Call-and-Response

Looking Outward from/with IGSA@ND

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and Shauna Pomerantz

We are proud to introduce this special issue that was inspired by the 2019 International Girlhood Studies Association (IGSA) conference at the University of Notre Dame (IGSA@ND). At that time, we were not yet acquainted with each other beyond exchanging pleasantries and knowing of each other's academic profiles. Yet we came together as three co-editors and scholars committed not only to the diversification of girlhood studies but also to the larger project of social justice for all. We want to promote such work through this special issue and, in the process, expand perspectives and practices within the field of girlhood studies, as many before us have done.

IGSA@ND Conference Participants. Photo credit Matt Cashore for the University of Notre Dame

Mary, an IGSA Executive Committee member, who was Director of Gender Studies at the University of Notre Dame at the time, came up with the idea of hosting this conference. IGSA@ND attracted scholars, activists, community organizers, artists, and students from around the world who specialize in girl-centered work from a variety of perspectives, including race, religion, ethnicity, globalization, poverty, and sexuality. As such, the conference was a welcoming and generative site for intersectional scholarship. The organizers also signaled their desire to move beyond traditional conference formats by encouraging collaborative work and presentations of creative, visual, and performance-based projects. While most conference attendees were from Anglophone countries where girlhood studies is a well-known field, we also attracted participants from countries where that work is less visible, including Israel, Qatar, and Sweden. Foregrounding the conference's connections to the past as well as the future of girlhood studies, the keynote speakers were Ruth Nicole Brown, an African American feminist scholar who helped to launch Black girlhood studies, and Lynne Vallone, a white American feminist scholar whose work has been foundational to both girlhood and childhood studies.

Ruth Nicole Brown. Photo credit Matt Cashore for the University of Notre Dame

Lynne Vallone. Photo credit Barbara Johnston for the University of Notre Dame

Our motivation to co-edit this special issue initially came from an important set of tensions elucidated at IGSA@ND. During the conference, two incidents represented a call by Black and other women of color scholars to make IGSA less white and Western. First, a panel of women of color scholars withdrew from the conference. One member detailed in an open letter their objections to the conference poster's use of an image of a Black girl to advertise an event that was not predominantly about Black girlhood, as well as a photograph on the IGSA website that represented South Asian children from a colonialist perspective. Second, the IGSA Executive Committee held a general meeting with all conference participants to discuss the future of the organization and the protestors' open letter. A group of women of color, including Angeletta, at a table at the back of the large banquet hall, drew attention to the all-white Executive Committee seated at the front. The disparity in the room in terms of racial and ethnic representation was notable. That lunchtime discussion stayed with the three of us and shaped our editorial meetings powerfully as we talked about how to attend to the vital critiques made not just in that moment, but at other times throughout the history of girlhood studies.

Angeletta saw resonances of Black rhetorical practices and forms in the conversations that catalyzed this special issue. Our collective editorial work provided an occasion to see these practices as an organizing discursive for cross-cultural engagement, especially call-and-response. What once appeared

as a single entry point suddenly became a set of multiple imbricated points of departure as we began to look outward from, but remain in reflective conversation with, IGSA@ND. Traditionally, call-and-response is understood in its sacred context, but like all Black rhetorical practice, it has a secular tradition as well. The practice continues from the *griot* historian and storyteller in various continental African cultures and manifests across diaspora storytelling traditions. Most obviously, call-and-response is an interactive form of communication during which the speaker is accompanied by the hearers in the telling of a story or tale. The call is the speaker's utterance, and the response is the hearer's acknowledgement that they are listening, or are, at least, ready to listen. In the Black Church, the quintessential example is the preacher sermonizing to exclamations of "Amen" from the congregants. The "Amen" has layers of meaning ranging from "I hear you" to "I agree" and from "say more" to "wrap it up." In the context of this special issue and how call-and-response organizes our work, Geneva Smitherman defines the secular practice in her groundbreaking text, *Talkin and Testifyin*, as "stating and counterstating; acting and reacting; testing your performance as you go" (1977: 118). We focused on her definition since it reflects keenly the conversations at IGSA@ND. She notes that in cross-cultural conversations, call-and-response can be disconcerting since it may be interpreted as "interference" (Smitherman 1977: 118). This notion of interference is linked to the practice's dimension; it is an interruption, but an interruption that orients itself toward extending the conversation, redirecting it, and enhancing its impacts.

