

one girl

THE SNAPSHOT OF

GIRLS

IN CENTRAL OHIO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Women's Fund
of Central Ohio

ONE GIRL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Carol Andreae
Candace Barnhardt
Kelly Budros
Dr. Lisa Courtice
Jean Droste
Nichole E. Dunn
Barbara Fergus
Aida Sabo
Guadalupe Velasquez

ONE GIRL COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS



ONE GIRL FUNDING PARTNERS



The Women's Fund of Central Ohio

investing in the potential
of women and girls

The Women's Fund of Central Ohio
230 Huntington Center
41 South High Street
Columbus, Ohio 43215
P: 614.225.9926
F: 614.225.9936
www.womensfundcentralohio.org

The Women's Fund of Central Ohio was founded in 2001 to transform the lives of women and girls by mobilizing the collective power and passion of all women working together. The Women's Fund promotes social change through growing philanthropy and making grants to programs that expand opportunities for women and girls. The Fund serves Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Licking, Madison, Pickaway, and Union counties, giving voice and visibility to the over 800,000 women and girls in Central Ohio.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lisa Hinkelman, Ph.D.

Executive Director,
The Interprofessional Commission of Ohio at
The Ohio State University
hinkelman.1@osu.edu

Founder and Director,
Ruling Our eXperiences
lisahinkelman@rulingourexperiences.com

Dr. Lisa Hinkelman is the Executive Director of The Interprofessional Commission of Ohio at The Ohio State University and is the Founder and Director of Ruling Our eXperiences. Hinkelman has spent years working with girls, parents, and educators in both educational and counseling settings and has been aggressively researching the experiences of diverse girls for the past six years.

Dr. Hinkelman is a graduate of Chatham College in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she earned her degrees in Psychology and Education. She additionally earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Counselor Education from The Ohio State University. She completed training in mental health counseling and school counseling and currently teaches several graduate level courses in counseling and interprofessional education at The Ohio State University. Hinkelman has authored numerous publications, including book chapters, articles, and educational curricula on topics including: self-esteem development, non-academic barriers to learning, motivational interviewing, sexual violence prevention, child abuse identification, career exploration, and study skills.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WE WANTED TO TRULY UNDERSTAND WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE LIVES OF GIRLS IN CENTRAL OHIO.....

So we asked them.

Over the past few years we have learned a great deal about the status of girls in central Ohio and the social, educational, health, safety, and interpersonal issues that are facing girls in our community. Yet, while this information sheds light on girls, it does not tell us what they are *really* thinking and feeling.

What are the daily issues that adolescent girls face and what are they most concerned about? What are the things girls struggle with and who do they want to talk to about their struggles?

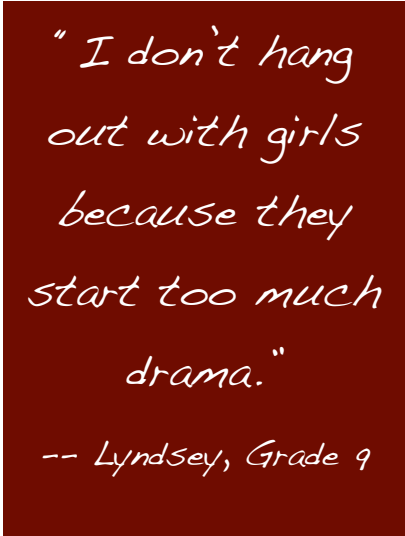
Through collecting surveys from a diverse sample of over 2,000 girls throughout the seven central Ohio counties via the One Girl Collaborative, and by compiling interview and focus group themes from over 900 girls via the Ruling Our eXperiences (ROX) empowerment program for girls, we have gotten a pulse on what girls are really thinking and feeling.

Here's what we've learned...

A girl in central Ohio faces many opportunities and many challenges. She believes that her life is hard and does not think that the adults in her life understand what she is going through. Despite the fact that all of the adults in her life have experienced puberty, she feels alone and confused as to what is happening to her body and her emotions. From as early as fourth grade she is gaining weight, developing breasts and hips (not to mention acne!), and she is starting to menstruate. She is beginning to receive sexual attention from boys and even older guys. She has lots of questions, but she is not sure who she can talk to, or how she should feel about what is happening. She may talk to her same-age peers, but she is less likely to seek accurate information from an older girl or an adult woman.

She has some difficulty forming healthy and supportive relationships with other girls her age and may make statements such as, "Girls are phony" or "I don't hang out with girls because they start too much drama." She has likely experienced and/or participated in some type of relationally aggressive behavior --- like gossiping, spreading rumors, or excluding a classmate -- and finds girl bullying to be a top concern during her middle school and early high school years. By 9th grade, nearly 2/3 of her female peers would say that 'drama' and 'girl bullying' are major issues in their lives.

