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Abstract

Girls' Voices is a collaborative research project involving multi-tiered community-and university-based mentorship and a Young Women's Studies Club (YWSC) at Hoover High School in San Diego, California. Since its inception 15 years ago, the Club meets weekly and engages in activities that address the life circumstances and coming-of-age issues faced by its membership. Thirty-five to 45 students (95% female) attend weekly. They are a widely diverse population: new immigrants from various parts of the globe, and mostly lower-socioeconomic status Southern Californians of color (Mexican, Asian, and African-American). English is not the first language for several of the members.

Girls' Voices is a year-long participant-observer and oral history project conducted by key mentors with nine Club members. All activities were shared with interviewee's ideas, opinions and creative projects noted. At semester's end, one-on-one oral histories were conducted. These asked the girls to reflect on their: roles within their families; ethnic and racial identities; support networks, educational goals, non-school activities, and the impact of the YWSC on their self-perceptions and choices. This study adds considerably to the extant literature on immigrant daughter's experiences, girls of color coming of age, and the impact of multi-tiered mentoring within a feminist, race-conscious, and social justice framework.

The activities are aimed at: improving self-esteem, encouraging and modeling the completion of high school and college applications, embracing healthy living behaviors (recognizing and avoiding relationship violence; understanding LGBTQ issues, sexual awareness; breast cancer knowledge; eating habits that promote energy and health and avoid eating disorders), and creative activities that foster knowledge of women's history, self-expression, appreciation of positive role models, honoring cultural traditions, and collective efforts among club members. The study, and the multi-tiered mentorship central to its implementation, offers insights into the value of a feminist collaborative mentoring.

Keywords: Feminist mentoring; oral history; multiculturalism

Introduction

Girls' Voices is two-year long collaborative research project imbedded within the on-going activities and dynamics of the Young Women's Studies Club (YWSC) at Hoover High School in San Diego, California. Eight participants self-selected to: participate in all weekly Club activities with their mentor/researchers, engage in a 90 minute one-on-one interview with same, and be part of a follow-up focus group at the end of the research period. Our study explored issues germane to girls coming of age: multiculturalism, ethnic/racial and social class identities, familial and affectional relationships, self-esteem, the influence of feminist mentoring, and guided goal setting.

We utilized the extant scholarly literature on girls negotiating young adulthood, oral history techniques and feminist methodology, pedagogical praxis, and analysis. Through these we offer insights into empowering mentoring and the value of learned self-respect for young women. Also examined in detail is the process of goal setting, both educationally and in one's life course. The organic nature of the *Girls' Voices* collaborative research project also evokes insights into feminist collaboration and the value of mentoring for mentors. To understand the genesis and approach to our study, a thorough understanding of the YWSC itself is essential, and it is where we begin.

Club History and Present Format
The Origins and Mission of the Young Women's Studies Club (YWSC)
      The Department of Women's Studies at San Diego State University (SDSU), the oldest in the nation, began an innovative collaboration with nearby Hoover High School in San Diego in 1995. Hoover High is an inner-city public school located in City Heights with students from diverse ethnic, racial, international, and linguistic backgrounds (twenty-three different languages are spoken there, and newly arrived students come from sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia, Central America, China, Russia, and the Middle East). Slightly over 2,000 students attend Hoover High. The ethnic composition of the school is as follows: 69.6% Hispanic; 14.1% African America; 12.3% Asian; 2.7% White, with other ethnicities all under 1%. Students who speak English fluently are 46.6% of the population, with English Learners at 36%. The languages of English-learners are (in order of predominance): Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Khmer/Cambodian, Arabic, etc. (California Department of Education [CDE], 2010a).
      According to the "California Adequate Yearly Progress Report for 2009," Hoover fell below both the California Department of Education's English/Language Arts and math proficiency requirements (24.8% and 34.6% respectively); yet, it improved in English/Language Arts, math, and participation rates. In 2008-09 there were 680 students in Grade 9 but only 400 in Grade 12. This significant drop-off correlates with the school's 70% graduation rate, up from 63.6% in 2004/05 (CDE, 2010b).
      Hoover High is situated within City Heights, an urban community that has benefited considerably from the vision and economic resources offered through the City Heights Educational Collaborative (CHEC). While the YWSC has flourished within this context, its growth, programming, and resources have been self-generated. The link began through an SDSU "Life Cycles of Women" class that visited Hoover to discuss girls' issues. The Hoover students' enthusiasm remained after this short-lived effort waned. Fostered by a former Women's Studies student, then teacher at Hoover, the YWSC took its current form in 1998 (Cayleff, 2010).
      The Mission of The Young Women's Studies Club at Hoover High School is to empower young women and men eager to create a more just and feminist world. Through myriad settings, members participate in cultural events, discussions, creative activities, and self-exploration. At the center are issues of gender equity, honoring racial, ethnic, and geographical diversity among all social classes, acceptance of diverse sexualities, and promoting girls' and women's' self-esteem, healthy choices, and future goals (Cayleff et al., 2010).

Collaboration and Mentoring as Central Components

2

Key to the YWSC is multi-tiered collaboration that bridges the academy and the community. This non-linear organization includes Club members, SDSU undergraduate and graduate mentors, a graduate student coordinator, Hoover High teacher/advisors, a Women's Studies professor and Club advisor/mentor, and the administrations of Hoover High and Women's Studies at SDSU. Twelve to 15 undergraduate Women's Studies students, through community-based service learning credit imbedded in their year-long *Women in American History* courses, supplement young women's and men's knowledge of feminist issues and introduce topics unfamiliar to them; all foreground Women's Studies. Experimental, feminist, multicultural, and non-dominant pedagogical practices are utilized to foster inclusive social change in a community-based classroom. Leadership roles are exchanged between/among seven levels of participants (described above) (Cayleff & LaGrotterria, 2007).

