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## Network News

Feminist Teacher, Volume 19, Number 1, 2008, pp. 81-82 (Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ftr.0.0017>



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## The Emergence of Girl Studies and Girl Activism

Feminist teachers in higher education are acutely aware of the issues facing young women. Although many of us do not work directly with girls, those who work in higher education seem increasingly attentive to girls' lives.

In 2005, the Girls Studies Interest Group was founded at the National Women's Studies Association Annual Conference. According to the NWSA website, "Girls' studies is an emergent field that focuses on girls' lives, interests, and culture—areas which have been under-researched and under-theorized, but which constitute a critical and exciting contribution to the future of Women's and Gender Studies." In 2007, the National Women's Studies Association sponsored a Girls Studies and Activism Institute as part of the annual conference. Topics considered at the conference included: ethnic and racial differences among girls, girls as immigrants, surveillance and girls, girls' body identities, girls' activism, the human rights of "the girl child," girls' roles in the world's economies, sex trafficking in girls, girls and technology, historical/cultural/development perspectives on "the girl child," and girls' sexualities. For more information on the Girls Studies Interest Group, visit <http://www.nwsa.org/communities/girlsstudies.php>.

In 2007, the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls released a report outlining

evidence of sexualization of girls, consequences of sexualization, and possible solutions. The report begins with the premise that girls are increasingly sexualized in popular culture and in their everyday lives and that this development represents a significant threat to girls' well-being. The APA distinguishes sexualization from healthy sexuality. According to their website, sexualization occurs when "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behavior, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness (narrowly defined) with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified—that is, made into a thing for others' sexual use, rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making; and/or sexuality is inappropriately imposed upon a person." The report is accessible online at <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/sexualization.html>, along with guides for what parents can do and exercises to facilitate media literacy for girls.

The emerging scholarly interest in girls' lives seems to be motivated by the understanding that changes in girlhood dramatically shape the future of women's lives. For example, what kinds of adult female sexualities emerge out of a childhood characterized by sexualization? If girls' roles in the world economy are characterized by low wages and human

rights violations, what does this mean for women's economic independence? Local community projects have emerged to intervene in girls' lives based on this very premise—that if feminism is invested in the characteristics of women's lives then it must understand the connection between girlhood and adulthood.

The New York City program Girls Write Now works to help girls “expand their natural writing talents, develop independent creative voices, and build confidence in making healthy choices in school, career, and life.” Girls are mentored by women writers, participate in writing workshops and life skills activities, and publish an original anthology. For more information, go to <http://www.girlswritenow.org>.

Act Like a Grrrl is a Nashville-based program structured around autobiographical writing and performance. According to the website, “Founded in 2005, ALAG

is an annual, four-week, autobiographical writing program for girls aged 12–17 offering the space and support for young women to gain a public voice, work with professional female mentors in a variety of creative fields, and foster friendships with peers from diverse backgrounds. Rooted in the exercise of writing to articulate one's personal experiences and beliefs, the program is augmented by guest artist workshops in performance, dance, and multicultural studies. The experience culminates in a public performance conceived, created, and enacted entirely by the GRRRLs themselves!”

In addition, the girls also participate in local feminist projects. In 2007, the girls performed in Eve Ensler's *A Memory, A Monologue, a Rant, and a Prayer* as part of a local fundraiser for V-Day. Learn more at <http://www.actorsbridge.org/act-like-a-grrrl.aspx>.