

FOR THE BENEFIT OF GIRLS: EVALUATING A GIRLS' PROGRAM IN
APPALACHIA

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2006

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research at the University of Florida. I thank my committee for their invaluable guidance and encouragement. I must thank High Rocks (alumni, current girls, staff, and volunteers) for constant inspiration, in my research and in life. I would like to extend my appreciation to the faculty I studied with at West Virginia University of their continued support. Finally, I thank my family and friends for their unconditional love, much appreciated support, and constant laughter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Basic Concepts of Girls' Movement and Girl Culture	3
Literature of Girls' Movement.....	5
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	8
Education	8
Media	11
Competition and Aggression	13
Self-Destruction: Eating Disorders, Cutting, and Sex	14
Teenage Motherhood	17
Hearing Girls' Voices	18
Conclusion	19
3 DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS.....	21
Traditional Programming: Girl Scouts	21
Girls' Movement Programming: Girls Inc.	22
4 METHODS	24
Context.....	24
Utilizing Appalachian Studies	26
My High Rocks Connections.....	27
My Standpoint	28
5 INTRODUCTION TO HIGH ROCKS	32
Girl-Led Youth Development.....	32
Feminist Principles	33
The Program	36

6	DATA	39
	Interviews	39
	Evaluating Responses	41
	Participants	42
	Who Runs High Rocks	44
	Attendance and the Application Process	45
	Initiation: New Beginnings Camp	46
	Creating Community	49
	Community Service	51
	Investment and Leadership	54
	Academics: Girls Night and Post-Secondary Planning	55
	Academics: School	58
	Positive Influence	59
	Critiques and Suggestions.....	61
7	CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION	74
	APPENDIX	
A	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	78
B	HIGH ROCKS APPLICATION FORM AND EVALUATION STATISTICS.....	82
	LIST OF REFERENCES	87
	BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	90

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May 2006

Chair: Stephanie Y. Evans

Major Department: Women's Studies

This thesis assesses the current dialogue among adults about teenage girls and how to help them. The author argues that this conversation must be opened to include the girls and their expertise about their own experiences. She examines the success of one case study located in rural West Virginia. The program is evaluated through feminist scholarship and the leading literature in the field of girls' movement. Most importantly, it is evaluated in interviews by current and past participants of the program. The research is framed by an Appalachian feminist standpoint which contextualizes the data. The case study program demonstrates the benefits of girl-centered, girl-led programming that works within a kind of feminist framework. The paper is meant to serve as a guide to those working with adolescent girls. The research provides concrete ways in which to improve girls' programming in the future.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

It's not for the simple minded, it's not for the weak minded, it's for the people who are willing to change, not change for someone else but willing to change for themselves and stick with it. And it's a place where you can be yourself without having to feel embarrassed about anything, where everybody accepts you and you don't have to be safe about who you are.

—Kristy, High Rocks girl expected to graduate in 2006

In Emily's¹ world you took pride in being the “bitch.” You gained a form of prestige from the amount of time you spent in the backseat of boys' cars. You smoked cigarettes you stole, but no one told you to stop—including your parents. Your mother was sick and distant. Your father was your hero, but the whole world was out to get him. You fought everything and everyone, and when you felt safe you cried more than you smiled. You also had a baby, but in your world this was not wholly unexpected. This was Emily's world at the age of fifteen living in a rural community in southeastern West Virginia. Emily's situation begged for answers, solutions, in mainstream discourse. However, she was a “success story.”² And yet, she did not contribute that success to her own potential: “I wouldn't even be here if it wasn't for High Rocks . . . really, they saved my life . . .” (Emily). High Rocks, an academic and leadership program serving teenage girls in three counties of rural West Virginia, contributed to her growth and maturation. It helped her discover the necessary skills in herself to set and then reach her goals. It

¹ All names have been changed.

² Emily graduated high school in the top quarter of her class, and attended an in-state college with a strong childcare program on full scholarship for two years.

helped her define her own boundaries, and make positive decisions in her life. To Emily, this meant life saving interventions.

Girls programs were created in part to create opportunities for girls that might otherwise be lost due to limitations in their life. These restraints were the expectations society places on girls. The contemporary manifestations of these restraints were the issues considered to be faced primarily by teenage girls: low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, poor body-image, self-destructive behaviors, competition, teen pregnancy, and forms of discrimination they face such as unequal education.

For over a century the edge of adolescence has been identified as a time of heightened psychological risk for girls. Girls at this time have been observed to lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression . . . This crisis in women's development has been variously attributed to biology or to culture, but its psychological dimensions and its link to trauma have been only recently explored. (Gilligan & Brown 2)

Once girls became the subject of popular discourse, a flood of literature about girls and "their issues," as well as programs were created to prevent and correct these "problems."

I investigated the various approaches focusing on the popular discourse surrounding teenage girls and their lives. This included exploring literature dealing specifically with teenage girls and one case study of a girls program (High Rocks). Guided by feminist scholarship, and informed by the literature I reviewed, I analyzed interview data of High Rocks girls through an Appalachian feminist standpoint, which takes culture as well as gender, race, and class into consideration.³ Through theory, observation, and interviews feminists have produced material about teenage girls. However, their audience has been almost exclusively other adults instead of their

³ See method section of this paper.

subjects. Their purpose has been to help women explain their own circumstances, and to aid them in understanding how to “help” and “fix” girls.⁴

From the perspective of many child psychologists, it seems that the very processes of living and growing place children at risk, and to make matters worse, children are by nature easily wounded by such psychological challenges. (Peterson et al. 16)

One solution inspired by this literature has been the creation of girls programs. Most girls programs have been run by adults and had the same objectives as the literature. Thus, disconnect between the adults and the girls, and between theory and praxis often developed in such programs. My goal in this research was to provide possible solutions to these problems by appraising the available literature, and evaluating the case study program to incorporate girls’ viewpoints on how to develop the most beneficial approaches for success of such a program. The girl-led approaches implemented by High Rocks and the founding feminist principles of the program offered some of these possibilities. These methods fostered a different kind of leadership style. High Rocks exemplified the solutions to connecting girls and women and theory and praxis by creating a partnership between women and girls.

Basic Concepts of Girls’ Movement and Girl Culture

Ideas about who girls were, what girls dealt with, and how girls behaved became more complex looking at what was often referred to as girls’ movement and girl culture. A whole new capitalist phenomenon of girl culture began to arise in the 1950s once youth were recognized as a powerful marketing demographic. For example, Catherine Driscoll argued in *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* that there

⁴ See Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982. Gilligan, Carol, and Brown, Lyn Mikel. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992. Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *ManifestA*. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

was a range of products that had to be included in girl culture because the products actually define girlhood and are continually circulated amongst them. This market, which sold girlhood, also manipulated the idea of conformity—and nonconformity—through the consumption of the products. Girls did not want to conform to an authoritative concept of who they should be, but did want to fit in with their peers. This created a profitable market, which sells the image of both.

Girls began to receive direct attention again in the early 1990s when the modern girls' movement really began to take shape, which was due in part to the groundwork that had been done earlier. This attention was a result of a combination of factors. From a feminist and marketing perspective, girls were getting attention through Girlie culture.⁵ Girls' issues were being publicized in the mainstream and many women took up their concern about the condition of adolescent girls as their new mission. The main concern at this time was the lack of adolescent girls' self-esteem. This concept was recognized by Peggy Orenstein who asserted, "Although ideas about the importance of self-esteem have been knocking around academic literature since the late nineteenth century, the phrase has become the buzzword of the 1990s" (Orenstein xviii). This focus included ideas about resiliency and how to help develop such a skill.⁶ The concern adults had about teenage girls motivated them to produce studies and books about girls and programs for girls. Low self-esteem and self-perceptions became central issues. Teenage girls began

⁵ Girlie: "A girlie-girl can be a stereotypically feminine one...Girlie is also a feminist philosophy put forth most assertively by the folks at *Bust*. Girlies are adult women, usually in their mid-twenties to late thirties, whose feminist principles are based on a reclaiming of girl culture..." I argue it has been co-opted as a marketing goldmine as well as a way to co-op feminist issues. It is sometimes claimed that it ignores the progress feminists have made. See Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *ManifestA*. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000.

⁶See Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Save the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Random House Publishing, 1994. See Also Peterson, Christopher, Robert W. Pearson, and Lawrence W. Sherman ed. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 591 (Jan. 2004) 17.

getting more attention for their apparent lack of self-esteem. High Rocks was one program born out of this climate, but its approaches were what made it unique and worth discussion.

Literature of Girls' Movement

All aspects of life associated with teenage girls were considered as a possible source of their problems. However, the work legitimizing this concept of problem adolescence focused mostly on the psychology of girls. For example, *In a Different Voice* by Carol Gilligan came out in 1982, and generated discussions about voice, difference, and questions about women's and men's development. In her work there was a focus on women's ability to forge and keep relationships and the importance of these relationships in their lives. According to Gilligan, relationships also affected the voices and self-concepts of women and girls. The book discussed socialization and expression of women and girls in the United States, providing psychological explanations. It also called for the appreciation of women's voices, values, and views in a patriarchal society as a solution to loosen the patriarchal strong hold. The book spawned a flurry of research, which created an atmosphere where adults began looking only at what girls had "lost" as teenagers.⁷ This was evident in Gilligan's follow up ten years later, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, which she co-wrote with Lyn Mikel Brown. The book kept with the emerging theme: as girls move into their teenage years they lose their voice, sense of self, and therefore, self-esteem. These losses were held responsible for the poor development of women.

⁷ See Also *Making Connections* by Gilligan, Nona Lyons, Trudy Hanmer—groundbreaking in studying girls. Identified ages 11-16 as an 'especially critical one in girls' lives' but it also applied studies of primarily white middle class girls to all girls. Baumgardner, Jennifer, and Amy Richards. *ManifestA*. NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000, 174-75.

Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) was a best-seller, and brought worries about girls into popular discourse. This book identified common issues faced by teenage girls—narrative case studies of Pipher's patients—and demonstrated approaches to support girls in overcoming the problems. She asserted:

Girls' symptoms reflect the grief at the loss of their true selves. Their symptoms reflect the confusion about how to be human and be a woman. The basic issues appear and reappear in many guises. Girls must find, define and maintain their true selves. They must find a balance between being true to themselves and being kind and polite to others. Pathology often arises in girls because of the failure to realize their true possibilities of existence. The best treatment for this pathology is growth encouragement and resistance training (Pipher 312).

Pipher also stressed the importance of context. She recognized, for example, the differences between growing up in the 1950s compared to the 1990s, but she also acknowledged that with new difficulties have come new opportunities. All of these works moved girls from the invisible to the vulnerable, partly because they were written *about girls for* adults. Unfortunately, these transactions have continued to talk around instead of to the subject. Even when girls' voices were included in the work, the audience was still adults. My audience was both adults and girls—adults working with girls and girls' movement and High Rocks. One purpose of this research was to aid High Rocks in its future development, and they will receive copies for their use.

The American Association of University Women's (AAUW) report, "How Schools Shortchange Girls," (1992) created the secondary focus in legitimizing girls' movement. It was considered one of the main works to catapult worries about girls into the mainstream. It called attention to the need for the change of sexist and unequal practices in the educational system. The report demonstrated discrimination in the educational

system based on gender and race, which created unequal opportunities for education and a lack of opportunities for those being discriminated against.⁸

⁸ See also Myra and David Sadker-*Failing at Fairness*..

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature of girls' movement tended to fall in three main categories: education, behaviors, and psychology of girls. High Rocks addressed all of these themes in its program. The psychology of girls usually assumed inherent gender differences between boys and girls, and framed the importance of girls' psychology as a way to explain women. Psychologists pathologized girls as suffering from their adolescence, and placed relationships at the center of their lives. Girls' psychology lead into girls' behaviors—often these were the manifestations of their psychology. Thus, girls' self-destructive behaviors signified their pathology. Another popular discourse within the discussion of girls' behaviors was the effects of the media. Many adults working in this discourse blamed the media for all of girls' self-destructive behaviors, ill-guided decisions, and low self-image. Finally, girls' education progressed from the unequal treatment of girls in the public school system, to theories of single-sex education, to gender-specific teaching approaches and curriculum meant to improve existing school settings.

Education

Educational goals should be to implement gender-specific approaches in a single-sex environment to improve girls' academic success and supplement the education gained in the public school system. Programs could encourage girls to do their best and to work towards improvement. "The Rural Girls in Science Program" through creative hands-on projects, inspired girls to seek success in their education. It consisted of a two-week residential summer science camp, a year-long, school-based, community-focused,

collaborative research project, and a statewide capstone event. There were five key components of the research projects: connection to students' interests and communities, involvement in the process, many sources of expertise, noncompetitive collaboration, and wide-ranging support. "The Rural Girls in Science Program," connected girls' schoolwork to their interests and life goals. The program provided girls with many different teachers and tutors with different styles of teaching, and supported them throughout the learning process. The results of "The Rural Girls in Science Program" demonstrated "that many scientific issues can spark girls' interests in science . . . [and facilitation and exploration] of local issues [can] simultaneously build skills, scientific knowledge, and a sense of community among . . . students" (Ginorio et al. 83). This program worked only with science, but the same approaches could work with academics in general.

Discussions of education, including single-sex education, were woven throughout the larger girls' movement conversation. Much of this surrounded the differential treatment of girls compared to boys within the classroom. Girls' programs philosophies need to agree with the philosophy of single-sex education and the positive influences which could develop from it. These ideas were addressed in Judy Mann's book *The Difference: Growing Up Female in America*, and editor Gaby Weiner's *Just a Bunch of Girls: Feminist Approaches to Schooling*, which focused on the experiences in schooling of women and girls in the 1980s. The authors argued that classroom sexism created an atmosphere that was less than conducive to girls' studies. Programs should supplement its girls' learning in the sexist public school classroom by providing innovative teaching styles which were culturally and gender sensitive. It is argued that girls learned through

the experiences of the public school system “to be quiet. To be passive. To make do with less air time . . . To get by with less feedback”(Mann 81). Girls could gain confidence and learn how to speak-out and advocate for themselves. Programs should also counteract other learned behaviors such as not learning how to handle criticism, to introduce and take ownership of an idea, and how to interrupt and take over conversations (Mann 82). Sexism must be confronted on all fronts, including those found in our schools—in teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the actual organization and content of what was taught (Weiner 104). Through hands-on classrooms and gender specific approaches, programs can work on the idea that a single teacher can make a positive change in how a girl viewed a subject (Mann 115). Programs also concentrated on giving the girls positive role models who were enthusiastic about education and learning.