IGSA@ND Conference. Photo credit Barbara Johnston for the University of Notre Dame

Connecting to Other Calls for Change

Coinciding with the 2008 emergence of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, critiques have been continually registered concerning the field's whiteness and its Western focus, among other issues pertaining to girls' categories of identity. While reviewing the evolution of the field from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, Mary Celeste Kearney acknowledges that "less attention [has been] paid to class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and ... age [and] ... despite the growth of girl-centered research internationally, non-white, non-Western girls remain vastly understudied" (2009: 19). As well, Shakuntala Banaji writes, "[T]he one thing that would be more damaging than the shocking absence of Muslim and Hindu or Palestinian and Tamil or Saudi and Turkish girls in research ... would be work which circumscribed and caricatured their experiences, contexts, and words" (2009: 121). These and other early critiques of girlhood studies remain germane, especially as we set them against current debates, including the lunchtime conversation at IGSA@ND.

In 2018, in their introduction to the special issue based on the inaugural 2016 IGSA conference at the University of East Anglia (11.1), Victoria Cann, Sarah Godfrey, and Helen Warner acknowledge some of the challenges they and other organizers faced around inclusion. They write, "[I]t is useful to remind ourselves that when we are pushing against white supremacy and neoliberal imperatives, we must continue to reflect critically on our processes and structures as well as on our outcomes" (2018: vi). As a result, "we were struck by the fact that there is still much work to be done if girls studies is to fulfil its potential as a field of study that is both inclusive and reflexive" (xi). For example, the editors noted the dearth of presentations on class at their conference and in girlhood studies more generally: "[C]lass has become an almost near invisibility in contemporary girls studies despite the global trend toward economic hardship and the increased imposition of measures of austerity" (xii). Even more recently, Barbara Jane Brickman's 2019 special issue on queer girlhoods (12.1) reiterates Marnina Gonick's fifteen-year-old question: "Are queer girls, girls?" (2006: 122). Acknowledging how far girlhood studies has come since this question was posed, Brickman's point is still quite clear. As she says, "[M]uch of the scholarship remains distressingly unable (or unwilling) to dislodge girlhood from its (hetero) normative grounds" (2019: vii). Similarly, but from a different perspective, Sandrina de Finney, Patricia Krueger-Henney, and Lena Palacio's 2019 special issue editorial on reimagining girlhood in white settler-carceral states

(12.3) notes that “[one] of the rationales for this special issue is to address the limited interdisciplinarity in girl studies and Indigenous and race-radical feminisms, so as to center anti-settler struggles in girl studies” (ix).

We agreed quickly that our special issue should focus on, and participate in, other calls for greater inclusion in, and expansion of, the field. We spent hours talking about how girlhood studies must continue to grow, including through attention to religion, racialization, settler colonialism, gender, sexuality, nationhood, ability, and age, but also through less noticeable disparities such as discipline, methodology, format, and a still narrow version of what counts as girls’ culture, as girl, and as girlhood studies scholarship. These conversations were, as they should be, hard work, and added depth to our process. Our outward focus thus caused us to consider the question, “What can girlhood studies be?” Instead of seeking to limit its possibilities by asking “What is girlhood studies?” we began to imagine what boundaries might be removed to include more people, perspectives, and approaches. These conversations were part of our editorial process and required the practice of listening—a direct response to calls at the luncheon that space be held for these concerns. This special issue is not simply a collection of works presented at IGSA@ND. The discussion in these pages is evidence of our own and the contributors’ critical reflection on what a more inclusive girlhood studies might look like, what scholarship it might engage, and what relationships it might foster. Our hope in co-editing this special issue is to offer our own take on, as well as participate in, call-and-response, revisiting that lunchtime conversation as a way of hearing and responding to critiques, each other, and our contributors.

The African American rhetorical practice of call-and-response thus frames the work of this special issue in two major ways. First, as “stating and counterstating,” call-and-response is fundamentally and always communal and collaborative. It is a space of collective agreements reliant on equal participation in meaning making and production. Although girlhood studies research is always already intersectional because of its dual focus on gender and age as power-laden categories of identity, numerous presentations at the IGSA@ND conference broadened and complicated that approach by examining the complexities of girls, girlhoods, and girls’ cultures through the additional lenses of race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and/or ability. We also include here a mix of scholarly analyses and creative projects, historical studies, and those focused on the contemporary moment. Additionally, four book reviews highlight some of the inspiring research currently happening internationally in girlhood studies. The research

here represents varied methodologies and identity frames and includes non-traditional formats.

