



Girl Driven Research Project

A Collaborative Project Between the Center for Urban Research and Learning
(CURL)
at Loyola University Chicago and Girl World at Alternatives, Inc.

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In collaboration with Loyola University of Chicago's
Center for Urban Research and Learning

Introduction: Why Participatory Research?

In spring 2002, the staff of Alternatives, Inc. gender specific program, Girl World attended a day-long training session at Girl's Best Friend Foundation. The training outlined the benefits and skills that youth can gain from participatory research projects and provided attendees with the materials necessary for implementing their own projects. The idea of engaging young women in a participatory research project was very intriguing to the Girl World staff because it would enable the youth to identify a topic of interest and empower them to use research skills to explore and analyze these topics.

Girl World's mission has historically been to build upon the strengths and creativity of young women and to advocate for opportunities for their voices to be heard and validated. Girl World has also been very dedicated to "youth driven" strategies in which the youth are engaged in every aspect of the programming from the implementation to the facilitation and evaluation. A participatory research project would also provide Girl World with a unique strategy that could empower young women to speak as experts about their own lives and to take on leadership roles in their communities. The project would also offer a number of opportunities to practice facilitation and presentation skills, to participate in social justice workshops, to learn about photography, and to develop employment skills. All of these skills are essential for success in college and could be utilized in future employment. Most importantly, a participatory research project would encourage the young women to go deeper into an issue that truly effects and concerns them. This is something that Girl World continually strives to do by offering programs that are dealing with issues that are the most pertinent and pressing for young women today.

Following the Girl's Best Friend training, the Girl World staff approached Loyola University of Chicago's Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL). CURL's staff found the project to be in the same vein as the work they were doing with youth civic engagement and agreed to collaborate on this pilot project. CURL connected Girl World

with a graduate student who could help the team create an effective research tool, conduct the data analysis, and enable the team to formulate a comprehensive final report.

With the support from Loyola University of Chicago secure, the next step was to identify a funding source that would support a six-month pilot project. Girl World applied for and received a discretionary grant from Girl's Best Friend Foundation. The grant covered the stipends for four young women, a portion of the graduate student's stipend, and the basic supplies needed for the six-month project, including film and development costs for the photo journaling portion of the project.

With the collaborations in place and the funds secured, it was time to interview applicants and hire the research team. Young women from the Girl World Teen Group were offered the opportunity to interview for a position on the research team. Each applicant underwent a formal interview process and from that process four young women were selected. The staff from Girl World and the CURL graduate student met for a few curriculum-building sessions and then in June 2002 the Girl Driven Research Project (GDRP) began.

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Curriculum

June 2002

In June 2002, the Girl World staff selected a team of four young women through a formal job interview process. Each of the applicants were asked a series of questions concerning their previous job experience, the skills they felt that they were capable of bringing to the group, and their expectations for this particular project. After the team was selected and job permits were obtained, the training for the participatory research project began.

July 2002

There were two goals for the young women this month. The first goal was to create a team that could communicate, compromise, and take on the various roles that would be necessary for a successful project. The second goal was to empower the young women to engage in critical thinking and social justice analysis exercises. The team underwent nine weeks of training from July 9th through Aug. 11th. Some of the training workshop topics included:

- Principles of good leadership
- Teambuilding
- Social justice training
- Definition of power and oppression
- Different dynamics of oppression such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism, and sizeism.
- Research basics adapted from [Ms. Foundation for Women's: Young Women's Action Team \(YWAT\) Curriculum.](#)
- Photo Journaling basics

Week 1

July 9th

Topic: Team Building Activities and Project Overview

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: Icebreaker
- Activity: “The Tower”
- Discussion: Project overview
- Discussion: Introduction to Participatory Research (traditional v. participatory pedagogy)
- Discussion: Expectations

July 11th

Topic: Defining Power and Oppression

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: “Medicine Wheel of Human Development¹”
- Discussion: Defining “power”
- Discussion: Defining “oppression”
- Discussion: Defining “isms”
- Homework: Read “To Work and Die in Juarez²” and then complete a power analysis about the article

Week 2

July 16th

Topic: Covering Research Basics

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: “Three Minute Timed Test.” The purpose of this activity, brought by one of the team members, was to learn how to follow directions.
- Activity: Scavenger Hunt. “The Research Model.” The team was asked to locate different symbols, pictures and objects hidden in the classroom that represented each step in the research model. Once they gathered the objects (i.e., light bulb), we wrote down ideas about each. For example, the team associated the light bulb with a vision for conducting our projects. These activities were adapted from the [Ms. Foundation for Women’s: Young Women’s Action Team \(YWAT\) Curriculum](#)
- Discussion: Research basics: “... a series of steps, techniques, exercises, and events that can be applied to every sphere of life in order to help you understand the world in which you live.³”
- Discussion: Traditional research (i.e., survey research, participant observation/ethnographic research, secondary analysis/content research,

¹ Gimeno-Cardona, Antonieta. 2001. “Girls Like Us in a World Like This: Young Women in Philanthropy.” Boston, MA: Boston Women’s Fund.

