

Summer 2012

# In what ways does research-based gender-specific youth programming affect girls' development post-program?

Alaina Ennamorati  
*SIT Graduate Institute*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones>

 Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Ennamorati, Alaina, "In what ways does research-based gender-specific youth programming affect girls' development post-program?" (2012). *Capstone Collection*. 2555.  
<https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/capstones/2555>

This Thesis (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Graduate Institute at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact [digitalcollections@sit.edu](mailto:digitalcollections@sit.edu).

In what ways does research-based gender-specific youth programming affect girls' development post-program?

Alaina Ennamorati

PIM 70

A Capstone Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management at SIT Graduate Institute in

Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

July 22, 2012

Advisor: John Ungerleider

## Consent to Use of Capstone

I hereby grant permission for World Learning to publish my Capstone on its websites and in any of its digital/electronic collections, and to reproduce and transmit my CAPSTONE ELECTRONICALLY. I understand that World Learning's websites and digital collections are publicly available via the Internet. I agree that World Learning is NOT responsible for any unauthorized use of my Capstone by any third party who might access it on the Internet or otherwise.

Alaina Ennamorati

7/22/2012

---

Student name

Date

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Practicum Description.....	3
Literature Review	
<i>Girl Culture and Development</i> .....	4
<i>Youth Program Leadership Outcomes</i> .....	10
Methodology	
<i>A. Identify Context for CLC</i> .....	16
<i>B. Practitioner Inquiry Design</i> .....	17
<i>C. Analysis of Data</i> .....	21
<i>D. Discussion and Conclusions</i> .....	31
References.....	37
Appendices	
Additional Research Materials	

## ABSTRACT

Current girls' development research in the United States shows that female adolescents are experiencing an increase in depression rates, eating disorders, and lower self-esteem. Many feminists believe the societal culture in which girls are growing up in is hazardous, with the acceptance and perpetuation of oversexualization, objectification, and stereotyping by all different types of media. The following capstone research takes a case study real world flexible design approach at the high school leadership program at Hardy Girls Healthy Women (HGHW), a nonprofit in Waterville, Maine that works to create a world where women and girls feel equality, independence and safety. Both quantitative and qualitative data is gathered from adult alumni from the Girls Advisory Board (GAB).

Results find that in the areas of volunteer/community service, leadership roles, agency vision, and stronger voice/sense of self, that an overwhelming majority of alumni feel that these developmental assets were met and increased during and after their term(s) with GAB. Academic performance did not increase in the majority. Safety tools and earlier volunteering roles are areas that alumni feel the program could improve upon.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

### **Introduction**

Initially what attracted me to SIT Graduate Institute was the Master's International program. I had served as an AmeriCorps member in City Year Boston after graduating from Northeastern University and traveling abroad. This led me to next apply and start training in the Dominican Republic in 2009 for Peace Corps for a position in youth, family, and community development. It was necessary for me to leave during training for health reasons and to recover from a family emergency that occurred immediately prior to my departure. My interest in SIT's Master's International program was to reapply to Peace Corps in hopes of returning to the Dominican Republic.

I entered the PIM degree last fall, and am a candidate for Intercultural Service, Leadership, and Management, focusing on nonprofit management and youth programs. I reapplied to Peace Corps in the fall during classes. I decided, based on timing, that it was best to remove my application in December, and applied in the summer to do my second term in AmeriCorps.

For my RPP, I am serving as an AmeriCorps member and the Programs Coordinator for Hardy Girls Healthy Women (HGHW), a nonprofit organization based in Waterville, Maine, whose mission is to create opportunities, develop programs, and provide services that empower girls and young women. Their vision is that all girls and women experience equality, independence, and safety in their everyday lives (Hardy Girls, 2010). HGHW is a young nonprofit, founded in 2000, and takes a strength-based approach to programming and educational resources. I will be serving my term until September 2012, and hope to be involved with their programming as a volunteer thereafter.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

I am working with youth and young adult women, and am predominantly applying my coursework in Nonprofit, NGO and Social Business Management, Youth Program Design and Youth Program Leadership from SIT.

As a woman, I've loved any experience I've had working with young girls—whether it be at the YMCA with the Youth and Family Department and Learning Center, with Big Brothers Big Sisters as a volunteer in high school, or mentoring three fourth and fifth-grade girls during my City Year service. I had to jump at the opportunity to work in an organization focused on empowering girls and young women, and in an organization that takes a holistic approach—involving parents, community members, teachers, and most importantly, the girls themselves.

### **Practicum Description, Hardy Girls Healthy Women**

HGHW's research-based philosophy is to repair the culture rather than solely treating the girl, by creating and promoting “hardiness zones,” or safe spaces where girls and women can cope and thrive in stressful situations (Debold, Brown, Weseen, & Brookins, 1999). HGHW programs focus on various ages and their Training Institute can be accessed by educators and community members worldwide, with webinars and tips on counteracting girlfighting/bullying and media oversexualization of girls and women, among others. The programming includes: Adventure Girls for girls in grades 2-6, Girls' Coalition Groups for middle school girls, Powered By Girl for 14-22 year olds, and the HGHW Girls Advisory Board for selected high school girls.

As Programs Coordinator (and AmeriCorps member), I am in charge of running the Adventure Girls program, monthly or bimonthly on Saturdays that exposes girls to women in male-dominated fields such as science and technology. I am the point person for our expansion of Girls' Coalition Groups in southern Maine, which are small focus groups that meet during the

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

school day to discuss issues relating to girl culture; media influence, healthy relationships, family, and other adolescent issues that are broken up into themes in the curriculum *From Adversaries to Allies: A Curriculum For Change, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*, by Dr. Lyn Mikel Brown (a co-founder and board member) and Mary Madden (a board member). I also co-ran a girls group in the capitol. I am the supervisor for Powered By Girl ([poweredbygirl.org](http://poweredbygirl.org)), our girl-driven media activist site, where I edit and post new blogs, manage the website, and provide structure for the eleven volunteers.

My goals and my supervisors' goals for the year include: developing a webinar series for how to create Powered By Girl high school clubs, maintenance and outreach for the Adventure Girls program, planning next year's sessions, and tracking participants in a database throughout all of our programs. My capstone research project will seek to answer the following question: In what ways does gender-specific research-based youth programming affect girls' development post program? I am interested in tracking the outcomes of girls in the GAB program because it is the primary girl-driven leadership program at HGHW. The GAB board currently consists of 12 members, with approximately 25 alumni, a relatively small number, allowing opportunity for an in-depth qualitative research approach. In the future, I want to work directly with youth and to be thoroughly aware of the desired outcomes of specific programs, and how to reach program goals. I am linking my capstone to my Youth Program Leadership course.

## **Literature Review: Girl Culture and Development**

Today's girl culture in the United States is in serious peril. Girl power in the 1990s represented feminine physical and mental strength, endurance, resiliency, and independence. A decade later, girl culture's source of power is in body image and materialism. The Kardashians,



## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Paris Hilton, and Jersey Shore divas are plastered over every teen magazine and are treated like capitalism's version of royalty. The media has sold being a girl into a product of sexiness, shopping, gossip, girlfighting and jealousy rather than one of inner beauty, determinism, and cooperation with other females. This is extremely unhealthy for girls, as we see oversexualization in the media lead to increase in depression rates, eating disorders and lower self-esteem in female adolescents.

In her book, *Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches From the Front Lines of the New Girlie-Girl Culture*, Peggie Orenstein explains,

According to the American Psychological Association, the girlie-girl culture's emphasis on beauty and play-sexiness can increase girls' vulnerability to the pitfalls that most concern parents: depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, risky sexual behavior (2011, p. 6).

**Figure 1: Rainbow Brite** The shift is seen most obvious in newer versions of thinned-out Dora the



Explorer, Rainbow Brite, Strawberry Shortcake, the sale of Bratz dolls, Monster High dolls and the ever-increasing division of gender in store toy aisles by pink and blue, Orenstein describes in her book. When girls see words like

“pretty and sweet” labeled across the new LEGO Friends toy section and “build, energy, power”

**Figure 2: Strawberry Shortcake** across the boys' LEGO aisle, they are being limited to superficial



standards, and marketed a very narrow definition of what it means to be a girl.