Five major core programs and activities inform all that the Club does: *healthy choices/healthy living; developing life building and work skills; education: succeeding in school and preparation for post-secondary education; promoting the arts in education among underserved populations;* and *promoting cultural understanding* (Cayleff, 2010). Through cultural competency training, mentors are asked to critically examine their own privileges, reject the notion that there is one "right" experience or way of being, become effective listeners, offer non-judgmental encouragement and suggestions that are reasonable and promote self-esteem, and embrace the impact of their roles as mentors and role models (Cayleff et al., 2010).

The *Girls' Voices* project is a research endeavor that evolved from within the YWSC; this participant-observation and oral history study was made possible by the extant successful operations of the Club and the trust built amongst students and mentors. Before discussing the specifics of our project, we first provide an overview of relevant scholarship and provide a description of the significance of the multi-tiered mentoring upon which the Club depends.

Literature Review
Public Education and the Gender Gap

Scholarship in the field of education and feminist pedagogy indicates a dearth of institutional support in educating young women. This is particularly true of young women of color and/or of low socio-economic status who face complex ethical and cultural issues and needs (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 1992, 2008; James, 1990; Warren-Sams, 2001). Formal education has consistently failed to provide young women with the attention and interactions with faculty and staff necessary to foster academic success and personal growth. Conversely, male students tend to interact more with faculty and adult peers, are praised more, called upon more often, and tend to dominate classroom discussions (AAUW, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 2008; Weiss & Nicholson, 1998). This often results in girls falling behind their male classmates in key areas such as mathematics, science, and technology.

Compounding this situation is what Rosser (1998) has coined the chilly climate of the classroom. The curriculum in formal education is based within a gender-biased context that employs sexist language with a marked absence of the achievements, experiences, roles, and societal contributions of women (ibid; AAUW, 1992; Andrews & Ridenour, 2006; DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2007; Einarsson & Granström, 2002; Miller

& Swift, 1976; Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2008; Vahed, 1994; Weiss, 2001). As the landmark American Association for University Women report (1992) and its follow-up (2008) found, the classroom curriculum can "strengthen or decrease student motivation for engagement, effort, growth, and development through images it gives students about themselves and the world. When the curriculum does not reflect the diversity of students' lives and cultures it delivers an incomplete message" (AAUW, 1992, p. 3). As such, young women feel distant, indifferent, unengaged, and alienated from the classroom. This in turn leads to reduced participation, learning, and educational or personal development.

The classroom is not the only place that disadvantages young women. This atmosphere pervades school halls, cafeterias, and surrounding grounds. Adolescence and coming of age is a difficult time for all young people, but it can be particularly difficult and damaging for young women (Cavallo et al., 2006; Simmons, 2009). These combined forces are compounded by ubiquitous media images of "perfection" defined as White and slender, overtly sexual, and bound by familial duties. This confluence of pressures induces a marked increase in the aggression between young women (AAUW, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Vail, 2002). One can speculate this is because girls are encouraged to perceive their female peers as competitors for male attention and consequently critically examine the behaviors, appearance, and choices of other girls. Additionally, a lack of cultural competency that values traditions and ways of being dissimilar to their own can fuel hostilities between girls. The insidious nature of such covert aggression affects young girls on a psychological level and is just as harmful as physical intimidation and violence. As researchers note, it poisons the climate of the school and has a tremendous impact on grades and the self images of girls who are the victims of this aggression (Ophelia Project, 2007; Vail, 2002). Recent scholarship illustrates a likely association between being bullied and increased suicidal thoughts (Kim & Leventhal, 2008).

While these shortcomings in educational settings affect most, if not all, young women, young women of color and/or those from lower social economic status face additional hurdles. Just as sexism is embedded in language and interactions, so, too, is racism and classism (Boler & Zembylas, 2003). In addition to dealing with covert and overt racism, young women of color have fewer interactions with teachers and administrators than their White peers, and their dropout rates are higher compared to male peers of the same ethnic identity (AAUW, 1992, 2008; Boler & Zembylas, 2003; Nwora, 2005). Similarly, young women from low-income families encounter increasingly severe obstacles in formal education as socioeconomic status affects access to resources and education more than any other variable (AAUW, 1992, 2008; Maldonado, 2008). These young women face lower teacher expectations, limited school and personal resources, lack of adult support and modeling, and amplified familial demands resulting in increased dropout rates (ibid; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2010).

These factors result in deleterious self-esteem and an educational achievement gap between female and male classmates. Young women do not emerge from school with the same levels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, or sense of empowerment as do young men (AAUW, 1992; Block & Weiss, 1993; Jhally & Kilbourne, 2000; Rosser, 1998; Sadker et al., 2008). As such, young women may lack resiliency and healthy identity development, future career or educational choices may be limited, access to means for self-actualization

may be closed off, and, most threateningly, young women may become subject to unhealthy, abusive adult relationships (Brown, 2004; Maldonado, 2008; Vail, 2002).

The YWSC at Hoover High School: Girls of Color and the Power of Mentoring

       The debilitating factors at play within the American public school system exist for the female student population at Hoover High. As a student body that is overwhelmingly of color, these students also face adversity and barriers resulting from racism and poverty. These institutionalized oppressions devalue students' skills and talents and fuel peer pressure to reject success by White standards (Warren-Sams, 2001). While the City Heights Education Collaborative seeks to ameliorate these disparities, Hoover High students come primarily from low-income families and neighborhoods which, more than any other variable, affects access, resources, and educational outcomes (ibid; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2010). Taken together, these young women face particularly severe obstacles.