² In *Mother Jones* (May/June) 2002:50-55.

³ Wysocki, Diane Kholos. 2001. *Readings in Social Research Methods*. US: Wadsworth Group/Thomson Learning.

experiments) v. Participatory research (i.e., personal interviews, photo journaling, videos).

The participatory approach became the focus of the youth-led project. The project involved the creation and implementation of the research process as devised by the young participants.

Participatory research

1. *Figure out the problem together.*
2. *Get more information as a group.*
3. *Put the information together and “judge” it to see if it makes sense.*
4. *Decide where to make the difference.*
5. *Use the information to make something better.*
6. *Evaluate the information and research findings to see what the next steps are.*

July 18th

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling Intro

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt, <http://www.JaneFultonAlt.com>

- Discussion: The camera as a tool.
- Discussion: Managing the equipment. Introduction of technical aspects of how the camera works.
- Discussion: Black and white photography exhibits and overview of books and writings of well-established photojournalists.
- Activity: Shooting film.
- Homework: Photograph three subjects.

Topic: Part 2. The Personal is Political Activity

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: Draw or paint any of the following components: fears, barriers, passions, successes, strengths or sorrows.
- Read: “The History of Social Change in the United States⁴”
- Discussion: Private and public realms in social movements.

Week 3

July 23rd

Topic: Sexism Workshop

Defining Sexism: Prejudice or discrimination based on gender.

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: Brainstorming about gender roles
- Activity: Research and discussion about sexism and oppression using various articles, internet sources, pictures, and songs.
- Discussion: Sexism and power

⁴ Dingerson, Leigh and Sarah Hay. 1998. *The Co/Motion Guide to Youth-led Social Change*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Justice.

- Activity: Role play. Internalized, Interpersonal and Institutional Sexism.
Young women created roles about interpersonal sexism by acting out scenes of sexual harassment in clubs and on the street. They demonstrated institutional sexism by re-enacting classroom settings where women's accomplishments were omitted from the textbooks and girls were not called on as often as the boys. Internalized sexism was explored as they acted out the way young women feel about their hair, bodies, and selves, in general.

July 25th

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: Homework on the issues with photography
- Discussion: Techniques. What makes a successful photo; creative uses of the camera, angle, lighting, aperture and focus.

Topic: Part 2. Classism Workshop

Defining Classism: Prejudice and or discrimination against people because of their socio-economic class.

Facilitators: Carima Watkins, Jessica Palmert, Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: Icebreaker. "What family were you born into?" All the members of our group stood in a single line and listened to various questions posed by the facilitator. If the person had experience with the question asked she was prompted to step forward. If she did not experience what the question asked she would take a step backward. Sample questions included: Does your family have a summer home? Has your family had to move because your parents could not afford to cover all of your bills?
- Activity: Budgeting. Each young woman was handed a fixed budget and a list of expenses was posted in the front of the room. Each young woman had to deduct the fixed expenses from their budget and then figure out if they had money for other luxuries or additional expenses. The budgets ranged from \$11,000 to \$100,000 annually.

Week 4

July 30th

Topic: Racism Workshop

Defining Racism: Prejudice and or discrimination based on the myth of race. Racists believe that some groups are born superior to others and, in the name of protecting their race from "contamination," they justify the domination and destruction of races they consider to be inferior to their own⁵.

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: Icebreaker. "How important is ethnic identity in my daily life?"
- Discussion: Defining racism, stereotypes, discrimination and ethnocentrism

⁵ Source: Anti-Defamation League; www.adl.org.

- Read: “Rosa Parks: Enough is Enough⁶”
- Discussion: Racism exists today. Cartoons by the White Aryan Nation; reactions and discussion
- Discussion: Resources to end racism. Offer concrete examples and steps to take to eliminate racism from your life.

August 2002

This month the team identified research themes they wanted to explore. After all of the training and discussions, the team narrowed down and defined their research question and the population that they wanted to study. The team also went on a field trip in the neighborhood to capture the beauty images that surround them on film.

