Girls Seen and Heard

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According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* the adage, “Children should be seen and not heard”, which dates back to at least the 1400s, was really directive to girls and young women: “A mayde [maiden or young girl] schuld be seen, but not herd.” The belief that girls and young women should be quiet and demure changed from being a piece of commonplace knowledge to being a written precept in the 17th century when manuals of prescriptive behavior began to be written for a gender-specific audience. For example, in a Puritan manual for young couples, published in 1612, different advice was presented to each: the husband was supposed to “[d]eal with many men, [b]e entertaining, and [b]e skilful in talk” but the wife was instructed to “[t]alk with a few, [b]e solitary and withdrawn, and [b]oast of silence.” (cited in Zipes et al. 2005: 1417).

By the late 18th century this belief in the value of young women’s silence was connected specifically to social class and economic status and it was promoted by conduct book writers such as the Reverend James Fordyce in his *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and by Dr John Gregory in his *Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). These books were manuals directed specifically at young women about to enter society and what was virtually a marriage market; they were to be subjected, therefore, to close societal scrutiny. The logic behind these directives was that the behavior of young women—their physical stance, gestures, movements and actions—were a direct reflection of their inner beliefs, and this meant that their actions could be read allegorically, one-to-one, by onlookers (Reid-Walsh 2007). These ideals were promoted so thoroughly by commentators that by the early 19th century they became normalized and presented as natural behavior for young women (Yeazell 1991).

As the articles and reviews in this issue of *Girlhood Studies* attest, however, contemporary girls are not only being seen, but are actively involved in constructing and producing what needs to be seen (through photography and other visual forms). Also, they are making themselves

heard, through online participation, through narratives of their relationships with family members, and through participation in civic and other social movements. We might ask, of course, if this being seen and being heard is enough to counter the patriarchal expectations regarding young women and girls. Some Canadian studies, for example, suggest that stereotypical gender roles and traditional notions of femininity are still being reproduced in Canadian schools in direct contrast to an increased emphasis on education for active citizenship, which promotes the ideals that all should have equal access to the structures and systems of citizenship (Savoie 2005; Dillabough 2003). And of course many girls in the world are often neither seen nor heard. They are absent from schools, and indeed absent from any public landscape.

This issue of *Girlhood Studies* goes some way towards examining key concerns in the arena of being seen and being heard, ranging from looking at girls' organizations, to examining the ways in which girls negotiate family settings and personal relationships, from considering the role of the state in relation to girls and their education to exploring very specific girlhood projects in which being seen is the point. In so doing, this issue looks at the experiences of girls across a number of countries (the US, Canada, Norway, Mexico and Kenya); in different cultural contexts; and through the use of a variety of tools and methods including ethnography, interviews and focus groups, document analysis, object studies, photography and the production of curated albums.

Jessica Taft's article on girls' civic engagement in which she explores how contemporary U.S. girls' organizations envision girls' civic identities opens this issue of *Girlhood Studies*. As Taft highlights, there has been in recent years a growth in girls' organizations (such as the Girl Scouts organization) which aim to involve girls in community participation. In her article Taft uses document analysis and two ethnographic case studies to distinguish between what she describes as an emergent transformative approach and a more widespread, normative model of girls' involvement. Transformative organizations, as she notes, are ones that engage girls in a critical analysis of the conditions of their lives and encourage their direct involvement in social change, while normative organizations "rely upon a psychological understanding of girls' problems, imagine the public as a space of threat and as being full of barriers girls that must learn to overcome, and emphasize service over political action." Clearly these two approaches have different implications for

how girls participate in the public sphere. More than anything Taft's careful analysis offers a critical lens through which girlhood scholars and practitioners might assess the potential impact of these organizations on girls' civic engagement. As she points out, normative organizations focus on possible threats to the well-being of girls, from which they seek to protect them while transformative organizations "have a more sociological understanding of girlhood" in their emphasis on working with "the social and institutional forces" that help shape girls' lives. For Taft, then, if girls' organizations "are truly interested in encouraging girls' involvement in civic and political life" it is essential for them to "consider some of the more subtle messages about public space [that are] embedded in their discourses and practices".

The next article, by Lilia Soto, "The Preludes to Migration: Anticipation and Imaginings of Mexican Immigrant Adolescent Girls" focuses on the experiences of adolescent girls and the phenomenon of transnational families—defined as households located in two or more nation states. Through interviews with Mexican immigrant adolescent girls, Soto looks at their immigrant journeys and how they experienced migration long before they ever arrived at the U.S.-Mexico border. As she notes, their lives always seemed to be on the brink of migration. What is interesting about Soto's work is her approach to migration and her use of the intersections of gender and age as analytical categories. As she highlights, adolescent girls are uniquely situated within their family so as to have a different set of experiences from men, women, or adolescent boys, and she concludes that "adolescent girls...are crucial actors in the migration process" and that "[t]heir stories are essential for a full understanding of transnational families."

