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Toward a Definition of Transnational Girlhood

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Abstract

In this article, I join a conversation about the definition and value of the term transnational girlhood. After surveying the fields of transnationalism, transnational feminism, and girlhood studies, I reflect on the representation of girls who act or are discussed as transnational figures. I critique the use of the term, analyze movements that connect girls across borders, and close by identifying four features of transnational girlhood: cross-border connections based on girls' localized lived experiences; intersectional analysis that prioritizes the voices of girls from the Global South who, traditionally, have had fewer opportunities to speak than their Global North counterparts; recognition of girls' agency and the structural constraints, including global structures such as colonialism, international development, and transnational capitalism, in which they operate; and a global agenda for change.

Keywords

Introduction

In this article, I work with the term transnational girlhood to contribute to a dialogue about its definition and value for girls and adults working with girls. Dialogue about what constitutes transnational feminism has defined that field, legitimizing the importance of bringing together women from diverse contexts to learn from each other and mobilize collective resources for greater gains. The same consideration has not taken place regarding transnational girlhood; while the two terms are increasingly used together, an operational definition for the composite term has not been established. I suggest a framework for doing so that draws from the literature describing transnational feminism, girlhood, girls engaged in international activism, and cross-border girls' networks to identify key elements of transnational girlhood. I do so in the hope that scholars and activists can operate with a shared understanding of practices that are likely to create powerful spaces in which to understand transnational girls and support their activism. After grounding this discussion in literature from the fields of transnationalism, transnational feminism, and girlhood, I review existing work relating to transnational girlhood to describe applications of the term, consider potential movements and moments of transnational girls' activism, and highlight the ways in which girls who act or are discussed transnationally have been represented. I conclude by suggesting key characteristics of transnational girlhood and its applications.

Introducing Transnationalism

The term transnational refers to manifestations of globalization that cross nation-state borders. In contrast to globalization, which refers to processes that take place in a global space, largely disconnected from national territories, transnationalism refers to processes that are simultaneously linked to multiple national states (Kearney 1995). The term is often used in relation to capitalist ventures whose operations and assets spread across numerous nation-states

and create a form of global hegemonic capitalism (Robinson and Harris 2000). It is also used widely in reference to migration and diasporic communities since migrants often have many involvements in their home and host societies, fostering actions and identities that span national borders (Schiller et al. 1992). While migration across borders has always existed, in the 1990s there was a recognition that the complexity and mass of migration was changing, leading to the use of the term transnational migration to refer to the growing number of people who are financially and socially active simultaneously in different countries (Portes et al. 1999).

Increasingly, political, economic, and social activities transcend national borders through, for example, the transferring of remittances, political campaigns that speak to expatriates living abroad, or the ongoing migration of refugees who continually move across borders in search of safety (Portes et al. 1999; Westwood and Phizacklea 2000). While often referring to physical movement, the term also encompasses communication and cultural transfer across nation-states. Kevin Dunn (2010) argues for an embodied analysis of transnationalism that focuses on the experiences of individuals as they confront the opportunities and constraints of living within and crossing over national borders, including uneven access to mobility based on nationality, gender, disability, and race. A transnational person, action, or idea is connected to various nation-states and contributes to all these spaces, highlighting an experience of mobility across states while recognizing the ongoing power of national borders.

Transnational Feminisms

Here, I identify elements of transnational feminism that are applicable to transnational girlhood, including analysis that connects global structures and localized experiences within nation-states, intersectional lenses that prioritize the voices of traditionally marginalized women from the Global South, and a critical counter-hegemonic call for global systemic change. When the term

transnational is considered as an adjective qualifying girlhood, it is useful to examine it in relation to transnational feminism. The field of transnational feminism is infused with activist energy that responds to the spread of global capitalism and its harmful impacts on women, particularly those in Indigenous and racialized neo-colonial communities. Transnational feminism emerged from postcolonial feminism as a critical contrast to the terms global sisterhood, global feminism, and/or international feminism that obfuscated the diversity of women's agency in favor of universalized models of women's liberation that embraced Western concepts of individuality and modernity (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mendoza 2002). These theories were criticized for prioritizing Western feminist perspectives, "homogenizing women's struggles for sociopolitical justice, especially in colonial and neocolonial contexts" as Richa Nagar and Amanda Lock Swarr (2010: 4) remind us, and, for M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty (1997), reinscribing a center/periphery model in which women of color were on the periphery. Nagar and Swarr (2010) observe a plurality of transnational feminisms that all include intersectional means of attending to (neo)colonial hegemonic relations, a range of subjectivities emerging from individual and collective agency, and self-reflexivity that subverts predetermined feminist politics.