Feminists often asserted that in our society the only answer for real equal education with gender specific approaches was single-sex education.¹ Mann claims that girl-schools expected a lot from the students, but also gave them the self-confidence to reach these high standards was important to note. The predominately female environment

¹ Interestingly, Susan Morse in *Separated by Sex: A Critical Look at Single-Sex Education for Girls* looks comprehensively at single-sex schooling. She states that there is actually no evidence that single-sex education in general “works” or is “better” than coeducation, that it is a much more complicated answer (Morse 2). Most arguments for single-sex education is only considering the effects of sexism. However, gender cannot be the only factor when looking at a school’s effectiveness—“different cultural, social, and institutional factors” must be considered as influences on outcomes in each case (Morse 3). She concludes:

The fledgling body of research on single-sex classes has yielded relatively consistent findings: Whereas girls perceive the classrooms in many cases to be superior, and may register gains in confidence, these benefits have not translated into measured improvements in achievement. (Morse 22)

Therefore, single-sex education may not be the only variable in creating a beneficial learning environment. However, it does seem unquestionable that all girl environments can create gains in self-esteem and self-confidence, at least while present in that environment.

found in girl-schools could be found in girls' programs and could provided girls with many different role models.

Media

Media was one of the most pervasive forums for cultural constraints and expectations placed on girls, and therefore, took the brunt of blame for girls' low self-esteem and the issues manifested from that. Media created an image people believed they must live up to, and they could buy the products to realize this image. Mass media sold its audience to advertisers, and created an environment teenage girls must navigate. Girls were told they must look a certain way, and they must buy certain products to attain this look. Poor body image, competition, and excessive consumerism were fostered in part by the images mass media produced. Competition manifested between peers and other females in general, and most girls were constantly comparing themselves to others. Few girls could fit the body image portrayed in media—especially in magazines geared toward teen girls. Teen magazines sold ever-new possibilities and popular ideals to its market.² Some feminists asserted media was directly correlated to low self-esteem and self-destructive behavior in girls. Rates of anorexia, bulimia, compulsive dieting and exercising, and other self-destructive behaviors, were escalating and manifesting in younger girls with media only promoting such behavior. Those who triumphed over

² Girls were supposed to be thin, beautiful, silent, passive, seductive, virginal, and put their energy toward gaining the attention of their male peers (Killbourne 136-149). "Advertisers also exploit adolescents' social anxiety and need for approval and independence to sell them crap, some of it addictive crap" (Pipher Foreword in Killbourne 12). Thus, girls were also sold rebellion in the form of smoking, drinking, engaging in casual sex, and a not exactly defined attitude which can be expressed through even more products (Killbourne 151).

eating disorders often claimed they first learned such behavior in a ‘what-not-to-do type article’ they read in one of these magazines.³

However, no matter how much evidence adults pointed to the media being “bad” for teenagers, teens were still subjected to it and found pleasure in it. While both Milkie and Currie assessed the affects of magazines on teenage girls, they gave different outlooks. Milkie argued that girls made critical assessments of magazine content in “Social Comparisons, Reflected Appraisals, and Mass Media: The Impact of Pervasive Beauty Images on Black and White Girls Self Concepts.” In “Decoding Femininity: Advertisements and Their Teenage Readers” Currie added an important element to the scenario because girls still internalized messages in these magazines.

Milkie and Currie found their respondents were critical of the lack of reality portrayed in the magazines. Perhaps most importantly, the girls in these studies also recognized that these images were a problem for either themselves or for other girls they knew. Girls were encouraged by media images to question themselves and this could assist the development of unrealistic expectations.⁴ The media influenced the definition of “normal.” Curie argued that girls were receiving definitions of femininity and teen magazines reinforced those kinds of messages. While the girls discussed in these studies may not question the magazines, they did still question themselves. Girls’ programs should instill self-esteem and self-confidence in girls which would help girls be less

³ See Also Tanenbaum, Leora. *Catfight*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, 128.

⁴ Ironically, while these magazines were considered helpful, the majority of the girls also admitted they “inevitably compared themselves with the ‘perfect’ girl” because they knew that is what ‘everyone’ expected of them (Milkie 1999).

critical of themselves and more critical of the images they received. The girls would learn that there were many images of beauty, and the ideal was being healthy.

Competition and Aggression

Programs must work hard to defuse competition between girls and create a sense of community. In her book *Catfight*, Leora Tanenbaum argued the competition found between women stemmed from “our confused place in society” (Tanenbaum 18). In *Odd Girl Out*, Rachel Simmons agreed. She asserted “girls are being asked to become the sum of our confusion. Girls make sense of our mixed messages by deciding to behave indirectly, deducing that manipulation . . . is the best route to power” (Simmons 116). Beneficial girls’ programs worked to give the girls tools to clearly define who they were. These programs also gave girls positive role models who defied conventional ideas of whom a woman was.

The competition between women and girls was covert and unhealthy. This competition occurred in the realms of beauty ideals, dating, and other relationships, work and school, and even motherhood. The goal of the competition was to raise the woman’s position, her value. The pattern was continually repeated, and women continued to hold other women down. This form of competition is exaggerated for girls in the environments of junior high and high school. Programs must foster a sense of group amongst its girls. Girls learn that competing against each other is unproductive.

In *Odd Girl Out* Simmons asserted, “our culture’s limited understanding of female aggression and intimacy makes it hard for girls to deal with their peer relationships in healthy ways” (Simmons 62). Girls’ lives were spent negotiating relationships, and yet none of their negotiations were ever supposed to include conflict. However, girls were able to get around this concept—they have figured out how to go undetected by adults—

by using relational, indirect, and alternative aggressions. Girls used specific strategies in their “underground aggression” against each other in order to keep the appearance of the “nice girl” who kept the restraints of femininity intact.⁵ This relational aggression often included indirect and social aggression. Programs provided space for girls to work through disagreements. They worked to defuse aggression and give girls new ways to handle conflict.

Simmons observed “alternative aggressions and conflict avoidance intersect with three areas of girls’ lives: leadership, relationship violence, and the reported loss of girls’ self-esteem around adolescence” (Simmons 262-63). Importantly, this book was directed at everyone—adults and girls, which meant the author’s solutions were about them working in partnership. Simmons stressed that it was often hard for girls to restrain their hurt and anger from being targeted by this aggression, but girls felt they must restrain themselves to maintain their femininity. This often meant that their hurt and anger manifested in unhealthy ways—often they took it out on themselves.

Self-Destruction: Eating Disorders, Cutting, and Sex

An example of how hurt and anger manifested was the development of an eating disorder. “These syndromes usually develop during adolescence and, until recently, were most prevalent among upper and upper-middle class women” (Hesse-Biber 80). Sara Shandler received more entries about eating disorders than any other subject for her book *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write about their Sense for Self*, which is a collection of adolescent girls’ writings (Shandler 12). Its contributions discussed the difficult body-

⁵ In relational aggression the relationship was used as a weapon. There was damage or threat of damage to the relationship. Some of these behaviors could include ignoring, excluding, or negative body language. Indirect aggression was a covert behavior in which the perpetrator was able to avoid her target and deny the intent to hurt. In this aggression other people were used as vehicles to inflict pain—this often took the form of rumors. Simmons referred to both of these tactics as alternative aggressions.

images girls face. Programs also can indirectly address eating disorders by encouraging healthy eating habits at meal times.

An eating disorder could begin for a number of reasons. For example, Tanenbaum argued, it could be an act to make a girl skinny enough to get back in to a group (122). However, girls could also develop an eating disorder to have a sense of control over one area of their life.⁶ “Manipulating food intake is one culturally approved way that women can gain some influence over their environment. Control of their own bodies is a substitute for control over [other aspects of their] lives” (Hesse-Biber 83). It could also be a form of rebellion against the impossible standards placed on them (Orenstein 95).

Futhermore, Mimi Nichter and Nancy Vuckovic in their essay in *Many Mirrors: Body Image and Social Relations* explained that “fat talk” in general described “a wide range of feelings about uncontrol” (Sault 113). Even dieting gave the impression of gaining control; unfortunately dieting could easily get out of control and escalate into an eating disorder. This fat talk was used by girls to receive affirmation from peers, as an apology or excuse for behavior, and as a way to reaffirm group solidarity. Engaging in fat talk could grant a girl entrance to a group. However, it could also legitimate eating disorders to those who had them.

Importantly self-mutilation or “delicate self-cutting” (which usually involved cutting or burning the skin) often manifested in tandem with an eating disorder. “In fact...nearly two-thirds of the women in one study of mutilators were or had once been anorexic, bulimic, or obese” (Orenstein 107).⁷ Peggy Orenstein addressed this in one

⁶ See also *Fasting Girls* by Joan Jacobs Brumberg

⁷ See also “Female Habitual Self-Mutilators”

chapter of her book *SchoolGirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, stating, “girls slice and burn themselves for much the same reasons that they deny themselves food: to alleviate anxiety and depression, to express powerlessness, and to restore a sense of control” (Orenstein 107).⁸

Sex was also used as a form of control. They can feel control over making the choice. However, girls often chose to have sex as an avenue to gain something that felt missing in their lives, to rebel, to feel independent, and often to get or keep a boyfriend as well. As with eating disorders and self-cutting, sex was a core theme in the discourse about girls.

Girls also used sex against each other. In *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut*, Emily White expanded on this idea concentrating on the rumor. Rumors were powerful because they spread quickly and effortlessly, and more importantly, they did not have to be true and they happened outside of the adults’ gaze. The “reasons” for becoming the slut varied and could be arbitrary even within the high school setting.⁹ “A ‘slut’ is not merely a girl who ‘does it,’ but any girl who—through her clothes, her makeup, her hairstyle, or her speech—seems as if she *might*” (Orenstein 51). Girls could be “the slut” and never have had sex or even done as much as the girls who were passing the rumor. Often the rumors became a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy in which the girl began wondering if everyone else knew something she did not. The rumors can be as terrorizing as any physical act. White argued victims of the slut rumor were often

⁸ See also Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Random House Publishing, 1994.

⁹ Being a slut is not about the body so much as all the things that have been spoken about the body...bad reputations tended to be under the spell of what physicians call precocious puberty (White 42). This meant that because a girl’s body developed fast, she was assumed to be fast as well. However, this is just one example of how a girl can become “the slut.”

depressed and turned inward on themselves. In short, if they heard something long enough, they may have begun to believe it, even if it was about themselves.

Teenage Motherhood

Of course, sex more often created more complications in a girl's life than it created control—evident in “the slut” and most obviously in pregnancy. Judith Musick argued in *Young Poor and Pregnant: The Psychology of Teenage Motherhood* that “it is mostly poor teens who have babies . . . [and] they share two common qualities: poverty and a tendency to define themselves through motherhood (Musick 4). Furthermore, Musick gave many reasons for why girls “chose” motherhood.¹⁰ Musick asserted girls who became pregnant usually lacked a healthy self-image and support, and were socially isolated. Some girls became pregnant as a way to form an identity. Most girls who became pregnant then valued their identity as a mother-to-be or mother, and often saw it as a way to receive love that had been lacking in their lives. Girls programs could provide the needed support, love, and socialization. However, girls could still become pregnant. Once a girl chose to become a mother, she had to balance motherhood with a sense of self, which took outside support, inner strength, and maturity (Musick 144).

Dodson's analyses in *Don't Call Us Out of Name: The Untold Lives of Women and Girls in Poor America* complicated Musick's view of poor mothers because she looked at the societal institutions—not the females' choices—that continued to make their lives difficult. For example, poor girls often had many responsibilities in their home helping out their families. The major prevention strategy she asserted was that these girls must be

¹⁰ Many times they received messages from adults in their lives that keeping the child was the only option. However, many of them saw it as the only option as well.

granted time away from their family work in order to develop a picture of themselves outside of those roles.

Hearing Girls' Voices

Although the literature may have taken on one or two specific issues, everything related back to self-esteem. Therefore, according to the literature, everything a girl faced in her life affected her self-esteem and self-concept. Thus, in this society even the most supported girl was still at a disadvantage. It was important for the literature to include the voices of girls whenever possible, instead of the adults' interpretations of the girls' voices. While Simmons, Dodson, and some others made an effort to include their informants in their work, Sara Shandler created an important format with her book *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write about their Search for Self*. The book addressed all of the "big issues," but without trying to explain them away or creating adult-driven solutions. The words were those of the girls, only framed by the author's introduction—personal reflections as a college student—to each section. Her goal was "to enable girls to tell their stories and to hear the stories of other girls" without the adult intermediary. She wanted girls to be able to see each other's "intelligence and experience, pain and power directly, free from adult interpretation" (Shandler xiii). It presented a range of views and experiences directly from the girls. It also informed other girls that they were not alone.

Moreover, *Girls to Women, Women to Girls* by Bunny McCune and Deb Traunstein, two counselors, also tried this approach in a slightly different way. They included the voices of girls, but also the voices of women reflecting back on girlhood. Throughout the book there were empty pages in which girls were able to write their own entries. The difference between this book and Shandler's was its purpose more than its

content. It was meant to create an understanding, relationship, and community between women and girls for the benefit of girls. However, the voices of all of the writers were filtered through the authors, which produced a different message than Shandler's *Ophelia Speaks*. Obviously, Shandler stood-out in the realm of this research with her goal of working with, or perhaps more appropriately, "for" teenagers. Her audience was important because she gave them agency. It was by girls, about girls, for girls. Her approach mirrored my attempt to demonstrate the importance of girl-centered and girl-led programs in which girls have the power. Girls' capability of articulating their needs must be recognized and valued in order for them to be met.

Conclusion

Positive Programming: The Common Denominator explored programs for youth considered "at-risk" and programs for women and girls. The analysis was based on three studies about girls and recreation.¹¹ They promoted a gender-specific program that took into account the differences of girls and boys. They stated "the majority of girls in the United States will have to face three primary issues—social contradictions, body changes, and sexuality...girls also face increased rates of depression, eating disorders, and pre- or posttraumatic stress disorders...much more frequently than do boys" (Stenger et al. 33). It was specifically promoting outdoor single-sex programs, in which girls learned about themselves and others while learning physical outdoor skills.

¹¹ These studies include: Culp, R.H. "Adolescent Girls and Outdoor Recreation: A Case Study Examining Constraints and Effective Programming." *Journal of Leisure Research*. 30 (3);356-77. Henderson, K. 1998. "Recreation Programming for Adolescent Girls: Rationale and Foundations." *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*. 16 (2): 1-14. Jordan, D. *Learning Outdoor Recreation Skills in a Safe Place: Lessons from a Single-Sex Program* (Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, 4th Research Symposium Proceedings): 85-91.

The literature stemming from girls' movement included three main themes which encompassed girls' lives and all they faced. These themes were education, psychology and development, and behaviors. Some of the literature only presented information based on girls who were invisible within the text, but some of it defined problems and offered possible solutions. It was clear that there were no 'quick fixes,' and that girls needed support in their lives. Programming was one way to work toward these goals.

CHAPTER 3 DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS

Often based upon works like those I have discussed, adults began creating programs geared toward teenage girls across the U.S, which were meant to help them through this period of their life.¹ There tended to be three main themes—improving self-esteem and resiliency, improving academics, and giving girls something productive to do as a way to prevent them from being involved in situations requiring complex decision-making which often involved “at-risk” behaviors. High Rocks incorporated all of these themes into its programming. However, even well established programs took notice of this discourse and shifted to keep up with these popular ideas.

