Claiming Space!

Black Girls Creating and Critiquing Community

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Overview

– Girl Empowerment
– Solhot
– Theory
– Solhot/Sisterhood
– Research Questions
– Methods
– Preliminary Insight
Setting the Context: Troubling Girl Empowerment

- Although girl empowerment is the professed goal of many gender-specific programs, power is rarely considered and when left to function without question, many program processes marginalize some of the same young people it claims to be “empowering” (Brown, 2007).
Celebrating All Girls

The Program:
Evolved from concerned parents, local non-profits, middle schools, and universities

Program Goals
Girl empowerment through group mentoring

Site of counter-socialization
Socialize girls against a “girl poisoning culture”
Model of Mentor Connections in Celebrating All Girls based on the Rhetorical Property of Stories

- Femtor Practices
  - Borders
  - Generates Intimacy
- Reflective Mechanisms
  - Reinforcement Mechanisms
  - Femtor Connects with Girls
  - Femtor Disconnects with Girls
- Generates Distance
SOLHOT (Saving Our Lives Hear Our Truths!)

- SOLHOT is about giving new form and function to the narratives we speak, sing, dance, and/or act out.

"Ruth Nicole Brown provides a dazzlingly insightful look into the spatial practices cultivated by black girls who speak through hip-hop. The signification of Brown's study is in its attention to African feminist (and the complex range of black feminist theory and third world feminism), reproducing the cultural and political fabric that helps us to understand the political import of black girlhood practices." —LaShonda Karen Barnett, Sarah Lawrence College

This book passionately explores the celebration of black girlhood in a diverse and vibrant urban community. Through analysis of performances and practices, it illustrates how black girls are mediators of popular culture, personal truths, and lived experiences, and how the discussion and critique of these factors can be a vital force in the celebration of Black girlhood. In the following pages, you will find a range of topics, including identity, representation, and social justice, as well as an exploration of the role of hip-hop culture in shaping the experiences of black girls.

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Solhot’s theory of black girlhood assumes:

• A shared identity based upon age or physical maturity alone is a myth.
• Black girls “become women” earlier than their female counterparts.
• Black girlhood is a fluid social construct that is neither mutually exclusive or infantilizing toward Black women.
• Understanding how identity matters requires an intersectional approach.
Solhot/Sisterhood
Research Questions

- How does creating art mediate both the form and content of Black girls' knowledge?
- In what ways do Black girls' bodies matter in both the creation and display of their media?
- What value do institutions assign to Black girls' presence and their productions?
Methods

- Participant Observation/Ethnography
  - Year long study of SOLHOT/Sisterhood.

- Photo-voice
  - Developed by Caroline Wang, the method, turns the camera lens toward the eyes and experiences of marginalized populations and gives people the opportunity to record, reflect and critique personal and community issues in creative ways.

- Performance Ethnography
  - Privileges how culture is done in the body.
“Productions” and Method Cont’d.

- Productions
  - Artistic-Photography Exhibit & Performance
  - Academic text (dissertation, book manuscript)

- Site: Local Middle School
  - 15 girls (sixth, eighth, ninth graders)
  - Year long project
  - Photos, writing, and fieldnotes as units of “data”
Preliminary Insights
Solhot/Sisterhood creates and identifies pathways for transforming institutional narratives and popular imagery of Black girlhood away from discourses of volume and voice to a metalanguage of presence and creative production that allow Black girls, in all of their complexity, to be recognized and affirmed.
Preliminary Insights Cont’d.

- Being there
  - University, community, school, family as participants in inquiry

- Redefining currency
  - Black girls’ way with words are developed and valued
  - From hobby to skill

- Transforming relationships
  - Black girl to black girl
  - “Researcher” to “Subject”
  - Black girls to school (from client to contributor)
  - School personnel and mentors
Black Girls are HERE!
Sisterhood/Solhot Spring '08
Thank you

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