Local and Global

In the 1990s, two conceptions of transnational feminism emerged. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) problematize a "locational politics of global-local or center-periphery" (13) by emphasizing the many different centers of power that transcend national boundaries. They describe the "relationship of gender to scattered hegemonies such as global economic structures, patriarchal nationalisms, 'authentic' forms of tradition, local structures of domination and legal-juridical oppression on multiple levels" (17). For Tanjou Seodu Herr (2014), this concept

emphasized transnational connections and obscured local and national experiences of women in the Global South. Alexander and Mohanty (1997) stress the need for understanding local specificities to illuminate overarching global power structures, including the state itself, contending that the state must be central to analytical attempts to understand colonial legacies. Chandra Mohanty (2013) states that

> an explanatory account of the systemic nature of power does not entail inattentiveness to local contradictions or contexts of struggle … such a sociopolitical explanation enables recognition of those moments of rupture and possibility that counterhegemonic movements can use to build solidarities across borders. (969–970)

By emphasizing localized experiences of women in the Global South, transnational feminism resisted essentializing discourses that spoke for all women, pointing to the interactions between numerous social constructs that linked individual and community experiences to global structures of power.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, the theory established by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, is the analytic tool that recognizes that people and organizations are best understood if we consider the social divisions, such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, sexuality, and ability that characterize them, and the ways in which they interact with each other (Collins and Bilge 2016). Emerging from black feminist scholarship, intersectionality illustrates how the exclusion of women of color from anti-racism movements and feminism enables their disproportionate exposure to violence. Despite controversy regarding the term, Brittany Cooper (2016) observes that intersectionality's main argument that institutions use systems of domination whose effects doubly or triply constrain individuals at the intersection of multiple subordinated identity categories while

simultaneously elevating those experiencing different forms of privilege, remains a highly useful methodological and analytical concept. In transnational feminist analysis, emphasizing the intersection of social divisions enables a more comprehensive theorization of universal concerns and coalition-building across borders (Mohanty 2003), recognizes the power of feminisms outside the Global North (Mendoza 2002), and prioritizes the perspectives of women from the Global South (Herr 2014). Transnational feminists identify how global structures of patriarchy, capitalism, and colonialism affect women in the Global South and North differently, and they recommend intersectional analyses for all contexts. For example, in a cartography of transnational feminism in academia, Alexander and Mohanty (2010) analyze syllabi in women's, gender, and/or LGBTQ studies courses in thirteen North American universities, and criticize the syllabi's misuse of transnational feminism in reference to the Global South, ignoring the relevance of transnational feminist analysis in the Global North. Mohanty recognizes the work of feminist scholars who analyze "racialization and the politics pertaining to racial/ethnic immigrant women" (2013: 985) within their own localities, including in the Global North, encouraging agendas for change that recognize discrimination as experienced by women whose identity spans many social categories.

Movements for Change

Transnational feminism is often followed by activism and praxis or preceded by the word radical (Baksh and Harcourt 2015). While much transnational feminist work has taken place in academia, it has also been shaped by practical mobilization and service delivery, particularly by grassroots activists and non-government and multilateral organizations. Globalization has often intensified inequality, racism, and heterosexism, but it has also created an unprecedented platform for collaboration to undermine political and cultural hegemonies (Mendoza 2002). This

potential is extended through Information Communication Technologies that dismantle

private/public divides constraining who can speak, although they remain accessible only to those

with online connectivity (Youngs 2015). Nagar and Swarr (2010) propose transnational feminist

praxis as a bridge on which feminists from various perspectives can meet. Alexander and

Mohanty also call on academics to engage in radical praxis that politicizes their work and

themselves

> across the fictive boundaries of the academy, constantly wrestling with its costs, and
> knowing that the intellectual, spiritual and psychic stakes are high, but believing that it is
> imperative to engage in the struggles over the production of liberatory knowledges and
> subjectivities in the belly of the imperial beast. (2010: 42)

Much transnational feminist work uses critical approaches designed to produce change rather

than just discuss it.