Tiffany Rhoades Isselhardt's "Sites of Girlhood" is a photo essay based on her presentation of the eponymous Girl Museum's project, its largest to date. Meant to put girls "on the map" of world history, this searchable database and digital map documents homes, monuments, towns, parks, and unmarked locations where girls have had an impact on history. Through critical reflection on both her conference presentation and Girl Museum's online project, Isselhardt's essay reveals not only the difficulties of researching girls' historical experiences and influences, but also those involved in defining and representing *girl*. Jordan Ealey's "*crushed little stars*: A Praxis of Black Girlhood" firmly "balances traditional scholarship and academic study with the artistic and creative lineage of Black women playwrights." She employs theories of Black feminism, affect, and Black performance to explicate how her play, *crushed little stars*, reimagines Black girl society through melancholy and sadness as a site of restoration and healing and of resistance and liberation. Through an integration of artistry and scholarship, Ealey activates Black feminism's political goal of self-definition and extends ethnographic and sociological perspectives to include the vantage point of performance. Desirée de Jesus's review of Aria S. Halliday's *The Black Girlhood Studies Collection* (2019) highlights one of the book's many strengths at "showing us ways of looking at, and seeing, Black girls" that expand girlhood studies through intersectional interdisciplinary approaches "that illuminate the prismatic complexities of Black girlhood." de Jesus's review includes chapter summaries and reference to interwoven themes. Courtney Cook reviews Marcia Chatelain's *Southside Girls: Growing Up in the Great Migration* (2015) as a captivating yet relatively unknown story of post-American Civil War geographic and social movement from the rural South to Chicago, Detroit, and Harlem. Cook notes that Chatelain balances beautifully the freedom of escaping Jim Crow with the still-present racism of the North to offer a unique narrative of migration and opportunity.

The second way call-and-response frames this special issue is in "acting and reacting" as a form of improvisation, with utterances patterned but neither formulaic nor predictable. The exchange is thus marked by an unspoken tolerance for multiplicity that renounces theory-based codification and that demands equal hearing while acknowledging that not all positions are equally valid. We recognize that expanding disciplinary perspectives is not limited to formats, but also includes the sites and spaces in which girls' agency, subjectivity, and experiences are explored. Toward that end, we

sought proposals from presenters who helped to make the IGSA@ND conference a point of departure for the continued growth of the field in subject matter. For example, Samantha White's "Black Girls Swim: Exclusion, Beauty, and Athleticism at YWCA Pools" uses archival research to examine the role of swimming in Black girls' sports and physical activity practices in Young Women's Christian Associations during the early twentieth century. Drawing attention to how Black girls faced discrimination at white-run pools, White reveals the limits of racial liberalism in the Northern part of the United States. Yet she also highlights African American girls' agency as they negotiated constructions of femininity and athleticism through practices of embodied respectability. Iris Chui Ping Kam offers a review of Ashwini Tambe's *Defining Girlhood in India: A Transnational History of Sexuality Maturity Laws* (2019) as a richly rendered, well-researched book that tackles the vicissitudes and debates surrounding the historical and contemporary regulation of sex and sexual maturity for East Indian girls.

While we aimed to highlight stories about girlhoods that are relatively under researched, we also aimed to expand familiar topics with innovative twists. For example, while critiques of Disney are not new to girlhood studies, Diana Leon-Boys expands the discussion to include Latina girlhood and ambiguity as represented in Disney Junior's animated series *Elena of Avalor* (2016–2020). Her article "Disney's Specific and Ambiguous Latina Princess: A Discursive Analysis of *Elena of Avalor*" uses theories of ambiguity and ambivalence to explore the series as an extension of Disney's avowed and disavowed dedication to the construction of Latinidad and can-do girlhood. As she demonstrates, the result is a fluctuation and flexible navigation between specificity and ambiguity in one narrative franchise. Although fandom is a dominant girlhood trope and practice in many cultures, in "Muslim Girlhood, *Skam* Fandom, and DIY Citizenship," Briony Hannell analyzes the place of faith in fandom and fandom itself as a vehicle for enacting citizenship. Using a feminist poststructural analysis while drawing on interviews and participant observation, she examines how Muslim fan-girls of the Norwegian teen web-drama *Skam* (2015–2017) articulate their desire for recognition and their creativity as cultural producers to engage in participatory storytelling that challenges popular representations of Muslim girls and generates new meanings of citizenship for minority youth.

