

MARK MY WORDS:
GIRLS' VOICE DEVELOPMENT IN THE HIGH SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

By
JULIE ANN SALTHOUSE

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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By **JULIE ANN SALTHOUSE**

Dissertation Director:

Joanna Regulska

In this master's thesis, I examine the High School Leadership Program, a semester-long leadership development program for young women at the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University, as a site of voice development and thus empowerment for girls. As I argue throughout this thesis, by providing young women with the opportunity to explore, develop, and use their voices, and nurturing an understanding of how voice can be used for action and social change, the HSLP provided girls with a space in which they could take emotional risk, thereby learning more about who they are and their personal and professional goals.

Following a literature review and description of my data, I build my argument by investigating what I believe to be the three program components key to nurturing girls' voice development and agency: a feminist community with a network of role models, advocates, and supportive feedback; the exploration and articulation of inner voice, informed by an oppositional consciousness as well as alternative definitions of

leadership; and the embodiment, enactment, and expression of girls' personal values and goals. In these investigations, it is my intention to show that through the exploration and expression of personal voice, girls better define their sense of personal agency and better envision themselves as leaders in the community. Through and as a result of this work, girls also begin to affirm their position as a force to be heard and taken seriously; posit themselves as agents of change within their communities; act as role models to other individuals within their communities; create networks of female leadership for support and strength; and better envision, plan for, and take steps toward reaching their professional and personal goals.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Barbara Bari.

You are so greatly missed and so deeply loved.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Dutch scholar Monique Leyenaar opened a *Signs* symposium on the challenges to women's leadership by posing the question, "Have women finally succeeded in persuading the long-term tenants of power—men—to start sharing the pervious commodity of political leadership with them?" (1). Writing in the context of Europe, Leyenaar argues that while strides have been made in the numbers of women in political assembly and in higher positions of power, overall progress in women's leadership continues to face significant challenges, as a rise in religious fundamentalism, quality of life issues, and a weakening women's movement, for example, all threaten the sociopolitical climate necessary to support women leaders (3-5). Scholars writing on Bangladesh, Vietnam, South Africa, Sweden, and New Zealand, respectively, similarly look at a destabilized women's movement, lack of support, and cultural norms as some of the factors that continue to prevent women from participating in positions of leadership in spaces traditionally defined as male.

Across the globe, this climate has profound effects on those individuals who are among the most invisible of the world's citizens: girls, particularly those from minority and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Despite the fact that, especially among those from educated and economically advantaged backgrounds, an elite few women do find themselves in professional leadership positions, the majority of young women enter careers that are seen as nurturing, routine, and possibly temporary, such as teaching, clerical work, nursing, social work, and childcare, which are also typically monetarily

and culturally valued less than careers such as doctors, professors, and engineers—those to which (white) male children are typically directed (see England, Budig, and Folbre 2002). Worldwide, this is especially true of young urban women of color who attend schools so underresourced that preparation for, entrance into, and the ability to pay for competitive, four-year universities can be near impossible. In most high-profile institutions, such as universities, research centers, large businesses, the military, and seats of government, a female in charge is largely seen as an exception (“woman leader”) rather than the norm (“leader”), and structural factors—such as those mentioned above—continually create and reinforce expectations and opportunities specific to various populations of females.

The U.S. case is no exception. Certainly women have come a long way in leadership within the paid workforce over the past thirty years: women’s income has increased by 63 percent, 49 percent of all professional- and managerial-level workers are women, and women-owned businesses make up 40 percent of all U.S. companies (Orman 2007, 7). But while 2008 and 2009 have seen an unprecedented level of women in politics—including former Presidential candidate and current Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, and current federal Cabinet members Hilda Solis, Kathleen Sebelius, and Janet Napolitano—the overall level of women’s political leadership, especially for minority women, still pales in comparison to that of (white) men.¹ In their opening chapter to *Women and Leadership*,

¹ The public outcry, for example, following President Barack Obama’s nomination of Sonia Sotomayor to the U.S. Supreme Court, particularly amongst conservative media outlets, clearly demonstrated the racist

Deborah Rhode and Barbara Kellerman assert that in the United States, women account for only “6 percent of top earners, 8 percent of top leadership positions, and 16 percent of board directors and corporate officers” (2007, 2), and similarly see great gender inequity in leading U.S. industries such as business, technology, and economics.² Moreover, overarching gendered and raced cultural systems undergird the very institutions that women hope to lead, effectually creating subjectivities that are deemed inappropriate for holding leadership positions within those same institutions. As Gloria Steinem considered in a *New York Times* op-ed piece on the 2008 U.S. election, “there is still no ‘right’ way to be a woman in public power without being considered a “you-know-what” (2008).

However, there is a growing movement to change these statistics as well as the language surrounding (women’s) leadership, particularly within the United States, that is striving to provide girls with the tools, skills, and opportunities necessary to grow into strong leaders and to change and challenge institutions through the creation of programs designed to supplement failing schools and connect members of the community. This

and sexist lens through which female leaders are frequently judged and undermined (see Totenberg 2009). Former Governor of Alaska and Vice-Presidential nominee Sarah Palin has been and continues to be scrutinized and touted on the basis of her role as a wife and mother and of her appearance, undermining her political legitimacy and the perception of her personal strength, resolve, and knowledge (see e.g. Brown 2008 and Stan 2009).

² Surveying the landscape of the United States institutional hierarchies, Rhode and Kellerman go on to assess that as of 2007, women constituted “only a quarter of upper-level state government positions...only 2 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs...[and] less than a fifth of law firm partners, federal judges, law school deans, and Fortune 500 counsels (2007, 2). These proportions also held true for the number of female professors, college presidents, and ordained pastors; as of 2007, the United States also ranked sixty-ninth in female legislative representation (2).

movement is backed by growing attention to the status of girls, who are increasingly (and rightfully) being viewed as future leaders (see, e.g., Simmons 2009). This thesis will examine one particular program that aimed to address the educational and personal needs of urban adolescent girls: the High School Leadership Program (HSLP), run by the Institute for Women's Leadership (IWL) at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Through a semester-long series of workshops, meetings, and a mentorship, the HSLP, a three-year pilot program that ran in the spring semesters of 2006-2008, aimed to equip girls for leadership positions through consciousness-raising exercises, skills-building workshops, reflective and critical thinking activities, connection with female professionals, and a mentoring community of young women. In its intent to educate young women in leadership skills within such a supportive community environment, the program similarly aimed to build the kind of relationships Najma Chowdhury endorses in the aforementioned *Signs* symposium. Chowdhury suggests that in order for women to successfully lead in today's sociopolitical climate, "alliances must be built [between men and women] on a common understanding of gendered power relations in society. To be able to forge these progressive ties, however, women leaders need first to resist the patriarchal values nurtured within their inner selves" (2008, 15; see also Dahlerup 2001), a resistance that is borne out of the HSLP's feminist foundation and goal of self-empowerment.

One of the most significant and profound ways in which the HSLP attempted to address and dismantle the impact of structural inequality with its participants was by nurturing girls' reflexivity and sense of agency through inner and outer voice

development. Situated within a semester of self-exploration, self-awareness, and skill-building, the development of public speaking and communication skills within the HSLP was for many girls, as formal student feedback and evaluations as well as observations of student behavior can attest, one of the most influential and impactful component of their experience in the program. Thus, as I argue throughout this thesis, by providing young women with the opportunity to explore, develop, and use their voices, and nurturing an understanding of how voice can be used for action and social change, the HSLP provided girls with a space in which they could take emotional risk, thereby learning more about who they are and their personal goals. Similarly, the program promoted an awareness about the “deeply embedded cultural rule[s]” concerning who girls are supposed to be (Davis 2001, 20), thus challenging discourses create narrow definitions of urban American girlhood and the possibilities of what girls can do, be, and say.

In articulating my argument, I begin in Chapter 1 by exploring two bodies of literature that inform my exploration of girls’ leadership development: recent scholarship on leadership education and the role of mentorships, and the developing literature within girls’ studies that has focused on voice. Both of these bodies of work continue to have significant impacts on current programming for girls, including, quite importantly, how adults believe they should (or can) interact with young women; feminist scholarship in both fields, in addition to the larger opus of women’s and gender studies, directly served as the foundational theory upon which the HSLP curriculum was based. In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of the High School Leadership Program, along with background information about the participants within it. This is followed by a description of my main

research questions, intentions, and goals; by a discussion of my data and methodology; and by some reflections on my role as researcher.

I then explore my research questions by investigating what I believe to be the three program components key to nurturing girls' voice development and agency: a feminist community with a network of role models, advocates, and supportive feedback, which I explore in Chapter 3; the exploration and articulation of inner voice, informed by an oppositional consciousness as well as alternative definitions of leadership (Chapter 4); and the embodiment, enactment, and expression of girls' personal values and goals (Chapter 5). In these investigations, it is my intention to show that through the exploration and expression of personal voice, girls better define their sense of personal agency and better envision themselves as leaders in the community. Through and as a result of this work, girls also begin to affirm their position as a force to be heard and taken seriously; posit themselves as agents of change within their communities; act as role models to other individuals within their communities; create networks of female leadership for support and strength; and better envision, plan for, and take steps toward reaching their professional and personal goals.

CHAPTER 1: WHERE HAVE WE COME FROM, AND WHERE ARE WE NOW? A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Changing Face(s) Of Leadership Studies

In her article, “Leadership Education at the Great Divide: Crossing into the Twenty-First Century,” Karin Klenke writes that the field of leadership studies has been “riddled with paradoxes, inconsistencies, and contradictions” (1993, 112). She explains that “[t]here are probably few areas of inquiry and practical importance which have produced more divergent, inconsistent, overlapping definitions, theories, and educational models than leadership” (112), due in part to interdisciplinary tensions and ambiguity concerning pedagogy and methods of teaching leadership. Klenke’s argument concerning lack of clarity within the field reflects many larger questions concerning the basic definition of what constitutes leadership as well as who is—or can be—a leader. Writing in the late 1990s, Curt Brungardt similarly established that at that in particular, “we know very little about youth leadership education and even less about the effectiveness of such programs in fostering leadership potential” (1996, 88).

In one of the few twentieth-century articles to address teaching leadership to youth, Kathleen Zimmerman-Oster and John Burkhardt (1999) argued that the lack of knowledge on youth leadership development could be due, at least in part, to the widely held belief that leadership is a skill or higher calling that individuals either are or are not born with, and, related, that certain types of individuals are predisposed to be better leaders. Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt broke down these stereotypes through their

endorsement of seminars and workshops, mentoring, and experiential learning as hallmarks of successful leadership programs, effectually promoting the idea that leadership is indeed teachable. While this research provided an excellent overview of some of the vital components needed to effectively teach leadership, it did not address how such components could be utilized in a range of educational contexts, nor how such programs could be accessed by those outside of higher education. As Charlotte Bunch has explained, “sex, race, and class and the intersection of these, as well as other factors of location and timing, play a big role in how one’s leadership evolves, whether it is recognized and supported or thwarted” (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2002, 16). Much early work in leadership studies did not examine the varying opportunities and challenges people from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds encounter in obtaining leadership positions.

Fortunately, within the past ten years, much has changed in the landscape of leadership studies, particularly when it comes to research on women’s leadership and youth leadership development programs. Institute for Women’s Leadership Director and historian Mary S. Hartman, for example, has produced much work that both questions underlying assumptions of leadership and power, and explores the significant contributions of female leaders throughout history. In *Are Leaders Made or Born? Educating Women for Leadership*, the transcript of an IWL panel discussion of the same name, Hartman explains that leadership has typically been defined within the male public sphere, and has thereby discounted the private and “less visible” work of women (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2000, 8), thus bringing to light the masculine conception of leadership as well as the many ways in which ‘strong’ or ‘good’ leadership

skills have been those typically associated with masculine characteristics. Large gaps in formal leadership roles between men and women have also “reinforced narrow views about what counts as leadership, how leadership should be defined, and who can be groomed as a leader” (8), all of which Hartman hopes to shift by changing the kinds of dialogue present in the field.

Such gaps in formal leadership roles as well as the narrow definitions of leadership have, unsurprisingly, led to the dominant belief among most youth regarding leaders—namely, that there are two types: the “traditional hierarchical (or ‘top-down’) model” that many girls see as “positional” and as “‘boy’ leadership,” and the inherently different “girl” leadership style, based on qualities like listening and creating community (Schoenberg and Salmond 2007, 15). As Mary Hartman explains in the introduction to *Talking Leadership*, the understanding of leadership as male and positional has continued to frame women leaders as “anomalous, never quite fitting the image of a real leader despite having attained formal leadership positions” (1999, 2). Such a framework also erases the agency and autonomy of those who do practice leadership in a variety of settings and through ‘nontraditional’ methods.

In *Are Leaders Born or Made?*, Isa Williams further advocates that scholars and practitioners must “dispel the concept of ‘leadership’ as solely existing on a national/global level controlled by one or two ‘charismatic’ individuals with a multitude of followers” (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2000, 26). She argues that leadership should instead be examined as “a process of interaction between persons that is goal directed and often includes movement towards change with implications of moral and

ethical considerations” (26). This is reminiscent of Joseph Rost, who offers that leadership “is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (1991, 102; Hartman 1999, 8). Incidentally, such a description is very similar to the definitions of leadership provided by girls across the United States in an exhaustive study conducted by the Girl Scout Research Institute (Schoenberg, Salmond, and Fleshman 2008). In that study, the majority of girls (ages 8-17) preferred definitions of leadership that implied “personal principles, ethical behavior, and the ability to effect social change” (8), and that focused more on having a holistic desire to help others rather than to control or exercise absolute power. It was also found that girls use this nontraditional definition to measure the effectiveness of individuals in leadership positions, as well as their own self-assessments as potential leaders. But while researchers found that 92% of girls believe that anyone can acquire and practice the skills necessary to be a successful leader, only 21% of girls believe that they currently have these qualities (14-15). Mary Hartman theorizes that this self-perception may be due to the fact that “girls continue to receive mixed messages, at best, about their own individual value as well as about the value of becoming leaders” (1999, 23), often causing a significant disconnect between girls’ perception of leadership and their own ability to lead.

As I describe in the next section, this disconnect has become the subject of much research and scholarship within the growing field of girls’ studies, which aims to examine the experience of girlhood and the construction of ‘girl’ both within discourses and as a subject of study. The attention to the experiences of girls and the advances made within this field have significantly brought to light both local community and larger institutional

changes that must be made in order to support the positive growth and development of girls, especially when it comes to their leadership.

Girls' Studies: Finding Its Voice

The growing body of work that constitutes the field of girls' studies, as well as the work from which girls' studies grew in the early 1990s, has had a significant impact on programming for girls worldwide, especially in the United States as well as how the experience of girlhood is constructed. A review of the major literature, particularly as it is embedded in the fields of education and psychology, is especially pertinent to this study, since many of the assumptions made about girls in early scholarship continue to impact the design and facilitation of programs intending to address a range of needs of diverse groups of girls.

Among these early investigations was the American Association of University Women's report on the U.S. school system, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, which showed that schools reaffirm gendered messages of popular culture by "systematically cheating girls of classroom attention, by stressing competitive—rather than cooperative—learning, by presenting texts and lessons devoid of women as role models, and by reinforcing negative stereotypes about girls' abilities" (1994, 5). Girls were found to be the only group that enters school with an advantage, in the forms of skills and ambition, but who, following their disproportionate loss of self-confidence, leave their schooling with a disadvantage (4-5; see also Sadker and Sadker 1994; Phillips 1998). The embodiment and practice of gender roles by students themselves was also

observed by Barrie Thorne, who in her *Gender Play* (1995) concluded that children help to police proper gender-based behavior in their peers (2; see also Raby 2006; Paechter 2007).

This early research had significant impact across the country as schools and local organizations attempted to ‘solve the problem’ by establishing clubs and programs specifically for girls, which were frequently aimed at addressing girls’ lack of self-esteem. Framed as interventions and frequently facilitated by adults, many of these programs did provide girls with the extra attention and support they needed. At the same time, however, the goals of these interventions were to address girls’ apparent lack of self-confidence and ambition by ‘fixing’ girls themselves, rather than turning to the larger social and cultural systems that contributed to young women’s experiences of girlhood. By framing girls as victims, this work stripped girls of their personal agency, and also failed to consider the wide differences between and among the experiences of girls themselves.

The educational disparities between boys and girls also caught the attention of numerous psychologists in the early 1990s, who tried to make sense of women’s lack of success in the workplace, despite so-called equal opportunities available in education, by tracing their development back to girlhood. Harvard psychologist Carol Gilligan, in particular, became somewhat of a spokeswoman on girls’ psychology as she came to new conclusions concerning girls’ psychological development and similar patterns found in adult women:

[P]sychological seclusion of girls from the public world at the time of adolescence sets the stage for a kind of privatization of women's experience and impedes the development of women's political voice and presence in the public world. The dissociation of girls' voices from girls' experiences in adolescence, so that girls are not saying what they know and eventually not knowing it as well, is prefiguring of many women's sense of having the rug of experience pulled out from under them, or of coming to experience their feelings and thoughts not as real but as fabrication. (1993, xxii)

For Gilligan, one of the most significant traumas girls experience in adolescence is their loss of authentic voice, which alienated them not only from having truthful relationships with others but also from being able to know themselves and have healthy self-confidence and a clear vision of and desire to achieve their personal goals. The root of this loss of voice, Gilligan believed, was caused by women's alienation from society:

When women feel excluded from direct participation in society, they see themselves as subject to a consensus or judgment made and enforced by the men whose protection and support they depend...Childlike in the vulnerability of their dependence and consequent fear of abandonment, they claim to wish only to please, but in return for their goodness they expect to be loved and cared for. (1993, 67)

As a result of these needs and expectations, girls establish superficial relationships that keep them connected with one another socially and politically within their communities, but which ultimately fail to create bonds based on genuine trust. Thus, Gilligan concluded, girls—and then women—establish early in their lives a separation of the 'public' self and the 'true' self, which results in the silencing of one's voice, if not the stunting of one's development, particularly as a leader.

Similar conclusions were found by Gilligan and her colleague Lyn Mikel Brown, who observed and interviewed seven- and eighteen-year-old girls at the Laurel School, a private day school in Cleveland, Ohio. Investigating the root of women's tendency to

“speak of themselves as living in connection with others and yet describ[ing] a relational crisis: a giving up of voice, an abandonment of self” (1992, 2), the scholars concluded that “adolescence is a time a time of disconnection, sometimes of dissociation or repression in women’s lives” (4). In their view, this was greatly influenced by larger social and structural forces, explaining that “institutionalized restraints and cultural norms and values become moral voices that silence voices, constrain the expression of feelings and thoughts, and consequently narrow relationships, carrying implicit or explicit threats of exclusion, violation, and at the extreme, violence” (29). This sentiment was powerfully echoed in Mary Pipher’s *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, in which Pipher warned that girls today are growing up in a “more dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture” and “face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated” (12). In the views of Pipher, Brown, and Gilligan, it was adults’ responsibility to help girls distinguish between narrow relationships and healthy relationships in order for girls to reestablish their personal ethics and live full lives as members of their communities.

While the findings of Gilligan and others were an important development in understanding both girls’ and women’s psychology, their work was based on three assumptions: that the findings from a select group of girls in private schools may represent the desires and needs of all girls; that it was the responsibility of adults to ‘fix’ the problems of these girls; and that ‘fixing’ them would solve the ‘problem’ and lead to permanent change. Later scholars would argue that by posing girls as a static and uniform group, speaking for girls, and focusing on adversity and risk factors, this research “fails to make explicit the motivations and supports that help urban girls become

not only successful young adults but also full, participating citizens in their communities and in the labor market, or political processes that affect them” (Leadbeater 2007, 2). As a result of this gap in scholarship, girls were and still are sent a message that their voices do not matter, reaffirming the very stereotypes and beliefs that researchers’ attempt to dismantle. Scholar Sumru Erkut and others similarly note that the absence and underrepresentation of girls from certain communities “calls into question the generalizability of findings” from early research, and that participation in academic knowledge building by a variety of women and girls would undoubtedly lead to a “reevaluation of the assumptions, approaches, and purposes that have shaped research on women and girls” (1996, 53).