Girlhood

I turn, now, to consider how these conversations about transnational feminism, in relation to their

emphasis on place, context-specificity, and intersectionality (Jiwani 2006; Rentschler and

Mitchell 2016) relate to girlhood studies, a field that is also concerned with critical conversations

about girls' voice, agency, and victimization (Bent 2016; Gilmore and Marshall 2010; Pomerantz

et al. 2013). The category of girl has various meanings, including being a reference to age and an

insult, as well as having connotations of community, inclusion, and solidarity (Jiwani et al.

2006). Although the word girl usually refers to female children or adolescents, women of a wide

age range also refer to themselves, or are referred to by others, as girls (Kirk et al. 2010). With

the recognition of trans and gender-nonconforming identities, the category of girl has expanded

to encompass all who identify as such, regardless of the sex assigned to them at birth.

The Place of Girls

Girlhood originally emerged as a Western construct, articulating the subject of girlhood studies as white, middle-class, heterosexual females in an English-speaking Western country (Jiwani et al. 2006; Weems 2014). The concept of girlhood has imposed an experience of Western girlhood on non-Western contexts in which the concept of girlhood or even childhood may be foreign (Hussein et al. 2006), often creating binaries between oppressive non-Western countries and an emancipatory, progressive West (Desai 2016; Khoja-Moolji 2017). This framing constructs non-Western cultures as backward, traditional, and violent toward women and girls, while ignoring violence perpetrated against girls and women in the West (Narayan 1998), much like the global sisterhood movements that transnational feminism subverted.

Like transnational feminists, many contemporary girlhood scholars advocate for context-specificity to understand girlhood in a place that is both social and spatial. Carrie Rentschler and Claudia Mitchell (2016) advocate for a focus on place as a means of examining girlhood and its interaction with media, social, historical, geographical, and methodological discourses. The focus on location also enables a political analysis of the ways in which girlhood is uniquely gendered, sexed, raced, and classed in different spaces (Jiwani et al. 2006). In relation to linkages across nation-states or the influence of transnational structures on lived experiences, the emphasis on context-specificity resonates with Alexander and Mohanty's [1997] 2012 conception of transnational feminism as understanding local specificities to illuminate overarching power structures.

Intersectional Understandings of Girlhood

Criticism of the white, Eurocentrism of girlhood studies led to an emphasis on intersectionality in this field that recognizes that experiences of girlhood are shaped by varying social processes

and the fact that more complex, oppressive normative standards are experienced by girls of color and others marginalized by constructs of class, heternormativity, and able-bodiedness (Hussein et al. 2006; Jiwani 2006). For example, Sandrina de Finney (2014) draws on the voices of Indigenous adolescent girls in British Columbia, Canada, who challenge the construction of their racialized, sexualized, and colonized bodies as invisible, insignificant, and disposable. By nurturing their voices within the collective advocacy of Indigenous resurgence, this work advances a more critical politicized approach to girlhood studies. An intersectional analysis of girlhood can become transnational when it is applied in research on and with girls whose identity straddles many nations, such as those in Jiwani's (2006) study of 52 first- or second- generation Canadian girls and young women. Their identity was fluid; the girls felt like outsiders while in Canada, but as Canadian when visiting their cultural homelands, a process that Jiwani refers to as "walking the hyphen" (88) between constructs of their Canadian identity and their ancestral communities. Given that transnational feminism and contemporary girlhood studies emphasize the importance of intersectionality, it belongs as an essential characteristic of transnational girlhood.

Agency and Victimization

Having established some commonalities between the fields, I now review conversations about integrating girls' perspectives and the dichotomous discourses of girls' agency and victimization among girl culture scholars that are relevant for transnational girlhood.

Early feminist scholars including Mary Wollstonecraft [1792] 1988 initiated discussions about girls' lack of agency that became prominent in Simone de Beauvoir's [1949] 2009 description of the patriarchal expectations of gender conformity faced by adolescent girls, as well as girls' resistance in response, as taken up by Penny Weiss (2018). The field of girlhood studies

demonstrates a balancing act between promoting girls' agency and recognizing the structural and

systemic influences that constrain it (Jiwani et al. 2006). Girls are often constructed as having

limitless power and opportunities, as reflected in the Girl Power discourse that captures the idea

of individualized female empowerment and constructs a world in which social inequalities and

the need for political change do not exist (Pomerantz et al. 2013). By contrast, girls, particularly

those in the Global South, are also often depicted as victims in need of rescue and protection

(Desai 2016), a portrayal referred to as the Girls in Crisis narrative (Gilmore and Marshall 2010).