Like Soto, Melissa Swauger is also interested in girls and families. Swauger's article "Do (Not) Follow in My Footsteps: How Mothers Influence Working-Class Girls' Aspirations" looks at the subtle interplay of working-class mother-daughter relationships in the US. The study upon which her article is based includes data from twenty-one white and African American working class girls, and fifteen of their mothers from Southwestern Pennsylvania in the US. Her study reveals that the three dominant messages mothers model as they prepare their daughters for the future revolve around: attention to caregiving; living near family; and the importance of financial independence and security. The author looks at the ways these messages are gendered, class-based, and racialized.

Then Mari Rysst's article "Girls, bodies and romance in the light of a presumed sexualization of childhood" which draws on ethnographic fieldwork in two field sites in Oslo, Norway, looks at how ten year-old girls "do" gender and romance in the light of "junior" and "senior" (hetero)sexuality. Rysst is interested in the fact that the Norwegian media is worried about a presumed sexualization of children and the "disappearance" of childhood. This concern, however, as Rysst discovers in the interviews with the girls, is perhaps unwarranted: the article describes in detail what girls say happens between "junior" partners in a "going out with" relationship—one that is characterized by play and no physical intimacy—in contrast to a "senior" dating relationship, and these narratives illustrate that childhood (sexual) innocence does still exist.

Erin Anderson and Autumn Behringer, in their article "Girlhood in the Girl Scouts" focus on a longitudinal approach in their study of the Girl Scouts organization. In so doing they offer the fascinating methodological approach of using the badges and the requirements that have to be met by Girl Scouts wanting to earn them as a crucial index of the practices of the Girl Scouts. In so doing, Anderson and Behringer describe and evaluate the evolution of the organization over the past century from its original focus on traditional femininity to its contemporary "backing of a more androgynous socialization" of girls and young women.

Finally, Christine Oduor-Ombaka's article "Girls in Transition: Negotiating, Constructing and Re-constructing Girlhood after the 'Fall' in Rural Kenya" looks at the problems related to pre-marital pregnancy and childbearing as experienced in rural Kenya by girls in their adolescence. The author discusses some of the unique challenges adolescent girls must deal with when they are faced with pre-marital pregnancy such as, for example, emotional and/or physical violence and abuse; early marriage; expulsion from school; unsafe abortion; and poverty, and the harsh choices they often have to make. These issues in rural Kenya call out to government and communities to put into place the policies and programs necessary to empower girls with enough information and enough choice to enable them to make a healthy and safe transition into adulthood.

The Review Section of this issue of *Girlhood Studies*, in offering two contemporary examples of how girls and young women are very much being seen and heard, is meant to complement the articles and to

extend this theme through practical examples. Leanne Levy and Sandra Weber's photo essay "'Yes I am a mother and I am still a teenager': Teen Moms Use Digital Photography to Share their Views" is based on a participatory visual study, Project TEEN M.O.M (Mirrors of Motherhood), that they carried out with pregnant teenagers and young mothers in Montreal, Quebec. The essay poses the questions: "If we took the time to listen attentively and carefully to pregnant teenagers and teen mothers what would we hear? If we invited them to articulate their messages to the adults who interact with them, speak to those who judge them, and give advice to their peers, what would they say?" As part of the project, the young women participated in an innovative activity during which they curated their own photo albums. Critical to this work is the idea of using visual culture to interrogate and construct new identities of young motherhood.

Then Ashley Remer, in "Girl Museum: a Global Project" describes the ways in which this virtual museum ensures that girls' culture is archived and showcased. Established in 2009 and involving an advisory group of girlhood scholars from the around the world, this online museum is a radical feminist project about girls (and girlhood), for girls and with girls—particularly in relation to the ways that girls are being seen and their voices are being heard as they conceptualise, plan and curate online exhibitions.

Lena Palacios' book review "'Smile Now, Cry Later': Chicana and Mexicana Homegirls Trespassing/Reinforcing Linguistic, Gendered, and Political Borders" is a reading of girls being seen and heard in the context of resistance. In reviewing Norma Mendoza-Denton's book *Homegirls: Language and Cultural Practice among Latina Youth Gangs*, Palacios enthuses that "poring over Mendoza-Denton's book is well worth the effort for scholars dedicated to the emergent, interdisciplinary field of Girlhood Studies, especially for scholars who understand the high stakes involved in being poor, racialized, criminalized, non-heteronormative, an immigrant/refugee (perceived and real), and a girl."

Girlhood Studies Seen and Heard

The six month period between May and October 2010 must surely be regarded as a hugely commendable milestone for girlhood studies. It

began with the United Nations Girls Initiative in Education (UNGEI) global conference on education and equality held in Dakar in May. Focusing on three key themes—quality in education, gender-based violence, and poverty—the conference culminated in the Dakar Declaration, which in and of itself calls for the greater visibility of girls’ experiences. We reproduce it here in full.

Dakar Declaration on Accelerating Girls’ Education and Gender Equality

We, the participants of the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative global conference “Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality”, assembled in Dakar in May 2010, call for urgent action in support of girls’ rights to education, gender equality and empowerment opportunities.

