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## **Guest Editors' Introduction**

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## Guest Editors' Introduction

This special issue of *Violence Against Women*, "Teen Girls' Experiences of and Resistance to Violence," originates out of deep concern about the realities of violence experienced by girls in all aspects of their lives. Girls experience violence on the streets, in their schools, and at home. The statistics are staggering. More than half of all rapes of women occur before age 18 (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Young women ages 16 to 24 are at the greatest risk for injury and death at the hands of intimate partners compared to women in all other age groups (Rennison & Welchans, 2000). Eighty-nine percent of teens infected with HIV through heterosexual activity were female in one major study, and sexual contact with adult males was a key risk factor (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). In a Chicago-based study of prostituted women, 62% entered prostitution before their 18th birthdays (Raphael & Shapiro, 2002). The rate at which U.S. courts are sentencing girls under 18 to detention is growing much more quickly than the rate for boys, and the courts often incarcerate girls for behavior for which they do not incarcerate their male peers (Miazad, 2002).

As media increasingly raise alarms about "mean girls" and "violent girls," researchers are called to compile real information about what is happening in the lives of young women. What differences are there in the experiences of today's young women compared to their foremothers who created the contemporary women's antiviolence movement? Do the antiviolence models and safety plans that worked for some adult women in the 1980s work for young women in their teens today? And what of the young women of color who have traditionally been marginalized by White, middle-class feminist antiviolence activism? These young women have become targets of some of the very systems to which second-wave feminists have turned and with which they have advocated to "save" victimized women from dangerous men: the police, the prisons, and the criminal courts. As we continue to critique, reform, and transform our organizations and institutions in our social justice work, we need a clear analysis of the ways young women's experiences are the same as those of the women who created contemporary organizations but also, especially, the ways young women's experiences differ.

Girls and young women are victims and perpetrators of violence, and they both accept and resist the violence in their lives. To create a more just and peaceful world, we need to listen to girls' voices as they narrate their stories.

The five articles in this special issue raise important questions about the continuum of violence against girls and young women. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the onslaught of violence, but we hope that readers will be inspired by the individual examples of resistance and the courage of the young women who continue to survive and even thrive. The researchers ground their work in the voices of young women,

collected through written narratives, ethnographic observations, content analysis, and in-depth interviews. The articles provide a foundation for future scholars, practitioners, and activists to continue building a research and action agenda about violence in the lives of young women.

Laurie Schaffner opens this special issue by exploring how young women end up in the juvenile legal system. She argues that their histories of abuse and victimization are inextricably linked to their current delinquency. Individual girls lash out in anger and come to see violence as a viable tool for survival. She suggests that although there is indeed an increase in girls' arrests for violent offenses, there is no consensus about why this is the case. In spite of this uncertainty, Schaffner suggests that it remains important to understand the experiences of young women who are being adjudicated delinquent for violent offenses. Girls who come into contact with the legal system are often mistreated; the author highlights the case of lesbian, bisexual, and transgender girls in detention as an example. Schaffner's work asks us to consider broadening the definition of community violence to fully capture what girls experience on a daily basis that has an effect on their current and future behavior. The article cautions us to interrogate what is usually considered personal/private trauma in the lives of young women because sometimes this manifests itself to all of us as public violence.

Lyn Brown, Meda Chesney-Lind, and Nan Stein pick up on Schaffner's discussion about girls' violence and provide a different context for understanding it. In their article, "Patriarchy Matters: Toward a Gendered Theory of Teen Violence and Victimization," they ask whether there is empirical evidence that girls are becoming more violent. Are they acting "just like boys" in terms of their use and reliance on violence to resolve conflicts? Although the authors acknowledge that there has been an increase in girls' arrest rates, they are skeptical about the idea that this means that girls are in fact more violent than in previous years. Instead, they maintain that girls of color, in particular, are increasingly coming to the attention of authorities through "relabeling" of girls' status offense behavior, the "rediscovery of girls' violence," and "upcriming" of minor forms of youth violence. The authors also make the connection between the schoolhouse and the jailhouse by examining the current focus on bullying among school children. They suggest that the current framework for understanding bullying "degender harassment" and relegates it to an individualistic, psychological arena that offers little connection to the larger systemic issue of male supremacy. This article concludes by critiquing a popular antibullying curriculum and offers suggestions for how to approach gender violence prevention in schools more responsibly.

