

Ethical Practice and the Study of Girlhood

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The field of girlhood studies is framed by theories that conceptualize girls and young women on the one hand as distinct, yet diverse, groups whose members have been systematically discriminated against but also, on the other, as capable social actors who influence and are influenced by the worlds in which they live. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the differences between these two frameworks, the starting point of girlhood studies should be research and engagement with girls, for girls, and by girls that aim to draw attention to their literal absence and voicelessness in initiatives that affect their lives. Despite this strong social justice orientation and commitment to the advancement of girl-centered research based on appropriate approaches, the relationship between girlhood studies and the field of ethics remains under-articulated and under-researched.

While there is a range of research that takes up feminist and childhood ethics, ethics in girlhood studies is a relatively new area of inquiry. There are extant feminist girl-centered interventions that have implications for the development of a girlhood studies ethic. See, for example, the work of Moletsane et al. (2008) with girls on gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS in South Africa. Not only did this research contribute to mapping the relationship between African feminisms and the study of girlhood in this region but the authors moved beyond simply listening to and recording the perspectives of girls on sensitive topics to actively addressing potential harm that might be incurred through their participation in research. Here we see an additional layer, as it were, of ethical practice in research with a vulnerable population of girls and young women. Additionally, the research of Mitchell et al. (2016) on embodiment and visual ethics with disabled girls in Vietnam provides valuable insights; through a photovoice project, the authors examined issues of anonymity in relation to the practice of using conventional protocols (such as not photographing faces and blurring or



otherwise obscuring them) for protecting participants' identities with girls whose bodies may carry other visible markers of their identity. By exploring the role of embodiment in relation to research ethics, this study brought to light some of the ethical complexities of using participatory visual research with girls who are marginalized or who belong to hidden populations.

Virginia Held has argued that different moral practices should be developed and applied to specific spheres of human activity and experience in what she termed "a division of moral labor." In her view, ethical approaches should align as closely as possible to the actual "contexts in which we live and in which our experience is located" (2007: 158). This volume is an attempt to carry out such moral labor.

Why an Ethics of Girlhood Studies?

I offer this special issue as the beginning of an essential conversation about the need for an ethics of girlhood studies. I invite readers to consider some questions that extend into practice, policy, and theory. What are the unique features of a girlhood studies ethics? Research with girls necessarily invokes a range of legal and ethical obligations. How might the changing socio-political forms of girls' lived experiences and the representation of these inform the meaning of constructs framed as being *in the best interest of the (girl)child* and in *doing the most good and least harm*?

Persistent forms of marginalization alongside concerns about the physical and mental well-being of girls globally necessitate the development of girl-responsive ethical frameworks. The aim of this themed issue is to produce new imaginings and understandings of ethical being, rights, otherness, power, agency, and responsibility in relation to the study of girlhoods. As allies of girls, we are also compelled to move beyond our role as "self-appointed moral guardians" (McRobbie 1991: x) and question the ethics of that collaboration to arrive at some consensus about how girls and adults may work together, and about how adults might gain the right to represent girls and their experiences (O'Toole 2012).

The impetus for this special issue follows the ethical turn that has shaped the social, political, and economic shifts that reflect the nuanced theoretical and practical research approaches in the social sciences and humanities more generally over the last twenty years. As I write, current occurrences underscore the fierce urgency of developing an ethics of girlhood studies. As the European refugee crisis continues, forcibly displaced Syrian girls and young

women face terrible obstacles related to their sex, gender, and age. While sexual exploitation—many are forced into engaging in survival sex—is a growing concern for female refugees, Syrian girls are being increasingly forced into early marriage. In Turkey, which has seen a large influx of displaced people, the constitutional court voted in July 2016 to annul a criminal code that punishes those who commit sexual acts with anyone under 15 years of age. Human rights organizations warn that this judicial change will increase the number of child brides taken by Turkish men.