Despite the difficulty she has with relationships with other girls, she believes that friendships are extremely important. If she is in grades 5 through 8, she believes that popularity and fitting in are paramount, and she may go to great lengths to identify with a particular peer group. As she forms a more stable identity throughout high school, she continues to rely on her friendships and maintains their importance, yet her focus shifts from fitting in and being popular to working on effective relationship skills and managing conflicts with other girls.



*"I don't hang out with girls because they start too much drama."
-- Lyndsey, Grade 9*

She is more likely to want to talk about 'boys' or 'drama' than her academic performance or her plans after high school. In fact, at almost any age from 5th grade through 12th grade, issues with 'boys' and 'drama' top her list of concerns. By 6th grade, over 70% of her peers want to talk about dating, although few may actually be dating.

By 7th grade, nearly 80% of her girlfriends are concerned with dating --- they also report beginning to experience harassment from boys and pressure to engage in sexual behavior.

While she may perceive herself to be in competition with other girls for the attention of boys, she does not believe that boys generally treat girls with respect. As she goes through high school she experiences more pressure surrounding sex and may believe that, "Boys make us have sex with them in order for us to stay with them...if we don't they are gonna go with our friends." She might not want to engage in sexual activity, yet may not feel equipped to handle this pressure. She asks, "Usually older guys want to do more stuff - what if you don't want to do something and they're pressuring you?"

*" Usually older
guys want to do
more stuff-what
if you don't want
to do something
and they're
pressuring you?"
-- Dominique, Grade 8*

By 9th grade, 61% of her peers say that sex is a major issue they are dealing with and by 12th grade, nearly 70% say the same. She reports that issues around sex include pressure, consent, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy.

If she is in high school, about 50% of her girl friends are concerned about pregnancy prevention, up from 40% in 8th grade.

An additional area where she feels pressure is surrounding her appearance. While the changes of puberty may have passed, she continues to feel insecure about her weight and body shape. Nearly 60% of the girls she knows in grades 6 through 10 report pressure to be thin or look a certain way as an issue worth discussing with other girls.

Bombarded with social messages and media images about what she is 'supposed' to look like, she may strive to achieve an unrealistic and unattainable ideal. She may be self-conscious about her appearance and "see other girls in magazines and want to be like them." Despite the pressure she and her friends may be feeling surrounding their looks, fewer than 40% of her friends are interested in discussing healthy eating and exercise, yet about half want to increase their self-esteem and feel better about themselves.

She reports a final area of pressure surrounding alcohol, drugs, and parties -- and these concerns increase as she gets older. By the time she is in high school nearly 1/2 of her friends want to discuss issues related to substance use and abuse and explore the pressure they feel from friends to attend parties or experiment with alcohol or drugs.

With all of the intense issues that she and her friends are facing, it is no surprise that she has somewhat of a lower interest in community service and leadership development.

Only about 23% of her friends in 9th grade and about 30% of her 12th grade friends want to discuss their involvement in community service projects or leadership development opportunities.

However, she is interested in planning for high school and college, as well as for a successful career. In 8th grade, 51% of her friends want to discuss college planning, in 10th grade this figure increases to 56%, and by her senior year, 65% of her female peers are interested in making plans for college and their futures.

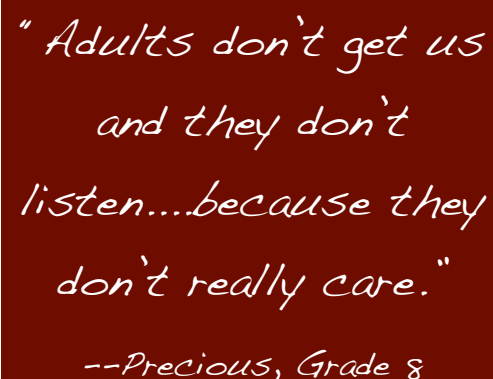
So how do we help her negotiate these developmental, social, and interpersonal challenges and connect with her in relevant and meaningful ways?

FIRST, WE LISTEN TO WHAT SHE CARES ABOUT AND ALLOW HER TO BE THE EXPERT ON HER OWN LIFE.

She tells us that she wants to talk to girls her own age, and even girls who are older than she is, about these important issues, but she is not particularly interested in talking to adult women. She believes that, "Adults don't get us and they don't listen....because they don't really care." She may have the sense that her parents, or other significant adults in her life, "don't want to talk to me."

While this may be untrue, her perception is her reality. The way that she experiences relationships with adults in her life reinforces her sense that they cannot understand her current life situation, feelings, or experiences. She tells us that parents are, "old and more mature, so they don't know what you are talking about." She is tired of hearing, "it is for your own good," and she wants desperately to be understood and validated.