The theme of gender violence is extended by Donna Chung's article, which is based on interviews with young women in Australia. Chung helps us untangle young women's own perceptions of dating violence. She examines micropractices of gender relations and considers how power structures girls' intimate connections. This article provides an analysis that practitioners can use in designing educational programs for young women. For example, Chung notes that violence prevention programs targeting youth need to incorporate structural explanations for men's violence against women, to emphasize men's responsibility for their own violence, to include an analysis of

heterosexual dominance, and to explore the pressures young women feel to be in relationships.

Madelaine Adelman and Sang Hea Kil also address dating, examining conflicts and the role of third parties in those conflicts. The authors examined students' narratives about their peers' relationships. One of the issues that emerges is young men's view of their female dating partners as property. The authors examine how dating couples are tied to one another and one another's friends. Although researchers and activists typically believe that violence against women and girls is a social problem, most of the analysis of interpersonal violence continues to focus on the problems of particular couples and individual survivors. Adelman and Kil bring a new dimension to our analysis of relationship violence by examining the role of community members and friends in supporting, tolerating, intervening in, and making sense of dating conflicts.

Xiying Wang and Petula Sik Ying Ho's article, "Violence and Desire in Beijing," anchors this issue. The article is a single case study that addresses sexual victimization and multiple strategies of resistance, offering the voice of a young woman struggling to make sense of the effects of repeated rape by her father. The authors' data include interview transcripts, poetry, Web logs, and other writing by the informant. Their work reminds researchers of the role of technology in the lives of many young women and asks us to examine, understand, and value girls' cultural production. This piece offers a young woman's analysis of the meaning she makes of multiple attacks from different perpetrators, provides a review of Chinese literature on violence, and gives unique insight into the use of a "soul/body split" as a coping strategy. The authors, incorporating both Foucault's theories and the young woman's life experience, ask us to think beyond the Western context for deeper understandings of how violence is experienced and enacted across the globe. Wang and Ho give us a glimpse of what the next generation of research might be, a type of participatory action research that examines the experience of one person and then works to understand her social context.

The articles included in this issue represent some of the best contemporary work addressing young women's experiences of violence. Taken as a whole, they help us begin to piece together the patchwork of oppression, struggle, and harm, as well as the strength, resources, and resiliency of diverse groups of young women. Amid these voices, however, we still hear silences. When we began this journey, our expectation was that we would receive some articles analyzing the connections between violence against girls and health, effects of increased militarism and state surveillance on violence against young women, experiences of pregnant and parenting teens, and exploitation and violence against young women in the labor market. We need to hear more about the effects of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ability, religion, sexual practices, HIV, sexual culture, pornography, and generation/cultural differences.

In the end, we did not receive articles examining many of the issues we believe are critical for addressing the current role of violence in the lives of young women. What does this mean? Are researchers focusing on these important areas of inquiry? We have observed that our collective conceptualization of violence against girls and

young women focuses predominantly on the interpersonal realm, tends to emphasize damage rather than resiliency, and examines individual struggle more often than collective resistance. The good news is that the landscape is full of opportunities for current and future researchers to delve into these and many other topics.

We see a particular need for future research on young women's resistance to violence in the following areas:

- collective resistance, including tactics that groups and organizations have used successfully to make neighborhoods, schools, and organizations safer and more responsive to the needs of young women;
- resistance of teen girls who are a neglected subset among other groups, such as factory labor, military personnel, or immigrants targeted by U.S. government surveillance;
- assessing violence by teen girls in complex, reality-based, and politically informed ways;
- testing the relevance of existing models of relationship violence for different groups of teen girls; and
- the discourse of self-esteem—Does it have a place? Why is this discourse so prominent?

In the meantime, this special issue is one brick in the wall of knowledge about young women's experiences of violence. The authors whose work is featured in this issue are opening doors to what we hope will be more dialogue between researchers, practitioners, and young women themselves.

## Discussion Guide

We are both researchers and practitioners. We have observed that there is a real disconnect between researchers and community organizations. Many practitioners may not have the appropriate language to describe the phenomena they see on a daily basis. Mariame notes that in her work as a practitioner, there were moments of not having the language, theory, or concepts to explain what she was observing. The response from academics might be to suggest creating theory from the ground up, but for Mariame, there was only ground and no up. Practitioners often do not have the luxury of time for in-depth analysis because they are necessarily focused on resolving crises and meeting constituents' everyday needs. What is the role of academia if not to offer relevant conceptual frameworks for how to think about confusing social problems?