In the face of marginalization, however, girls have continued to push back. The media images of girls and young women of the Black Lives Matter participating in protests across North America reflect the movement's grounding in young feminist activism. On 11 July 2016 in Baton Rouge, Leisha Evans stood on the front lines, face-to-face with armed riot police. On 3 July 2016, at Toronto Pride, Black Lives Matter held a sit-in, an event led primarily by young queer women of color involved in student organizing.

Given that the lived realities of girls involve both vulnerabilities and agency/resilience largely related to intersecting factors of age, sex, and gender, girlhood scholars need to better articulate what kinds of ethical judgements and codes of conduct should prevail when we are working with girls. Also, by interrogating the ruling morality (read adult-centric, patriarchal logic) we can help girls to dismantle oppression and, in the process, we may also better understand their lives. Narratives that articulate a coherent image of girlhood as a traumatic space and present “[young] femininity as a state of injury” (Marshall 2007: 707) are one avenue, yet we must move past such accounts to include narratives of agency and thus bridge the gap between the at-risk and the can-do girl particularly since many girls are both victim and agent.

Situating Girls in Ethical Discourses

Part of looking forward is to identify previous gains. Two recent issues of *Girlhood Studies* have contributed to advancing the ethical study of girlhood. The Special Issue, “Disability and Girlhood in Transnational Contexts,” aimed to interrogate how hierarchies of power operate to constitute girls with disabilities as both vulnerable and lacking. This newly-formed allegiance between girlhood studies and disability studies is explicitly ethical in nature. Pointing to how intersecting hierarchies of power operate to marginalize girls with disabilities, these contributions to this journal are further calls to action to “negate forms of domination by connecting stories of disabled girls within and across geographical borders” (Erevelles and Nguyen 2016: 5).

The ethics of research into indigenous girlhoods, self-governance, and responses to gender-based violence demands the immediate attention of the academy and offers multiple avenues of exploration including the ethics of recognition, truth-telling, and decolonization, as well as indigenization. The introduction by Lindquist et al. to the Special Section on Indigenous Girls, “Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths: Shaping Indigenous Girlhood Studies” reflects the ongoing relationship-building between indigenous communities and researchers. This issue provides a platform for the “robust expressions of decolonial and Indigenous perspectives on coming of age resurgently that [honor] Native traditions, communities, and languages after years of settler, colonial, hetero-patriarchal violence, and oppression” (2016: 5). Such declarations of Indigenous understandings of knowledge, narrative, intergenerational relations, and gender have important ethical implications for participatory, girl-centered methods as well as institutional research ethics in general. Close scrutiny of the complexities produced in research with Indigenous girls may help to elucidate the ways in which academics with markers of privilege (age, race, education) can become more closely allied to Indigenous girls.

What Do Girls Say and Do?

The creative processes girls employ to navigate and resist dominant systems of power might involve their “contesting adult constructions, scaling and demarcations of space in material and symbolic forms, and (re)appropriating materiality, space and technology to their own ends” (Jones 2012: 141). Our adopting this perspective as researchers could lead us towards more ethical practices since it requires that we explore the types of questions girls ask, the actions they take, and the tactics they use to do this sort of resistance work, every day and on a larger scale. For example, Sandra de Finney examines indigenous girls’ everyday practices of resurgence and contestation of “their positioning as invisible by physically, spiritually, and symbolically (re)occupying the places that hold their ancestral connections as First Peoples” (2016: 29).

The Role and Limitations of Institutional Ethics

Researchers are bound by codes of conduct set forth by the research ethics boards (REBs) of institutions that operate typically as an extension of larger