Focusing on gender and schooling from an international perspective, Megan Connor reviews Heather D. Switzer's *When the Light Is Fire: Maasai Schoolgirls in Contemporary Kenya* (2018) as an eloquent exploration of Maasai girlhood and education. Connor notes that Switzer toggles deftly

between optimistic and critical analyses to tackle “girl-effects logic” while still honoring the hope that permeates Maasai girls’ future-oriented dreams of success. And, as noted above, while class was a prominent thread running through early girlhood studies in the UK, Maria Vogel’s “Disciplining Girls: Classed Femininity Norms in Swedish Secure Care” examines the self-regulating features of secure care through intersections of class and gender to bring renewed attention to class as a key category in the lives of girls. Using data from her ethnographic study, Vogel highlights how the goal of secure care is to produce self-regulating subjects. The ideal girl of such gendered middle-class discourse is not accessible to marginalized girls, however, since feminist movements focus primarily on middle-class women, leaving girls in secure care to shoulder the responsibility for resolving situations shaped by structures beyond their control.

While we hope that this special issue will spark unique conversations, we also know that we are contributing to the important work already happening in the field, including special issues of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* that have both expanded its boundaries and challenged its homogeneity. In addition to the special issues already mentioned, themed issues on disabilities and girlhoods (9.1), Indigenous girlhoods (9.2), tween girlhoods (11.1), girls’ activism (13.2), rape culture (14.1), geographies of Black girlhoods (forthcoming), and teaching girlhood studies (forthcoming), among others, continue to push girlhood studies in productive, important, and necessary directions. For these reasons, we have specifically concluded the article portion of this special issue with the call put forward by The Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia Group, Cindy Moccasin, Jessica McNab, Catherine Vanner, Sarah Flicker, Jennifer Altenberg, and Kari-Dawn Wuttunee. In “Where Are All the Girls and Indigenous People at IGSA@ND?” this group of Indigenous girls, community activists, and academics adopts a collective autoethnographic approach to share the Young Indigenous Women’s Utopia Group’s critical reflections on moments of inspiration and difficulty at the conference. From these conversations they invite deliberations on shifting the center of academic conferences from being “about girls” to being “empowered by, for, and with girls.” They offer suggestions to help future organizers of girlhood studies conferences negotiate the politics and possibilities of creating meaningful spaces and dialogues that not only discuss but also contribute directly to enhancing girls’ agency, empowerment, and decolonization. Our hope is that this special issue will add to the conversations in *Girlhood Studies* and beyond by offering different modes of access for talking about, teaching, and researching girlhoods.

Historical Contexts

The Coronavirus pandemic disrupted our work, and our editorial meetings began with filling each other in on how COVID-19 was affecting our teaching and research, family and social lives, mental health, and editorial duties. Like us, our contributors were affected by extra responsibilities and anxieties at their institutions and at home. These circumstances made meeting deadlines more challenging and occasionally generated palpable panic across communications between and among us and with our global contributors. However, the proverbial and literal headaches we endured were incomparable to the one that brought the importance of our work into high relief.

As we were preparing to receive the first drafts of the articles we had selected for this special issue, the US had its first death of a child to COVID-19—5-year-old Skylar Herbert. Skylar complained of a headache, so Eddie and LeVondria took their daughter to their pediatrician who diagnosed strep throat. When the headache persisted and Skylar's crying intensified, despite the doctor's recommendation that they treat her with antibiotics for 48 hours, her parents rushed her to the ER where she was admitted and where she tested positive for COVID-19. When Skylar's pain abated, she was released, only to return later that same day when extensive examinations found a rare form of meningitis and advanced brain swelling. She was placed on a ventilator. Two weeks later, after improvements declined, her parents made the heart-wrenching decision to stop life-sustaining measures. That was on 12 April 2020. It was not lost on us that Skylar was a Black girl.