August 1st

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: Black and white photography (i.e., examples of composition and capturing feelings).
- Activity: Representing the Medicine Wheel in pictures. Capture images that represent your spirituality, economic status, gender, and race.

Topic: Part 2. How to document your research topic. Defining research questions

Facilitators: Jessica Palmert and Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Discussion: Summary of classism, sexism and racism workshops (intersections).
- Discussion: Defining research questions.
- Activity: Brainstorming session. Possible Research Questions. The young women amassed a number of possible topics that incorporated the themes of gender, age, community, race, and socioeconomic class. Some of their possible subjects included: money, beauty images, teen pregnancy, and African American young women and their hair.
- Homework: Bring media (i.e., newspapers, cds, website, magazines, songs) that represent your research interest.

Week 5

Aug 6th

Topic: Research Round Robin

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: Brainstorming session. Defining the research question.
- Discussion: Researchers’ rules: no generalizations, no preconceived notions, no mindset about findings, always objective.
- Homework: Capture “beauty images” in your neighborhood on film.

⁶ Howell Raines. 1977. *My Soul is Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South.* NY: Penguin.

Aug 8th

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: Sharing photos
- Discussion: Importance of spontaneity and natural poses
- Discussion: Books and portraits as samples
- Homework: Follow one person throughout one day

Topic Part 2. Evaluation Session

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Discussion: We asked the young women a number of questions concerning the project, their participation, and how the team was working at that particular point in the project. Sample questions:
 - What is research?
 - Give an example of a good research project.
 - Rate your participation in this group thus far.
 - Rate how the team is working together at this point.
 - Provide a definition for two dynamics of oppression that we have covered in this group.

Week 6

Aug 13th

Topic Part 1: Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: “Beauty images”
- Discussion: Nina Simone song and beauty
- Discussion: Capturing feelings with your camera

Topic Part 2: Data Collection Neutrality and Objectivity

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Discussion: Review the research model and sample design
- Discussion: Questions to keep in mind when doing research and writing questions
- Discussion: Ethics and research. The importance of integrity, confidentiality, sharing findings with others; avoiding misrepresentation, plagiarism and dishonesty; informed consent form
- Discussion: Overview of the data collection and analysis process:
 - Collect data through observations, interviews and photos
 - Process the data by categorizing and coding
 - Analyze the data looking for patterns, regularities, trends.
 - Make sense of the data and interpret findings.
 - Share the results!

Aug 15th

Field Trip: The team went out in the community to photograph “beauty images” in their neighborhood and beauty products sold at local beauty supply stores. There are 15 beauty

supply stores in the four block radius of the agency. The young women captured a number of interesting images of advertisements, wigs, and a variety of products.

Week 7

Aug 20th

Topic: Research Round Robin

Facilitators: Carima Watkins and Jessica Palmert

- Discussion: Beauty images and marketing in Uptown neighborhood
- Discussion: Critical analysis of beauty images. The team discussed all the pressure the beauty industry puts on young women. They talked about their desire to alter their natural features.
- Activity: Brainstorming session. Developed a list of all the ways women can possible modify their physical features. The team then categorized all of the products they can buy that are marketed to help them to become more physically “acceptable” such as skin bleaching cream or hair relaxers.
- Activity: Brainstorming session. Developed a list of questions that the team was interested in researching
- Activity: Preliminary literature review. Each team member was asked to identify previous research or sources that would provide examples and an overview of hair and African American women. Some reference sources included: *Good Hair: for Colored Girls who Have Considered Weaves* by Lonnice Brittenum Bonner and *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America* by Ayana D. Byrd. The team also explored websites that deal with Black beauty and hair: www.nappyhair.com.
- Homework: Explain unacceptable/acceptable hair and beauty issues.

Aug 22nd

Topic: Working with Data and More Questions

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Discussion: The “what,” the “who,” the “how” and the “why” of our research project; defining our population in terms of age, race, gender, and communities.
- Discussion: Interviewer skills.
- Discussion: Articles about hair and beauty.

Week 8

Aug 27th

Topic: Outline Research Project.

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: Worked with and developed different type of questions (i.e., open-ended, close-ended, structured)
- Discussion: Data collection, methods, time line, and the different responsibilities of various team members.
- Activity: Developed 28 questions and separated them into three major categories: ideal hair, influences, and self-concept.