       Mentoring programs, however, like the Young Women's Studies Club at Hoover High, have proven to be effective in working against these negative impacts (Berkey, Franzen, & Leitz, 2000; Brown, 2004; DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002; Johnson, 2007a; Johnson, 2007b; Maldonado et al., 2008; McCluskey, Noller, Lamoureux, & McCluskey, 2004). Stable adult support and modeling through mentoring are strongly linked to setting educational and career aspirations while fostering self-esteem and self-actualization (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Majoribanks, 1986; Trice & Knapp, 1992). Mentoring programs offer these positive alternatives and provide mentees the ability to cultivate the behavioral and social characteristics necessary to become successful students and future adults (Coleman, 1988; Lee & Cramond, 1999; McCluskey et al., 2004; McLearn, Colasanto, Schoen, & Shapiro, 1998; Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). For students from these demographics, mentoring programs offer them a chance to shift away from and offset the negative impacts of the various intersecting social oppressions they face; they help strengthen confidence, academic success, and healthy identity formation.

       The YWSC attempts to fill in the gaps in formal education. By utilizing theoretical and practical applications found in decolonizing pedagogy (Tejeda, Espinoza, & Guiterrez, 2003) social justice and feminist pedagogy (Cohee et al., 1998; Fisher, 2001; hooks, 1994; Keating, 2006; Rosser, 1998) and classroom equity (Ng, 2003), the YWSC works to ameliorate these inequities in formal education. Rosser (1998) notes that feminist pedagogy, such as that utilized by the YWSC, has the potential to empower girls insofar as "overcoming sexism as a barrier to learning and including more information about women in the curricular content are ways to begin to warm up the chilly climate" (p. 42). Through employing inclusive language (Rosser, 1998), highlighting the achievements and contributions of diverse women (AAUW, 1992; Sadker et al., 2008), and engaging with the Club's young women outside of a hierarchical power construct, the YWSC helps to educate, equip, and enable these young women to have a strong sense of self and make informed, empowering decisions about their futures.

Club Structure and Pedagogy

To fully situate our research within its proper context, details of the format, content, and internal organization of the Young Women's Studies Club are essential. Over time, a system of multi-tiered mentoring (previously described) has proven best suited for achieving the Club's goals and activities. At various points in the Club's history, Club officers have also been elected from and by the high school students, in response to both necessity and interest. The high school students' needs and desires are at the core of all decision-making and meeting planning; their interests, feedback, and ideas are continually elicited and become the genesis of the Club's weekly topics. This non-hierarchical approach to mentoring allows the Club's format to be both flexible and responsive.

The Community-Based Service Learning (CBSL) mentors play the most vital role in the Club's success. Each semester, seven to 12 undergraduate mentors selected from two upper-division women's history classes are given the opportunity to receive course credit for their CBSL time (a 20 hour commitment). Their participation is entirely elective, often motivated by identification with Hoover students, altruism, or their consideration of future career goals (for example, social work and teaching). Once mentors are selected from the pool of applicants, they are trained in cultural competency (Cayleff et al., 2010) and introduced to the basic principles of mentoring.

Their mentorship training is oriented towards realizing four distinct goals. First, mentors are informed that their role is to engage the students in discussing their lives, problems, and concerns, while simultaneously encouraging their individual agency and ability to make positive choices (Johnson, 2007; Maldonado et al., 2008). The second objective is to raise students' self-esteem and inspire high aspirations and expectations for themselves (Maldonado et al., 2008). The third goal is to act as positive role models, both personally and in their capacity as young adults obtaining a university-level education (ibid). Finally, mentors must help students question stereotypes about women, feminism, and gender roles, as well as exemplify what it means to be strong, self-respecting, and socially aware young adults.

Both the creative and thematic activities of the Club are structured around four major core programs. The first emphasizes the students' abilities to make healthy choices and achieve healthy living. Often, guest speakers from the local community volunteer to visit the Club and speak about topics such as breast cancer awareness, maintaining healthy relationships, and making responsible and informed decisions about sexual activity and health. The second goal offers practical skills for working life by presenting workshops on budgeting, dressing for job interviews, and resume writing. The third focus reiterates the importance of education and helps the students prepare for post-secondary education by taking them on campus tours of local universities, allowing them to attend a college class, and guiding them through the process of college applications. The fourth objective seeks to counteract under-funded arts education by giving students opportunities for self-expression through zine-making, analyzing and creating posters on popular media constructions of women, and quilt-making. Finally, cultural understanding is promoted with speakers on "Understanding Muslim Women" and "Immigrant Daughters and Family expectations" and so on, given by Women's Studies faculty.

The Club meets once a week during the high school students' half-hour lunch period throughout the school year (excluding holiday breaks and days reserved for the

high school's standardized testing exams). The professor-advisor (Cayleff), graduate student coordinator (Wheeler), and undergraduate mentors arrive at the school with pizza and supplies for lunch. This ritual serves two purposes: students are able to come to the meetings directly from class without waiting in long cafeteria food lines, and, most importantly, students and mentors are able to build solidarity and friendship by sharing a meal and chatting informally. Each meeting is carefully pre-planned around a variety of topics relating to female empowerment and social justice issues. The collaborative efforts of the professor-advisor, graduate student coordinator, and undergraduate mentors work to realize these goals.

Though attendance rates fluctuate slightly, an average of 30-40 high school students attend each meeting: The (paired) undergraduate CBSL mentors divide their attention between six to eight high school students. The vast majority of Club members are female (96-98%), though several males do attend regularly and participate; likewise, the majority of mentors are female, with an occasional male. Because time is so precious, each meeting is meticulously planned in order to maximize mentoring efficacy. Occasionally CBSL mentors assist in the preparation for a meeting's main activity, but ordinarily they focus predominantly on developing bonds with Club members by sharing activities, listening, and talking with them throughout the meetings. They also offer both support and advice. Mentors face several challenges as they interact with Club members; prime among these are language barriers and coaxing shy students to speak more freely. Despite these difficulties, the Club member's end-of-semester reflections report that their relationships with their mentors aid them in decision-making, raising their self-esteem, and recognizing the commonalities they share with other young women. In short, the Young Women's Studies Club sustains its long-term success by utilizing a multi-tiered format that distributes the emotional work of mentoring, the week-long preparation for meetings, and the rewards of both amongst many individuals (Caldwell et al., 2008; Johnson, 2007a, 2007b).

