



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Erin A. Dubyak for the degree of Masters of Arts in Women Studies presented on April 26, 2012.

Title: “Flying the Plane as We Build It”: A Qualitative Study of an Organization's Goals and Actions toward the Prevention of Exploited Female Youth

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Within the U.S. there is a growing interest in the case of female adolescents being coerced into the sex industry (Bernstein, 2010; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Soderlund, 2010; Williams and Frederick, 2009). This interest, which emerged due to U.S. involvement in the international trafficking phenomena and grassroots organizing, has resulted in a movement to end commercial sexual exploitation of children (also known as “child trafficking”). Feminist activists have mobilized around this issue seeking recourse for youth who have been victims of exploitation. This thesis presents a study of a prevention/early intervention program, the “Girls Coalition,” founded for adjudicated girls who are deemed “high risk” for commercial sexual exploitation. The Youth Resource Center, a non-profit organization, began the Girls Coalition in order to prevent exploitation by empowering the youth to better their lives. While not an openly identified feminist organization, the Girls Coalition does espouse feminist goals and its mission emulates feminist processes. Through qualitative methods my study explores how the staff understand their role in the lives of the youth they serve as well as the organization in which they work. Findings reveal themes centered on feminist management and

organizational functioning, which includes the processes and dynamics present within the running of the organization. Results also reveal themes that include how participants enact ethics of care and empowerment of the youth whom the Girls Coalition serves.

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“Flying the Plane as We Build It”: A Qualitative Study of an Organization's Goals and  
Actions toward the Prevention of Exploited Female Youth

by  
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of the Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Erin A. Dubyak, Author

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## **Introduction**

Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), or what has been previously been known as child prostitution, has become, within the last decade, a hot button issue in the United States (Bernstein, 2010). This can be in part attributed to the growing interest, research, and sensationalism of sex trafficking in U.S. media culture linking the phenomena of sex trafficking and CSEC together. Upheaval and indignation is nothing new concerning the perceived sexuality of young women. Young women's sexuality has a long history of being policed in the U.S. with roots in the women's moral reform movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the "white slavery" scare of that same time period (Bernstien, 2010; Doezema, 2010; Soderlund, 2010). The laws and regulations that emerged from these movements were especially geared toward and used against people of color as well as working class and immigrant women and men (Kempadoo, 1999; 2001; 2007). Feminists have had a stake in these racialized movements both as advocates and critics, illuminating the tensions that surround women's sexuality and agency.

During the late 1990s, due to much agitation by feminist activists, U.S. governmental authorities, and human rights NGOs, the stage was set for action at the international level to legislate policy to combat human trafficking. According to the UN, human trafficking is the "recruiting, transporting, transferring, harboring or receiving a person through a use of force, coercion or other means, for the purpose of exploiting them" (UN). While economic migration occurs quite frequently in our increasingly globalized world, an important shift occurred during the negotiations at the UN Centre

for International Crime Prevention. Although these negotiations were intended to address human trafficking as a broad phenomenon, sexual trafficking of women and children became the dominant focus of the negotiations. As a result, the Center was charged with drafting the Trafficking Protocol, otherwise known as The 2000 Protocol to Suppress, Prevent, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. This optional protocol is a subsidiary treaty to the United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. These “negotiations” were the target of intense feminist and human rights lobbying, due to the shift to an almost sole focus on sex trafficking, splitting the lobbyists into two separate “camps” adhering to very different ideologies around prostitution (Harcourt, 2009). One camp held that prostitution is under all circumstances violence against women making consent irrelevant, while the other camp held that a woman could freely choose to engage in sex work and her consent must be taken into consideration in discussions of trafficking. These camps both project feminism and advocate for women, although in different ways. As hooks (2010, p. 26) states, feminism is the “struggle to end sexist oppression” and is necessarily part of a movement for social justice.

In what has become a movement to end sex trafficking stemming from the international discourse and differing camps, feminists have reignited debates on what constitutes violence against women and the most effective ways to combat this social problem: a problem that has become increasingly racialized as women of color are more likely to be employed in sex work with white women as advocates on their behalf. Even more recently a growing interest has emerged around the case of adolescent females

entering into or being coerced into the sex industry, an interest which can be largely attributed to the US involvement in the international trafficking phenomena and grassroots organizing. While the themes of this movement do resonate with the past, and should be problematized, a new crop of female activists have emerged who are locating the blame outside of the individual girl and onto the contextual circumstances in which that child has been placed. This is most clearly evidenced by feminist Rachel Lloyd and her organization Girls Mentoring and Educational Services (GEMS) that seeks advocacy for young women who have been commercially sexually exploited (Bernstein, 2011). I would even venture to say she singlehandedly popularized the very phrase commercial sexual exploitation with now a best selling memoir (Lloyd, 2011) and documentary (Lloyd, 2004) of her organization.

Organizations have mobilized and non-profits have sprung up across the country, particularly in urban centers, all working to combat CSEC in the legislature, bring awareness to the public, and provide services and shelters for victims. One pioneer organization, the Youth Resource Center, is attempting to take a more holistic approach to CSEC by building programs and instituting initiatives for the means of early intervention and empowerment in the lives of the youth with prevention of CSEC being the end goal. The women pioneering this new approach see prevention as an under-developed area in the social service arena, and makes the case that it is an essential element when laying out the bigger picture of CSEC. Prevention also represents a deeper understanding that these activists have of how communities and society at large are complicit in CSEC and therefore should be held responsible for helping these youth

particularly because those who are the most at risk of exploitation come from marginalized populations. Though not all of the women identify as feminists, they are following in the footsteps of many who came before them in the violence against women movement with the feminist goal of empowering women and youth (Ferree & Martin, 1995).

This research project presents a qualitative study of the Youth Resource Center (YRC) and their prevention/early intervention program, the Girls Coalition. While not an openly identified feminist organization, the Youth Resource Center and their program the Girls Coalition, espouses feminist goals of intervention as empowerment in order to prevent commercial sexual exploitation. Through in-depth interviewing and participant observation I examined the Girls Coalition as a program committed to providing early intervention services for female adolescents coming through the juvenile justice system. The clients of the Girls Coalition are a vulnerable population and the program aims to provide services and holistic solutions to deter these young women from becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation. The staff works with clients, largely African American and all females aged 11-17 years, providing opportunities to strengthen and reinforce the principle of empowerment. All aspects of the project aim to deliver the fundamental messages necessary to educate the youth about CSE dangers and to promote healthy relationships, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. The YRC employs thirteen female predominantly African American staff members, three of whom work directly with the youth in the Girls Coalition. The Youth Resource Center is located in the southeastern part of the United States in a large urban center.

I undertook this research while serving as an intern at the YRS for the Girls Coalition during the summer of 2011. My research seeks to comprehend how the staff understands their roles in the lives of the youth they serve and their motives for taking on this work. It also addresses the functioning of the organization as a whole. Three women who work directly with the youth were interviewed as well as two psychologists who were community partners not employed by the YRC but who did programming for the youth in the Girls Coalition for extended periods of time. Through participant observation during my time spent at the YRC I came to witness a myriad of social processes at work. This experience helped me to understand the need to interview other employees of the organization who did not work with the youth, but who assisted their co-workers on a day-to-day basis with the running the Girls Coalition.

This study is framed within themes of feminist management, which seeks to empower and dismantle power differentials among those working within an organization or institution. It explores organizational functioning, meaning the processes and dynamics present within the organization that impact the running of the organization. Themes are also centered on empowerment of the youth the organization is serving and how participants enact that empowerment. Lastly, ethics of care are explored as a driving force undergirding the Girls Coalition and as a personal attribute among participants. It is my hope that the results of this research will serve as a guide to other feminists and individuals within the non-profit sector looking to initiate or work in programming for youth within the CSEC and trafficking movement.

Following the introduction, chapter one sets the stage for understanding the work and feminist goals of the YRC and their program, the Girls Coalition, by exploring global and local perspectives on sex trafficking and how these perspectives have shaped the current movement to end commercial sexual exploitation among adolescent youth. The YRC is predicated upon feminist means of operating and espouses feminist goals of empowerment. In order to further understand these feminist processes, chapter two reviews relevant literature on feminist management, conflict and conflict resolution, and empowerment of both employees and youth. My methodological approach comprises chapter three where my research design, data analysis, limitations, and personal disclosure are discussed. Chapter four includes the results of my analysis with a discussion of themes and implications of my findings. These themes include issues associated with the relationships staff have with the youth they serve that include motivation to mentor girls; having an ethic of care guide their work; and empowering the girls to find their voice. Themes also include a discussion of the relationships staff have with each other and the organization they serve. These involve a need for organization structure, strategic planning, and management, having a shared vision, and struggles of power. Finally, I end with the conclusion and goals for future research.



## **Chapter 1: Global and Local Perspectives on Sex Trafficking**

Trafficking discourse has developed at an astronomical rate with much of it coming from the global North. In this chapter I first examine the history of “white slavery” in order to understand the historical precedent of the contemporary trafficking movement. Next, I analyze the different ideologies and negotiations that surfaced at the UN while developing the Trafficking Protocol in order to contextualize how trafficking discourse developed and how this discourse structured the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in the U.S. Finally, I end with a discussion of the national discourse and how it impacts the trafficking movement in the U.S.

### **Contextualizing “White Slavery”**

Before embarking on a description of contemporary negotiation proceedings it is necessary to contextualize current trafficking dialogues in history. A similar phenomenon occurred with what has now been termed the “white slavery scare” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Similar to contemporary discourse around prostitution, which will be discussed later in this paper, there were two opposing discourses on prostitution that helped to shape “white slavery,” as it would come to be known. The first was espoused by “regulationists” who believed that prostitution was a necessary evil and thus supported licensed brothels and forced medical examinations so as not to spread disease (Doezema, 2010). The second discourse was produced by “abolitionists,” or social purity feminists led by Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams, who were opposed to the idea of the prostitute as a “fallen woman” and placed all blame for this vice on the uncontrollable lust

of men. Social purity feminists opposed all legislation that enacted a “double standard” of sexuality for men and women and that was used to control women’s lives and movement. In her document “Social Purity,” written in 1865, Susan B. Anthony (2007) cites poverty as the driving force behind American women turning to prostitution to support themselves. She writes “[w]hile on the part of woman, in the great majority of cases, it is conceded to be destitution-absolute want of the necessities of life” (p. 88). She asserts that due to the few opportunities for women to make a decent living, as a result of lack of education and opportunity, they do not have a fair chance in the world of work dominated by man. Prostitution is not so much a choice but a last resort.

Elizabeth Bernstein (2007), a critic of the contemporary trafficking movement, notes the parallels between this historical movement and the current problem of trafficking. She writes that what ensued was a moral panic brought on by the proliferation of stories about women’s sexual enslavement. Such narratives began with the assumed “widespread abduction of innocent women and girls who, en route to earn respectable livelihoods in metropolitan centers, were seduced, deceived, or forced into prostitution, typically by foreign-born men” (Bernstein, 2007, p. 132). Historical investigations would later expose the extent of white slavery to be a racist myth, which likely stood for anti-immigration sentiments, or as a means and justification to bar immigrants from the US, and women’s frustrations with their second-class citizenship or lack of decision-making power. Feminist historians have revealed an interesting partnership between evangelical women and feminists suggesting how “the fight against White Slavery served as a useful stepping stone and surrogate for a host of additional causes, from social purity and moral

reform to temperance and suffrage” (p. 132). The white slavery movement served a larger purpose of trying to curtail men’s sexuality for the purpose of controlling “vice”: a code word for sexually transmitted infections. Moreover, by couching prostitution within “slavery,” these early feminists had an outlet from which to advocate such social reforms as temperance, which they saw as tantamount for improving the lives of women subject to domestic violence by alcoholic men. It is important to understand how this historical rhetoric of white slavery has been influential in shaping the contemporary binary of “innocent victim” and “bad prostitute” that exists currently.

It was during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when an increasing number of white women began to migrate for work and other economic opportunities that stories of kidnapping and coercion began to circulate in the press, giving rise to the idea of white slavery and causing rapid expansion of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the creation of special vice units in U.S. cities. Legislation aimed at stopping this problem became increasingly repressive leading to the 1910 White Slave Traffic Act passing congress in a nearly unanimous vote. As Soderlund (2010) explains, the Mann Act “prohibited the transportation of unmarried women across state lines for ‘immoral’ purposes” (p. 439). This kind of legislation occurred all over Europe as well, effectively stopping the movement of women and policing their everyday activities. The passage of this legislation implies that only white women are capable of being trafficked making their innocence and victimhood an assumed fact thereby excluding women of color from being seen as innocent victims. The rapid expansion of this legislation was made possible

by the alliances between religious groups and abolitionist feminists as well as the rhetoric used to frame this issue.

What makes the white slavery scare a point of fascination is that historically, and presently, the bodies of women of color are positioned as servants, sexual or otherwise, to the white world in the Americas and other colonized nations. Prior to white slavery “Black women’s wombs were incorporated into plantation economies to increase the size of the slave population” (Kempadoo, 1999, p. 39) and through the 20<sup>th</sup> century their bodies and lives were commodified and controlled by way of the structuring of laws and labor practices to the benefit of white people. What’s more an unconditional, unmitigated sexual access between women of color and white men is part of an ongoing theme central to the relationship of force and coercion between women of color and white men and women. In this way the complicity of racial superiority and economic privilege “that accompanied histories of Empire for white European women are an integral part of the narrative and require exploration.” While women of color have been sexually victimized for centuries with little to no recourse, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the “white slave panic” received extensive media coverage, international conferences, and national laws devoted to its eradication. Although the white slave trade is still believed to have existed by many contemporary historians, feminists tend to question its validity and believe this “epidemic” actually stood for racial anxiety (Doezema, 2000, p. 25-26).

Jo Doezeema, in her comparative analysis of the historical and contemporary discourse on sex trafficking, posits that public sympathy for victims, not prostitutes, was essential to the abolitionist campaign. Thus a “victim” had to be created. A re-formation

of prostitution had to occur so that the binary between voluntary or willing prostitute and involuntary, forced prostitute was shattered. A victim's "innocence" was established through a "variety of rhetorical devices: by stressing her youth/virginity; her whiteness; and her unwillingness to be a prostitute" (Doezema, 2000, p. 28). Gretchen Soderlund (2010) in a critical discourse analysis of the *New York Times* during this time period, found when examining an actual supposed exposé of white slavery that the rhetorical strategies paint a near perfect picture of a victim. The exposé reads like a crime novel as "one girl is described as 'disconsolate over the loss of her teddy bear,' while another is said to have 'brought nothing with her except a tattered doll . . . [that] was dearer to her than anything else in all her unlovely world'" (p. 28). Infantilizing the girls by emphasizing the loss of toys serves to settle a debate over the girls claimed age of 18 years, while the District Attorney states definitively that they are "only 15" ('White Slave Traffic', 1910, p. 1. p. 446). Moreover, what this excerpt highlights is the linkage of white slavery and child prostitution as evidenced by the young women's ambiguous ages. By positioning the victims as children it is implied that they had to decision-making capabilities in their circumstance thereby reifying their innocence. This constructed "innocence" simplified the very complex reality of prostitution for many women masking how prostitution does and does not intersect with migration.

