

# **Building Girls Capacity in Philadelphia: Meaningful Access to Participatory Action Research and Platforms of Feminist Standpoints**

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## **Introduction**

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa brings light to the imperative role of awareness—and its relation to the material world—in the quest for social change, as following:

"The struggle is inner: Chicano, Indio, American Indian, mojado, Mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads" (353).

Self-awareness and collective awareness lay at the core of social change. The understanding of the material conditions in which populations develop is a key

component to their advancement. This awareness should—if not must—drive the revolutionary struggle against dominant structures. The social and political strings that determine the conditions in which people interact on a daily basis might limit their efforts to enhance those conditions but might also spark change through their informed consciousness. Efforts to organize and politicize such consciousnesses tend to be left out of academic inquiry (Fine 613). However the relatively recent partnership of feminist theory and participatory action research (PAR) aims at democratizing the relationship between 'subjects' of research and researchers in order to advance social activism and routes for change (Krumer-Nevo 281). Grassroots organizing is therefore increasingly taking the lead in transforming voices into knowledge by making space for subjugated discourses. However, there is still a gap between theorization and analysis of the manifestations of feminist participatory action research, particularly that which concerns girls and women of color. Even though the feminist notion that the 'personal is political' has opened up spaces for politicized perspectives, the standpoint of girls and women of color are still practically or materially—beyond the theory—confined to the private and not the public sphere. Feminist action research can dismantle this disparity by building spaces where voices have potential roles in affecting change, transforming personal experiences into

knowledge. The question is how do radical epistemologies lead to social change? How do, in the words of bell hooks, radical spaces support marginality as a space of resistance? How do social activists make sure that voices are not lost throughout action-oriented research projects? Moreover, who gets to be a social activist and why? This project examines these questions by looking at how Girls Justice League (GJL), a non-profit organization committed to building girls' capacity, goes about carrying out participatory action research in the City of Philadelphia and the Greater Philadelphia area. This study contains three main sections: The first one is an overview that explores what GJL has defined as 'girl-centric participatory community-based research efforts', the history of women's research efforts in Philadelphia, and the research strategy for the study. The second section describes the findings and analyzes the development and implementation of PAR in GJL and its implications for feminist participatory research action through participants' personal narratives. The third section has a two-section conclusion which includes recommendations to improve PAR in GJL and a reflection on the role of a radical liberal arts education and the importance of implementing feminist PAR across disciplines.

## **Overview**

### **Girl-centric participatory community-based research, history of women's research in Philadelphia, and research strategy**

Women's experiences have been historically undervalued, particularly those of women of color. Male-dominated mentalities and abstract masculinity institutionalize themselves in public life (Hartsock 44) as cisgender white men have historically dominated discourse. In a patriarchal and capitalist society like the United States, like in many other societies, women still struggle against sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression in general. However, government-led welfare measures have fallen short in ensuring equity despite being enacted with intentions of tackling oppression. For this reason, it is paramount that non-profit and non-governmental organizations take the lead in addressing issues that impact the lives of women, transforming silence into voices and voices into knowledge. One way of doing this is through capacity building of communities. Capacity building of girls of color is a fearless response to the deep need to disrupt and dismantle the multiple-layered systems of oppression that silence marginalized voices.

The personal struggle as a bridge between silence, language, and memory, as defined by bell hooks in "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," creates a counter-discourse that challenges and destabilizes the universalization of experience. Building capacity of girls of color engages with the politics of articulation, and politicizes personal narratives. Therefore, it is an imperative step in the process that leads to social change. Critically contextualizing the multiple

identity markers of girls and women of color, such as their skin color, economic status, and gender identification transforms marginality into a radical perspective. In this way, this awareness brings new meanings to previously colonized mentalities. Taking new meanings and transforming them into responsive support networks challenges privilege and puts subjugated voices into motion through participation in their own resistance. Research action that resembles this engaged awareness does not take away agency and articulations of struggle, but uses it in order to bring about change. This study therefore seeks to expose the agony that Maya Angelou famously framed in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, as following: "there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story," and to show the critical power that lays at the core of this pain. For this reason, girl-centric participatory community-based research efforts are not only critical but epistemologically necessary. First, nonetheless, it is important to explore the local history of research efforts in Philadelphia that either attempt to ease the agony or ignore it.