regional governing bodies established for research with humans. The emergence of institutional policies is based on the admirable aim of protecting participants against incidents of abuse and mistreatment as a result of being involved in research activities. As research ethics has developed, it has “generated its own discursive systems, meanings, and representations of the world, evolving into a particular sort of institutional discourse” (Halse and Honey 2007: 339) that produces particular truths and subjectivities. Rooted in bio-medical models and positivist worldviews, procedural ethical protocols and the type of participants and research relationships they dictate, such as securing parental consent prior to involving girls in research, can be markedly different from the everyday situations encountered by researchers. In 2002 Helene Berman and Yasmin Jiwani produced a report on the status of girls focusing on manifestations of gender-based violence and legislative, policy, and programming responses to violence prevention in Canada. The report called for the need to re-consider standard parental consent practices when we are researching with girls who are minors (under the age of 19) and who may be victims of violence, particularly family violence, as otherwise, they may be “too afraid to be in a situation of potential disclosure” (54). It is clear that practical, contextualized ethical approaches that consider the needs, desires, and complex social positioning of diverse participant groups are needed. The range of human relationships that constitute the research encounter is not navigable with reliance only on a set of regulatory standards.

There has been considerable scholarship dedicated to the development of ethical work with children (see Alderson and Morrow 2011) and REBs have reflected this shift in thinking about research with children as involving specific ethical dilemmas and questions such as the role of local gatekeepers and the use of alternative consent practices like visual consent forms. Children are usually considered a vulnerable population and are given more protection, so more robust professional responsibilities are required, including direct access to support services should the well-being of the child be jeopardized, and requirements to report to authorities any discoveries of abuse, neglect, or harm. Women, especially those with curtailed capacity for autonomy because of circumstances related to gender, such as those in abusive relationships, are also given special consideration by REB policies. Over-protectionist attitudes that would exclude research participation are discouraged while particular attention is given to recruitment practices so that such participants are not further marginalized. However, in institutional ethics discourses, girlhood is given cursory attention at best. For example, the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2, a 218-page document providing guidelines for

research in Canada, contains only two instances of the word “girl(s)” (2014: 204); both are found under the glossary entry for gender. The conceptualizations presented in institutional ethics discourses, which are linked to societal conceptualizations of the nature and boundaries of girlhood, are limiting and must be challenged.

Connecting Girlhood Studies and Ethical Practice: What about the Girl?

Despite the legacy of gender and age specific issues faced by contemporary girls and the urgent need for responsive research theories and practice, the girl as a focus area of moral philosophy or feminist ethics is notably absent. Additionally, feminist ethics such as care-based approaches “make visible the moral significance of values held primarily by women, which historically have not been regarded as fully moral” (Peter and Morgan 2001: 4). To some extent feminist theorizing has also explored considerations of young people as a marginalized group (see Minow 1986) but, surely, “[t]o talk of ‘children’ is to talk of a complex and densely varied class of people and to gloss over all that difference” (Jones 2001: 175). As noted by Erica Burman, “a focus on gender illuminates a key way of interrogating the limits of prevailing models of childhood by exposing the implicit, assumed understandings that underlie them—including how the state of childhood is feminised, while the activity of developing is portrayed as culturally masculine” (2008: 179). The girl has been addressed by feminists through topics such as motherhood, domesticity, and gendered socialization. However, girlhood is often considered in terms of the implications for understanding womanhood rather than as an experience and topic of ethical inquiry in its own right. By highlighting the ethical issues raised through the inherent power relations involved in researching with girls, Morris-Roberts attempts to “make explicit and challenge injustice, exclusionary practices, and oppressive behavior ... specifically along the lines of age, gender, and compulsory heterosexuality” (1991: 148). Mahowald (1995) describes the effects of normative gender roles on adolescent girls who suffer from anorexia and explores the disease as a space of simultaneous aspiration towards and rejection of the stereotype of the adult female body.

As Caroline Caron recently pointed out, while girlhood studies is largely informed by feminist methodologies, and feminist ethics are of great significance here, there remains a fundamental ethical failing in terms of account-

ability towards girls. She states, “If the ethics of accountability has been widely discussed and debated in the context of research *about* women, *for* women, and *with* women ... the same cannot be said of our field” (2016: 126, emphasis in original). This neglect has persisted despite the earlier identification of such gaps by feminist scholars like Cheshire Calhoun who says,

Women moral philosophers with feminist sensibilities have consistently challenged the tendency in much moral philosophy to begin theorizing, either implicitly or explicitly, from a picture of moral persons as fully formed adults, who are not located in egalitarian societies, who do not experience long periods of dependency on others, whose moral life is not hedged with contingencies, whose pleasures and passions are not constitutive elements of their moral life, and for whom reason giving is unaffected by the narratives we tell of our lives or by the dynamics of social interaction (2004: 7).

