Girls and their Health

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It has been forty years since the feminist classic on women's health and sexuality, *Our Bodies, Our Selves* was published. Available first in 1971 and then produced commercially in 1973 (revised, re-issued and, as of October 2011, in its ninth printing), *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, published by the Boston Women's Collective, was regarded by many girls and women in the 1970s and 1980s as the book that changed their relationship to their own bodies and to their own health. And indeed, it set the stage for a revisioning of the questions: "Whose bodies?" and "Whose voices?" in health research, and could be regarded as a precursor to such works as Sandra Harding's (1991) *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*.

All these years later, it might seem unnecessary to devote a whole issue of *Girlhood Studies* to the theme of girls' health. However, if we start thinking from the perspective of girls' lives, a range of new issues concerned with their health emerges. In the original *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, HIV and AIDS was not an issue, and even in the later editions of the 1980s, no one was predicting the impact the pandemic would have on the lives of girls and women across hundreds of thousands—even millions—of geographic and social contexts.

Then in the last five years there has been all that work, too, on the Human papillomavirus vaccine (HPV) to help prevent cervical cancer, and the highly controversial campaigns to vaccinate girls before they become sexually active. Another concern about girls' health issues can be seen in relation to food security in rural Ethiopia and in other parts of Africa where adolescent girls have been found to experience more insecurity than boys even within the same household. Hadley et al. (2007) and Belachew et al. (2011) for example, found that adolescent girls had twice the likelihood of reported illness and up to seven times more difficulties with activities because of health issues and fatigue. As is highlighted in this issue of *Girlhood Studies* there are concerns related to girls' sexual and reproductive health that are new and some that are

not so new: all situate girls' health within crucial sites of study, analysis, and social action.

For drawing together this collection, we thank our guest editor, Katie MacEntee. What this issue of *Girlhood Studies* attests to, in particular, is the significance of the multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary space occupied by the subject of girls' health. One of the major objectives of this journal is to contribute to interdisciplinary dialogue in relation to girlhood, and in this issue we see how richly this plays out, with work converging across such areas as Anthropology, Public Health, Water Resources Management and Engineering, Education, Feminism and Women's Studies, and Literary Studies. As the editors of *Girlhood Studies*, we like to think that this interdisciplinary space that surrounds girls' health is itself part of feminist history-in-the-making.

References

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