Such an oversimplification removes the blame from the woman or girl placing it on a "trafficker" by the use of global interventions designed "to protect women" by restricting or banning their migration. Paradoxically, women's place in the nuclear family was left unchallenged despite the fact that much of the abolition campaign rested on the

women's suffrage movements in U.S. and Europe (Kempadoo, 2007). What is ironic about this moral panic, and subsequent crusade, is that it emphasizes Kempadoo's argument of unexplored complicities with white women's racial superiority and economic privilege revealing white Western patriarchal anxieties about the potential freedom of both people of color and women. She writes:

It foregrounded the circumstances of Euro-American women while demonising men of other cultures, echoing the ideologies that fuelled lynching of black men in the US. Cloaked in moral outrage about violations to womanhood, the white slavery discourse of a century ago was structured in racism and aided patriarchal state control of women's sexuality and mobility (p. 82).

In this way the true causes of oppression and exploitation were rendered invisible and thus unimportant to the discourse, while women of color, immigrant women, and poor women being engaged in sex work and/or migration during and before this "scare" were not a part of this moral panic. They were not worthy of being "saved" or even worthy of mention in the conversation. These excluded classes of women would come to occupy a much more visible and equally silenced status, however, when trafficking emerged again in a not-so-new contemporary setting.

### **Contemporary Trafficking Debates**

Much like during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there were two separate ideologies present at the negotiations at the UN during the drafting of the Trafficking Protocol in 2000. On the one hand neo-abolitionist feminists from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), a transnational feminist network, headed by women of the global North, joined by other NGO's and human rights groups, held the radical

feminist belief that all prostitution is violence against women and is in no way a legitimate form of labor. This organization spearheaded one side of the UN's anti-trafficking campaign. Examining claims made by these advocacy organizations concerning prostitution, specifically their claims of the inherent harms associated with the sex industry, Ronald Weitzer (2010) asserts that these organizations operate from what he calls the "Oppression Paradigm." Such a paradigm depicts prostitution as the epitome of male domination and exploitation regardless of historical period, societal context, or type of prostitution, and presents these claims as absolute principles. Prostitution being grounded in male violence against women is premised upon a monolithic idea of women in general and more specifically "third world" women as passive and weak (Kempadoo, 2001, p. 28-29). Set against this position are sex workers rights activists who advocate that sex work is implicit in sex trafficking, meaning that if women were sexually trafficked then they will likely be engaging in sex work, however, they assert that not all prostitutes have been trafficked because a woman may have chosen that work (Harcourt, 2009).

As a proponent of the second position, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) has critiqued the construction of "third world women" as an already-constructed monolithic group by feminists of the global North. She critiques the usage of the category "women" as a strategic ploy for analysis. Mohanty argues that to assume that women are an "already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic, or racial location, or contradictions, implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy that can be applied universally or cross culturally" (p. 21).

She asserts that for many women in the global South, and marginalized women in the global North, being a “woman” is not the primary source of their oppression, and to assume so strips them of their own voices and positions them as an ahistorical, apolitical group. The radical feminist belief that prostitution is violence against women, regardless of context, is a belief predominantly held by feminists in the global North and has been critiqued by women engaged in the global sex industry as well as sex worker rights activists in both the global North and South.

Indeed, Kempadoo (1999) has also actively critiqued the western construction of a woman as a prostitute as opposed to a sex worker. She asserts that sex workers who fight for industry reform and not for complete abolition are “often charged by feminists with acting with a ‘false consciousness,’ or as handmaidens to patriarchal capitalism” (p. 234). Even more insidious, both mainstream media and feminists relegate these women “to the status of objects, thought to be violently manipulated and wrought into passivity or acquiescence” by using such terms as “slaves, trafficked, and victims, all of which evoke images of helpless, ignorant, dependent, women and girls” (p. 234). Such so called third world women are positioned as always needing saving. Or, as Spivak (1988) says that white first world men are positioned as needing to save brown women from brown men. To put another way, they must be saved from their “backward countries” and cultures and the highly demonized and racialized men who are in the business of trafficking. As with historic constructions of white slavery, organizations such as CATW capitalize on such traits as youth and virginity, innocence, and violence and deception (Harcourt, 2009). Moreover, the line between adult and child is continuously blurred so as to conjure a



certain image of the trafficking victim. Doezema (2000) asks if white slavery had “been shown to be a cultural myth with repressive consequences for women, especially prostitutes, and subaltern men, what are the implications of this for the current campaign against ‘trafficking in women’?” (p. 31). Such consequences include increased restrictions on women’s general movement and migration, much like during white slavery period of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Sex worker rights feminists at the UN negotiations wanted to make a clear distinction between trafficking of women and trafficking of children, and between forced prostitution and voluntary prostitution. The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), a transnational network, heavily influenced by sex worker rights activists, and whom the Human Rights Caucus later spearheaded, were the primary exponents of this position on prostitution (Harcourt, 2009). This group conceived prostitution as legitimate work and, more importantly, that this work was both a cause and factor in women’s economic migrations. Both of these “camps” agreed that coerced trafficking in humans was a global problem and in need of international response. However, this ideological divide would prove to be irreconcilable, making its way into the final Trafficking Protocol.

The first drafts of the Trafficking protocol were submitted by the United States and Argentina and explicitly linked trafficking of women and children with prostitution. This occurred despite the best efforts of the Human Rights Caucus to draft a protocol that did not make gender or the reasons or purpose for which a person was trafficked explicit (Doezema, 2010, p. 119). The arguments over the definition of trafficking served to

extend the period of negotiations, as it swiftly became a battle of ideologies. Many countries, specifically developing countries, were effectively excluded from the added informal sessions, because the sessions were not translated, and the extended stay added extra expense to the delegates in attendance. Entities such as NGOs were literally excluded from these informal negotiations and were forced to rely on contacts outside the conference rooms where the sessions were held to be able to lobby their positions (Doezema, 2010, p. 114). When the final agreement was reached and both the definition of “trafficking” and the main terms of the Protocol to “prevent,” “punish,” and “protect” were established, both sides felt that they had “won” highlighting the ambiguity of the Protocol that came in response to the ideological tensions of the debate on the global level.

### **U.S. Trafficking Victims Protection Act**

These ideological debates shaping the direction of the global protocol on sex trafficking are also evident in the development of sex trafficking legislation in the US. Originally, in 2000 a trafficking bill was proposed by the late Senator Paul Wellstone and included a much more nuanced and broad definition of trafficking than what was present in the U.N.’s Protocol. Both the Clinton State Department and sex worker rights groups were very supportive because the Wellstone-sponsored bill stressed that trafficking and forced labor were not exclusive to the sex industry, but were prevalent in other service and agricultural sectors. Prostitution was treated as legitimate labor inextricably linked to the conditions under which work is performed. In this way the “relative autonomy or

dependency of the worker” was an important aspect in “assessing whether a particular incident constituted voluntary migration, a form of debt bondage, or outright slavery” (Soderlund, 2005, p.73). However, as with the global protocol, evangelical Christian organizations such as the International Justice Mission allied with conservative anti-trafficking feminist groups to launch a campaign denouncing the Clinton administration as pro prostitution or pro “sex slavery.” It was this latter group who drafted the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), formatting the language to resemble the discourse created at the UN and the intense lobbying by neo-abolitionists, conservative feminists, and faith-based groups.

President Clinton signed the TVPA into law in 2000; however, it received most of its “teeth” during the subsequent years of the Bush administration. In the United States the rhetoric of the “neo-abolitionist” movement has become tantamount as a response to trafficking, which of course is always a reference to sex trafficking. As a result the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2005 states “[t]he purposes of this division are to combat trafficking in persons, a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children, to ensure just and effective punishment of traffickers, and to protect their victims.” The TVPA is decidedly gendered with no explicit reference to men, but repeated references to women and girls and the specific gendered labor they perform along with their assumed sexual exploitation. It does not recognize voluntary prostitution and repeatedly uses the term “sex slaves” to obliterate any distinction between forced and voluntary sex work, effectively making all women ensnared in what the neo-abolitionists have coined the “modern day slave trade.” Like the

UN Protocol there is linkage, again, of women and children, specifically girls, rendering all women helpless while denying other migrants of the ability to be trafficked and have human rights abuses enacted against them.

After 9/11 the Bush administration amped up the “War against Trafficking” and as part of the administration’s Faith Based Initiative gave over a million dollars to evangelical groups like Shared Hope International and the International Justice Mission (IJM). Gretchen Soderlund (2005) in her exploration of the trafficking movement and discourse found that faith-based organizations and feminists came together on global sex trafficking and subsequently have come to interact and create policy for the U.S. domestic issue. They were amply rewarded by the Bush administration “in part because the feminized war against trafficking functions to give a human face to the war against terrorism” (p. 68) while simultaneously strengthening Bush’s popularity among his evangelical base because their organizations had access to lucrative opportunities to spread their ideas of Christianity internationally. Soderlund (2005) discovered that the groups affiliated with this coalition of evangelicals and feminists have “ascended to the top of the anti-trafficking milieu, gained control of most federal anti-trafficking funds, and [have] become the most prominent media and policy spokespeople on the topic” (p. 68). As a result, this group has control over the discursive politics to the detriment of other voices and is therefore shaping public perception of sex trafficking.

Consequently, in 2001 the U.S. government established the Trafficking in Person (TIP) report as a means to rank countries on their compliance with U.S. standards on combating trafficking, especially sex trafficking. Countries are asked to report annually

to the U.S. State Department on their levels of forced trafficking and labor. These countries are then ranked into three “tiers” according to their trafficking problem. A ranking of “Tier 1” indicates that a nation has acknowledged the existence of human trafficking and is willing to comply with the TVPA’s minimum standards to combat the problem. To maintain the Tier 1 status, governments have to show that they are making progress and following guidelines (TIP). A ranking on the lowest tier, Tier 3, can result in the U.S. threatening, or enacting, economic sanctions on that country.

Kempadoo (2007) heavily critiques the usage of the TIP report by the U.S. as a strategy for U.S. global hegemony. Many nations, including those in the Caribbean, are asked to report annually. Countries such as Cuba, North Korea, Iran, and Venezuela are continuously placed on Tier 3 as more of a symbolic demonizing gesture than anything based on real fact or “care” for those nations peoples (p. 80). The TIP report has allowed the U.S. to spread its own morality on a global scale sanctioning countries that appear to support prostitution by cutting HIV/AIDS funding or other forms of aid. Anna Agathangelou (2003) responds to this, explaining that neo-liberal trade policies are to blame for neo-liberal sites of production in the global south that create “desire industries” and feminized “Others” resulting in trafficking in the first place. She writes, “[n]ational industrialization strategies institutionalized this order of female exploitation by selling women as ‘docile,’ ‘cheap,’ and ‘expendable’ labor-whether for the factory at home, a household overseas, or a brothel anywhere” (p. 137).

A micro-level focus individualizes sex trafficking rendering the larger institutional structures that give rise to migration and “desire industries” invisible. Critics

of this movement say that a focus on “sexual violation, rather than the structural preconditions of exploited labor more generally,” has been instrumental to transforming an issue which had been the focus of a small number of activists “into a legal framework with powerful material and symbolic effects” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 49). This allows for more policy interventions, intensified militaristic policing, and an intensified reliance on “humanitarian” organizations to aid countries and “victims” in the global south that only reify racialized and sexualized hierarchies.

Organizations such as the International Justice Mission, Shared Hope International, and Free The Slaves, like Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, subscribe to the abolitionist ideology that all prostitution is sex slavery. Many of these organizations receive federal funding to do research and, because of biases within the organizations, they presuppose certain outcomes thus making the research flawed by overestimating the number of trafficking victims (Weitzer, 2010, p. 18-22). The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women and the International Organization on Migration have questioned their numbers because, due to the illegal nature of prostitution, these women and children usually cannot be tracked. In addition, these organizations also include all sex workers, even those for whom prostitution is legitimate labor, in their numbers. This research then makes its way into policy-making decisions in the government because of the sensational aspects and lobbying power of the advocacy groups. Such research empowers and justifies the saving practice of “raid and rehabilitation” in foreign countries whereby men enter into brothels posed as “johns” and rescue the sex workers working, or as they would put it, “enslaved” there.

“Saved” young women are then held in centers set up by evangelical organizations where they are taught a new trade and put to work most often producing goods for the organization’s “store.” Bernstein (2010) goes on to link contemporary evangelicals ideas of “freedom” directly with capitalism. By touting the purchasing of consumer goods as a means to fight trafficking, it “serves a dual purpose in solidifying the distinction between freedom and slavery” (p. 64). For global North consumers, “freedom” lies in our “ability to purchase the trinkets and baubles that ‘trafficking victims’ produce” while also pertaining to the “practice that new evangelicals call ‘business as mission,’ in which former ‘slaves’ are brought into ‘free’ labor by producing commodities for Western consumers” (p. 64). This form of coercive labor practice that Bernstein and Jakobsen (2010) have coined as “pro-business social remedies” (p. 1032) simultaneously hides and holds up neo-liberal ideologies of consumerism as “freedom” while also emphasizing the current “inadequacies” of the state’s policing capabilities. As evidenced by these pro-business social remedies, Soderlund (2005) asserts that these faith-based NGOs contend that prostitution is an issue of “conscience and morality rather than of income possibilities and labor” emphasizing “protection over autonomy and empowerment” (p. 81). She quotes Gary Haugen of International Justice Mission who summed up his organization’s stance by saying, “trafficking is not a poverty issue, it’s a law enforcement issue” (p. 81). A reliance on law enforcement as the only way to rescue women, assuming they need rescuing, and subsequently punish traffickers, has become a form of police force or carceral politics around which the current global and local discourse on trafficking is centered.