Scholars of ethical theorizing in childhood studies have made similar conclusions. In his book, *Ethics in Light of Childhood*, John Wall provides many examples of young people’s complex and diverse ethical thinking on issues such as death, disease, voice, war, empathy and so on. “Strangely, this better understanding of children as ethical thinkers has had little to no effect on ideas about ethics itself. On the contrary, what it means to think in an ethical way is, if anything, understood today in an especially adult-centered way” (2010: 168). In a subsequent publication, Wall explains this oversight by scholars of philosophical ethics as being rooted in the treatment of children as objects of rights, care, and responsibility rather than as ethical subjects. He suggests that the goal is not to understand how ethics can be applied to children, for that is an adult-centric view to begin with. Rather, it is to explore “how a fuller understanding of children’s lived experiences in the world can transform basic ethical assumptions and norms, regardless of whether one is considering particular issues concerning children or not.” More comprehensive theorizing would thus “rearrange the ethical landscape around experiences such as age, temporality, growth, difference, imagination and creativity” (2013: 69).

Such a list should necessarily include sex and gender since girls and young women bring unique voices to creative and cultural expression and also interact with social spaces in particular ways. To illustrate, Mia Lövhelm’s research on young Swedish women’s personal blogs indicates that this new media genre (of which the majority of producers and consumers are young women) allows for the forging of new types of ethical spaces in which “reflections and negotiations on values and norms of subject behavior and interpersonal relations are evoked, formed in interaction between media

producers, texts, and users.” Lövheim further explains that the blogs of the young women could “also be seen as performative and public spaces: that is space to extend, differentiate, and negotiate social norms and cultural values; voice issues of common concern; and contribute to forming public opinion” (2011: 350). The implications for ethics are apparent.

Overview of this Special Issue

The purpose of each contribution is not to eradicate the discomfort created by ethical dilemmas but to dwell within it as a form of experimental inquiry into pre-established values and modes of understanding. The first article in this issue, “Sharing Images, Spoiling Meanings? Class, Gender, and Ethics in Visual Research with Girls” explores the ethical tensions between girls’ self-expression, gendered identities, and photographic representation in participatory visual research. By working through a series of ethical dilemmas, Janet Fink and Helen Lomax offer a critical reading of a photograph produced by and depicting British working-class girls. The authors highlight the ways in which institutional ethics are insufficient to address the complexity of consent and anonymity involved in the production and dissemination of photographs in a hyper-connected world marked by rapid proliferation and where images can become divorced from the original research context and the intentions of the participants. Fink and Lomax probe fundamental questions about what it means to make visible the perspectives of girls and support their capacity as creative, agentic beings while minimizing highly unpredictable stigmatization that can be damaging to their future selves. They point to the role of images in the sexualization of girls and to anti-poor biases in Britain that lead to girls and their families being victim-blamed while the systemic causes of pervasive poverty are overlooked. The authors present a combination of care and representational ethics as a way of thinking through how girls’ images should be viewed, or not viewed at all.

Moving from instances of particular girls to general understandings, Mar Cabezas and Gottfried Schweiger, in “Girlhood and Ethics: The Role of Bodily Integrity,” provide a theoretical inquiry into the fruitful connection between the capability approach and bodily integrity—the basic right to physical security, self-determination, and positive self-relations—as a means to better assess and support the well-being of girls everywhere. Extending feminist scholar Martha Nussbaum’s work on gender inequality, Cabezas