Fortunately, much of the girls’ studies scholarship published since 2000 has attempted to address the gaps left by earlier work (Girls Incorporated 2006; Dabek-Milstein 2007; Sullivan 2008). *The Supergirl Dilemma: Girls Grapple with the Mounting Pressure of Expectations*, for example, a 2006 report conducted by Girls Incorporated, calls adults to work with girls in encouraging them to speak and take action for themselves:

Whether you are a parent or another caring adult, ask a girl—or even better many girls—about what is on her mind and really listen, careful not to get upset or judgmental....Encourage girls to make themselves heard... Together with girls, advocate for change. Encourage girls to channel their stresses and frustration into positive action...Show girls that their voices have a significant impact on their own lives and the lives [of] others. (Girls Incorporated 2006, 79-80)

Calls such as these encourage the girls’ studies community to actively engage girls, which has paved the way for innovations in programs designed for—and now even

implemented by—girls. Just as important, many national and global organizations and governments are now specifically placing girls’ needs on their agendas (see, for example, Eitel 2009), a move followed in part by the Report of the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which had a priority theme of “the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child” (United Nations Economic and Social Council 2007), and which consequently pumped new interest in girls’ issues into the international community, inspiring countless projects focused on the needs of young women (see, e.g., Working Group on Girls 2009).

Where Are We Now? Bridging Theory and Practice

While girls’ studies scholars have produced much work on the varying experiences, needs, goals, work and products, conceptions, and discourses of girls and girlhood, where does this work leave us when it comes to leadership and voice? For one, new definitions of leadership, infused with calls for social change, have brought increased attention to and endorsement of relationship, community networking, and alliance building over the traditional ‘top-down’ leadership approach. Theory has decidedly shifted away from a hierarchical endorsement of leadership, thereby bringing about new understandings of masculinity, femininity, and, most importantly, power. The literature seems to suggest that new value is being placed on those characteristics and behaviors traditionally seen as ‘feminine’ and encompassing solely ‘female leadership.’ New understandings of power recognize the nuances of individual actions and daily practices of power, as well as the impact of community and team cooperation.

This new focus on individual experience and relational, goal-oriented leadership has paralleled a similar focus on individual, subjective understandings of girlhood as scholars increasingly critique what has become the notion of a singular, essentialized “girlhood.” While early scholarship and practice in girls’ studies framed girls as victims and called for interventions, some more recent work has also attempted to shift this gaze by framing girls and programs for them under a guise of “anything is possible,” or, in other words, that girls can—and therefore should be able to—do anything, and do it well. Much like the conception of the “supermom” that grew out of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, the “girl power” movement of the 1990s suffered from placing unreasonably high expectations on girls to make up for all of the disparities present in education, the workplace, and other institutions (hence the title, *The Supergirl Dilemma*, of Girls Incorporated’s recent study [2006]). Intentionally or not, this work has been just as silencing to girls, as it communicates that instead of institutions and programs challenging the cultural systems in which we all live, the responsibility of changing the world falls on the shoulders of girls and therefore depends on their success. In striving to avoid Pipher’s “dangerous, sexualized and media-saturated culture,” young women now face, once again, the pressure to be perfect.

When it comes to developing leadership skills, such as communication and being assertive, girls must now also confront the tensions between what they truly want to say, do, and be, and what they feel they must live up to outwardly; in short, they are measured against standards of and themselves defined by narrow expectations. Synthesizing recent scholarship in both leadership studies and girls’ studies, those who work with girls have had, in the past two years, to examine how broadening understandings and definitions of

leadership can be used to similarly broaden the methods and frameworks practitioners have used to approach how they address girls' needs. Most importantly, in thinking about how previous 'interventions' have been approached in the past, scholars and practitioners have had to especially consider how girls are using their voices and what they are, and are not, saying.

Girls' studies and leadership studies have therefore left a number of critical questions that researchers, grassroots organizations, and institutions alike must tackle: What kind of environments can be created for girls to make them feel comfortable and support their efforts, challenges, mistakes, successes, and goals? How can we help empower girls to make them feel confident and take healthy risks in their lives? What tools should adults help to provide girls, and how should these tools be taught? In what ways can adults work with girls in providing them with these tools? Additionally, the work of the past two decades has challenged current scholars to examine "girl" as a social, cultural (and sometimes political) construction, and to critically evaluate how discourses about girlhood both impact real individuals' identities and behaviors, as well as empower and/or disempower girls and those who work with them. As a result, scholarship of girls' studies is beginning to benefit from some of the theoretical work in intersectionality and postcolonial studies that has enriched feminist scholarship of the last decade (see, e.g., Collins 1998; Mohanty 2003), but still leaving much to be explored, however, in direct research and programming concerning how girls' voices shape and are shaped by cultural systems and how theory and practice can seek to directly empower girls and provide them with more just lives.

Locating securely in the feminist community at the Institute for Women's Leadership, the High School Leadership Program grew from and responded to girls' studies' theoretical explorations in women's psychology and understandings of power and agency, and practical research in girls' leadership development and programming, structural inequality, and the impact of school, adult and peer relationships, and other institutions in girls' lives. In its programmatic desire to work with girls in the local community and provide them with opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills, the HSLP fostered positive, supportive peer relationships within a feminist community; utilized what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls oppositional consciousness, a state of knowing that alters one's self-awareness and understanding of the world and one's position within it, to redefine concepts of leadership and power; expanded upon students' knowledge and practice of leadership skills; encouraged girls to take healthy risks to further their skills; and provided young women with the opportunity and space for self-reflection and leadership practice to use in their own lives and communities. While the HSLP was an imperfect model, it served as an invaluable resource and an excellent case study through which to examine many of the questions that have arisen in girls' studies within the past few years, and, as I describe in the next chapter, provided me with a critical platform through which to examine my own research and practice with girls as well as the assumptions, questions, and biases that I have unwittingly brought along to this work.

CHAPTER 2: WORKING WITH THE HIGH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The HSLP Structure and Goals

The Institute for Women's Leadership (IWL) on the campus of Douglass Residential College, Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, is a major force in the current landscape of research and programs on women's leadership. Made up of eight consortium units, the IWL is "dedicated to examining issues of leadership and advancing women's leadership and involvement in decision making in all arenas," particularly through scholarly research and programmatic practice by consortium members (Institute for Women's Leadership 2009a).³ Under the direction of Mary S. Hartman, the IWL aims to critically explore both concepts of leadership, agency, and power, as well as the larger institutional structures—locally, nationally, and internationally—through which such concepts are manifested and enacted. It is among this community of scholarship and activism that two of the IWL's student-based programs—the Leadership Scholars Certificate Program and the HSLP —sit.⁴

³ The eight consortium members that make up the IWL are Douglass Residential College, the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, the Center for American Women and Politics, the Institute for Research on Women, the Institute for Women and Art, the Center for Women's Global Leadership, the Center for Women and Work, and the Office for the Promotion of Women in Science, Engineering, and Mathematics.

⁴ The IWL also runs two additional undergraduate-based leadership programs: WINGS (Women Investing in and Guiding Students), a school-to-career mentoring program that pairs female students with professional women as mentors; and CLASP (Community Leadership, Action and Service Project), an intensive service-learning internship held during the summer.

For over ten years, the Leadership Scholars Certificate Program has provided high-achieving Rutgers University undergraduate women with the opportunity to expand upon their leadership skills, and develop and practice new models of what constitutes leadership. This two-year-long program aims to deepen students' understanding of leadership and women's contributions to social change; enhance skills through classroom- and extracurricular-based activities; provide students with the opportunity to develop and enact social action projects; connect students with community activists; and provide students with career-building internships and mentors (Institute for Women's Leadership 2009c; see also Bent 2004, esp. 34-35). The two main foci of the program are the internship experience and the independent social action project, utilizing a service-learning model and bridging theory and practice. Among the choices for Leadership Scholars' social action projects has been the opportunity to train to be a Dean of the HSLP, responsible for both developing and implementing the curriculum.⁵ It is within this context of social justice and activism, of diverse leadership models and self-reflection, that the HSLP grew, as its facilitators—young women themselves—as well as the HSLP staff provided the structure of what became a powerful and transformative experience for high school women.

The HSLP, the focus of this project, was a three-year leadership development pilot program for female students who have demonstrated leadership potential in their

⁵ I would like to be clear that in the context of this research project, I use the term developed by the HSLP staff—"Deans"—to refer to those Rutgers undergraduate women who help design and facilitate the HSLP curriculum. The use of this term should in no way connote the word's typical use in the context of university administration, unless I otherwise explicitly state so.

school community at Henry Snyder High School in Jersey City, New Jersey. The aim of the program, which ran during the spring semester (January through May), was to “provide promising young women opportunities to develop leadership skills through a structured after school curriculum that increases students’ understanding of career and educational options and develops awareness of personal strengths” (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2009b). The program was also structured and implemented around four main goals: to help young women from underrepresented backgrounds define their voice, attend college, and professionally succeed in their chosen path; to develop young women’s leadership abilities through a skills development program; to provide participants with the opportunity to learn about college and to be taught and mentored by college students; and to develop a partnership between Rutgers University and Snyder High School to order to increase the understanding of pre-college women’s leadership development needs (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2009b). The spring 2008 program consisted of two critical components: a curriculum designed and structured by IWL staff and undergraduate Deans that is informed by women’s studies theory and praxis; and a mentoring component that supports student participation, communication, and personal growth.

The curriculum itself also consisted of two main parts: workshops (called “modules”), and club meetings. During the spring 2008 semester, in which I acted as participant-observer, the program contained eight modules, each focused on a particular strain of leadership, which were held every other week for three hours after school at the Institute for Women’s Leadership on the campus of Rutgers University. These modules

were entitled, chronologically, “Overview of Women’s Leadership,” “Self-Awareness,” “Identity and Self-Presentation,” “Bridging the Gap: Self-Expression,” “Public Speaking,” “Diversity,” “College Preparation,” and “Coming Full Circle: Closing Module.” Each module was co-designed and facilitated by one or two Deans along with additional support from HSLP staff and guest speakers. In total, six Deans worked for the 2008 HSLP session, all of whom were Leadership Scholars. Three of the Deans were seniors at Rutgers University (class of 2008) and three were juniors (class of 2009). They represented a range of academic disciplines and interests at the university, with majors encompassing Africana studies, communication, economics, history, political science, psychology, and women’s and gender studies. To my knowledge, at least three had extensive travel experience studying abroad, and amongst the six Deans, they were fluent in at least five different languages. They were also involved in a wide range of other activities at Rutgers University, holding a number of different leadership positions and participating in a variety of academic, professional, community, and research projects.

The modules that the HSLP Deans facilitated were complimented by two-hour club meetings held biweekly on Fridays after school at Snyder High School. These meetings were planned and facilitated by the Club Dean, along with the assistance of a Snyder High School instructor who was present at all events and oversaw logistical responsibilities such as paperwork, transportation, and attendance. At each club meeting, the Club Dean facilitated discussions of important issues in the girls’ lives (prompted by both the Dean and the girls themselves), explored themes and topics from previous modules with the girls, guided the girls in creating their social action project (a zine), and

brought in supporting materials such as films and articles of interest. The purpose of the club meetings was to provide an additional, less-structured space in which the students could explore and reflect on the many topics and activities presented during the more formal modules.

The second core component of the 2008 HSLP was its mentoring partnerships, which emerged after HSLP staff observed the relationships between undergraduate Deans and the high school participants during the 2006 program and the potential impact of mentorships in the program. The mentorships of the 2008 HSLP utilized IWL-affiliated female undergraduates as mentors to support the high school participants' learning experiences in the formal program and their exposure to the college community in unstructured social time. Undergraduate women from across all disciplines at Rutgers University applied for positions as individual mentors for one HSLP girl, and, upon their acceptance, were trained by HSLP staff in communication, leadership, and other mentoring skills. They were diverse in their ethnicity, ages and years in school, academic and personal interests, professional goals, and geographic hometowns. Varying so greatly in their backgrounds, the mentors represented a cross-section of the larger Rutgers community, and provided their mentees with a wide range of connections to varying departments, clubs, and interests on campus.

An important resource used by HSLP staff in training the mentors was *Urban Girls Revisited: Building Strengths* (Leadbeater and Way 2007), in which leadership scholar Jean Rhodes argues that mentoring positively affects youth in three important ways: by enhancing one's social relationships and emotional well-being; by improving

cognitive skills through meaningful communication; and by promoting positive identity development through role models and advocates (Rhodes et. al. 2007, 145; see also Rhodes 2002). HSLP Program Associate Sasha Taner reiterates that,

mentors offer the potential to help enable a transformative experience for girls who often find themselves with the multiple challenges of coming from an urban environment, studying in an underresourced school, (such as an Abbott school district, which was the case with our population), and often from a single parent family home. (2008)⁶

This more personal relationship allowed the high school participants a space to reflect on their personal growth and challenges with young women who may have, just a few years earlier, faced similar obstacles and asked similar questions. Moreover, the mentorships provided the undergraduate mentors with a space to also reflect on their experiences as young women with their mentees, and similarly share their own challenging and empowerment with them. Additional goals of the mentoring component included supporting the mentors and mentees in skills development, enhancing their personal strengths as leaders, helping the high school girls envision possibilities of a college career, and guiding the girls through practical questions and concerns they may have as high school students preparing to attend college (Institute for Women's Leadership 2009b).

The HSLP curriculum was also framed by additional activities aimed at enhancing the core curriculum through presentations, retreats, social activities, and

⁶ Named after a 1991 New Jersey Supreme Court ruling, "Abbott" schools are those in which the education provided is considered grossly inadequate and unconstitutional, and which subsequently receive state financial aid and must implement mandatory reform programs.

networking opportunities in order for students to practice the skills developed in the program and to learn more about college and the professional world. Like the modules and club meetings, these activities were also designed to expand students' opportunities for taking personal risks in the form of, for example, leading a team, sharing ideas, public speaking, and debate. By encouraging this participation, students were supported when they made mistakes, celebrated for their self-expression, and challenged to critically evaluate the messages and social expectations placed on them throughout their lives.

Within the first month of the program, two mentoring retreats were held; the first, held on the opening Saturday of the program, provided mentors and mentees with unstructured social time to get to know one another while making memory boxes and picture frames they could use to honor their relationship. The second retreat, held two weeks later, provided mentors and mentees with structured activities designed to help them plan activities for the semester, reflect on personal and professional goals for the mentorship and the HSLP program generally, and, most critically, develop trust and communication to support their individual and collective growth and development. Additional events throughout the semester included Jazz n' Java, a Rutgers University poetry slam that mentors and mentees could attend and participate in together, as well as Bridging the Gap, in which the high school girls had the opportunity to hear from and speak with a panel of Leadership Scholar alumnae. The high school mentees also had the opportunity to visit their mentors' classes and dorms and eat lunch together during the Snyder High School spring break and at other points during the semester.

Twenty young women comprised the class of participants during the spring 2008 semester that I observed. They were enrolled in the ninth through twelfth grades at Snyder High School, and were between the ages of fourteen and seventeen years old when they began the program. Their participation in the program came following an extensive admissions process: in addition to a written application, which included an essay, applicants also had to be recommended by Snyder High School teachers who could vouch for their potential to be effective leaders within their community. Following one-on-one interviews with IWL staff, the students were chosen as participants based on their academic record, commitment to and interest in the program, and a record of leadership and/or community involvement. While the girls were not necessarily all “straight-A” students, they were some of the most active and engaged students in the school.

They were also some of the students that Snyder teachers and HSLP staff believed could most strongly benefit from participation in the program, especially given the lack of opportunities available to them at their own school: in August 2008, Henry Snyder High School was ranked 304 out of New Jersey’s 316 public high schools in terms of quality of education available (*New Jersey Monthly* 2008). As mentioned earlier, the school district of Jersey City, which has approximately 250,000 residents, is also one of thirty-one “Abbott” districts in the state. Like many other underresourced, urban schools, adequate education is compromised at Snyder by a multitude of challenges, including a poor economy and loss of jobs, underfunding, lack of space and resources, students’ work and family responsibilities, adolescent pregnancy, depression, and neighborhood and domestic violence and incarceration (Taner 2008; see also Fine 2005). Many of the high

school girls in the HSLP came from single-parent households, and held caretaking and work responsibilities in addition to their academics and participation in the program. These were realities that impacted both the participation of the girls, who sometimes could not attend sessions, and the effectiveness of the program. It is most noteworthy to mention outright that not all of the twenty girls who began the HSLP program in January 2008 graduated in May.⁷ That nineteen of the original twenty students did, however, complete and graduate from the HSLP is a testament to the resilience and personal strength of the girls, as well as to their willingness to take risk.

Research Questions and Intentions

I was thrilled when the opportunity arose for me to work with the High School Leadership Program for my final project as a master's student in the Rutgers Women's and Gender Studies Department in the winter of the 2007-2009 school year. In retrospect, parts of this project started within my first semester of graduate work in the fall of 2007, during which two specific courses—Agency, Subjectivity, and Social Change; and Feminism(s): Theory and Practice—challenged my ideas of power, personal agency, identity, and inequality; provided me with the theoretical tools with which to examine the world and scholarship around me; and gave me the opportunity to begin exploring the emerging field of girls' studies. This early work also organically led me to

⁷ One student abruptly quit the program approximately halfway through in March. HSLP staff members and this student's mentor believed her departure was caused by conflicting family responsibilities, but specific details or reasons were not known.

the Institute for Women's Leadership, where my interest and participation in this project grew through many ongoing conversations with IWL staff, including Development Director Lisa Hetfield, Leadership Programs and Research Director Dr. Mary Trigg, and Program Associate Sasha Wood Taner.

My original intention with the project was to investigate feminist pedagogy in a leadership development context, and to determine the factors necessary to successfully support girls in that development. In my initial project proposal, I explained that I intended to look at how leadership could be (re)defined by young women, as well as how young women can and do influence and mentor other young women, thus modeling and encouraging leadership skills. In that proposal, I outlined some of the questions I intended to use to guide my investigation: What are the tools that young women need to lead, and how does the IWL program deliver these tools to their students successfully? How do the HSLP facilitators prepare modules for the program? What are the structures set in place that allow for successful preparation and implementation? What are the core elements of the leadership skills training that, by using the IWL program as a model, can be replicated in other schools, youth centers, and organizations?

Within a few weeks of actually working with the HSLP, however, I realized that while these questions served as good starting points, they were ultimately much too broad. I was overwhelmed at the prospect of attempting to answer even some of these questions with my observations of the five-month-long program, and began realizing that these questions needed to be narrowed and redefined. As I got a clearer picture of the inner workings of the HSLP program and the roles and positions of the girls and

facilitators within it, my initial general interest in feminist youth leadership development shifted to a specific focus on public speaking after I began to observe nearly all the girls strongly reacting to speaking and voice-based activities. Strength and resilience, as well as anxiety and fear, framed activities based on outer voice, while exercises aimed at inner voice development seemed to support the self-confidence and self-awareness needed to successfully speak out formally to the group, and bring to the surface questions of identity, moral values, familial expectations, and more. I wanted to learn more, and I wanted to explore how using one's voice, particularly through public speaking, seemed for so many of the girls to be the biggest obstacle and greatest victory in taking their leadership skills to the next level.

I thus began to reframe and develop new questions specifically focused on these observations: Why did girls react so strongly to the voice-focused activities? How did their reactions to and participation in these activities impact their leadership abilities? How were the girls choosing to express themselves, and how did these expressions change over the course of the program? What was it that girls want to share? And what types of relationships were developing amongst the HSLP participants, facilitators, and staff around these acts of expression? These questions led me to critically examine the apparent tensions between girls' inner voices and their outer behavior and, thus, the molding process of girls' process that can occur in a leadership development context. Most importantly, these questions also framed my methodology as well as the ways in which I considered how my own experiences, knowledge, and biases influenced and shaped my work as a researcher and producer of knowledge.