While we know that violence, varying greatly depending on social identities, status, and location,

is a daily reality for many girls and young women, (Hussein et al. 2006), in the Girls in Crisis

narrative, girlhood becomes necessarily equated with victimhood (Gilmore and Marshall 2010).

As transnational systems such as international development increasingly focus on girls, as

Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2018) and Heather Switzer et al. 2016, remind us, the balance between

recognizing girls' agency while illuminating the structural barriers that may limit their freedom

is relevant for the study of transnational girlhood, along with the recognition that girls

themselves are often best positioned to describe experiences within these systems.

Girls' Voices

Catherine Driscoll (2008) notes that historically girls have been analyzed by women who call on

their memories of girlhood to relate to the girls they study. Despite increasing calls to consult

girls directly is the use of problematic approaches such as tokenism, manipulation, and

ornamentalization that are common in broader efforts to consult young people (Bent 2016). The

analysis by Switzer et al. (2016) of interviews with North American girl representatives at the

2010 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) points to girls' understanding of how their

bodies are used to legitimize adults' agendas. They quote Jessica, a 15-year-old American, who noted that

> [CSW members] were going on and on about how we are the people who are going to change the world, and then when we tried to say something that wasn't strictly to [the theme], we were silenced, and they took the microphone away. (40)

Jackie Kirk and Stephanie Garrow (2003) advocate for consultation with girls in all steps of policy implementation using participatory girl-friendly activities that position "girls as knowers" (6) of their lived experiences. They emphasize that this takes significant time, flexibility, and political will to accomplish effectively. Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2009) recognize the importance of this approach in research, defining girl-method as a feminist methodology *for, with,* and *about* girls. Girls are also leading change themselves without requiring adults' invitation to participate, as Jessica Taft illustrates in her depiction of girl activists across the Americas,

> from the young Zapatistas with the braids and bandanas who climbed the fence at the WTO protests in Cancun to throw flowers at the police to the U.S. high school students designing curriculums to educate their peers about child labor and sweatshops, teenage girls in the Americas are participating in a variety of struggles for social justice. (2011: 3)

Providing an opportunity for girls to speak has become a key element of girlhood studies, and should hold a prominent place in transnational girlhood, particularly given the propensity that has existed in international development and other global fora to use essentialist labels to describe girls.

Applications of the Term

The term transnational girlhood has been used in historical and cultural analyses of girls influenced by transnational structures such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, international development, and/or other international social movements to explore how they operate within or against these structures. Jialin Wu (2015) describes participation in the Girl Guides in early twentieth-century British Malaya, observing that the Girl Guides movement began in England but spread quickly to its colonies as a popular social movement. For Wu, Girl Guides provided opportunities for girls and women to challenge both Indigenous and British expectations of girlhood, advancing their individual aspirations while negotiating power relations among Malay girls themselves and under colonial rule. Lisa Weems (2014, 2018) reveals more overt forms of resistance in her analysis of Maya Arulpragasam, better known as rapper M.I.A., who was born in London but lived for most of her childhood in northern Sri Lanka, where her father was a Tamil political activist. M.I.A. spent her childhood crossing borders, experiencing labels such as refugee and terrorist that she would later speak back to in highly political music and activism. Weems describes M.I.A. as illuminating the ways in which "'third world girls' are subject to multiple layers of domination, discrimination, and exclusion as transnational citizens in a global youthscape" (2014: 117) and promoting cross-border connections to unite girls in the Global South and challenge diverse forms of patriarchy that oppress them.

While Weems (2014) and Wu (2015) analyze how individual girls and young women react to or resist the transnational structures that they experience, Nirmala Erevelles and Xuan Nguyen (2016) analyze the construction of disability and girlhood in transnational spaces such as humanitarian, international development and human rights systems. Their guest edited special issue of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* entitled "Disability and Girlhood: Transnational Perspectives" connects, as stated in their guest editorial, "stories of disabled girls

within and across geographical borders" (2016: 5) that analyze the impact of global structures such as (neo)colonialism, imperialism, and neoliberalism on discourses of ablebodiedness and experiences of disabled girls in localized contexts. Across these examples, there are three main applications of the term transnational girlhood: as a reference to girls' experiences as they live and travel across national borders; to analyze girls' experiences of transnational systems at a local level; and to examine the construction of global norms and expectations that are imposed on girls in various nation-states. Wu (2015), Weems (2014), and Erevelles and Nguyen (2016) all expose the limitations that these systems can place on girls' agency, particularly for girls of color in the Global South, while recognizing girls' potential for resilience in global systems of patriarchy.