Abolitionist feminists and evangelical groups and allies operate under a key political ideological front that Bernstein (2007) has termed “carceral feminism.” It demands the use of the state to solve the problem of trafficking, namely through the use of incarceration and police force instead calling into question the economic conditions that drive men and women into risky migration and labor practices in the first place (Bernstein, 2007, 2010; Bernstein & Jakobsen, 2010). Elizabeth Bernstein (2007) engaged in participant observation of anti-trafficking conventions led by organizations such as the International Justice Mission and the U.S. State Department. These conventions showcase the current collusion of secular feminists and evangelical organizations and their construction of “slavery” and “victimology” that have come to dominate the discourse surrounding the movement.

Such anti-trafficking groups have taken up this carceral politics, increasingly narrowing the conceptualization of trafficking and labor and campaigned for the 2005 reauthorization of the TVPA to establish domestic sex trafficking as a crime analogous to cross-border trafficking. The domestic trafficking provision provides no mention of other forms of labor. What is interesting in the developments of domestic sex trafficking discourse is its almost exclusive focus on minors. In addition, a fear of “bad strange men” has revealed the way “both groups are turning away from direct engagement with the gender politics of the family and toward a focus on gender and sexual violence in the public sphere” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 66). Carceral feminists argue that domestic sex trafficking will only cease when johns and pimps in the U.S. and abroad are thrown in jail. While child predators should not go unpunished, such a narrow focus does nothing to



examine the material realities of women and girls that placed them in this situation. When the Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking Deterrence and Victims Support Act of 2010 was proposed to decriminalize prostitution by minors, Concerned Women for America launched a very successful campaign making sure the bill did not pass. To them, keeping prostitution a criminal offence adds another layer of protection for these adolescents so that police can keep them safe. Criminal courts have the “option” of sending them to rehabilitation programs, though they acknowledge those are few and far between, but rehabilitation also implies a complicity in their victimization leaving the question of who gets to decide victimhood.

The history and current policies, despite how they are lauded by these global forces, are contributing to a paucity of applicable appropriate aid while “humanitarian” organizations and law enforcement are making millions. Furthermore, the neo-liberal policies that governments enact must be examined to understand how nations are complicit in the problem of “trafficking”. This paradox has been attributed to the rise of the Non-profit Industrial Complex (NPIC) as articulated by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (2007). The NPIC is the “industrialized incorporation of pro-state liberal and progressive campaigns and movements into a spectrum of government proctored non-profit organizations” (Rodriguez, 2007, p. 21). It is the job of the NPIC to redirect our attention away from those in power by managing and controlling the efforts of those trying to survive at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Kivel, 2007). This vast concentration of wealth produces the ill-conditions that necessitate services. “Services that only provide temporary support and do not foster long term personal change or one’s

capacity to be self-determined” (Kivel, 2007, p. 132). Thus the NPIC serves to maintain the status-quo by the “emergence of new forms of governmentality with an entire repertoire of strategies, regulatory practices, and instrumentalities linking the state to bodies” (Grewal and Kaplan, 2001, p. 672). Thus the state helps to produce victims and then regulates their existence ensuring the continuation of the NPIC.

The state by expressing an interest in the “care, definition, and intervention of certain forms of violence,” meaning violence by individuals, simultaneously dismisses, negates, and deploys “other forms of violence,” (Durazo, 2007, p. 122) namely, state-violence. For carceral feminists, the slavery/freedom dichotomy “poses a way of addressing the ravages of neoliberalism that effectively locates all social harm outside of the institutions of corporate capitalism and the state apparatus.” Indeed the “masculinist institutions of big business, the state, and the police are reconfigured as allies and saviors, rather than enemies,” helping to save women by supporting the NPIC (Bernstein, 2007, p. 143). By absolving institutions of responsibility, the problem of “slavery” is “shifted from structural factors and dominant institutions onto individual, deviant men: foreign brown men” or currently, “African American men living in the inner city” (p. 143). Thus the NPIC exists side-by-side with and is co-maintained by the Prison Industrial Complex. The anti-trafficking movement, as it has become, has shifted focus away from the structural causes of trafficking focusing on individual perpetrators and victims to achieve a broader ideological aim: one that focuses on “freedom” in capitalism, justice through incarceration, and recourse through state-funded and managed non-profits.

### **Discourse Surrounding Sex-Trafficked Youth**

While the rhetoric of “saving” is still a dominant force, what makes this contemporary dialogue different is a strict focus on adolescent females who have been “sexually trafficked” within U.S. borders. The binary rhetorics of sympathy and deviancy are key concepts associated with the treatment and classification of minors who have been exploited in the United States or who are considered at “high risk.” These discourses construct particular narratives that the youth inhabit in order to receive benefits or aid from the state. Discourses of sympathy imply that these youth are victims worthy of help and being saved, whereas framing high-risk youth as deviant implies a complicity in their victimization. In this way, the rhetoric of sympathy and deviance has been utilized to construct reality for women creating particular roles for them to fill. One of the many consequences of this knowledge construction has been the delineation of women worthy of being saved and women who are not. Teenage females at risk of sex trafficking, many of whom, as discussed below, are women of color are the current population with whom the roles of sympathetic victim versus deviant prostitute are being created. No surprise that the latter discourse is more likely applied in the case of women of color (Kempadoo, 2010). The moral panic that has ensued has caused a blurring between being sexually trafficked and being coerced or engaging in prostitution, or other kinds of sex work. This blurring is a result of conflating prostitution and sex trafficking in the national discourse and the bodies of adolescent females are serving as the grounds on which these moral debates are taking place. The circumstances in which these adolescents have been placed

should be taken seriously, however, advocates must be cognizant of the underlying agendas being played out in this political arena.

Transnational feminist theorists shed light on the terms used to describe the global sex trade through the politics of naming. Nancy Naples (2002), for example, defines the politics of naming as the way “we explicate and frame our approach to the intersection of global and local organizing” revealing “our political orientation, disciplinary assumptions, and cross-cultural sensibility” (p. 5). This means that the words chosen to describe or talk about an issue are never created in a vacuum, but represent the structural boundaries in which they are born. In addition, politics used in this context symbolize power meaning “[w]ho gets to define issues to be brought to the transnational political stage, who gets to participate in this form of activism, and whose voices are left out of the dialogue” (Naples, 2002, p. 8). Power, in this context, encompasses the ways sexual trafficking is talked about and theorized and who is shaping the conversation.

To counter the oppressive frameworks and paradigms I, along with others, advocate for a transnational feminist perspective that is more nuanced and sensitive in understandings of sex trafficking specifically, and prostitution generally. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (2001) advocate for transnational theorizing so “we can begin to understand how the study of sexuality remains bound by disciplinary constraints” (p. 664). They emphasize that a “more interdisciplinary and transnational approach that addresses inequalities as well as new formations can more adequately explore the nature of sexual identities in the current phase of globalization” (p. 664). Because the “violence against women” paradigm of prostitution has become the foundational paradigm for sex

trafficking, a transnational approach is becoming more urgent. This urgency is heightened because the rhetoric of “third world woman” as victim is still dominating the dialogue. Adolescent females within the U.S are being defined in this way too, linking the two “groups” of females together by this universal patriarchy. They have been connected by their “victim” status of being “third world” women and “little girls” under the age of eighteen. The term “girls” has come to represent not just a developmental stage, but the inability to have personal agency and power of definition. Consequently, both groups are positioned as passive women being acted upon and incapable of making decisions about their lives.

This essentializing discourse makes the formulation of new language both challenging and necessary simultaneously. It reveals the “epistemic privilege of a social group that has racialized power to define the world and to create new meanings about social realities” (Kempadoo, 2001, p. 42). In the U.S., young women of color have been coerced into prostitution for years, but there has been a recent emphasis on how “normal” white middle class “girls” are being ensnared in the sex trade. What this says about the views of women of color’s sexuality is quite telling. As Kempadoo (2001) explains “[w]omen of color remain in various ways racialized as highly sexual by nature, and positioned as ‘ideal’ for sex work (p. 40). This leads to another problematic distinction in the rhetoric: female adolescents of color are overwhelmingly understood as prostitutes while white female adolescents are more likely to be represented as sexually trafficked. One phrasing implies complicity and agency in victimization while the other implies violence, coercion, and a complete lack of choice. Very often youth who are exploited are

considered “throwaways,” meaning poor, race/ethnic minority, runaway or drug-involved therefore garnering little sustained public attention because they do not fit the “innocent” construction (Estes & Weiner, 2001; Williams and Frederick, 2009). This construction also connotes a level of colonialism in that the youth involved in this debate are stripped of agency by the use of the state as savior.

Saving these teens by the state implies that the state knows what is best and can use its power to preside over the lives and voices of these youth. The construction of trafficked youth demands the use of the state to solve the problem, namely through the use of incarceration and police force. As previously stated, critics of this movement assert that a focus on sexual violation as opposed to the structural conditions that make exploitation possible in the first place has transformed how we conceptualize trafficking and has led to a shift in focus, which has changed how to combat the problem. These activists are focusing on the “sexual depravity” of individual bad men instead of on the economic conditions that made this possible. Such a narrow focus strips women of any agency or voice in naming their own experiences because it lumps them into one monolithic group.

I would like to clarify that I am not advocating that these adolescents be written off as totally in control of their lives and fates, or that the people involved in their exploitation be absolved of all guilt. Rather, I am advocating that we rethink the language we are using to describe their situation so as not to collapse the larger structural frameworks that placed them in this situation. As Kempadoo (2001) argues:

those who start from a ‘victim approach’ to prostitution often advocate prosecuting men who participate in the sex trade as pimps, clients, traffickers, or

brothel owners, proposing laws that criminalize working women in the belief that they can rehabilitate men who use prostitutes and can ‘rescue’ or ‘save’ women in a missionary fashion (p. 43).

The term “commercial sexual exploitation” has emerged from advocacy organizations and more accurately describes what is, and has been, occurring to youth within this local U.S. context. While not perfect as a term unto itself, it does not conflate prostitution and sex trafficking but allows for a distinction between adult women and the complex situation of minors. I would also argue that this phrasing could be applicable to other contexts as well to help describe the specific material realities where other language has failed.

What is necessary is a “transnational feminist theory and politics on prostitution and other forms of sex work [that] also includes a rethinking of practical strategies and programs to address the specific situations for women of color in the global sex trade” (Kempadoo, 2001, p. 43). A transnational framework is necessary to address the politics of naming and the violence that ensues in both global and local contexts. Only by demanding a reframing of the rhetoric can we begin to understand the complexities surrounding the exploitation of youth. This has the liberatory potential to give these adolescents back the power to name and define their own experiences. This also has the potential to shift our focus from that of saving to that of prevention and empowerment by avoiding collapsing the youth into a monolithic group and instead allowing us to examine the driving forces determining these adolescents’ fates. The organization that is the subject of this study has taken up the goal of prevention in an effort to give the youth back autonomy over their lives and experiences.

## **Chapter Two: The Ways and Means of Feminist Organizing**

While Youth Resource Center generally, and the Girls Coalition specifically, did not explicitly identify as a feminist organization, they did adhere to feminist means of organizing and advocate feminist concerns that include gender equality and women's empowerment. Ferree and Martin (1995) characterize feminist organizations as an "amalgam, a blend of institutionalization and social movement practices" (p. 7-8) that are continuously changing in response to the needs of those they serve and the socio-political context in which the organization is situated (Schmitt, 1994). Feminist organizations have been successful at institutionalizing their goals, language, and practices into the mainstream U.S. culture (Gelb, 1995), so feminist organizational practices have been integrated into mainstream social movement organizing. Martin (1990) identifies the criteria of feminist organizations as attributing women's subordination to structural inequalities and working to improve women's collective status and empowerment. Organizations such as the YRC meet this criteria even if they eschew the feminist label for political or survival reasons. Below I review relevant literature on feminist organizational structures, feminist management, conflict and conflict resolution, and empowerment of workers and youth.

### **Feminist Organizational Structures**

Feminist organizing is characterized as desirous for workplace cultures that value nonhierarchical, participatory, relational, interconnected environments (Acker, 1990; Ashcraft, 2001; Ferree and Martin, 1995, Mansbridge 1974, Morgen, 1995). There is



often a pull between collectivist versus bureaucratic organization, or participatory-democratic versus hierarchical authority and control in feminist organizations (Martin, 1990). Ouchi and Price (1993) define bureaucratic hierarchies as tending to have employees who are willing to submit to a central authority, are invested in the organization and its outcomes, and where individuals have a higher level of specialization. Hierarchies have been assumed to be a masculine construct predicated on domination and therefore antithetical to feminism's goals and feminist organizing (Ashcraft, 2001; Ferree & Martin, 1995; Mansbridge, 1973; Morgen, 1994; Riger, 1994). Consequently, feminist and women's social movement organizations have sought more collective means of organizing.

Participatory-democracies have a long history in social movement and feminist organizing and are an attempt at creating an alternative to bureaucratic or hierarchical structures (Morgen, 1994; Mansbridge, 1974; Strobel, 1995)). A participatory-democracy is a completely egalitarian organizational model where decision making is direct, face-to-face, and based upon complete consensus (Mansbridge, 1974). In her studies on the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, a feminist organization of the second wave, Strobel (1995) found that "ideals of completely egalitarian, collective decision-making and action are impossible to achieve...given the existing organizational structure of our society and the embeddedness of organizing efforts in that structure" (p. 140). The fact that our society is organized around hierarchy and bureaucratic principles undermines feminists' goals of alternative processes. When feminist groups endeavor to construct different models of organizing, "the slate is rarely wiped clean" because "bureaucratic assumptions

and practices often co-exist with counterbureaucratic assumptions and ideals in the actual practice of these organizations *although participants rarely acknowledge this is so* [orig. italics](Morgen, 1994, p. 675). Joan Acker (1995) asserts that organizations are “constituted through practices and processes that occur through the actions of organizational participants,” such that “many of these practices are grounded in fundamental social arrangements and understandings, are supported by powerful interests, and persist over time and the coming and going of particular people” (p. 137). Ultimately, organizations are merely abstractions because people engender the processes enacted in organizations. Therefore, organizations are never completely democratic or completely hierarchical but a blend of the two and a product of those who make up the organization.