Traditional Programming: Girl Scouts

The Girl Scouts of the U.S.A had a major facelift since the girls’ movement of the 1990’s. Girl Scouts, founded in 1912, began with the “goal of bringing girls out of isolated home environments and into community service and the open air.”² The program based its ideals on the belief that all girls should be given the opportunity to develop physically, mentally, and spiritually.³ However, Girl Scouts recognized the need to adapt to emerging issues and adapted to societal changes over the years. For example, math and science gained importance in the overall focus, and science and technology

¹ While there have been public programs for girls since the early twentieth century, there was a new revival in the 1990s.

² See Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Girl Scouts Official Website. Available (http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/). Accessed 2-1-06.

³ See Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Girl Scouts Official Website. Available (http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/). Accessed 2-1-06.

exploration programs for girls were instituted. Girl Scouts also created new badges in the 2000s which included Global Awareness, Adventure Sports, Stress Less, and Environmental Health. The program made many changes to live up to the current motto “where girls grow strong.”⁴

Girls’ Movement Programming: Girls Inc.

Another example of a successful girls program—one much more in response to girls movement—was Girls Inc, whose goal was to keep girls “strong, smart, and bold.” The key for this program was “strong.” It meant breaking down many stereotypes surrounding what it meant to be a girl or woman, and instilling the belief that strong and nurturing could go hand in hand. One of its accomplishments and guides was “The Girls’ Bill of Rights.” It stated:

Girls have the right: to be themselves and to resist gender stereotypes; to express themselves with originality and enthusiasm; to take risks, to strive freely, and to take pride in success; to accept and appreciate their bodies; to have confidence in themselves and to be safe in the world; to prepare for interesting work and economic independence. (Fine 4)

This philosophy has been praised by many feminists, and adopted by many of those working in girls’ movement.

Girls Inc. published *Strong Smart & Bold—Empowering Girls for Life: How to Raise a Girl Who Knows Her Rights* in 2001. The book outlined the ambitious mission of Girls Inc. and asserted who the ideal girl was—she was empowered. “An empowered girl not only knows and believes in her rights, she also advocates those rights for herself as well as others” (Fonda, *Strong, Smart, and Bold*). As was evident from the Girls’ Bill

⁴ See Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Girl Scouts Official Website. Available (http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/). Also in the early 1990s two Girl Scout centers were opened to develop stronger relationships with specific population groups. One was in Texas and the other was in the Appalachian region. (http://www.girlscouts.org/who_we_are/history/timeline/1990s.asp).

of Rights, gaining empowerment meant adults supporting girls to conquer the issues they faced. Additionally, the organization supported the common idea embraced in girls' movement—"a girl needs to know herself" (Fine 11). This book also fell into another common theme of girls' movement: its audience was adults. Although this was evident in the title and throughout the book, Appendix A: "101 Ways to Empower a Girl and Improve Her World," left no doubt this was the case.

CHAPTER 4 METHODS

Context

While I did not want to downplay the success of Girls Inc, the disconnect between adults and girls had to be recognized as one of the major downfalls of girls' movement and most of the programs created in response. Again, High Rocks was an exception to this rule. Not only did High Rocks utilize innovative methods making it unique, it had a very specific setting. In "Telling the Untold Stories," an essay in *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Writings in Appalachian Women's Studies*, June Langford Berkley concluded, "It is difficult to imagine a newborn female arriving in any place on earth more challenging, contradictory, and open to multiple definitions than this Appalachia" (249). This was an observation worthy of analysis.

Appalachia was an important context in which to place High Rocks in comparison to the larger United States, because of its history, economics, culture, and stereotypes, among other reasons.¹ Appalachia was a region of complications. The region was defined in different ways—geographically, culturally, economically—and could be a point of contingency.² West Virginia was the geographic "heart" of the Appalachian region. It was the only state in the region containing the entire Appalachian Mountain

¹ See Williams, John Alexander. *Appalachia: A History*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

² Appalachia can be geographically defined according to the Appalachian Mountain range that extends from New York State to Georgia and Alabama. It can be culturally defined to include the more stereotypical areas of the region: parts of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina, as well as all of West Virginia. It can be economically defined as the areas designated by the Appalachian Regional Commission as areas needing social and economic assistance.

range, and was the only entire state that was considered part of Appalachia. It may be the least known of all of those states, and can be considered the most northern southern state or the most southern northern state.³ The land continued to be a valuable economic resource for the area, evident in its dependency on the coal, timber, and tourism industries. Politically, West Virginia was an example of the contradictions found in the region. The state's two congressmen and its governor were democrats, yet in the past two presidential elections the republican candidate had won the state. On the surface, the region was home to a homogeneous population of white, working-class, Christian, heterosexuals, who valued a simple (read: rural and backward) way of life. "Appalachian" was still considered to be a valid racial identity by many, and the region was often referred to as the 'third world' of the United States (Engelhardt 14, 10). Stereotypical perceptions of the region were at once rejected and embraced by the people living in the region, and helped shape their own opinions. For example, Appalachian women have embraced the strong-willed supermom identity who supports her man and community without regard to her own needs.⁴ Of course, this was a stereotype, but this view of Appalachian women has also been perpetuated in Appalachian Studies literature (Engelhardt 4).⁵ The region had a rich history, poor economics, and a celebrated culture

³ Many people (especially those not from the region) do not make a distinction between West Virginia and Virginia. See also Engelhardt, Elizabeth S.D. *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005, 11.

⁴ This phenomenon can be related to black women accepting the stereotype of the matriarch. Other parallels can be drawn between the stereotypes of Appalachian women and Black/African American women such as Mammy and Granny and Jezebel and Elly May (Engelhardt 15).

⁵ See Giesen, Carol A. B. *Coal Miners' Wives: Portraits of Endurance*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995; and Kahn, Kathy. *Hillbilly Women*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1973.

that was a source of pride while it has also been commodified.⁶ This environment only added to what adolescents must navigate. High Rocks offered its girls tools for this navigation, such as shaking off culturally imposed limitations and roles and working with each other to break down barriers. It was not long ago in this region that a girl's best hopes after high school were to marry a man who could support her. The reality is different, but the idea has not faded. High Rocks opens girls to a wider array of options. The program empowered girls to empower themselves.

Utilizing Appalachian Studies

Appalachian Studies and Women's Studies could work together in much of the same ways because they were complimentary disciplines. They shared many of the same goals; both were developed with a dedication to activism and academic scholarship, as well as a commitment to making a difference in the lives of its subjects (Engelhardt 12). Appalachian Studies held a broad definition of activism and agency. Because of the class make-up of the region, class oppressions were at the forefront of Appalachian Studies discourse, which meant that the discipline developed tools to address a broad range of class issues.⁷ These approaches also considered the intersections with race. Feminist scholarship lent itself well to this discipline, and could contribute to incorporating gender and sexuality analyses as other important intersections of oppressions in studying Appalachia.

⁶ The medium household income of the counties served by High Rocks is \$26, 767 which \$2,929 below state and \$15, 227 below national medians (2000 Census). The Center for Economic Development's state "report card" for West Virginia, which gave the state F's across the economic development board. The Institute for Women's Policy Research's state rankings indicated a continuing economic, educational and social crisis for West Virginia women. "Folk Art" gained recognition and became another source of income for the tourist industry.

⁷ Economic class and social class are often two separate identities in Appalachia. Appalachian Studies has developed methods to analyze these differences as well.

In attempting to contextualize Appalachia and West Virginia, I risked essentializing an entire region and people. In *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in*

Appalachian Women's Studies, Elizabeth S. D. Engelhardt articulated this obstacle.

The challenge becomes how to frame a discussion of women in Appalachia that does not let stereotypes dictate the terms of analysis—but that instead thinks in complicated ways about the social hierarchies that intersect and shape individual lives. (Engelhardt 3)

Thus, the acknowledgement of the intersectionality of gender, race, class, age, and sexual orientation as well as the social institutions that helped produce and reinforce these oppressions were imperative to my research.⁸ These had to be factored into my analyses of my interviews, and my assessment of the benefits of High Rocks.

My High Rocks Connections

My introduction to the High Rocks came in the spring of 2002 as part of a service-learning project for my senior women's studies capstone class at the state's largest university. I was intrigued by the feminist mission of this program located in the heart of the state in which I grew up. After graduation, I applied to be an Americorps VISTA volunteer at High Rocks—the position I held for two years.⁹ All of my data was collected after I was no longer a staff member, but while an M.A. student at the University of Florida. However, there was an undeniable “reflexive practice” to my work, which

⁸ Intersectionality became an accepted concept in feminist scholarship, but its introduction could be contributed to black feminist thought. See Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000; hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000; and hooks, bell. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989. See also Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. NY: Routledge, 2005; and Engelhardt, Elizabeth S.D. *Beyond Hill and Hollow: Original Readings in Appalachian Women's Studies*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005.

⁹ VISTA stood for “volunteers in service to America,” and was established in 1965 as part of the renewal of the “war on poverty.” VISTA's received a living stipend ten percent above the poverty line of the area they were serving. Therefore, a VISTA volunteer at High Rocks were considered a full staff member, but did not cost the program any money to have them working.

included “both individual self-assessment [as a researcher] and collective assessment of research strategies”(Naples 41). I also sought feedback on my progress in my research from past co-workers, some who still worked at the program and some who did not. Therefore my positionality in this research was complex. I have some “indigenous” knowledge as a female who grew up in West Virginia, as well as a person who was intimately involved in the workings of the program.

My Standpoint

In my research, I took an “Appalachian feminist standpoint” in which certain knowledge was privileged.¹⁰ The concept of this standpoint developed in two parts—scholarship and experience. The first aspect of this Appalachian feminist standpoint involved Black feminist thought and standpoint theory.¹¹ In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill-Collins placed Black women’s lived experiences and ideas in the center of her analysis. I positioned Appalachian women and girls at the center of my research, and connected the theories and philosophies of High Rocks to the practices of the program and the everyday lives of the girls.

This standpoint involved the validity of ideas produced in both academics and everyday life. The knowledge produced through lived experience constituted a kind of intersubjectivity. Collins asserted, “being black and female in the United States exposed African-American women to certain common experiences” (Collins 23). These commonalities produced a distinct kind of knowledge, which was placed in a historically

¹⁰ I used this term to define a privileged feminist standpoint found in women who consider themselves “Appalachian.” Standpoint referred to group knowledge. I based much of my theory and epistemology on the works of Patricia Hill-Collins, bell hooks, and Nancy Naples.

¹¹ These theories lend themselves to work in Appalachia because they all involve analysis of marginalized people.

situated context. The shared experiences of Appalachian women created this same kind of group-consciousness. Thus, overall patterns emerged to create a shared knowledge, even though not all Appalachian women faced the same challenges or placed the same importance on these experiences, or even responded the same way to the challenges they faced.

Black feminist thought and this Appalachian feminist standpoint both addressed the empowerment of a marginalized group of people, and a history of struggle. As marginalized groups, their viewpoints were suppressed by the hegemonic patriarchy. Black women struggled against gender, race, and class oppressions. Although many Appalachian women were white, they were also discriminated against by their gender and class, as well as judgments about rural living. Popular discourses subjected both groups to stereotypes. For example, the mammie, sapphire, and jezebel all categorized who black women were supposed to be.¹² The caricature of Appalachian women was a barefoot and pregnant hillbilly who was too ignorant to “know better.” This stereotype could be exaggerated further with jokes about inbreeding, and both groups of women dealt with the persona of lazy welfare mothers as well. All of these women were often considered to be dominated by the men in their lives; however, there were also stereotypes depicting the opposite. Both groups of women were placed in the margins, and utilized similar resistance strategies—such as community based activism.

¹² See: hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. hooks, bell. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989. Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000.

The second part of this standpoint developed through working at High Rocks. Being a native West Virginian gave me an advantage while I worked at the program. I had not grown up in the area High Rocks served, but because I was born and raised in West Virginia (and had family roots dating back to the 1800s) I was granted a certain privilege. In other words, when I worked at High Rocks those I came into contact with—girls, staff, and community members—assumed what I understood.¹³ Most of the time the assumptions made about me were correct, but sometimes I surprised people by not fitting the image they held about what a white woman my age from West Virginia should be. Being from West Virginia also meant that I was considered to be “one of them,” and that made it easier to assimilate into these communities.¹⁴

As an employee of High Rocks, I had many responsibilities. I was involved in the weekly tutoring during the school year where I assisted in classes, did some informal counseling, and assisted with homework. I was also responsible for the post-secondary planning program. I collected and updated college and scholarship information, held workshops to prepare girls for SAT/ACT testing, helped girls navigate the financial aid process, taught and assisted in writing college essay workshops, and planned and implemented college visits. I also accompanied girls to conferences throughout the state. I developed a West Virginia Women’s History curriculum, and worked on creating a life-plan curriculum. I taught a variety of classes at the summer camps, and was a Junior Counselor supervisor. I was also a county coordinator, which meant establishing and

¹³ For example, people assumed I followed West Virginia University football. They assumed that I knew how to drive on winding dirt roads. They assumed I liked to hike and camp, and that I knew the geography of West Virginia. It was assumed I spent my Sundays at church. Girls assumed I had attended a high school similar to their own.

¹⁴ I contribute gaining the trust of the girls I worked with to be in part my ability to relate to their experiences as teenagers living in West Virginia.

fostering close relationships with girls living in my county. I supported them in planning community service projects and in their academics. I had to establish a presence in the schools. I also had more administrative duties which included fundraising, writing and submitting newspaper articles, and being the volunteer coordinator. Therefore, I had a strong understanding of how High Rocks worked and the philosophies that guided it.

CHAPTER 5 INTRODUCTION TO HIGH ROCKS

Girl-Led Youth Development

High Rocks offers a solution to the disconnect between adults and girls and theory and praxis which is to create girl-led programs based in my interpretation of general feminist principles.¹ However, I do not label High Rocks as a feminist organization, because it would not self-identify in this way. If it was perceived to be overtly feminist, it could lose funding and community support. The girl-led approach consists of the girls having a high-degree of ownership and responsibility that fosters leadership skills. It places the adults and girls within a partnership. High Rocks grants the girls agency and privileges them as experts of their own experiences and needs.

The success of High Rocks maintaining a girl-led approach is due to many factors. The program forges a partnership between the adult staff and the girls in order for the adults to facilitate the girls' leadership processes for each program or project without being "in charge." This includes allowing for frustrations and even failures, in order for the girls to learn from the experiences. The sense of group is an important component of these processes. Girls hold each other accountable, and work together to reach consensus about each decision. Everyone in the group is equal, and speak honestly with complete freedom. In the end, each girl feels invested and is a leader of her own ideas. Each

¹ This is a guiding principle of the case study of this paper—High Rocks. High Rocks is a 501c3 nonprofit organization funded by foundation grants and private donations. It also depends heavily on volunteers (including girls' parents) to supplement the small staff. The year-round staff consists of around six employees. However, the summer staff that staffs the camps is much larger and usually consists of around fifteen members.

project is developed, implemented, and evaluated as a group. The adults provide the necessary support for the girls to carry-out those decisions. High Rocks also builds on each year of girls, and they each gain different responsibilities based on their leadership abilities.