Methodology and Data

Before I began this project, I knew that working with girls would provide me with the excitement and inspiration that comes with being an activist as well as the intellectual challenge and commitment of scholarly research. As mentioned above, initial interest in the project developed from conversations with IWL staff that took place during my first semester at Rutgers in the fall of 2007. I conducted my fieldwork during the length of the HSLP session, from January to May 2008, and continued to review my notes as well as written evaluation forms and other documents from the program from June through September 2008. I also conducted three interviews—one with an HSLP staff member, one with a Dean, and one with a staff member at the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership—that ranged from one to two hours in length.⁸ What would later become a few chapters and subsections of my thesis was written in the fall of 2008 and presented at three conferences: the 18th Annual Women's Studies Conference at Southern Connecticut State University in October 2008; the Feminism in Practice Conference at Lehigh University in November 2008; and the March 2009 Meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Women Studies Association at Rutgers University, all of which provided me with invaluable feedback. The bulk of my writing and editing process took place from January through September of 2009.

⁸ The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership is a nonprofit educational organization that provides ethical leadership training and professional development for women. Woodhull retreats and seminars focus specifically on community service, negotiation and conflict resolution, financial literacy, inner voice, and effective and ethical speaking. Their focus on voice as it is connected to women's leadership development was particularly pertinent and insightful to this project.

The methodology that I used for my research came after careful consideration and reflection concerning the opportunities and challenges I faced working with the program. On the one hand, I have had much professional experience working with youth in the U.S. Northeast who came from a range of backgrounds in a variety of contexts. At the start of the HSLP program, I had experience as a Language Arts instructor for middle and high students in a New Jersey public school in Union County, where students came from a range of ethnic and economic backgrounds but had strong community and school resources. I also had worked as a counselor and advisory board member for the Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls, located in Brooklyn, New York, which has a particular focus on girls' leadership and skills development.⁹ Since August 2008, my work as the current Chapter Director at Girls Learn International®, Inc., has given me even more experience working with girls to develop their leadership skills and has challenged me to consider the subjectivities of girlhood, as I work with students from oftentimes highly privileged backgrounds teaching them about the experiences of girls who often face large challenges in accessing equal education.¹⁰ All of these experiences, as well as my work with the

⁹ Founded in 2004, Willie Mae Rock Camp for Girls is a nonprofit summer day camp serving girls and women in New York City. Dedicated to youth and women's empowerment, the program is founded on the proposition that music can serve as a powerful tool for self-expression, self-esteem-building, and combating racism and stereotypes by building bridges of communication and shared experience among young women from diverse communities.

¹⁰ Girls Learn International®, Inc. (GLI) is a New York-based nonprofit organization dedicated to universal girls' education. GLI pairs U.S. middle and high school-based Chapters with Partner Schools in countries where girls have traditionally been denied access to education (Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Ecuador, India, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Zambia). The GLI Program gives students the opportunity to explore issues affecting girls in relation to global human rights, promotes cross-cultural understanding and communication, and trains students to be leaders and advocates for social change.

HSLP, have greatly impacted the ways in which my work—including the writing of this thesis—subvert or provide space for girls’ voices, and have given me new insights concerning how the experiences and memories of my own girlhood impact the ways in which I both view others’ experiences of girlhood and produce knowledge and materials for, about, and with girls. Constant reflexivity has become increasingly important to me as I age and move further and further away from the direct experience and embodiment of (my own) girlhood.

Thus, while my professional work experience provided me with a body of knowledge about communicating with girls and working within certain curricula and programs, my geographic, ethnic, and educational background—and age—clearly marked me as an outsider from the Snyder High School and HSLP communities of the girls I worked with; this is a fact of which I was critically aware from the very beginning of my research and that had the greatest bearing on how I approached my work. The relative intimacy of the work—I would be seeing the girls on a weekly basis, often during module sessions that contained personal and at times highly emotionally charged discussions—forced me to be aware of the ways in which my presence as an outsider could potentially silence them or decrease their comfort, especially since they knew I was observing them. I feared that my observations, interpreted as judgments, would impede upon their growth and increase their vulnerability.

Many of the questions that I faced are explored by Shu-Ju Ada Cheng, who writes that “fieldwork best reflects the process of negotiation and balancing, particularly the balancing among various conflicting interests” (2001, 192; see also Rose 1997): while I

saw myself as an advocate for the girls and would have liked to enjoy closer relationships with them as a “full” HSLP community member, I knew that my role and power as a white, educated researcher could and would compromise the program and the girls’ full participation in it. As Cheng reflects on her own work with female migrant workers:

I have had to ask myself whether my presumed solidarity with the researched is, in reality, a display of maternalistic and thus condescending attitudes towards them. Further, given the fluidity between personal, epistemic, and discursive paternalism/maternalism, the blurred border between solidarity and condescension raises serious questions concerning my discursive engagement. In other words, the formation of my lenses, the representation of the researched, and the creation of my texts would not be exempt from the coloring of this blurred border. (2001, 189)

At the same time, however, I was not comfortable with fully taking on a role as “the researcher,” with the idea of “invisibility and depersonalization” (Avis 2002, 199), and so situated myself in the “betweenness” (see Mascia-Lees, Sharpe, and Cohen 1989, 33; see also Katz 1994; Nast 1994) of the larger university community and the immediate community of the HSLP.

This positioning in the space of “betweenness” proved to be a site of constant negotiation and balance for me: I directly interacted with the girls occasionally during their formal activities, but engaged more through informal conversations with them (which I did not record) during lunch, breaks, and other down time between activities. At the beginning of the program, the girls all knew who I was and that I was working as a participant-observer of the program for my master’s research in girls’ leadership programs; a few would greet me before and after modules and sometimes come to me if they needed materials during an exercise. By the end of the program, however, my

relationship with the girls generally became much friendlier and candid, and a few would even ask me questions about my experience at Rutgers, where I lived, and what I wanted to do after I finished my degree. Over time, my growing relationship with the girls empowered me with a new sense of responsibility in attempting to portray them and the program in the most ethical and ‘truthful’ way as possible, and thus to think as critically about my observations and the work of the HSLP as possible.

It was therefore also essential for me to include as much unfiltered voice directly from the mouths of the students as possible. Given my position of relative power as a researcher, I needed, as M. Jacqui Alexander writes,

to theorize from the point of the view and contexts of marginalized women not in terms of victim status or an essentialized identity but in terms that push us to place women’s agency, their subjectivities and collective consciousness at the center of our understanding of power and resistance. (1991, 148)

This was a challenge from the very beginning because I knew going into the project that I would not be able to interview the girls—which would have undoubtedly enriched the depth of my research as well as my experience as a researcher. I was unfortunately unable to interview them because of their status as minors and because of the relatively short amount of time between my decision to work on the project and the actual start date of the program; I could not gain legal permission before the start of the program to interview them personally. I understand that not being able to directly interview the girls appears now as a paradox, especially considering my agreement with and advocacy of the calls within girls’ studies for researchers to include the unfiltered and direct voices of girls in their work. Despite this dilemma, I still moved forward with the project because I

believed that it was worthwhile; my challenge, then, was to give girls a voice within my research through other means, to find a way for them to speak without using direct voice.

I therefore looked to the strongest experiences and access to materials that reflected girls' voices that I did have: direct participant-observation. During each of the HSLP sessions that I attended, I sat with the girls during their exercises and activities, and, in a few instances, participated in the activity with them. I was present for the entire length of all the HSLP program modules, two of the club meetings, and the events (such as retreats and special presentations). During the sessions, I looked specifically at how information was presented and framed by sessions facilitators, and, most importantly, how girls responded to information and the interactions between the girls, one another, their mentors, and the Deans. I looked at the types of products and ideas they constructed (posters, discussions, images, activity responses, etc.) and what types of messages were being communicated through these artifacts. I also looked at the ways in which girls were communicating verbally and nonverbally, looking at body language, the ways girls chose to interact with one another, voice and speaking tone, eye contact, level of participation and engagement during activities, and body language and other messages that signaled levels of self-confidence.

Second, upon which my research is also heavily based, I used textual analysis of the participants' feedback from evaluation forms, including ones completed by both girls and mentors for all events and for their larger exit evaluation, and forms from the girls from every module. These came to provide me with some of the strongest insights, as they contained both qualitative (short-answer) and quantitative (surveys) feedback and

were, aside from my observations and participation during sessions, my main source of direct voice from the girls. Questions on the evaluation forms frequently asked respondents, “What did you think about [name of activity]?” which, because of their highly subjective nature, I found to be extremely informative in gauging girls’ reactions to various exercises. Girls were also asked on evaluation forms to rank their level of satisfaction with activities, evaluate their level of communication with their mentors, describe the usefulness of activities for their personal or professional goals, and/or to indicate what they would change in a given module or session. When reading these forms, I looked first and foremost at what girls were actually saying and compared these responses against what I observed during each module, and also looked for response patterns within and between each module’s forms.

Third, I was graciously permitted to use all of the HSLP curriculum materials, which included module plans, handouts (which ranged from directions for exercises to business tip sheets to handbooks), planning materials, and similar resources throughout the length of my research. I used textual analysis to look at how module facilitators framed conceptual questions; planned and structured exercises and discussions; addressed girls’ development, social, and academic needs; and utilized previous research on girls and leadership. While these materials didn’t necessarily include the voices of the Snyder high school girls, they did include, directly or indirectly, the voices of the HSLP staff members and Deans who ultimately wrote the curriculum and whose insights, experiences, and knowledge as women leaders marked the mission and tone of the program.

Lastly, I conducted three interviews in order to learn more from program facilitators: one interview with an HSLP staff member, one with an HSLP Dean, and one with a staff member at the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, which also focuses on voice development in its programming. Each interviewee was interviewed one time individually, with interviews ranging in length from sixty to ninety minutes each. Two interviews were conducted over the phone, and one was conducted in person. My goal in these interviews was determine how each program aimed to empower women and what tools each program used to do so. Interviewees were asked about the use of role models and mentors in their programs, how each program specifically explores voice, challenges they've faced in designing and implementing their programs, and any (anonymous) insights into how the program has impacted the lives of its participants. Interviewees have been kept anonymous throughout this thesis. In addition, when citing material from my field notes, I have utilized a coding system that indicates to which specific source material I refer. These citations, which are coded by date and notation number, appear as footnotes and start with any of the four letters: "C" for HSLP curriculum materials; "D" for information taken from direct observation of modules and events; "E" for student and mentor evaluation forms; and "I" for material taken from interviews.

Based on the information compiled during the length of this project, I argue in this thesis that public speaking and the development of voice is a critical component in shaping girls' agency and leadership. In the chapters that follow, I explore a number of programmatic components that supported the development and projection of voice as well as, effectively, the development of leadership skills: the establishment of a self-

reflective community of leaders/activists/leaders; the development of oppositional consciousness among the high school students; and individual- and group-based opportunities to reflect on inner voice and practice outer speaking skills. Additionally, and quite importantly, I argue that a ‘nontraditional’ definition of leadership was also critical in the participants’ interest in and motivation to take on leadership positions within and beyond the program; this conceptual belief of leadership as a process of interaction between persons that is goal directed and that often includes movement toward social change formed the foundation upon which both community and skills were built. In the chapter that follows, I explore how this community was formed from the very beginning of the program, and how the guidance and care from mentors, HSLP staff, Deans, and peers in many cases provided the girls with the necessary emotional and psychological support necessary to safely and positively develop a consciousness of leading.

CHAPTER 3: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

The concept of “community” has been a widely contested one in feminist scholarship (see Joseph 2002; Everingham 2003; Young 2005; Gorman 2006), but few can deny the immense potential for change that participation and membership within specific communities can have on individuals, groups, governments, and other bodies, and vice versa. This is especially true for adolescents, whose “positive reception into [their] larger social world plays an enormous role in [their] development as an adult” (Davis 2001, 48; see also Erikson 1968; Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer 1990; Brown and Gilligan 1992; and Gilligan 1993). As Patricia Davis argues, a girl’s “social world provides her a mirror into which she can gaze, to see how her new image is reflected in others’ eyes” (2001, 48).

Davis’s argument concerning the importance of community and relationships in forming—and challenging—girls’ identities and self-perceptions was a key foundational component of the High School Leadership Program, which, through its mentorships and relationship-based activities, sought to create spaces to support and enhance the mentor-mentee relationship and empower participants as well as provide academic and career information and resources (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2009b). Research on college women’s leadership aspirations has found that the number one factor positively influencing young women’s aspirations was connectedness with others and establishment of positive peer relationships (Boatwright and Egidio 2003, 663; see also Chin 2002), most especially because young women feel comfortable enough to take the healthy risks

needed to develop leadership skills. As the Girl Scout Research Institute similarly found, any girls' leadership development program needs to provide girls with a structured support system so that girls "can learn how to overcome some of the stresses they associate with leadership and participate in the types of leadership activities that most appeal to them" (Schoenberg and Salmond 2007, 19).

In this chapter, I argue that one of the main reasons that the high school participants progress their leadership skills by the end of the HSLP program was due to the establishment of community early on within the program, and to the resulting support systems that allowed girls to grow, develop, question, and make mistakes in a context of mutual respect and encouragement. Key to this growth and development was the existence of spaces in which the participants—both from Snyder High School and Rutgers—could question many of the prevailing assumptions about (young) women and leadership, and thus develop oppositional knowledge (Collins 2000) and oppositional consciousness (Sandoval 2000). Here, I use the term "community" to define the dynamic matrix of relationships between HSLP participants that worked toward the shared goal of self-development, self-reflection, skill-building, knowledge-sharing, and the development of voice, and which were located within the overlapping communities of the larger university, IWL scholars, Snyder High School, Jersey City, and the other communities to which the girls belonged. Thus, while the HSLP served as a community space where the program was enacted and practiced, it was also not an isolated space, but one that was constantly in conversation with the other groups and communities to which girls, mentors, Deans, and staff belonged.

Establishing Trust

One of the basic components of any group working toward a common goal is a sense of communal identity, a communal sense of “we.” As such, one of the first goals of the HSLP at the start of the program was indeed to begin to establish community, which the program aimed to do almost immediately through the first few activities: the first club meeting (held the first Friday of the program), and a Mentor Retreat (held the following day, Saturday). The importance of these two events in developing trust, communication, respect, and support between HSLP participants cannot be emphasized enough. Indeed, they were imperative in the creation of homeplaces, or “comforting, safe spaces in institutions such as schools or in social groups such as clubs, social movements, or gangs” (Pastor, McCormick, and Fine 2007, 75), in which (typically young) people can create a space where extended kin—friends, peers, mentors—can connect with one another. Coined by bell hooks (1990) to describe the sites within American slave communities in which family members and extended kin could meet up, homeplaces are typically thought of as sites of connection as well as resistance. For minority girls and women in particular, who are situated in multiple positions of oppression, building such homeplaces with other community members frequently foster unity and pride within the very sites (such as schools) that perpetuate raced and gendered ideologies (see Collins 1989). Despite this challenging locality, however, membership within such homeplaces, which are often led and/or facilitated by mentors, othermothers (Collins 2000), or community adults, foster consciousness-raising, act as coping spaces for discrimination,

and a system of social support that can foster resilience (López and Lechuga 2007, 98), all of which are crucial to community and personal identity.¹¹

The HSLP aimed to establish such a community, which was needed to develop leadership skills later on in the program, by fostering mutual respect, acceptance, and trust through group and team-building exercises, one-on-one activities between mentors and mentees, and the reinforcement of positive traits and attributes of young women. Additional challenges were posed because of the nature of some of the relationships already between some participants coming into the program: while many of the Snyder students did not know each other, a few were already good friends, which inevitably led to some ‘cliquiness’ between some of the girls as well as some intimidation, especially for those in the ninth grade. Moreover, the Mentor Day was the first time that the girls were meeting their mentors, and only the second day that some of the mentors were meeting each other. Thus, the level of vulnerability of both mentees and mentors during these opening weeks were high, so it was thus crucial for the program facilitators to build bridges of acceptance and trust.

¹¹ Coined by Rosalie Riegle Troester (1984) and universalized by Patricia Hill Collins (2000) during women of color’s backlash to the second wave in the past three decades, “othermother” refers to those women within the African American community “who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities” (Collins 2000, 178), thus creating networks of mothers dedicated to taking care of the community’s children, whether genetically related or not. As a strategy for resistance, this network works to oppose the effects of the multiple systems of oppression—racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.—that undermine the well being of the black community; through these networks, African American women “develop strategies to defend against societal threats” but also aim to protect, socialize, and empower their daughters through instilling these same defenses in them (Townsend 2008, 4).

Following the school day on Friday, January 25th, the Club Dean and an HSLP staff member met with the girls at Snyder High School for their first club meeting. The focus of this first meeting was on the mentoring relationships that were to be established during the Mentor Retreat the following day, and it was the aim of the facilitators to set a positive tone as well as realistic expectations with the high school students about these relationships. Building on students' experiences with other positive role models and adults in their lives, the Dean and staff member facilitated a discussion asking: What is mentoring? What non-family members have had a positive impact on your life? What were their positive characteristics? What lessons could you take away from these role models in your life? What is the role of the mentee? What is the proper way to approach a mentoring relationship for a mentee? To prepare for the next day's retreat, the students developed and reflected upon a list of positive characteristics that mentors can and should embody, including being trustworthy, patient, encouraging, respectful, open-minded, caring, reliable, and supportive, as well as a list of characteristics that they themselves should bring to the mentorships: communication, having an open mind, asking for positive feedback, listening, and flexibility. In doing so, this activity attempted to balance the power dynamic between mentor and mentee by framing the relationship in terms of both parties' expectations and responsibilities. This activity also sent the message that the students should advocate for themselves, and that the HSLP facilitators, too, were advocates for them.

Not surprisingly, the tone of this initial meeting was quiet and even a bit tense; many of the students paused before contributing to the conversation, and few actively

volunteered information before being prompted. Additionally, many of the girls demonstrated that they did not yet feel connected with the group members through their occasionally leaving the room to make or answer cell phone calls, and the few who were already friends carried on-and-off side conversations during the group discussion. During the discussion on current role models, one student replied that no one outside her family had had a positive impact on her – “there’s nobody else.” Another student replied back to her the name of the one of the Snyder High School teachers, which was followed by the first student pausing, saying “oh,” and then writing again for the exercises. This small exchange demonstrated the range of backgrounds that students brought to the program, as well as, in the case of this student, sometime outright resistance and defensiveness, perhaps due to negative past experiences and/or an unwillingness to share personal information with complete strangers.

It was with this backdrop that these same students entered their first Mentor Retreat the next day, which was the first time that they met their mentors in person. Like with the club meeting, the facilitators of the retreat aimed to build trust and a sense of community, this time through morning team-building exercises and afternoon bonding time between mentors and mentees. The day started with two hours of rock-climbing and similar activities at a Rutgers University gymnasium with mentors, mentees, and some of the HSLP Deans. These exercises, which had to be completed using group work, utilized a great deal of physical touch as well as verbal encouragement. In the afternoon, the retreat moved to the IWL building, which began with unstructured time for lunch, in which mentors and mentees were able to acquaint themselves, followed by structured

activity time, during which the pairs made memory boxes, where they could leave messages to one another, and picture frames, and participated in a journaling activity.

The undergraduate mentors would later evaluate the January Mentor Retreat overall as a good first step in developing ongoing communication with their mentees, saying that “it gave me the ability to talk to her without feeling weird”¹² and the program “aided in conversation.”¹³ This was especially important because most of the mentors and mentees had not spoken with one another before the retreat—and some of the mentors also found their mentees to be shy; as a result, many appreciated the structured time that provided them with tools to communicate with one another and begin to develop emotional intimacy. Reflecting on how they felt about the time they spent with their mentors during the retreat, the mentees overall liked this time very much, especially because it gave them an opportunity to explore shared interest and realize how similar they were to their mentors.¹⁴ Many also indicated that they appreciated meeting other Snyder girls, in addition to their mentors, even though they were “nervous at first.”¹⁵ However, this wasn’t the case with all of the girls. One obstacle at the beginning of the program was the inadequate preparedness of a few of the mentors, who either missed or arrived late to events or who seemed to have difficulties communicating with their

¹² Field note E012608-010207.