The City of Philadelphia is usually remembered as a space of independence because of the Declaration of Independence itself and the men who signed it. Most of its historic figures, who also happened to be white men, are the de facto figures that symbolize change. Women's leadership roles, therefore, are too often kept in the margins (Blackmer). Furthermore, the stories of low-income women of color have

been kept off the radar of media coverage. It is only through the effort of alternative and independent media outlets, such as the *Off Our Backs* periodical, that the public can access information on women of color's activism (Abramovitz 15).

Historical records and research efforts on women's issues in Philadelphia follow two main trends that tend to leave women of color out of the picture. According to historian Cindy Little, there is a great collection of the stories of predominantly white middle-class women who took part in social movements, such as the abolitionist or suffragist movements. The lives of women like Lucretia Mott and Fanny Jackson Coppin, both abolitionists, as well as Alice Paul and Eliza Sproat Turner, two suffragists, are common topics of study in academia (Blackmer). Research, moreover, tends to pay attention to the changing role of women during the mid and late 20th Century. According to Mimi Abramovitz, the mobilization of white middle-class women during the 1980s is a reflection of the welfare rights movement of the 1960s and 70s. As in previous decades, the late 1980s saw the multiple uprisings of welfare mothers against the stigma attached to their economic status. Nevertheless, the coverage of women of color's efforts was minimal. Mainstream efforts such as the Women's Liberation Movement gathered more public attention than that of grassroots movements led by low-income activists (Levenstein 33). Furthermore, women of color were commonly stigmatized behind Ronald Reagan's label of "welfare queens",

which removed agency from them (Levenstein 34). For these reasons, a vast majority of the population is still unaware of activism carried out by low-income women of color in Philadelphia.

Only recently has U.S. society become more aware of the stories of women warriors, who also happen to be women of color, in Philadelphia. For example, Elaine Brown's autobiography reveals the importance of taking the voices of revolutionary characters seriously. The stories of revolutionary women can illuminate the importance of research on the correlation between capacity building, social activism, and civic engagement of people of color. However, capacity building of girls of color, as such, does not date too far back. According to the *Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, advancing research on the experiences of women of color requires multiple steps to be taken. Margaret Jerrido, who works for the *Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, suggests that Philadelphia-based institutions, such as Grey Panthers or Women's Way, mainly keep documentation on white women's efforts, and even these are still hard to access since there is no inventory. Therefore even evidence of white middle-class women's efforts has not yet found its way out of limbo. Another speaker from the *Historical Society of Pennsylvania*, Marion Roydhouse, claims that biographical models and institutions such as the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* do publish articles on the lives of women of color more than before but topics of study

are still narrow and literature on their lives is still underrepresented. She suggests that researchers need to take a closer look into the role of women of color in voluntary associations, social reform, and cross-class institution building in the City of Philadelphia. Roydhouse also highlights the growing need for research on the complex intersections of identities, such as gender, sexuality, and race, when studying the role of women of color in Philadelphia political activism (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

Awareness of these gaps in literature and research efforts is not widely recognized. According to *The Atlantic* correspondent Melinda D. Anderson, women of color in the Greater Philadelphia area face similar negative educational experiences on the basis of their gender and skin color (Anderson, Melinda D. "Black Girls Should Matter, Too." *The Atlantic Magazine*). The author suggests that former president Obama's initiatives such as 'My Brother's Keeper' funds and advocates for the rights of Black and Latino males only. In this way, the experiences of women of color are disproportionately underfunded as well as overlooked. According to Anderson, girls of color feel overwhelmingly marginalized while policymakers focus on their male counterparts. Nevertheless, several organizations such as the National Women's Law Center or the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund are aiming at changing the narrative of girls of color's stories by gathering evidence through research studies that would bring girls of

color's narratives to policy discussions. Therefore, there is some national and state organizing against the erasure of the experiences of young women of color.