Training Fall/Winter Schedule
August-December 2002/January 2003

The team began the process of creating their interview tool, gathering their data, and taking their portrait photographs during this time. They were also responsible for preparing and facilitating a Social Justice Workshop for the Girl World Teen Group.

Aug. 29

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: Focus on editing and sequencing.
- Discussion: Began visualizing how the final presentation would look like, how to create a slide show, what images we would use for posters, brochures and Power Point presentation.
- Discussion: How to capture a mood or someone's personality in a portrait photograph.

Topic: Part 2. Instrument Design

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Discussion: Outlined the research project in terms of data collection, methods, time line and individual and group responsibilities.

Sept. 7

Topic: Instrument Design

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: Complete interview instrument and consent form; practice asking interview questions. At this point, the team was ready to identify the categories and questions that would go into the final research instrument. We also reviewed and reflected upon the purposes of the project and what to do with our data findings.

Sept. 14

Topic: Interviews

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Bring in first three completed interviews and concerns.
- Discussion: Problems/issues encountered and attempted to troubleshoot how to find the time and appropriate space needed to conduct the interviews.
- Discussion: How to access respondents in and outside the high school setting; how access to same age group should facilitate research process
- Discussion: Need to re-emphasize the importance of doing the one on one interview versus the survey because of the quality and honesty of the information that one may derive from one versus the other.

Part 2: Photojournalism

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: Brainstorming of ideas for representation
- Activity: Began editing the images down in order to get photographs that really focused on hair and captured the ideas we were attempting to discuss.

Sept. 21

Topic: Social Justice Session

Facilitators: Jessica Palmert and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Prepare for Social Justice session with larger teen group.
- Activity: Develop content to include systems of oppression, classism and sizeism
- Discussion: Session logistics and preparing activities that are interesting, interactive, and informative.
- Activity: Practice presentation, assign facilitation roles, and create discussion questions for the group.

Sept. 24 (Tue.)

Social Justice Workshop on Sizeism and Classism: Team facilitated a budgeting exercise and passed out media images in an effort to discuss these two forms of oppression. They also created a short role play using different models to demonstrate various eating disorders and surgical “improvement techniques” that harm young women’s minds and bodies.

Sept. 28

Topic: Part 1. Status Check.

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Bring in next three interviews.
- Discussion: Literature review.
- Discussion: Evaluation of the *Social Justice Workshop on Sizeism and Classism*

Topic: Part 2. Photo Journaling:

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: Music that could accompany the visual presentation and how photographs should be displayed.

October 2002

In October, the team created a codebook in an effort to start organizing, understanding, and analyzing the data that they had collected. They also completed the process of taking portrait photographs of the young women that they had interviewed. They began editing their photographs and discussing the best ways to display their photos. The team also facilitated their second *Social Justice Workshop* for the Girl World Teen Group.

Oct. 5

Topic: Interviews and Photo Journaling

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Bring final set of completed interviews.
- Activity: Finished critiquing their photojournalism work and began constructing display boards for their photographs.

Oct. 12

Topic: Coding and Preliminary Data Analysis

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Literature Reviews. Read articles about hair and create essays about our findings.
- Activity: Creation of the brochure that will summarize our findings.
- Activity: Creation of codebook and data entry to begin analyzing results.

Oct. 19

Topic: Coding and Preliminary Data Analysis

Facilitator: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez

- Activity: Created questions they wanted to answer in the final report and presentation.
 - Hair History: what have been marketing strategies over time, what have been popular hairstyles over time
 - When did natural hair begin to be despised, and when was the relaxer created?
 - What influences have corn rows and relaxers had on what is considered to be professional hairstyles for young women?
 - What are the popular hairstyles for celebrities and pop stars?
 - What hair products are made by white-owned companies?
 - How much money do young women spend on their hair and how much money do hair care companies make?
 - How do chemicals in relaxers affect your hair?
 - Where is the education about taking care of natural hair?

Oct. 26

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling.

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Discussion: Ideas for photo presentation: power point, booklets, posters of portrait photos, quotes, collages with ideal hairstyles, products, marketing posters, and audio display.
- Discussion: Decide on final presentation.

Topic: Part 2: Presentation Ideas

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Brainstorming components for potential presentation.

November 2002

During the course of this month the team worked on the final analysis of the data, wrote up results, and prepared the visual presentations.

Nov. 9

Topic: Part 1. Photo journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: Prepared visual presentation of photographs and the text that would accompany the images.

Topic: Part 2. Presentation

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Brainstormed ideas for the verbal and visual presentation in addition to working on ideas for the upcoming *Social Justice Workshop* with the Girl World Teen Group.