Yet, the structure allows for spontaneous shifts: one meeting featured a partial screening of Jean Kilbourne's film *Killing Us Softly* (1979), a film that depicts mediated violence against women. It was followed by a discussion of these portrayals. Afterward, a Club member suggested to her CBSL mentor that they should design their own feminist, woman-positive advertisements. The Club's activity schedule was adjusted in order to implement this activity; this highly successful approach encouraged the students' participation and acknowledged the inherent worth of their opinions and ideas, thus fostering members' sense of empowerment.

The multi-tiered collaborators ensure that the Club's activities are designed and carried out in ways that meet a specific set of pedagogical criteria. The pedagogical approach to the Club is deeply informed by feminist and social justice perspectives. These emphasize the student's *active* role in obtaining, interpreting, and contributing to current bodies of knowledge (Golden, 1998; hooks, 1994; Tejeda, et al., 2003). Discussions also facilitate the multiple, co-existing factors of difference and oppression that may be present in the students' lives (Ng, 2003). These pedagogical concepts include: a) skill-building and/or learning through critical discussion; b) opportunities for mentor-student bonds to flourish; c) the furthering of students' self-esteem, self-awareness, and empowerment; and d) opportunities for students to express and expand upon their feelings and opinions, often through creative or interactive activities.

During the semester in which we conducted our research, the students almost unanimously preferred creative activities where they could talk freely with their mentors, as opposed to more structured meetings that asked them to speak topically about self-esteem issues or goal-setting. For example, they enjoyed creating quilt squares that reflected themes of empowerment through both their intersecting identities and friendship and support networks. Also popular was the "Role Models" project, in which students were given one-time-use cameras and asked to take photographs of female role models in their communities. The cameras were then returned to the Club, the film developed, and the students created large posters and collages of their role models. They presented these to the Club with great enthusiasm.

This ongoing and successful pedagogy was key to our collection and interpretation of data for the *Girls' Voices* research project. It was the efficacy of the Club's current organization that allowed us (a group of four graduate students, a community activist, and a Women's Studies professor, separate from the undergraduate CSBL mentors,) to assume our role as researcher/mentors with relative ease and acceptance. The project and its emphasis on feminist pedagogy and use of oral history and qualitative methodology are described more in-depth in the following sections.

Girls' Voices as Feminist Pedagogy and Oral History

Girls' Voices utilizes feminist pedagogy, oral history, and guided mentoring to multi-cultural high school girls. It narrates the life experiences of eight self-selected teen girls ages 14 to 18 who are Club members. Of the eight interviewees, two *self-identified* as Caucasian, one as African American, one as Black and White (bi-racial), and one each as Hispanic, Latina, Vietnamese, and European (Uzbekistan). During the semester, three graduate researchers, a community activist, and their professor (Cayleff) engaged in weekly activities with the Club members and took hand-written notes on the discussions. At the end of the semester, a one-on-one interview was conducted utilizing audio recording. Specifically, the girls were asked to reflect on their: sense of agency, roles within their families, ethnic and racial identities, support networks, educational goals, non-school activities, and the impact of the Club on their self-perceptions and choices. Historians Armitage and Gluck (1998) write that the importance of conducting oral history is that it not only advances knowledge, but it can also empower people and lead to social change: a core value for Women's Studies (and other feminist) scholars (Zimmerman, 2002). *Girls' Voices* attests to this: it narrates the participants' life experiences and fosters a sense of empowerment by allowing them to speak for themselves, something the participants spoke to in interviews (Einerson, 1998). The project also bridges the academy and the community (Zimmerman, 2002), another central goal of Women's Studies.

Researchers and student participants worked collaboratively in the "telling" of the girls' lives. They collaborated in activities that provide insights into participants' world views, self-definitions, aspirations, and concerns as culturally diverse inner-city residents. Yow (1997) emphasizes the significance of this interactive process between interviewer and interviewee, noting that oral history is co-produced by both. She further explains that reflexivity is now standard for oral history since it upholds the idea that interviewees are experts on their own lives and experiences (Einerson, 1998; Pillay, 2005). This process is valuable for the participants, the graduate student and community-activist mentors, and

ultimately, to scholarship that looks at these issues. Gluck (1977) notes that when researchers interview marginalized individuals and attempt to write them into history (a feminist methodology in itself), participants gain by seeing their lives as worthy of recording, something perhaps particularly valuable for teen girls of color and/or lower socio-economic status.

Feminist standpoint epistemology also informs the methodological and theoretical framework of this project (Brooks, 2007; Hill Collins, 1990; Kirk & Okawawa-Rey, 2010). It is based on the use of participant interviews and observations from the perspective of women's experience. It places women at the center of the research process and upholds the validity of their knowledge based on their own life experiences. Brooks (2007) corroborates this and states that standpoint epistemology is "a fusion of knowledge and practice. It is both a theory of knowledge building and a method of doing research--an approach to knowledge construction and a call to political action" (55). Hill Collins (1990) popularized this claim that women's experiences and their knowledge further sharpens attention to social inequalities and injustices. *Girls' Voices* embraced these methods: it supplemented the participant's knowledge of girls'/feminist issues through a feminist pedagogical approach to empowerment.

Central to this methodology founded in oral history and standpoint epistemology is the incorporation of direct respondent quotations, in this way allowing participants to speak for themselves rather than us speaking for them (Alcoff, 1991; McCarthy Brown, 2001). While there is a larger abundance of mentoring research that looks at quantitative rather than qualitative analysis (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002), there is an increasing amount of research that has incorporated such methodologies. Maldonado et al.'s (2008) analysis of a Big Sister/Little Sister program relies heavily on the inclusion of Little Sisters' quotes obtained through structured interviews. Rather than projecting meaning onto respondents' answers, lengthy quotes are employed to investigate participants' subjective perceptions of the importance of the mentoring program. Similar qualitative methodological frameworks have been used to: investigate girls' perception of empowerment through music-focused schools (Apolloni, 2008), determine effective practices in female leadership programs (Denner, Meyer & Bean, 2005), record changes in perceived mentee-mentor relationships from youth to adolescents (Liang, Spencer, Brogan & Corral, 2008), and analyze girls' narratives to identify interrelated relational processes between female dyads of mentees and mentors (Spencer & Liang, 2009).