Ashcraft (2006) draws on new organizational conceptions known as postbureaucratic forms and asserts that contemporary feminist organizing falls within that category. Postbureaucratic forms share certain features such as a minimizing of hierarchy or a flattening to facilitate collaboration, autonomy, and communication blended with control creating a paradoxical hybrid (Heckcher, 1994; Keidel, 1995). As previously discussed, the absence of hierarchy in feminist organizations can create acute dilemmas, such as how to manage ideological differences among members, cliques, invisible influence or power, and lack of consensus. A feature of bureaucracy is formalization, or rules that dictate behavior and responsibilities (Weber, 1964, 1969), and these unspoken rules can serve to mitigate problems in feminist organizations. Feminist organizations, however, are generally conceived as pursuing empowerment by way of collectivism;

however, collectivism is weakened by the tendency of bureaucracy to enforce compliance (Ashcraft, 2006; Riger, 1994, Morgen, 1990). These tensions of feminist bureaucracy, like other postbureaucratic models, are a hybrid form Ashcraft (2001) terms “organized dissonance.” She suggests that organized dissonance is the “strategic union of forms presumed hostile” (p. 1304). What makes this model applicable to current feminist and social movement organizing is the melding of feminist organizing principles with the actual contextual circumstances in which feminists or others are organizing.

### **Feminist Management**

Feminist styles of management are different from more traditional styles of management in that they seek to empower everyone in the workplace setting (Mooney-Nickel, & Eikenberry, 2006; Madden, 2008). Margaret Madden (2008) traces the roots of management back to the paternalism and philanthropy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which “simulates patriarchal, family-like relations, exerting power for the good of the workers and promoting compliant and predictable employees” (p. 195). This conception of management coincides with the gendered nature of organizations. While previously conceptualized as gender neutral, feminists and other theorists have noted the masculine nature of organizational structure (Acker, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; Kanter, 1977) leading to more traditional forms of management typically associated with the for-profit organizational setting. Specifically, individualism and masculinity are two dimensions that apply directly to feminist management (Hofstedt, 1980). Hofstede (1980) examined management practices based on U.S. sociohistoric traditions and notes that masculine and

individualistic cultures focus on achievement and evaluate performance based on self-interest, while feminist cultures focus on quality of life, relationships between people, and shared loyalty towards a common goal.

Feminist management challenges the false split between public and private life (Mooney-Nickel, & Eikenberry, 2006) and seeks to wed the two together. Therefore feminist management practice is necessarily about “eliminating false dichotomies or artificial separations, empowering women [and other historically marginalized groups], democratizing organizational structures, valuing process, and linking the personal is political” (Chernesky, 1995, p. 73). Specifically, feminist management embodies an ethic of care, egalitarianism, and collaboration over hierarchy (Madden, 2008; Mooney-Nickel, & Eikenberry, 2006).

Diane Metzendorf (2005) conducted 15 in-depth case studies of feminist organizations founded in the 1970s and analyzed their life cycles over 10 or more years as they developed into more bureaucratic forms. Metzendorf found that these social movement organizations still relied upon feminist principles of management even though they had evolved into more hierarchal “traditional” bureaucratic structures. These managers emphasized the value of collaboration and the importance of the decision-making process to include organization members on various levels of the hierarchy while being sensitive to those affected by said decisions. Such an emphasis on process can improve communication in other human service organizations because it encourages full participation among all members. In non-profit organizations, due to limits of time and resources (Mansbridge, 1974), it is crucial to foster methods of communication that are

not only conducive to the organizational environment but take into account the needs of the staff (Mansbridge, 1974; Riger, 1994) so as to avoid unnecessary conflict.

### **Conflict and Conflict Resolution**

There are many stereotypes concerning the ways in which women work together, often making such stereotypes self-fulfilling prophecies. While men are typically characterized as "aggressive and hostile," women are thought of as "catty and backstabbing" (Chesler, 2009; Rutter & Hine, 2005; Lewis & Orford, 2005). In feminist scholarship the term horizontal hostility (Kennedy, 1970) has been used to describe the situation in which members of the same oppressed and marginalized group fight amongst themselves resulting in relationally aggressive behaviors such as verbal and/or covert forms of expression like secrets, gossip, spreading rumors, and feigning friendship (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995).

Conflict is present in all facets of life including feminist organizations or organizations utilizing feminist processes. Mansbridge (1974) asserts time, emotion, and ingrained inequalities are all sources of potential conflict in feminist organizations. Ingrained inequalities include levels of expertise, personal attractiveness, verbal skill, self-confidence, access to information, and interest in the task. All decisions take longer to make because of the emphasis on consensus. The issues become personalized leading to criticisms being taken as personal slights with social locations contributing to how we deal with and interpret emotions and conflict. These ingrained inequalities have increased in some situations, for example, as non-profits have become "more formalized, more

impersonal, more specialized and hierarchical” (Metzendorf, 2005, p. 152). This can be attributed to organizational growth and certain requirements by funders. Furthermore, differences between co-workers’ positionality, meaning differences in identity and privilege, can also foster conflict and inhibit clear communication. Clear and effective communication as part of a successful working environment can prove challenging when women of different ages, sexual identities, social classes, and races/ethnicities come together (Chesler, 2009; Jehn et al., 1999; Riger, 1994).

Jehn et al. (1999) studied three different facets of potential conflict in workplace settings: First, informational diversity refers to differences in knowledge bases and perspectives likely arising from differences among group members in education, experience, and expertise; second, social category diversity refers to differences such as race, gender, and ethnicity among members; third, value diversity is when members have different ideas about what the overall goals, objectives, or mission should be for the group. They found that group performance was enhanced by informational diversity and worker morale (satisfaction, intent to remain, commitment, and perceived performance) was increased by social category diversity. Conversely, both performance and worker morale may suffer when groups have greater diversity in terms of values. In this context communication is key to how effective a feminist manager will be (Mooney-Nickel & Eikenberry, 2006).

Phyllis Chesler’s (2009) book *Women’s Inhumanity to Women* is a longitudinal study of horizontal hostility among women spanning 20 years. She found that women’s internalized sexism contribute to conflict in the workplace. Chesler reviews the work of

Paige P. Edley, a professor of Organizational and Interpersonal Communication, who found that in small female-dominated businesses, women often view other women they work with as pseudo-family members and expect their female colleagues to behave as such, leading to self-silencing of dissent and creativity to maintain a “family-like” closeness. For example, women did experience anger but relabeled it as PMS so they could “maintain the illusion of a happy family” (p. 342). Lastly, women may be willing to sacrifice creativity and visionary leadership or effective, i.e. non-maternal, management, for the semblance of a family-like work structure.

While the family is a seemingly natural form of group organization and thus many other collectivities tend to or are encouraged to treat others “like family,” the family is embedded in hierarchy and has been idealized as a patriarchal model (Cole and Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Hill-Collins, 1998). Anne McClintock (1995, p. 45) writes that the image of the family came to embody “*hierarchy within unity* as an organic element of historical progress, and thus became indispensable for legitimating exclusion and hierarchy within nonfamilial social forms.” In other words, the family is often the first place women learn hierarchy and learn their place within hierarchy both within and outside the family unit. Hill-Collins (1998, p. 221) takes this further asserting that women learn their place within “hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and class” in the family making such hierarchies outside the family appear as “natural social arrangements, as compared to socially constructed ones.” This keeps women from seeing their connection with other similarly situated women and from building coalitions across difference. “Family,” and stemming from the family, “sisterhood,” assumes a shared material reality

of all women and therefore undermines itself as an organizing tool because it does not allow for a deconstruction of the hierarchies that exist among women and that often present themselves in the workplace.

Solving workplace conflicts are often very challenging because what works well on paper may not be applicable in real life settings. Distrust, anger, and misunderstandings across race and/or class can both foster and undermine “we”ness in organizations (Morgen, 1994). Emotions are mitigated by hegemonic forces and power (Morgen, 1995) and are thus socially constructed by political and historic social practices in which emotional discourse is created, interpreted, and contested. Morgen (1995) draws on Gloria Anzaldúa when articulating the importance of historicizing and politicizing styles of conflict and interpersonal relations. She argues that feminist theory must elaborate on conflict and interpersonal relations to effectively analyze them “if it is ever going to be able to capture what power relations feel like and how processes of domination and resistance work in every day life” (p. 242). To overcome conflict, time and energy need to be spent on relationships, process, collaborative consensus building, and worker participation. Such a strategy ensures worker growth and development (Chernesky, 1995).

### **Empowerment of Workers**

Before conceptualizing what is meant by empowerment, we must first articulate and define what is meant by power. Feminists have conceptualized power in three different ways: (i) power as an individual attribute; (ii) as power over, or power as a



relationship of domination; and (iii) as power to, or power to challenge domination, otherwise known as empowerment (Hartsock, 1983). Power is thus reformulated as having power over oneself as opposed to being powerless. In a workplace setting, empowerment “is defined as workers’ belief that they have the capability to shape events in their jobs and their lives, that their actions are effective, and that they have some control over their choices and actions” (p. 314) Feminists have conceptualized empowerment of workers as intertwined with specific organizational forms and processes previously mentioned such as flattening of hierarchy, collaboration, etc. Nevertheless, the social context through which someone is empowered is often lost in these frameworks (Ashkraft & Kendrowicz, 2002; Chiles and Zorn, 1995). Empowerment of employees also emphasizes self-efficacy by accomplishing or having control of one’s work life (Ashkraft & Kendrowicz, 2002). It has been posited, however, that this perspective downplays emotional and relational dimensions of empowerment by depicting empowerment as an individual, psychological condition existing prior to the organization (Koberg et al., 1999).

Women continue to be associated with the private sphere (Lazzari, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009; Martin, 1990; Morgen, 1983; Mumby, 1993). Feminist models of empowerment that deny the relevance of the private sphere on work life “institutionalize privilege for many men and preserve systemic discrimination against many women” in the process (Ashkraft & Kendrowicz, 2002) by devaluing both the private sphere and the reproductive labor essential for the maintenance of the private sphere. Consequently, feminist organizations actively pursue models of empowerment that embrace the private

as an essential part of work life (Lazzari, Colarossi, & Collins, 2009; Taylor, 1995). Members will often treat family needs as organizational obligations and seek personal, emotional work relations that emulate relations in the private sphere (Morgen, 1994). Mumby & Putnam (1992) have articulated this organizational obligation as bounded emotionality. This way of organizing values previously suppressed elements of work experience, such as “nurturance, caring, community, supportiveness, and interrelatedness” (p. 474). Bounded emotionality encourages the open expression of feelings in the workplace, which can enhance intimacy among members. Emotional expression is maintained by negotiated “rules of feelings” to preserve functionality, marking members’ needs and limitations. Metzendorf (2005) highlights a model that integrates feminist principles of empowerment in her analysis of Women Organize Against Rape (WOAR).

The “Power and Empowerment” model used by WOAR (p. 157) tries to integrate feminist principles of empowerment and process within a formalized hierarchical structure. Fluidity of information and accountability is open in order to facilitate dialogue across all levels and views feedback as characteristic of the model (Gordon, 1987; Metzendorf, 2005). Feminist organizations working toward the betterment of women’s lives may also work to redefine power beyond the individual to include empowerment of the feminist or women’s movement generally. Thus empowerment has been redefined as collective power (Reinelt, 1995). Lazzari, Colarossi, and Collins (2009) argue that all levels of power and influence, no matter how formal or informal, should be critically examined to restructure power as empowerment. Fundamentally, managers and those in

leadership positions must encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the effectiveness with which the organization is carrying out its work. By keeping tasks and projects at the forefront the main objective is then bringing those within the organization with the most applicable skills and talents to the tasks at hand.

### **Empowerment of Youth**

During the past several decades empowerment practice in the human services sector has emerged so as to develop more effective and responsive strategies to aid marginalized groups (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley 2006; Guitierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995). Empowerment practice is meant to “address the role powerlessness plays in creating and perpetuating personal and social problems” (Guitierrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995. p. 249), therefore *empowering* those affected by powerlessness to overcome those problems. Implicit in empowerment practice, however, is the possible reification of power differences because empowerment is predicated on one person empowering another (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley 2006; Pease, 2002). Pease (2002) states that framing empowerment as emancipatory may be hazardous because, unlike other discourses, “it sees itself not as requiring further justification or critique. It is therefore possible to regard empowerment as a more subtle refinement of domination, masked by the respectability of a liberatory discourse” (p. 138). Thus domination is shrouded by the societal conception of individuals as autonomous when they are in fact the product of Western sociohistoric/economic belief systems. Feelings of personal control are conflated with actual control, and mistaking “one’s ability to control resources

with a sense of empowerment depoliticizes the latter” (Riger, 1993. p. 282). Emphasis on the individual or “micro” level as opposed to macro levels has the potential to place empowerment in the hands of experts rather than clients (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley 2006; Guiterrez, GlenMaye, & DeLois, 1995; Pease, 2002)

Empowerment practice has been especially critiqued and positioned as problematic in social service projects aimed at women and girls. Much of the practice on “intervening” with the goal of empowerment is predicated on constructions of adolescent girls as “in trouble” (usually in the realm of sexuality) (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley 2006; Lerner Phelps, Alberts, Forman, & Christiansen, 2007). The field of adolescent sexuality is plagued by an overwhelming emphasis on sex-negative research. In other words, adolescent sexuality is almost exclusively discussed in terms of its risks and potential dangers. This is contrary to other research connoting adolescence as a time of identity development with rebellious behaviors characterized as both beneficial and normative (Diamond & Williams, 2009; Leadbeater, 2007). As discussed in the literature on sex trafficking in chapter one, such a sex-negative outlook of sexuality is further complicated by the gendered and racist assumptions about girls of color who have been disproportionately studied in terms of the “problems” associated with adolescent sexuality and deemed dangerous “urban girls.” On the other side, their white middle-class peers have often been characterized as the virginal “gate keepers” of sexuality (Diamond & Williams, 2009; Tolman, 1996). Sexuality, adolescence, gender, and race as constructs are not easily melded together nor are they complementary (Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley 2006). This results in contradictory demands for youth engendering a double

bind of being both “good girls” and “normal” teenagers exploring sexuality playing into the discourse of sympathy and deviance associated with sex trafficked youth as discussed above.

Recently, feminist-oriented empowerment interventions have proliferated in working with adolescent girls “in trouble” (Bowling et al., 2000; Sullivan, 1996; Walsh-Burke, 2000) Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, & Malley (2006) studied one such program, revealing that the adult mentors subscribed to the “in trouble” trope and thus ended up disciplining and regulating the girls’ voices when they did not fit within their determinations of normative girl talk. Despite the deficit view of urban adolescent female development, many studies have shown the resiliency of adolescents, especially when they have access to nonparent female adults (Banister & Leadbeater, 2007; Lopez and Lechuga, 2007; Rhodes, Davis, Prescott, & Spencer, 2007). In this context, resilience means how with social supports youth from stigmatized communities succeed amidst multiple sources of oppression, such as race, class, and gender oppression (Lopez & Lechuga, 2007).