and Schweiger propose a flexible normative ethical theory as a way to measure the specific, yet often invisible, threats to the rights of girls in a way that foregrounds the intersectional effects of gender and age. In contrast to many existing top-down definitions of girls' rights, such an approach necessarily includes the perspectives of girls themselves. By conceptualizing bodily integrity as a central capability, or the freedom of girls to be or do something that is of value to them, the authors argue for universal standards to assess "a society's level of justice towards girls and to show how an unjust situation, after the application of some social measures, has changed or improved." This ethical threshold supersedes given cultural practices and expectations girls to which girls are subjected and can be used in the development and implementation of policy by our paying attention to the often occluded experiences of girls. The application of the concept of bodily integrity to the development of policy also serves to ensure that damaging assumptions and rhetoric about girls are not replicated in policy.

The third article, "Narratives of Ambivalence: The Ethics of Vulnerability and Agency in Research on Girls in the Sex Trade," explores the ethics of how language constructs reality for girls involved in the sex trade in Montreal, Canada. Alexandra Richard-Guay and Myriam Denov articulate the ways in which language directly influences the thoughts, speech, and social action of and towards specific groups. The complex and ambivalent narratives of the participants illustrate how they can be simultaneously oppressed and liberated by sex work, which, in turn, highlights the limits of academic and legal language in capturing the girls' lived experiences. Enabling girls to tell their own stories raises numerous questions about the ethical and political nature of narrative formulation in research and the underlying issues of power and what knowledge gets produced and accepted as truth. The words of the girls also point to the ethically suspect conduct of our adhering to binary representations of sex workers as either victims or agents. They point out that girls are never simply at risk but also exercise savviness and generative capacities. The authors offer an ethics that is embedded in social context that recognizes the ways in which multiple identities, agencies, and constraints may operate simultaneously within a given moment.

Ronda Zelezny-Green's article, "Can You *Really* See What We Write Online?" Ethics and Privacy in Digital Research with Girls," addresses ethical practice in conducting research using cellphone technology with black girls from Kenya. Her study aimed to increase cellphone access of secondary schoolgirls in Nairobi to the educational content of ebooks. By devising a novel ethical framework to guide the research, she "worked to capture pos-

sible ethical reflections on the interactions between and among the people, technology, and their contexts of use.” Zelezny-Green’s ethical deliberations focus on the permissibility and implications of the surveillance of the girls’ online activities, with reference to the book titles they accessed, and the monitoring and recording of their online messages. The outcomes of this research suggests that the process of consent is layered and relational, and Zelezny-Green lays down significant and long overdue groundwork for building intergenerational solidarity with girls across geographic locations.

Emily Anderson looks at the ethics of UNICEF’s advocacy for girls’ education on Instagram in “The Ethics of Representing Girls in Digital Policy Spaces.” Using a policy frame analysis, she interrogates “how girls’ images and lived experiences are used to frame policy goals through new media and how researchers engage with image-intensive new media.” An ethically-informed reading of UNICEF’s Instagram usage reveals how a girl affected by epidemic illness, violent conflict, and/or natural disasters is “positioned as a symbolic representative” of tens of thousands of other children affected by the lack of educational opportunities. UNICEF’s imaging of girls “provide[s] a face, a name, and a testimonial to legitimate its work.” The proliferation of these photos via social media leaves little space for the expression of the identity of these girls beyond the social categories of schoolgirl or daughter, prevents adequate assent and the right to withdraw participation, and blurs the boundary between public and private online spaces. Anderson rightly calls for revised ethical protocols for research involving images of girls on digital media.

Emily Bent, in “Making It Up: Intergenerational Activism and the Ethics of Empowering Girls,” provides a detailed look at the relational and political landscape of working with girl-activists at the UN as a member of a partner organization. She recounts significant experiences with some of these girls and contemplates the ethical dilemmas associated with empowering girls in a typically disempowering environment run, necessarily, by adults. The strategic inclusion of girls in the often hostile political arena of the UN often functions to regulate the girls and to discipline their voices. Bent grapples with her uncomfortable position of wanting to amplify these voices alongside being tasked by the UN to ensure that the girls are not too loud, too inflammatory, or too boisterous. Given the delimiting spaces of the UN, Bent offers this work on intergenerational activism as a “radical blueprint” for ethical girlhood studies research.