Orenstein explores this girlie-girl culture in depth by attending a Miley Cyrus concert, visiting the largest

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

American Doll store in New York City, exploring toy conventions, and attending a Toddlers & Tiaras beauty contest to examine this pursuit of physical perfection, as well as what roles the parents and toy marketers—in particular *Disney*—play in this cultural shift of late, even as career and educational strides have been made by women in the past decade as well. Orenstein says,

Even as new educational and professional opportunities unfurl before my daughter and her peers, so does the path that encourages them to equate identity with image, self-expression with appearance, femininity with performance, pleasure with pleasing, and sexuality with sexualization. It feels both easier and harder to raise a girl in that new reality—and easier and harder to be one (2011, p. 7-8).

This phenomenon can be more closely examined when considering one of young girls' largest attractions—*Disney* movies and merchandise. *Disney* movies can be a wonderful childhood memory for many, but when really analyzed, these fairy tales perpetuate very traditional roles for girls. For example, the female leads always get rescued by males (almost none rescue themselves), they do not have female friends or mothers, and in fact are often times in direct competition with other females--as in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* with the queen to be the “fairest of them all.” *Disney* has made a fortune off of their *Disney* princess line that was a controversial launch back in 2000. By 2009 *Disney* made \$4 billion in sales (Orenstein, 2011, p. 13). When discussing what role marketers play in this girlie-girl culture versus what girls really want, Orenstein writes, “But when you’re talking about 26,000 items (and that’s just *Disney*), it’s a little hard to say where ‘want’ ends and ‘coercion’ begins” (2011, p. 16).

Orenstein goes on to explain how marketers have even coined terms such as “toddler” and “tween” as marketing techniques. These are in fact not real stages of childhood development, and only have been considered such after becoming so commonly used. Orenstein explains,

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

It was only after “toddler” became common shoppers’ parlance that it evolved into a broadly accepted developmental stage. If that seems impossible to believe, consider the trajectory of “tween,” which was also coined, in the mid-1980s, as a marketing contrivance (originally describing children ages eight to fifteen). Within ten years, it was considered a full-blown psychological, physical, and emotional phase, abetted, in no small part, by the classic marketing bible *What Kids Buy and Why* (2011, p. 36-37).

If marketers have such power over language and developmental concepts, how are children and teenagers ever to stand a chance? Orenstein makes a great case of this throughout her book, and takes the reader on a journey of her own trials and tribulations with her own young daughter. She is navigating the rough media seas with the rest of the public who read her work, and admits that there are times when compromises need to be made, where saying “no” constantly to a growing girl in efforts to make her freer is actually a very dangerous concept, explained Orenstein during her book signing in Portland, ME on February 9, 2012.

Author Lise Eliot is an associate professor of neuroscience at the Chicago Medical School of Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science, and mother of two sons and a daughter. In her book, *Pink Brain, Blue Brain: How Small Differences Grow into Troublesome Gaps—and What We Can Do About It* (2009), Eliot goes into detail of how the brain (its chemicals, size, etc.) develops from birth to adulthood, what gender differences are biological, and what are socially constructed.

Eliot explains that there are certain biological differences; male brains are slightly larger than female brains, females have slightly better audio perception but slightly poorer vision than males (2009, p. 59), but that these biological differences are so miniscule that they don’t affect them. “Put all of this information together, and it’s clear that at birth, boys and girls do not differ dramatically in their perceptual abilities,” says Eliot (2011, p. 59).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Eliot describes how pre-natal testosterone affects both males and females, and how this leads to aggressive behavior that is stereotypical of young boys. “In other words, it is not the testosterone circulating in young males’ blood that drives their aggressive play and other behaviors but the testosterone that washed through them at the very beginning of life” (2009, p. 30). Biologically, certain hormones (such as testosterone and estrogen) affect males’ and females’ emotional and physical responses, but these differences are often exacerbated by parents during the toddler years when children think in extremes in regards to their own gender identity, between two and three years old (Eliot, 2009, p. 113).

During her book signing in Portland, Maine on February 9, 2012, Peggy Orenstein said that children don’t understand that they won’t just change sexes when they wake up, or get older, or change a pair of pants, for example. That some young girls say things like, “I want to grow up to be a dad,” or young boys “to be a mom.” To counteract this anxiety, kids at this age tend to behave in extremes, to play with what is considered the most “girly” or “for boys only,” or dress in only dresses or don only certain haircuts, said Orenstein. In agreement and connecting this to a few years older, Eliot goes on to write, “Most children achieve a gender constancy or permanence by six or seven, which happens to be the age when children form their most stereotypical views of males and females” (Eliot, 2009, p. 116).

In regards to parental roles in gender development, Eliot says,

Boys and girls enter the world with slight differences in social and emotional styles, but in reacting to these differences, parents end up training boys and girls in different ways. Girls’ stronger social bias is highly reinforcing to parents and so becomes easily strengthened, while boys, who are less mature and consequently slightly less social and more fussy at birth, compel parents to a more cautious style of interaction, reinforcing boys’ already weaker orientation toward other people (2009, p. 78).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

These parental reactions may be natural and unintentional, but when recognized, altering behavior may allow their child to grow and be challenged to fully understand their capabilities.

Connecting this back to the culture in which youth are growing up in today, kids often learn their gender roles through play, and are socialized early into knowing what is culturally accepted. Eliot writes about how adults tend to buy baby boys footballs and hammers, engaging with them differently and “interacting in more physical, expansive ways with boys and more nuanced, verbal ways with girls” (2009, p. 84). Eliot goes on to explain, “Parents must work hard to avoid prejudging boys and girls based on their often dramatic differences in toy choices and instead focus on how to compensate for these play preferences to promote other aspects of each sex’s development” (2009, p. 109).

In regards to marketing power over teen confidence in their own body, in particular for girls, Eliot says,

Then there is body image, which is arguably the biggest factor contributing to girls’ plummet in self-esteem at puberty. This decline has been documented in most western societies and now is rapidly developing in many Asian cultures: girls enter puberty and start comparing themselves to the impossible standards of beauty in every magazine, billboard, and TV commercial. Of course, boys also become more self-conscious about their bodies at puberty, but because males’ status rises with their size while females are judged by their thinness, the physical changes at puberty work at detriment of girls’ self-esteem and to the benefit of boys (2009, p. 258-259).

This directly connects to the four behaviors Orenstein points out are developing at higher rates in adolescent girls today; depression, eating disorders, distorted body image, and risky sexual behavior.

Orenstein and Eliot lay the groundwork of girl culture today, but it would have been helpful to see a timeline as to how we got here as a society. Relate the materialism in our culture

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

more to capitalism, and when marketing techniques started to go too far—and why parents did not push back against what was being sold to their children—or if there was push back, why it failed. Both authors are thoughtful in their analysis of why girls (and boys) are developing behaviors and strict social cues at earlier ages, but in order to learn from where we are now, taking a step back and examining how we got here would be a valuable tool to include in the literature.

### **Literature Review: YPL Youth Program Outcomes**

In *The Impact of Youth Peacebuilding Camps: Connectedness, Coping, and Collaboration*, (Ungerleider, 2006) the bi-communal Turkish and Greek Cypriot peace-building youth leadership camp at SIT Graduate Institute discusses capacity building program outcomes in regards to three measurements: connection, coping, and collaboration. These outcomes were measured to understand the students' ability to feel a sense of social and political empowerment, measure their sense of ability to create change, and to determine what elements of the youth program support these attributes, as well as taking into account what program elements could be improved.

*The Cyprus Review* evaluates former Turkish and Greek Cypriot youth who took part in SIT's youth program, of the Governor's Institute of International Affairs, between 1996 and 2004. The U.S.-based program developed in response to the forbidding of Turkish and Cypriot youth to enter the UN buffer zone for dialogue groups in 1997 on the island of Cyprus. The island was clearly divided, and a way to allow the youth to continue to work together (which started in 1996 in dialogue groups on the island), the program was moved to SIT in Vermont and

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

expanded to include skills training, outdoor teambuilding activities, social and recreational activities, and immersion by students living together (Ungerleider, 2011, p. 140).

Youth were between the ages of 15-17 when attending camp, and were contacted to respond to a questionnaire with narrative questions and numerical ranking in January 2004 on the island of Cyprus, in the buffer zone in Nicosia. Forty-one alumni attended the reunion, who were by then in secondary school, university, or in the military. Most came from the previous year's camp in 2003, within six months of their return home from camp, for some it had been six months, and the longest had been three years (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 141).

Prior to attending camp, none of the campers knew each other, so outcomes in connectedness were guaranteed improvement—47% of students listed the maximum score of “5” in response to their sense of connectedness to new friends from the other community. When responding to whether the connections lasted after camp, the responses indicated that an average marked “3” six months after camp, which was a .88 drop from during camp. However, 22% listed a “5” for feeling maximum connectedness to their peers post-camp (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 141). A great result found in the reunion was that since the end of the programs, all of the students who took the survey had visited with campers from the other community, although the researchers noted that these results are biased by “the fact that those taking the survey were willing to come to the reunion” (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 142). Another interesting fact was that 98% of respondents said that they communicated with members of the other community via the Internet (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 142).