¹³ Field note E012608-010201.

¹⁴ On their written evaluations of the January Mentor Retreat, eleven mentees answered that they loved the time spent with their mentors, five wrote that this time was good, and two wrote that they didn’t like the time spent.

¹⁵ Field note E012608-020101.

mentee and establishing a positive relationship. Researchers at the University of Missouri have noted that the quality and degree of mentor preparedness can positively or negatively impact the mentee, and that those relationships in mentoring programs that most benefitted youth were ones in which mentor-youth contact was high and involved little staff involvement (DuBois and Neville 1997; DuBois et al.2002). In their investigation of youth mentoring and perceived benefits, David DuBois and Helen Neville recommend that,

one basic requirement for mentoring programs should be the availability of appropriate supports to insure that adult volunteers spend time with youth on a regular basis and in ways that are likely to foster close emotional bonds. Such supports might include training and on-going staff supervision, structured opportunities for mentor-youth interaction (e.g., program-sponsored events), and monitoring procedures to ensure regular patterns of contact between mentors and youths. (1997, 233)

While DuBois and Neville here speak in the context of “adult volunteers” and mentors (implying a significant age difference between mentor and mentee), I believe that their suggestions for mentor support apply just as well to student volunteers (like the HSLP mentors). I must note here that all of the mentors in the HSLP program had received training in the winter prior to the start of the program, and had also gone through an application and interview process before being accepted as HSLP mentors. The mentors were also regularly supervised by HSLP staff and a Mentor Dean, the latter of whom they met with on a monthly basis. While being fifteen minutes late to a meeting may not in retrospect seem significant in a college class, this could (and, I suspect, did) have a

significant impact on a mentee when she was the only one in the group starting a module or activity without her mentor.

Mentors communicated in later evaluations of the Mentor Retreat that they appreciated this structured time together, though some too reflected that communication with their mentee was sometimes challenging. I became aware of this challenge through informal discussions and by co-presenting on a panel with Alicia Reaves, who had served as Mentoring Dean. Alicia's role was to help manage the mentoring component of the HSLP, communicate regularly with the mentors, and meet with them on a monthly basis to evaluate and talk about their experiences. As she writes in a paper about her experience (Reaves 2008), some of the mentors approached her early in the program with what she calls "the misrepresentation of reflection," which occurs, she argues, when someone is judged purely by their outer aesthetic and the possibility for connection is breached. She explains that assumptions on the part of some mentors early in the program prevented them from opening up to their mentees, a fear that was clearly also being communicated to the girls:

Fear of judgment and preconceived notions about urban female youth hindered certain mentors from letting down their guards and allowing their mentees to get to know them on an interpersonal level...Eventually, through continued modules, readings, mandatory skill-oriented and voluntary social gathering events, the aesthetic became increasingly trivial. The young women were able to forge reciprocally positive mentoring relationships based on the interests and concerns listed on their applications that were used to create the pairs. Once dialogue began, it was based upon common challenges faced by young women aged fifteen to twenty-two years of age. (Reaves 2008)

As Reaves worked with the mentors in the early weeks of the program, much of this prejudice, in her view, did fade, giving way to acceptance, respect, and trust. Drawing

upon the work of Audre Lorde (1984), Reaves argues that the successful growth and connection of participations within the HSLP was contingent upon their development of a womanist frame of reference in approaching the program: the participants sought equal access in the professional world not necessarily because they were women, or even young women of color who wanted equality with men, but because, like men, they are human beings (Reaves 2008).¹⁶ This would prove to be an important foundational understanding in the HSLP as modules focused on exploring different experiences accessing and practicing leadership worked to further this same political belief, particularly in the case of the very first module.

Breaking Barriers and Building Alliances

The first module of the HSLP, “Overview of Women’s Leadership,” was held on Thursday, January 31st, one week after the initial program orientation, and the second Mentor Retreat was held on February 9th, just one week later. Both of these sessions aimed to continue the community building of the first retreat but also, drawing on feminist scholarship, to break down some of the dominant ideas concerning leadership and women by utilizing theories concerning the nature of power and understandings of agency. In *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Saba Mahmood begins her own exploration of agency by first introducing Michael Foucault’s insights on power:

¹⁶ For discussions of the concept of womanism, see Walker 1983, and Collins 1998 and 2000.

Power, according to Foucault, cannot be understood solely on the model of domination as something possessed and deployed by individuals or sovereign agents over others, with a singular intentionality, structure, or location that presides over its rationality and execution. Rather, power is understood as a strategic relation of force that permeates life and is productive of new forms of desire, objects, relations, and discourses. (Mahmood 2005, 17; see also Foucault 1978)

The application of Foucault's definition of power to the HSLP is especially pertinent because as recent research has shown, although many girls have experience in informal leadership roles, few girls actually define themselves as leaders (see Schoenberg, Salmond, and Fleshman 2008). By rejecting the concept that power is solely dominational, and instead employing one that is relational and positional, girls can similarly begin to understand themselves as embodying and enacting power, which in turn can provide them with a sense of enablement and authorization to act. Such an understanding also recognizes the collective power of communities as well as the dynamic, ever-changing relationships within them.

According to Mahmood, understanding Foucault's definition of power is also necessary to an understanding of agency because agency, like power, is everywhere: it is located throughout power structures and continually works to reproduce and reinscribe power (2005; see esp. Chapter 1). Because power is indeed relational, individuals therefore practice power—and have the capacity to act to varying degrees—throughout their lives (see Hartman 1999). Lila Abu-Lughod similarly observes that “we should learn to read in various local and everyday resistances the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power...by letting their practices teach us about complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power” (1990, 53). As actors,

individuals therefore also have the capacity to influence and to create change, not just at or from the top of institutional positions, but from positions within their homes, communities, organizations, businesses, and institutions. For girls, as with all individuals, this means that the skills necessary to undertake given projects are already in hand—and that leadership is not a future abstract ideal but a possibility for *now*.

As scholars from the Girl Scout Research Institute write in *Change It Up!*, the way a girl interprets an intended definition of leadership will determine whether or not she finds a leadership program appealing. It is therefore essential that communication and materials from a leadership program help girls understand and identify different forms of leadership (Schoenberg, Salmond, and Fleshman 2008, 16), and, I would add, the assumptions underlying dominant definitions of leadership. In their investigation of college women, Karyn Boatwright and Rhonda Egidio similarly noted that “interventions designed to raise women’s consciousness, particularly with regard to internalized gender-biased assumptions about the masculine nature of leadership roles, may stimulate leadership aspirations” (2003, 664). The activities and exercises of Module One, “Overview of Women’s Leadership,” aimed to do just that: “promote new understanding of women’s leadership” (Institute for Women’s Leadership 2009a), and work to begin developing skills like critical thinking, organization, self-presentation, team work, and public speaking. At the heart of this three-hour-long module were exercises that responded to Mary Hartman’s call to “reimagine leadership, to think in new ways about what it is and what it might be, and to articulate more forcefully why it matters that

women in far larger numbers be supported in seeking and securing decision-making positions” (1999, 7).

Three main activities compromised Module One: “Portrait of a Leader,” in which definitions, concepts, and importance of women’s leadership were explored. Here, students and mentors worked in groups using words and drawings to portray what they felt leadership was as well as women they felt embodied strong leadership skills. Then, with the help of Dr. Kim Owens, Assistant Dean at Rutgers University, the students explored their assumptions about the importance of high school-, college-, and graduate-level education, including corresponding pay scales for each acquired degree, with a particular focus on gender. Students reacted most strongly to this activity, as it showed the disparities between the lifetime earnings of men and women of various academic backgrounds; in most cases, the girls and even most mentors expressed surprise that they had so greatly overestimated the lifetime earnings of high school and even bachelor’s degrees. During this activity, facilitators guided a discussion on financial and educational plans after high school; as above, this discussion was punctuated by much surprise on the parts of the students, who for the most part had not formulated any plans beyond vague concepts of what careers they wanted to have “down the road.”

Module One closed with a common module component, “Success Circles,” in which students worked in groups to reflect on particular questions or concepts. At this module, facilitators posed questions such as: Do we need women’s leadership? Why? Why do we need young women leaders? What or who is a leader? Who are some female leaders that you know of? What characteristics do they have? Which of these

characteristics do you also have? At both this session as well as similar discussion sessions at the February 9th Mentor Retreat, students and their mentors expanded dominant concepts of leadership by listing and exploring leadership characteristics that were relation-based, such as one's commitment to others, ability to build others' confidence, and being a team-builder. Additionally, students listed characteristics like "one's own confidence," "composure," "moral beliefs," and "character"¹⁷ as those they would most like to embody as leaders, alluding to the ability of and preference for leaders to work with, rather than over, other people. In this way, students and mentors also began developing concepts of ideal leaders that formed an atmosphere of alliance and support rather than competition as the focus of strong leadership became more and more centered on one's ability to work collaboratively.

A particularly strong exercise during the second retreat worth its own mention here was one titled "Traces of the Self," in which mentees' bodies were traced by their mentors and then filled in with words and images worked on by the mentoring pairs. The goal of this activity was to build trust and communication between mentors and mentees, and to strengthen mentee's self-confidence. I had the opportunity to work with a girl whose mentor could not come to the training on this exercise, which proved to be an exciting and very insightful experience. After tracing her body and stepping back to look at the image, I asked her where she wanted to start. She immediately said her shoulders – "I have strong shoulders to carry weight on...and I have a big heart, so let's draw that

¹⁷ Field note D020908-0501.

in.” I asked her about her head, and she said “I’ll draw a big mouth because I talk a lot, and little eyes to peer at people with. I have to be able to see them.” We continued on to different parts – her hands, feet, arms, and then her torso, which I called “your strong core middle.” She asserted, “No! I have to draw that to be skinnier, it looks too fat.” I replied, “If you make it so skinny, will it still have enough strength to hold you up and carry all your insides?” “No,” she said again, “It has to be skinnier. Other girls shouldn’t think this way because it’s not good, but it’s just me, I have a hang-up. It needs to be skinny.” Not wanting to pressure her into an uncomfortable position, I said “okay” as she began to curve in the outline of her torso.¹⁸

I’d like to believe that this was an important moment for this student; she was asserting the confidence to present her body the way she wanted, even after admitting to me that there were parts she didn’t like, and she was disagreeing with an adult whom she hadn’t known for too long. For me, I recognized that even though I wanted to tell (or maybe convince) her that she had a strong, beautiful body, that in doing so I also would have been silencing her and undermining the views and interpretations she had about her body. This was an important moment for me in recognizing the need for girls to be able to express their voices in an unfiltered and fully supported manner. Later on, as each mentoring pair presented the outlines of the mentees, I thought more about this exchange as well as if my partner’s ideas about her body would change over the course of the program. Interestingly, amongst the other presenters, most did not make any negative or

¹⁸ Field notes D020908-0202; D020908-0203.

self-defeating remarks about any parts of their bodies except for a few, including the student I worked with; whether so few girls did make negative remarks was due to positive self-perception, trust between other group members, and/or other reasons, however, I can only speculate. Rather than come across as self-defeating, though, these admissions became catalysts for admiration and respect—girls simultaneously reacted “yeah, sometimes I feel like that too” and “that’s because we’re pressured to feel that way, I know what you mean,”¹⁹ demonstrating a level of solidarity that hadn’t been expressed yet in the program.

An Ethic of Care

Due, I believe, in part to length of time in the program as well as the increasing intimacy of exercises, the students and mentors in the February 9th retreat began to show an increasing level of alliance and solidarity with one another. Also noting the emerging sense of unity and collective responsibility among mentors and mentees, Sasha Taner (2008) explained in a recent panel that this care filled a strong need among the high school students for caring and trust relationships grounded in mutual respect and compassion. Taner noted that,

[The high school students] made this [desire] clear in various activities that included creating charts of their ideas of what a woman leader is, diagrams that outline their bodies and illustrate what is going on from the inside, lists that address their motivations, and their needs. They’ve not only illustrated this need, they’ve spoken freely and honestly about hurtful relationships, and a lack or

¹⁹ Field notes D020908-0203; D020908-0207; D020908-0213.

disillusionment with relationships through poetry, reflections on the past, present and future, and through private conversations.

Throughout the length of the HSLP, both mentors and mentees demonstrated a growing ethics of care for one another and the whole group based upon a personal level of responsibility for the entire community and grounded in the desire to successfully negotiate people, places, and systems that worked to undermine them.

Such an ethics of care was demonstrated verbally through informal social interactions among HSLP participants, as well as through more structured social activities. As the weeks went by and the relationships between the mentors and mentees strengthened, the high school students as well as the undergraduates became more comfortable speaking candidly with the HSLP facilitators about their personal lives outside the program, along with personal challenges they may have been facing; this demonstrated a willingness to be emotionally vulnerable and available to one another, and an emotional openness that was not present at the start of the program. Both mentors and mentees also frequently referred informally to one another as “best friend” or “sister”—a signal Dorothy Roberts notes is frequently used by non-genetically related persons that define one another as part of one’s larger ‘family’ (1997, 261; see also Casey 1990, 316). The mentees continued to exhibit positive feedback about the mentors through written evaluations, remarking on the comfort, trust, and emotional openness they felt with their mentors: “Rachel, my mentor, was great. She was there for me and I was very comfortable with her. I love her, she was great, and she deserves a [high

rating]”;²⁰ “I feel that my mentor was very comfortable with me and I could trust her”; “The experiences I shared with my mentor were about my life! How I had to experience growing up with no parents and what that was like”; “We talked on the phone, she gave me advice on personal problems and she was like a best friend to me”; “It made me laugh and even really trust others [even though] I usually don’t.”²¹ Later on, demonstrating to what degree this care ultimately grew, perhaps the impact and strength of the ethics of care could best be understood at the end of the last module of the program, when all of the HSLP participants sat in a circle informally reflecting upon their experiences. Staff, undergraduates, and high school students alike spoke of how “It makes me so happy to see what you’ve accomplished” and “It’s been so fantastic to work with all of you and thank you all for making it a fantastic experience and being able to work with such strong women.”²² Participants frequently ended their reflections with “I care for you very much” and “I love all of you,” particularly in the case of the students.²³

In their own feedback regarding their roles as mentors, the undergraduate participants of the HSLP also demonstrated their own ethics of care toward the high school students, as well as a sense of collective responsibility for their present and future well being. It is worth noting once again here that it was the undergraduate HSLP Deans who designed and facilitated the individual modules, an act that clearly demonstrates

²⁰ Field note E050208-020101. Student participants in the HSLP have been kept anonymous in this thesis, therefore this and any other names of students have been changed for privacy.

²¹ Field notes E050208-020201; E050208-020401; E050208-020403; E020908-010208.

²² Field notes D050208-0108; D050208-0109.

²³ Field note D050208-0101.

these women's intragenerational desire to ensure that other young women can not only be part of part of the conversation on women's leadership, but can assert themselves in leadership positions just as they themselves have. In one interview with an HSLP staff member, she expressed her own sense of responsibility for the well-being of the girls in the following way:

Young women can bring new ways of thinking, new ways of acting in our homes, our communities, our country, the world. We need diverse voices, and we want to help these students understand that not only are their contributions valuable, but critical. Young diverse women are a necessary part of the conversation of how to make the world a better place, and we need to support them to do so.²⁴

Similarly, the undergraduate mentors also used their "sense of collective responsibility" to help the high school participants understand and act upon the opportunities available to them in college and beyond. In their end-of-program feedback evaluations, many undergraduates expressed responsibility for providing their mentees with the knowledge they had gained since entering college, and providing them with guidance and support: "I am from Jersey City and I came to college and made something of myself and I wanted my mentee to feel the exact same way"; "I wanted to help girls realize their potential"; "My favorite part of the program was building a relationship with my new mentee. She wants to learn everything about Rutgers and the college environment and I am happy to help her."²⁵ In an interview with one of the Deans, she also noted that part of this sense of responsibility came from the fact that the individuals from both Rutgers and Jersey City were part of a larger community of young women

²⁴ Field note I073108-0206.

²⁵ Field notes E050208-010309; E050208-010302; E050208-010807.

facing challenges and for that reason, it was imperative that members of this community help one another for the general success of the group. She explained that

all of us went through this experience together and we were able to share our stories but experience the same things...it goes back to that idea of awareness of yourself and your peers and seeing your experiences not necessarily as uniform but somewhat as a collective experience...[and] that in itself is political.²⁶

These early discussions of leadership in HSLP modules, partnered with a structural support system throughout the program, allowed a few very important understandings of leadership to be established and explored, all of which were key in the ongoing self-development of the high school students, especially as it concerns voice: (a) certain types and areas of leadership have been dominated by men; (b) women should have equal rights to those of men; (c) having women leaders changes beliefs about both men and women; (d) young women bring an array of fresh perspectives, approaches, experiences, and minds to leadership positions; (e) leadership can take many forms other (if not better) than the dominant top-down approach; and (f) holding leadership roles will help young women and the people around them move forward in their life goals. Most importantly, the exercises and discussions during the program challenged racist, sexist, classist, and ageist assumptions underlying the stereotypical image of leadership as being embodied by a white, upper-middle class, middle-aged, highly educated male. Discussions stressed an alternative definition of leadership that sought to make social change, rather than traditional leadership that perpetuates the status quo. Foundational to the program is the assertion that leaders are and can be of a range of backgrounds, an assertion that allowed

²⁶ Field note I091608-0112.

the high school students and their mentors to understand that many of them were already themselves leaders: as one student asserted during the discussion on leadership characteristics, “I *am* a role model, because my cousin looks up to me.”²⁷

The resulting community that was established through the interactions and relationships of the HSLP participants, and the support that community brought to its members, was critical in both moving investigations of alternative forms of leadership forward and building and perfecting leadership skills. In her *Community Activism and Feminist Politics*, Nancy Naples (1997b) argues that such community-building is essential to the coalition and cooperation needed for political activism. She writes that “as a dynamic process, the social construction of community offers the possibility for redefinition of boundaries, for broadened constituencies, and for seemingly unlikely alliances” (337). This community, however, is not based on sameness, nor is it necessarily looking for consensus, which would undoubtedly silence those without the greatest power (see also Lorde 1984). Rather, the community of the HSLP sought to be one based on a myriad of truth claims and knowledges, seeking to produce alternative visions to the dominant view of women, leadership, and women leaders. The HSLP staff, undergraduate Deans, mentors, and high school girls all act as role models for one another through whom alternative forms of leadership are reflected. In striving to explore leadership for social change, the program understands and recognizes that difference

²⁷ Field note D020909-0701.

opens up possibilities for new knowledges and connections, which create a ‘safe space’ in which participants can explore, question, challenge, and reflect with support.

Like other past and present social networks among women (see Naples 1997a), the resulting community that formed within the HSLP allowed the participants to organize collectively around a shared vision of dismantling dominant conceptions of leadership, and to resist externally imposed constructions of themselves as women leaders, their community members, and the possibilities for their lives. It also facilitated resiliency and resistance among the participants by validating their backgrounds and identities.²⁸ This focus on difference, and on alternative visions of reality, allowed the young women to develop what Chela Sandoval (2000) calls oppositional consciousness, which I explain further in the next chapter. Through self-reflective exercises that tapped into this oppositional consciousness, the HSLP provided the high school girls with an opportunity to explore their inner voices, which, in turn, raised their outer ones.

²⁸ By resiliency, I am referring to the ways in which youth from racially stigmatized communities succeed in a context of multiple intersecting adversities. Resilience has typically been viewed as an inherent individual trait fostered by immediate family and one’s own agency. However, resilience is now understood as one that is fostered through multiple systems of support based on authentic and engaging caring relationships between an individual and her surrounding community, and the values that community places on a diversity of class backgrounds, cultures, identities, and languages. For a more thorough discussion of girls’ social networks and resiliency, see Nancy López and Chalane Lechuga (2007).