The last of the articles is by Heather Fitzsimmons-Frey whose innovative application in “An Ethical Approach to Encountering Nineteenth

Century Girls,” of contemporary girl-centered methodological frameworks to the words and artifacts produced by Victorian girls, particularly accounts of at-home theatricals, invites us to reconsider how we conduct research ethically across historical eras. By using feminist understandings of voice, participation, solidarity, and concepts of time/space, she “disrupts mainstream versions of nineteenth-century history that systematically exclude or ignore the voices of girls regarding their socio-political world.” The girls are positioned as experts in their own lives, yet the researcher has her own expertise, access to information, and theoretical tools that the Victorian girls did not. Despite the remove of time and location, the words of present-day girls illuminate possible meanings of dramatic activities of Victorian girls. Fitzsimmons-Frey demonstrates that ethical approaches are not bound to the present, but may be extended into the past to better understand the lives of long-deceased girls.

Two book reviews round out the issue. Veronika Novoselova reviews *Becoming Women: The Embodied Self in Image Culture* by Carla Rice. She points out that Rice’s accounts of girls’ “embodied transitions to womanhood convey complex and ambiguous understandings of gender, race, sexuality, disability, and other dimensions of identity” that destabilize dominant narratives of, for example, girls’ experiences of puberty. Marnina Gonick and Susanne Gannon’s *Becoming Girl: Collective Biography and the Production of Girlhood* is reviewed by Dayna Prest, who makes clear the ways in which collective biography, a new ethically-oriented methodology, prompts researchers to “reflect deeply on questions of difference and the ways in which these manifest in the research process.”

Emergent Themes

Common threads of understanding link the different perspectives and disciplinary standpoints of these articles and reviews. The notion of embodiment figures prominently. It has been argued that “raising children is an intensely Foucauldian process of disciplining the body in complex geographical patterns. In other words, it is a process of convincing children what is right and wrong to do in particular spaces” (Jones 2001: 176). For girls, this process involves gender-specific moralistic instruction regarding what is right and wrong for bodies to do, wear, or be in a given space (Mitchell and Rentschler 2016). Since the body is the basis for many categories of difference, it is central to girls’ struggles in and against existing

sociocultural structures whether it is gendered socialization, schooling, reproductive rights, sexual desire, standards of beauty, negotiations of difference, or discipline and the policing of the female form. “Human bodies are by definition vulnerable” and the “vulnerable human body is also the provocation for an ethics insofar as it elicits a response.” However, “each unique body will live its vulnerabilities differently” (Murphy 2011: 577–578). As proposed by Mythili Rajiva, “becoming for girls is a process shaped, at least in part, by experiences/memories of sexual violence (either their own or that of other girls) that created horizons of violence for them, whereby they are regularly aware of trauma as a possible future” (2014: 152). Girls live through vulnerabilities at very particular intersections of age, gender, race, class, and so on.

To stand with girls is to recognize the perspectives and experiences we share with them but also the ways in which that relationship is marked by girls’ profound alteriority. Although half of us were girls, “children’s worlds are irretrievably alien to adults: bizarre (to us) ‘other’ worlds, closed off by the ‘dark of reason’ that limits the adult gaze” (Jones 2001: 174). There have been significant attempts to partially bridge this gap by accessing girlhood through methodologies related to memory and memory-work (for example, Ntombela and Mashiya 2009). Although there are often slippages between what is experienced by and expected of girls and adult women, even when we can momentarily return to girlhood through such explorations, the ever-shifting social, political, and economic forces make the worlds of today’s girls only partially knowable to us as adults. While different or other from adulthood, girlhood can still be engaged with and responded to. An ethics that fails to account for embodied relations “ultimately loses its capacity for flexibility, for openness to others, and for being part of a common and shared reality that opens up possibilities for the future” (Fielding 2011: 520). Within academia, this process is, however, challenging. Academic books and journals are still for the most part largely inaccessible to girls (two notable exceptions are the *LEARNing Landscapes* journal that regularly includes content from young people and the *Girlhood Studies* Special Section on Indigenous Girls (2016) that includes personal pieces written by Indigenous girls and young women). Textual expressions are delineated by certain scholarly standards and maintaining space for girls’ narratives within these confines means continued efforts to dismantle their western-centric academic styles and conventions. As Fink and Lomax contend in this volume, contemplating our relationship to girls helps researchers to explore the ways in which ethical dilemmas are affective, visceral experiences so that “we [may] con-