In measuring coping, 97.6 percent responded that they felt hopeful about the future of Cyprus in their post-camp experience, with anecdotal evidence taken from reunion attendees

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

sharing their feelings of optimism for peace. “After they returned to Cyprus, from six months up to several years after the camp, an overwhelming 92.5 percent reported that the camp still helped them feel more hopeful and positive, even when the political situation was negative” (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 144).

The collaboration outcomes showed that 53% of camp respondents claimed to have participated in bi-communal activities, with 41% claiming to have worked in “more substantive bi-communal projects” after camp (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 144-145). A resounding 73% said that they met more individuals from the other community through results of these bi-communal activities that they only participated in after SIT’s camp, as well as remaining in levels of discussion about living in peace and creating change for Cyprus (Ungerleider, 2006, p. 145).

The methodology used to measure these results was the questionnaire with narrative questions and numerical rankings on a scale of “0” to “5,” as well as results from discussions at the reunion in Nicosia. Admittedly so, the results of the camp-goers who did not respond cannot be known, and the impact of camp on their outcomes of connectedness, coping, and collaboration cannot be distinguished. It is clear that during camp attendance, there was personal change in each camper, according to Ungerleider, “group cohesion are impossible to miss at the tearful end of these peace camps,” (2006, p. 139). It also seems clear that this age group is very appropriate to be discussing such matters of political efficacy and change-maker ability, as Ungerleider explains, “Teenagers are capable of dramatic re-assessment and shifts within their personal and collective identities” (2006, p. 139).

Youth leadership is a large part of being a member of the Girls Advisory Board (GAB). There are many ways to be a leader, and GAB helps move young women towards taking



## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

ownership of different projects and taking the lead on presentations and community organizing.

New members may feel shy at first, and can participate by listening, and grow to feel more natural and comfortable in the group environment. Such was the case of Beth Preston, a GAB alumna who served in GAB from 2005-2007, and said in her interview,

I think that GAB gave me something to be passionate about, and once I had something to be passionate about, I was able to express that and be able to talk to people about that. I think that GAB really helped me to find the words to talk to people about things, and it was gradual, and definitely when I was first in GAB I was nervous to talk in case someone disagreed, but gradually got more involved—and it's still growing—but definitely started in GAB (B. Preston, personal communication, March 14, 2012).

Similarly, in *Increasing Student Voice and Moving Toward Youth Leadership*, Dr. Dana Mitra discusses typologies of student voices, and the participatory coalition of students and teachers through a case study of Whitman High School (2006). Mitra writes,

Through student voice opportunities, students can work with teachers and administrators to co-create the path of reform. This process will enable youth to meet their own developmental needs and will strengthen student ownership of the change process, (2006, p. 7).

Allowing youth a platform to use their voices in a way that it is being heard and actively listened

to is a major part of empowering youth. It allows them to progress through

stages of participation and leadership, and through a “pyramid of student

voice.” As Figure 3: Pyramid of Student Voice shows, the base is “being

heard,” which is the most common and basic form of student voice (Mitra,

2006, p.7). The next layer is “collaborating with adults,” and in Whitman

High School’s case, they focused on students and teachers working together to change the school

environment by collecting data and working on school problems. The top of the pyramid is

“building capacity for leadership,” which Mitra points out is also the smallest and least common

**Figure 3:  
Pyramid of Student Voice**



## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

layer and occurs when students “share in the leadership of the student voice initiative” (2006, p. 7).

This happened in the case of Whitman High School, as students and teachers created a “Student Forum” where they named four themes needing reform in their school, and focused on strengthening relationships between the faculty and students. This type of collaboration requires patience and a lot of effort to understand one another, and they found that they even had to break into “education lingo,” where adults and students explained how each other communicated and where there was common miscommunication in order to move forward most effectively (Mitra, 2006, p. 8). It’s quite fascinating to see how simple phrasing can create a chain reaction where suddenly a student is too embarrassed to come to class, so simply stops going, as in the case of one student who missed several classes due to family issues and didn’t want her teacher to be let down and disappointed when they showed that they were angry that she had been missing class (Mitra, 2006, p. 8).

In leadership programs such as the “Student Forum” created at Whitman High School and the Girls Advisory Board at HGHW, shared leadership is encompassed, where there is no one expert, but rather both adult and youth learning in a mutual environment. There is no power struggle because power is shared, and youth and adult are experts alike in their own right. Each person’s experience is valued. This is an ideal environment to foster collaboration and creativity between group members of all ages and backgrounds, as it allows each to bring their own passions and story to the table without feeling inferior or insignificant to another member of the group.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Another great resource for developing deep connection, communication, collaboration, and reflection between youth and adult is through structured dialogue, as expressed in *Structured Youth Dialogue to Empower Peacebuilding and Leadership* (Ungerleider, 2010). Ungerleider explains,

Through structured, adult-facilitated peer dialogue, high school and college students practice critical analysis of issues and reflect on their generation's role in responding to these challenges. For future leaders, dialogue groups can create a place and time to expand self-expression, envision peaceful change, and examine one's own leadership potential (2010, p. 1).

Ungerleider stresses that it is not only important for youth to engage in dialogue with adults, but in addition, especially with their own peers. Dialogue groups provide a safe space to build trust, as they are usually made up of small groups of people, although they can be used in larger classroom settings as well. The facilitator is trained in guiding the discussion, asking questions requiring participants to dig deep and reflect on their own views and perspectives, and what has fueled their perceptions. The goal of dialogues are to be understood and to understand another point of view, not to convince another that one view is right and another is wrong (Ungerleider, 2010, p. 1).

In measuring outcomes of the Youth Peacebuilding and Leadership Program, 100 participants evaluated their dialogue experience in 2009 (which included students from Iraq, Serbia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Denmark, London, and racially diverse American students), through an anonymous written evaluation (only their national origin was identified), and results were positive learning, "participants reported relational, expressive, intercultural, analytical, and personal development from their participation in dialogue sessions" (Ungerleider, 2010, p. 1).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Ungerleider concluded, “the individual and collective development of relational, intercultural, analytical, and personal capacities in teenagers allows for a shared sense of empowerment for social action” (2010, p. 6). Furthermore, outcomes were evident from the students’ stories themselves, “Evidence that program graduates have been able to return to their communities and transform their visions and motivations into becoming leaders for social change comes from anecdotal stories of follow-up achievements” (Ungerleider, 2010, p. 6).

## **Methodology**

### **A. Identify Context for CLC**

Currently, there is no specific organized tracking system to identify outcomes in the GAB program beyond high school. There were pre-surveys outlined, which I have adapted to create my own interview questions and pre-interview survey, based off of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (see Appendices C). There is currently no structured follow-up to determine the long-term effects of the GAB program. Such is necessary to understand the benefits and shortcomings of GAB youth programming.

My research focused on the GAB alumni. The alumni I interviewed range in age from 18-23 years old. I focused on interviewing adult alumni to assess program and development outcomes. Initially, 25 alumni were anticipated to be contacted to participate in the survey and interview per HGHW’s President Megan Williams and Vice President of Research and Programs, Jackie Dupont, recollection and records. However, there are actually 16 alumni above the age of 18 and in HGHW’s contact lists. I also cross-checked the alumni names with Williams and Dupont and none were found to be missing. Twelve alumni were interviewed and thirteen filled out a pre-interview survey and consent form. One additional alumnus was contacted for an

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

interview but couldn't fit it in her schedule. Another submitted the pre-interview survey and consent form, but was never able to arrange an interview time. Two alumni could not be reached after multiple attempts of contact. Two out of the twelve alumni did not return their pre-interview surveys nor consent forms before the phone interview, but verbal consent was received and their pre-interview surveys and consent forms received in the mail after. It is possible the unreachable two had out-of-date contact information, or as in the case of one of the unreachable members, that they only served sporadically in the first term GAB was created (when there was no attendance policy). In total, 12 out of 16 potential adult alumni were surveyed and interviewed; about 75%, and 13 out of 16 submitted pre-interview surveys; about 81.25%.

During service, GAB members range from grade 9-12 and apply to become members during the summer for the following school year. GAB members work with the President of HGHW, the Board of Directors, and the Vice President of Research and Programs to give girls' perspectives on what program areas should focus on, what girl culture is like today, and how to make the world a safer place for girls. Girls have been involved with drafting petitions, creating 'real beauty' floats in parades, and drawing attention to sexism in the media through the Powered By Girl online media activism site.