CHAPTER 4: DEVELOPMENT OF INNER SELF

In her investigation of The College of New Jersey's W.I.L.L. (Women in Learning Leadership) program, Emily Bent (2004) argues that students participating in women's leadership programs unknowingly embody and employ an oppositional consciousness that is crucial in students' ability to redefine dominant ideologies for positive social change. Drawing upon the work of Chela Sandoval (2000), Bent writes,

the current future of women's leadership programs remains dependent upon students' capacity to knowingly employ [oppositional] consciousness, articulate visions beyond and through negotiations of theoretical and practical engagements, while also fostering structural change through mobile and tactical constructions of leadership and power. (2004, 2)

Through mobilizing this consciousness, students can manipulate dominant ideologies concerning women, power, and leadership, and transform dominant culture ideologically and physically (4). By changing the way they think about leadership—and the possibilities of leading themselves—young women can effectually change the practice of leadership through their own participation in and dialogues of leading.

Such an analysis of the use of oppositional consciousness in the W.I.L.L. program similarly provides a framework through which to examine the development of an oppositional consciousness and transformative self-awareness amongst the high school participants of the HSLP. In theory, the facilitators of the HSLP employed Sandoval's methodology of the oppressed, as they actively deconstructed cultural signs and worked to break down the meaning and power that such signs carry, particularly for the category "woman" and understandings of and stereotypes about women's ability to lead (see

Sandoval 2000, 131). The program also broke down stereotypes, community boundaries, and assumptions about young urban women through what Elsa Barkley Brown (1989) calls truly “feminist” pedagogical strategies, such as focusing on experience, context, and the subjectivity of individuals.

As I argue below, the employment of oppositional consciousness was critical for the high school girls in the HSLP to cultivate leadership skills through the exploration of their inner voice. In this section I will examine how inner voice was developed in the second month of the HSLP curriculum through two specific modules—Module 2: Self-Awareness, and Module 3: Identity and Self-Presentation. Following a brief discussion of Sandoval’s oppositional consciousness, I explore how the content and activities of the aforementioned modules, which took place in the fourth and sixth weeks of the program, encouraged the self-exploration of the students’ inner voice, an understanding of one’s inner values and aspirations in relation to outer presentation and action, and similar self-reflective exercises aimed at investigating personal goals, values, and desires.

Oppositional Consciousness and Girls’ Leadership

In *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval (2000) provides a framework—oppositional consciousness—through which to examine transformative processes of self-development, self-awareness, and consciousness-raising, such as that which takes place in the HSLP. Sandoval believes that once subjects are self-consciously aware of their subject positions within the larger structural social matrix, these positions

can be shifted and changed by their inhabitants, thereby becoming sites of resistance and power. The oppositional form of consciousness is particularly appropriate for women's and girls' leadership development programs because, as Jill McLean Taylor contends, the healthy resistance to disconnection that girls show in childhood becomes at adolescence a "resistance to knowing one's feelings, to knowing one's body, and to being in authentic relationship with others," all of which have "profound consequences for psychological health and development" (1996, 119). Practitioners can use such consciousness, Sandoval argues, as "tactical weaponry for intervening in shifting currents of power" (2000, 58), and can work to undue inauthentic relationships with self and with others by bringing to the surface an awareness of social constructs and power structures as well as a motivation to change these same structures.

There are many ways to foster oppositional consciousness within individuals and groups, perhaps most powerfully as a framework through which to examine both larger social issues as well as individual experiences. As I explained earlier, one of the key tenets of the HSLP was providing students with alternative definitions and models of leadership, which encourage girls to engage in leadership positions from different approaches and to associate strengths they already possess with being leadership qualities. In providing girls with both alternative definitions as well as space in which to reflect upon and continue to develop their own definitions of leadership, the HSLP opened the opportunity for girls to reflect upon their own personal leadership values and the role they see themselves playing in the world. In short, it employed a feminist pedagogy, which Robbin Crabtree, David Alan Sapp, and Adela Licona define as a

method of teaching that is “based on assumptions about power and consciousness-raising, acknowledges the existence of oppression as well as the possibility of ending it, and foregrounds the desire for and primary goal of social transformation” (2009, 3). With its focus on individual voice and personal experience, the program also emphasized, following Crabtree, Sapp, and Licona’s definition, “the epistemological validity of personal experience, often connected to notions of voice and authority...[and one that] acknowledges the personal, communal, and subjective ways of knowing as valid forms of inquiry and knowledge production” (4).

With such an acknowledgement of personal experience and voice as a source of authority, such practices help students, Elsa Barkley Brown explains, overcome notions of what is normative:

It is also about coming to believe in the possibility of a variety of experiences, a variety of ways of understanding the world, a variety of frameworks of operation, without imposing consciously or unconsciously a notion of the norm. What I have tried to do in my own teaching is to address both the conscious level through the material, and the unconscious level through the structure of the course, thus, perhaps, allowing my students, in Bettina Apthekar’s words, to “pivot the center”: to center in another experience. (921; see also Freire 1973; Mohanty 2003)

Through its structure, content, and those facilitating it, the HSLP sought to also “pivot the center” by providing young women with fresh perspectives on what could be considered normative. Indeed, as Sumru Erkut and others contend, race, sexuality, and social class do not account for “variations on a universal or essential experience of being female,” but instead work to produce radically different experiences of woman- and girlhood (1996, 53). The work of the HSLP was profoundly political in intent and practice to expose its participants to this range of experience, as it worked to undermine the expectations and

assumptions set in place concerning young women's roles, behaviors, expectations, and goals (see Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2002).

Chela Sandoval argues that the capacity to use oppositional consciousness as a tool for social movement depends both upon one's position and sense of identity in the world, and on one's ability to "read the current situation of power and self consciously choos[e] and adopt...the ideological stand best suited to push against its configurations" (2000, 60). The HSLP's modules on self-awareness, and identity and self-presentation did just that: in providing girls with an alternative framework through which to examine women's leadership, girls were also given the space to examine their beliefs and personal identifications, and to explore and express their inner voice.

The HSLP "Inner Self" Modules: An Overview

The portion of the HSLP curriculum that specifically focused on inner voice and self consisted of two main modules: Self-Awareness, and Identity and Self-Presentation, which took place during the second month of the program. Though each module was specifically focused on a particular topic, activities aimed at exploring self-awareness, identity, and self-expression took place in both modules. In this section, I provide a brief overview of the content of these modules, before investigating how this content impacted the high school participants.

It is worth mentioning that the very first exercise specifically focusing on inner voice, "Great Expectations," in which girls mapped out the steps needed to fulfill their

professional goals, took place at the second Mentor Retreat on Saturday, February 9th. Just five days later on Thursday, February 15th, Module 2: “Self-Awareness” continued this work with four main goals for students: to explore who they are as individuals and as effective leaders; to foster their listening and communication skills; to understand the importance of self-awareness as the core motivator in any action; and to understand that having a strong sense of self-awareness and knowledge will enable individuals to confront adversities in a constructive manner. Importantly, the module also aimed to foster communication skills by providing students with activities that explored how effectively to connect with their inner selves and their peers, investigating how knowing various aspects of themselves (e.g. where they come from, what they believe, what they value, who they are, what they hope to be) impacts their ability to connect with others and, consequently, act as leaders. Activities such as journaling about self-reflective prompts, film clip screenings, and discussions about significant past events continued these discussions, and pushed the girls into thinking further about how both the past and present continue to influence and impact the(ir) future, as well as how social expectations and cultural scripts dictate how they live their lives.

Two weeks later, Module 3: Identity and Self-Presentation continued much of this work on self-reflection with a particular focus on women’s status in the workplace. Building upon the work students had done with self-awareness and alternative definitions of leadership, the goals of this module were two-fold: to furnish students with a deeper understanding of the current situation of women in the professional workplace, and to lay a foundation for students upon which they can build business and self-presentation skills,

including self-confidence. The facilitators aimed to accomplish this by encouraging students to develop a deeper understanding both of their personal character and diverse skill set, and of how and where they can utilize this skill set; and by teaching them how to present themselves in a professional setting that stays true to who they are and their personal and professional goals. Facilitated by a number of undergraduate Deans, the module consisted of four main components: a lecture/discussion on the wage gap, barriers to upper-level positions, and the importance of pre-professional thinking for young women; a workshop on business etiquette and self-presentation skills; an activity on non-verbal communication skills; and a workshop on resume writing. While this module was much more skill-centered and less discussion- and self-reflective-based than others, the module was among the most impactful upon the high school girls, as evidenced by verbal and written feedback, because it had directly addressed how—and, indirectly, *if*—they were going to prepare for the personal and professional goals upon which they had just reflected two weeks earlier.

As mentioned above, the second and third modules of the HSLP, though each separately focusing on a particular component of leadership, all contained elements of self-awareness, identity and self-presentation, and self-expression. In evaluating each of these components below, I consider how knowing and understanding oneself forwards a girl's leadership skills and capacity to lead. I consider the words of a staff member at the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, which utilizes voice development in its own leadership seminars for young adult and professional women. She explains that the reason Woodhull teaches awareness of inner voice is “because you can’t advocate, or get

up in front of a group, if you don't know your instincts...It's about finding your inner voice and understanding the things that are really important to you and why you do what you do."²⁹ Like the ancient Greek aphorism, "Know thyself," this component of the HSLP curriculum sought to provide girls with opportunities to explore which voices they are listening to, whom they are really pleasing, and what inner values they wish to express in the work that they create and do. In doing so, the program pushed girls to consider the messages and people around them whose values conflicted with their own, and to understand how such messages were being internalized—and what to do about them.

Self-Awareness

The HSLP curriculum description for Module 2 starts that "Leadership begins with self-awareness," a sentiment echoed by anthropologist Susan Greenhalgh who in her *Under the Medical Gaze* argues that emotions and self-reflection are "necessary features of all knowledge, influencing the values, observations, and thoughts that make up the process of intellectual inquiry" (2001, 55). Nancy Naples continues in *Feminism and Method* that "the practice of ongoing self-reflection provides one strategy to make visible how daily interactions are shaped by dominant constructions and structures" (2003, 200), and, I would add, provides an individual with an understanding of how one actively reshapes and recreates those very constructions or alternatives. The HSLP understood

²⁹ Field note I031009-010202.

leadership as being at least partially brought about through a self-understanding of one's relation and position to those around her. One of the prime methods of facilitating this self-awareness and reflection was by bringing to light three points of consciousness among the HSLP girls: an understanding of their personal history (where they have been), an understanding of their personal values and gifts (where they are), and an understanding of their goals and desires (where they want to go). It appeared that an awareness of these three points provided the girls with the self-understanding of how their experiences and the larger social structure continually impact their lives, and how they would like to respond to these structures and move forward into the future given the obstacles and opportunities around them. In short, it helped shape their sense of personal agency and understanding of how to take action.

Amongst the preeminent ways of facilitating self-awareness was in the form of reflective exercises concerning significant past personal experiences and the girls' emotional responses to these experiences. Modules generally began with some sort of opening discussion portion, but in Modules 2 and 3, discussions within small groups pointedly focused on more in-depth questions geared toward exploring and understanding one's personal history. A closing activity during Module 2, in which students were asked to create images—using drawings, magazine cut-outs, words, etc.—to represent their past, present, and future further provided them with a time to critically evaluate their personal experiences with one another and individually, and how such experiences shape their course of life. Quite frankly, simply providing girls with the space and time to think and talk about positive and negative experiences seemed to be the biggest facilitator for

self-reflection, not in the least because girls (if not most individuals) frequently do not have the luxury of regular time and space in which to self-reflect, meditate, and critically assess one's life.

During these sessions, Deans posed questions and prompts such as: "When do you feel happy or content?"; "If you have felt depressed lately, talk about it"; "Talk about the person who has influenced your life the most"; and "Share a turning point in your life."³⁰ Varying in their level of candidness and secrecy, students reflected on a range of personal experiences, from a younger sibling's hospitalization to a family member's deployment in the military, to the excitement and trauma of immigrating to the United States. While many girls were reserved in their discussions, when sitting in on these talks I was continually amazed at the candidness of many others, who, with students and young women they'd met only weeks before, described in detail arguments with their parents, financial and academic challenges and fears, family illness, and self-doubt. Quieter girls provided more talkative ones with a sounding board through which to express conflicts and anger, and, over time, they themselves increased in their own willingness to speak, having developed stronger, more trusting relationships with the other girls.³¹

³⁰ Field note D021508-0201.

³¹ Field notes D021508-0202; D021508-0203; D021508-0204.

Such discussions, in the voice of one student, “allowed us a space to reflect upon my own past and think things you don’t normally talk about.”³² Many students felt that this exercise was soothing and eye-opening, but at the same time scary in bringing to the surface memories of and emotions from of the past: “I was scared that my past would upset me”; “it was absolutely shocking. I didn’t know where all the emotions came from, but I know I felt relief”; and “[this exercise] opened up some good and sensitive points in my life” were among the responses of the girls, reflecting some fear and discomfort with thinking about past experiences.³³ At the same time, however, many of the girls also remarked that they were grateful for the opportunity to reflect on their past, present, and future, because “even though I still don’t know what I want to do, I have an idea”³⁴—a common response in feedback forms and discussions. Girls also often indicated that they wished the discussions would last even longer so that they would have more time to “just talk.”

Discussions of personal history were undoubtedly connected with discussions of personal values and one’s “essence” or core being, and HSLP activities, in aiming to kindle girls’ inner values and identity, frequently involved reflective exercises about the past. An early exercise in which students actually helped define self-awareness helped to bridge some of the ideas about their past. Students defined self-awareness as “discovering yourself,” “comfort,” “interaction,” “who you are,” “creation,” “process,”

³² Field note E021508-010103.

³³ Field notes E021508-010402; E021508-010404; E021508-010414.

³⁴ Field note E021508-010403.

“confidence,” and “peace of mind”³⁵ – a range of definitions and concepts, to be sure, but a list composed of terms and phrases that reflected the transformative and dynamic process of self-discovery. Early on, the students, mentors, and Deans had begun this process of self-discovery by framing the HSLP experience by a self-defined concept of leadership; students aimed to be the kind of leaders that *they* wanted to be and challenged dominant narratives about young women’s leadership abilities. They defined leadership by what was already around them—their own skills, values, teachers, sisters, role models, etc., while the modules help them draw connections between what they already had and what they could do.

In addition to group discussions, these connections also grew out of the many individual journaling activities throughout the HSLP, which further encouraged the exploration of inner voice. In one of the first mentoring retreats, students had been given journals and introduced to the self-reflective and therapeutic practice of journaling by Maddie Hunter. One month later, students once again revisited journaling in an activity in which they were asked to free write personal responses to four video clips from popular films and television shows. HSLP Deans and staff facilitating a discussion about the clips framed it under the auspices of having the girls examine what messages were expressed about expectations for women through the characters’ portrayals. Two main points were discussed: how women are judged by how well they compete for men, and how the young women in the HSLP should respect themselves and one another aside

³⁵ Field note D021508-0401.

from how they ‘compare’ to the characters in the clips. The girls reflected that “our society doesn’t allow us to think for ourselves at all”³⁶ and that “certain people [i.e. media figures] can make the entire world think differently.”³⁷

Deans continued this self-reflection by prompting the girls to talk about questions such as: What do you respect in yourself? What do you want others to respect you for? What do you value? How do these clips agree or disagree with what you personally value?³⁸ Following their time to write, girls commented about the narrow portrayal of women in the film clips, particularly in *Flavor of Love*, a popular reality show that often portrays women fighting against and betraying one another while vying for the love of a male rap star. Many girls admitted that they watched the show or had seen it before, but hadn’t consciously considered the larger social messages conveyed in its portrayal of gender roles; to them, they said, it had been “just entertainment.” This particular film clip was used, however, as an opportunity for one HSLP staff member to explain to the girls the ease with which narrow views of gender roles are engrained and embodied by individuals, and the importance of self-awareness and support in growing into the person one wants to become. She encouraged the girls to “set goals for yourself...strive to be independent and set high goals for yourself...get a clear picture of what you do and don’t want to be involved with.”³⁹

³⁶ Field note D021508-060304.

³⁷ Field note E021508-010203.

³⁸ Field note D021508-060401.

³⁹ Field note D021508-060501.

This conversation continued with the girls about how in *Flavor of Love* specifically and in the media generally, men have the ability to judge and determine the destiny of women's roles, which go on to determine how women see and value themselves. One young woman reflected that although watching the show may support it by giving it high audience ratings, one can also watch and learn from it. This remark segued into the second independent journaling activity aimed at further self-reflection. Girls were asked: What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a minority? What does it mean to be a minority woman? And how do you deal with society's expectations and how do we need to fit them?⁴⁰ In evaluations following the module, girls later expressed that this journaling session was among the most difficult of the activities, as "thinking of the questions makes you think of your life" and that these "very significant" and "very thought-provoking" questions were among "the most important questions meant to be answered."⁴¹ One girl reflected that writing about these questions "opened my eyes" because she had never thought about them before.⁴² Directly and indirectly, these questions would go on to be addressed at modules and club meetings throughout the entire semester, frequently through the embodiment of leadership by the young women themselves.

The exercises described in this section were important but also just singular moments in the life-long journeys of self-awareness and self-discovery—though

⁴⁰ Field note D021508-070101.

⁴¹ Field notes E021508-010305; E021508-010309; E021508-010313; E021508-010312.

⁴² Field note E021508-010314.

moments that also formed a foundation for continuous explorations of core values and understandings of inner voice. As I explain below, understanding one's personal values is a key component of successful leadership, not only because of the ethical decisions that leaders must regularly make, but also because it allows one to reflect upon what type of leader one wants to become. The HSLP curriculum used two main components to move an exploration of personal values to reflection on future goals: outward exercises in which high school girls were specifically asked to reflect on their futures, and role modeling by HSLP Deans and mentors. Both of these components, in conjunction with exercises on self-awareness, moved the girls through ongoing investigations of identity in terms of who they are and who they want to be in the future, evidenced by their growing interest in emulating the role models around them and in expressing the personal and professional goals they set for themselves.

Identity and Self-Presentation

In an interview I conducted with an HSLP staff member, she explained that the impact of role modeling, combined with a raised awareness of opportunities outside of their community, had a “transformative” effect on how the high school participants saw themselves and the lives they had ahead of them. She explained that this process is

a direct vehicle—a lot of learning takes place on a very personal level when you resonate with other people's personal experience. There's a real space for personal transformation to take place...I also think that the actual atmosphere, the environment of being around peer models outside of their community is

extremely important for them. The girls are looking around intently and taking everything in.⁴³

This staff member reflected on the transformative process that occurs when self-awareness combines with a desire to emulate role models and mentors and with the development of skills and a plan to make active and positive choices about their future. As Amy Sullivan reflects, such adult women “can foster healthy development by validating girls’ feelings and experiences even when they are at odds with convention and by assisting girls’ efforts to recognize and resist idealized social norms” (1996, 233; see also Gilligan 1990). This psychological resistance is manifested in an abundance of creative energy and an assertion of personal identity as girls shift the lens of how they think about themselves and others. In this section, I outline some of the ways in which the HSLP’s high school girls reflected on who they are and what they want to be, and how they worked to present themselves in ways that reflected these identities.