Our use of feminist standpoint epistemology and oral history contends that these narratives pertain to those girls we interviewed. They can be instructive about the experiences of other people, but they cannot be assumed to be a universal "truth." Standpoint epistemology asserts that an individual's multiple social locations create identity and life circumstances, but this is not to generalize irresponsibly. Their narratives do resonate with previous scholarly findings and informal conversations and written reflections with Club members, mentors and faculty over the years. The narratives of these young women reveal themes of inclusion/exclusion, issues of race, and feelings of empowerment that are reflected both in the literature (see above) and informal communication with young women not in the *Girls' Voices* Study, but active in the YWSC. While these narratives are not quantitative using a large sample, they do offer insights into the experience of young women within this community and the perceived positive impact of this specific mentoring program. Such an increased awareness offers a

more accurate and authentic understanding (Brooks, 2007) of what it may be like for a young women at Hoover High School today. It also highlights ways in which other mentoring programs in similar settings may prove effective and influential.

In order to conduct our research, we followed Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. Particular care was taken as the participants were minors and parental consent was necessary. The consent forms were readily available to students and their parents in both English and Spanish; the Hoover High principal also assented since the Club meets on-site. Participants then made a commitment to attend a minimum of eight Club meetings and to be interviewed one-on-one by their graduate mentor at the end of the semester (with incentives of two movie tickets and a gift certificate to Subway offered). Potential risks included possible feelings of discomfort for the participants (a risk of all qualitative research involving interviews) but were outweighed by potential benefits such as a heightened sense of self-awareness and self-esteem, something confirmed by participants.

A Collaborative Endeavor

As discussed in previous sections, the Club's success depends upon multi-tiered mentoring and activities designed to empower members. Hence, the researchers served as mentors to the participants, who were not separated from their friends or other Club members during the semester. Data was collected through conversations and interactions with the girls over the course of fall semester 2009. This data was supplemented by one-on-one interviews with individual girls at the end of this semester. In addition to the five researchers previously mentioned, the graduate student coordinator (Wheeler) and another Women's Studies student participated in the project; involvement varied from six months to two years. Data was co-collected, co-discussed, and all researchers' voices and contributions were valued equally. All seven authors worked on the collection and interpretation of data, secondary research, writing, and editing. This process involved numerous meetings, phone calls, and e-mails, facilitated by leadership that emerged within the group.

Results and Discussion

The following section presents the results of our project. Before delving into those, we want to add that, in an attempt to truly reflect the participants' voices, we conducted a focus group in April 2010. Five of the eight participants were able to participate in a discussion where we asked them to elaborate on issues such as: the impact of the Club, possible barriers to future goals, how their social locations affect their lives, and how they perceived their experiences as participants in *Girls' Voices*. All five participants said they personally benefited from their participation. Ayesha and Shanelle explained that the one-on-one interviews were particularly helpful in prioritizing their lives and allowing them a means of discussing issues important to them. Ayesha said that the interview "was kind of like an opening for me, so it was like a relief kind of to say my thoughts and stuff." Esperanza pointed out that the researchers' mentoring was particularly important. She said:

> I got to talk, and I felt really good about it. She's [her mentor/interviewer]
> like a good friend, umm I talked before with other friends like that, but

then they don't understand really, because since they are my age, she's older so she knows how I feel because she's been there before.

After 10-plus weeks of interaction with the girls, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group designed to ensure our findings reflect the participants' voices, we collectively combed through notes and transcriptions to present findings that, true to oral history and feminist methodology, relay the life experiences and insights of the eight participants. Below we group our findings into three themes, quoting the girls often to prioritize their voices. The first time each girl is mentioned, we include their ages and races/ethnicities; variations reflect how the girls' self-identified. The girls are identified by pseudonyms that reflect their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Amidst the results, we briefly discuss our findings and conclude with directions for future research.

Support Systems and Relationships

Scholarship clearly indicates that girls with strong support systems reap many benefits (Bandura et al., 2001; Berkey et al., 2000; DuBois et al., 2002; Johnson, 2007a, 2007b; Lee & Cramond, 1999; Majoribanks, 1986; Maldonado et al., 2008; McCluskey et al., 2004; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Trice & Knapp, 1992). Our participants, with their close ties to family and friends, reflect this trend. Unlike the Euro-American psychological development models that stress individuation and separation (Allen & Stoltenberg, 1995; Allison & Sabatelli, 1988; Blos, 1967; Bray & Harvey, 1992; Daniels, 1990; Gnaulti & Heine, 2001; Hoffman, 1984; Mahler, 1968; Rice, 1992; Steinberg & Silverman, 1986; Tamar et al., 2006), none of the girls in the study sought to distance themselves from their familial contexts. All of the girls said that family and friends were crucial to their well being and pointed to female role models as particularly influential. Mothers and extended female kin (aunts, grandmothers, sisters, godmothers for instance) were noted throughout the interviews, though mothers emerged primary among these. This emerged most clearly in their poster boards on female role models and their creative endeavor to create quilt squares that reflected their personhood and values.

For example, as Shanelle (African-American, age 14) succinctly puts it, her female family members are always "willing to help." Though female family members prove to be especially important for the girls, family in general is highlighted as extremely crucial; Esperanza (Latina, age 15) stated, "We're always together. We're close-knit. We don't have anything to hide from each other. […] Without family, where would I be?" Mercedes (Hispanic, age 17) echoed this statement, "I'm really close with them [family], I'm like a daddy's little girl…me and my mom are really close, she's like my sister." Even more poignantly direct, Ayesha ("Black and White" [biracial], age 14) stated:

> Most important is having a healthy relationship with your family…because without a relationship without your family, you basically have nothing…how can you have a relationship with someone else if you can't have a relationship with your family?