### **B. Practitioner Inquiry Design**

My approach was real world flexible design. I took a mixed approach--both qualitative and quantitative research--but focused more heavily on qualitative. I chose to do a case study approach of the Girls Advisory Board leadership program outcomes.

Real world flexible design contains three design traditions within it—grounded theories, ethnographic studies, and case studies (Robson, 2002). To deal with threats to validity, all

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

interviewees were emailed their interview directly after they were conducted, and sent a copy of this capstone paper prior to SIT publication. This means of assuring validity is called “member checking,”

This involves returning (either physically or through correspondence, phone, email, etc.) to respondents and presenting to them material such as transcripts, accounts and interpretations you have made. It can be a very valuable means of guarding against researcher bias (Robson, 2002, p. 175).

Case study was the most appropriate design tradition for answering the inquiry question because the data collected was from the alumni of the GAB program, which is a particular real life context, by using multiple means of data collection (surveys and interviews). The research is also participatory action research, because the information gathered from alumni will be used to implement a participant tracking system for GAB members and a plan for long-term program measurement. The research gathered and the designs of the questions focused on what worked well in GAB, what could be improved, and how participants developed since leaving GAB.

Interviews were a useful method for gathering data from youth and HGHW supervisors because it provided personal, direct feedback from those most affected by the youth leadership program. It also put theory into use by creating a shared power space for youth, as their ideas and feedback will be used to influence the GAB program. By offering the survey and interview to be taken anonymously (although only one chose to do so), it was a great method for allowing alumni to express their thoughts honestly without feeling the need to hold back feelings based on embarrassment, challenging authority, shyness, or any other reason. Informal and formal communication (email, phone, conversation) methods were used with GAB alumni and HGHW staff because it assured a constant flow of interaction and feedback. Theoretical and practical

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

research was also conducted through Google Scholar and the SIT Donald B. Watt Library online database.

I interviewed 12 out of the 16 GAB adult alumni for an hour each, measuring the following girl development aspects based off of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents, ages 12-18 (the age they were during program):

1. Volunteer experience/Community Service
2. Leadership roles
3. Agency: Increased Equality, Independence, and Safety
4. Academic Performance
5. Stronger Voice/Sense of Self

This was done through a mixed quantitative and qualitative pre-interview survey (see Appendix A), as well as through interview questions (see Appendix B). A letter of informed consent was sent along with the pre-interview survey, found in the Human Subjects Review and also in Appendix A.

For further comparative data collective and organizational learning, I emailed a mixed quantitative and qualitative survey to sixteen gender-specific research-based youth organizations in Maine to gain knowledge on how other organizations track participant outcomes in development (see Appendix D). A letter of informed consent was also included with the survey. The following gender-specific Maine-based youth organizations were contacted via letter and survey: Crossroads for Women, Women, Work and Community, Maine Girls Collaborative Project, Maine Business and Professional Women, The Women's Wilderness Institute, Maine Media Women, Maine Women's Fund, Maine Women's Network, Coastal Studies for Girls, The

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Girl Scouts of Maine, Zoey's Room, Maine Women's Lobby, A Company of Girls, Mainely Girls, Girls, Inc., and Girls on the Run. These organizations were chosen because of their single-sex program approach, their affiliation or direct work with youth, as well as their location in Maine (this list was compiled by myself, the HGHW President, and the HGHW Vice President of Research and Programs).

I have also interviewed the President and the Vice President of Research and Programs at HGHW to gain their perspectives, as well as outcome goals. The interview questions focused on what the initial vision of GAB was when first formed seven years ago, what the short-term and long-term goals are now (for both the girls and the program), what improvements could be made, what the successes are, and what my research could be utilized for in the organization (see HGHW staff sample interview, Appendix E).

The design of the survey and interview questions was based off of Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets. Search Institute is an independent nonprofit organization whose vision is to create healthy communities and create a world where all young people are valued and thrive (Search Institute, 2011). This is very close to HGHW's theory and trainings to create "hardiness zones" in communities—or places where girls and women cope with stress and thrive (Debold et al, 1999). Search Institute's mission is to "provide catalytic leadership, breakthrough knowledge, and innovative resources to advance the health of children, youth, family, and communities" (Search Institute, 2011). It has been a renowned source for conducting surveys and high-level research since 1990, when it launched its concept of Developmental Assets, and now services over 600 communities in 45 states (Search Institute, 2011). The Developmental Assets are what the GAB alumni interview questions and survey were based on, as well as the Maine youth organization survey,



## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

The Developmental Assets are 40 common sense, positive experiences and qualities that help influence choices young people make and help them become caring, responsible, successful adults. Because of its basis in youth development, resiliency, and prevention research and its proven effectiveness, the Developmental Assets framework has become one of the most widely used approach to positive youth development in the United States (Search Institute, 2011).

There are eight categories within the 40 Developmental Assets, broken up into four internal assets and four external assets (see Appendix C). External assets are seen as the influences that young people have from family and community, and internal assets are seen as the motivation and competencies within the individual. These eight asset categories are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (the first four are external assets, the latter four are internal). Search Institute's research has proven that the fewer the assets a youth has, the higher the likelihood that they will engage in high risk behavior such as drug use, sexual activity, and poor academic performance (Search Institute, 2011).

Search Institute was also appealing to use in research for HGHW because of its asset-based approach, which is another similar philosophy to HGHWs strength-based approach; using youth as part of the solution, rather than seeing them as the problem. Furthermore, one of Search Institute's main sponsors is the Corporation for National and Community Service, which is the federal agency governing AmeriCorps.

### **C. Analysis of Data/Findings**

As mentioned, 12 alumni were interviewed and 13 returned their pre-interview surveys. The quantitative data collected showed that 12 identified themselves as Caucasian females between the ages of 18 and 23, and the thirteenth survey did not answer this question (and

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

wished to remain anonymous). Eight identified their socioeconomic status during GAB as middle class, two as upper middle class, and three did not know. Seven entered GAB as freshmen in high school, four as juniors, and two as seniors. The alumni who responded served between one term (one semester) and eight terms (all four years of high school), with three who were unsure of how many terms they served.

When answering the pre-interview survey question regarding whether they felt supported by HGHW staff while serving in GAB, a resounding 12 out of 13 respondents replied “yes,” with the one who did not reply “yes,” saying that she “did not feel as though the staff at Hardy Girls were ever included in my actual personal support system, or that I felt particularly supported while at HGHW, in comparison to before and after” (Ende, K. 2012). All pre-interview questions were submitted via mail or fax; eleven interviews were by phone, and one via Skype.

I did receive one additional pre-interview survey and consent form from an alumna that wished to remain anonymous (previously mentioned above). She did not complete the quantitative questions on the survey, but did say she felt supported by HGHW staff.

Other pre-interview survey questions collected information of how GAB alumni first heard of HGHW, why they became interested, what they enjoyed best about being part of GAB, what ways the GAB program could improve, and two questions about feminism (as HGHW refers to itself as a feminist organization). A blank pre-interview survey can be found in Appendix A.

There were approximately five interview questions in each of the five categories sought to measure development: volunteer experience/community service, leadership roles, HGHW agency (increased equality, independence, and safety), academic performance, and stronger

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

voice/sense of self. One question that had to be adjusted was in the first section, volunteer experience/community service—I had forgotten to ask what volunteer service the alumni had been engaged in prior to GAB, so this question was added during the first interview, and then remained in the interview guide.

Each section asked how they felt or partook in an experience before GAB, during GAB, and after GAB, to attain a sense of timeline and overall developmental assets. The questions were a mix of internal and external assets—for example, HGHW agency were questions on their own equality, independence, and safety (which are part of the HGHW vision), as well as how they have looked at or influenced others' equality, independence, and safety, and fall under an external asset on Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets, in "Support." The last category, stronger voice/sense of self, measures an internal asset, under "Positive Identity" in the 40 Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2006). The first three categories, volunteer experience/community service, leadership roles, and HGHW agency: increased equality, independence and safety, all fall under external assets, with the remaining two categories of academic performance and stronger voice/sense of self falling under the internal assets, though there are elements to each of these categories that concern both external and internal assets—such as a sense of purpose that is felt and achieved through community service, though technically they are separated as internal and external.