We are committed to bridging the gap in our own work and will offer some of our thoughts about how to do this here. We hope that more people will join this conversation and share their experiences and successes at doing this. We have observed that there are several key barriers for practitioners who could benefit from access to academic research. The factors we consider most central include language, focus, framing,

distribution, institutional and personal distance, expense, time, political differences, and race, class, and other identity issues. For example, although specialized language and terms can be invaluable in communicating complex concepts, sometimes such writing and speaking styles serve chiefly as markers of status, while at the same time shutting out general audiences. At the least, researchers can strive for clarity in our writing style. More researchers can begin to shift away from using data from community organizations chiefly to build our own theories and instead use our research practice to address the issues that community organizations are struggling to understand. Instead of distributing our work solely within academic circles, we can create newsletters, Web sites, and community meetings to discuss research.

Because of the prevalence of the violence to which girls are exposed and that they experience and may ultimately reproduce, we believe it is important to engage with girls' lives. In our personal experience as researchers and practitioners, we have found that academics have much work to do to share relevant empirical data and analysis with the general public. Ideally, we would like practitioners to read the articles included in this issue and use the ideas in their work with young women. We offer the following discussion guide as a tool for sparking dialogue within community organizations. The first three questions emerge directly from the articles. The remaining questions connect more broadly to the issues raised by the authors and are also grounded in our practical experiences:

1. Some of the authors included in this special issue report that girls frequently do not define their experiences with aggression, dominance, and sexual coercion as violence. Is it our role as educators, counselors, friends, or parents to convince them that this is violence? What is our investment in telling a girl that a particular experience is violence? How do we address the harms of an experience without alienating a young woman by forcefully imposing our frameworks and language on her?
2. The powerful writing and speech of the survivor Wang and Ho document is a reminder to all of us that victims of violence are not the violence that they experience and that their identities are much broader than that of "victim/survivor." The authors also show us that we need to examine girls' own words if we want a better understanding of what violence has meant for them. As practitioners, how can we make better use of girls' cultural production, such as poetry, zines, blogs, spoken word, and music, to connect with girls in meaningful ways?
3. Police are increasingly arresting girls and adjudicating them to the juvenile legal system. These young women may have committed troubling acts of violence, and once they are in the system, they sometimes become increasingly violent. How should practitioners address girls' aggression without minimizing it and without ignoring how girls' violence is rooted in men's aggression against girls and in systemic violence?
4. Internalized misogyny prevents girls from forming healthy relationships with each other. It also contributes to girls' isolation, which abusers exploit. Symbolic rejection through put-downs of other girls may be at the heart of girls' own self-definitions. To accuse other girls of being "weak" or "hos" clearly implies that the speaker denies the applicability of such terms to herself. Yet she is acutely aware that she too is

- susceptible to being labeled this way. How can we help to form healthy communities of girls who can work together, play together, and support each other?
5. Girls manage danger every day. It is a continuing, taken-for-granted, almost routine process. The violence that girls experience is so widespread that they find themselves accepting and adapting to it. How does this pervasive danger and vulnerability shape what it means to grow up female in the twenty-first century? What are the commonalities and differences in the violences that girls face in different regions, nations, and communities? What specific tactics do different groups of girls use to avoid, resist, or cope with the particular violences in their daily lives?
  6. Large-scale cultural, technological, and historical forces shape the textures and contours of violence against girls and possibilities for resistance. As one example, the rapid expansion of electronic communications, such as e-mail, text messaging, and Web pages, has brought new forms of stalking, sexual harassment, and pornography. As a second example, the United States is creating new strategies of war and imperialism, such as mass distribution of sanitized images of “surgical strikes” and “smart bombs.” Along with the institutionalization of permanent wars on drugs and “terror,” these practices normalize and legitimate violence, especially violence against people of color. What other connections do we see between cultural developments and changes in violence in the lives of girls? What new antiviolence or community-building opportunities might these cultural changes also create?
  7. Where are the spaces for resistance for girls in our cultures in the twenty-first century? Where are the bases for young women to organize and garner support for social change? When girls focus on searching for individual solutions to their problems, this can lead them to think that individual violence is a viable remedy. Girls need opportunities to practice using their voices and doing activism. How can we help move our work with girls out of the individual realm and toward a more systemic solution to violence?

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