The rights of girls and women are guaranteed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Beijing Platform for Action.

In Jomtien in 1990, we established the Education for All Framework; in Dakar in 2000, we strongly endorsed the need for targets for education, especially for girls.

Since then, there has been considerable progress: about 22 million more girls enrolled in primary schools from 1999 to 2007, and gender gaps in primary school enrolments have narrowed in many countries.

Despite the progress that has been made, poor quality of education, extreme poverty, structural inequality and violence against girls continue to jeopardize the achievement of the education- and gender-related Education for All and Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

Powerless and poor girls make up the most disadvantaged group in education. Achieving equity in education will entail putting in place a rights-based empowerment framework that will target the most vulnerable and transform power hierarchies in learning spaces, communities and policy structures in order to give poor and vulnerable girls a voice and ensure that their right to quality education is sustained.

Gender equity is at the centre of transformative, quality education. Attention to the physical, social and academic aspects of multiple learning environments is necessary to enhance opportunities, especially for adolescent girls, and to move beyond basic education. Recognition of teachers as professionals, supported by gender-responsive curricula, is likewise key to ensuring gender equality.

Because poverty is both structural and multidimensional and has differential impacts on girls and women, interventions for girls’ education

must cover multiple sectors. Education policies, strategies, plans and budgets must all be gender-responsive.

Gender-based violence remains an obstacle to the full achievement of girls' rights to education. We call for effective strategies and for enforcement of legislation and policies to ensure safe and secure learning environments for girls. Protective and innovative learning opportunities must also be created for children and young women affected by HIV and AIDS and for those in armed conflict and emergency situations.

We envision a world in which a special initiative for girls' education is no longer needed – a world in which all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming their societies, so that gender equality becomes a reality.

This same time period also saw the launch of Plan International's annual report, *Because I am a Girl: Situation of Girls in the World: Urban and Digital Frontiers* on 22 September 2010; an invitational symposium at the University of Winnipeg from 15 to 17 October called *Girls, Texts, Cultures*; the conference at State University of New York College at Cortland, *Reimagining Girlhood: Communities, Identities, Self-portrayals*, from 22 to 24 October; and the *Girlhood Exchange* Symposium at McGill University, co-sponsored by the Faculty of Education; the Institute of Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies; and Girls' Action Foundation. (The latter is a Canadian-based NGO and umbrella organization with over 200 partner girl-focused organizations representing 60,000 girls.) This has truly been a productive few months in the history of girlhood studies.

These events and initiatives highlight, in particular, the ways in which "girlhood seen and heard" is also about girlhood communities, alliances and partnerships being seen and heard. As Brown (2008), Brown and Gilligan (1992), Holland et al. (1998) and many other feminist scholars working in the area of Women's Studies and Girlhood Studies highlight, partnerships, alliances and collaborations are central to advancing issues related to girls' lives. These approaches range from memory work to feminist collectives, from memoir-writing and using other tools for exploring the critical links between the lives of girls and young women (Haug 1987; hooks 1994; Kuhn 1995; Spence and Solomon 1995; Davies and Gannon 2006; Moletsane et al. 2008; Kirk et al. 2010), to the use of girl-method (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2009) which, along with participatory approaches, acknowledges the significance of historicity and looking back (to look ahead) as well as the notion of intergenera-

tionality as a type of partnership or alliance (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2002). The feminist project of work *with* girls, *about* girls and *for* girls suggests other types of collaborations and partnerships, ones which call for age-sensitive, place-sensitive and power-sensitive methods and approaches which aim to be decolonizing (Smith 1999), participatory and transformative (see Burt and Code 1995; Lykes 1997; Lykes and Conquillon 2006). At the same time, and as argued elsewhere (Mitchell et al. 1998), one of the greatest barriers to deepening an understanding of girls' lives and simultaneously contributing to addressing issues of equality, is the fragmentation around girls' lives in particular and the existence of gaps in policy more generally. Unless scholars, practitioners and girl-focused communities come together, girls' lives will continue to be fragmented. Thus, rather than parcelling out what needs to be done about girls' lives according to education, social policy, and the law, for example, scholars, policy makers and practitioners should be striving to work in more holistic ways with girls at the centre of such endeavours. Studying and advancing work in the area of girls as cultural producers, and simultaneously advocating for a strong voice for girls and young women in policies and practices related to their lives calls for scholars and girl-focused community organizations to form alliances and strategic partnerships (Garrow 2005). Such alliances are critical if girls all over the world are to be seen and heard.

And then, to add to the visibility of girlhood, we recently learned that *Girlhood Studies* was awarded a Highly Commended Certificate by United Kingdom Association of Learned and Professional Society Publishers (ALPSP). Attached to the award was the citation: "This journal demonstrates ambitious and high quality publishing which aims to reach beyond purely academic audiences to have real impact in this area of study".

Even if it has taken us over six centuries since that belief about the value of having girls seen but not heard was formulated, girlhood studies is certainly being both seen and heard.

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