According to Anderson, girls from the Greater Philadelphia area have become key agents of social change. She mentions that girls such as Melanie Horton, an engaged member of the *Girls Justice League*, should be on the forefront of the struggle to build girls of color's capacity through participatory research (Anderson, Melinda D. "Black Girls Should Matter, Too." *The Atlantic Magazine*). Thus, the different positions that government and organizations have taken on girls of color's experiences highlights the importance of supporting non-governmental organizations that focus on girls' voices and knowledge. The double awareness—that of girls and women of color themselves and that of their counterparts—could bridge the gap between personal narratives and policy changes since not only voices would rise up, but there would also be ears to hear them.

*Girls Justice League* is one of the most salient organizations that combines capacity building of girls of color and feminist participatory action research. In a collective effort to bring about social justice for women of color, several other groups have also taken the initiative but conceptualize participants as recipients of benefits rather than as agents of change. For example, *Congreso de Latinos Unidos* seeks to promote the status of women through programs such as Girls Today, Leaders Tomorrow (Youth Resource Guide).

Furthermore, creative efforts such as *Girls Rock Philly* focus on empowering girls through musical experiences (Youth Resource Guide). *Girls Inc.* is another non-profit that aims at creating mentoring relationships and advocating for girls' rights (Youth Resource Guide). These multiple efforts attempt to transform silence into voices, yet they stop there. The next epistemological step, namely, turning voices into what Donna Haraway calls 'situated knowledges' which refers to holistic perspectives that start at the bottom of the privilege scale, is lacking.

As a meta analysis of efforts that support situated knowledges, this research project uses a qualitative approach to understand GJL's effort to build girls' and women's capacity through feminist PAR. In this way, this study seeks to amplify the participatory action research efforts of others through research itself. The Girls Justice League's non-hierarchical structure enables access to different perspectives and angles on what GJL is and what their goals are. The research process began by an analysis of GJL's website, which provides very specific and relevant information on their goals, projects, and programs. Secondly, two semi-structured interviews with Clarice Bailey, co-founder of the League; and Charlotte Jacobs, executive director, provided insightful reflections on the origin and role of the organization, particularly on the Board's participatory approach to building girls' capacity. The next stage involved direct conversation with the girls and women who participate in the

League's Saturday meetings. After experiencing GJL's reactions to a presentation by the Education Law Center, a more personal engagement took place as a natural conversation. Third, a focus group with six girls and two board members revealed first-hand experiences of participants as researchers and vice versa. The questions did not originate from the researcher side only but from girls and women in GJL as well. This symbiotic experience represents how GJL takes radical openness seriously. Lastly, a review of one of GJL's reports, the Status Project, as a stable documented source of information, shed light on how GJL's methodologies and data collection methods converge as a feminist participatory action research.

### **Girls Justice League - Findings**

#### **Development of PAR as a driving force**

Girls Justice League, established in 2012, focuses on building girls' capacity through an intersectional approach to participatory action research. The understanding of the effect and possibility within oppressive systems is a key component of their approach to the research. According to GJL's website, the organization's structure is built on a community-based non-hierarchical model, in which ten board members, three peer coordinators, twenty-three adult allies, and seventeen institute fellows interact with one another. The League has three main goals to pursue. First, it seeks to build solutions based on original data, which lead to the implementation of policies that will

empower girls. Second, it attempts to create a participatory space where girls and women, ages twelve to twenty-four, can listen to each other's concerns and pave the way for agendas that will directly impact their lives. Third, it seeks to connect organizations which pursue gender equity. Through these three goals, the Girls Justice League hopes to develop girls' critical thinking skills and enable them to engage and impact their sphere of influence by participating in the recognition of their status in society. The League provides a space where girls and women can listen to each other and see the beauty of difference. Conversation becomes a powerful tool in which voices are given their deserved attention. Consciousness-raising and dialogue are two of the main components to building girls' capacity. These efforts are put into practice in the Saturday Institute, Summer Institute, and Research Projects; which are funded by Women's Way, the Douty Foundation, and the Valentine Foundation (GJL website).