One of the key ways in which the high school girls expressed their identities and particular leadership styles was by exploring the values that they stood for and the stances they took on various social issues. Earlier in the program, a facilitating Dean had closed a module by having the students write their names next to the characteristics they had listed about female leaders. Students were asked to position their names next to the characteristics they either already had or wanted to develop, an exercise which positioned the girls as current and future leaders. A few weeks later, particularly as exercises and discussions challenged the girls to think deeper about what they truly valued in

⁴³ Field note I073108-0205.

themselves, what moral compasses guided them, and how society pressures women to identify themselves in certain ways, the girls began to express more clearly what they stood for. In the previous section, I had described an exercise in which the students watched a range of film clips and had a follow-up discussion and journaling activity in which they were asked to reflect on the clips' portrayal of women. During this discussion, many students demonstrated an embodiment of oppositional consciousness and expressed the values that they stood by reflecting on the conflicts between the United States media's apparent values system and their own. One girl explained that "[on the show] women are judged by how well they compete for love, and by their body and sex, and [are] judged by a guy...this is an issue of self-respect," and remarked that she did not wish to be judged by this way.⁴⁴ Another girl reflected on the difficulty of having certain values that, in her case, are in conflict with the more traditional values of her conservative family: "sometimes it's hard, because sometimes you have to disagree with your family, and you need to figure out what to do for yourself."⁴⁵ With these and similar comments, girls demonstrated their growing understanding of the importance of multiple viewpoints, knowing their own personal value system, and the challenges of embodying and enacting those values amongst individuals with different beliefs.

An understanding of self and of personal stance was also explored and demonstrated through multiple activities with mentors—and, undoubtedly, in the private conversations and interactions between mentors and mentees that they alluded to having.

⁴⁴ Field note D021508-050302.

⁴⁵ Field note D021508-050401.

During these early HSLP modules, the girls and their mentors were still developing relationships, and thus negotiating boundaries, emotional vulnerability, trust, and simply getting to know one another. Both mentors and mentees had to assert themselves in order for their relationships to grow, which also involved breaking down assumptions about themselves and their peers (see Reaves 2008).

Module 3 on Identity and Self-Presentation addressed the issue of identity and core beliefs even further by giving girls an opportunity to reflect and discuss how they can present themselves professionally and personally to other people, particularly when it comes to body language, outward appearance, eye contact, and introductions. While this module worked on a number of different practical skills—such as handshakes, dining etiquette, resume writing, and business attire—perhaps the most significant activity of this module addressed how students should introduce themselves and network in professional settings. Students had been given resource guides that outlined all of the aforementioned skills and that the facilitating Deans reviewed with them during the module. But when the Deans introduced the concept of approaching professional contacts, they particularly reiterated the importance that introducing oneself makes to both speaker and listener, as speakers convey both their power and their potential, as well as their respect and concern for themselves in such an act. The Dean asked the students to think about and practice a sequence of statements used during professional introductions, a fairly simple exercise that had deep responses from and impacts on the students.

In *Women & Money: Owning the Power to Control your Destiny*, consultant Suze Orman (2007) ends her book of financial planning with a final chapter: “Say Your Name.” In it, Orman argues that “simply saying your name is an act of power” (247), because who you are is the most basic foundation of what you have in your life—your identity. Orman writes,

I believe that there is something incredibly powerful in the act of saying your name. I might even go as far as to say that it is the symbolic key to unlocking your powerful self. I believe that it is not until you can say your name with pride, incredible pride for who you are and all that your name represents, that you will ever be the powerful woman I want you to be. (245)

While it may appear strange to glean insight from a financial guru in an examination of girls’ leadership programs, Orman’s point is taken well within the HSLP: knowing who you are forms the foundation of understanding your power and capacity to lead and take charge—though this does not mean to say that such an exercise is enjoyable, or even easy. It was obvious while the facilitating Dean went over this portion of the resource guide that the high school girls were markedly nervous and uncomfortable: they appeared tense, many were unusually quiet and attentive, some questioned what they would say during such a speech, and communicated that they “wouldn’t have enough to say” to fill up even a thirty-second networking conversation.⁴⁶ Sample introductions by the HSLP Deans appeared to remedy some, but not all, of this discomfort.

However, the point of this exercise was more about having the girls reflect on what they would say in such a scenario rather than actually doing it, and to have the girls

⁴⁶ Field note D022908-020201.

understand the power that they had within them and how they would share their personalities and skills with those around them in a professional setting. Indeed, the girls knew that they would be utilizing introductory speeches during an upcoming event, Bridging the Gap,⁴⁷ in which they would be meeting with Leadership Scholar alumnae, and so allowing them time to think about what they would share about themselves with other people, as well as practice with one another, seemed to be a safe, nonthreatening way of having them to speak about themselves formally with one another. It was also one way in which the girls' identities and self values were validated early on in the program—a point which cannot be overemphasized in its importance. By announcing one's name and personal goals to one another, and having the audience listen and support this act, the girls and mentors validated one another in their personal identities and values, as well as supported the development of healthy, supportive relationships, which many girls in the HSLP did not have (Taner 2008). This exercise also provided girls an opportunity to acknowledge their own independence, while still being provided with guidance and advice, as well as the motivation and emotional support to continue asserting their independence and autonomy.⁴⁸ It was what Janie Victoria Ward calls “truth telling,” a liberating act that helps girls experience “constructive, critical affirmation of the individual and the collective by encouraging her to think critically

⁴⁷ Bridging the Gap is an event hosted annually by the IWL. Alumnae from the IWL's Leadership Scholars program reflect on their insights since the completion of the program and their experiences in graduation school, their professional careers, and life after college.

⁴⁸ For more on mentors' and nonparent adults' role in supporting girls' independence, see Rhodes and Davis 1996, and Sullivan 1996.

about herself and her place in the world around her” (1996, 95). In this act of truth telling, girls also build their resistance to negative (self-)critique by replacing it with positive recognition (95).

The HSLP also utilized role models, particularly role models that were within the girls’ same age bracket, who acted as mirrors upon whom the girls reflected their developing and shifting identities. Mentoring and role modeling for adolescent girls is a quickly growing area of research in girls’ studies, but even early scholars affirmed that mentors and other nonparent adults in the lives of girls can “serve as credible role models and alter young women’s beliefs about available opportunities,” particularly for minority youth (Rhodes and Davis 1996, 218-19). Amy Sullivan (1996) explains that any successful mentoring-based relationship is also based on healing, agency, and self-empowerment on the part of mentees, and, I would add, on the part of the mentors, since the HSLP mentorships followed a feminist model of two-way learning and support that was based on a social change-based leadership model. In these relationships, Sullivan explains, girls must know how to negotiate the risks they may face in speaking up without losing connection to their inner selves. As such, it is the responsibility of those around them to “reduce the material and psychological risks” (Sullivan 1996, 244-45) that young women confront. For the mentors and undergraduate Deans of the HSLP, this power included role modeling to their younger mentees the very messages about public speaking, leadership praxis, alternative definitions of leadership, active listening, and more, that they discussed throughout the program. For the high school girls, seeing their mentors and facilitators practice leadership styles and skills helped them internalize the

skills and messages that they were receiving, and provided them with a comfortable, safe space in which to practice and model these skills back to their mentors. Seeing young, ethnically diverse women only a few years older than themselves perform, for example, at the Rutgers Jazz n' Java poetry slam event,⁴⁹ as well as lead modules, and talk about internships and college classes sent the message of possibility—that the girls themselves too could embody these same positions. Role modeling by the mentors and facilitators—and by the high school girls to one another—literally started the day the entire program began, but as students learned more about specific leadership skills, and explored deeper issues surrounding identity and personal and professional goals, role modeling took on an even larger role.

In both their formal facilitation of Module 3 on Identity, as well as the content of their discussions and materials, the HSLP Deans provided the girls with living examples of the kind of women many of the girls communicated that they'd like to become (i.e. future lawyers, journalists, or doctors) through both the Deans' academic courses of study and professional achievements as well as how they challenged conventional notions of women's leadership. In presenting questions such as “What does it mean to be a minority woman?” and “How do you fit into society's expectations?”⁵⁰ the HSLP Deans provided the girls with at least part of the answer in embodying proof of alternative models of what they believed they themselves could become personally and professionally. This was

⁴⁹ Hosted by the Douglass Black Students' Congress, which is the oldest and largest black women's organization at Rutgers–New Brunswick, Jazz n' Java is an annual event that brings together members and friends of the Rutgers community for an evening of poetry and music.

⁵⁰ Field note D021508-0601.

true for the mentors as well, particularly in the case of one who had actually graduated from Snyder High School a few years earlier and already knew some of the girls. During one module discussion on future careers, this mentor stated to the girls,

Look at me here. I'm from the same place you're from, and I've worked hard and I've come here [to Rutgers University]. You don't have to stay in the same place. You can dream bigger dreams than you've had for yourself, and move forward in life. Things don't have to stay the same.⁵¹

This particular mentor directly challenged the negative view and/or narrow personal goals that the girls may have had for themselves, and similarly demonstrated not only a sense of personal self-value and pride, but a willingness to help the girls shape what they wanted to become (see also Taner 2008). She also demonstrated alternative professional and personal paths from the dominant narrative of paths available to minority girls, and modeled racial pride and self-respect (see also Ward 1996).

Module 3 also utilized role modeling and self-expression through a self-reflective exercise that high school girls completed with their mentors and facilitators in which they discussed nonverbal communication and outward body language as it relates to self-awareness and communication intentions. As Program Associate Sasha Taner explains, “multiple dynamics of group mentoring transpired during these sessions, including role modeling, effective communication, and positive affirmations” (2008), as girls reflected on how they are “read” by others, how they can control what messages they communicate through nonverbal signals, and how nonverbal self-presentation relates to impressions and stereotypes. Girls were given small images of individuals embodying nonverbal

⁵¹ Field note D022908-020204.

cues, and were asked to identify not only what these individuals were communicating, but how these cues aligned with what the girls self-identified as ideal characteristics that leaders should embody, such as trust, authority, love, consideration, readiness, and self-control—concluding, in the words of one girl, that “talking about self-expression says a lot about your identity.”⁵² Undergraduate Deans then facilitated further discussion on which ideal cues were embodied by the girls’ role models that they had named in earlier sessions, and how they themselves could enact these cues in future professional settings.

During this and many other HSLP sessions, mentors and mentees frequently brought up personal anecdotes as they related to material covered during discussions. As mentioned earlier, these anecdotes were sometimes quite emotionally charged, and displayed a great deal of both vulnerability and trust on the part of the speaker. Mentors themselves often talked about their personal challenges, especially as it related to the college admissions process and their first-year experiences as freshman. By sharing these experiences and challenges, as well as their positive achievements, mentors again demonstrated for their mentees avenues of opportunity, sites of support, and the possibility of achievement. To be sure, though, these conversations were not one-sided. Over time, mentees grew increasingly more confident in providing feedback to mentors themselves, comment on how they would negotiate similar situations, thus internally opening the possibility that these experiences could occur in their own lives. Mentors also demonstrated the same practical skills, like active listening and public speaking, that their mentees were learning, and supported mentees when practicing these skills.

⁵² Field note E022908-010405.

In *Identity and Inner-City Youth*, Milbrey McLaughlin (1993) argues that adolescents need an enlarged vision of choices, of alternatives to dominant ideals, and of self, particularly as they develop strategies to achieve their goals. The first section of the HSLP addressed this need in its emphasis that the high school participants must have an understanding of who they are individually and what they stand for in order to be effective leaders, and that knowing such aspects of the self (such as where one comes from, personal beliefs, personal values, who one is and who one hopes to be) impacts one's ability to connect with others and, consequently, to act as a leader.

I'd like to reiterate once again that this understanding was part of a semester-long (and indeed life-long) process of growth and self-awareness in understanding one's personal and professional goals. In the context of leadership development, the early HSLP modules served to bring to the forefront questions of societal expectations, stereotyping, and gender roles within the goal of participants understanding how such external structures impacted, shaped, and redirected individuals' personal goals, self-concept, and identity. Through this awareness, girls demonstrated both that they were similarly aware of the social systems in place that continue to direct and be directed by them, and that they wanted to do something actively and consciously do something about it through personal and community change.

As we will see in the next chapter, the second half of the HSLP built upon earlier development and progress by providing the girls with a forum to outwardly express and practice leadership skills through public speaking and more formal presentations. Though widely regarded as the number one fear of adults, practicing public speaking and

learning speaking and presentation skills was also reported by the girls as being the most impactful experience of the HSLP, and one that would directly and immediately impact their self-concept and self-belief.

CHAPTER 5: LEADERSHIP THROUGH PUBLIC SPEAKING

In *Speak with Confidence*, Albert J. Vasile (2004) notes that regular practice in different forms of public speaking can gain a speaker significant benefits professionally and personally, among them “more self-confidence; an increased ability to communicate one to one within a group, and to a group; help in conquering shyness;...a keen sense of personal accomplishment; and a heightened ability to listen” (2). He argues that public speaking may be one of the most important tools one can learn and use, particularly because out of the four main acts of communication—talking, listening, writing, and reading—“there’s no question that talking and listening predominate in business, social, personal, and political relationships” (6). Vasile continues by explaining that practicing public speaking may help individuals overcome learned shyness, including the learned feminine trait of bashfulness, particularly prevalent in certain ethnic and religious cultures (see 8-11). By overcoming shyness and messages of self-silencing, one can become more assertive, and confidently be able to “express your thoughts and feelings as well as to disagree and be able to say ‘no’ without feeling guilty” (11). Refining these skills can also assist even those for whom public speaking is not anxiety-inducing, allowing them to reflect on their abilities and speaking style and try out new ones.

Indeed, being a strong public speaker not only showcases the ability to communicate one’s ideas to others, but also informs one’s capacity to persuade and lead others. Despite its importance in leadership, however, public speaking is generally considered to be one of the biggest fears of most individuals—especially of women. As

Carrie Paechter (2007), Barrie Thorne (1995), and Carol Gilligan (1993) have found in their own research, girls struggle with speaking up and speaking honestly, particularly in situations in which they feel judged and their voices scrutinized. Knowing that public speaking is one of the biggest challenges facing young women leaders, the High School Leadership Program aims to teach and encourage the high school students enrolled in the program to speak up throughout the semester and, most importantly, advocate for themselves.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the HSLP provided its participants with opportunities to reflect on their personal goals and values, building what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) argues is one of the key components of empowerment: self-knowledge. It is upon this knowledge that self-empowerment—and the (r)evolution of community and institutional structures—are based. Similarly, within the HSLP, outer enactments and embodiments of power grew out of the developing self-knowledge of the high school girls. Reflecting on the politics of empowerment, Collins writes in *Black Feminist Thought* that

When Black women value our self-definitions, participate in Black women's domestic and transnational activist traditions, view the skills gained in schools as part of a focused education for Black community development, and invoke Black feminist epistemologies as central to our worldviews, we empower ourselves. (2000, 289).

Collins here draws upon the work of Audre Lorde (1984), who in “Age, Race, Class, and Sex” likewise reflects,

My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of whom I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restriction of externally imposed definition. (120-21)

In this chapter I argue that, building upon the relationships, skills, and self-awareness established in the first half of the program, the second half of the HSLP pushed the girls to utilize their knowledge and practice personal agency in the forms of outer projection, self-presentation, and public speaking as a means to continue learning and practicing leadership abilities. I build my argument by exploring three main components and practices of public speaking key to developing the HSLP girls' leadership skills: self-presentation, networking, and peer role modeling, all of which was based upon a sense of personal authority. Before exploring these components in depth, I first begin by providing an overview of the second half of the HSLP curriculum, which included, most notably, Module Five: Public Speaking.

“Outer Voice” in the HSLP Curriculum: An Overview

Two events and two modules ushered a transition from the first half of the HSLP to practicing public speaking and outward self-expression: Jazz n' Java, an annual poetry slam hosted by the Douglass Black Students' Congress on February 29th (following Module 3: Identity and Self-Presentation); Bridging the Gap, in which the HSLP participants heard from and networked with Douglass alums; Module 4: Self-Expression, in which students shared personal interests and skills, such as painting and traditional ethnic (Indian) dancing, in a talent show-type setting; and Module 5: Public Speaking, in which students practiced formal public speaking exercises. In this section, I will provide more detailed accounts of these events, as well as a summary of the last three modules—

Module 6: Diversity, Module 7: College Preparation, and Module 8: Closing—which served as time in which both inner and outer voice were further practiced and expressed.

Jazz n’ Java, which took place about one month into the HSLP, was the first formal opportunity that students had to practice and see public speaking at a large event. All of the 2008 HSLP mentors were invited to participate onstage at this event, and one, a sophomore, accepted, presenting an original piece of poetry as her high school peers and mentors watched in the audience. An opportunity to spend quality time with their mentors and access the larger Rutgers community, Jazz n’ Java thus also became an opportunity for one of the girls to showcase her skills and talents and act as a role model to the others.

Two weeks later, the HSLP participants enjoyed the opportunity to hear from and speak with female Rutgers University alum during Bridging the Gap, an evening-long dinner and panel presentation that followed Module 4: Self-Expression. Students met with five women who were involved in such a range of careers as nursing, school reform, teaching, law, and financial analysis, and who addressed such issues as the college-to-work transition, work/family balance, women’s leadership in the workplace, and career challenges for women. Like Jazz n’ Java, the purpose of Bridging the Gap was for the HSLP students to access the larger community outside of the HSLP program and Snyder High School, and to be able to connect with that community on a personal, academic, and professional level. Most importantly, Bridging the Gap provided students with the opportunity to network and practice introducing themselves to professionals, a skill they had just learned in Module 3.

Participation in Jazz n' Java and in Bridging the Gap was partnered with Module 4: Self-Expression and Module 5: Public Speaking, which, together, aimed to provide students with a safe environment in which to practice and showcase formal and informal public speaking and presentation skills. The main goal of Module 4 on Self-Expression was “to provide students with a space where they can express their creative sides in a welcoming and positive environment,” “to allow the scholars to discover more about each other and themselves through dance, theater, song, poetry, or other expressive media,” and “to enhance public speaking skills as well as force the scholars to get over any fears they have of performing in public.”⁵³ In addition, the module aimed to teach audience etiquette and to prepare for events like Bridging the Gap. Serving also somewhat as a break mid-way through the program, this module also featured a voluntary talent show, in which approximately half of the high school girls (nine) participated, showcasing ethnic dancing, singing, artwork, and poetry. This module served as a strong transitional event in that it moved the high school girls from simply learning about and seeing particular leadership skills as demonstrated by role models around them, to actively practicing these skills in more formal settings, such as in Module 5: Public Speaking, and other activities to come. In short, this module allowed the girls to “try out” skills such as speaking, business etiquette, and self-presentation in a nonthreatening, supportive environment with the HSLP Deans and mentors, and to see first-hand, through practice and testimony, one model of positive leadership.

⁵³ Field note C031308-0101.

As Harvard research scholar Deborah L. Tolman (1994) has theorized, girls learn from the voices of the dominant culture—those of white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class males—and see themselves through this voice. As a result, they lose touch with their own voice and their authentic selves (325). Held on Friday, March 28th, approximately two months after the program had started, Module 5: Public Speaking aimed to continuing combating this process by guiding the high school girls to, among other goals, develop public speaking skills, be confident with introducing self and other speakers, and realize personal speaking style.⁵⁴ Undergraduate Deans developed two main components for the module in order to achieve these goals with the girls: (1) an informal introduction and discussion about the importance of public speaking, and (2) structured speaking activities led by guest speaker and Woodhull Institute Fellow and Rutgers University Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies and Africana Studies Karla Jackson-Brewer. The progression of this format gave girls the opportunity to speak throughout the module with increasing formality and independence and, as later student evaluations showed, became the most influential of all of the modules they experienced.

In part one, an HSLP Dean posited questions to the group for understanding why and how speaking in front of others is an act of leadership: What is the importance of public speaking? Who are some people who speak in front of small and large groups often? What are some audiences you may someday speak in front of?⁵⁵ Students reflected that public speaking “builds confidence,” “lets [your] voice be heard,” and

⁵⁴ Field note C032808-0102.

⁵⁵ Field note C032808-02.

allows one to have an “awareness of body language”⁵⁶ – all positive characteristics that the Deans reinforced with positive role models such as political leaders, teachers, and media figures like Oprah Winfrey and Tyra Banks. The Deans also reinforced that the “audience has a responsibility to the speaker,” and that those listening to public speakers are there to learn and listen, rather than judge and critique.⁵⁷ Framing public speaking in this way immediately placed speakers—and, by default, the girls, who knew they would be speaking formally later on—as leading individuals with knowledge and experience from which others could learn, which directly reflects Girls Incorporated’s call in *The Supergirl Dilemma* to “[s]how girls that their voices have a significant impact on their own lives and the lives [of] others” (2006, 80; see also Brown 2006).