Nov 16

Topic: Part 1. Photo Journaling

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: The team finished their picture boards and added text to them.

Topic: Part 2. Preparation for Final Report and Presentation

Facilitator: Carima Watkins

- Activity: Prepared a glossary of hairstyles and textures using a combination of their own definitions and a glossary from the “Hair Matters” book.
- Discussion: Evaluated the *Social Justice Workshop* that the young women had prepared for the Teen Group.

Nov 23

Topic: Getting Started

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Review timeline and assignments.
- Activity: Create data analysis questions that the team wants answered.
- Activity: Begin writing the final report.
- Activity: Create a supply list for items needed for visual presentation.

December 2002

This was the last full month of the project and the team still had a lot of work to do! Between planning for the community event, completing the final report and preparing the visual presentation the team was busy. Planning for the community event included organizing the food, media, advertising, and invitations, etc. Assembling the final report included finishing the literature review, completing the data analysis, writing the process review, and drawing up the conclusions. We also began preparing the visual presentation which required preparing the photo displays, power point presentation, and slide show.

Dec 7

Topic: Part 1. Visual Presentation

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: Created floor plan for presentation.
- Activity: Selected tentative date.

Topic: Part 2. Written Presentation

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Created brochure.
- Activity: Worked on writing literature reviews.
- Activity: Wrote up the process we went through to complete this research project.

Dec 14

Topic: Visual Presentation

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Completed data analysis and literature reviews.
- Activity: Work on finishing the brochure on MS Publisher.
- Activity: Addressed the invitations.
- Activity: Created Power Point and slide show presentations.

Dec 21

Topic: Part 1. Visual Presentation

Facilitator: Jane Fulton Alt and Jessica Palmert

- Activity: Completed visual presentation by stretching fabric over boards and hanging lights for display

Topic: Part 2. Verbal Presentation

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, and Carima Watkins

- Activity: Created rough agenda for presentation.
- Activity: Finished all data analysis.

January 2003

January marked the final month for our participatory research project. The young women really pulled together during these last weeks in a unified effort to complete and organize all the remaining details of the project and the event. Overall, the event was well attended by other girls' groups and members of the community and their presentation was dynamic and informative. We had a productive and interactive feedback session following the presentation. The young women felt very proud of their accomplishments.

Jan 4

Topic: Getting Ready

Facilitators: Madeline Troche-Rodriguez, Jessica Palmert, Carima Watkins, and Jane Fulton Alt

- Activity: Practice final presentation.
- Activity: Determine food and other arrangements.
- Activity: Figure out the exact program content and logistics.

Jan 11

Topic: Presentation of research findings to the community.

Facilitators: Courtney Smith, Helena Smith, Pamela Posey, and Lilly Aliance

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A. Curriculum Notes

Curriculum Development and Organization: The adult facilitators of the project planned the curriculum in stages. We were not completely sure how the project was going to unravel as this was the first time we attempted to do a participatory research project with youth. As a result, we did not have a thoroughly organized curriculum that transitioned smoothly from the introduction and the social justice training to the actual research project. Because of our inexperience, the project lost focus and momentum at certain points, which led to frustration with the young women and the adult facilitators. All this was compounded by the participants' high school schedules as the school calendar began in the fall.

Transition and Making Connections: There was a major shift in our curriculum in the fall as we moved our meeting times from two times a week to once a week on Saturdays from 12:30 to 4:30 PM. Even though the shift was necessary for both the young women and the staff, it proved to be a major adjustment time for the entire team as we were attempting to balance the start of the school year and work responsibilities. Transitioning between the general social justice workshops and the specific research project was tough because we wanted the team to narrow down one of the concepts we presented in the social justice workshops into a research question. That proved to be a more difficult and daunting task than we anticipated. We also struggled to find an effective way to help them narrow down "sexism" or "racism" into something they could manage to create a reasonable research question. Ultimately, the social justice trainings did influence their question and the analysis they did on their data, but there wasn't a clear connection between the training and the research at first.

Setting Real Expectations and Consequences: We did not define clear consequences for not fulfilling work obligations at the beginning of the project. As a result, when a few of the young women did not complete their assignments the adult facilitators were not prepared

to deal with that circumstance and momentarily panicked. We were able to define the circumstances in time, but it would have been easier if we had been clear and straightforward with the consequences from the start. If the boundaries had been in place from the start we probably would not have ended up with some of the young women testing them like they did.