These affectional bonds are strengthened by time spent together and reciprocity; Ayesha continued, "We [her family] spend a lot of time together." This importance of familial

reciprocity is mirrored in statements from many of the girls. As Shanelle stated, "[my mom] helps me when I have problems at school…and they [family] help me with my homework, and I help my family out by, like, doing things that are helpful for them."

There is not always a clear distinction between the instrumentality of family and friends. As Lizbeth emphasized, (Euro-American, age 15), "I value family first and foremost, but after my family comes my friends…besides my family, my friends will always be there for me." Concomitantly, there is a marked conflation between the use of the terms "sister" and "best friend" with many participants likening their best friends to their sisters or family members, or describing family members as best friends. Melynda (Euro-American, age 16) referred to her sister as her best friend. Similarly, Anh (Vietnamese, age 15) juxtaposed this relationship when she relayed that her best friends are like sisters. Significantly, the YWSC became a site for the development of such bonds.

The YWSC as a Site to Build Bonds and Transformative Resistance

All of the girls described the Club as a positive influence on their lives. Esperanza said, "I feel like I'm actually a part of something. […] I'm really proud to be part of the group, like you support us." Esperanza and the other seven participants all discussed increased confidence, pride, and camaraderie as a result of membership in the YWSC, something supported by scholarship that indicates that mentoring can have a positive impact on the lives of girls, particularly girls of color (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Majoribanks, 1986; Trice & Knapp, 1992). Feruza (Uzbekistani, age 15), for instance, explained that the YWSC gave her confidence as a girl and helped her build friendships. She said it is important to come to the Club to "get help and mentoring and have fun too." Ayesha added, "I respected myself more after coming here."

Club members demonstrate a greater awareness of the social pressures girls face, a result, most likely, from their participation in YWSC activities designed to raise the girls' consciousness. Two examples of such activities include the Clothesline Project, which gives voice to the violence in girls' lives and positive media collages, which reject idealized girlhood. Melynda, for instance, referenced such activities' impact when she stated that the Club "helps [members] to realize what some girls go through and how people are affected by sexism and stuff." Participants explained that this greater comprehension of social pressures, such as media portrayals of women and peer pressure on girls to have sex, provided them with tools for resistance. Melynda noted that the Club not only helps members realize what girls are going through, but it "helped [us] realize about problems that go on and [that] they are trying to teach us how to overcome them." Literature confirms that mentoring programs such as the YWSC have been effective in helping mentees combat pressures (Berkey, Franzen, & Leitz, 2000; Brown, 2004; DuBois et al., 2002; Johnson, 2007a, 2007b; Maldonado et al., 2008; McCluskey et al., 2004), and this was reflected in the participants' statements. Shanelle, for example, asserted that things get "better each week because you guys explain stuff that girls go through, and it helps us understand things better. We don't have to be like things that are on TV, we can be ourselves and stuff like that." Shanelle, Melynda, and a number of other participants emphasized that the Club empowered them to be themselves. Their statements indicate that the girls' newfound awareness of social pressures and their understanding that their experiences are shared by others provided room for them to

refuse to conform to social expectations. This, along with their increased confidence in their unique identities, is significant given that research demonstrates that most girls' self-esteem and self-confidence falls in middle and high school (AAUW, 1992; Block & Weiss, 1993; Jhally & Kilbourne, 2000; Rosser, 1998; Sadker et al., 2008).

Cultural Competency

Not only is the Club a site of consciousness-raising and transformative resistance, but it is also a place where girls establish friendships and build bonds across race and class. Many participants described the Club as instrumental in the development of friendships and even alliances with girls outside of their usual social circles, something they noted as significant. Mercedes said, "Yeah, because if we wouldn't have been able to sit down with a different race in a group and actually talk about these things, like, I don't think we would have ever did it on our own because we would be in that still judgmental part."

Many of the participants indicated that before attending the YWSC, they believed that people of different ethnicities would not understand their experiences and tended to form friendships with people of the same background as a result. Some of the girls, of course, had friends of different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds prior to their participation in the Club. The Club, however, provided an opportunity for girls of different backgrounds to sit down together and share their experiences. Activities designed to raise awareness of and celebrate the diversity of the girls' lives, like poetry, posters, Black History Month, and undergraduate students who spoke on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer) issues facilitated cross-racial/ethnic/class bonding, leading the girls to realize their shared commonalities as young women and allowing them greater understanding of and respect for differences. Melynda stated that "Because of going here, we talk to people we wouldn't have. […] Like normally we wouldn't have been in the same room talking about certain things. […] It opens up room for us to get to know each other better." Anh echoed this in stating that she now recognizes that girls share experiences, and she feels "safer" talking to others as a result. In a society that often divides girls' interests (Simmons, 2009) and where a misunderstanding of difference and lack of appreciation of commonality frequently leads to hostility and social distancing from "others," it is significant that the girls report increased appreciation of and respect for perceived others as a result of Club participation. The realization of the Club's mission of promoting cultural competency is clearly reflected in the girls' statements.

Reclaiming Hoover

Coming together across ethnicities also allowed the girls to interrogate how Hoover's negative reputation impacts them. Esperanza explained that, "When people ask, "Oh, what school do you go to?' and you say Hoover, people say, 'Oh, you're ghetto' and sometimes stop talking to you just because of that." Responding to Esperanza's statement, Ayesha pointed out that before she began attending the YWSC she bought into preconceived notions of Hoover as being "ghetto," as highlighted by Esperanza. However, the YWSC helped her to deal with others' negative opinions. Ayesha asserted:

> I kind of felt that way before I got there, before I got to the Young
> Women's Studies Club, but like during the process I started kind of edging

> away because I met people more like me and they thought the same way,
> so I was like 'Oh, well, who cares what other people say, it's not true, and
> I know it's not true so why believe it.'