GJL defines itself as a "girls' rights organization dedicated to taking action for social, educational, and economic justice for girls, young women and those who identify as female in Philadelphia" (GJL website). The organization is unique and creative in its bottom-up and fluid structure. It is in its core to follow a 'girl-centric participatory community-based research effort,' meaning that the girls decide which topics to discuss and do research on based on their personal experiences and aspirations for change. According to Clarice Bailey, co-founder of

the organization, it is key for them to keep in mind that GJL is neither a service provider nor a mentorship effort. This means that everyone who is involved is rendered an active ally of the effort. Bailey suggests that girls and women already have too many authority figures in their lives. Therefore, the organization seeks to break this trend by opening a radical space for girls to run it themselves (Interview session).

### **Practical implementations of PAR**

The PAR strategies that GJL follows are linked directly to their mission. Each of the three goals is enacted by their participatory action plan and matches specific projects. The listing below corresponds to the project and the goal that it meets:

1. Status Project - First Goal: to build solutions based on original data, which lead to the implementation of policies that will empower girls.

In order to explore the current standing of women, the organization launched a coalition for the Status Project. This effort revolves around research formulation and public education as a way of giving deserved attention to women of color's research efforts. According to Caroline Sotello Viernes Turner, "new ways of thinking about teaching and research have provided spaces for women scholars to challenge old assumptions about what it means to be in the academy [...] new paradigms emerging from black women's scholarship provide a liberatory lens through which to view and construct scholarly life"

(88). As a means and ends to defying the historical lack of academic work by and about women of color, the Status Project emerged. The project started in 2012 mainly through conversations which later developed into a forum in which girls illuminated the most salient issues according to their own experiences. According to Charlotte Jacobs, executive director, girls are experts on the issues that affect them. In this way, they are key agents in the research process (Interview session). For this reason, the research design breaks down as follows: two academic partners/faculty members, one senior fellow, post secondary students, and fellows from the institute (GJL website).

The Status Project is divided into four research areas: Health and Well-Being, Justice, Economic Security, and Education. The project is an ongoing effort, with the first two stages already complete and the latter two still in progress. The data collected from this project is expected to be reviewed by the City Council, which promised that the organization's research findings would be used as the centerpiece of public hearings. In this way, the organization's advocacy agenda aims at pushing for stronger gender-responsive programs which would fund and support girls' transition into adulthood (GJL website).

2. Justice Institute - Second goal: to create a participatory space where girls and women can listen to each other's concerns and pave the way for agendas that will directly impact their lives.

In order to ensure that the voices of girls are heard, the organization pays close attention to providing a space where girls and women can talk about their concerns and develop courses of action to address issues they deem salient. According to Theresa Ann Rosner-Salazar, "multicultural service-learning as a teaching strategy is an experiential and reflection-oriented approach that addresses social issues and community needs. Multicultural service-learning emphasizes reflection, equality, mutual reciprocity, and empowerment"(Rosner-Salazar 65). Rosner-Salazar argues that these types of strategies disrupt and challenge the perception that minorities are in need of a service by questioning the status quo and emphasizing minority voices.