Now, breaking into each category of questions individually, percentages of interview responses can be discussed. First, volunteer experience/community service. The questions asked what service, if any, GAB alumni were involved in prior to GAB, post-GAB, what their roles were, if they felt GAB influenced them in how they approached volunteer roles (and in what way), what knowledge GAB provided them with, what they think they could have provided

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

more of, and if they felt that their GAB experience led them to volunteer more (either during or post-program). When answering if she thought GAB influenced how she approaches volunteer roles now, alumnus Kate Bengtson said,

GAB influenced the thought process, for everyone to contribute and be appreciated, [it] helped me be more productive on these new boards where tension can be high with few people. GAB really taught me how to work through that and see the greater goal, with a respectful attitude (K. Bengtson, personal communication, March 5, 2012).

Six of the twelve respondents (50%) said that they did not have any prior volunteer experience to GAB, one was unsure, and five had experience in school or at one-time community events. Eleven out of the twelve (91.6%) said that they have volunteered post-GAB, in a variety of roles including at youth centers, women centers, college campuses, church, tutoring, political campaigning, writing for a newspaper, and at other nonprofits. Both of these numbers are rather significant—it means that half of respondents began their volunteer experience in GAB, and continued to pursue community service after. In fact, eight out of the 12 said that they think GAB directly resulted in them volunteering more after leaving the program, with three saying no, and one who was unsure. Ten out of the 12 (or 83.3%) replied that GAB influenced how they approach volunteer roles, emphasizing that it brought community awareness and provided organizational skills. The types of volunteer knowledge the alumni listed were ways to contribute to society, structure for projects, discussions on girl culture and pressures, meeting girls and being exposed to other nonprofits and adults in the field.

“I definitely think GAB helped a lot with being able to speak about what I thought was right and being able to express my opinions,” said alumnus Beth Preston in response to whether her GAB experience influenced how she approached volunteer roles (B. Preston, personal communication, March 14, 2012).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

When asked what volunteer knowledge GAB could have provided more of, about 33% of the alumni would have liked to have volunteered more in a diversity of activities while in GAB, and earlier on in their terms. Many also noted in their replies that they were part of the initial start-up GAB group, and therefore were part of a lot of initial planning, but not necessarily with many volunteer projects themselves.

Overall, GAB seems to correlate with the alumni seeking to continue serving in their communities after they are no longer in the HGHW leadership program. When answering whether she thought that GAB led her to volunteer more, alumna Ali Reynolds said, “Definitely. Working for GAB just makes you feel good all-around because you just know that you’re part of something bigger than yourself and you just get addicted to that feeling” (A. Reynolds, personal communication, March 9, 2012).

The next category was leadership roles. Questions on leadership roles included what roles were taken prior to GAB, post-GAB, whether they felt GAB increased their leadership skills, what skills they think they could have sharpened, and whether or not they felt that GAB was their leadership base, or if they have always been inclined to take on these roles. Alumna Beth Preston said,

I think that I’ve always kind of been a leader, but I think that GAB helped me to gain those skills. I also think that having mentors like Jackie and Megan to look up to was really important to me, seeing how they operate, and taking those skills into account with leading myself was important (B. Preston, personal communication, March 14, 2012).

Almost all of the alumni said that they were involved in various leadership roles prior to GAB (many of whom were middle school students prior to joining). Only one responded that she had not been involved with any leadership roles. Roles mentioned were school clubs and

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

sports teams. One hundred percent of respondents said that they have taken on leadership roles post-GAB, ranging from participation in college clubs, being involved in state leadership programs, sports and school clubs, or being a manager at a restaurant.

Eleven out of 12 (91.6%) of respondents replied that they thought GAB increased their leadership skills, and the majority of respondents (66.7%) said that they think GAB was part of their leadership base, but that they have always been naturally inclined to take on these roles. Skills members wished they could have sharpened included organizational skills, balancing schedules, public speaking, being a bit more open-minded and also more help navigating through the process of blaming others (“boys” mentioned in particular) when going through the thought process of the problems they saw themselves facing. A few mentioned better initial organization and member attendance, in particular when GAB was originally forming. Alumnus Allison Putnam said,

I think joining GAB gave me an opportunity to interact with a really cool, small group of girls who I felt comfortable talking to, and it helped me to kind of come out of my shell and see that it was okay to voice my opinion, and take leadership roles, and be willing to embrace leadership roles (A. Putnam, personal communication, March 25, 2012).

In regards to the HGHW agency vision of increased equality, independence, and safety, the alumni were asked what their feelings were on these issues before GAB, during GAB (if their knowledge and awareness changed and in what ways), if GAB taught them to increase these three qualities in the lives around them (if yes, how so), if they apply these skills in their life today, and if their awareness of issues on equality, independence, and safety has increased since leaving GAB.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Responses to the first two questions varied, with most alumni saying they felt safe growing up in rural Maine communities (with the exception of one alumni who discussed an incident of sexual assault freshman year in high school, which led her to participate in GAB), had a relative feeling of independence (most did not have their own license or car, etc.), and felt naive about equality—thinking that everyone deserved equality and had a fair chance, but that they learned more as they grew (through GAB and other experiences) and realized there is a system involved, and that equality is a much larger issue than they initially understood.

Eleven out of the 12 alumni (about 91.67%) said that they felt their awareness of equality, independence and safety increased during GAB, but two said that the safety element could have been emphasized more. One hundred percent of respondents said that they thought GAB taught them to increase these qualities in lives around them, as well as 100% felt that their awareness of equality, safety, and independence has increased post-GAB, whether through becoming more global citizens or taking college courses on these topics.

In response to increasing equality, independence, and safety in lives around her during GAB, Kate Bengtson said,

GAB gave us personal interaction skills, especially through GRW [Girls Rock Weekend] and GU [Girls Unlimited] conference, to actually talk and present to girls in the community who may not have heard these things before, and how to do that effectively, respectfully, and at their level (K. Bengtson, personal communication, March 5, 2012).

In agreement, alumnus Thalia Matthews said in her interview, “Absolutely, I think that I became a better well-rounded adult, and I was able to educate others and bring my education elsewhere,” (T. Matthews, personal communication, March 21, 2012).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

The fourth category, academic performance, data is as follows: 83.33% said that they performed strongly academically before entering GAB, and 75% said that GAB did not increase their academic performance and priority; most acknowledging that they did not need assistance to be pushed academically because they were doing so themselves prior to GAB. A majority of respondents, 66.67% said that GAB influenced career and higher education choices, in particular fields that they studied in school, such as women's studies, equality, and one mentioned a high interest in an all-girls school directly due to her experience in all-girls GAB. Nine out of the 12 alumni are currently students in high school or higher education, and all of them say that they are doing well, or even on the Dean's list. Finally, the skills mentioned most commonly that GAB provided which they applied to higher education were networking, activism with HGHW online (signing petitions), help from working in a group, and receiving recommendation letters, scholarship help, and job references from HGHW staff. Thalia Matthews even said that Williams (President of HGHW) and Dupont (Vice President of Research and Programs) were the second people she called after being accepted into Southern Maine Community College (T. Matthews, personal communication, March 21, 2012).

“Everyone has an opinion, but only a few people have a voice. If my opinion matches someone else's, I can be a voice for them as well. Having a voice has been so much more important to me after GAB because now I have to find my own ways to speak out,” said Ali Reynolds (A. Reynolds, personal communication, March 9, 2012). One hundred percent of respondents agreed with Ali, as all said that they thought their sense of self and voice changed while being in GAB—by being louder, feeling recognized, and feeling passionate about something.



## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

The alumni all were divided in how confident and comfortable they felt in themselves prior to GAB, splitting up just about in thirds as to whether they felt confident, not confident, or some confidence, but 11 out of the 12 (91.67%) responded that the way they viewed themselves changed throughout and after their GAB experience, and the one alumni who didn't, said that she was unsure because it is hard to pinpoint the timeframe of when such a change occurs. Many mentioned that GAB helped them break out of their shells and feel more confident.

