

# Re-writing the (Gender-role) Script: The Girl Project's Artist-Academic-Activist Collaboration

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# Watch

- ▶ 3:13-7:04: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=423&v=1ls35j0RzaQ>

# How Did We Get There?

- ▶ The creative vision of two local arts educators
- ▶ A year of retreats, workshops, rehearsals, and community outreach
- ▶ The commitment of 18 diverse high school-aged girls, the staff of a non-profit community theatre, a volunteer board of adult women, and 10 guest artists from around the country
- ▶ Now preparing for our third year of performances in Lexington and Versailles, KY



WOODFORD  
THEATRE

# Why The Girl Project?

- ▶ Social psychology theories about media effects typically position girls as passive, uncritical media consumers
- ▶ Objectification theory links media consumption with mental health problems disproportionately affecting girls and identifies points for intervention
- ▶ Typical interventions include media literacy programs with small effect sizes that didactically instruct passive participants
- ▶ The Girl Project fosters a creative, critical environment in which a community of girls collaboratively re-write the gender script and share their vision of girlhood with their community
- ▶ Facilitates mentoring relationships and positive role modeling to counter media misrepresentations

# Recruiting and Auditions

- ▶ Co-founders and co-directors Ellie Clark and Vanessa Becker-Weig visit all high schools in Lexington and Versailles to introduce The Girl Project and distribute information about auditions
- ▶ Auditions involve conversation about why they want to be involved with The Girl Project and their interests
- ▶ 18-20 girls selected based on their expressed level of interest and commitment to consistent participation



Vanessa Becker-Weig



Ellie Clark

# The Retreat and Workshops

## ▶ The Retreat

- ▶ *Miss Representation* screening and conversation
- ▶ Workshops in yoga, dance, creative writing, and women's history
- ▶ First “closed container” session to establish “The Girl Code”

## ▶ The Workshops

- ▶ 9 monthly, four-hour sessions with local and national guest artists to foster girls' creation of:
  - ▶ Poetry/spoken word pieces
  - ▶ Movement/dance pieces
  - ▶ Creative writing pieces
  - ▶ Visual arts pieces



# Writing, Production, and Performances

- ▶ During the summer, girls participate in a two-week writing intensive:
  - ▶ Review all artistic work created in workshops
  - ▶ Edit and revise
  - ▶ Devise script collaboratively with directors
- ▶ Production
  - ▶ Rehearsal and staging
- ▶ Performances
  - ▶ Two weekends at public venues in Lexington and Versailles
  - ▶ Talk-back sessions, community workshops, and intergenerational piece
  - ▶ In-school performances at area high schools and middle schools



# The Girl Project: Next Generation (GPNG)

- ▶ Pilot in Spring 2015 at Leestown and Woodford County Middle School
- ▶ High school-aged participants and alumni of The Girl Project volunteer to serve as mentors and teachers
- ▶ Mentors participate in day-long training and curriculum development session
- ▶ Mentors lead hour-long after-school workshops
- ▶ Closed container and one-on-one mentor-mentee connections
- ▶ Final in-school performance



# What the Girls Say

- ▶ “Being in The Girl Project has changed my life. Having spent time with the girls in my class has bettered me, something I always strive for. I'm less judgmental, more informed, and more confident--not only in things like body image, but in taking charge of my life and striving for what I want to accomplish. Having a support system of girls and women who love me deeply and know things about me that I rarely share is a true gift and something that is hard to come by. It's been amazing being able to share my experiences with an audience and create art out of opinions to make a change in my community”
- ▶ “The Girl Project affected me in so many ways. It taught me I can be both vulnerable and strong and taught me how to share my voice. It also helped me discover what I want to do with my future. The Girl Project made a difference in my life by showing me that most teenaged girls have struggled with things I have struggled with as well. It showed me that I am not alone, and if I ever need anyone I always have a wonderful and tight knit group of young women to count on to lift me up.”

# What the GPNG Mentors and Mentees Say

## ▶ The mentors:

- ▶ “The best part for me with the mentoring program was forming a bond with younger girls that were going through a lot of the things I was going through in middle school and giving them advice.”
- ▶ “I learned that being a leader doesn't mean always being the one to do the talking; leadership can mean being there to give advice when it's needed, or simply being someone to look to as a role model. I also learned that you don't have to be outgoing to be a leader, since I am definitely not all that outgoing.”

## ▶ The mentees:

- ▶ “I learned that I don't always have to doubt myself and I am better than I think.”
- ▶ “I learned that girls have more power than we thought.”
- ▶ “My favorite part was being able to express myself. I have never been able to do that before.”
- ▶ “I learned that I'm really hard on myself and comparing myself to others. I also realized I should be easier on myself and be who I am and not be ashamed.”

# Community Engagement and Response

- ▶ During the past two years, The Girl Project's 36 participants have given 11 public performances and reached more than 800 audience members
- ▶ From audience response survey data collected after every performance:
  - ▶ 100% of respondents would recommend attending the performance to their family members and friends
  - ▶ 100% of respondents would recommend participating in The Girl Project to teen girls they know
  - ▶ All of the following quotes are from audience members between ages 10 and 18:
- ▶ "The entire thing was incredible and perfectly sums up what I feel I am fighting in being the gender I am."
- ▶ "It completely opened my eyes and makes me want to take action for girls."
- ▶ "The entire show was completely influential. I could really relate to a few of the topics."
- ▶ "Some of what was talked about is stuff that goes through my head every day and it was nice to know I'm not alone."

# What's New for 2015-2016?

- ▶ Service learning projects between workshops
- ▶ Curriculum development for dissemination
- ▶ College program development
- ▶ Expansion of GPNG to five schools
- ▶ GPNG performances at elementary schools
- ▶ Mother-daughter programming at retreats



# Lessons Learned for Performance Arts-based Community Development

- ▶ Apply for grants and develop sponsorships
  - ▶ Grants from Toyota, the United Way, and the Kentucky Foundation for Women
- ▶ Plan for transitions and successions
- ▶ Invest in diversity
  - ▶ Consider retention plans, transportation, and financial assistance
- ▶ Engage parents to ensure family commitment
- ▶ Form a volunteer board of community supporters
- ▶ Build in time for evaluation, reflection, and adjustments

# Contact

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