The youth development epistemology High Rocks utilizes is best explained as an adaptation of a person-process-context model of intersubjectivity processes as outlined by Joyce West Stevens in *Smart and Sassy: The Strengths of Inner-City Black Girls*. Stevens asserts that intersubjectivity is the intervening variable between person and context (Stevens 22). Intersubjectivity involves relating to others in intentional empathetic responses, and is located in a specific context. She argues that meaning is created within social interactions and is always contextualized. The person-process-context model connects universalized youth development theories with the lived experiences of youth. This creates a view of youth that incorporates agency and is less focused on girls' developmental "problems." Thus this approach permits a large variety of approaches to support girls (Stevens 23). High Rocks supports girls to establish a strong sense of identity, nurtures their self-confidence in this identity, and helps them to set and reach their goals.

Feminist Principles

Generally, High Rocks works towards equality—through the practice of its programs and the theory of its mission. More specifically, the program incorporates many aspects highlighted in the works of bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins. For example, High Rocks recognizes the intersections of oppressions specific to their demographic, and does not create a hierarchy among these oppressions. The programs

are gender-specific, age-appropriate, and culturally sensitive. The girls in the program have agency, and their everyday knowledge is listened to and valued.

High Rocks fosters a group-dynamic—similar to the ideas of sisterhood bell hooks advocates.² Girls group is the space where the High Rocks philosophy is established, and is one approach the program employs in order to build a sense of group. It is a time for deep and personal conversations amongst girls with an adult facilitator. Girls group is comparative to a consciousness-raising group in which girls are the experts of their experiences. Girls learn new viewpoints and many issues become more personalized within the course of these groups. Through these discussions a common knowledge and common language emerges that helps girls discuss and work through the issues. High Rocks works to evaluate knowledge on different levels, and thus, assessing knowledge through dialogues is one way it validates girls' knowledge. Girls find their individual voices affirmed by others', and this builds self-confidence within the individual.³ Consciousness-raising groups are also promoted by bell hooks as a first step towards politicization.⁴

If girls group is the first step in politicization, community service is the politicization in practice. Based on their perceptions of need, girls apply their leadership and team building skills to make a difference in their communities. Community service

² For example, see: hooks, bell *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000, 43-67.

³ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000, 260-262.

⁴ For example, see: hooks, bell. *Talking Back: thinking feminist, thinking black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989, 105-111.

projects foster an ethic of caring within the girls.⁵ The girls gain a new understanding—a knowledge—through working on these projects. They recognize their individual uniqueness and that of their community. They are able to express themselves and what is important to them through their decisions about the projects. After working on these projects, girls develop a new sense of empathy for others.

Finally, girls are responsible for their own personal accountability, which is exemplified in the Pledge and expectations girls hold.⁶ Girls are given the agency to make their own decisions, and are supported to carry those decisions through. High Rocks girls go through processes in order to understand their new knowledge, to validate it, and to have confidence in it. They remind each other of their personal responsibilities and support each other in these responsibilities. They learn ways to be heard and taken seriously in the larger communities in order to promote positive change.

Interestingly, neither the girls nor the staff would call this feminism. Feminism is still a “bad word” in this region. There is no denying that High Rocks exhibits feminist ideals, but it is an invisible feminism. Susan Burt, founder and ten year director, believes that High Rocks’ version of feminism is about being a whole woman. She asserts that High Rocks starts out addressing girls’ individual needs and issues and instills a sense of group. This assists girls’ understanding that women have their own validity and voice, and a special style of leadership that is needed in their communities and in society. This awakens a different reality in them, and girls automatically become feminists. In other

⁵ See: Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000, 262-265.

⁶ See: Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000, 265- 266.

words, the girls gain a deep understanding of feminism without it ever being called feminist. Burt recognizes that High Rocks could be labeled feminist, but finds the word too associated with politics for her own comfort.

The Program

This program was established as a two-week summer camp in 1996 in rural West Virginia. It was founded by Susan Burt, a gifted-program teacher, and a group of other concerned women in the area. They were tired of seeing the negative changes in female students and other females in their lives in the transition from junior high to high school. They identified these changes as a loss of self-esteem, but they knew it was more complicated than that. They recognized that girls were not automatically given the skills they needed to navigate their lives in healthy ways. Girls faced decisions that did not have easy answers, and they often did not have adequate role models. Burt believed a resiliency program such as High Rocks could improve these circumstances. After that first summer it became obvious that the girls needed more than a summer camp for any results to be long-term. Therefore the program soon became year round with a once a week after-school tutoring program run out of Burt's farmhouse. Since then, the program grew and became more organized.

There is a small staff of about six adults (two of which are VISTA volunteers) and a board of directors, which includes girl representatives. The board of directors includes parents of High Rocks girls and community members throughout the state. The executive director also has a girl advisory committee. The program has grown to serve three area counties and meets girls twice a week during the school year—once at High Rocks and once in their individual communities. High Rocks has its own facility, which includes a lodge, private campground, horse arena, and surrounding acreage, and remains tuition-

free.⁷ The program accepts an average of fifteen new girls each summer, and serves as many as sixty girls during the school year. High Rocks concentrates on five main programs to work towards its goals: general leadership and resiliency, summer camps, academics and tutoring, post-high school planning, and community service. Its mission “is to support and strengthen young West Virginia women from all walks of life. Our purpose is to educate, empower and inspire girls, giving them the confidence to lead active lives and work toward the long-term betterment of our community” (High Rocks Mission Statement 2004). However, High Rocks has a holistic approach and strives to encompass every aspect of its girls’ lives. High Rocks’ long-term goal is to be completely self-sustaining, in which alumni girls will come back and staff the program. This long term goal involves creating a strong community of women and a strong sense of investment in the program and the communities it serves. These same concepts can be found in black feminist thought. For example, the fostering of Black women’s relationships with one another to provide a community for Black women’s grassroots activism and self-determination is a guiding principle of black feminist thought.⁸ This goal falls in-line with High Rocks’ guiding principle, which is to keep the girls at the center of all decisions about the program. It also gives the girls the responsibility to maintain the program’s existence. There are four overarching themes that all of the programs work toward: creating a culture of success, a new sense of self, community service, and leadership. High Rocks has many programs in order to meet all of its goals;

⁷ The High Rocks property was donated. High Rocks paid for the materials for the lodge through selective timbering of the property, and built it using a construction crew from the local prison.

⁸ See Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000.

however, girls begin their High Rocks experience by applying for acceptance and then with attending New Beginnings Camp.

CHAPTER 6

DATA

Interviews

I had already established trust and intimate relationships with many of my interviewees. The way I was viewed by my informants had a significant impact on my data collection that I did not expect. Interesting power dynamics existed in the interview process. I was not only a researcher, but also a former staff member of the program, which most likely influenced their answers and their word choice. The interviewees held assumptions of my knowledge, and did not explain themselves, their experiences, and their viewpoints the same way they would have to a stranger.¹ For example, there was mutual agreement of High Rocks terms and definitions.

I also had knowledge of the interviewees' personal backgrounds. Forging relationships with interviewees is a strategy many feminist interviewers and ethnographers endorse.² However, my position as the researcher fostered a lack of full disclosure from the interviewees. I had predicted that the data collection would be easy because of my position, but it was actually made more difficult. This was because I had believed that my relationship with them would put me at an advantage to set up interviews, and that they would not have issues discussing their thoughts with me.

However, my interviewees did not see themselves as informants to my research, and

¹ While I address the negative aspects of this, I acknowledge there are positive points to this as well.

² There are also recognized dilemmas. For example, Tamar El-Or, a Lecturer of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem who conducted research close to her home, "describes how intimacy between researchers and informants can mask the objectification of the researched"(Naples 39-40).

therefore, felt no obligation to be interviewed. My relationship allowed them to be informal with keeping dates. I was still able to interview fifteen girls, including alumni of the program; however, I was not able to get an equal sample of the three counties. I had also planned to interview more current girls than alumni, but because of the logistics of getting parents' signatures and transportation issues I interviewed more alumni than current girls. I interviewed nine High Rocks alumni and six current High Rocks girls. The girls I interviewed were a convenient sample of the larger program based on their availability. However, their responses can be considered typical of the girls' in the larger program.

The girls came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, different risk categories, and fourteen of the fifteen interviewees identified as white.³ I was also able to have at least one representative from each entering year from 1996-2004. All of the alumni I spoke with were currently attending college or were recent college graduates. Because of this, the alumni interviewed were equipped with a different language to articulate their thoughts and experiences, and they were able to be reflective about the whole program. I did not include girls who had been in the program for less than a year.⁴

All current girls were interviewed individually. Four of the alumni girls were interviewed individually, and the remaining seven were interviewed within a focus-group. The focus-group took place at High Rocks as well as three individual interviews,

³In the overall High Rocks organization Sixty percent of the girls were considered to come from low-income families; however, the other girls came from a mixture of socio-economic backgrounds (High Rocks brochure 2002). High Rocks girls were relatively evenly distributed across "risk" factors. Thirty-eight percent were considered to be average risk, thirty-three percent were classified as medium risk, and the remaining twenty-nine percent were put in a high risk category (High Rocks brochure 2002). Four percent of High Rocks girls self-identified as black.

⁴ I called current High Rocks girls, but contacted alumni via email.

and the other interview locations varied from front porches and playgrounds to restaurants and coffee shops. I conducted open-ended interviews that lasted around an hour which were guided by a list of questions influenced by literature I have discussed and my own knowledge of the program. There were slight variations between the questions for a current girl or alumni.⁵ I followed up their answers with other questions not on the list when appropriate. My interview methodology was based in a constructivist approach to grounded theory. This was a pluralistic approach, which I coupled with my understanding of feminist scholarship, promoted by such theorists as bell hooks and Patricia Hill-Collins. In the interviewing process, constructivists stressed that the participant defined their situations, experience, and terms. The interviews were conversational, and a mutual understanding was constructed by the interviewees and myself.⁶ Thus, analysis focused on these views and meanings.

Evaluating Responses

The interviews presented the girls' voices, which meant including their perceptions of the program and its benefits. It was a collaborative and interpretive process to achieve a common understanding of the girls' meanings. The results reflected their individual experiences interpreted through our common knowledge of the program and their backgrounds. I attempted to represent their views without evaluation. Because of the nature of the interviews and of High Rocks, some topics were not represented. However, overall, the interviewees offer a unique insider perspective of the program.

⁵ See Appendix for interview questions.

⁶ See Holstein, J. A., and Gubrium, J. F. *The Active Interview, Qualitative Research Methods Series 37*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.

An interesting aspect of these results was the difficulty in gaining any information or viewpoints that reflected negatively on the program. High Rocks spent a lot of time asking girls questions such as: what is High Rocks; what is a leader; what does High Rocks mean to you; and why is High Rocks important?⁷ Furthermore, the girls understood High Rocks was vulnerable because of its position in the community and its dependence on unreliable funding.⁸ Therefore, I worried that my data may be skewed by “cookie-cutter” High Rocks engrained responses. I pointedly asked one interviewee about this possibility. Stella assured me she had thought about the answers she gives. She said the answers were not simple absent minded responses. She had interrogated her answers to make sure they were really her thoughts, and had decided to continue using them. I valued Stella’s self-awareness and thoughtfulness about her responses. For the purpose of this research, I hypothesized that all of the interviewees had a similar reflexive outlook in their answers. They were the experts on the subject.

Participants

My interviewees expressed a specificity of growing-up female in rural West Virginia. I asked them their views about replicating this program—“is High Rocks a program that could be universal?” Many of them were not sure if it could work elsewhere, and often the response was that it would depend: “I think it would have to be

⁷ At Camp Steele in 2002 (the camp for girls who have been in the program for a year) staff worked with girls to create a definition of a leader. The final definition is: “To be a leader, you must be the best person you can be. You must enjoy yourself, have faith, speak up, be adventurous, be supportive, know yourself, and have a plan and follow through. Remember, no matter how small, you can change things. Know when to lead and when to follow. No matter what the conditions are, life must go on.”

⁸ For many years, High Rocks was rumored to be “a bunch of witches and lesbians up on the hill.” High Rocks has accomplished creating a positive name for itself, but stays in a vulnerable place. For example, a similar program in another rural county of West Virginia closed a year ago, due, in part, to issues surrounding one of its girls being openly lesbian. High Rocks also depends on private donations for a large amount of its funding.

tailored to different . . . to urban areas and rural areas and specific locations. Well, I'm not sure it would work as well because it would be a totally different camp" (Elizabeth). Elizabeth did not question the importance of a program like High Rocks for all girls, but could not visualize how it would transfer to an urban setting. Georgia had a similar viewpoint, but expanded on the thought,

I think you could do it in a city but it would alter it. Well, it would be a totally different camp because ours is really isolated geographically I think it would work if the staff was committed. I think there would be different aspects of it—like there is totally different living in an urban setting. . . You're still dealing with the same stuff, it's the same teenage stuff you deal with as you grow up . . . the group dynamic aspect I think would be the same . . . and as far as the whole philosophy of the whole thing, I think . . . I think it would work anywhere as long as you have a staff. As long as it is set up to work, it's going to work because it just works, I think. (Georgia)

For Georgia, the commitment to the program was the key ingredient to recreating it somewhere else. Hannah went beyond the working of the program in another setting and thought about how the population may change. She added, "it would be challenging because I mean urban, it hasn't been done. But there might also be more opportunities for money in an urban situation and more wealthy people who go that would donate money. So I mean like it would be easier on one hand getting it started" (Hannah). Jessica also considered how it would translate to an urban area. She said, "I think it would do really good, but I think you would have to have a very strong staff and a very strong group of girls to get it started. Because if you didn't you couldn't like get it going" (Jessica). She worried about having the needed involvement in the program, but also did not question the need of the program itself. Although Anna disagreed with this viewpoint, she agreed the program was universal. She answered,

Definitely. As long as they have a place where you can go to be away from everything else and just be yourself with other people who are like you, even not like you just as long as you have that I think it can work. The hike . . . there

definitely has to be something like the hike. The hike, it's so hard, well at first you're like ah I can't do that there's no way I can get over that mountain, but then your like okay I can conquer anything. (Anna)

Anna believed a program somewhere else would need to have facilities similar to those at High Rocks. Geographic isolation of the camp was valued by the interviewees, but none of them considered how this isolation could be different for urban girls. No one questioned the need for a program like High Rocks other places. However, most of them were not sure what a program somewhere else would look like.⁹

Who Runs High Rocks

Interviewees were asked about who ran High Rocks. They all believed the girls ran the program—that their voices were not only heard, but listened to by the staff members. The responses demonstrated that girl-led programs were possible in actual practice. Although they all agreed, current girls responded differently than the alumni. Laurel said:

I think really, yeah, you know, the staff writes the grants, but I really think it comes down to the girls. I mean, you know, not behind the scenes, but what the staff works toward is really for the girls. It's really the girls. And I think [High Rocks] helps girls develop their ideas so they can help decide where the program should go. (Laurel)

Laurel recognized that the adult staff performed the necessary tasks to keep the program running, but believed the directions High Rocks took depended on the girls. Another alum responded, “It was created by us for us. And that's what it is. And girls will continue to listen to each other” (Hannah). She supported the idea that the program was girl-led. Hannah was certain that High Rocks girls ran the program, but she also pointed out that it was not accomplished just by staff members listening to the girls. The

⁹ Further investigation was needed in how to replicate this program, and if it would have the same success in an urban area.

girls had to listen to each other, and had to agree on what should be done. Current girls concentrated on explaining why they felt they were listened to by the staff. For example, Melody articulated a difference between High Rocks staff and other adults in her life. She said, “If we say something they don’t just blow it off like other adults. They really care about what we have to say” (Melody). She admitted this was challenging for her. She said it was sometimes hard for her to remember “that they’re there to support us, and if they give me advice it isn’t just because I’m a teenager and don’t know nothing. They care if I take their advice . . . ” (Melody). The running of High Rocks was a more abstract concept, and current girls related their responses directly to their experiences as they were still occurring. They expressed knowing their input was valuable as well as valued, but did so more through examples such as discussions which occurred at Girls Night.