In both the Saturday Institute and the Summer Institute, girls and women take part in participatory workshops about systemic oppression, research strategies, and self-empowerment. According to Bailey, girls have learned to recognize when they have been targeted, and to let go of victimhood. They understand that the consequences of being pushed back are not personal flaws, but rather an institutionalized and structural flaw (Interview Session). The Summer Institute provides intensive training for girls and women to navigate daily experiences, such as confronting discriminatory dress codes in school or dealing with the oversexualization of their bodies. The girls are encouraged to use media tools to conduct workshops during the Summer Institute. According to

Ferman and Smirnov, "media making is [...] an important source of empowerment through skill building in collaboration, planning, technology, and argumentation, creating 'pathways to the development of student agency against conditions of social inequality'" (187). Therefore, the League ensures that girls and women are in charge of deciding the topics of the workshops preparing videos that portray respectability inside and outside of their communities (Focus group session).

The Justice Institute gets girls involved in a way that their voluntary commitment to the issue becomes a significant component of their lives. The girls are very aware of the role of their personal narrative in the collective consciousness. Scholars Julia Daniel and Michelle Renee Valladares claim that black girls and women organizers can find a true voice through "the consciousness-raising and leadership development work they engage in together [which] builds their understanding of one another's lives such that they have a deep and collective analysis and commitment to work together to address all forms of oppression" (Julia Daniel and Michelle Renee Valladares 204). According to one girl from the League, she keeps coming back to the meetings because of the welcoming and comfortable atmosphere she finds in it. The safe space that they have collectively built allows her to share her perspective without fear of not being heard or of being rejected. A personal and collective sense of solidarity and active participation challenges girls and women to

voice the knowledge in their experiences. Participants look forward to seeing each other because they have built a community in which they can be free to express themselves and take direct action on social issues that affect them (Focus group session).

3. Girl-centric community-based research efforts - Third goal: to connect organizations which pursue gender equity.

Girls Justice League empowers girls and young women through a creative approach. Because girls are at the center of every activity and goal, they are constantly being inspired. In this way, they transform their internalized assumptions into knowledge. Girls lead reach-out campaigns which have proven to have positive outcomes, such as the Change Campaign in Upper Darby, a collective dialogue on racism and sexism in K-12 schools. For example, the Change Campaign led to the establishment of "peer mediations" in schools, which allows students to resolve conflicts through dialogue and settlements. Girls are key agents in connecting what they learn in the League and applying it in their daily lives (Focus group session).

GJL partners up with multiple organizations to expand their network. Personal encounters with potential allies and recruits are at the core of this objective. Both Jacobs and Bailey highlight the importance of building meaningful relationships. They believe that meeting people personally allows the organization to

have a more radically open and democratic standing. It is through this approach that they manage to bring organizations together. For example, they have partnered up with Saint Joseph's University, Temple University, and the University Community Collaborate through this method. Clarice believes that it is paramount to build momentous allyship with people who are interested in committing to their effort (Interview session).

Moreover, the structure of the organization allows for inter-generational conversations to take place. The Board, renewed every two years, is composed of self-identified girls and women who vary in age. In this way, ideas are proposed, debated, and challenged from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, participants are always welcomed to stay during Board meetings and raise points for discussion. After the focus group ended for this study during the Saturday meeting on March 25, 2017, two out of the six girls stayed for the Board meeting (Focus group session), one of whom mentioned that the League has taught her that age is irrelevant concerning the will to affect change. The girls recalled an instance of having a true voice when the organization had to decide whether or not to publicly ally with Planned Parenthood. After discussing the issue, they democratically voted not to do it. This shows how GJL considers every voice and choice during the decision-making process.

Participants also play a central role in recruiting fellows for the Summer Institute. Even though some of them recall

being first brought to the organization by their mentors, they are also involved in reaching out to people in their schools and public spheres of influence. They do this through social media outlets such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as through word of mouth (Focus group session).

### **Successes and challenges of PAR in GJL**

Clarice Bailey brings an interesting insight to the success of the organization. She reiterates that even if the participants might not be fully aware of their impact, they are true agents of change. This is reflected in the girls' capacity of deconstructing the social issues that surround them. The girls have learned to be in spaces where they know they will face sexism and racism, and yet are bold enough to take a stand and to reveal their knowledge through factual arguments. The girls have become sensible enough to assess when and where they should try to educate a receptive audience with intersectionality or let others educate themselves (Interview session). In this way, the second and third goals have been effectively achieved as girls and women in GJL are empowered and ready to set an agenda while building inter-organizational networks that will pave the way for change.