Banister and Leadbeater (2007) evaluated an intervention program seeking to empower youth who were in unhealthy and dangerous heterosexual relationships. They sought to determine “what works” in an empowerment intervention program. Several strategies emerged: first, helping the girls express themselves and their concerns so they could hear their voices out loud; second, learning to identify problematic relationships; third, offering alternative perspectives and understandings about healthy relationships;

and fourth, increasing adult participation and helping adult mentors to demonstrate positive role modeling.

I now turn to explore the relationships in the Youth Resource Center and the Girls Coalition, a program that seeks to empower young women at risk for commercial sexual exploitation. Following my methodological approach, I address themes of feminist management and empowerment and their consequences for both the relationships the staff have with their clients as well as with each other and the organization they serve.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The summer of 2011, I was an intern at a non-profit with a pilot program aimed at preventing CSEC. As already mentioned, the Girls Coalition is a direct service initiative of the Youth Resource Center (YRC) providing early intervention services for mostly African American girls coming through the juvenile justice system, many of whom have experienced some form of child abuse and/or neglect. The youth are mandated to the program as part of their probationary requirements for offences such as shoplifting, running away, and truancy. The Girls Coalition provide services and holistic solutions to deter these girls from becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC). The predominantly African American staff work with the girls, ages 11-17 years, empowering them and providing opportunities to strengthen and reinforce the principle of empowerment. All aspects of the project aim to deliver the fundamental messages necessary to educate the youth about CSE dangers and promote healthy relationships and self-esteem.

After being accepted into the internship, I approached the YRC asking if they would allow me to conduct my thesis research on their program the Girls Coalition and the youth they are serving. The goal of this project was to assess how the youth understand and make meaning of their daily lives. What might it mean to them to be "high risk?" From those questions I hoped to determine a "best practices" model for intervention, prevention, and empowerment of these youth and others in similar circumstances. I planned on interviewing the youth, about 15 of them, and 5 staff members. I was also planning to treat their weekly 2 hour group meetings as focus groups

so I could observe and record the actual program in action. The organization was very receptive to my initial request, and, after I sent them my research proposal, enthusiastically approved it highlighting the importance they placed on research. I began my IRB application immediately and set my sights on the summer that lay ahead.

When I began my internship the YRC appeared very well organized and efficient. Granted, they were over worked and under staffed, but that seemed to me to be normal operating procedure for non-profit agencies. Thrown in immediately, I was excited about the experience of working in a non-profit and the environment. I was invited to participate in all aspects of the organization and everything that the YRC and the Girls Coalition were implementing into the program or brainstorming. The Girls Coalition is a “pilot” program, meaning the first of its kind and less than a year old. Because I was the Girls Coalition intern I was attached to the hip of “Simone,” the Girls Coalition coordinator. Everywhere she went, I went, and everything she did or asked me to do, I did. I arrived in the middle of June and at the time I was still waiting for IRB approval so my research was temporarily put on hold. I explained to “Angela” the deputy manager, and “Gloria” the assistant Executive Director, Simone’s supervisors, the long approval process explaining them I would let them know as soon as I heard anything.

A few weeks into the internship it became apparent that politics and conflict among the staff had caused an oversight regarding my research: Managing staff who were supposed to have seen the proposal and read it had not been given the opportunity. When I finally received my IRB approval Simone and I sat down to chart a plan of action to complete my research. By this time it was the middle of July. Because of the delayed



approval we only had a few weeks before the girls would start back to school in August, making interviewing them nearly impossible. The time challenge was compounded by the fact that the youth had severe transportation difficulties. Many of the youth had drivers contracted by the Girls Coalition to transport them to and from group or the Girls Coalition gave them metro cards. What's more, only about six of the youth regularly came to group. Starting my research would be challenging, as I still needed to have all the parental consent forms signed before any interviews or observations could begin to take place.

Managing staff decided they wanted to review my consent forms and after reviewing explained to me that I as a white woman could not use the consent and assent documents I had created. Gloria was even surprised that the documents had passed through IRB. Angela proceeded to tell me the language in the parental consent form was inaccessible for their clients' families. I was told the families would not understand my forms and they would think that their daughters were lab rats in an experiment. Staff did acknowledge that I had asked them during the IRB process if they would like to see the documents and that they had declined. I apologized and tried to assure them that I had tried to remain cognizant of my role as a white researcher working with an African American population and that I was deeply troubled about the situation. I also affirmed that I would redo the forms immediately. I apologized again and explained that this was my first time doing research and unfortunately, I was learning as I went.

It became clear that staff was unaware of the extent to which the Girls Coalition would need to be involved in my research. Because of youths' transportation issues and

with the advancing start of school, the YRC/Girls Coalition would have to offer me a great deal of support. Though, I had emailed YRC a very extensive proposal detailing my research design, that information had simply not been shared among managing staff. After extensive discussion regarding the many roadblocks I was going to have with the consent forms, the YRC and I decided the research work could not proceed.

Acknowledging the situation I began to outline a new plan. My new research design would seek to assess, through qualitative research, the social context out of which the staff experience their role in the lives of these youth in order create, in conjunction with the YRC, a “best practices” model for intervention, prevention, and empowerment. I was now only interviewing the staff and community partners who came to do programming for the youth. I called my thesis committee chair immediately to explain to her what was happening. She was wonderful and encouraged me to not internalize what had just transpired. This was a time when academia meets applied setting and it did not work. That day I redid my entire IRB application while in the YRC office. I thought about what had transpired, and the other dynamics that I had become aware of at work in the organization, I decided to change course and interview staff employed at the YRC, but not necessarily working directly with the youth. Thankfully, I was reapproved fairly quickly and set about this new plan.

This study asks questions of the staff and community partners about how they understand their role both in the organization as a whole and in the lives of the youth they are serving. With reference to the adults working with youth I am interested in (1) how they seek to empower the youth; (2) what is their relationship with the youth; (3) what do

they believe the organization needs to be successful and effective; (4) how do they see the dynamics of being a woman working with other women and girls in such a setting. In this chapter I detail the research design overview, the participant recruitment process, the way in which I analyzed my data, my personal disclosure, and limitations that may have impacted the research process.

### **Research Design**

I approach this research through a women's studies perspective, drawing on feminist methodologies to design my research (Hesse-Beiber, 2007). There is no one feminist methodology or particular research method. Rather, feminist methodologies provide a framework in which to conduct research including a focus on women's experiences, stories, and inequalities with an emphasis on social justice and change, and researcher reflexivity (Hesse-Beiber, 2007; Reinharz, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1983). These elements further contribute to the feminist tradition of seeking to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the forefront, especially among marginalized groups (DeVault & Gross, 2007). Feminist methodology also necessitates an examination of power within the research process by specifically addressing how researchers' own positions of power and personal subjectivity contribute to the research process and its outcomes (Naples, 2003).

The research presented here is a qualitative study based on "methodological traditions of inquiry" where the researcher aims to construct a "complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports a detailed view of informants, and conducts the study in a natural

setting” (Creswell, 1998. p. 15). Just as feminist research tends to draw upon multiple disciplines, feminist research often utilizes multiple methods (Reinharz, 1992). Multiple methods enable the researcher to “link past and present, ‘data gathering’ and action, and individual behavior with social frameworks” (p. 197). A multiple methods approach works to accomplish several tasks including an appreciation of individual difference, recognition of the role of the researcher in the project, as well as acknowledging that the conditions of our lives are mitigated by personal and structural factors.

I engaged in participant observation during the course of my internship in the summer of 2011. I observed the daily business workings and interactions of staff of both the Girls Coalition and the YRC as a whole. Reinharz (1992) explains that feminists “try to interpret women’s behavior as shaped by social context rather than context free or rooted in anatomy, personality, or social class” (p. 53). Observation allowed me to provide such a context to my interview data, deepening and giving a more complete picture to the interview data. I became what DeWalt and DeWalt (2002) identify as an active participant where I actually engaged in almost everything that other members of the organization were doing but did not actually become a full and complete member. Feminist researchers have differing opinions on distance versus closeness in observation with many advocating for complete integration of participant observers to eliminate the subject-object distinction (Reinharz, 1992). Being an intern I was able to integrate more fully into the organization and lessen my impact as an outsider. On that same account, only having the summer to work in the YRC did limit my ability to integrate fully into the organizational collective.

Participant observation addresses my research questions by offering a holistic “cultural portrait” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61), meaning an overview of the scene or setting integrating aspects learned about the group in order to show its complexity. By being an observer I am able to incorporate “both the views of the actors in the group” and my “interpretation of views about human life” (p. 60) or explicit and tacit observations, respectively (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Despite issues of complete integration, participant observation did allow me insider access to the daily processes and dynamics of the organization, offering me more complete answers to my research questions.

Semi-structured, open-ended interviewing is a particularly useful and common research tool for feminist research studies (DeVault, 1999; DeVault and Gross, 2007; Reinharz, 1992). DeVault and Gross (2007) state that open-ended interviewing draws on the “political traditions of testimony and consciousness raising” (p. 173): familiar tools in women’s studies and feminism to bring out the untold stories of women and other marginalized groups. Considering the contradictions inherent in giving voice to others, semi-structured open-ended interviewing lessens the challenges by giving the participant a level of control in choosing both how to answer a question and in how to shape the interview (Bernard, 2006). Participants were also given pseudonyms so as to protect their identities. Active listening is a crucial element in this style of interviewing to enable more of a conversational exchange. Such an exchange also allows for clarification and elaboration so that new topics and themes can emerge that were not initially in the researcher’s mind (Bernard, 2006; DeVault and Gross, 2007). This flexibility gives the

researcher the ability to explore an individual's experience and the nuances within that experience as separate and distinct from the other participants experiences.

Interview questions were constructed so as to understand participants' experiences serving youth and working in the Girls Coalition. Specific interview questions included: Why did you decide to work with youth? What do you think the youth need to be successful and make healthy decisions? What does the organization need to be successful? How do you see your role in the lives of the youth and in the organization? (See Appendix A for interview questions.)

### **Selection of Site and Participants**

As explained above, following my acceptance as a Girls Coalition intern in the spring of 2011, I approached the YRC with a proposal of conducting my thesis research on the Girls Coalition program. My sample selection was purposeful in that I was interested in the Girls Coalition specifically and not the YRC as a whole entity. A total of nine interviews (all female) were conducted and participants were selected if they worked within the Girls Coalition or closely assisted those staff working directly in the Girls Coalition. Seven participants were employees of the YRC at the time of interviewing. Three participants were working directly with the youth in the Girls Coalition program. Four individuals who did not work directly with the youth, but who assisted their colleagues programmatically on a day-to-day basis were also interviewed so as to provide a more complete picture of the program. Two women were interviewed who were not employees of the YRC, but were employed as clinical and school psychologists who had

become affiliated with the YRC from their respective graduate programs. These women were purposefully selected for interviewing because of their simultaneous insider/outsider status within the program. The psychologists spent eight weeks presenting curricula to the youth that the educational psychology department of their university had created. Although they had developed rapport with the staff and youth because they were not employees, they were still able to offer an outsider perspective. Six of my participants identified as African American and three identified as white. The Girls Coalition program coordinator emailed my participant selection requesting they contact me if they would like to be interviewed. All those selected agreed to be interviewed. YRC employees who had no direct connection to the Girls Coalition were excluded from my sample.

All participants were interviewed in a mediation room at the Juvenile Court where the YRC is housed during normal operating hours. Choosing this location to hold the interviews meant that participants did not have to go out of their way to meet with me and we were in a familiar, comfortable, and private setting. The interviews were semi-structured in that questions were previously constructed but allowed for probing questions to draw out more complete and nuanced stories. Interviews generally lasted between an hour and an hour and 15 minutes, although one interview lasted only half an hour. Each interview was recorded on a handheld digital audio recorder after gaining participant consent at the onset of the interview. During the interview, participants were free to decline answering any questions, to ask questions for further clarification, or stop

participation altogether. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were invited to add any additional comments or concerns. (See Appendix B for consent document.)

### **Data Analysis**

Field notes were carefully taken during ongoing participation in the day-to-day workings of the organization. I took both descriptive notes containing chronology of events and settings and reflexive notes recording my experiences, intuitions, and reflections (Creswell, 1998). All handwritten field notes were later typed to be stored in digital format. I also followed Creswell's (1998) recommendations of using a grounded theory approach where transcriptions of interviews were initially coded for themes or categories individually and then reexamined to make connections across multiple narratives. After all interviews were transcribed I analyzed them and made a list of initial categories and then drew out recurring themes that fit within those categories. Quotes were then pulled from the interview narratives to illustrate the themes and formed the basis of my interpretations as they coincided with my interview questions. I then went back to my observations and field notes to put my interview data and themes into context (Reinharz 1992).

### **Limitations**

I must consider my subject position during my time observing, through the interview process, and as I coded the data. First, I identify as a feminist and I realize that my identity as a feminist researcher impacts my perceptions and interpretations of what I



saw and heard in my day-to-day interactions at the YRC, as well as how others related to me. Furthermore, my feminist lens also impacted my interpretation of the direction of interviews and what questions to pursue further. Additionally, the fact that I chose to code all of my data through a feminist lens also means that my understanding and interpretation of themes includes that bias. Lastly, feminist methodology emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and making explicit our social location as feminist researchers (DeVault, 2004; Naples, 2003; Weber, 2004). Therefore, it is crucial that I acknowledge my role as a white researcher and the implicit power differentials that exist in working with predominantly women of color on this research project.

Weber (2004) has identified common themes that characterize the scholarship on race, class, gender, and sexuality studies. In addition it is important to recognize that these social hierarchies are connected to each other, are institutionalized, and exist at the individual level as apparent in the way we experience our lives and develop our identities. Almost all of us occupy both dominant and subordinate positions and these identities are simultaneously expressed, which is otherwise known as intersectionality. My position as a white researcher signifies the socially constructed hierarchy of domination and necessitates an examination of both privilege and oppression and I find these themes useful in discussing my social location as a researcher. First, these systems are all contextually based, meaning race, gender, class, and sexuality, among others, are not static and change across time and location. That I am a white woman doing research on an organization largely staffed by African American women who serve, at the time of the research, only African American girls, cannot be divorced from its contextual

circumstances. The YRC is located in the southern part of the US and exists amidst a long history of oppressive race relations between white and black communities. I have grown up and spent the majority of my life in the south and am aware that my position as a white researcher may appear suspect and could potentially reify the “othering” of a community. Moreover, being a white researcher may have infringed upon my ability to gain the trust of the women I interviewed.