Malala Yousafzai

The most intensely discussed individual to personify transnational girlhood is Malala Yousafzai. A Pakistani advocate for girls' education who survived an attack by the Taliban in 2012, she established the Malala Fund with her father, Ziauddin Yousafzai, in 2013, to champion every girl's right to safe, free, quality education and, in 2014, became the youngest Nobel Peace Prize recipient. Her attempted assassination catapulted her to international fame, but before this happened, she had been a girls' education advocate. The overwhelmingly positive Western media coverage of Malala has led to criticism that her story of rescue from violent Pakistani terrorists (re)produces Western subjects as "free, empowered and humanitarian," and Pakistanis and/or Muslims, by contrast, as "repressed and backward, harboring ill will toward women" (Khoja-Moolji 2017: 385). Her foundation proclaims that education is an essential human right, fitting popular Western narratives about the liberating nature of education (Ryder 2015). Malala's story fits into what Khoja-Moolji (2017) calls the "chain of vulnerability-suffering-

empowerment" established by contemporary human rights regimes, in which "a brown woman inevitably has to travel through this chain in order to achieve the kind of empowerment recognized by the liberal humanist discourse of rights" (383–384). But Phyllis Ryder (2015) observes that while Malala relies on Western media to communicate her message, she also "persistently disrupts its dominant messages" (176) in, for example, humanizing the Taliban and implicating the West in its rise to power. By situating her advocacy work primarily within Islamic traditions and structures of nonviolence, Malala nuances human rights discourse and challenges opinions that these frameworks are incompatible (Khoja-Moolji 2017). In embracing Islam and challenging violent Western constructs, Malala demonstrates her resistance to Western cultural hegemony and underscores her agency. She draws on her own experience as she travels the world advocating for improved quality education for girls and boys, thus embodying multiple characteristics of transnational girlhood.

Movements for Girls

In recent years, there has been a dramatic shift from girls' invisibility to their hypervisibility in international development (Switzer et al. 2016). As Khoja-Moolji (2018) observes, campaigns that emphasize girls' access to education as a liberating force include Girl Effect, Girl Up, Girl Rising, G(irls)20 Summit, Because I Am a Girl, and Let Girls Learn. The United Nations Foundation's Girl Up program targets girls in the Global South as beneficiaries and creates space for girl activists most of whom are situated in the Global North. On its website Girl Up[1] is described as a "global movement of empowered young women leaders who defend gender equality" (n. p.). Its 2018–2019 teen advisers include 19 girls living in the United States and 1 each in Brazil, France, the United Kingdom, and Mexico, not reflecting Girl Up's focus countries of Guatemala, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, India, and Uganda. Girl Up embodies previous feminist

iterations of a global sisterhood in which mostly white women, in this case, girls, in the Global

North employ a Girl Power narrative to rescue their brown sisters in the Global South, who are

constructed as being Girls in Crisis. Girl Up activism uses primarily consumerist and fundraising

approaches to promote an investment method of rescue, reinforcing "postfeminist notions of

Western women as free from any form of gender discrimination or bias … . First World girls are

invited to endorse feminism but only in relation to the South" (Koffman and Gill 2013: 98). The

program encourages girls in the Global North to speak against barriers or harmful practices in the

Global South, without identifying gender-based discrimination that affects their own lives. These

efforts connect girls across the world unidirectionally, moving from Global North to South,

without interrogating manifestations of girlhood in the Global North, and providing little

opportunity for girls in the Global South to respond. This movement fails to fit into a

transnational girlhood framework since it emphasizes the voices of privileged girls in the Global

North and does not stimulate critical dialogue with girls in the Global South regarding the lived

experiences of both groups.

A Moment of Transnational Girlhood

In July 2018, an event, the Circles Within Circles conference, in Montebello, Quebec, brought

together over 70 participants from South Africa, Canada, Sweden, and Russia, with remote

participation from Ethiopia and Kenya. This diverse intergenerational and international event

included Indigenous girls, gender activists, researchers, community partners, and members of

NGOs who explored girls' participatory arts-based research on sexual violence in their

communities to engage participants collectively and in girl-only activities that enabled

knowledge-sharing among girls within and across their national borders. The event culminated in

the production of a document, named by one of the girl groups as a girlfesto (Participatory