Attendance and the Application Process

High Rocks has a detailed acceptance process. Every spring older High Rocks girls accompanied by staff members visit each school that High Rocks girls attend to recruit new girls. The girls discuss why High Rocks is important to them. Girls usually apply between their eighth and ninth grade years, and are expected to continue the program until they graduate from high school. The acceptance process is involved because High Rocks wants motivated girls who are choosing to be there. Mandatory attendance would sabotage the girl-led aspect of the program. Acceptance is based on the initial application and the interview.¹⁰ High Rocks tries to answer three main questions about each applicant during the decision making process: What can High Rocks give to her? What

¹⁰ See Appendix for application.

can she give to High Rocks? and Will she continue with the High Rocks program through the following school year? These questions are important to consider in assessing the need, potential, and motivation of each applicant. The acceptance policies reflect High Rocks' philosophy—girls are given the information and are then given the space to decide to seek out High Rocks acceptance.

Attending High Rocks activities is strictly voluntary. There is no reward or punishment system in place for attendance. Stella stated, "I would cancel the other plans [to attend High Rocks]. When I missed, it was because I had other obligations...like obligations I couldn't just get out of" (Stella). Reflecting the girl-led aspect of the program, girls are called the night before an event and encouraged to attend, but the ultimate decision is left to them. Girls decide the importance of High Rocks and its programs. Stella pointed out the leadership girls took on by pressuring each other to go to different functions. Girls see the importance of High Rocks, and their support of each other in its continuation.

Initiation: New Beginnings Camp

Girls accepted by High Rocks are required to attend a summer camp for all of the new girls.¹¹ New Beginnings Camp (as it was renamed in 2003) is held for eleven days at the High Rocks campground. It has remained virtually unchanged since its inception, and is valued by High Rocks girls as a common experience they all share, and one in which they take pride.¹² It is also the most directly adult facilitated of all the programs.

¹¹ New Beginnings Camp is the most common way girls enter the program, but High Rocks accepts a few older girls into the program through a backpacking trip.

¹² Emily's interview revealed her view that New Beginnings Camp was imperative to High Rocks, and supported the idea that girls valued and took pride in the shared experience.

However, this is because New Beginnings Camp builds the foundation for the rest of the program, and introduces girls to High Rocks philosophy.

High Rocks rewards older girls' display of leadership skills by offering summer jobs to them as junior counselors to the new girls at New Beginnings Camp.¹³ This is a challenging role that forces girls to take on many new responsibilities. It is the junior counselors' responsibility to set good examples for new girls, and to explain their understandings of the High Rocks philosophies. Junior counselors are considered to be the missing link between the girls and the staff. Girls consider being a Junior Counselor a great honor and take the responsibility extremely serious. Girls work toward achieving this leadership role.¹⁴

The goals of this camp are multifaceted and embody most of High Rocks' goals. The camp takes girls out of their comfort level, challenges and pushes them to the edge of their ability, and forms a tight-knit group out of the campers. There is no electricity, no telephones, no hot water, and they use outhouses.¹⁵ They attend classes all day, which include math, science, writing, horses, girls group (which is similar to a consciousness raising group), solo time (which is a time that girls must sit in the woods by themselves and reflect and are encouraged to write), and a form of art—usually drama or painting a mural. Along with these classes, girls participate in strenuous group building activities, as well as an all day hike to a rock outcropping for which High Rocks is named. All of the activities have a specific purpose, related to the overarching goals of the camp.

¹³ Junior Counselors: paid summer positions as mentors for new girls at New Beginnings Camp

¹⁴ Once they graduated they were able to strive for new leadership positions in High Rocks as Interns with an eye on eventually staffing the program.

¹⁵ For many years the girls slept in tents; however, they now sleep in three-walled shelters with a tarp covering the door.

The overall objectives of the math, writing, and science classes are to convince girls that anyone (including them) can do well in the subjects, and that the subjects can not only be fun but useful in everyday life. These are not the average classrooms; therefore, all assignments are creative and hands-on.

Three things seem to be key. First, the provision of support and encouragement...based in trusting, caring relationships; second, finding creative and fun ways to teach [subjects] that focus on real life application; and third, [the staff] being role models themselves in terms of attitudes about interactions with the subject[s]. (High Rocks Evaluation 19)

Girls gain confidence in subjects they otherwise find difficult, and this confidence is reinforced throughout the school year at tutoring sessions. In drama and horseback riding they gain confidence in their bodies and communication skills. Art helps them learn to express themselves visually and participate in a group creative process.

Furthermore, each night there is a campfire, which includes singing campfire songs, performing skits, and sharing writings from classes, solo time, or other journaling. This is just one more example of how everything at this camp is about building confidence in the girls and creating a sense of community. In the last few days of camp girls are told about the High Rocks Pledge. Each girl who plans to continue High Rocks after camp is expected to recite the pledge at campfire before camp is over. The Pledge is explained and discussed at length, and it is stressed to the girls that they should only say it if they truly believe it. Once they recite the Pledge they are considered forever a High Rocks girl. The Pledge is

I, (your name) do solemnly swear to have respect for myself, respect for others, and respect for this place in order to uphold the traditions of loyalty, honesty, trust, acceptance, and adventure founded by the girls who have come before me as I am now a sister of the High Rocks”(High Rocks Pledge).

It is understood that High Rocks girls have the responsibility to uphold this pledge.

Creating Community

By the end of camp, High Rocks girls feel a certain bond with each other just because they are High Rocks girls, and from then on there is a certain amount of trust that is automatically given. Emily put it this way:

All you have to do is look at the pledge. We're all, not so much forced, it's just kind of a courtesy so to speak. We . . . all respect each other and respect ourselves, that's what you do. In life in general that might be common courtesy, but in high school it's not. I do not have to be nice to you, I don't have to be nice to anybody, and I wasn't. Unless I liked you and then you were my friend and it made a difference. But that's like even now, [with] any of the High Rocks girls that come in the store. It's not, 'hey how you doin'? It's give me a hug.' It's just different, it's not the same, and there's no way on God's green Earth that you could make it the same . . . it's not that I'm bonded to every single girl, but at the same time if I met a first year girl from this year, I bet I'd have something to talk about . . . (Emily)

Emily pointed toward a kind of self-policing on which the girls took in order to respect and support each other. Everything High Rocks does has the underlying mission of creating and maintaining a group dynamic, but it is the girls who carry it out.

Girls discover the importance of this at New Beginnings Camp. At first the staff helps girls break down cliques and diffuse the interactions girls are used to having with each other. For example, the staff pairs each girl with a shelter-mate from a different county and Junior Counselors institute “scrambling” (sitting by people you do not know) at the first few meals. The group-building activities begin the first day of camp, once the girls move into their shelters and do some “getting-to-know-you” activities.¹⁶ These group-building exercises encourage girls to work together to reach a common goal. In fact, they quickly realize they must work together to accomplish anything at camp. Girls

¹⁶ The first day the girls are taken on a hike—it is short but steep. The girls have to stick together as a group and help each other out by holding briers or branches back for each other, warning about unsteady rocks, and encouraging each other to reach the destination. The camp is filled with other activities meant to build a group. Some of the overt group-building activities include trust falls, figuring out how to get everyone in the group over a waist high rope, and figuring out how to get the entire group on a too small wooden platform.

slowly transfer this idea to other parts of their life as well. High Rocks discourages competition and divisiveness between the girls. This kind of feminist environment advances a new way of seeing other girls, and fosters support for each other.

Girls group is integral to this process. Girls group is an adult-facilitated group discussion about specific subjects that occurs once a day at New Beginnings Camp. It is used as a platform to get girls to think about specific issues and a place to introduce them to High Rocks philosophy. It is a safe space in which girls open up, get to know each other better, and learn what each other think. Although even at New Beginnings Camp some topics depend on the specific group of girls and what may be going on at camp, there are some topics that are always addressed.¹⁷ These include: sex; alcohol and drugs; relationships with friends, family, and partners; abuse (usually in the context of abusive relationships); how to handle situations such as domestic violence and rape; family issues; how girls interact with other girls and their friends; eating disorders; and spirituality. Girls form bonds through the process of these conversations. The process is similar to other discussions at High Rocks, and establishes the program's methods of conversation. Everyone in the group is equal, and everyone is given the same opportunities to be heard. Each person has total freedom in what they say. Girls group is strictly confidential. The facilitator pushes the girls to think more critically in the conversation—asks key questions that challenge girls to look deeper within themselves and the topic. They learn not to assume or make judgments about people, because they discover surprising information about people for who they care and respect. These bonds encourage them to listen to each other and to value each other's opinions. Girls shift

¹⁷ Girls group at Camp Steele is more focused on discussing topics chosen by the girls.

from the specific to the abstract; the abstract being the theories they begin developing about life. During the course of their participation in the program, these critical thinking skills are used in decision-making and in discussions about the direction of the program.

Community Service

Community service is one aspect that is not directly addressed at New Beginnings Camp. It is an integral part of High Rocks' overall mission and most easily demonstrates the girl-led aspect of the program.¹⁸ The staff meets with girls a second day a week in their specific communities to plan and administer these projects. The projects range according to the girls' decisions pertaining to their communities' need.¹⁹ Community service projects have become more involved and creative throughout the years.²⁰

However, the girls understand these projects are much more than just being involved in fun activities—they see the importance to the program and their own development. Girls develop self-confidence and leadership skills working on these projects. One of High Rocks' overall intentions is to establish a strong set of beliefs in its girls, which includes the need to give back. Complacency is unacceptable—if one sees a problem one should

¹⁸ Community and participation in community is also a guiding principle of black feminist thought. See Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000.

¹⁹ Historically, there were two repetitive projects—an after school program and a one-time project carried out for Martin Luther King Jr. Day. The after school project was carried out in two elementary schools in two of the counties each spring for a set number of weeks. It was called “Use Your Noodle” and was designed and implemented by High Rocks girls. It was an after school program held once a week for first and second graders (although some years included kindergartners and third graders), with the purpose of making learning fun. Each year the girls would decide on a uniting theme carried through each lesson. The girls as co-teachers taught lesson plans they designed to a small class. It became known as the most popular after school program each year.

²⁰ Some examples of these are: a tea party to celebrate women in one of the counties who have made a difference, an art and beautification fair, volunteer work with the elderly and disadvantaged children, learning and craft fair at local elementary school during parent-teacher conferences.

try to do something about it. If girls complain about an issue in their community, High Rocks staff supports them in developing a community service project that will help combat it. Girls learn how to implement their leadership skills, and how to network within their communities.²¹

Stella believed she learned why community service was an important part of being a High Rocks girl, “because we’re leaders of our community. It is our community, and it is partly our responsibility to take care of it too” (Stella). She exhibited the leadership in her community the program worked to nurture. She felt pride in her High Rocks community, not only because it was a safe and supportive environment, but because of the hard work she put into it. The community service projects gave her the opportunity to expand this to the community in which she lived. Kristy saw community service as a way to secure the future.

I think it is like an important part of life. Like if you can do community service [at High Rocks] they can get you into doing community service, and maybe you’ll want to do it through out your whole life, and you’ll get other people to join in with you, and they’ll get other people, and just kind of spread it around to everybody. It’s a good thing to do community service. It makes you feel good about it.
(Kristy)

She acquired the viewpoint High Rocks worked toward—community service should be part of life, and others will follow suite. The alumni I interviewed supported Kristy’s point. Almost half of those I interviewed had continued with community service projects

²¹ According to High Rocks’ 2006 Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative grant application High Rocks community service projects build twenty-three of the Search Institute’s forty assets in its girls. The program builds external assets which are that young people in the community: have a useful role, are valued by adults, serve the community one hour or more per week, and feel safe in their school and neighborhood. Internal assets include positive values such as: caring about others, working for equality and social justice, standing up for what you believe in (integrity), honesty, and responsibility. The program also builds social competencies such as planning and decision-making, interpersonal competence, resistance skills, and peaceful conflict resolution. It builds positive identity including personal power, self-esteem, sense of purpose, and a positive view of the future. Other assets include support from other adult relationships, positive adult role models, and caring neighborhood, positive peer influence, high expectations, and spending three or more hours a week in a youth program.

after graduating and one was becoming an Americorps volunteer. They also expressed the positive publicity community service gave High Rocks. One took it further by saying that it was a smart strategic way to get High Rocks' name in to the community in a non-threatening way.

The interviewees discussed positive outcomes of community service in the alumni focus-group as well. "I think the first two years, the first two camps are really focused on the group and the individual so I think it's important for the girls not to focus on themselves year round...to get out" (Georgia). Like Georgia, Summer saw community service as a way to combat egocentrism, "like when you're a teenager and your world is like you and your peers" (Summer). Courtney agreed, but included it was everyone's responsibility: "... yeah to realize that everything is your world" (Courtney). The alumni were able to appreciate the different ways in which community service worked within High Rocks. It was not just an altruistic gesture, but a strategic one used to help the girls grow and secure a solid place in the community for the program. Community service also became a recruiting tool for High Rocks. The program had girls apply because they were involved in classes or activities that High Rocks had offered to the community. Girls created role models for others in their communities to see during their projects in the same way that younger High Rocks girls looked to older ones. For example, Emily described the pride she felt in "her kids" still recognizing "their Use Your Noodle teacher."²² Community service promoted leadership skills, but also made girls feel accomplished. The accomplishments were tangible changes they could see in

²² "Use Your Noodle" was an after school program with elementary school children that High Rocks girls planned and implemented as a community service project for many years.

their communities and in which they could take pride. They were the ones responsible from inception to the final results.