I also feel it is important to acknowledge that while I entered this organization as an intern in a more “activist” capacity, I also entered as an academic feminist researcher. All but one of the women I interviewed had college degrees, with two having advanced degrees, despite this my role as a researcher separated me from them as activists and this separation is highlighted by the difficulty I had with my consent forms as explained above. I bring this particular instance up in order to help illustrate how my race and education also informed the analysis and coding of my data.

Being self-reflexive is a crucial aspect of engaging in feminist research because it allows the researcher to locate herself in the research process and explore her own biases and objectivity. I felt I had to be honest about the events surrounding my internship as they greatly impacted my research process, which is why I chose to include this discussion in my methods section. While participants were very willing to be interviewed by me, I do not know if these events infringed upon the trust building I had tried to do with them and whether this affected their desire to be honest during interviews. I do believe this reflexivity improves my credibility as a researcher, however, and strengthens

the credibility of my findings because I have been honest about these events and my part in them.

As with any research project there are also methodological and ethical considerations to consider alongside the personal bias I bring to the research study. This non-profit, like many, has a public image to uphold. This concern may encourage interviewees to hold back from being completely honest. In addition, there is always the risk of subjects telling the researcher what participants think she wants to hear. Finally, I had been serving as an intern for several weeks prior to the interviews making me less than a stranger but not fully accepted as a part of their community. I became an insider as a participant observer working in the organization and that bias may be present in my analysis too.

Another limitation of this research is the small sample size among interview participants. The themes present cannot be compared to other organizations to test their validity. Moreover, because I was not able to interview the youth, I can only conjecture how the processes present in this feminist organization and in the Girls Coalition program were made obvious to the youth, and if the organizational dynamics were affecting the youth. While my sample is small, an advantage is that it presents a relatively in-depth look at staff relationships in one organization. In this way it provides examples of the trials and tribulations of that organization and the women who work there.

## **Chapter 4: Paradoxes of Empowerment**

Interview data revealed two different layers of themes. The first layer is about participant's relationships with the youth they are serving, while the second layer is about organizational dynamics among the staff themselves and within the organization they serve. Themes on participant relationships with youth included the following: being called to mentor girls; importance of an ethic of care in work; and youth finding her own voice or youth empowerment. Themes dealing with organizational dynamics included first, issues associated with organizational infrastructure, strategic planning, and management; second, a need for shared vision; and third, struggles of power and hierarchy (drama) in the organization. Below the recurring themes from participant narratives are reviewed. (See Appendix C for chart of participant demographics and job title)

### **Staff Serving Youth**

#### *A Calling to Mentor Girls*

A majority of the staff had worked in direct service prior to working at the YRC. The staff cited identification with the youth as a primary factor in making the choice to work in direct service. All participants working directly with the youth stated that they could see parts of themselves reflected in the youth they are currently serving. Several times throughout the interview Angela, the deputy manager in the YRC and an African American woman in her early thirties, stated: "It could've been me," meaning she had the same "high risk" indicators as the population she is serving. Angela also identifies with

the youths' physicality. She discussed how she developed a curvy backside at a young age and talked about the unwanted attention she received because of her body: "I see a lot of young girls today that look just like I look, but they think that's all they have to offer because people...that's the only thing people ever comment on. So I'm so drawn to that, to teach them that just because you look grown don't mean you are." Angela believes that she represents a different future or a possible future for the youth because she looks like them and has a similar background, but was still able to go to college and is a professional. In addition, Mary, the ED and an African-American woman in her early forties, said that:

there is something special about helping a girl, a young woman, that is on her life journey cause, you know, I've travelled a life journey of being a little girl growing up so there's something unique about...being able to see, you know, something of yourself or give something of yourself that's kind of directly inline with what the journey is you've already experienced.

Patty, an African American woman in her early thirties and the Girls Coalition facilitator and advocate, is herself a survivor of CSEC, and quite literally sees her life story in the lives of the youth. She grew up in very similar family structures, received similar societal messages, and has a corresponding negative legal history. She wants to "lead by example" so the youth can use her story as a lesson of what could happen to them if they stay on their present paths. Patty doesn't want them to make her story "their own story." Rachel Lloyd (2011) advocates for survivor led organizations because they best understand the background of where the youth are coming from and what they need to be successful.

All three of these examples illustrate what Patricia Hill-Collins (2009, p. 269) refers to as “Black feminist epistemology,” which is specialized and “reflects the interest and standpoint of its creators” by centering on the “distinctive themes of African-American women’ experiences” and emphasizing the “importance of intersecting oppressions in shaping the U.S. matrix of domination”. These women recognize that resisting oppression is not a theoretical or academic exercise, but an imperative for survival. Mentoring these young women and holding life journeys and experiences as knowledge useful for mentorship and empowerment is very subversive under hegemonic meanings of what counts as knowledge because it privileges the ways of knowing for a subjugated people.

Many staff felt that they connect well with teenagers and just genuinely enjoyed working with that age group, especially young women. Three participants working with the youth felt that even if they came from different cultural backgrounds, they still have many key points of identification with the youth and could engage in coalition building across difference. One of the psychologists, Cherrie, who is in her mid twenties, grew up in a different region of the U.S., which she explained, created a barrier with the youth. Even though Cherrie is African American, she was aware of not “sounding” like the youth. She said she has had to “break in and let them know that we’re completely different, but we’re so the same.” The other psychologist, Eliza, a white woman in her late twenties born in Eastern Europe, had known women in her community who answered false employment ads resulting in those women being sex trafficked upon their arrival in the U.S. This experience of vulnerability, as well as other traumatic events in her life and

in the lives of women she knows, led her to seek out this population of girls because she felt, despite their differences, she could relate and offer help to them:

I mean we are different. I mean, we have a different culture and backgrounds and it's about not placing value on those things versus saying you don't see them. Because I think if you say you don't see them that's just disrespectful and it is like placing value on them. So, kind of just being aware, being comfortable, and being open. Like me coming in...I have a different experience than they have. I have similar experiences in some ways because I'm a woman and I was their age, but because I wasn't an African American woman growing up in the South, I know I have a different experience than they do and I'm also from another country. I'm originally from (*omitted*) and I moved here as an adolescent.

Eliza felt that her experiences as a woman, as well as her understanding of sexism and oppression from her training as a psychologist and from women's studies courses, led her to identify and find similarities with the youth. By acknowledging difference she created a safe space for connection.

Unlike other participants, Simone, a white woman in her early thirties, did not seek out direct service work, but came upon it by accident and "identified more" than she thought she would with the youth. When asked specifically what drew her to the population Simone responded:

Other than being a girl myself? (Laugh) Probably not specifically girls but...very much specifically girls who identify themselves as not liking other girls, as just having to be hard and should put up a wall so that they don't get messed with and things like that. It probably has to do more with the challenges that they face and the things that they want to talk about and the things they need to talk about. And just being stable, sitting in a place and listening to them about these issues.

Participants felt the importance of mentoring and connecting with female adolescents as crucially important. For them, these youth hold precarious positions in society due to

their race and gender, as well as a result of their legal and socioeconomic status. Every participant feels she has something special to offer or an experience that can be used as an example to help guide the youth toward better decision-making and better circumstances. They were in agreement that their job was to connect with and empower the youth.

### *Ethic of Care*

All participants felt it was crucially important to have a strong ethic of care guiding their delivery of service and advocacy. This ethic of care serves as another alternative epistemology used by African-American women. Hill-Collins (2009) identifies three interrelated components of the ethic of caring as having an emphasis placed on individual uniqueness, legitimizing emotions in dialogues, and developing the capacity for empathy. This ethic of care served as the foundation for the entire program and is the well from which the women drew to mentor and empower. Moreover, the population of youth they are serving necessitates a strong ethic of care so the Girls Coalition does not appear like “the system” or the Department of Juvenile Justice to the youth. Angela knows that without their strong ethic of care the youth will not trust the staff. She explains:

If you don't care, you're not gonna do good in this arena. You're just not. Because if you come in here just to check in at your nine to five, you're not gonna get the job done. They're not gonna believe you. They're not gonna tell you anything. They're not gonna be honest with you, and in that one moment when they're really, really scared or when they're shutting down, they're not gonna come to you. They're gonna treat you just like the system. “The Man,” and, you know, could be me if I... if I didn't obviously care.



In this quote Angela is expressing the importance of legitimizing both the youth's and her emotions while in dialogue with them as well as empathizing with whatever problems the youth may face.

The importance of the ethic of care was further evidenced by an event I witnessed at a group meeting between one girl, and Simone, and Patty. This young woman recounted an exchange she had with her probation officer in which the probation officer said that she would never leave her current path. Another young woman in the group remarked on the racism of the exchange and that what happened wasn't right. The Girls Coalition staff walk a fine line between wanting the girls to follow the rules and respect the authority of the legal system while also acknowledging that the system is flawed in many ways. In this instance staff agreed that racism was occurring in this instance and affirmed the girl's feelings and emotional response. They also told the young woman that she did not have to continue on this path and she was her own person making her own decisions.

The young women in the Girls Coalition are very used to having services or the state directly involved in their lives, whether it is foster care, probation officers, counselors, and so forth. These adults represent the "system." Such personnel are not involved in the adolescents' lives because they care about them individually, but because they work for the state. Simone takes Angela's point a step further by emphasizing the large number of adults in the youths' lives who have not come through for them in the

past. For Simone as the project coordinator it is also about showing the tangible proof that you care. For example, she explains, the youth constantly hear:

I'm here for you I'm here for you, but if you don't see people doing anything, the I'm here for you falls apart because you have...there's so much more to support and so much more to really being engaged in a persons life than just being there. You have to show interest in what they want to be doing and if you're not showing interest in what they want to be doing then they're gonna feel a bad vibe off of it and they're not gonna stay around. Then there's not much point to have a program.

Due to the adolescents' history with other social services being constantly in and out of their lives, building trust and connection with the youth is that much more challenging.

Therefore, the intense ethic of care helps to make the Girls Coalition a more effective program by providing "proof" of their care, which in turn helps with retention of the youth in the program.

Patty also stresses the importance of building a caring environment by creating a "space where they can release and express themselves the way they want to be expressed versus people coming down on them." She does this by simply being a "friend or someone that they know cares. So yeah, an ally, someone who is on their side." Often, the youth are self-parenting or feel they have no one to turn to when they need help. For all participants, showing an ethic of care means showing them that they are on the side of the youth or are allied with them in their struggles. Indeed, caring adults can be an "agent of change" in the lives of youth, according to the resiliency studies Eliza has read in her psychology studies. Because of this research, she strives to give them experiences where they feel loved and cared for because they are "human," and, therefore, deserving of that treatment.

### *Finding and Empowering Voice*

Stemming from participants' ethic of care is a strong desire on the part of the staff to make sure each adolescent finds and has confidence in her own voice. This is seen as a means for the youth to feel empowered. Emphasizing emotion and expressiveness in African-American communities resembles feminist perspectives on connective knowing (Hill-Collins, 2009). Connected knowers see the individual's personality as contributing to her ideas and to group knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986 as cited in Hill-Collins, 2009). These young women are constantly being bombarded with negative societal messages based on race, gender, and class, which are compounded by being placed in a legal system that does not value their uniqueness as individuals. Considering all these factors, participants naturally seek to stress the inherent value in the young women. Simone explained that for the youth to be successful and make healthy decisions it is her job to help and encourage them to "find a voice that really is their own and will be what they can use to help get what they need out of life, whatever they see they need out of life." Mary agreed, stating that the Girls Coalition provides an arena for the girls to "get in touch with their positive voice" and to "let it out." Having this positive space to take ownership of their voice will have long lasting effects they believe.

Angela harkened the youth finding their voice to perfecting a skill, a skill that will help them "in life" if they can hold onto those things and understand that they have their own voice" and can learn "how to use it appropriately" so the youth, will feel heard by others. Another venue for this kind of exploration does not exist for these youth making the Girls Coalition a unique space. Similarly, Angela frequently commented that she

“sounds like them,” meaning she and the youth have the same manner and way of speaking, which she feels show the youth that they can sound and/or speak the way they do and still be successful professionally like Angela. She believes taking pride in her voice and the way she speaks helps to empower the youth to take pride in their voices, too. Ultimately, only the youth can move themselves beyond the circumstances they are in, but the staff believes that they can help provide the means in which to do that.

Alongside providing a safe space for the adolescents’ voices it also becomes necessary at times to downplay the voice of the facilitator. Eliza is very cognizant of the power differential between the youth and the adults in their lives, including those working in the Girls Coalition. She said she has to be aware of her position and not

think my voice is louder because I’m older. I’m coming in as the facilitator so trying to minimize that as much as I can and letting them have a voice and letting whatever they say be ok and be acceptable and not be like, well, that’s what you think, but this is really the right way.

Valuing each voice and the ideas and opinions behind each voice means at times minimizing your own. Both Eliza and Cherrie want the youth to believe in the power of their decision-making skills and their ability to effectively convey those decisions to those around them. They both also stress the importance of the youth literally hearing their words and thoughts out loud because so often such young people are just told what to do rather than have their opinions solicited. By actually speaking their minds and explaining their decision-making processes they can begin to develop critical thinking skills, which all participants emphasized as very important to finding and owning their voice. Moreover, valuing each girls voice places these young women as agents of

knowledge in that they speak for themselves and makes them accountable for their knowledge claims.

## **Staff Serving the Organization**

### *Organizational Structure, Planning, and Management*

The YRC as a whole entity has many programs and initiatives serving many individuals, namely youth and their families. I was curious to know what the insiders felt was missing or what could be improved upon within the organization. Participants were asked what they think the organization needs to be most effective for the individuals they are serving.

Participants overwhelmingly stated the need for strengthened infrastructure and strategic planning. The assistant executive director, Gloria, a white woman in her early sixties, said quite succinctly: “It would be to strengthen our infrastructure, our strategic planning, our financial structure...all the things that undergird what we then go out from.” She recognized the importance of a foundation to ground all of the programming the organization does and emphasized that foundation must be in place before creating what the executive director Mary calls “action steps”: the strategic plan to build and effectively produce programming. Gloria said the strategies to actualize their programming ideas have not always been in place.

So, I think we need to do a better job of what our mission and vision are, and then our strategies as to how we're going to actualize that mission and vision, and then the programs should grow out of that. I think we got a little backwards for a while. We got a program going and tried to fit it into what we did as opposed to getting clear on what we do and then letting the programs come out from that.