The Club and their friendships with other like-minded girls provided participants with the means to resist people's biases toward and misperceptions of Hoover and the students that attend the school. While Esperanza and Ayesha were the most vocal during this portion of the discussion, these sentiments were confirmed by each participant. It is clear that the Club provided the girls with a sense of agency and allowed them to reject racist and classist stereotypes. As Ayesha said, "We come here because we want to, not because we are forced." As the next section will illustrate, this reclamation of Hoover pride also reflects the girls' positive educational experiences with their teachers, the YWSC, and other Hoover mentoring programs, as well as their own use of Hoover as a stepping stone toward their goals of higher education. While it is discussed more in depth in the next section, we want to acknowledge that these girls do not necessarily differ from other Hoover students in their aspirations, but in their greater access to the resources, guidance, and skills to allow them to fulfill their dreams. It is apparent that the Club is one such major resource for the girls.

YWSC and Education and Goal Setting
The literature has shown that adult support and mentoring are significant in setting educational and career aspirations for students (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Majoribanks, 1986; Trice & Knapp, 1992). In addition to the Young Women's Studies Club, Hoover High also offers Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a program aimed at fostering the academic skills necessary to increase middle-performing students' enrollment in four-year colleges and universities (AVID, n.y.), in addition to other academic counseling and pre-professional societies that they can access for scholarly guidance. Three of our participants (38%) specifically mention their participation in AVID, while several also indicate other sources of academic support outside of the YWSC. Another large population from which the YWSC draws from is English as a Second Language (ESL) students. Notably, during the 2009-2010 academic year, the Hoover YWSC teacher/advisors were an ESL teacher and a health educator. Their rapport with students and enthusiasm for the Club was an asset on all fronts. Previous teachers/advisors were, of course, valuable, but the current combination is ideal.
It is unsurprising, then, that all participants said that education is an important aspect of their self-identity and an immediate goal. Furthermore, they all discussed the importance of going to college or university after high school, and many specifically indicated they wanted to maintain a good Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.5 in order to attend an institution of higher education. As pointed out in several interviews, this 3.5 GPA is founded upon the idea that it will provide an automatic entrance to San Diego State University (SDSU) through a reciprocal agreement. For those not interested in SDSU, a 3.5 GPA is seen as the minimum to enter other universities and colleges. This emphasis on a strong GPA and college aspirations is highlighted when Lizbeth stated, "I at least want to pass with a 3.5 GPA…[after] high school…I want to go to UCSD [University of California, San Diego]". Shanelle mirrored this desire. When listing her

top goals, she said she wants "to get straight A's, to get a 3.5, to do all my work…to go to college." Importantly, despite the other academic resources offered at Hoover High, half of the participants cited the YWSC as having a profound influence upon the importance they place on college and professional aspirations. Anh illustrated this when she said, "The Club made me think more about college and to be more serious about college." Aspects of the YWSC that directly foster this increased emphasis on higher education amongst the participants include the academic standing of the mentors which provides a positive model for college-bound young women, "how to" college application workshops, field trips to SDSU, and goal-setting sessions.

In addition, participants pointed to motivation from familial adults in their lives as also inspiring them to be academically successful. This is most evident in Ayesha's narrative which illustrated her desire to follow in the footsteps of her female kin who have successfully negotiated competing demands of maternal responsibilities and achieving the professional status necessary to secure financial viability for their families. Ayesha said she admires her mother and grandmother:

> Because my mom, even though she had me at a young age, she still went to college, she still finished high school, and then my Grandma, even though she had 15 kids, she's still a teacher, like nothing holds her back, even though she started a family young, she still did what she needed to do to make it.

Conversely, a number of the participants recognized the socio-economic difficulties faced by their parents due to a lack of formal higher education. For many, even the thought of attending college is a novel idea as a number of the participants will be first-generation college students. Specifically three participants (Anh, Esperanza, Mercedes) will be first generation college students, whereas it is unclear for five participants (Ayesha, Feruza, Lizbeth, Melynda, and Shanelle). Mercedes, one of the would-be first generation students, demonstrates an understanding of the linkages between education, career, and economic viability, "I want to go to college, want to be the first in my family to actually get a college [degree]…because of my mom because she had me her senior year and didn't finish high school…it was probably hard for her." The mentoring received by members of the YWSC, information made available on sex education, parental influence, and personal experiences combine to motivate students to aspire to attend college, receive a degree, and enter into a professional career.

There is an overarching concept that higher education leads to financial stability in all participants' responses. Though not couched specifically in terms of economics and socio-economic status, many participants recognize the American capitalist links between education, a career, and a moving up the proverbial economic ladder (Bills, 2003; Bowles & Gintis, 2000, 2002; Sorokin, 1959; Wolf, 2002). Ultimately, then, education is a necessary trajectory for the consideration of living outside of a lower socio-economic status and escaping the struggles associated with poverty. Esperanza succinctly stated, "They [my parents] want me to go to school and study for something. *They don't care what as long as I have a career*. They don't want me to break my back at a job for minimum wage" (italics added). In keeping with this, all eight participants identify a professional career as their ultimate goal. Half of the girls want to enter a medical

profession, ranging from general medicine to "maternity doctor" [gynecology and obstetrics] and pediatrics (Ayesha, Feruza, Lizbeth, and Melynda); the other four aspire to be a lawyer (Mercedes), a veterinarian (Anh), a criminologist (Shanelle), and a Border Patrol agent (Esperanza).

These goals may prove to be difficult to attain, as several students expressed issues that hampered them such as parental insistence that they serve the family's needs, familial hesitancy to provide financial information (which prevents them from qualifying for financial aid), and feelings of uncertainty that stem from their (potential) first-generation college status. However, the participants did not articulate that these competing demands would problemitize achieving their goals, but that possibility exists (and is a possible topic for future study).