Cultures Lab 2018) that provided recommendations to policymakers (see Vanner et al. (2019) for details of its production). The Montebello Girlfesto positions girls and young women as leaders who demand a world without gender-based violence that prioritizes equity, equality, justice, and dignity. It uses critical, decolonizing language that frames girls as powerful agents while confronting the systemic constraints they experience in demanding freedom as distinct from safety, and drawing connections between the colonization of land, water, and female bodies. Unfortunately, the event also reflected the inequality that characterizes international travel since some participants from South Africa and Ethiopia who were scheduled to attend were unable to do so since their visas to Canada were denied, reflecting the regulated mobility of citizens from the Global South. While recognizing constraints, including the inability of some activists from the Global South to participate, I assert that the conference exemplified transnational girlhood by building cross-national feminist activism centered on the lived experiences of girls from diverse physical and social locations in the Global North and South.

Defining Transnational Girlhood

I suggest that the following are essential features of transnational girlhood: cross-border connections that build on the localized lived experiences of girls and speak to linkages between global and local power structures; intersectional analysis that recognizes the interrelated influences of gender, sex, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, religion, language, and location, and prioritizes the perspectives of girls from the Global South, girls of color, and other girls who have traditionally not been given equal opportunities to speak on an international stage; recognition of girls' potential agency as local, national, and global activists despite constraints imposed by global structures of patriarchy and (neo)colonialism; and a counter-hegemonic agenda that challenges oppressive global systems to create more equitable societies for all girls.

Intrinsic to the concept of transnational feminism is the so-called bottom-up notion centered on the perspectives of local women, particularly women of color, speaking to global policymakers by connecting their lived experiences in a given context to the experiences of women in other nation-states (Alexander and Mohanty [1997] 2012). The emphasis on place that emerged in transnational feminism as a mechanism for analyzing the local with attention to context-specificity is also present in conversations about girlhood (Jiwani et al. 2006; Kirk et al. 2010). At the same time, transnational feminism emphasizes non-physical spaces that connect feminist activists, scholars, and practitioners across geographic divides (Mendoza 2002). Presuming the alignment of transnational feminism and transnational girlhood, the latter requires processes that connect localized experiences of girlhood to illuminate global structures. Girls in different countries must speak to each other, whether it be in person, through virtual networks, or by responding to each other's work. The term involves more than the analysis of girls in multiple spaces, necessitating the travel of girls (although not necessarily their physical transportation) to build moments of solidarity in which they learn from each other and challenge global patriarchy. It is essential that this connection should facilitate exchanges that center on girls' perspectives since it is their experiences that make evident similarities and differences, forge alliances, as well as initiate debate.

Transnational feminism challenges essentializing versions of global feminism that impose universalizing concepts of womanhood or constructs the Western woman as empowered in contrast to the imprisoned non-Western woman. Transnational feminism emphasizes the interactions of many different social constructs (Mendoza 2002), which has also been an important facet of a critical, politicized contemporary girlhood (de Finney 2014; Jiwani 2006). Intersectionality belongs firmly within a transnational girlhood that welcomes all girls but

particularly amplifies the perspectives of girls of color and those from the Global South whose experiences have traditionally been excluded or distorted in dominant constructions of girlhood. Girlhood studies increasingly emphasizes the amplification of girls' voices to speak with them instead of for them; transnational girlhood scholars and activists should also consider how, in connecting girls across the world, girls' voices and perspectives are prioritized over or alongside the analysis of adult researchers and policymakers.

To align with transnational feminism's emphasis on action (Nagar and Swarr 2010), transnational girlhood should be a purposeful area of study. The scholars, activists, and practitioners who participate in transnational girlhood work toward change for a world in which there is more justice. The promotion of girls' agency as individuals and as collectives must be balanced by analysis of the structural constraints imposed upon them by global hegemonic structures including capitalism, neocolonialism, and patriarchy. In transnational girlhood studies, the balanced analysis of agency and systemic constraints must be charged by a critical and radical agenda for change that re-envisions a world for girls in which, as stated in the Montebello Girlfesto, they are not only safe, but also free (Participatory Cultures Lab, 2018). Adults working to strengthen transnational girlhood need to examine how our efforts genuinely connect girls from different localities and build from the experiences they choose to share. We must consider how we frame these experiences in an intersectional analysis that privileges the voices of girls who have been the most overlooked, mobilizing with them to enact structural changes that create a better world in which to be a girl.

Bio

Catherine Vanner is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University. Her research uses qualitative methods to analyze the

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Acknowledgements

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Note

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