HGHW staff—Williams and Dupont—were very pleased when some alumni quotes were shared during their interviews, “I’m just astounded at what the program has become today,” said Williams, who said that GAB was never originally intended to become a leadership program but a way for the girls to be integrated in the organization and engage in fun activities (M. Williams, personal communication, April 23, 2012). When Dupont began overseeing GAB in its second year, the program became much more leadership-based, said Williams. Both Williams and Dupont agreed that they learned from the alumni interviews that the girls could be offered more programming focused on safety, and plan to bring back Rape Aggression Defense System training (RADS), which they had members take part in for a few of the years. Williams also hopes to improve the program by continually reaching out to include a diverse group of girls, in order to represent all girls—diversity in race, ability, social class, etc. Dupont also hopes that the program will be a great networking tool for the girls in the future,

Long-term goals for the program would be to continue building the leadership capacity and overall create a network of young women that stay connected to the organization as they move through college and into their adult lives. I think that was kind of the intention in creating the Facebook page—how do we keep them connected to each other and the organization. Long-term goals for the girls themselves would be that they get the experience that enables them to feel empowered and self-sufficient, and individual goals of staying connected to each other and to stay involved with women’s issues (J. Dupont, personal communication, April 23, 2012).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

I did not have much success in having other Maine-based gender-specific youth programs fill out my survey, or respond to have an interview. Crossroads for Women, Maine Girls Collaborative Project, and Maine Women's Network had responded that they would respond, although they work with mostly adult women rather than girls, but never returned the survey after several contacts. Maine Media Women and Maine Women's Fund did not do direct youth work, but rather grant-writing workshops for girls where outcomes were not measured. Coastal Studies for Girls and A Company of Girls responded that they would have anecdotal information, but they do not have the capacity or funds to measure program outcomes. I offered to interview for anecdotal information, but never heard a response. There was no current contact information for Zoey's Room, as it is being updated online, Girls on the Run has just begun to start in Maine, and there is no Girls, Inc. affiliate in Maine as previously thought. I never heard back from the remaining organizations not listed, after several attempts to contact, except for Mainely Girls who provided anecdotal information. Correspondence with these organizations can be found under Additional Research Materials. Many had very positive responses to my capstone project, were curious to find out results, and stated that they would love to implement a system to track their participants and outcomes, but the majority did not have the funds or staff time to dedicate in order to do so.

Mary Orear is the founder of Mainely Girls, a statewide nonprofit focusing to bring about change for girls on a state level, as well as work with individual girls in rural communities through middle school and high school book clubs and eating disorder awareness and assistance programs. Mainely Girls does not have the capacity to measure program development, but has heard responses from participants such as "If it hadn't been for Mainely Girls, I never would

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

have made it through high school,” and “that conference [on eating disorders] saved my life” (M. Orear, personal communication, April 4, 2012).

In regards to measuring external assets, anecdotally, participants felt supported and empowered—some even contacted Orear to let her know that they started their own book clubs in college and in other states where they relocated. Also, that they talk up more in class, have more confidence, and realize that their opinions matter. The book clubs allow young women and adults to work alongside girls in a shared space where personal issues can be explored through books. Girls’ opinions are validated.

For internal assets, girls frequently wrote to Orear that they read a lot more on their own and became better readers, as well as became excited about reading, which showed an increase in commitment to learning. Mainly Girls also received a lot of feedback from their annual conferences on eating disorder awareness, where they promote positive identity within youth—so that they have a healthy self-esteem and outlook of the future. Orear is currently in the process of creating a Maine eating disorder association.

## **D. Discussion**

### **1. Conclusions**

The purpose of gathering this research and capstone project was to determine girl development outcomes for a Hardy Girls Healthy Women leadership program, using the Girls Advisory Board as a case study. By contacting other Maine-based gender-specific youth programs, the hope was to learn best practices to develop a tracking system for participants where all of their information is in one space at Hardy Girls Healthy Women, and their outcome evaluations are easily accessible.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Changes that were made to the interview guide during the interview process were small, but necessary. As mentioned previously, the first set of questions regarding volunteer experience and community service did not initially ask the alumni to provide information on what they participated in prior to GAB, so that was added in right away. Also, the last question, regarding whether the way they view themselves has changed should have been made clearer. Verbally, I asked the girls to specifically think to the time before they were in GAB, while they were in GAB, and after leaving the program if their view had changed, but considering they were growing in many different areas of life, it is hard to pin point how strong GAB played in that shift over other school and community groups the girls were involved in at the time.

It can be concluded that GAB members are natural leaders, as well as trained leaders. GAB exposes young women to issues of equality, independence, and safety and equips them with not only the tools to become more aware themselves, but to raise awareness and compassion in others. A very high rate of GAB alumni experienced a stronger sense of self and voice after participating in the program for various lengths of time, and have continued to be involved in their communities and school environments since. Areas of improvement for the GAB program that alumni noted, would be to have a larger amount and variety of community service projects executed by GAB themselves and earlier on, as well as a stronger connection to how the people they serve were affected. It is important to note that many of the GAB alumni interviewed were from the initial starting group, and therefore GAB programming has naturally evolved and become more congruent since seven years ago.

## **2. Practical applicability**

The conclusions drawn were from interviewing GAB alumni. To make this project more effective, it would be beneficial for the new participants of GAB to have an incoming interview, perhaps an evaluation after each semester long term, as well as an exit interview, and one several years down the line to determine long-term impact.

A system similar to this, with an initial evaluation, mid-term evaluation, and long-term evaluation (by interview and survey) would benefit the sixteen Maine-based girl-focused youth organizations listed above (even if they serve women, I think it would benefit them), and has been mentioned to me from them if funding were not an issue. To receive grant money, programs need to fulfill certain aspects of project execution and outcome, but it seems there needs to be a clearer, more efficient and cost-effective way to distinguish program outcome, in particular when it concerns girl development and the 40 Developmental Assets, to ensure as many assets are provided and fulfilled as possible.

## **3. Recommendations for Further Research**

Another survey approach was analyzed that could be utilized with this capstone research and distributed within the HGHW organization in the future to look at the efficiency and effectiveness of each program; the Youth PQA: Program Quality Assessment. It is one method of measuring youth program outcomes that is used by Communities for Children and Youth (C4CY) in Maine. The Youth PQA is a validated assessment tool designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and to identify staff training needs (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005).

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

The Youth PQA outlines a set of score-able standards for best practices in after-school programs, community organizations, schools, summer programs, and could be adapted for other programs involving youth. It provides “a shared language for practice” and decision-making by producing scores that can be used for comparison and assessment of program progress over time. It is experience-tested, research-based, and flexible so that it can be adjusted for self-assessment, research, and evaluation (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005).

There are several different categories, or “scales,” that the Youth PQA uses for assessment, with subcategories, or “subscale,” ratings of 1, 3 or 5. The average of the subscale ratings is the score for that category.

For example, one category is “1. Safe Environment” and its subscale is “1-A. Psychological and emotional safety is promoted.” There are 1, 3, and 5 indicators, ranging from a negative climate to a predominantly positive climate, with room for supporting evidence and staff anecdotes on the side. In this case, there are only two indicators: the emotional climate, and comments and slurs, so the average is these two scores divided in half (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005).

This assessment evaluates four categories: Safe Environment, Supportive Environment, Interaction, and Engagement. Then the data is compiled on a summary sheet at the end with all of the scores in one place.

The Youth PQA is one option for future use, as well as utilizing the GAB alumni qualitative interview research to establish a system and timeline of measuring developmental assets of members of the program when they enter, mid-way through their term, when they exit, and several years post-program, entered into an online database system where records can be

Gender-specific youth program outcomes

more easily maintained and updated. Contact information can be kept current, and program goals can be annually analyzed (or whenever most appropriate).

#### **4. Skills Developed**

“Personal qualities such as having an open and enquiring mind, being a good listener, general sensitivity, and responsiveness to contradictory evidence are needed,” said Robson when expressing what is needed in an investigator doing flexible design research (2002, p. 167-168). These are skills that I have sharpened over the duration of my RPP by interviewing 12 alumni, two HGHW staff members, and one Maine nonprofit founder. These interviews certainly put into practice strong listening skills and an enquiring mind—and also sensitivity at times, when discussions reached a more personal level with several of the alumni.

The skills learned during this research process include learning specific development outcomes of the GAB alumni and relating outcomes to girl development in the U.S. although there is always room for more learning. Great anecdotal evidence has been collected, but in the future it would be fortunate to gain more quantitative data throughout the duration of the participant’s engagement with HGHW—from first day, mid-way, last day, and years down the line, which would require several years of data collection. Creating a database tracking system of GAB alumni and applying it to other programs at HGHW has been started with updating alumni contact information and collecting alumni data.

#### **5. Limitations**

I learned more about gender-specific youth programming and established connections with GAB members. An area to improve on would be trying out a variety of survey techniques and communication methods when asking for other organization’s knowledge, but most of the

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

nonprofits replied that they simply were unable to measure the development assets I was inquiring about. This proved to be a great challenge, but is a learning experience, and shows that this research work is needed and would be useful to many organizations.