Adult Facilitators' Roles: Role definition among adult facilitators should have been clearer especially for the volunteer who assisted with the photo journaling aspect of the project. We should have been more direct about who was responsible for the lesson plans, and we should have had the volunteer sit in on the planning sessions and all of the group discussions so that she could get a sense of what the young women were working on throughout the project and then assign photo projects accordingly.

Research in Action: The aspect of the curriculum that focused upon interviewing and probing skills should have been stronger and further developed to make the young women more comfortable and to assure better quality of the data gathered. This would have been an excellent area for more role-playing and interactive activities to review and practice good interviewing skills. The team should have discussed ways to troubleshoot issues that arose during an interview and come up with a list of good probing questions that would allow them to get at the information they were really looking for.

Research is Fun! All youth work (and adult work for that matter) should be a balance of work and fun. Our curriculum included icebreakers, games, field trips, and activities in the beginning of the project but should have probably incorporated them into the middle and the end to help the team with our motivation issues and getting through to the end. The research and data analysis proved to be a lot of hard work that needed to be broken up more with films, field trips, and games. All work and no play makes participatory research BORING and no different than school.

Notes on Photo Journaling: It would have been desirable to work with only black and white film and to find a better way to ensure all the film was turned in and processed on time. Location was also another concern. On-location shooting would have allowed the instructor to help the young participants with technical difficulties as they came up. A few sessions in the darkroom and having time alone with the young participants to

examine the photography portion as separate from the academic should also be considered in the future.

B. Unexpected Challenges:

Teamwork: We ended up having many discussions and arguments about what teamwork really means over the course of this project. Here are some of the questions that we struggled with concerning teamwork:

- How does it affect the team if everyone is not playing their role?
- Are the remaining team members expected to pick up that slack or cover those gaps?
- Should that team member be asked to leave?
- Do we accept that some people should play different roles on a team or does everyone have to do the exact same thing?
- Do people fail to be truly critical about their own role in the group when others are not doing their job?
- Should people challenge or change the role that they traditionally play in the group allowing others to take on new roles as well?

Learning and Comprehension Different Styles: Trying to assure that everyone understood the concepts we were presenting and that all of the team members contributed to the conversation when people were at different analytical and critical thinking skill levels was challenging. We also realized that people's reading comprehension and writing skills were at vastly different levels.

Fulfillment of Required Tasks: We often had to negotiate with and prod the young women who were uncomfortable with interviewing their peers even though they had agreed to complete that aspect of the project. We continually struggled with the difference between working an issue through, motivating a youth, and forcing them to do things outside of their comfort zone.

Conflicting Schedules and School Policies: Having the young women interview their peers at school was both a plus and a minus in the sense that they had access to the population

in whom they were interested, but they didn't always have the appropriate private space in which to conduct the interviews or a secure place for their cameras.

Personal Issues and Emotional Work: We had to accept that the young women's personal issues were sometimes more important than the project and the pressing timeline.

Remembering to be mentors and friends as well as employers and teachers is always a hard balance. The adult facilitators were not really being prepared to deal with some of the resistance and emotional responses that the subject matter brought up for the young women.

Job Skills: We did not expect that basic employment skills would require so much of our time. Some of the skills we worked on were:

- Calling when going to be absent.
- Getting to work on time.
- Filling out paper work in a timely manner.
- Participating in all requirements of job even when they challenged or bored you.
- Separating private feelings from job responsibilities.

C. Unexpected Strengths:

The topic that the young women picked was truly their own and therefore extremely powerful. Adults could not have picked such a personal and important subject matter. This was an incredibly rich question that explored cultural, political, economical, gender, and racial realms. This question reached them exactly where they are at in this moment in time.

The team's presentation and facilitation skills vastly improved during the course of these six months. This was due in part to the frustration and irritation that resulted from their first presentation to the Teen Group. After that tension-filled presentation the team organized themselves more thoroughly, practiced and prepared more, and ultimately presented themselves as the competent, intelligent young women that they are.

The photo journaling aspect of this project was an incredible asset because it allowed the young women to express themselves, to see the world and their culture differently, to gain new skills, and to create art.

The insights that the young women gained into their cultural norms and their history was extraordinary. Each of them processed the information that they gathered differently and some have made personal decisions about their hair as a result. All participants were exposed to websites, literature, and films that have addressed the issues surrounding African-American hair.

D. Timeline Issues:

The whole team had difficulty with the transition from the summer time into the school year. We quickly realized that our energy level was limited and that school obligations and schedules were going to be first priority from then on. It took us a while to regain our balance and continue our work after that transition.