Many participants echoed this statement, including Mary, the ED. Interestingly, Patty, the Girls Coalition main facilitator and a survivor of CSEC, felt that she could not answer this question because she had only been working at the YRC for six months and because the Girls Coalition was too new. It was my understanding, however, that she had never received any sort of training either in facilitation or program management, but was serving the organization as the face of the issue both publicly and for the girls. Implicit in this comment and a theme that was embedded in all of the themes was a lack of, and need for, very clear internal communication. Many participants mentioned communication as muddled, leading to a compounding of problems for the staff.

It was obvious to me from my research dilemma that the lines of communication were not always open. Not everyone had access to key pieces of information or the thought processes of all staff. For example, the project coordinator for the Girls Coalition explained:

This would be an organization to compete with, this would be a, the standard you would want to be at if there was more communication and stronger development of strategic planning and program development. There's so many people here with awesome ideas, with great skills and the ability to do amazing things. I don't know that everyone within the building is being used to their capacity. That they get to shine in what they would be good at, I think we would do a much better service to the families we serve and to the community if we could acknowledge that internally, build from it and continue to talk and see when things need something new, and something different, and when things need more structure, when things need a different plan, or anything and just come to the table as all awesome intelligent people who are passionate about our work with great ideas and great skills who are all equally valued. And feel at the end of that, um, that from all of that exchange it was mutual and there was a benefit and a give and take no matter how it ends would make this the organization that people would want to move to [omitted] and be a part of.

Simone as the coordinator is struggling to make the program she is responsible for live up to its full potential. She is balancing a somewhat ambiguous role as being “in charge” or the leader of the program, but not having full authority to run it in a way she views as best. At several team meetings about the Girls Coalition there was disagreement about programmatic policy stemming from different “visions” about how the Girls Coalition should be run, with no strategic plan or clear orders from those at the top. Simone indicated that she did not feel that her expertise in program development was being utilized to the fullest potential.

The lack of a solid infrastructure and strategic planning contributed to an unclear delineation of responsibilities and muddled leadership. Some of the tension is a result of the YRC’s tenuous position within the Department of Juvenile Justice. Simone is very intrigued by the idea of wanting “to have this community non-judgment, non-sanctioned non-hierarchal process within a process that requires labels, requires sanctions.” Nearly all participants called the YRC a “family style” organization stating how that separated them from “the system.” With the non-hierarchical process, however, problems of responsibility and management emerged as they might within a family system.

Alice, a white woman in her early twenties and administrative assistant to the ED, stated that she is often asked to do the work that no one else wants to do. Because of Alice’s lower status position in the organization she saw the inner workings and is privy to information on office politics not available to everyone. Alice went on to say that everyone she works with is very nice, but sometimes the “niceness” leads to unclear chains of command and people being hesitant to take charge and control of situations.

If everybody were just more blunt maybe, and upfront about things and...yeah and sometimes...well sometimes this does affect me. There's not always a good chain of command, I mean I don't know who all of my bosses are. And I think that would probably help things. If people were approving things, you know, like you go to this person and if that doesn't work you go to that person and that sort of thing. Cause I think there are a lot of people who are just talking to people who aren't their supervisors about things and then it's kind of like playing telephone, you know things get mixed up. So I think we would probably do better with a clearer chain of command. We have a very nice chart that I designed on Word but not everyone follows it. So that would probably help.

An unclear chain of command is what Alice saw as especially problematic in the Girls Coalition. She described this situation as “too many cooks in the kitchen.” Many staff members want to have a voice and say in the way the program is run. This is causing problems because they did not start the program with a solid enough foundation and a clear trajectory. Alice harkened the processes present in the Girls Coalition to “playing telephone,” meaning when one person says one thing and because there are so many people involved the original meaning of what was said is lost. Alice laughed saying it had turned the program into a “hot mess.”

For Simone the problems began shortly after taking the job six months earlier. The job description and the actual job she took did not match up and she was having trouble figuring out her place in the organization. She explained:

There is a very clear place and a clear need for a Girls Coalition coordinator in this organization, so my role within in that is definitely needed...so, many people are used to doing things that probably would fall into my role that it can sometimes go too many directions at one time, and as a result sort of muddies up the effectiveness of my place and my role as the coordinator.

Eliza, as an outsider working with the Girls Coalition, said that she could sense that there was an issue with leadership and management within the Girls Coalition. The two psychologists communicated almost exclusively with Simone, building a very good



rapport, and feeling they connected with her over theoretical approaches to working with youth. Cherrie had similar feelings on the issue of management within the Girls

Coalition, which made working with them challenging. On this point she said:

One of the things I think that made it difficult for us kind of working with Girls Coalition was that everyone was sort of on a different page and so within the organization, you could talk to one person and they saw things one way and you could talk to another person and they saw things a different way. I think that that happens in any office, but I think that's something that would have made, would make them more effective is if they could find a way to kind of blend, you know, what they're doing. Cause they're so many different legs, and so many different arms, and its amazing cause they're touching so many different places but if everyone could kind of be on one accord.

Eliza and Cherrie did not necessarily understand the whole problem, just that there was a problem that sometimes created a very tense environment. Being guests invited in the program made it hard to know whose "side" they were on, if there even was a side, or whom they should agree with because there was not an obvious leader of the Girls Coalition.

### *Shared Vision*

Consistent with the need to formulate "action steps" or strategic planning is a shared vision for the organization and programs. Language of vision is common in social justice projects signifying the "end" or desired successes of a movement. All staff shared the ultimate goal of wanting to prevent the youth in the program from ever being exploited and they wanted the youth to better their circumstances and lead different more successful paths. What was not shared was the means by which to make that happen or how they envisioned running the program to accomplish their goals.

During my time spent in meetings and listening to the talk amongst the staff it was clear to me that the “vision” of the YRC and the Girls Coalition were very important aspects, but the same vision was not shared amongst the staff as a unit. Angela talked about the issues they were having in terms of measuring their program and the youths’ success:

So for the Girls Coalition, I think we don't have a way to evaluate the girls and their successes right now, and that's kind of hurting us because there are no best practices. We're kind of flying the plane as we build it, and we're hoping that, you know, due to the not... the expertise that we've had working with actual victims that we're on the right that... on the right page...I mean, we're moving into our second group now. We'll hopefully be able to have, and we actually are working with the Department of Juvenile Justice to give us a certain level of girls that kind of fit the same criteria as our girls, so that we can kind of mirror and match, you know, their progress. So... we're putting things into place, so hopefully we'll be able to develop a methodology that works for us and that is credible and consistent, and that we can actually use as a way to evaluate.

What constituted success was not uniformly shared among the three main Girls Coalition staff. The program was not fully planned out programmatically before they started getting referrals for girls. For example, Simone commented:

I don't think we were wholly ready to start when we started and because once you start something you have to maintain it and we were still trying to build it at the same time, it caused, it created issues that didn't need to be there without, if there had been prior organizational structure and planning and a little more time and care taken into it. We've bounced back okay and we added another staff member who does part time Girls Coalition, which helped with some of the task oriented things, but since we still have such a broad vision and not a lot of the meat underneath the vision it can create difficulties between the team because I think it's fairly safe to assume that all people can see the same vision, but just organically by being different people you have different ways of carrying out. You see something being carried out differently even though you have the same end goal.

Simone wanted the girls off probation and with a high school diploma or GED, Angela wanted college to be on the immediate horizon and Patty merely wanted them to gain

skills to turn negative situations or circumstances in their lives into positive ones. It was stated in many meetings that the staff did not know when this group would officially “end.” This was proving to be problematic as the Girls Coalition was starting to take referrals for their new group of girls and there was disagreement about whether to add to the existing group or start a new group entirely. There was one staff meeting in particular where the tension between Angela and Simone was very high because they could not agree on whether or not the girls should be “penalized” by their probation officers if they did not come to group, which is a requirement of their probation.

Shared vision also came up repeatedly among participants as it relates to philosophical approaches associated with working with the girls. The approach espoused by the Girls Coalition is of “meeting the girls where they are” and teaching them *how* to make decisions rather than telling them what decisions they should make. Unfortunately in this case theory did not lead to action. As previously mentioned, the Girls Coalition had partnered with another organization to provide programming and curriculum for the youth. The two women delivering the curriculum were trained psychologists who had facilitated other groups prior to working with the Girls Coalition. The psychologists, Cherrie and Eliza, both came from the same theoretical model of limiting the power differential between the facilitators and the girls. Valuing and encouraging each voice was crucial in their process of skill building and they believed strongly that the youth had to make their own decisions. Cherrie said:

In order to really think things through and really make good decisions you have to have confidence in your own decision-making skills. And so one of my big pushes with our curriculum, with everything that I do, is teaching kids how to think critically. I’m not gonna tell you what the answer is but I want you to come

up with an answer and then tell me why you came up with that. Why is that the safest answer for you?

When I asked Angela about her mentoring or teaching approach, however, she talked about those ideals of teaching and not telling, but contradicted herself when she said, “you know you can lead them with the right questions to the decision you want them to make, without you telling them.” In other words, Angela identified with the girls to a great extent and wanted so much for the girls to make good decisions that she would default into leading the youth to the decisions she wanted them to make. Eliza said:

I think one was that I think a distinction was made...it was also kind of our own approach to kinda how, you know, I mean even with the group there was a few incidences where other people who were involved in the group who were not part of our project, you know, would kinda say things like, ‘well you’re not supposed to do that’ or ‘that’s wrong’ and we’d be like, ‘eek!’ ‘Cause, you know, that kinda went against our whole model which was like not telling them what the right answer is, or don’t do that, or this is wrong.

Eliza noted that this issue of authority was especially problematic in regards to the sexuality of the youth. There were several occasions when a young woman would talk about her sexuality and she would be cut off and told she should not be sexual until she is married. Ultimately, the girls’ voices were disciplined, which is antithetical to the Girls Coalition claim that they are empowering the girls’ voices.

Shared vision relates to what Jehn et al. (1999) refers to as value diversity, meaning when group members hold different ideas concerning what the overall goals, objectives, or mission should be for the group. The in the Girls Coalition staff shared the same overall mission for the program, to empower the youth thereby preventing exploitation, but did not share the same belief in how to accomplish that goal.

Consequently, and as found by Jehn et al. (1999) this created conflict amongst the staff

and this conflict had an impact on worker morale and possibly contributing to the tense environment.

*Struggles over Power*

Nearing the end of my time at the YRC the tension present in the office was very high. Shortly after my arrival one morning in early August, Simone and Gloria came out of Mary's office and it was obvious Simone had been crying. Simone then proceeded to pack up her belongings in her desk and leave. The staff around me seemed genuinely surprised by what was happening, but with a completely open floor plan no one was able to say anything. Alice was not surprised by Simone's sudden departure, as the "drama" present in the office was something with which she had been well acquainted. In our interview that same day Alice said:

Well obviously there is a lot of drama with Simone. I don't know, I think she just got fired...that's what it seems like (laugh) so that was kind of awkward and dramatic. I don't know, from what I understand and some of this just comes from...Simone and I aren't like BFF's or anything, but I have spent some time with her outside of work and talked to her then. I really, I hate being in the middle of drama cause I don't want to be and this obviously...I'm sure you knew this was what I was talking about, like it doesn't have any impact on my job cause I don't have anything to do with the Girls Coalition, but I hate that all this stuff happened with Simone and obviously there is some problem with Simone and Angela and I don't know what it is and I don't think Simone knows what it is and it seems like... I don't know how much you need this for your research, but it seems like everyone takes Angela's side, and I really like Angela, I think she's pretty good at what she does, but I'm not quite sure why everyone is taking Angela's side.

Mary later explained to the staff that Simone had decided to leave for personal reasons, but that things had ended on very good terms. Simone later revealed to me that she was given the option of being fired or leaving because she just was not the right fit for the job and they should have hired someone with a counseling background. She agreed that they

needed someone with a more therapeutic background, but she also knew it was because she and Angela did not get along.

Other staff members also felt uncomfortable with how that morning's events had transpired. Ella, an African American woman in her early fifties, works as the program coordinator of the family visitation program at the YRC but helped the Girls Coalition arrange transportation for the girls and worked very closely with both Simone and Angela. Ella did not have any problems working with Simone, but observed conflict between Simone and Angela. Ella noted "their communication and interpretation of things were just different and I don't know if one was willing to compromise with the other." It was interesting to me that after Simone left, no one approached me to ask about my internship or what projects I had been working on with Simone. I found it odd that my position in the Girls Coalition was almost completely ignored.

I asked all participants what it was like working in an all female environment and Gloria said the "cattiness," or spitefulness, present in female environments was not present at the YRC. "If it goes on, I pretty much just get my work done and if there are certain undercurrents that are going on for the most part I'm pretty oblivious to them." It seemed as though she was backtracking slightly or did not want to see the issues present as typical "catty" female drama. Many staff members felt that the YRC "is a family-style organization" and as Chesler (2009) points out, "drama," can disrupt that semblance of family in a negative way. Cherrie was also perceptive of the challenges between Simone and Angela. She explained:

There was almost like a power struggle that was going on that we sensed but we weren't able to kind of...we had no idea what was going on and you know we

would have conversations with each other like, 'I'm so confused, I don't know who's in charge, I don't understand why this is happening.' But it just wasn't clear you know? You don't feel like you can ask because it's almost like it's the elephant in the room. You know it's there so it's not like you can act completely naïve, like 'oh what's going on?' But it's not being said to you so you know that it's not for you to talk about and I think that it's just kind of nonverbal, covert communication that happens that makes it difficult working with women.

Both Cherrie and Eliza saw this power struggle making its way into the group setting and hindering the work they were able to do with the girls when the tension created an unsafe environment. The admitted that they had the most fruitful conversations with the youth when the other staff members weren't there because the environment felt less tense.

The youth did not want to identify with other women or girls because they saw their females peers as "all drama" meaning engaging in gossiping or backstabbing and the staff actively tried to counter this assumption because they believed it help to contribute to negative self worth. If they believe all girls are always dramatic or causing problems, then how do they feel about themselves because they are after all, girls.

Cherrie and Eliza were both bothered by how female relationships were being modeled to the youth by Simone and Angela because it was an example of women not getting along.