### **6. Final Comments**

Modern theory and current girl culture in the United States has been explored throughout this capstone project, with Orenstein and Eliot providing both scientific and anecdotal evidence of the societal pressures on youth today, in particular health factors that result from the oversexualization and stereotyping of girls in the media and stereotypes that have become societal norms. Youth program leadership outcomes were explored in several case studies—SIT’s peace-building camp results with the Turkish and Greek Cypriot youth, and Whitman High School’s student forum.

Through shared power and leadership, as expressed in these programs and also reflected in the Girls Advisory Board, positive results were found in interviewing the 12 alumni. In the end, several of Search Institute’s 40 Developmental Assets increased during and after terms in GAB in the areas of volunteer/community service, leadership roles, agency vision, and stronger voice/sense of self, with academic priority staying about the same (and is an area alumni admitted that they were already fulfilling themselves). Data collected allows the HGHW staff to reflect on the successes of GAB, as well as learn ways to improve from the alumni feedback. This type of organizational learning reflects the quality and dedication of the HGHW staff and the commitment and connection alumni feel to the program well after they have left it.



## REFERENCES

- Brown, L.M. & Lamb, S. (2006). *Packaging Girlhood*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.
- Brown, L.M. & Gilligan, C. (1992). *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Debold, E., Brown, L., Weseen, S. & Brookins, G.K. (1999). Cultivating hardiness zones for adolescent girls: A reconceptualization of resilience in relationships with caring adults. In N. Johnson, M. Roberts, & J. Worell (Eds.), *Beyond appearance: A new look at adolescent girls*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- DiBenedetto, A. & Ungerleider, J. (1997). "Empowering Students to Address Current Issues: The Vermont Governor's Institute on Public Issues and Youth Empowerment." San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Eliot, L. (2009). *Pink brain, blue brain: how small differences grow into troublesome gaps--and what we can do about it*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Hardy Girls. (2010). *Hardy Girls Healthy Women*. Retrieved from [www.hghw.org](http://www.hghw.org).
- Hardy Girls. (2011). *Powered By Girl*. Retrieved from [www.poweredbygirl.org](http://www.poweredbygirl.org).
- High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. (2005). *Youth PQA: Program Quality Assessment*. Michigan: High/Scope Press.
- Jennings, L., Parra-Medina, D., Messias, D. & McLoughlin, K. (2006) "Toward a Critical Social Theory of Youth Empowerment," in *Youth Participation and Community Change*. Barry Checkoway and Lorraine Gutiérrez, eds., The Haworth Press, pp. 31-55.

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Kipp, T. (2004). "Teaching Youth Empowerment." *Challenging Child Labor: Education and Youth Action to Stop the Exploitation of Children*. Brattleboro: School for International Training.

Mitra, D. (2006). "Increasing Student Voice and Moving Towards Youth Leadership," *The Prevention Researcher*. Vol. 13, (1), February.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Search Institute. (2011). *Discovering what kids need to succeed*. Retrieved January 2012, from <http://www.search-institute.org/>

Search Institute. (2006). *What Kids Need: The Building Blocks for Children and Youth*. Retrieved from <http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets>.

Sullivan, A. (1996). "From mentor to muse: Recasting the role of women in relation to urban adolescent girls." In B.J. Ross Leadbeater & N. Way (Eds.), *Urban girls: Resisting stereotypes, creating identities* (pp. 227–249). New York: New York University Press.

Ungerleider, J. (2011). "The Impact of Youth Peacebuilding Camps: Connectedness, Coping, and Collaboration," *Cyprus Review*, Vol. 18, (1), Spring.

Ungerleider, J. (2011). "Structured Youth Dialogue to Empower Peacebuilding and Leadership," in *Critical and Reflective Practice in Education*, Vol. 3, 2011.

## Appendix A

### Girls Advisory Board Letter of Informed Consent

January 15, 2012

Alaina Ennamorati  
Programs Coordinator/AmeriCorps  
Hardy Girls Healthy Women  
P.O. Box 821  
14 Common Street  
Waterville, ME 04903  
p. (207) 861.8131  
f. (207) 615.0154

Dear Girls Advisory Board Alumni,

Greetings! I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Alaina Ennamorati, and I am the Programs Coordinator and AmeriCorps member at Hardy Girls Healthy Women for the year. I am in the second year of my master's program at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, studying nonprofit management and youth programs. I am focusing my capstone project at Hardy Girls on outcomes of the Girls Advisory Board. I would love to be able to interview you for one hour on your experience in GAB, and your development post-program.

My inquiry question is: In what ways does gender-specific research-based youth programming affect girls' development post-program? I will be asking you questions based on the following categories, based off of the Search Institute's 40 Development Assets for Adolescents (ages 12-18):

6. Volunteer experience/Community Service
7. Leadership roles
8. Agency: Increased Equality, Independence, and Safety
9. Academic Performance

Gender-specific youth program outcomes

10. Stronger Voice/Sense of Self

I also have enclosed a short pre-interview survey to gather demographic information with questions for you to begin thinking about your experience with GAB and provide us some initial feedback. By signing below, you agree to have your name and responses published in my capstone paper for public view at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT. You may opt-out of answering any questions during the interview, or request that your name remain anonymous. I will keep requested personal information confidential and private, and send you a transcript of the interview and data gathered before publication in July 2012.

I hope you will choose to join me in my research, as I hope to develop a tracking system for Hardy Girls to apply to their Girls Advisory Board program, in an effort to better meet the needs of girls. Thank you kindly for your participation!

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand and agree to the conditions outlined in the GAB Letter of Informed Consent.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

Please mail or fax a signed copy of this GAB Letter of Informed Consent to:  
Hardy Girls Healthy Women  
Attn: Alaina Ennamorati, Programs Coordinator  
P.O. Box 821, Waterville, ME. 04903, fax: (207) 615.0514

GAB Pre-Interview Survey

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Hometown (if different from above) \_\_\_\_\_  
Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex: \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of terms in GAB (1 semester=1 term) \_\_\_\_\_  
Socioeconomic status during GAB \_\_\_\_\_  
Current Socioeconomic status \_\_\_\_\_

1. What grade were you in when you entered GAB? (Please circle) What age were you?
  - a.) Freshman
  - b.) Sophomore
  - c.) Junior
  - d.) Senior
2. How did you find out about Hardy Girls Healthy Women?
  - a.) Family or Friend
  - b.) School
  - c.) Online
  - d.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. How did you find out about the Girls Advisory Board?
  - a.) Family or Friend
  - b.) School
  - c.) Online
  - d.) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Why were you interested in becoming a member of GAB?
5. What were some things you enjoyed best about GAB?
6. Did you feel supported by Hardy Girls staff while in GAB?
7. In what ways could the GAB program improve?
8. HGHW describes itself as a feminist organization, what does this mean to you?  
Would you describe yourself as a feminist? Why or why not?

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

9. What do you believe it means for a girl or woman to be a feminist? How does our society feel about feminism? What are some stereotypes?

*Thank you kindly for participating in this survey.*

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Girls Advisory Board Alum

#### In What Ways Does Gender-specific Research-based Youth Programming Affect Girls' Development Post-Program?

##### Measuring:

11. Volunteer experience/Community Service
12. Leadership roles
13. Agency: Increased Equality, Independence, and Safety
14. Academic Performance
15. Stronger Voice/Sense of Self

##### 1. Volunteer Experience/Community Service

- What, if any, volunteer experience and community service have you been involved in pre-GAB? What were your roles?
- What, if any, volunteer experience and community service have you been involved in post-GAB? What were your roles?
- Do you think your GAB experience influenced how you approached this role? In what way?
- What volunteer knowledge did GAB provide you with? What knowledge do you wish GAB provided more of?
- Do you think your GAB experience led you to volunteer more?

##### 2. Leadership Roles

- What leadership roles did you take part in in high school?
- What leadership roles did you take part in post-high school?
- Did GAB increase your leadership skills?
- What skills do you think you could have sharpened better?
- Do you think GAB was your leadership base, or have you always been inclined to take on these roles?

##### 3. Agency Vision: Increased Equality, Independence, and Safety

- Before you entered GAB, what were your feelings and thoughts about equality? Did you have a sense of independence? How safe did you feel on any given day?
- During GAB, did your knowledge/awareness change about issues of equality, independence, and safety? In what ways?
- Did GAB teach you to increase equality, independence, and safety in lives around you? How?
- Do you apply these skills in your life today?

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

- Did your awareness of these three issues increase post-GAB?