She feels embarrassed to bring up sensitive topics with her parents, but she has so many unanswered questions. She is afraid that if she asks questions about dating, or tells them that she has a crush, her parents will "assume that I'm fooling around".



*"Adults don't get us
and they don't
listen....because they
don't really care."
--Precious, Grade 8*

She wants to be important, listened to, and valued.

NEXT, WE PROVIDE HER WITH INFORMATION AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP NEW SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS THAT WILL HELP HER TO NEGOTIATE HER WORLD DIFFERENTLY.

She may struggle to identify her own strengths and competencies. In fact, by 12th grade nearly 60% of her friends are concerned with self-esteem and feeling good about themselves. She understands the messages she is receiving from society on how she is 'supposed' to look, think, behave, or dress --- and on what she is 'supposed' to study, pursue, or earn. She also knows that stepping outside of these expectations can be difficult.

She needs to develop new ways of interacting with her environment and new skills that will assist her in negotiating the challenges she will invariably face throughout her middle and high school years. She needs accurate information, positive role models, and a safe space where she can explore.

She needs to first find value within herself if we expect her to add value to the world.

FINALLY, WE SUPPORT HER BY WORKING TO CREATE A COMMUNITY CULTURE THAT UNDERSTANDS -- AND ATTENDS TO -- THE CRITICAL ISSUES THAT IMPACT HER LIFE.

She has so many questions and faces so many unknowns. There is no one person, program, agency, or organization that can adequately address the complex problems she will face. She needs the collective expertise of a community dedicated to enhancing her opportunities and enriching her life -- so that while she is becoming a smarter, stronger, more competent girl, we are creating for her a safe, equitable, and more accessible world.

IMPLICATIONS

Ensuring that our approach to building relationships and providing programming to girls is informed by what girls actually care about provides us an opportunity to transform services and interventions targeted to girls. We have an increased ability to engage girls in relevant ways and to demonstrate to girls that we understand and care about their experiences and their challenges.

I'm a *business person* .

Businesses and corporations who invest in community agencies, schools, or programs that focus on girls should ensure they are making **targeted investments in evidence-based programs and interventions**. Millions of dollars have been invested in agencies, programs, and organizations that are well-intentioned, yet may be lacking in empirical outcome data. How can you know that your dollars are having the greatest impact? **Fund innovative concepts and ideas that incorporate a rigorous evaluation protocol**. It is wise to expect a program to allocate a percentage of their budget to program evaluation, and funders would be well-served to require thorough evaluation metrics in their requests for funding. Effective evaluation supports program improvement and integrity.

I'm a *girl-serving organization* .

If you are involved with a girl-serving program or organization it is important to ensure that your programs incorporate **targeted marketing and relevant recruitment** of girls. Girls have told us that they are intensely concerned with friendships, relationships, and dating. If our efforts to engage girls do not initially demonstrate an understanding of their lives, we may miss the opportunity to pique their interest.

Aligning desired program outcomes to program interventions is critical to effective programming. Simply put, **program inputs must match the program outputs**. If your desired outcome is to improve girls' self-concept, your program must include evidence-based interventions that have demonstrated success in improving self-concept.

Finally, organizations must also be concerned with, and willing to pay for, **rigorous evaluation** that measures the efficacy of their programs. Evaluation allows you to be able to demonstrate to funders and constituents the ways in which the girls are different by having participated in your program or intervention.

I'm a philanthropist.

If you are a philanthropist or are otherwise concerned with the funding of organizations and programs that provide services to girls, you should be asking yourself the following: “**Do the voices and experiences of girls inform the programs that I support?**” Knowing that girls have a say in the program design and implementation means that the girls are being listened to and valued.

Another question to consider is: “**Do the programs that I support actually make a difference in the lives of the participants?**” Take care to ensure that your investment is making an impact in the way that you would hope.

I'm an educator.

As schools seek to provide effective education to girls, there are several issues that must be taken into consideration. First, an acknowledgment that **there are non-academic barriers that impact girls lives and can have a substantial impact on academic performance**. Girls told us that the issues they face at school have less to do with academics and much more to do with school climate and interpersonal relationships. We must take a holistic approach to educating girls and work to **create an environment where girls can learn and thrive**.

I'm a parent.

Parents and other adults who have girls in their lives can improve their relationships by **making a conscious effort to connect with them in authentic and developmentally appropriate ways**. Adults often approach their conversations with teens from a place of superiority or expertise. While adults have the benefit of wisdom and experience -- they must recognize that a girl's only experience is her current situation. When she goes through a difficult relationship, she does not want you to tell her that, “There are other fish in the sea” or “I know how you feel”. Rather, **she wants you to validate her intense emotions and realize that her feelings and experiences are all new to her**. She wants to be listened to, trusted, supported, and encouraged.