Given that almost a third of the Hoover High population does not earn a high school diploma, the fact that all of these participants have professional career aspirations and are taking the steps necessary to better ensure post-secondary school success indicates that they are resistant to stereotypes surrounding high schools that are predominantly made up of students of color and/or coming from a low socio-economic status. Ayesha pointed out "that the school [Hoover High] has a bad reputation" but goes on to credit the YWSC as contributing to the development of a mentality of resistance, dismissing others' negative opinions of the constituency of the school and their subsequent academic capabilities.

As the literature has shown, for students from such demographics, mentoring programs offer them a chance to shift away from and offset the negative impacts of the various intersecting social oppressions they face and helps strengthen confidence, academic success, and healthy identity formation. The YWSC ultimately contributes to the development of personal agency and bolsters resiliency for young women who often experience pressure to surrender to what is expected of them as women negotiating life after high school.

The Process of Feminist Collaboration in Girls' Voices

In keeping with self-reflection, we, as feminist scholars, feel it is important to discuss our feelings and thoughts on the research process. In keeping with such reflexivity, all members of the research team submitted brief reflections, parts of which are shared below. All of the reflections touched on the centrality of feminist pedagogy and the importance of collaboration to the success of the project, as well as the reciprocal benefits of mentoring. Jessica, a first year Women's Studies master's student, summed up the group's feelings about collaboration quite well in writing:

> My voice and my contributions have been consistently heard and incorporated along this collective journey, and the women I work with have modeled for me a revolutionary method of academic production heavy with the transformative potential necessary for resisting individualistic approaches to academic achievement.

To this, Sarah, graduate student coordinator of the YWSC, added that she felt honored to "work with women equally committed to the processes of research and writing,"

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speaking to others' feeling that everyone's voices were honored because everyone participated in the project fully.

For four of the researchers, this was a first experience with qualitative research and interviews, so this project presented an excellent learning experience. Alicia, a community activist about to begin the master's program in Women's Studies, explained that this project allowed her to understand the import and nature of academic research, something echoed by Jessica and Sarah. All student participants noted gratitude to Professor Susan E. Cayleff, who provided students with a crucial opportunity to grow as scholars (and to work toward conference presentations and publication) and activists.

Dr. Cayleff explained that while this project has been demanding for her, it has also been "enriching and personally satisfying," largely due to the collaborative nature of a project where "we have conceptualized an empowering realm for girls to gain self-efficacy, while approaching our vision of a just world." She also highlighted the value and satisfaction of mentoring graduate students. Cayleff and others addressed the value of this project in bridging scholarship and activism, a central tenet of Women's Studies (Zimmerman, 2002). Alicia explained that, "This experience has further solidified my commitment to the work of mentoring youth, being an advocate for their stories to be heard and shared, and for the continued bridging of the academy and the community."

Chelsea, Cristina, and Melissann also observed personal and academic fulfillment through mentoring. Although we all know the benefits of mentoring listed in scholarship, it is easy to underestimate our own roles, something Cristina, a first year master's student, explained well in sharing that her mentee hugged her after the one-on-one interview at the end of the semester.

> She told me that she had not shared those things with anyone and only did so because of the role I had played sitting with her group, interacting with them and sharing my experiences. Until that moment I had not considered the trust and unspoken bond that had built in the Club, the impact and intimacy that emerged from the Club not only between the mentors and the girls but the girls with each other and with those of us working with the project.

This was echoed by Chelsea, a second year public health master's student, who added that watching the girls grow and become more self-confident has been a rewarding and enriching experience. Melissann remarked that:

> The whole project has been a wonderful experience. Not only have we added to scholarship and privileged marginalized voices, but we've built friendships with participants and with each other. We've all gained from participating in this project.

For participants and researchers alike, then, the project was clearly beneficial, which clearly traces back to literature that shows that mentoring is beneficial for both mentors and mentees (Caldwell et al., 2008; Johnson, 2007a, 2007b).

Questions for Future Research

The process of conducting the *Girls' Voices* study prompts several possibilities for future research. Another study could utilize a larger sample that could provide even greater insights. A longitudinal follow-up of the participants would also be ideal in that it would reveal the in/congruence of their aspirations and their lived lives as well as what factors came to play in these outcomes. Maintaining contact with the participants once they finish high school would also reveal which of the AVID, ESL and "other" students were more likely to achieve their goals.

A longitudinal study could also allow for ongoing mentoring and contact that would benefit both the girls and the researchers. However, in this case, neither the graduate students' geographic mobility nor resources make this possible. In retrospect we realize that additional demographic information would illuminate our findings. Future questions would include: length of residency in the United States, native-language spoken at home, and religious affiliation. Some of this emerged during the activities/interviews/and focus groups, but more detailed information would likely enhance our understanding of the girls.

The opportunity to engage the girls' parents in these conversations would also be a productive avenue to explore. Their perspectives and hopes for their daughters would offer interesting insights and contrast to the girls' self-designed plans. It might also spark discomfort in some whose primary hopes are that they daughters marry, raise a family, and eschew aspirations that postpone or replace this life course.

The finding that emerged from the focus group relating to the formation of cross-race coalitions beckons to scholars as well. An exploration of participants' experiences in reference to race and ethnicity would strongly contribute to scholarship. Specifically, the formation of these cross-race bonds or coalitions among the participants and also between the participants and their mentors, the duration and impact of these bonds both within and outside of the club, should be examined. Particular attention to the differences between native English-speaking students and students for whom English is a second-language in their experiences of the Club, their relationships with their mentors and to the Club's activities, would also benefit research in this area.

Finally, we would recommend that other activist/scholars who embark on a collaborative project of this scope consider a number of factors from its inception. These include: assurance of timely communication, equitable distribution of all tasks, and means to offer constructive criticism throughout the process without the risk of alienating or offending one another. We are very satisfied with our collaborative dynamics, but realize that clearer expectations, articulated at the outset, would facilitate this process for others doing similar work.

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