brown whose work with girls and with other key authors such as Carol Gilligan, dating back to the early 1990s, has helped to put a new feminist order of girlhood on the map, and Catherine Driscoll whose recent work offers new readings on a variety of popular culture texts, including girlhood itself as text of popular culture. As Lyn Mikel Brown’s writing about her latest work with girls so powerfully points out, the project of girlhood is one that endures and reinvents itself.

The articles, then, begin with Lyn Brown’s autobiographical piece “The ‘Girls’ in Girls’ Studies” where she reports on the work she is currently doing with girls in Waterville, Maine. We then go on to Catherine Driscoll’s “Girls Today: Girls, Girl Culture, and Girlhood Studies.” Taken together, these anchor articles written by two well established scholars in Girlhood Studies offer a critical reading on Girlhood Stud-

ies that reminds us of where we have been (Driscoll) and where we are going (Brown).

The next set of articles, all peer reviewed and submitted in response to our first “call for papers,” begins with an article written by Jessica Ringrose, “‘Every time she bends over, she pulls up her thong’: Teen Girls Negotiating Discourses of Competitive, Heterosexualized Aggression.” The article explores the themes of heterosexualized competition and aggression in Avril Lavigne’s music video *Girlfriend* (2007) as representative of the violent heterosexualized politics within which girls are incited to compete in contemporary schooling and popular culture. Writing from the UK, the author argues that psycho-educational discourses attempting to explain girls’ aggression and bullying fail to account for the heterosexualized, classed or racialized power dynamics of social competition that organize heteronormative femininity. Jessica Ringrose elaborates on a psychosocial approach using psychoanalytic concepts to trace how teen girls negotiate contemporary discourses of sexual aggression and competition. Drawing on findings from a study with racially and economically marginalized girls aged thirteen to fourteen attending an inner-city school in South Wales, she suggests that the girls enact regulatory, classed discourses like “slut” to manage performances of heterosexualized aggression. Moments of critical resistance in their narratives, when they refuse to pathologize aggressive girls as mean and/or bullies, and in their fantasies, when they reject heterosexual relationships like marriage are explored.

Then, in “The Origins of the Girl Hero: Shirley Temple, Child Star and Commodity,” Rebecca Hains, writing from the US, offers an historical perspective on the idea of super-girls. Since the late 1990s, “girl power” programs featuring girl heroes have emerged as an important new trend in children’s television. However, girl heroes are not as new as they seem. Producers of mass media texts created many girl heroes in the 1930s, before the adoption of television as a mainstream medium, but the scholarly literature on today’s girl heroes rarely acknowledges these pre-television predecessors. To address this gap, this article presents research on the depictions of the strong orphan girls portrayed by Shirley Temple, positioned as cultural girl heroes in the 1930s. It explores the commercial contexts in which films starring Shirley Temple were produced and offers an analytical discussion of the positive and problematic features of these stories and the product lines associated

with them. By understanding the themes, commercial contexts, and controversial aspects of Shirley Temple's on-screen stories and marketplace commodities, scholars can better study the relevance and importance of the girl heroes who are so popular in today's marketplace.

Next, Heidi Ross and Lei Wang, in their article, "Learning to Lead: Challenging Girls in Rural Chinese Schools," interrogate the cultural context of girls' leadership. As they observe, leadership training is often described as an important component and goal of girls' secondary education and also a crucial step for realizing gender equality. This article explores the possibilities for, and the barriers to, effective leadership training in one "Spring Bud" girls' education project conducted in a poverty-stricken area of Shaanxi Province since 2001. Following a review of the Chinese and international literature on girls' secondary education and leadership training, the authors explore different understandings of "leadership" (and empowerment) among various project stakeholders and indicate the urgency of a mutual understanding of "leadership" and how it might be mentored in girls in formal educational settings. The authors draw on interviews, observations, and student writing, as well as the results of a 2006 survey of nearly 1,000 participating girls and their homeroom teachers, in their discussion of how to connect the concept of "leadership training" with the resources and constraints that shape girls' lives and future educational and career expectations and aspirations.

Shifting the girlhood space to Israel, Dafna Lemish and Shiri Reznik, in their article "To Laugh or Not to Laugh? Performing Girlhood Through Humor" explore gender differences in the roles of humor in the lives of Israeli children. Thirty-four Jewish middle-class Israeli children, sixteen girls and eighteen boys, aged eight to ten years were interviewed in focus groups in which they discussed a variety of humorous video segments, jokes, and everyday humor. The analysis suggests that humor in interaction is a highly gendered process in this age group and is employed differently by boys and girls to perform their gendered identities. Girls engaged much less in sexist and aggressive humor and clearly used it to maintain their separateness from boys and younger children. The authors conclude that humor provides us with another avenue through which to unveil the complicated processes of gender construction in pre-adolescent childhood, while at the same time demonstrating the ambivalence and complexity involved in these processes.

The articles *about* girlhood then shift over to the section of GHS that will regularly feature work *by* and *with* girls. In this first issue, “Seeing for Ourselves” is a photo essay produced with ninth grade girls in rural KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa in a context where more than 25 per cent of young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four are HIV positive and where girls and young women are four to five times more likely to be infected than boys and young men. In the Learning Together Project, involving teachers and community health care workers working together, along with women and girls working together, a variety of visual methodologies, including photo-voice were used. The girls, working with simple point and shoot cameras explore the issue of stigma. They produce captions that offer an additional layer of meaning.

In another section of GHS, we plan to feature regularly reports “from the community”—reports on projects, performances, exhibitions, films/video, individual or series, or conferences that are girl-focused. In this first issue Jenny Perlman Robinson offers a report on the work of the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Girls, based on work with girls and young women in East Africa: “Listening to Youth: The Experiences of Young Women in Northern Uganda.”

The final section of the journal highlights a key feature of Girlhood Studies—new publications, books and journals. In this issue Diana Belscamper reviews Ilana Nash’s *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Finally ... a Word of Thanks

For getting the journal launched, there are many people we would like to thank, starting with recognition of the important work of several key scholars in Girlhood Studies, notably Angela McRobbie and Valerie Walkerdine. We would also like to thank our enthusiastic Editorial Board made up of scholars from around the world all interested in girlhood studies. We are particularly indebted to Joan Christiansen, an intern studying with the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women for her dedication in seeing this first issue through to fruition. And finally we would like to thank Berghahn journals and especially

Vivian Berghahn, who was excited by, and supportive of, our ideas, patient with our many questions about journal development and start up processes, and who engaged her staff in the daunting task of coming up with a cover design that would do justice to the potential of such an ambitious journal project!

References

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