It is possible that race was a factor in the struggle over power between Angela, who is African American, and Simone, who is white. Angela holds a higher position within the organization, but Simone was technically in charge of running the Girls Coalition, which muddled who was seen as or who felt they did have authority over the program. As previously stated, all staff working in the Girls Coalition felt a deep connection with the youth and their success and empowerment was vitally important to the women. Angela identified with the youth on multiple levels and was very concerned

with the racism inherent in the youth's lives. It is possible Angela wanted to have a bigger or more profound role in the program in part because she is the same race as the youth. Angela feels she understands the youth better or they connect with her better because she is black and she, along with Patty, feel they belong to the youth's community. Simone does not belong to the youth's community in that same way and her "outsider" status could have negatively impacted her relationship with Angela. Other possible factors might be that both women are very assertive with strong opinions and thus clashed. The Girls Coalition is a very new program and Simone was hired on after it's initial inception. So many members were involved in the creation or thought process behind the program giving many people feelings of ownership.

Angela and Gloria, an older white woman, worked very closely on projects outside the Girls Coalition, and had very open and frank dialogues about race, especially when they would raise awareness in the local community about CSEC. They were both very conscious of the population they were serving as largely African American and how the community would relate to Angela versus Gloria. It was very apparent that Angela and Gloria had engaged in a great deal of coalition building across difference to better serve the youth and the community at large. Gloria also served in a mentoring capacity for Angela grooming Angela to take over her position when she retired. Coalition building across difference is not an easy task and can be very challenging for white women and women of color (Hill-Collins, 2009; hooks, 1984) and it did not appear that Simone and Angela were able to engage in the same coalition building as Angela and Gloria. I know the Girls Coalition staff had conversations about how race would or would



not affect the way the youth would relate to them and their community partners and all of the individuals working with the youth were very aware of potential differences.

Simone's whiteness was a barrier for one youth and Simone acknowledged and was very matter of fact about the situation and did not take it personally. Despite this, when the youth were told that Simone had to leave the YRC, many were outwardly upset and voiced feelings of abandonment possible destabilizing the environment of the Girls Coalition for the youth.

### **Tensions and Contradictions**

This chapter focuses on themes from interview and participant observation data that included explorations of the staff's relationships to the youth they seek to serve as well as to each other and to the agency of which they are a part. Empowerment programs aimed at marginalized and disenfranchised populations have become more common in recent years (Gutierrez et al., 1995) and youth at risk for commercial sexual exploitation fall within that category. Participants working with the youth all felt a desire or calling to mentor youth, specifically girls, and sought to empower the youth by helping find and own their voice. The staff wanted to create an environment where the youth could use what Tolman (2002) refers to as an authentic voice, but were hindered by their relationships to the organizational structures in which they worked. While an ethic of care guided participant's work, by not agreeing on the appropriate way to deal with certain issues, namely sexuality, that would arise in group meetings staff to inadvertently discipline the youths' voices. Bay-Cheng, Lewis, Stewart, and Malley (2006) found

similar themes in their evaluation of a feminist-oriented empowerment intervention program aimed at disrupting the negative socialization of girls. In both cases adults tended to reinscribe normative gender roles and behaviors when girls stepped outside of what was deemed appropriate behavior. In the Girls Coalition, when youth would bring up sexual behaviors, several staff would admonish them thereby disciplining their voices and possibly disempowering the youth.

Data on the Girls Coalition suggest these problems might have arisen because of internal communication, management, and struggles over power. These struggles existed in part because of the unsuccessful melding of a pro-feminist “family style” organization into a hierarchical structure. This structure is in line with the postbureaucratic form as articulated by Heckcher (1994) and Keidel (1995) where a paradoxical hybrid organization attempts to minimize hierarchy, facilitate collaboration and autonomy while still trying to maintain control. In feminist organizations, Ashkraft (2001) labels this fusion of presumed hostile organizational attributes as organized dissonance. While there were hierarchical job positions and titles within the organization, there were no obvious key decision makers on programmatic functioning, trajectory of the program, or philosophical approaches to empowering youth. This is most clearly evidenced by Angela and Simone’s contentious relationship.

Feminist styles of management embody an ethic of care, egalitarianism, and collaboration over hierarchy (Madden, 2008; Mooney-Nickel, & Eikenberry, 2006) and this organization espoused such beliefs. In actuality though, collaboration was not occurring as many participants felt they were forced to take sides. Letting Simone go was

actually a very strategic decision on the part of the YRC leaders. By “disowning” Simone, the organization will be better able to maintain a semblance of a “family-like structure” (Chesler, 2009) because they removed a source of resistance or conflict from decision-making processes. With the tension and potential for conflict gone, the “family” becomes more functional; however, because the “family” as a method of organizing is a social construction embedded in patriarchy, the potential for conflict may be inevitable. This is due to underlying hierarchies among women that the “family” does not address.

I feel it is also important to state that I am not trying to villainize this organization or to say participants had anything but the best of intentions for the youth, however, it is important to understand how organizational functioning contributes to work with vulnerable populations both positively and negatively. Simone leaving may actually create a more positive environment for the youth because the “tensions” that were noticeable to Eliza and Cherrie, the two psychologists, and they believe noticeable to the youth, will no longer be there. This may help to create a safer environment and more positive role modeling.

The Girls Coalition espoused feminist goals of empowerment. These included helping the girls express themselves and think critically, helping the youth learn to identify problematic relationships while offering alternative perspectives and understandings about healthy relationships, and demonstrating positive female role modeling (Lopez & Lechuga, 2007). Eliza and Cherrie, were very aware of the conflict within the Girls Coalition and felt that it created an unsafe environment for the youth to be open and vulnerable. They stated that the most fruitful conversations always occurred

when only they were present in group meetings and not other staff. All participants working with the youth noted that the youth did not like other girls and would rather identify with boys because girls are “all drama.” It is my belief that the staff was actually reinforcing this negative model and role modeling horizontal hostility for the youth thereby possibly lessening the effectiveness of their mission of empowerment and positive self-worth. This finding supports the need for more research into how and if female adults teach horizontal hostility to young women. On the other hand, the ethic of care grounding the organization was very much centered on Black feminist epistemology, (Hill-Collins, 2009) which legitimated the stories, ideas, and emotions of both the youth and staff were placed on center as knowledge. Knowingly or not, this ethic of care is incredibly subversive for a program housed within the same courthouse charged with punishing the youth they serve.

## Conclusion

Ending sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of youth has solidified as a movement in the U.S. with far reaching implications for victims of exploitation, those who are “high risk,” and vulnerable populations generally. As explained in previous chapters there is a long history in the U.S. of trying to eliminate trafficking and at the same time policing women’s sexuality. Currently, an increasingly carceral approach of using the state to solve the problem of trafficking through police force has been taken up by feminist and non-feminist activists as a means to combat trafficking (Bernstein, 2010; Soderlund, 2005). Instead of examining the contextual circumstances surrounding trafficking, emphasis has been placed on the state to “rescue” women individualizing the problem and imprisoning perpetrators who may also come from the same vulnerable populations. The organization where this research was conducted focuses on prevention of exploitation offering a different perspective on how to combat commercial sexual exploitation. It works to empower the youth to be successful and make healthy decisions by focusing on the structural preconditions contributing to the youth being labeled high risk in the first place.

This research sought to understand how the staff of the Girls Coalition understood their roles in the lives of the youth they serve and it discovered that the internal circumstances were an extremely important factor in both staff motivations and organizational functioning. The original purpose of the research was to assess how the youth in the Girls Coalition understand and made meaning of their daily lives. Through interviews with the youth and staff working in the Girls Coalition program it was my

hope to determine a "best practices" model for intervention, prevention, and empowerment for these youth and others in their situation. During the course of my internship my research changed altering both my sample and research questions. My research shifted to try and understand how staff understood their roles in the lives of the youth and how organizational functioning worked to actualize staff goals. My interviews revealed a lack of evaluation measures to determine if their program was successful and staff admitted they were "flying the plane" as they built it, meaning that while they shared the same overall goal they did not have a set of agreed upon methods to get there. This was in part due to the internal problems of the organization. There was a lack of effective communication and resolution of conflict stemming from an unshared vision of how the program should be run and productive management of the program.

It is possible to say, however, that the staff of the organization had specific goals in terms of the relationship to the youth they served: being called to mentor youth, possessing an ethic of care in the work, and empowering youth to find their voice. Unfortunately, some of the positive effects of these intentions was hindered by the problematic relationships the staff had with each other and with the organization generally. While the YRC has both white and black women working as employees, African American women predominantly staff the organization. While some staff engaged in coalition building, and were successful, others were not able to work across difference. This inability combined with the newness of the program and lack of clear communication caused internal conflict among the staff causing tension both in the organization and in the Girls Coalition program meetings as cited by the two

psychologists. It seemed that staff modeled horizontal hostility to the youth. More research needs to be done to determine if in fact adults do teach horizontal hostility to youth. I would recommend that leaders of this organization have staff participate in diversity training or trainings where effective communication techniques can be learned and practiced in a safe setting. Ultimately, I am unable at this time to determine if this organization was in fact effective in their goals, however, it is my hope that more research will be done around prevention work. I believe prevention has the potential to lessen the individualism so prevalent in the “saving” projects of the trafficking movement because it could offer more holistic and contextual solutions for populations vulnerable to exploitation.

Finally, as activists and researchers engaged in social justice projects it is important that we articulate the “vision” of our work. Vision implies articulation of desired outcomes and trajectory of our programs and the need to have that vision be shared by all members of the organization. This vision should undergird all policies and procedures and be the rationale for taking up projects and making decisions. Moreover, the vision should guide the procedures and methods used to get to the ultimate goal of the organization and those procedures should be shared and used by everyone. Having clear delineations of responsibilities and repeated check-ins to make sure lines of communication are open is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of programs and making program goals are being met. Internal conflicts may lessen the effectiveness of our work. Lastly, the trafficking movement has had the tendency to ignore the structural preconditions that make exploitation possible. Therefore, we must be cognizant of the

populations we are serving creating what Hill-Collins (2009) refers to as a politics of empowerment. This can be done by embracing a paradigm of intersectionality that recognizes individual and collective agency within social relations of domination and resistance enabling those we are serving to define their own realities on their own terms.



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### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. Why did you decide to work with youth?
  - a. Why did you decide to work with girls?
  - b. With this particular population?
  
2. How do you see your role in this organization?
  
3. What does this organization need to be effective?
  - a. What is this organization doing now that you see as being the most effective? Where could the organization improve?
  
4. What were/are the expectations of work?
  - a. What are the surprises?
  - b. What are the disappointments?
  
5. What is your ideal job?
  - a. What's really happening?
  - b. Explain meaning of the gap?
  
6. What is the most difficult thing about this work for you? What do you enjoy the most?
  - a. How do you take care of yourself while doing this work?

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title:** At Risk For Commercial Sexual Exploitation? A Phenomenological Approach To Best Practices Intervention.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Janet Lee

**Student Researcher:** Erin Dubyak

**Version Date:** May 2, 2011

### **1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS FORM?**

This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this study or not. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You may ask any questions about the research, what you will be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research that is unclear or this form that is unclear. When all of your questions have been answered you can decide whether you want to be involved in this study or not. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

### **2. WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?**

This is a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand how you understand and make meaning of your role in the lives of these youth. From these questions I will determine a "best practices" model for intervention, prevention, and empowerment for "high-risk" youth. This research will be supervised by JJF and I will be working in along with their staff.

This study is being done by a student for the completion of a thesis.

Up to 10 staff members and community partners may be invited to take part in this study.

### **3. WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

You are being invited to take part in this study as a result of your employment with the Juvenile Justice Fund and/or your work with "The Voices Project".

### **4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be interviewed. The interviews will be transcribed and compared to the transcripts of the other participants.

The study activities include:

Interviews: I will conduct semi-structured, open-ended interviews with 10 staff members and community partners. The interviews will take place at the JJF office in a private setting and be audio recorded. These interviews will take up to an hour and a half and will be the only extra time commitment needed of the participants.

**Recordings:** The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of the words spoken by you. This is to ensure the accuracy of your words in any reports or publications resulting from this research. After all recordings have been transcribed all recordings will be destroyed. You can choose whether or not you want to be recorded and can still participate in the study if you choose to not be recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.  
*Initials*

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio recorded.  
*Initials*

## **5. WHAT ARE THE RISKS AND POSSIBLE DISCOMFORTS OF THIS STUDY?**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the being in the study include: Some of the questions asked during the interview may make you feel uncomfortable. You may skip any question you would rather not answer.

There is a risk that we could accidentally disclose information that identifies you.

## **6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?**

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, this researcher anticipates that the creation of a “best practices” model for intervention, prevention, and empowerment of adolescent girls could be utilized by The Juvenile Justice Fund and other professionals working in direct service with similar adolescents, as also might policy makers.

## **7. WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE?**

The information you provide during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Federal regulatory agencies and the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

If the results of this project are published your identity will not be made public.

To decrease the amount of risk all participants will be assigned a code of a combination of 5 letters and numbers to represent them that will be used on all data. We will use password protected computer files, and a locked file cabinet for forms and back up discs. In the final thesis and any subsequent publications a pseudonym will be created for each participant.

## **8. WHAT OTHER CHOICES DO I HAVE IF I DO NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. JJF is not conducting this research study and you do not have to participate because you are employed by JJF or work in conjunction with JJF. Your employment or partnership will in no way be effected if you choose not to participate or if you do choose to participate. If you do decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

## **9. WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions about this research project, please contact:

Erin Dubyak  
404-232-5083  
dubyake@onid.orst.edu  
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Women Studies  
Oregon State University

Janet Lee, Professor  
Women Studies  
Gilkey Hall 200  
Corvallis, OR 97331-6208  
[jlee@oregonstate.edu](mailto:jlee@oregonstate.edu)  
541-737-6132

If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu)

## **10. WHAT DOES MY SIGNATURE ON THIS CONSENT FORM MEAN?**

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

### Appendix C: Participant Chart

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age</b>
<b>Mary</b>	<b>Executive Director</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Early Forties</b>
<b>Gloria</b>	<b>Assistant Executive Director</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Early Sixties</b>
<b>Angela</b>	<b>Deputy Manager</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Early Thirties</b>
<b>Simone</b>	<b>Program Coordinator of Girls Coalition</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Early Thirties</b>
<b>Ella</b>	<b>Program Coordinator of Family Visitation</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Early Fifties</b>
<b>Patty</b>	<b>Girls Coalition facilitator and advocate</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Early Thirties</b>
<b>Alice</b>	<b>Administrative Assistant</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Early Twenties</b>
<b>Cherrie</b>	<b>Community Partner-Psychologist</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Mid Twenties</b>
<b>Eliza</b>	<b>Community Partner-Psychologist</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>Mid Twenties</b>