Motivation toward the end of the project was difficult especially after working intensively on it for six months. Winter break and exams also came around making it a constant struggle to pull through to the end.

E. Overall Lessons Learned:

In retrospect, we should have had a specific goal or place for the research findings themselves from the beginning of the project. We knew from the beginning that we wanted to present the findings to the community and to incorporate our research into CURL's Youth VIP project. However, we did not plan for further presentations or a permanent display space for the photographs. Due to the lack of a larger goal there was a point in the project where the team felt that they were doing research for research's sake.

The best thing that we as adult facilitators did was allowing the project to be truly youth-led and not interfering with their topic. We originally felt that the research agenda could have been more oriented toward social justice or that it could be more directly related to gaps in services or programming. The ownership that the young women felt for the project and the outcome of their research was much more meaningful because it was truly theirs.

Conclusion: What We Learned

The Girl Driven Research Project (GDRP) proved to be a fruitful, moving, and thought provoking experience for everyone. The young women, staff, volunteers, and community members who were a part of this project all walked away with new knowledge and a deeper understanding of how young women feel about themselves. We also learned about the messages they receive about their hair and ultimately about who they are as African-American females. Participatory research projects, such as this one, empower and engage young people in a unique and compelling way. When young people are encouraged to identify an issue that is important to them and impacts them, the research becomes real and meaningful in a way that could not be achieved by an outside researcher imposing research questions upon the youth.

The question that the GDRP team chose to explore was originally picked because it appeared to be an “easy” question. How African-American young women feel about their hair and what influences them to feel that way seemed manageable and straightforward. No one was prepared for how emotional, personal, historical, economic, and political the question turned out to be. Issues of self esteem, self perception, cultural norms, racism, and the creation of beauty images were all confronted during many of the long and often difficult conversations that we had over the course of six months.

Each of the young women ended up confronting their personal ideas about their hair and where those ideas originated. The team questioned the answers that their peers gave in their interviews and hypothesized about the interviewee’s motives as well as their emotions. The team’s search for answers to this complicated question just led to new and more in-depth questions, so that in the end they had a number of ideas about what they would have asked differently or thoughts about what they were not able to resolve with the data they collected. The search for knowledge generated more questions and exposed the idea that there is no truth--just more questions and creations.

The young women learned about the research process, instrument design, and data analysis. They learned how to work with statistics and how to interpret data relevant to their research question. Through that process participants realized how much control

“experts” have over the “facts” that they present. All of these realizations challenged them to practice and utilize their critical thinking skills more often when they are confronted with information and “facts.”

In addition to being thought provoking and personally challenging, the project also offered the young women an opportunity to gain practical skills. Over the course of the six months the team practiced employment, teambuilding, research and leadership skills. The GDRP team rose to the challenge of the complex subject matter, the ongoing project requirements, the long Saturday hours, and the difficulties of team work. The GDRP team’s strength is evident in the beauty of their photographs and the candidness of their research findings. It was a truly powerful experience to be a part of this project and to work with young women with such dedication, passion, intelligence, and diligence.

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This report is the product of collaboration between the Loyola University of Chicago Center for Urban Research and Learning and Girl World at Alternatives, Inc. Copies of the report can be accessed on the CURL website. In addition, if you are interested in more information on the curriculum and research process, please contact Jessica Palmert at Alternatives.

The Center for Urban Research and Learning – CURL

Loyola University of Chicago's Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) is a non-traditional university research center. CURL promotes an innovative model of teaching and learning that reaches beyond Loyola's campuses and classrooms to develop equal partnerships between the university and Chicago's communities. CURL is guided by a mission that places strong emphasis on research that addresses community needs and involves the community at all levels of research. By working closely with activists outside the university, the Center recognizes and values the knowledge and experience of individuals and organizations in non-academic settings.

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Alternatives, Inc.

Alternatives' mission is to facilitate personal development, strengthen family relationships, and enhance the community well being.

Alternatives' programs and services use an asset-based model that focuses on enriching a youth's life by building upon individual strengths within the context of their family and community. Alternatives' provide comprehensive, accessible, and affordable programs that increase young peoples' opportunities to succeed and grow as individuals and community members.

Alternatives serves Chicago's multi-ethnic northeast side and the participants reflect the community's rich diversity: 40% Latino, 37% African American, 10% Caucasian, 8% Asian, and 4% bi-racial/multi-ethnic and Middle Eastern. Two-thirds live in low-income households; one-third live in single-parent homes.