In terms of the research goals, the effort is still ongoing. However, the two completed phases have been carried out successfully. Girls have been on the forefront of the research process starting with conversations on their concerns. For example, a girl recalls first talking about the

injustices that women face within the school-to-prison pipeline and their aspiration to stop it. This awareness translated into their hands-on role during the Justice Project section of the Status Project. Girls recall visiting prisons and taking part in reading scripts of the stories of incarcerated women, coding themes on those scripts, and having insightful conversations with these women (Focus group session).

However, GJL efforts have encountered challenges that reflect the nature of their environment. Charlotte Jacobs recalls the struggle of white girls coming into the organization with assumptions of class and color privilege. She mentioned that some of them did not come back because being aware can be a painful and demanding process. Nevertheless, there are also white girls and women who become very committed once they become receptive to embracing difference. Furthermore, some of the girls recall an incident during the 2016 Summer Institute when it was hard to connect new members with older fellows. This problem was fueled by miscommunication. Nevertheless, the girls managed to resolve their conflict by having a healing story-telling session in which girls opened up and finally felt part of a community by sharing their personal narratives (Focus group session).

Clarice Bailey pointed out that there are some structural challenges beyond the organization's reach, such as under-age access restrictions in certain places like prisons. This situation does not allow

members who are minors to be part of certain parts of the research process, and might challenge the level of involvement they can achieve. She also recalls the problem of finding allies that could comprehend the struggle in the same in-depth manner as the participants. For example, she thinks that the effort of the *Education Law Center* is great but needs to move beyond promoting cultural competence (Focus group session). She also recognizes that it can sometimes be hard to figure out how to employ the girls once they have graduated and start the transition into adulthood. Finally, Bailey mentions that while it can be challenging to bridge the generational gap within the organization, a byproduct of their structure yields a healthy flow and interaction of the intersecting identity markers of its members.

Thus, the Girls Justice League resolves internal and external challenges by taking an intersectional approach to them. The girls are constantly acquiring life-changing skills that reflect their understanding of intersectionality, which allows them to effectively counteract the discriminatory stimuli that might undermine their efforts. In this way, Bailey's reflection on her personal challenge of "letting the organization be what it would become" (Interview session) was directly defied by the robust, powerful, and impactful form that the organization has acquired today.

## **Conclusion**

### **Recommendations - Improving PAR as a feminist tool**

Building girls of color's capacity through participatory action research is a demanding project. It requires lifelong commitments to an engaged struggle. The work of Girls Justice League is unique in structure, approach, and practical implementation of PAR in the City of Philadelphia and the Greater Philadelphia area. Their model could be replicated by organizations with similar aims just like Michelle Fine has done with youth and inmates. The organization's original and holistic approach to deconstructing unjust social systems needs to be spread beyond the city, state, and even country. Social media can be a great tool to spread the word of the organization's efforts. However, it can also be beneficial to use the partnerships with universities not only as resources, but also as potential spaces to share findings and open new radical spaces. Even after the research projects get published, the findings could be further shared through lectures or virtual platforms with people who are not necessarily engaged with social activism but might potentially become interested in it. The world needs to know that there are women of color working towards their own empowerment, self-determination, and capacity building. The City Council might have a potential role in building a virtual platform in which people can find out about the efforts being made, but they first need to be fully aware of the value of this type of

activism. This might spark the minds of people who could contribute with resources.