Later, in the second half of Module 5, Karla Jackson-Brewer similarly noted that “courage means being scared of something but doing it anyway.” She elaborated that public speaking is “especially useful for people in leadership positions,” then explained to the girls that as women, they would need to carry courage with them in order to face those in the world who would prefer to have them be quiet. “As women,” she explained, “public speaking is important because we’re all in the process of reclaiming our voices,” a remark that reflects both Carol Gilligan’s (1993) call for authentic relationships among girls as well as Mary Hawkesworth’s (2003) findings of female politicians of color being silenced in the halls of Congress. Jackson-Brewer then introduced a two-part exercise in which the girls would practice public speaking directly, explaining that it “will give you

⁵⁶ Field note D032808-0101.

⁵⁷ Field note D032808-0301.

an opportunity to reflect on your accomplishments, skills and strengths, and to communicate those to a small group.”⁵⁸

In the following sections, I argue that participation—as speakers and as audience members—by the HSLP students in all of the above activities helped develop their leadership skills through three main avenues: witness and practice of informal public speaking; self-expression and autonomy; and networking and real-life application. In doing so, these young women challenged dominant scripts of how and where young women—particularly young women of color—are supposed to speak, what they are supposed to say, and what impact they are supposed to have in particular communities. In short, by speaking up and speaking out, they affirmed their positions as leaders, and challenged the role that young women of color are “supposed” to embody.

Seeing Public Speaking

Beyond simply the act of speaking itself, public speaking within the context of the HSLP had a definite political aim, both in its use of women’s and gender studies-based curriculum, as well as in its goal to educate and empower young urban girls. In the first half of the HSLP program, the HSLP participants challenged the positioning of young, urban women of color through their affirmations of identity, presence on a university campus, and their establishment of professional goals. At the same time, throughout the entire length of the program, informal and formal public speaking was also used as a

⁵⁸ Field notes D032808-0302; D032808-0303; D032808-0304.

modeling tool and teachable skill through which to practice leadership. In this section, I will describe how public speaking was witnessed and practiced informally in club meetings and through Jazz n' Java, which was one of the most significant and influential of the HSLP events.

In *Girls Share Their Voice*, Dana Dabek-Milstein argues that one of the strongest ways in which girls can learn about their own leadership potential is by listening to other girls and hearing their stories (2007, 24). Such was the purpose of the HSLP club meetings, held biweekly for 2-3 hours at Snyder High School and facilitated by an HSLP Dean and the Snyder High School faculty advisor. At these meetings, the girls explored current social issues relevant to their lives through readings ranging from reports from Legal Momentum to articles in *Cosmopolitan*, statistics and information on women's health and advancement in the professional sphere, and poetry by Lucille Clifton and Maya Angelou, as well as through ongoing discussion of personal and community issues and reflection on HSLP material and activities.

Here, the aim was to apply the skills, critical eye, and self-awareness fostered in formal HSLP modules to the girls' personal experiences and everyday living; the Dean who ran the modules explained to me that behind all of the club meetings' materials and discussion "was the possibility for them to look at their own lives and relate that kind of knowledge to their own experience."⁵⁹ Discussion topics ranged greatly from name-calling to college admissions, gossip and personal relationships to responsibilities in their

⁵⁹ Field note I091608-0103.

homes, with the girls often using the club space as a forum through which to mediate personal dilemmas and explore positive ways to move forward. For example, during one club meeting, a girl shared her recent experience of approaching and shoving an individual who had been gossiping about her behind her back. She explained how she had “gotten worked up and this girl kept talking about me,” and how after engaging in a loud argument and eventually hitting the girl, had been escorted out of the school football game where the argument had taken place.⁶⁰ A conversation between this girl (“Student 1” below), two other students (“Student 2,” and “Student 3”), and the Snyder club advisor (“Facilitator”) ensued:

Student 1: But what happens when people are still talking about you?

Student 3: People perceive that you have certain traits based on their own views of you.

Facilitator: You can’t control other people in your environment. But how do you take control of who you are in a hostile environment, like when people are spreading rumors about you?

Student 2: You have to ignore them and do the opposite and avoid those people.

Student 1: But if they’re being hostile, how do you react? Like, what am I supposed to do then, just walk [away]? No, no, I can’t do that.

Facilitator: You must not become disgruntled or violent...Two wrongs don’t make a right.

Student 3: A leader would walk away, but we’re still learning to lead.

Student 2: But even though we’re still learning to be leaders, you still have leadership skills now. You have to stay calm.

⁶⁰ Field note D020808-1003.

Facilitator: You have to stand your ground on truth and honesty and justice. You have to have your principles and your morals. Don't forget those, don't forget what you stand for.⁶¹

In sharing stories of personal conflict, girls verbally worked through past experiences, questioned the structural system in which such conflicts took place, explored their own moral guidelines, and worked through some of the issues that impact their everyday lives. As evidenced above, this verbal sharing allowed them to build skills such as public speaking, conflict resolution, debate, and active listening at the same time that it built the students' more abstract personal viewpoints and morals. In the particular discussion described above, Student 1 initially was defensive about her actions, defending her violent outburst on the grounds of personal integrity. In debating with her peers and the facilitator, the student mediated the bumpy terrain of her own values and behaviors, expressing her own inner voice while also participating in a negotiation process that served as a learning opportunity for those around her as well.

In a later interview, the Dean overseeing the club also explained to me that the three girls who had been in the program once before were significant resources in the program in their ability and willingness to share experiences and reflection of personal growth to the other girls. She reflected that these three girls "are definitely role models and they are definitely not the same people they were when they started the program."⁶² During the modules, these three young women often also provided insightful commentary within discussions about leadership and applying the skills taught in the HSLP to their

⁶¹ Field note D020808-1011.

⁶² Field note I091608-0108.

daily lives; they often echoed messages of the HSLP Deans and also shared their experiences within the program from the year before. In doing so, they modeled what Amy Sullivan (1996) often sees adult women convey to the girls they mentor: critical perspectives on the world around them, strategies that negotiate and resist the system in which we live, and encouragement to both speak up and embody those strategies.

One of the most significant examples of public speaking-based peer modeling occurred at Jazz n' Java, a Rutgers University poetry slam event held at the end of February. Though held fairly early within the context of the HSLP program, the participation of the HSLP girls—one as a performer and the rest as audience members—provided them with a community of young women scholars/performers/activists. In this space, the girls not only bonded with their mentors and one another, they also witnessed acts of self-expression, empowerment, acceptance, and celebration, including a performance by one of the girls from the HSLP who volunteered to do a poetry reading, in a diverse community of college students.

In an interview conducted with one of the HSLP staff members, she described the impact of this evening in terms of witnessing peers, as well as, for one HSLP participant, actually speaking in a public space in front of a large college community of diverse men and women:

There's something [at Rutgers events] that touches students on a personal level that I think is powerful. I also think that the actual atmosphere, the environment of being around peer models outside of their community is extremely important for them...There was one girl who spoke this year, which was really another layer to the empowerment process because it takes a lot of confidence to get up in front of a couple hundred college students and read something personal that you wrote.

The room was packed, there was hardly any standing space. And one of our students said she wanted to read something she had written, and she was supported there by her mentor and by all of us...She was very nervous, but her mentor and her practiced over and over again, and she got up, she asked the facilitator to give her a hug in the front of the room, and then she brought the house down. She was amazing. They saw her get up and do that, there were like two hundred and fifty people there. I think that was a really powerful experience for her, as well as her peers.⁶³

As this staff member points out, part of the power of Jazz n' Java was the levels of witness and affirmation present at the event: Rutgers community members performed for one another and the girls; an HSLP student performed for her peers and the larger Rutgers community; and the HSLP audience members witnessed the support of the Rutgers community to all of the performers. Such support and affirmation were also given in the context of performances that conveyed very personal yet universal topics like discrimination, relationships, and anger—experiences about which the HSLP students and the performers could immediately share similarities. This event was also sponsored by the Douglass Black Students' Congress, whose mission is to instill black consciousness within the Rutgers community through events, meetings, and other activities. Thus, this event triply served as both a challenge to the narratives of dominant voices, and a support and model for further expression of young women of color through the participation of college students, the HSLP staff and mentors, and the HSLP high school presenter herself.

The high school girls would go on to list Jazz n' Java as the event that they overall enjoyed the most and found the most memorable, and the event that they would

⁶³ Field note I073108-0205.

most want repeated for the next year's participants. In their evaluations of the evening, they explained that "I loved it because I saw things from others' point of view," "It was cool and the people were nice," "some of them spoke the truth," and "It was eye opening and I wish to experience it again next year." The student who had performed at the event reflected that "For the first time I got to hear and see live poetry performances at a college. Also I got to perform as well, which was scary at first."⁶⁴ One Dean remarked in an interview that Jazz n' Java, as an enhancement to the material covered in the HSLP modules, was an excellent opportunity for the girls "to be able to see theory in practice, to be able not only to learn about public speaking, but to be able to see college girls living it and who are successfully doing things."⁶⁵

This early witnessing of peers and community members speaking out and practicing informal public speaking through discussions and debate set a foundation for the more formal speaking activities in Module 4: Self-Presentation and Module 5: Public Speaking. When informal public speaking experience was partnered with the self-awareness developed in the first half of the program, students, as evidenced in the next section, spoke with an increasing level of confidence and authority, using these skills to share their opinions and skills in large-group formats and, later on, in professional settings. Establishing and projecting this sense of authority was for many of the girls an emotionally challenging yet ultimately fulfilling project, as this practice affirmed their leadership status and goals to themselves, their peers, and their community.

⁶⁴ Field notes E022908-020113; E022908-020110; E022908-020104; E022908-020115; E022908-020105.

⁶⁵ Field note I091608-0109.

“Doing” Public Speaking: Self-Expression and Autonomy

In her research on self-change and self-perception, Dianne Tice (1992) concludes that displaying behaviors publicly has a greater impact on internalizing (and thus reinforcing) those behaviors—as well as on one’s self-concept when enacting those behaviors—than when they are displayed privately. She found that “public behaviors led to substantial shifts in self-descriptions and even to consistent behavioral changes” (447) and concludes that there are three main reasons for this difference: individuals choose to convey and present themselves in specific ways when they know they are being watched; they draw upon past experience and memory when interacting publicly; and they assume that they will interact with their audience again in the future, which motivates them to enact and internalize certain behaviors. Knowing that one is being looked to by a group affirms one’s self-concept, and strongly influences the internalization of publicly displayed behaviors so that they may be repeated over time.

Such is the importance and success of the public speaking components of the HSLP: in practicing public speaking skills and presenting their selves, the high school girls continually internalize these leadership skills and reaffirm the personhood they are projecting—and internalize the power that such presentation brings. In this section, I review the public speaking presentations of Module 4: Self-Presentation and Module 5: Public Speaking in their capacity to push the HSLP participants to embody and practice leadership. Drawing upon research by Tice (1992) as well as by leadership scholar Kay Kleinerman (2008), I argue that through the expression of outer voice, the HSLP

participants not only practice leadership, but also develop the characteristics that increase and improve their capacity to lead.

In comparison to the other more formal modules throughout the program, Module 4: Self-Expression presented the girls with the opportunity to participate in a talent show run during the length of the module session. Held in the more intimate setting of the Institute for Women's Leadership library, rather than in their typical Ruth Dill Johnson meeting room, this setting, along with the audience members of fellow HSLP participants, Deans, and staff, provided the girls with a safe, inviting space in which to make their first presentation in the program. Of the twenty girls in the program, nine girls volunteered to perform in this show, which required them to determine what unique talent or skill they would present to their peers, prepare and practice for the event, determine what presentation style would best suit their performance, and begin to overcome any fears or anxiety they may have in speaking formally to a group, particularly a group of peers. During the talent show, the girls showcased a range of talents: dancing, solo singing, group singing, presenting original artwork, and reading original poetry. The tone of the show was celebratory and jubilant, with audience members frequently cheering the girls on.⁶⁶

This atmosphere provided the girls with support as well as positive feedback as they courageously spoke out and shared their talents, reaffirming the self-perception of power and leadership that audience members similarly saw in them (see Tice 1992). The

⁶⁶ Field note D031308-03.

performances were also acts of self-advocacy, in which the girls expressed that their skills and abilities were valuable, even if they could not always be nurtured or supported in the communities of their city and school, or if they were talents that family members did not want their daughters to pursue professionally. The performances themselves and feedback from viewers reinforced an “I can do it” attitude while also reinforcing the importance of team-building and networking in order to produce successful events or projects. In later evaluations, girls noted the importance that “everyone express[ed] themselves freely, they were very courageous/confident,” as peer models, and the activity’s ability to build support community in that “it showed all the different things we ha[ve] in common.”⁶⁷ Interestingly, students gave quite powerful feedback concerning the discussions following the talent show, in which Deans reviewed with the girls components of self-presentation and public speaking, as well as how to approach a speaker, in preparation for the evening’s Bridging the Gap event. Students reflected that these sessions following their talent show “made me feel better about my performance” and provided them with reminders about the kinds of skills that they’d like “to practice and build on.”⁶⁸ This kind of feedback exemplified that though the girls were internalizing and practicing the leadership skills they were being taught—and were conscious about it—they still very much looked for positive reinforcement and outside approval to support these practices. Such reinforcement was especially important during Module 5, when the girls made formal presentations to each other.

⁶⁷ Field notes E031308-010110; E031308-010107.

⁶⁸ Field notes E031308-010307; E031308-010312.

Earlier I described that the goals of Module 5: Public Speaking were to develop individual public speaking skills, and, through practice, to similarly develop self-confidence in one's abilities in order to keep students motivated for further presentation. I explained that this module had two main parts: an introduction, in which Deans facilitated a discussion on public speaking essentials; and formal public speaking practice led by Karla Jackson-Brewer. In truth, the gut of this module lay, unsurprisingly, in Jackson-Brewer's exercises, which were based on improvisation, self-reflection, and self-presentation. After dividing the students and Deans into five groups, each student was instructed to write down a short introduction about themselves, an accomplishment or personal strength of which they are proud, and concluding remark thanking their audience. After a few minutes, each girl then took turns presenting this information to their other group members, focusing on speaking clearly, making eye contact, and accepting their applause. In the group of girls with whom I was sitting, the exercise seemed fairly straightforward to them. Many stated that they "didn't know what to say," and, when they started their short speeches, began laughing when they forgot something or "messed up," at which point the other people in the group would tell them to take a minute and regroup, and then start again. Most of the students also did not look everyone in the eye while they said their speeches.⁶⁹ I was impressed, however, with the forcefulness of their voices when saying their names and describing their future goals; even if some would lose their places, they began with an apparent intention to present

⁶⁹ Field note D032808-04.

themselves firmly, then receiving continuous boosts if their comfort or confidence levels declined mid-way.

Once this exercise was completed, the students took turns repeating the same short presentation to the entire workshop community as a whole, standing in front of the room while everyone else sat and faced them. Tension during this exercise was clearly high—side conversations ceased, and I observed many girls displaying nervous behaviors (tapping fingers or feet, adjusting their seating frequently, etc.). The first few speakers to present in the large group during Module 5 all displayed signs of anxiety during their speeches as well, particularly when it came to accepting applause: giggling, quickly running away from the podium, and blushing/putting their head down were all behaviors indicating a certain level of discomfort with receiving praise. Also noting this, Jackson-Brewer encouraged the girls to pace themselves, stand tall, and wait for the applause to end before leaving the podium. She, along with the other girls, encouraged them to “stand firm,” to “trust your intuition,” and to take pride in their presence in the front of the room. Jackson-Brewer similarly encouraged the audience members to use active listening skills such as nodding and smiling to indicate to the speaker that they were paying attention, and to provide them with respect and appreciation in the form of applause once each presenter was finished.⁷⁰ As each girl presented her short speech, the mood of the room continued to grow into one of celebration and excitement; the girls clearly displayed a sense of accomplishment after they each presented, and encouraged

⁷⁰ Field note D032808-0502.

those girls yet to present with statements like “I got up there and said my thing, and you can do it too.”⁷¹

My appreciation for the impact of this exercise in leadership training exponentially increased about six months later, when I participated in a three-day-long Woodhull Institute Leadership Retreat in Ancramdale, New York, with about twenty other young professional women. On the second day of the retreat, which featured workshops on negotiation, financial literacy, and spirituality, we participated in a workshop on public speaking, very much similar in design to the HSLP Module 5. Literally sharing nearly the same learning experience as the HSLP girls, I experienced for myself the anxiety and fear that frequently occurs when formally and impromptu speaking in front of one’s peers. In my case, our exercise involved us standing in front of the group and presenting a two-minute-long pitch on why the audience members should vote for me to be the United States President. When I initially heard that I would be participating in this exercise, I was anxiously excited, but also confident in my abilities to speak in front of others (reasoning that my experience as a teacher would guide me). During the workshop, however, I tried everything possible to avoid my turn—I began worrying about how I would be perceived if I too “messed up,” I kept drawing blanks on the mental script I had written for myself, and very much feared future unspoken judgments of my peers. Though I was surrounded by nonprofit directors, professional performers, and teachers, I was clearly also not the only one experiencing this anxiety,

⁷¹ Field note D032808-0607.

which was expressed verbally and nonverbally throughout the entire exercise by those around me.

I do not remember much about what I actually said during my speech, only the feedback from the facilitator (“you’re funny, but you need to slow down!”), the smiles of my audience members, and the enormous feeling of relief and accomplishment when I was done. For me, this, too, was the most impactful feeling of empowerment during the entire weekend; though it only took up about an hour of the retreat, it acted as a very strong reinforcement for me concerning my own public speaking skills, and a reminder not to fear the judgment of others when I open my mouth. I would explain to a Woodhull staff member months later that the experience of public speaking was the one I personally remembered the most from the weekend, clearly recalling both the anxiety and sense of accomplishment that such an experience bore within me. The experience also gave me a new appreciation for the girls and their accomplishments in the HSLP, but also reminded me how challenging it is to work through negative inner thoughts and messages. It reminded me of the many spiritual mantras to “think happy thoughts,” but also reminded me of how empowering hearing my own voice, as well as support from others, can be and reinforced the importance of routinely practicing skills like communication and speaking and the importance of community encouragement.

In their final evaluations in May of the entire HSLP program, the high school girls ranked the modules focused on voice development and identity, and the skill of public

speaking, as the most impactful and influential parts of the entire program.⁷² They remarked that the exercises “made me more confident in groups,” “it showed me how good I am and what I need to work on,” “we all got to share our strong qualities or achievements,” and “I finally got over my fear to talk in front of a group of people.”⁷³ Others reflected that “standing tall, project yourself and [your] voice in front of a larger group—the feeling was overwhelming,” “I was nervous at first but I felt good when I finally got up and spoke and was complimented on how I did,” “I feel like this is something I can use for the rest of my life,” and “It was challenging but gave me a surprise about myself.”⁷⁴ These comments, and many others, unlike the comments from Module 4’s talent show, were direct reflections of the students’ own inner thoughts and feelings, evaluating and reflecting on their individual achievements of presenting publicly. Their comments clearly reflected a sense of pride and accomplishment, and many also alluded to ‘the future,’ thus reinforcing the idea that they can and will speak publicly again.

The impact of the public speaking exercises lay in what was needed of the participants in order to succeed in the module: overcoming the fear of speaking in a formal setting; the presentation of one’s very personal achievements, involving the acknowledgment that such a presentation may bring peer critique; and the manifestation of a sense of authority and power through the act of speaking. Recalling Patricia Hill

⁷² Field note E050208-010207.

⁷³ Field notes E032808-010212; E032808-010213; E032808-010208; E032808-010207.

⁷⁴ Field notes E032808-010301; E032808-010302; E032808-010310; E032808-010312.