tinue to invest significant emotional labor in managing the different anxieties generated by this experience.”

A second concept is that of (in)visibility. It is no coincidence that the prevailing language used to describe the inclusion of marginalized groups in research reflects the socio-physical notions of being seen and heard. This volume aims to “make visible the continuities, changes, and challenges of girlhoods” (Forman-Brunell 2010: xii). The authors make visible the methodological choices and steps involved in ethical girlhood research. Fitzsimmons-Frey, for example, uses textual analysis, Fink and Lomax employ visual methods, Bent recounts the narrative and experiential happenings of girl-activists, and Cabezas and Schweiger map the application of theoretical constructs to real-world situations. The authors also seek to make visible the otherwise invisible—girlhoods that are underrepresented, ignored, or silenced, whether it is the perspectives of girls in the Global South as conveyed by Zelezny-Green, Anderson’s policy analysis of girls’ appropriated images, or those otherwise located on the periphery as with Richard-Guay and Denov’s work with girls in the sex trade.

The deliberately disruptive practices of girls are particularly important given that girlhood is often a site where selves must be made invisible to prevailing hegemony to succeed in life. As Emily Bent points out, the presence of girls is called for in a political arena like the UN. However, the expressions of these girls are actively suppressed should they become too disruptive to the status quo, particularly when they embody stereotypically masculine behavior such as being loud or challenging authority. In Signithia Fordham’s ethnographic study of girls in a predominantly African American high school, she notes that being invisible and “dislocating oneself from the image of ‘those loud Black girls’ who refuse “to conform to standards of ‘good behavior’” (1993: 22) is one strategy for survival and academic success. To be in power and capable of affecting the system is often evidenced by being the most visible. However, silence can also be an act of defiance, a refusal to play the game, so to speak.

Alongside the strategy of making visible, ethical work is presented as a deeply reflexive process through which new ways of being are imagined and enacted. Each of the articles alludes to the poststructuralist separation of morality and ethics. The perspectives of the authors recall the writing of feminist scholar Saba Mahmood who extends Michel Foucault’s theorizing. In her reading of Foucault, for example, Mahmood writes,

Foucault distinguished ethical practices from ‘morals,’ reserving the latter to refer to sets of norms, rules, values, and injunctions. ‘Ethics,’ on the other hand, refers

to those practices, techniques, and discourses through which a subject transforms herself in order to achieve a particular state of being, happiness, or truth [E]thics is a modality of power that, [according to Foucault] ‘permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being’ . . . in order to transform themselves into the willing subjects of a particular moral discourse” (2012: 28).

Since a primary concern of this present volume is coming to understand the lives of girls and young women who must navigate various and often competing norms regarding what is seen to be their proper behavior including their expressions of desire and sexuality, presence in public and private spaces, and participation in civic life, articulating the relationship between ethics and morality is important. There is a persistent moral panic about, for example, the sexualization of girls by digital technology (Dobson and Coffey 2015). This gender-based fear also takes on specific facets depending on the location of the girls in question and whether they are of color, poor, or from an urban or rural locale.

As is clearly apparent, this special issue offers only a starting point for thinking about girlhood studies in conjunction with ethical practice. Overall, the work presented here highlights advancements in theory and methodology but also draws attention to the vital work that still needs to be done.

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Note

1. <http://www.learninglandscapes.ca>

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