Alternatives values the rich diversity of the communities we serve and partner with over 100 local organizations and schools. Their long-term strategy is to strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders in the community in order to remain responsive to needs identified by youth and their families.

Girl World is an innovative gender-specific after school program which provides tools for self-determination and safe space for young women to engage in positive self-expression.

The goals of the Girl World program are to:

- Increase self-esteem and team building;
- Create a diverse community of women and girls to encourage cultural exchanges and understanding; and
- Develop girls as leaders in the community through grant making and research projects.

The professionals at Alternatives believe in the power of youth as change agents, thinkers, problem solvers, and as architects of their future--people who are committed to empowering and improving the lives of young people in the community. They are passionate about their work. Each day they connect with the families of the community in order to positively affect their lives.

Alternatives promotes diversity and a team-centered culture that relies on the strengths of each person to bring expertise and knowledge from which all members of the team can benefit.

The Alternatives community advocates for youth in schools, courts, and state agencies in order to keep them safe.

Youth have a prominent role in program design and implementation to ensure that their needs are met.

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Postscript:

Onward to Girl Driven Research Project 2

It is now over a year since the first team of four young women from Girl World, Alternatives, Inc.'s gender specific programming, began their work on the Girl Driven Research Project (GDRP). The team received training on social justice concepts and the research process. They designed their research project, asking the question "How do young African American women feel about their hair and what influences them to feel that way". The reviewed literature; collected data; and analyzed data.

Then, in the late spring of 2003 the team presented their findings to the community. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive, sparking intergenerational dialogues about the significance of hair for African American and all women, inspiring other girls' groups to initiate their own research projects, and leading the Chicago Foundation for Women to award the GDRP team with the 2003 Ripple Award.

The project has also had a number of benefits for the Girl World program as a whole in the sense that staff, volunteers, funders, and community partners developed a deeper understanding of the current issues effecting young women through the questions the team developed and their analysis of the data. Their questions and conversations have helped us to strategize ways to give them more support around issues of self-esteem and critical thinking about the media. The research also allowed the young women to challenge the perceived norms of their world and provided them with an opportunity to be experts about their own lives. As staff, program participants, and the gender specific programming community, we have all grown and benefited from the depth and power of the questions the young women have raised.

Thanks to continued support and funding by Girls' Best Friend Foundation and Loyola University of Chicago's Center for Urban Learning and Research. We are pleased to be continuing the Girl Driven Research Project in 2003-2004. The second year of the GDRP will be building upon the basic structure and curriculum that was created during our pilot year. The GDRP will continue to be a program designed to increase critical thinking and academic skills of young women aged 14-18. Additionally it will provide an opportunity to practice basic employment skills in a safe and supportive environment. We

attempt to achieve these goals by engaging a team of young women in a participatory research project in which they define a question they are interested in exploring, create a tool that helps them to capture their data, engage in the process of analyzing the data they collect, and practice their presentation and facilitation skills by presenting their findings to the community. This year we are planning to use the same basic curriculum that we utilized last year, but we have tightened up the timeline and added more leadership opportunities for the team. The curriculum still begins with the social justice training and research basics, but we asked two of the young women from last years GDRP to cover three of the trainings topics for the new team. These young women were expected to develop curriculum around the questions, “What is research,” “What are the social issues,” and “How do you define the research question”. This training opportunity has enabled the two trainers to build on last year’s experience. In addition, last year’s participants were asked to present to one of the new research groups they inspired at Family Matters. This opportunity not only continued to build the young women’s skills, but also incorporated cascading levels of leadership into the curriculum itself. This will empower the youth to own more of the program and to demonstrate leadership not only in our program but in other girls’ programs in the community as well.

Other changes we have made to this year’s curriculum are concerned with strengthening the defining question and the data analysis components of the curriculum. We are examining these specific aspects of the curriculum because the written and oral evaluations with last year’s team indicate that these aspects needed more definition and clarity. We will continue to receive technical support from Loyola University of Chicago’s Center for Urban Research and Learning. They will primarily be assisting us with finding appropriate data collection methods for our questions, making sure the project is ethical, and helping us analyze and present the data once it is collected. We will be receiving additional support from Catlin Fullwood, a consultant who has worked closely with the MS Foundation, in terms of finding the most effective, youth friendly ways of engaging youth in the research process. Funding for the project will be covered in large part by Girl’s Best Friend Foundation. We are grateful for the opportunity to continue doing participatory research with young women and excited to see what direction the new team will take us in.