Collins' command "Don't let anybody tell you who you are" (1998, 9), the high school girls embodied the "the other story – the counterpoise" (Sandoval 2000, 63) of what young urban girls of color are supposed to achieve and to say about those achievements.

In her recent research on developing leadership through singing, voice coach and scholar Kay Kleinerman (2008) similarly found that this "don't let anybody tell you who you are" attitude, particularly when applied to public presentation, strongly impacts women's ability to develop and practice leadership skills. Kleinerman asserts,

[F]or women to claim their equitable rights as leaders and meaning makers in their communities, they must know themselves and make themselves heard....When a singer performs in front of an audience she embodies a personality and displays the courage to use her voice in public. Having this witnessed by an audience can be a powerful affirmation for her and may contribute significantly to constructing a positive self-perception. (2008, 3-4)

Kleinerman's remarks were directly reflected in the feedback from students concerning their Module 5 presentations when it came to the power of speaking in front of an audience in constructing and embodying a sense of authority, of taking action, and of finding support and motivation through witnessing the presentations of their peers. As Karyn Boatwright and Rhonda Egidio have also found, such relational teaching environments can have a profound effect on mediating some of the negative self-evaluations young women leaders can have, environments that can help leaders "regain a sense of their own voice and personal empowerment" and "prevent them from losing their leadership aspirations" (2003, 666).

While presentations in a high school leadership program may, in the length of a girl's life, seem trivial, the personal growth, confidence, and self-awareness demonstrated in these presentations showcased what Chela Sandoval (2000) argues is needed for the embodiment of oppositional consciousness and, by extension, the enactment of social change: the ability to read situations and “to stake out and hold solid identity and political positions in the social world” (60). Furthermore, the girls also demonstrated additional characteristics that Sandoval claims are necessary for social change: the strength to recognize and adhere to one's true identity; the flexibility to read and adapt to situations while staying true to that identity; and the ability to recognize and cultivate alliances with others committed to similar social justice (60). These characteristic in particular would be practiced and tested throughout the remainder of the HSLP program as well as through outside activities, as the girls began to apply the skills and confidence they learned into their everyday behavior and interactions.

“Applying” Public Speaking: Leadership in Action

One of the biggest challenges I faced while conducting research for this project was that I did not have access to the girls, and had very limited access to information about them, after the HSLP program ended. However, the observations and information that I did have led me to conclude that the girls were indeed actively engaging in their communities and practicing leadership after they completed the program. Of all the skills taught in the HSLP—communication, business etiquette, planning, setting goals—oral

and written communication was the primary skill girls were utilizing in their leadership practices. In so doing, the girls continued to gain confidence and refine these skills while also continuing to rewrite the dominant narrative of the capabilities of and possibilities for young urban women of color. I look to the following experiences as examples: Bridging the Gap, an HSLP event in which students had the opportunity to network with Rutgers alumnae; participation in the remaining components of the HSLP, including Modules 6, 7, and 8; and, in the year following the completion of the HSLP, participation in a creative writing workshop and participation at The Girls' Orientation at the 53rd Session of the Commission of the Status of Women in New York in March 2009. Through these experiences, the high school girls applied the skill of public speaking as a means, in the words of speaking coach Carla Kimball (2004), to "influence and inspire others and effect change...to speak with agency, credibility and authority...to be visible, to take a risk, to take a stand."

One of the first opportunities the girls had to put their skills and knowledge to action was at Bridging the Gap, a formal networking event with Rutgers alum that included a dinner and panel discussion. As explained earlier in this section, Bridging the Gap utilized role modeling for the HSLP participants in its presentation of young, successful female leaders, but it also featured an important networking opportunity that proved to be extremely useful in the HSLP girls actually applying their speaking skills in a professional setting. One HSLP facilitator elaborated that the girls themselves made a significant impression on the panelists, who offered words of advice and suggestions for their future professional endeavors:

One of the panelists also told one of the students that she could come tour her law school and tell her all about it. The students beforehand participated in a business etiquette module where they did [a] fun, interactive session on what is appropriate in networking, attire, and overall professionalism. Students really were primed to put these tools into action at the BTG [Bridging the Gap] event and that is exactly what they did. They asked questions at the panel, they introduced themselves, shook hands, and took phone numbers and names. The panel member [mentioned earlier] picked up on how groomed they were and responded how impressed she was, but we all were, and there was an air of excitement between the IWL [staff], and HSLP Deans afterward as we all were so proud and delighted that they took advantage of this opportunity and did such a great job at it.⁷⁵

The staff member went on to explain that one of the panelists emailed the IWL following the program, writing, “I just want to say how blown away I am by those girls.” The girls themselves expressed that while many of them were scared and “felt awkward” about meeting with and speaking to professional contacts, they also acknowledged that it was important to know “how to present myself” and served as a “good reminder” for why they were participating in the program in the first place.⁷⁶ In short, it seemed as though the students recognized that the event served as an opportunity for them to make their voices count in a real, professional setting—that because they did not have opportunities like this often, that it was important to practice their speaking and networking skills when they knew they would need them in college. Mentors, who also attended the event, similarly recognized this, noting that “hearing others [sic] professional experience help you learn how to handle situations in the work world,”⁷⁷ and that because the panelists

⁷⁵ Field note I073108-0212.

⁷⁶ Field note E031308-0201.

⁷⁷ Field note E031308-030103.

were “real” and “down to earth,” their stories and experiences were “helpful and applicable” to both mentors and mentees.

Module 6: “Diversity,” Module 7: “College Preparation,” and Module 8: “Closing: Coming Full Circle,” which took place in the last month of the program, served as supports for the skills and self-motivation of the HSLP girls that had grown over the course of the semester. While none of these modules focused specifically on speaking, they examined some of the challenges that girls would encounter in practicing leadership in the future and provided them with tools in order to access resources around them. Module 7, for example, examined the college application process and included large group discussions on choosing the appropriate school, goals for going to college, courses and tests needed for admission, how to fill out an application and get the fee waived, types of financial aid, and how to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Since most of the high school girls were either sophomores or juniors, this information, along with guidance from the Snyder facilitator, allowed them to begin preparing to apply to college early, and, even more importantly, as girls explained, “opened my eyes about what college is about”⁷⁸ and “showed me that the things I [can get away with] now and have no consequences [for], if I try it in college, I will pay [for] it.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Field note E041808-010101.

⁷⁹ Field note E041808-010102.

On Friday, May 2nd, a combination of Module 6 (rescheduled due to transportation problems) and Module 8 took place, which served as a wrap-up and reinforcement of what the girls learned and, most importantly, of how they can apply it. This session specifically addressed diversity—a topic that had been talked about indirectly in many modules, but one that the girls probably would have benefited from having earlier in the program. The intention of the session was to foster an understanding and acceptance of difference and of the connections that exist among diverse groups of people, to give students an understanding of the importance of open-mindedness, and to highlight students' differences and connections to demonstrate their significance in today's global society. I believe that many of the topics discussed during this part of the session (racism, what it means to be a young woman of color, the importance of the representation of multiple voices, etc.) would have had a much great impact on the students, and would have added many new dimensions to the existing modules, if these kinds of frank and honest topics had been addressed earlier in the semester. However, at the same time, by addressing them at the last module, the facilitators reinforced to the girls the importance of their presence at all levels of government, activism, education, and institutions.

The emotionally charged “Unity Circle” at the end of the session, in which HSLP participants shared their thoughts about the program, showcased just how far students had come in their comfort and willingness to speak up and verbally share their opinions on the topics of the program, as well as showed the depth of the community relationships that had been formed and the impact that those relationships had in girls developing

within the program. It was, as one Dean explained, a visual and verbal affirmation of what the girls learned and how they have moved through the program. As a microcosm of the larger development that took place throughout the program, the Unity Circle, she explained, showed how

Public speaking was definitely huge for them, and a lot of them went from being very shy and quiet to being able to speak in front of others. But they may also have thought about public speaking being huge because it's not an abstract idea, it's something where they couldn't do it before and now they can. It's about more than public speaking, public speaking is just a part of self-awareness and being able to say things and speak about oneself.⁸⁰

This sentiment was echoed by many girls themselves during the discussion, elaborating that “I learned a lot....every module I learned something new. Every skill, practice, technique, I could apply to my real life experience. Now I can talk in class and when I see people in hall, I'll say hello to them.”⁸¹ Another explained that “the impact that this program has had on me, I just want to say, has been major...we don't just have to be a housewife or something, we can be anything we want...Thank you very much for this opportunity.”⁸²

Sadly, I did not have the means to follow the girls of the 2008 session of the High School Leadership Program after they graduated the week after this last session. However, following the graduation, one of the HSLP Deans, who was entering her senior year of the Leadership Scholars program at the IWL, decided to implement a social

⁸⁰ Field note I091608-0104.

⁸¹ Field note D050208-0706.

⁸² Field note D050208-0715.

action project required of all Leadership Scholars in the form of a creative writing project for the HSLP participants. After working closely with Snyder High School administrators, students, and IWL staff, the Dean created a weekly after-school creative writing workshop series called “Our Voices, Ourselves.” Five of the original HSLP students from the 2008 class voluntarily decided to participate in the program, which took place for eight months (October 2008-May 2009) and involved a large range of leadership- and voice-development based exercises. To my knowledge, this was the only formal leadership-based opportunity available to the students from the IWL this year, but one that served as a transition point from the skills-based HSLP to the college classroom. In May 2009, after compiling a portfolio of work, the five participants each shared one of their stories during a formal presentation for the Snyder and IWL communities, getting up in a panel-style format reminiscent of Bridging the Gap, and reflecting a little bit about the year before reading their original work.

In March 2009, through networking with the IWL and the facilitating Dean of “Our Voices, Ourselves,” eight of the HSLP participants—including one who had already graduated from Snyder High School—attended The Girls’ Orientation, a one-day workshop in New York city aimed at introducing students to the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Girls’ Orientation offered students the chance to meet one another, familiarize themselves with the CSW process, and discuss the theme of the 53rd Session of the CSW: “the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” They also participated in breakout sessions covering topics such as violence against women, women and climate change, and

women, education, and training; and networked with representatives from dozens of NGOs as well as other advocates and activists within the broader United Nations community.

Through the HSLP and the experiences of which I am aware that followed the program, students continued their leadership work through their embodiment of an oppositional consciousness aimed at self-empowerment and education. At the end of program, when students filled out evaluations on their personal progress throughout the HSLP as well as a student evaluation of the program, students listed public speaking as the number one skill learned through the program in terms of personal importance and ability to do. Out of fifteen completed Personal Progress evaluations, thirteen girls listed public speaking as their number one accomplishment, stating of their progression that “I am getting better at speaking in front of a group of people,” “I think I am good at it, I just need to work on my presence,” “My progress was ah-mazing! I never thought I could ever do some of [the] things I had to do here,” “I’m more calm and able to speak with confidence!” and “At the end...say goodbye to ‘shy.’”⁸³ In their general Student Evaluations of the program, one girl wrote that “My public speaking skills are better so now I can speak out in a crowd and in class,”⁸⁴ and another stated that “In singing I will have more confidence.”⁸⁵ These responses about increased public speaking skills alluded to an increased self-confidence gained from participating in the HSLP program.

⁸³ Field note E050208-06.

⁸⁴ Field note E050208-020208.

⁸⁵ Field note 050208-020403.

In Caitlin Cahill's (2006) study of young women of color negotiating and challenging the gentrification of Manhattan's Lower East Side, Cahill writes that one critical insight made by the young women is that "power lies in controlling how you are defined" (353). Like the young women with whom Cahill worked, the girls of the HSLP challenged the assigned scripts of what it means to be a young, urban woman of color, assumed positions as engaged agents, and "created an opening for reconsidering the role of women" (356; see also Torre 2000 and Rios-Moore et al. 2004). In doing so, they also redefined and recreated, to various degrees, the communities of the HSLP, Snyder High School, and Jersey City by speaking up not only against assigned scripts and the lack of voices of young women of color in the academy and mainstream discourse, but by speaking up for social change; for the advancement of young women in leadership positions; to showcase the strengths and capabilities of young women personally, professionally, and academically; and to support, directly or indirectly, the other young women of the Snyder High School and Jersey City communities. This, I believe, is the mark of leadership—the girls of the HSLP are stepping up and speaking out because they have come to see themselves as "those who can, those you are able to step into leadership" (Kleinerman 2008, 5), as those who want to facilitate change, and then do it.

CONCLUSIONS

The ability of the High School Leadership Program to strengthen the voices of young women and help develop their leadership abilities and sense of personal agency reinforces significance of providing girls with such opportunities as well as the enormous and often underutilized potential that young women have to grow to be leaders within their communities. As a vehicle to establish both a critical consciousness as well as applicable life skills, the HSLP responds to calls in psychology and girls' studies for community members to work with young women toward mutual growth and development and to open up spaces and continue ongoing dialogues in institutions about and with girls. HSLP participants used these spaces to engage in debates surrounding dominant narratives on the roles and places of urban young women of color, and to challenge and respond to such narratives through their own poignant displays of self-expression and presence on and participation in a university campus. Such work was principally supported and enabled by demonstrations of their inner and outer voices, and through the support of a community of peers, mentors, HSLP staff, and Rutgers students who pushed one another to be oppositional practitioners.

It is an unfortunate truth that as of September 2009, the IWL has no immediate plans to continue running the HSLP, principally because of lack of funding. However, rather than view the HSLP as a project of the past, I'd like to underscore the very present relevance that the program still has for students and communities. Despite the fact that the HSLP ultimately had to end, it served as a productive site of growth and resistance,

representing the location of intersecting communities interested in social change and exemplifying what action can be taken when passionate individuals come together for a shared goal. The HSLP continues to serve as an example of what can happen when a group utilizes local resources, brings together institutions and communities, challenges the status quo, and empowers individuals with tools and knowledge to change existing conditions.

Even more specifically, the HSLP highlights the vast amount of work that can and should be done to improve the lives of young women as well as the challenges of designing and implementing such work. My work with the HSLP taught me firsthand that hearing girls' voices isn't just about listening to them, but it is also about understanding the complex and highly subjective lenses with which researchers and practitioners view young women. My fieldwork showed me just how truly challenging it is working with young women, particularly when you come in, consciously or subconsciously, wanting to equip them with the tools and knowledge that one has garnered, ironically, since becoming an adult. What became clear to me is that those of us who work with girls must critically analyze our own agendas. Why do we want to work with girls? What do I wish to teach and give them? Why do I want to give these things to girls? Do they want them too? How do I know? Have I asked them what they really need and want? In short, I recognized how the construction of girlhood is irrevocably connected to one's memory of youth, and the ethical responsibility of researchers to analyze this construction and communicate directly with girls.

Thus, I also came to understand the crucial importance of truly supporting, empowering, listening to, and understanding girls' voices, and encouraging and supporting girls to take action. Working within and observing the implementation of the High School Leadership Program has reinforced to me the necessity of working with girls as partners in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs of which they are participants. Listening to and incorporating girls' voices into our work questions assumptions of common experiences of girlhood and thus presumed universal subjectivities. Dialogue and connection with young women can expose many of the assumptions made about girls and can open up new dialogue concerning how and by whom girlhood is socially constructed—as well as girls' differing processes of self-development. Such exposure can lead to more nuanced and meaningful approaches in how adults work with girls and how programs address their varied needs and wants. Alternately, it can also lead adults, scholars, and activists to reexamine how girls see themselves, how they are socially constructed, and what types of connections are possible with the girls with whom they work.

The HSLP also brings to light the importance of providing girls with simple space and time through which to explore, brainstorm, debate, and create—in short, the importance and necessity of investing in girls. The significance of allowing girls such resources to talk and connect with one another cannot be overstated, as it is often through these spaces that girls develop the critical consciousness necessary to learn how to assert themselves in a world in which they are at the bottom of the social ladder. As demonstrated throughout modules, club sessions, and events, the HSLP and similar

programs show what young women are capable of creating and doing when given the space and time to practice, question, and grow. I am reminded, for example, of multiple instances in Module 5 during which the HSLP participants meticulously practiced introducing themselves and simultaneously encouraged one another to keep going. I am also reminded of the many hours of meetings with groups of girls at Girls Learn International during which students have planned for their own events, and the hours of music practice at Willie Mae, in which all-girl bands create and give voice to original music compositions. In all of these contexts, I have witnessed the potential that peer modeling can hold for girls' leadership development, and the critical importance of uninterrupted space and time where girls can develop and ask their own questions, work together, and create solutions. This is the space and time that empowers girls to take action.

Thus, as I conclude my work with the HSLP and look forward to the work I continue to and will do with girls, I understand more clearly my role in continuously examining whether and how girls have access to resources around them, and how their voices are subverted and/or supported within their communities and the larger cultural systems of our world. As a model for future programs, the HSLP showcased what can happen when women of all ages work *together* and how programs like the HSLP can invest in local communities by investing in girls themselves. Lasting and significant impact on the lives of participants as well as social change are necessitated by programs like the HSLP partnering with the other forces in girls' lives—schools, families, extended kin, community programs, religious organizations, and other institutions—if they are to

secure long-term structural change for young women. Girls' voices must be heard within the institutions and by the people who structure their lives, and programs like the HSLP can work with local institutions and community programs to ensure that girls can voice their needs and local communities can attempt to address girls' greatest concerns.

In the case of Jersey City, like many other districts across the United States in which programs and institutions receive federal and state funding and in which girls face some of the most challenging conditions, it is the moral responsibility of those who work with girls to make local agencies, committees, community leaders, program directors, and other actors accountable for how funds and other resources are distributed to and used for girls. Of the significant amount of federal and state funding, for example, that an Abbott school district in New Jersey receives, how much of those funds are used directly for girls' education and empowerment? Do girls have a say in how these funds are distributed? Of the many federally and state-funded programs for youth, which ones are targeted to girls? How many girls are recipient of community social services? And what kinds of messages are girls being sent through the ease or challenges girls face in accessing such programs and services?

Though imperfect, the HSLP serves as a strong model upon which future leadership development programs for young women can and should be based. In working with the High School Leadership Program, and in many others in the New York City metropolitan area, I have been reminded of the large range of challenges and obstacles that girls face daily, as well as the energy, resilience, intellect, creativity,

power, resourcefulness, and self-motivation that many of them possess. The HSLP aimed to address some of the issues girls face and to tap into some of their skills and power in order to increase their capabilities as well as the likelihood that they will see their personal goals come to fruition, and it is my genuine hope that this program will lead to the development and start of many other similar programs in the near future. As I hope is also evidenced throughout this examination, such aims are not easily reached; however, my own experience working with the high school students, as well as with the Deans and HSLP staff members, challenged me to continually think critically about how I personally address the needs of girls within my other professional contexts, as well as how the scholarly and activist communities can best serve and work with young women. I would relish the opportunity to explore the HSLP and similar programs further in a more involved dissertation, in which I could interview and interact more directly with girls to investigate the psycho-emotional development that occurs in such leadership training more thoroughly. I believe that the fields of education, women's and gender studies, girls' studies, and (feminist) psychology could all greatly benefit from the insights such a project would produce.

If one of—if not *the*—main goal(s) of the women's movement is to imagine and create a more perfect world, its future remains dependent on the voices of some of its most invisible citizens: young urban women of color. The work of the High School Leadership Program points to the leadership potential embodied by young women when some of the obstacles to such leadership are overcome, as well as the responsibility of those who work with girls to continuously (re)examine the ways in which they comply

with, reproduce, or challenge dominant scripts concerning who girls are and what they do. If it is the intention of feminists to improve the state of the world, and to indeed provide girls with the tools and knowledge to transform the dominant ideologies and positions of the hegemonic culture, adults must partner with young women, young men, schools, nongovernmental organizations, government councils, policy makers, and community members, and critically examine the distribution of our resources, the priority of our agendas, and the language we use to discuss and frame our guiding questions, investigations, and solutions. And, above all else, we must listen to what girls have to say, we must advocate for their full and equal participation in society, and we must continuously seek new possibilities for education, partnership, action, and change.

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