Girls Justice League is very responsive to people who want to get involved. They make sure to respond to people who contact them, volunteer, build a partnership, or join as a participant. This effort could be used as a model for other organizations that want to engage diverse parties in working towards building girls' capacity. For example, Girls Justice League poses the question how white people can serve in advancing the position of girls and women of color. According to them, "it is not the role of women of color to educate those who do not want to be educated;" that should be the responsibility of white people. For this reason, predominantly white organizations should make sure that they are not acting as white saviors, but as proactive allies. Constantly checking on their privilege can yield a much more intersectional understanding of what still needs to be done in terms of research and education.

Recommendations for the Girls Justice League stem directly from the challenges they face. In terms of escaping structural barriers, the organization could allocate research responsibilities in a way that even if some fellows cannot attend certain activities, they are still engaged in other important parts of the process. In this way, girls might not get to experience all parts of the research process but are still able to carry out other important research-related tasks. Moreover, girls could better integrate one another through team-building activities that they care deeply about. For example,

girls seemed very enthused to take a group trip to the movies and watch *Get Out*. Through this non-academic, yet educative framework, girls can get to know each other better by engaging in consciousness-raising activities that do not look like it from the outside. Having a sense of community seems rather important in the lives of the girls. For this reason, building cross-sectional awareness of personal and collective value could yield positive results.

Finally, it would be helpful for the League to start establishing concrete dates for the City Council to review their research efforts. In that way, they could delineate a more accurate assessment of their future steps, when marshaling their research findings for purposes of changing policy. Mobilization will need to be strengthened in this stage of the research effort as well.

### **Reflection - The urgency of feminist PAR in social justice organizations and institutions**

Social activism is a challenging path to take. It is often said that remaining in the struggle already signifies winning. Social issues are all around us, even if some prefer to turn a blind eye. Some people choose to follow a social activist career as their way to cope with the precariousness of their reality, and other people because there is no other choice. People who engage in social activism need a set of unique skills to be successful. Most of those skills seem to be acquired on the go because social activism is inherently fluid and requires people to adapt to the changing demands of the work. The

women who take part in Girls Justice League are each unique in their own way and take their personal narratives very seriously in developing solutions that will address their concerns. Nevertheless, those personal experiences are different and translate into a shared set of aspirations and skills including commitment, passion, critical thinking, and networking. In this way, feminist PAR is a comprehensive approach to build girls' and women of color's capacity.

Women and girls of color who take part in the League are all very committed to the cause and understand the value of their input to the collective effort. They devote a significant amount of their lives to achieving the goals of the organization. In addition, members of the League are passionate about their work. The different and fluid layers of the organization's structure allow each member to have an area in which they can explore and embrace their enthusiasm for building themselves and other participants up. Furthermore, women from the League are very aware of intersectionality and the nuances of their identities. They have acquired this awareness through constant utilization of their critical thinking skills. Finally, members of GJL understand the importance of building networks that build girls of color's capacity. They are constantly reaching out to other girls who might be interested in joining the organization, and are eager to open their discussions to new participants.

This set of required skills and aspirations for social activism can be found

in a liberal arts education. Critical thinking is the cornerstone of the liberal arts. Dialogue and discussion of social issues is at the forefront of almost every class in the College of Liberal Arts at Temple University. Students are constantly encouraged to share their thoughts and listen to each other's opinions. In comparison to other colleges at Temple, the College of Liberal Arts is invested in getting students to think outside of the box. Nevertheless, some disciplines still face issues of disproportionate participation, which is promoted by white and male privilege. In classroom settings, the conversation is often dominated by white men. Furthermore, some students and professors normalize this behavior and contribute to the perpetuation of this trend. For this reason, women, especially women of color, still struggle to be heard in academic settings at Temple. The College of Liberal Arts could improve significantly if the curriculum required every class to include an intersectional lens to teaching and learning and a participatory research action plan. In this way, universities could be more mindful of the quality and purposes of teaching students to critically think about their realities. It is paramount that institutions, such as universities, provide the space for people who want to be change makers to interact with one another. Hence, creating an interdisciplinary research-oriented participatory forum that builds on feminist theory is very much needed.

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