### 4. Academic Performance

- Would you consider yourself strong academically in high school pre-GAB?
- Did your term(s) in GAB result in an increase in academic performance and priority?
- Do you think GAB influenced career or higher education choices post-high school?
- Are you in school now--how are you doing/how did you perform academically in higher education if you attended?
- What skills did GAB provide you with that you applied to your education and current career? Were you able to network through GAB/pursue internship opportunities as a direct result to contacts made?

### 5. Stronger Voice/Sense of Self

- How confident and comfortable were you as a high school student pre-GAB?
- Did your sense of self or voice change while serving in GAB? How?
- Have you self-reflected on your GAB experience and how it affected you positively or negatively as a young woman?
- What are some examples you can give where you've used your voice to create change post-GAB?
- Has the way you view yourself changed?

Other information to gather and be aware of: what other organizations, clubs, mentors, influenced you during high school (can outcomes solely be a result of GAB involvement, or are there many other factors?) Ask to reflect back on GAB duties and what they specifically remember as areas of personal impact.



## Appendix C



### 40 Developmental Assets® for Adolescents (ages 12-18)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets®**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.



<b>External Assets</b>	<b>Support</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Family support</b>—Family life provides high levels of love and support.</li> <li>2. <b>Positive family communication</b>—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.</li> <li>3. <b>Other adult relationships</b>—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.</li> <li>4. <b>Caring neighborhood</b>—Young person experiences caring neighbors.</li> <li>5. <b>Caring school climate</b>—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.</li> <li>6. <b>Parent involvement in schooling</b>—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Empowerment</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. <b>Community values youth</b>—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.</li> <li>8. <b>Youth as resources</b>—Young people are given useful roles in the community.</li> <li>9. <b>Service to others</b>—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.</li> <li>10. <b>Safety</b>—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Boundaries &amp; Expectations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. <b>Family boundaries</b>—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person’s whereabouts.</li> <li>12. <b>School Boundaries</b>—School provides clear rules and consequences.</li> <li>13. <b>Neighborhood boundaries</b>—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people’s behavior.</li> <li>14. <b>Adult role models</b>—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.</li> <li>15. <b>Positive peer influence</b>—Young person’s best friends model responsible behavior.</li> <li>16. <b>High expectations</b>—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Constructive Use of Time</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. <b>Creative activities</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.</li> <li>18. <b>Youth programs</b>—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.</li> <li>19. <b>Religious community</b>—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.</li> <li>20. <b>Time at home</b>—Young person is out with friends “with nothing special to do” two or fewer nights per week.</li> </ol>	
	<b>Internal Assets</b>	<b>Commitment to Learning</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. <b>Achievement Motivation</b>—Young person is motivated to do well in school.</li> <li>22. <b>School Engagement</b>—Young person is actively engaged in learning.</li> <li>23. <b>Homework</b>—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.</li> <li>24. <b>Bonding to school</b>—Young person cares about her or his school.</li> <li>25. <b>Reading for Pleasure</b>—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.</li> </ol>
		<b>Positive Values</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. <b>Caring</b>—Young person places high value on helping other people.</li> <li>27. <b>Equality and social justice</b>—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.</li> <li>28. <b>Integrity</b>—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.</li> <li>29. <b>Honesty</b>—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”</li> <li>30. <b>Responsibility</b>—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.</li> <li>31. <b>Restraint</b>—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.</li> </ol>
		<b>Social Competencies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. <b>Planning and decision making</b>—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.</li> <li>33. <b>Interpersonal Competence</b>—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.</li> <li>34. <b>Cultural Competence</b>—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.</li> <li>35. <b>Resistance skills</b>—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.</li> <li>36. <b>Peaceful conflict resolution</b>—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.</li> </ol>
		<b>Positive Identity</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. <b>Personal power</b>—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”</li> <li>38. <b>Self-esteem</b>—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.</li> <li>39. <b>Sense of purpose</b>—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”</li> <li>40. <b>Positive view of personal future</b>—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.</li> </ol>

This page may be reproduced for educational, noncommercial uses only. Copyright © 1997, 2006 by Search Institute, 615 First Avenue N.E., Suite 125, Minneapolis, MN 55413; 800-888-7828; www.search-institute.org. All Rights Reserved.  
 The following are registered trademarks of Search Institute: Search Institute®, Developmental Assets® and Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth®.

**Appendix D**

Maine Youth Organization Letter of Informed Consent

January 15, 2012

Alaina Ennamorati  
Programs Coordinator/AmeriCorps  
Hardy Girls Healthy Women  
P.O. Box 821  
14 Common Street  
Waterville, ME 04903  
p. (207) 861.8131  
f. (207) 615.0154

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Greetings! I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Alaina Ennamorati, and I am the Programs Coordinator and AmeriCorps member at Hardy Girls Healthy Women in Waterville, Maine. I grew up in Waldoboro, Maine and am in the second year of my master's program at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont studying nonprofit management and youth programs. I am focusing my capstone project at Hardy Girls on outcomes of our leadership program, the Girls Advisory Board.

I am sending out a survey to gender-specific youth programs in Maine in hopes to share knowledge on tracking outcomes in leadership programs. I would love to have you complete the enclosed survey, or perform a thirty-minute phone interview based on your experience in youth development post-program.

My inquiry question is: In what ways does gender-specific research-based youth programming lead to girls' development post-program? I'm basing my questions off of Search

Gender-specific youth program outcomes

Institute's 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents (ages 12-18). I will be asking you questions based on how you measure outcomes, and if you measure the following categories:

- 16. Volunteer experience/Community Service
- 17. Leadership roles
- 18. Agency: Increased Equality, Independence, and Safety
- 19. Academic Performance
- 20. Stronger Voice/Sense of Self

I am interested in what additional outcomes you measure post-program, and how you conduct your tracking.

By signing below, you agree to have your name and responses published in my capstone paper for public view at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, VT. You may opt-out of answering any questions during the survey/interview, or request that your name remain anonymous. I will keep requested personal information confidential and private, and send you a transcript of the survey/interview and data gathered before publication in July 2012.

I hope you will choose to join me in my research, as I hope to develop a tracking system for Hardy Girls to apply to their Girls Advisory Board program, in an effort to better meet the needs of Maine girls. Thank you kindly for your participation!

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand and agree to the conditions outlined in this Letter of Informed Consent.

\_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date

Initial here if you request to submit information anonymously \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail or fax a signed copy of this Letter of Informed Consent to:  
Hardy Girls Healthy Women  
Attn: Alaina Ennamorati, Programs Coordinator  
P.O. Box 821, Waterville, ME. 04903, fax: (207) 615.0514

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

### Maine Gender-specific Youth Organization Survey

Please fill in the blank with the most appropriate answer. Feel free to elaborate where necessary, or to write N/A if your organization does not track this asset.

The areas of girl development my organization measures are:

#### External Assets

1. Support – How does your organization make sure girls are adequately supported by caring adults or role models in their lives?
2. Empowerment—How does your organization involve youth as leaders in the community?
3. Boundaries and Expectations—In what ways does your programming challenge youth to succeed? What expectations do you have of participants?
4. Constructive Use of Time—How do you draw out participants' own creativity and put it to use? How are participants physically active during programming?

#### Internal Assets

5. Commitment to Learning—How does your organization support participants' participation and motivation in school?
6. Positive Values—In what ways does your organization foster caring and responsible behavior amongst participants?
7. Social Competencies—How does your programming help participants resolve conflicts peacefully and is culturally sensitive?

## Gender-specific youth program outcomes

8. Positive Identity—In what ways does your programming ensure youth have a healthy self-esteem and positive outlook of the future?

Please circle the appropriate answers.

9. My organization measures girl development during program by:
- a.) Surveying alumni
  - b.) Interviewing alumni
  - c.) Feedback from parents
  - d.) All of the above

Please explain in further detail:

10. My organization measures program outcomes post-program by:
- e.) Surveying alumni
  - f.) Interviewing alumni
  - g.) Feedback from parents
  - h.) All of the above

Please explain in further detail:

11. Our program is very successful at:

12. Our program could improve results in the following areas:

*Thank you so much for kindly filling out this survey.*

## **Appendix E**

### Interview Questions for HGHW Staff

1. When you first started GAB seven years ago, what were your visions of what it would become?
2. What were your short-term goals for the GAB girls to learn and accomplish?
3. What were your long-term goals for both GAB and the members?
4. I'm going to read a few responses from GAB alumni from various years, some from the first year, some from very recent, and I'd like your reaction:
5. Where are areas of improvement you see for the program?
6. What do you think GAB does best as a program (the successes)?
7. What do you hope to utilize my research results for?
8. What results would you like to measure in the future?