The covidian moment collided with other traumatic stories of Black and other women and girls of color under siege. On 25 May 2020, Darnella Frazier forced the world to witness Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, kneeling on the neck of a prone and handcuffed George Floyd until he died. What should shock us equally is that this 17-year-old Black girl casually walking from the store, a daily habit in urban environments, instinctively knew that she needed to film the encounter, as she told *The Source*, because the "police most definitely would've swept it under the rug with a cover up story" (quoted in Ekpo 2020: n.p.). She knew of this potential not from some paranoia; she knew this because not even two weeks earlier, on 14 May 2020, the buried story of Breonna Taylor's killing surfaced in *The New York Times* (Bogel-Burroughs 2020). Taylor, 26, was shot on 13 March in Louisville, Kentucky, just after midnight. Jonathan Mattingly, Brett Hankison, and Myles Cosgrove, white plain-clothes Louisville Metro

Police officers, used a battering ram to force entry pursuant to a no-knock warrant. They believed Breonna's ex-boyfriend Jamarcus Glover and Glover's accomplice, Adrian Walker, were either storing drugs in or moving them through the apartment. Her current boyfriend, Kenneth Walker (no relation to Adrian), licensed to carry a firearm and fearing intruders who meant them harm, fired a warning shot which was met with a barrage of gunfire. Breonna was struck many times and died at the scene. In September 2020, Officer Hankinson was charged and indicted on wanton endangerment because bullets fired from his weapon entered the neighboring apartment of a white family. None of the three officers were indicted for Breonna Taylor's death.

As we finalized this special issue, we were yet again brought up short by racialized gendered violence, this time against Asian Americans, and in direct conversation with academic scholarship and global politics. In the wake of a South Korean Court ordering Japan to pay reparations to the so-called comfort women who were forcibly conscripted into sexual servitude during World War II, J. Mark Ramseyer, a corporate-law specialist in Japanese legal studies, published "Contracting for Sex in the Pacific War" online in the peer-reviewed journal *International Review of Law and Economics* (2021). Ramseyer declared that the women and girls, some as young as 10, had voluntarily contracted themselves as sex workers and that claims otherwise were "pure fiction" (n.p.). Jeannie Suk Gersen, the first Asian-American woman and the only ethnic Korean tenured professor at Harvard Law School, wrote a scathing critique of Ramseyer's representation for *The New Yorker* (2021). The penning of narratives that cast Asian women and girls as sexually permissive lingers in the ether of the recent killings of six Asian women in three Atlanta massage parlors and spas, where the confessed shooter's self-outing as a sex addict looms as large as the murders themselves. As a Canadian, Shauna also spoke of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls as a national crisis that has prompted public inquiry and mass protest movements across the country. According to the Office of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Indigenous women and girls represent 16 percent of all female murders yet comprise only 4 percent of the Canadian population. The lack of attention given to this on-going emergency by police and government is indicative of a deeply racist and misogynist settler culture.

These contexts were not just a backdrop to this special issue but bound us together as we expressed grief and concern as incidents of racialized gender abuse unfolded or continued to rage on. However, rather than viewing

these horrific events as a negation of girls' agency, another key interest for girlhood studies scholars, we understood them as part of the nuanced engagement that must continue to take place. Our call for expansion in the field, and our desire to join similar calls from others, is related directly to the continued need to pay attention to real world events that concern girls and girlhoods as they connect to theories and methodologies that promote social change. These horrendous incidents of systemic oppression point to the ongoing need for girlhood studies as a field and as a bridge between scholarship and the everyday lives of girls. From this perspective, girlhood studies is still as relevant and urgent as ever.

When we began our co-editorship as three strangers, we had no idea what to expect from this process or from each other, beyond, of course, the labor of soliciting manuscripts, wrangling reviewers, reviewing drafts, participating in long Zoom meetings, attending to administrative details, assembling articles, and writing this introduction. We had no premonition and could not anticipate how this seemingly straight-forward process would expand into surprising complexities. The debates about the IGSA@ND poster, the IGSA website image, and the conference luncheon resonated with and impacted us differently as a result of this broader context. In the organization and planning of this issue, there was always an urgency, but now there is also an anxiety—an intellectual reckoning with what, if anything, scholarship can really do.

This special issue is our collective recognition of the powerful interruption of the IGSA@ND conference and a response to those calls to action, as well as other calls that continue to emanate from the wider social world. Turning academic critique into call-and-response created a space in which progressive scholars and thinkers could see the results of their performance and design the next move collaboratively. Part of that next move, that next utterance, is this special issue, a call anew. Thus, our last call is to you, our readers, to engage with these ideas and to connect to a broader discussion that has already been unfolding in girlhood studies for some time.

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thank our reviewers for their careful reading of, and suggestions for improving, the manuscripts, as well as the other IGSA@ND conference organizers: Barbara Green, Danielle Green, Sonja Stojanovic, and Pamela Robertson Wojcik. Last, but not least, we feel profound gratitude for our contributors, whose research and creative work expands girlhood studies in provocative and necessary directions.

Special Issue Editors. Photo credit Special Issue Editors

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