Investment and Leadership

Overall, girls unanimously felt invested in High Rocks. They discussed their desire to continue to come back to High Rocks throughout their life and to give back to the program in whatever ways they could. Kristy said:

Gosh I've invested a lot of time in this place and I love it . . . I don't care what I'm doing, I don't care if I'm in Peru, I'm going to make time in my schedule to come up here, I mean I plan on being a donor. I want to donate money to this place when I start making money. I mean without the people who have donated money here I wouldn't be here, nobody would be, you know? (Kristy)

Many of the girls articulated that this investment was more than just their own desire to stay involved, that it was their responsibility as High Rocks girls. Jessica responded, "I will always consider myself a High Rocks girl. I think that once you go through the program, once your there and see the impact it makes on people, you can't see how you cannot consider yourself a high rocks girl" (Jessica). All interviewees expressed investment in the program, and the alumni were still invested in High Rocks after they graduated. Laurel stated:

still now you know [my husband] and I try to come up and volunteer . . . and any chance I have to talk to somebody about the program I really try, you know, to promote it whether I'm here or, you know, even in [a different state]. I would talk to people about it and it's just really, really great. And you know [we] got married up there so it's really nice to have those kinds of memories there. (Laurel)

These feelings reinforced an important High Rocks goal—to eventually have the program be completely self-sustaining. There was other evidence of this investment, such as the alumni who returned each summer to work as interns.

High Rocks is still a relatively young program—the first girls to graduate the program are just beginning to graduate from college—and will not be able to reach this

goal until there are more alumni ready to join the workforce. Once this goal is reached, it will strengthen its mentoring, and it will improve the girl-led aspect of the program. It is more likely that High Rocks alumni will be invested in maintaining girls' voices at the center of the program, and they might have new insights for creating even more space to hear the girls. Furthermore, girls will see staff who were High Rocks girls themselves, who are achieving their dreams, and work at the program to give back. Obtaining this goal is the definitive community service project. It will provide the ultimate leadership roles within the High Rocks community and in the larger communities it serves. It will strengthen the network of women involved in the program.

Academics: Girls Night and Post-Secondary Planning

The academic goals of High Rocks that begin at New Beginnings Camp are supported and obtained through tutoring (renamed Girls Night in 2002). Girls come to Girls Night at the High Rocks lodge directly from school once a week during the school year. The girls receive one-on-one attention from a tutor to help them with their school assignments.²³ Often High Rocks also offers classes during this time, which girls do not have the option to take in their schools.²⁴ The focus on academics gives girls more self-confidence in their schoolwork and helps them become leaders in their schools. Jessica said, "I wouldn't get that individual help anywhere else but there. And if you didn't have it, I don't see how people pass their . . . math, mainly . . . my problem was math and

²³ Tutoring many times meant re-teaching a lesson in a way the girl understood. This environment was often the only time a girl would ask a question about something she did not understand. The girls self-reported asking more questions in class due to High Rocks' influence. Girls were habitually taught studying tips, memorizing techniques, and engaged in dialogue about the importance of what they were learning.

²⁴ If girls finished their homework and High Rocks was not offering extra classes at the time, usually girls were given academic assignments by staff members in areas which the girl needed extra help.

English classes cause I couldn't have passed them without help—especially my 9th and 10th grade years” (Jessica). Girls also spend time at Girls Night in facilitated discussion to address issues which come up within the organization. Girls take advantage of this structured time, taking responsibility for the girl-led aspect of the program, to suggest ways the program can best meet their needs.

“Post-graduate planning” is a main emphasis of the program.²⁵ The communities it serves are not necessarily college oriented, which means many of the girls are first generation college students.²⁶ Therefore, the program focuses on supporting girls throughout the entire process—from the decision to attend college through acceptance. Everything leading up to applying to schools has the purpose of supporting girls to make the best and most informed decisions for themselves.

Interviewees considered the program extremely helpful.²⁷ For example, Natalie said, “I definitely think that the college prep program is extremely helpful . . . We really focused a lot on my writing skills and they helped me a lot, you know, on SAT prep. And definitely improved my writing, and got me much more prepared to face the challenges of college level classes and work” (Natalie). The staff holds SAT and ACT study sessions, and offers practice tests. There is a college library with information on

²⁵ “Post-graduate planning” was the title High Rocks used to describe their program that involved supporting girls in the decision-making process in what they will do after high school. Here after I referred to this program as “college preparation program” or “post-secondary planning.”

²⁶ According to High Rocks brochure 65% of High Rocks girls are first generation college students.

²⁷ According to High Rocks’ brochure 92% of girls who completed the program were in college, the military, or vocational programs. Alumni interviewed agreed that the program was helpful for them in applying to college.

most colleges a girl would consider attending.²⁸ Much of the information in this library is also distributed to the juniors and seniors in order to help them think about places to apply. High Rocks works with the girls to write their college essays, and helps them to apply for financial aid. Each year High Rocks staff members take girls on two college trips. Usually this means one trip to in-state schools and one trip to out-of-state schools within a reasonable driving distance. However, the choices are based on the girls' interests.²⁹ These trips involve taking girls to a variety of schools, where they spend the night in the dorms with a host student, attend a class, take the tour, and meet with a financial aid advisor.³⁰ Emily found these trips an important part of the post-secondary planning, "just to see what college campuses are like and what campus life is like. I mean because the first [trip] I was on we got to stay in the dorms . . . And it's very helpful in that sense because [we] get a real sense, even if it is in general how things work" (Emily). High Rocks also makes a concerted effort to support the girls' decisions even when the staff believes there may be more appropriate choices.³¹

²⁸ The library was created by two of the first High Rocks girls to attend college. It has expanded from the information those girls received to information on all the colleges girls have been interested in attending over the years. Information is also collected on other prospective colleges not originally represented.

²⁹ High Rocks has designed a questionnaire which is administered to all juniors and seniors in order to help them decide what school is right for them. It involves helping them decide what is important to them in the school they want to attend, such as size, location, classes and extracurricular activities, as well as financial aid packages.

³⁰ Whenever possible, girls stayed with High Rocks alumni.

³¹ The program also stresses the staff availability for any extra help a girl might need. On more than one occasion the communication between High Rocks and the admissions office was the final factor in a girl's acceptance to a specific school. One example from my interviewees is Stella's acceptance to an out-of-state school. However, a number of High Rocks girls are/have attending(ed) academically challenging out-of-state schools.

Academics: School

The fact that High Rocks is a community is extremely important to the program's mission, and something High Rocks devotes a lot of energy towards maintaining. One way the program does this is to make the environment at High Rocks dramatically different than that of the schools. Girls discuss what makes school difficult and work on ways to not produce the same situations at High Rocks. These ideas are established at each New Beginnings Camp and then reinforced through each year-round program. High Rocks accomplishes its academic goals through using gender-specific approaches to learning, and teaching styles to which specific girls respond. These methods are accompanied by encouragement from the staff and other girls.

High Rocks is different from schools in other ways as well. Schools uphold social institutions that uphold gender, race, and class oppressions. Public schools are co-educational, and students are required to attend by law. Moreover, Emily stated, "School doesn't push you to do anything except get your homework done" (Emily). The goals of schools are to have students pass their classes and graduate. High Rocks works to give girls confidence in their school work, and to make it something they enjoy.

Interviewees self-reported that the environment created within High Rocks was much more conducive to their learning. Some girls felt that they initially stayed involved with High Rocks because of the positive reinforcement about their academics that was established at New Beginnings Camp.

We had classes in math and writing and science and I was always 'I can't, I can't, I can't. I don't want to.' And they kept telling me 'don't whine, don't whine, you can do it,' and they'd be like 'did you try it?' And I was like, 'no.' And they were like, 'well you can't say you can't do it until you try it.' So I tried it and got better and better and better as we kept going along. And I started feeling better about myself and that's what kept me involved in it. Every time I did something right they reinforced it positively and I felt really, really happy. (Kristy)

This positive reinforcement empowers girls in their education, and builds their self-confidence. Girls become their own advocates, especially in their own education. Girls advocating for their own education is also an example of the leadership High Rocks builds in its girls. They become academic leaders even though many of them are not straight A students. Their grades improve and they are positive examples in their classrooms.

Stella believed High Rocks influenced her in this respect. She commented, “there have been many times that people have been like, ‘oh this sucks,’ and I’ve been like, ‘oh it isn’t that bad.’ Usually it’s like in math class, and before I was that person who said it sucks” (Stella). Stella gained self-confidence in her school work, and understood the importance of learning a subject like math. This demonstrated the success of High Rocks’ educational goals. This was also important because the girls were exhibiting this leadership within their schools where there was no direct High Rocks support, unlike for example community service projects.

Positive Influence

All interviewees believed High Rocks had a positive influence on them. The girls established that High Rocks accomplished its holistic approach. All current girls gave the same answer to the question, “what parts of your life do you feel High Rocks has influenced?” They all responded that there was not a single part of their life that was not influenced in some way by the program. For example, Stella answered with the rhetorical question, “what part of my life isn’t affected by High Rocks?” To Stella, it was impossible to separate High Rocks’ influence from any aspect of her life. Anna explained this belief by giving some examples,

I wouldn't be as comfortable with school work, well confident and comfortable with school work like I am . . . I'm confident because of High Rocks-that's one way it's helped me. It's helped me conquer issues about the divorce of my parents, the death of my grandparents, and it's helped me work on my [eating disorder]. I'm still struggling with it a little bit, but I would probably be really sick if I hadn't joined High Rocks because I was pretty bad when I joined. (Anna)

She believed the program had been more important in certain areas of her life than in others, but that overall it had affected everything. She found the support of the staff and other girls to be imperative to overcoming specific issues.

Moreover, alumni believed they were still growing from their experiences at High Rocks. For example, one who was a recent college graduate stated:

I think they've influenced me a lot . . . Just the whole mentality of doing things, doing hard things and not giving up. Like everyday of camp being ridiculous and, you know, you come out and you're like, 'yes!' And carrying that mentality on into your life. I wouldn't have gone to the college I did, you know? I wouldn't have been me. (Elizabeth)

High Rocks supported and challenged girls to discover their own identity for themselves.

The program accepted and supported that identity to develop and reach their own personal goals. High Rocks also worked on supporting these goals without judgment.

This was instrumental to the program's goal of creating a culture of success and staying girl-led and girl-centered.

As the multidimensional goals suggested, High Rocks girls believed there were many important aspects to the program, and that it was not just one thing that made it work. When asked what the most important aspect of High Rocks was for a stranger to understand, Emily answered:

High Rocks takes girls, all girls, from all different shapes, sizes, personalities, and helps them grow in their own way to be . . . I don't know, I guess to be the best they can be Whether you know it or not they push you . . . you learn from your experiences and, you know Like they push you and push you until you think you are going to fall off the edge of a cliff and then when you don't you kind of step back and go 'whoa, I didn't know I could do that,' you know what I'm

saying? Like you learn a lot about yourself . . . and a lot about other people and how . . . to know your strengths as well as your weaknesses, and not so much that your weaknesses are weaknesses, just that you have stronger points, you know what I'm saying? You have . . . some people who just have to work harder at certain things than other things (Emily)

She explained the importance of the program being open to any girl, and the challenges it presented to them. The challenges gave girls a new sense of their abilities, and a new outlook on and confidence in the qualities that were less strong. In response to how she described the program to others, Natalie said, "I try to emphasize the network of women it creates and umm . . . how unjudgmental the group, a support group, it is. And that's really one of its key high points" (Natalie). While she concentrated on the support she received, Elizabeth said, "I think I focus on the leadership aspect of it-just giving girls opportunities to do stuff, like be a leader and . . . you know learn different ways of interacting with women" (Elizabeth). For her, the support and relationships were only a part of the program. She also saw the leadership skills it cultivated to be imperative to the program's overall mission. It was clear that the interviewees believed they gained a positive influence in their life by being in the program. The fact that it was difficult for them to settle on one or two reasons why High Rocks was important, pointed to the program's many goals and holistic approach.

Critiques and Suggestions

The interviews suggested High Rocks was successful in many of its goals, and in its overall mission. According to the perspectives of the interviewees, many goals needed no improvement. However, while only one interviewee directly critiqued anything at High Rocks, interviewees did express indirect dissatisfaction with aspects of the program. Interviewees sometimes perceived there to be a lack of organization. For

example, Emily's comments about continuing with High Rocks throughout high school hinted at an understood disorganization.

Like we get there and it's such a hassle and everything's confusing, you know how everything's scattered? It gets to be that you don't want to be there, but yet you continue to go back—over and over . . . Well it's just something about the place that kinda draws you in, you don't really have a choice . . . I guess it's just that they've done so much for me . . . but I mean I don't think about it. When [High Rocks] just comes and says 'we need you to do this' I'm like 'okay, whatever you say.' (Emily)

The apparent lack of organization could be frustrating and “a hassle” for the girls who attended, but the overall attitudes toward attending was positive. Furthermore, the apparent lack of organization could be responsible for Stella's observation about tutoring. She often felt there was not enough time during tutoring nights to finish all of her homework. She described feeling distracted because of the many different activities going on at one time.

Based on Stella's observations, I suggest High Rocks can do two things to improve their tutoring program. Tutoring spaces can be arranged in more conducive ways, and away from activities not involving schoolwork.³² Second, since Girls Night cannot be extended any later, High Rocks can organize tutoring workshops on a set number of days to take place in the individual communities. For example, once a month a community day could be set-aside for “specialty” tutors to visit individual communities to help with specific subjects. This could also be turned into a community service project, in which

³² I recognized that High Rocks has made attempts to keep Girls Night productive and not distracting. These suggestions are not new. This could mean separating tutoring space and class space by floors; it could mean holding classes in the quiet rooms where tutoring usually takes place and hold tutoring in the larger common areas. It could also include hanging curtains or laying area rugs in the large common areas to absorb some of the sound.

the tutoring service is opened up to other students.³³ At the least, girls need to contribute suggestions for improvements.

The High Rocks evaluation revealed a few more critiques of the program. The girls pointed out that there was a lack of diversity in the people involved with High Rocks. They also pointed out that there was favoritism among staff members and certain girls. This was put into the context of allowing certain girls special privileges not available to other girls. “They worried that these special allowances were preventing the girls from being ‘united’ and perhaps sending problematic ‘messages’ to girls” (High Rocks Evaluation 2004).

Although, High Rocks girls are predominately white and over half are from low-income families; this is a reflection of the communities the program serves.³⁴ Considering this, diversity is found at High Rocks. The girls come from three different high schools, and would most likely never meet each other outside of High Rocks. “Popular girls” and girls with higher socio-economic backgrounds become friends with the “losers” and girls coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. I argue that High Rocks reaches its goal of creating a diverse community of women working within its restraints of predominately poor white communities. Although there is no denying that race and class diversity exist in Appalachia, this diversity is minimal in the three counties High Rocks serves; therefore, considering four percent of High Rocks girls identify as

³³ I realize this suggestion would be difficult to manage; the staff is small and is already traveling to a home county at least once a week. Logistically this could probably only work if all staff stayed on a rotating schedule for community days and did not travel to one specific county every week, (which could create new problems). Also High Rocks tried a similar idea before final exams in the fall of 2005.

³⁴ Sixty percent of current girls were from families considered to be low-income (High Rocks Brochure).

black and a little less than half come from higher socio-economic families the program reflects the diversity found in the communities it serves.

The only direct critique of High Rocks from the interviews involved the focus on college planning. Laurel saw the one shortcoming of the program to be the intense emphasis on attending college directly after high school. It was telling in itself that High Rocks had only recently begun referring to this aspect of its programming as “post-graduate planning” as opposed to “college preparation.” Laurel saw the advantages to the post-secondary planning, and believed it was helpful “to a certain extent.” She expanded on her opinion:

I think I felt really pushed to go to college, even though I made it clear that I wasn’t ready to go yet, but I felt really pushed instead of being able to focus like, “well yeah, you’ll go to college. Here’s some colleges to think about. Lets look and see what else you could do before college.” Instead it was just college, college, college. And I got out of school and was like, “what am I going to do?” In the process of me not going to college they could have been more supportive. (Laurel)

She made the decision not to go to college straight out of high school.³⁵ She felt confident in that decision, she acknowledged, because of the self-confidence she gained at High Rocks. However, she not only felt pressure from High Rocks to go to college, but lacked the support she needed to figure out other options.

While High Rocks has created a strong college-preparation program, it has not focused on helping girls make alternative plans for life outside of high school. The program was not meeting all of its girls needs by focusing on only one path for after high school. I suggest High Rocks can implement a more inclusive post-secondary planning to include positive alternatives to college. The program must accept alternatives to

³⁵ Laurel moved out of the state after she graduated and worked for two years before returning to West Virginia. At the time of the interview, she was married and was attending school to become a registered nurse.

college as viable options. High Rocks attempted to implement this in the summer of 2005, but other programs took precedent. Some of these ideas included creating a library that provided information about alternatives to college, fieldtrips to area businesses that do not require college degrees, and inviting successful women who have taken alternative paths in their lives to speak to the girls about their lives. High Rocks could follow through on those plans, and enlist girls to help them build this part of the program.

While some of the literature may have guided it, overall, High Rocks did not conform to the larger societal ideals about who girls were, what they needed, and who they should become. Instead, it adhered to what girls expressed needing. It created a space for girls to learn who they were, what they believed, and how they defined success for themselves. It then helped and supported them to make and reach their goals.

In my analysis of High Rocks I have found some critiques of my own that were not addressed by the interviewees, but that are important to the overall evaluation of the program and to the use of an Appalachian feminist standpoint. High Rocks was unique to its community because of its philosophies and mission, and worked hard to create a good name for itself. It was also unique to an all girls, seemingly feminist organization because of its cultural context. For example there are two issues High Rocks did not bring to the group and only handled with the individual girl. These two issues are the acknowledgment that there is more than one possible choice when a girl becomes pregnant, and that there is more than one (heterosexual) sexual orientation.

High Rocks was a deterrent in pregnancy among its girls, and while there was no quantitative evidence the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (APPI) agreed that

High Rocks was an intervention program for teenage pregnancy.³⁶ Musick argued girls need a healthy self-image and support, which High Rocks provided. High Rocks received funding from APPI for a number of years. However, some girls still became pregnant. High Rocks was supportive and pragmatic with the girls. They had two main priorities—getting the girl to finish high school and helping the girl make a plan for after the baby was born. High Rocks was an important ally for the girl to have at this time in her life. However, as a girl-lead program it fell short here, because High Rocks strictly followed the larger communities’ belief that if a woman became pregnant she must deal with the consequences of raising the baby. Although, most High Rocks girls had been brought-up in religious families with traditional values, and Musick argued girls “choose” motherhood as a sense of identity, High Rocks not discussing a full range of information with the girl limits larger objectives. High Rocks does not discuss adoption or abortion as even an option unless girls bring it up. Each staff member approached this slightly differently, but the general response was that the girl would not be able to handle the consequences of any option other than having the baby. Burt suggested that in general High Rocks girls strongly believe in keeping their baby. Other information should have been available to girls. High Rocks was a source of information and support; the program may be the only place in their community that girls could hear honest information about other options. High Rocks provided information about healthy and responsible decision-making about sex, STD’s, and about using condoms and birth

³⁶ APPI is a state-run program. According to the Kids Count 2005 data book, the national teen birth rate as of 2003 was 41.7%. The West Virginia teen birth rate is 42.7%. The teen birth rate in the three counties served by High Rocks are just slightly lower or slightly higher than the state’s average. However, one of these counties’ birth rates has dropped 22.6% since 2001. See: <http://www.wvkidscountfund.org/> .

control. High Rocks should have information about adoption and abortion available to girls who may want it.³⁷

This critique highlights the context of High Rocks, and the need to use an Appalachian feminist standpoint in this analysis. It also falls back to the invisible kind of feminism that occurs at High Rocks. For example, in the spring of 2002 The Feminist Majority Foundation held a workshop at West Virginia University. High Rocks girls were invited by my Women's Studies Capstone class to visit WVU that weekend and attend the workshop. The High Rocks girls enjoyed their visit up until they attended the workshop. One of the main topics of the workshop was organizing and activism around reproductive rights. The girls were unaware of many of the topics being discussed, and became upset and offended when they were given an explanation. The girls did not want to organize for something like emergency contraception. During the workshop a workshop leader was asked if a person could be a feminist and not support the right to choose. The unit leader answered no. Susan Burt spoke of this later saying High Rocks girls are feminists; they are just feminists who keep their babies. The Women's Studies class had not considered that members of an all girls program like High Rocks would not be overt feminists. Even though most of the students in the class were from Appalachia, the academic setting assisted in ignoring the cultural context. This is where Appalachian feminist standpoint holds an advantage—feminist scholarship by itself would miss important contextual clues and supply a less accurate analysis.

Context is also important when considering there were over one hundred girls who were a part of the High Rocks program, and as far as High Rocks was concerned, they

³⁷ Even if a girl decided to have an abortion, there is only one clinic in the entire state which is at least two hours from where any of the girls live. The state is in the process of passing a parental-consent act.

were all heterosexual. Although High Rocks devoted time to discussions about healthy relationships with friends, families, and partners, it only discussed heterosexual romantic relationships. It was a place where girls felt comfortable talking about the hardest aspects of their lives, and yet it was not an easy place to discuss homosexuality. Homophobia is not tolerated; however, if a girl self-identified as a lesbian the situation was handled with that individual girl. They were encouraged to not be open.³⁸ This was another situation in which High Rocks let the dominant ideas of the community dictate its actions, instead of what was best for the girl. High Rocks excused this contradiction by asserting that the girl would have an easier time if she waited until she was in a more accepting community to come out. While in the sense of the larger community this was almost guaranteed to be the case, High Rocks should be an accepting community in which girls would not question the reaction of their coming out. High Rocks worked to support girls find themselves and sexuality is part of that.

The interviews described the thoughts and experiences of a small sample of current and alumni High Rocks girls. Although conversations varied and were individually influenced, they were all loosely guided by my research tools and findings along the way. Reviewing the responses collectively, certain patterns emerged. For example, some aspects of the program were not addressed at all, and others developed into being more salient than expected. The data represented the reality of the interviewees and my interpretations of their experiences at High Rocks.

Interviewees confirmed High Rocks' ability to listen to girls and to keep the program girl-led. For example, Jessica believed she was heard at High Rocks, but

³⁸ A current girl who joined the program in the summer of 2005 successfully 'came out' at New Beginnings Camp and in general it has been a non-issue. This is new territory for the program.

discussed that it was not just individual voices that were heard. She said, “. . . they listened to you in a way but in a way it’s a whole, it’s a group” (Jessica). She explained what she meant by giving an example. She said that she may have went to a staff member and told them her idea, but that when the idea was finally implemented other girls had given their input—“and made your all’s idea better” (Jessica). She believed it was this group effort that made her feel that the girls ran the program. High Rocks concentrated on understanding girls and listening to what they articulated needing. The staff facilitated productive and beneficial programming based on the girls’ leadership.

The foundation of the program is found in New Beginnings Camp where girls are introduced to High Rocks philosophy and gain the necessary tools to make changes in their lives. The program begins by forcing girls to interact with each other and work together. It is imperative to create a group dynamic. Once the girls feel comfortable as a group, the camp concentrates on nurturing individual self-esteem. Girls learn to meet challenges, and realize they can accomplish seemingly impossible goals. The camp establishes the value of girls and their strengths.

It directly addresses the core themes of a girls’ life identified by High Rocks in girls group. The program then keeps an active role in the conversations throughout the school year. Girls group is often one of the first places girls feel safe to open up to each other. The experience opens them to new experiences and knowledge, and gives them the chance to bond on commonalities and to support one another. In this way, Sara Shandler’s *Ophelia Speaks* could be considered a girls group in print. Girls group and camp as a whole also represent core themes in the epistemology of Black feminist thought—lived experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing

knowledge claims, an ethics of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability (Collins 257-266).

Girls group directly addressed common issues faced by girls, not to pathologize them, but to provide support. Although girls group could be seen as a prevention strategy, it was much more about creating space for girls to talk and be heard by each other. For example, Anna revealed that her experiences at High Rocks had been helpful to her dealing with her body-image and eating disorder. Of course eating disorders were about more than just accomplishing thinness. Like other self-abusive behaviors, they could be about gaining control, an act of submission, an act of protest, or a cry for help (Pipher 184-85). High Rocks offered girls new ways to feel in control of their lives. They had a new sense of self-confidence. Their opinions mattered at High Rocks, and they learned how to articulate those opinions. They were also given a support network to fall back on when things became too tough to handle on their own.³⁹

Furthermore, the sense of group that the program nurtured deterred the competition and aggression commonly found between adolescent girls. For example, Melody said she was proud of the changes she had noticed in herself. She said, “I don’t just think of myself I think of others and care about how other people feel . . .” (Melody). Like Gilligan, Rachel Simmons placed relationships as central to girls’ lives in her book *Odd Girl Out*.⁴⁰ She argued that girls were not given the skills needed to deal with the conflict that could occur in these relationships. She asserted the alternative aggressions exhibited

³⁹ Developing good decision-making skills was another part of this process that began in girls group.

⁴⁰ See Gilligan, Carol. *In A Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982; Gilligan, Carol, and Brown, Lyn Mikel. *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992.

by girls affected their leadership ability and correlated to loss of self-esteem (Simmons 262-63). High Rocks prevented aggression and competition by establishing a group dynamic in the beginning stages of the program. Simmons' conclusion of *Odd Girl Out* was similar to High Rocks' approaches; she advocated having girls and women acknowledge the existence of alternative aggressions and work together on the problem.

High Rocks utilized a similar approach in its community service projects, in which the staff supported the girls to address their communities' needs. The leadership skills girls gained from High Rocks were nurtured in the community service projects. Developing leadership skills through community service was supported by the theories found in the book *Care and Community in Modern Society*. High Rocks girls learned they could have a real impact on their community and that the program respected that impact. Studies found students with poor academic performance, discipline problems, and low self-esteem benefited significantly more than other students from being involved in community service because they began to internalize a new self-image (Schervish et al. 145). High Rocks supported girls to redefine themselves and self-image—community service was just one way the program provided that space.

The program also improved girls' leadership skills within their academics. Well-designed educational programs can improve self-esteem, coping skills, and basic knowledge levels (Stenger et al. 40). The improved self-confidence in their schoolwork gave them a new sense of accomplishment and a purpose to achieve within their educations. Interviewees expressed improvements in their schoolwork, because of High Rocks' teaching styles. The methods the program implemented and the learning environment it created were promoted by the evidence presented in "Positive

Programming: The Common Denominator,” which encouraged gender specific approaches in single-sex programs.⁴¹ As Judy Mann suggested, the single-sex education environment at High Rocks put girls’ needs at the center of every decision, and provided role-models who viewed education as important and positive. For example, Melody described how her involvement in High Rocks had changed her attitudes toward school. She said, “[my grades] may not have changed letter-wise, but I actually pay attention to what my teachers are trying to get across to me” (Melody). Melody had not valued her education until she went to High Rocks. The program helped her realize that she was capable of learning and accomplishing challenges if she had the right support.

The results of The Rural Girls in Science Program found similar success in these approaches. Like High Rocks, this program gave girls opportunities to apply their education to their everyday lives. The Rural Girls in Science Program promoted this practical application by creating research projects that were community focused. This program also found that wide-ranging support, like High Rocks provided, was a key component to its success. At High Rocks, this support can be found in the one-on-one tutoring time, the small special-topics classes it offers, the academic classes held as

⁴¹ The article outlined specific teaching strategies found in the High Rocks program: hands-on and fun activities; wide variety of activities to choose from, individual activities, and time alone; opportunities to learn technical activity-oriented skills as well as outdoor survival skills; unstructured time to socialize. These methods were supposed to be applied to outdoor programming, and were outlined by R.H. Culp. High Rocks camps include all of these suggestions. For example, close to all of the activities and classes at camps were hands-on, including math and science. Camp Steele often offers classes girls can choose from; some are group-activities and some are individual; solo-time is structured individual time. The girls are given some unstructured time to just hang-out with each other. Camp Steele had been working on building projects that past few years in which girls built a sleeping shelter. High Rocks offered outdoor survival classes in both Camp Steele and New Beginnings Camp.

supplements to school classes (like math), the intensive summer camp classes, and the extra time spent on tutoring before exams.⁴²

Overall, the interviewees reported High Rocks as a positive influence in their lives. High Rocks' holistic approach encompassed all aspects of its girls' lives, and made it difficult for the interviewees to define any one feature as most salient. High Rocks supported girls to become leaders of their communities and agents of their own lives.

⁴² “Researchers have found that a lone teacher can have a significant impact on girls’ attitudes toward math by providing active encouragement to girls through role models, sincere praise for good work, and explicit advice regarding the value of math and its usefulness in high-paying careers”(Mann 111).

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

High Rocks serves thirteen – to eighteen–year–old girls living in three rural counties of West Virginia who want to change their lives. The girls apply to the program and are accepted based on their need and their potential. Once girls are accepted into the program, High Rocks supports them to establish healthy relationships, to gain self-confidence and strong sense of self, and to succeed in their lives through education, community service, and goal setting. It fosters conversations about issues girls face, and positive decision-making involving these issues.

High Rocks' methods were advocated by the authors of *ManifestA* and by Sara Shandler in *Ophelia Speaks*. Shandler expressed this in the purpose of her book *Ophelia Speaks* in which she described the need for girls to represent themselves without adult filters, and to describe their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Shandler placed herself in a similar position to High Rocks staff by creating a kind of partnership with the writers and facilitating the publishing of their words without judgment or interpretation. Baumgardner and Richards critiqued girls programs ran by adults that addressed what the adults believed the girls needed, instead of what they articulated. For example, the authors described the process of *New Moon: The Magazine for Girls and Their Dreams*. It was created by a mom who was “anxious about [her daughters’] impeding adolescence” and was intent on not repeating the same patterns with her daughters that she had experienced at that age (Baumgardner and Richards 187). The magazine was meant to be an alternative to teen magazines by and for teenage girls. However, girls

were not given full creative freedom for the content and were not at all involved in the circulation of the magazine. It was also asserted that the awareness of how teen magazines hurt self-esteem was only that of the adults involved. There were positive aspects to *New Moon*, but it did not quite reach its goal of being an alternative girl-run magazine.

High Rocks began during the re-surge of girls' movement in the 1990s, which focused on who girls could become with the much needed help of adults. Adults produced a large body of work which discussed the psychology, the behaviors, and the education of girls. The literature put adolescent girls at-risk for low self-esteem, looking only at their gender and age. Most programs were run in accordance to what adults thought girls needed. This was what made High Rocks different. The program gave its girls agency, understanding they were the experts on their needs. High Rocks was successful as far as being a girl-led program staffed by adults because the leadership was a partnership between the girls and staff. Initially, at New Beginnings Camp, High Rocks was maintained by the adult staff with the assistance of the Junior Counselors. However, as the girls went through the program they gained more responsibilities and decision-making power. They became leaders, and the staff fell to being facilitators. High Rocks supported girls to discover the best of themselves, and the girls exhibited this. Girls experienced improvements, and inherent changes in their lives.

My analysis of this data was informed by an Appalachian feminist standpoint, which assumed shared commonalities amongst Appalachian women and girls and privileged the knowledge found within everyday experiences. I borrowed from the epistemology of Black feminist thought to help outline this Appalachian feminist

standpoint. Both standpoints highlight the resistance to oppression by these marginalized groups. The information was framed by the complimentary disciplines of Women's Studies and Appalachian Studies to place it in a specific context.

The program's feminist foundation and girl-led leadership style addresses what girls articulate needing, which makes it unique to many girls programs. High Rocks could be modeled by other programs to improve the disconnect between theory and praxis and adults and youth that often occur. At High Rocks adults facilitate girls' leadership through a partnership. The person-process-context model grants agency to the girls, values their experiences, and places their knowledge in a specific context within social interactions. High Rocks overall programming and methods are transferable to other girls programs, and can be used as a guide to improve the benefits of these other programs.

My research assessed existing literature about teenage girls and girls' programs. It revealed that these projects are meant to help adults assist girls in maneuvering through issues adults perceive to be salient in the girls' lives. I argued that girls could benefit more from these interventions. My research provided possible solutions to improving these projects—adults should act in partnership with girls to support them to address the needs they recognize for themselves. High Rocks differs from other projects because girls were given the needed agency to articulate their needs, and then were provided with the necessary support to address those needs. My research demonstrated the benefits of High Rocks, and contributed this success to its unique approaches to programming. The programs' holistic approach created positive change throughout the girls' lives. It nurtured girls' leadership ability, improved their self-esteem and self-confidence,

nurtured a culture of success within the girls' communities, and provides girls with an understanding of the value of community service and education.

High Rocks served a specific community and demographic that has been given less attention than others. The majority of these girls were white, living in rural areas, and, if they were not living in it, they were at least exposed to poverty. The program functioned in specific ways based on its setting. Therefore, while the overall mission, goals, and philosophies could be transferred to other programs in other areas, the programming itself would have to be adapted to a different place with different cultural norms. While I recognized that High Rocks could be improved, it could also serve as a beginning model for improvements of other programs. This lends itself to further research involving what a girls program modeled after High Rocks would look like in another setting. Evaluative research will be needed once a program does adapt High Rocks inspired methods to gauge improvements in the benefits to the girls involved in the program.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. Why did you apply/why are you in this program?
2. Do you recognize any changes after the first part of the program was complete?
3. What then made you continue the program?
4. What part of the program do you enjoy most? What do you think is most helpful?
5. Does the program work? Why does the program work?
6. Do you think you follow the trends at your school?
7. Do you consider yourself a trend setter?
8. Describe your school's social atmosphere. How does it compare to the atmosphere of this program?
9. Describe your friends. Are your friendships in the program different than those in school?
10. Are you friends with the girls in the program outside of it?
11. Describe yourself. How do you think people in school would describe you? How do you think people in this program would describe you?
12. Do you think you look at yourself differently since you have been in the program?
13. Describe the program. What do you think is most important for people to understand?
14. Have your grades changed since you started the program?
15. Have your study habits changed since you started the program?
16. Do you feel any differently, has your performance changed at all in regards to math and science?
17. Do you feel like you have examples to look up to in life? Did you have them before you were in the program?
18. What are your life goals? Where do you see yourself after high school?
19. Describe the community service done with the program. How do you feel about it? Why do you think the program asks you to do it?
20. Describe the post-graduate prep done in the program. How do you feel about it? Why do you think the program approaches it the way it does?
21. Do you feel like there are differences in the program compared to the rest of your life (differences in you, in general, in the people you are around, the messages you receive)?
22. What parts of your life do you think have/are effected by this program?
23. Why do you think the program is just for girls?
24. Talk about the staff. What do you think about them? Hoe do they make you feel?
25. Do you feel like the staff encourages you? Do they give you praise?
26. Have you ever thought about the gender roles you assume and accept? Have you questioned them after being in the program?
27. Do you feel like you have been exposed to things that you may not have been if you had not been in this program?

28. Have you discovered any new interests or something that you find fun that was introduced to you in the program?
29. Do you feel free to express yourself in the program? Do you feel you express your opinion any more while you are participating in the program?
30. Do you feel listened to at the program?
31. Do you feel challenged in the program?
32. Has the program changed the way you make decisions? Do you think of anything differently when you make decisions now?
33. Do you think that your relationships have changed at all since you have been in the program?
34. What are your family dynamics?
35. Are there ideas that you practice in the program that you don't feel comfortable with practicing outside of the program?
36. Who decides what happens and what will be done at the program? Who makes the program work/run?
37. Do you think this program is universal, do you think it could work anywhere?
38. Do you look forward to completing the program?
39. What do you and what does the program expect of you when you leave the program?
40. Do girls interact differently at the program than they act at school?
41. Do you feel invested in the program?
42. Do you think you have re-evaluated things in your life since you have started the program?
43. Does the program continue to support you once you complete it?
44. What influence do you think the program has had on your post-graduate plans?
45. Do you feel connected to the program now?
46. How much influence do you think the program had on you when you were in high school?
47. Do you believe you would have turned out differently if you had not been involved in this program?
48. What do you think was the most positive influence/change the program had on you?
49. What would you say to people who spoke negatively about the program?

Dear High Rocks Parents/Guardians,

My name is Kendra Vincent, and as many of you know, I am at the University of Florida pursuing a graduate degree after spending two years as a VISTA at High Rocks. As an Americorps VISTA volunteer I was able to be considered one of the core staff members at High Rocks, but be paid a living stipend as a government volunteer. I am starting my research for my thesis, which is a large research paper that must be completed before I can graduate. I am working closely with my faculty advisor, Dr. Stephanie Y. Evans (who you may contact at 352-392-6088), on this research. This paper is titled “For the Benefit of Girls: Evaluating a Girls’ Program in Appalachia,” and is looking at the information which exists about being a teenage girl and about raising and educating teenage girls. I am analyzing this information as to how it pertains to the U.S. and specifically to Appalachia.

I plan to use High Rocks as the example of a program focusing on working with teenage girls located in Appalachia. I want to interview and pass out questionnaires to as many High Rocks girls as I can for this research—alumni, current girls, and girls who have completed New Beginnings Camp this past summer. I am hoping to recruit around 50 High Rocks girls as volunteers to be interviewed and to fill out the questionnaire. The questions will pertain to the girls’ perceptions of High Rocks and how High Rocks influences their life. High Rocks tends to be a place girls confide and confess, which often means High Rocks is a place where girls deal with hard issues or situations they are facing. Although I do not ask any direct questions about the common issues faced by teenage girls—eating disorders, self-mutilation, sexual activity/pregnancy, drugs and alcohol, domestic violence/sexual assault, etc.—these issues still may come up in the course of the conversation, just because of the role High Rocks often plays in girls’ lives. If these issues do come up they will be discussed according to the comfort of the participant.

I will be the only one conducting the interviews and the only one with access to the information. All girls’ names would be changed to protect confidentiality. I will ask them to choose an alias which will be how they will be referred in all of my research. All interviews will be tape recorded, but I will be the only one with access to these tapes. I will be the only one with access to any of the information provided by the girls. I will destroy all of the information at the completion of my research. The girl is able to skip any question she does not want to answer, or withdraw from participation at any time. It is also required of me to keep all participants’ identities confidential to the extent provided by law. However, at the same time, I must inform you that I am required by Florida law to report any participant’s report of child abuse to the state. Therefore, if this occurs I will also send a copy of the report to WV. This means that in the case of abuse my data, including my tape recordings of the discussions/interviews could be subpoenaed in a court case. All participation is voluntary and I assess no risk posed to the participants.

I will be visiting High Rocks specifically to conduct interviews, and would like to get as many interviews done during this time as I can. The interviews will last between 30 to 45 minutes. I am willing to provide any transportation that may be needed for this process, and will work with you to set up a time which is convenient for all involved.

This is all on a voluntary basis and there will be no rewards or punishments no matter the decision made about participation. High Rocks will not be involved in this process and not have access to any of the information except the final draft of my thesis. However, my research will be to the benefit of High Rocks as an organization for evaluations, funding, etc. Most High Rocks girls are under the age of eighteen, and I therefore need parental consent for their participation. I am asking your permission for your daughter to participate in my research. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me.

Any further questions concerning research participants' rights can be directed to the UFIRB office, PO Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, 32611 or you can call 352-392-0433.

Thank you,

Kendra Vincent
 Cell: 352-256-3164
 High Rocks: 304-653-4891
 Home: 352-336-5241
kendranadean@yahoo.com

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to allow my child _____, to participate in Kendra Vincent's thesis research, and have received a copy of this letter.

Parent/Guardian

Date

2nd Parent/Witness (if needed)

Date

APPENDIX B
HIGH ROCKS APPLICATION FORM AND EVALUATION STATISTICS

High Rocks

A Community Non-Profit Dedicated to the Growth of Girls

HC 64, Box 438 Hillsboro, WV 24946 e-mail info@highrocks.org www.highrocks.org

phone (304)653-4891 fax (304) 653-4335

Name _____ Age _____ Grade _____

Home Address

Home Phone _____ email _____

School

Mother's Name and Occupation

Father's Name and Occupation

Who do you currently live with?

Phone and Address of any parent you don't live with full time _____

Favorite Subject: _____ Least Favorite Subject: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

email (optional)

We interview top candidates in their home. We'd like to meet at least one of your parents (or guardian) as well. Please indicate the best times to meet with both you and a parent (e.g. Wed evenings are no good, or weekends are the best) and give us good driving directions to your home from a major road.

Directions
Best time to visit

SHORT ANSWER: Please answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

1. Why do you want to become a part of the High Rocks?
2. What do you think are your best qualities? What do you think is your worst quality?
3. If tomorrow you suddenly moved to a place where no one knew you, are there ways in which you'd like to be different? How?
4. Tell us about a time when someone turned out to be different than you expected.
5. Tell us about a dream you have for yourself.
6. What is something you think many people don't know about you and would be surprised to learn?
7. What is a change you would like to work towards in your school and/or community?
8. What makes you unique? What will you bring to the group that no one else can?

ESSAY (must be at least 250 words long) High Rocks is a powerful challenge for girls who want a new adventure and a chance to prove themselves in new ways. **With this in mind, please describe a challenge you have faced and how you dealt with it.**

Try to write it like no one could but you. Other girls have written about dealing with a friend, a divorce, a problem at school, a death, moving, gossip or even a class! Your applications are confidential; no one will read them other than us.

RECOMMENDATIONS You also need to ask two adults to fill out the recommendation letter that goes along with the application. Below, please list the name, relationship and phone number of each person you give this recommendation letter to.

Name _____ Relationship to you _____ Phone _____

Name _____ Relationship to you _____ Phone _____

If you have a photo of yourself, please send it along with your application to us. We'll be contacting you after we receive your application to set up an interview, and look forward to getting to know you better. Good Luck!

Turn your completed application in at school or mail to: High Rocks, HC 64 Box 438, Hillsboro, WV 24946

Evaluation Findings:

Statistically, we learned some very interesting information about our girls and our program. In a study of our participant demographics, we evaluated how closely we keep to the philosophy of bringing together a diverse group of girls and serving girls who need us most. We calculated overall percentages for a sample of girls who have been through the program from 1999-2002. Statistics were collected and compiled by program staff, interns, and alumnae volunteers. Data was collected through surveys sent to girls, phone interviews, and knowledge of participants based on their applications or contact with High Rocks staff.

As of Summer 2003, 83% of participants from 1999-2002 were still actively involved in the program.

We are serving a community of girls who are (based on guidelines from research on building resiliency in adolescents):

26% low-risk

38% medium risk

36% high risk

65% of the girls we serve qualify for free or reduced lunch.

Overall rates of free and reduced lunch in counties we serve: 54%, 58%, 62%.

When we surveyed our participants' parents' education levels,

16% did not complete high school

47% are high school graduates

7% have associate or technical degrees

30% have a Bachelor's Degree or higher

Therefore, 63% of our girls have parents who did not go on to higher education and 70% have parents who did not earn a BA.

Our evaluation shows that our increasing focus on post-graduate planning in our programs is paying off.

48% of our girls have taken or are taking advanced courses to prepare them for college.

For all girls from 1999-2002, about 60% said they had college plans.

In the group of girls entering in 2002, that number jumped to 74%.

This is a particularly striking when one takes into account college going rates in our communities:

46%, 54%, 49%

We also measured girls' satisfaction with their program experience. Rating High Rocks on a scale from 1-5, 85% of participants chose 4 or 5.

Asked to rate their relationships with staff,

65% of girls reported 3 out of 3

35% of girls reported 2 out of 3

We wanted to find out what part of our program girls participated in and whether most girls came to programming during the year.

58% of girls overall participated in our Tuesday Girls Nights (tutoring and enrichment).

In 2002 the number was 75%.

Summer camps for older girls drew about

66% overall

85% of the 2002 entering group.

We are seeking to foster a sense of community responsibility in High Rocks girls

58% of girls have done community service with the High Rocks overall.

70% of 2002 girls have participated in service projects with the High Rocks.

We tried to see how well we were succeeding in our mission to foster a sense of community responsibility and develop girls' capacity for leadership.

68% of High Rocks girls have done voluntary community service with us or another organization.

For 2002, that number was 85%.

44% of girls who did service were in a leadership position, such as teacher or planner. In 2002, 50% were.

19% of girls have taken leadership roles in the High Rocks by serving as Junior Counselors.

40% have had other leadership roles within the organization, such as tutor, advisor, board member, or recruiter.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kendra N. Vincent graduated from West Virginia University in May 2002 with a B.A. in English and minors in women's studies and communications studies. She worked as a VISTA volunteer for two years before returning to school to pursue an M.A. at the Center for Women's Studies and Gender Research at the University of Florida in 2004.