SPACES OF SECURITY: INTERROGATING *THE GIRL EFFECT* IN GUATEMALA

By

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Submitted to the graduate degree program in Anthropology and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date Defended: April 29, 2014

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Date approved: April 29, 2014

Keywords

Abstract

In 2008, the Nike Foundation introduced *The Girl Effect*- a one-size fits all plan to solve poverty that argues girls in the global south are invisible and should be made visible through data collection and investment. During the summer of 2013, semi-structured interviews were conducted with young, indigenous Guatemalan women affiliated with an NGO funded by *The Girl Effect* in an attempt to better understand how NGO knowledge about universal human rights and gender equity is received by program participants. This thesis problematizes the NGO as a space of security by questioning for whom the NGO actually serves and viewing young women as willful subjects of a specific sociohistorical context instead of turning them into simplified 'data'. I suggest that NGOs embracing *The Girl Effect* should avoid promoting a singular route to neoliberal success and instead attend to the diverse experiences of the young women they wish to serve.

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INTRODUCTION

"Girls are the most powerful force for change on the planet. Welcome to *The Girl Effect*."

"Economically empowered girls can stop poverty before it starts- girls have the potential to add billions of dollars to GDP."

The Girl Effect website

Guatemala is a country saturated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Beck (2011) estimates that there are over 10,000 registered organizations in this country approximately the size of Tennessee with a population of 14 million. While the roots of NGO involvement in Guatemala began in the 1960s, the growth of foreign aid was spurred by natural disaster relief funds in response to the devastating 1976 earthquake. The end of the civil war and signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, combined with neoliberal economic policies meant that NGOs began appearing all over Guatemala at record rates and continue to do so today (Rohloff et al. 2011). NGOs are not disinterested actors (James 2010a). They often promote neoliberal economics and are heavily influenced by Western gender norms.

As is the case for many American and European ex-pats living in Guatemala, I moved there in 2011 to work for an NGO and quickly became immersed in the discourse of the international development world. Many of these organizations are based out of the colonial city of Antigua—a picturesque tourist town in the central highlands nestled between three volcanoes and boasting cobblestone streets and modern amenities. While the NGO I worked with did have an office in Antigua at one point, they ultimately moved to Guatemala City because of the desires of its staff, who were all *ladinos* (Hispanic or mestizo Guatemalans) from the capital except for three young indigenous women in lower level positions and the occasional rotating foreign consultant.

This NGO, Women First[1], is funded by various United Nations inter-agency groups and primarily targets young indigenous Maya women ages 8-17 in rural communities. Their main program consists of girls' clubs in these communities that are led by a *lideresa* (girl club leader) who receives training on the program's curriculum so that she can replicate it during weekly club meetings. Separate clubs with different curricula exist for girls ages 8-12 and 13-17. At the time of this study, Women First ran clubs in approximately 35 rural communities in the departments (states) of Sololá, Chimaltenango, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán and Alta Verapaz. While the girls' clubs are the central focus of the organization, they also conduct other activities for various projects including reproductive health research and community mobilization activities known as "Safescaping." "Safescaping" consists of a series of workshops with community members and leaders that includes: identifying gender-based violence as a real problem in the community, organizing focus groups to discuss basic concepts of primary prevention of gender-based violence, and promoting gender-equitable norms through participatory safety-mapping and participatory video (Del Valle 2012:3).

I came to work at Women First during a transition period. A new program director, and monitoring and evaluation director had both arrived and were undertaking major changes. At the same time, *The Girl Effect* was becoming popular. This brand and its "theory of change," founded by the Nike Foundation in 2008, subsequently spread via the "girl-powering" of international development. (Koffman and Gil 2013). The premise of *The Girl Effect* is that by investing in the world's 600 million adolescent girls, NGOs and their funders can not only change the life of each particular girl, but her entire impoverished community (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011; Moeller 2013). This transformative process of empowerment takes place through formal schooling, delaying the age of marriage and childbirth, and increasing the earning

[1] Pseudonym

power of girls (Koffman and Gil 2013). *The Girl Effect* recommends that these changes be made through educational scholarships, cash transfers and increased market opportunities for employment and female entrepreneurship (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011). Research by The World Bank (2011) analyzed the macro-level economic benefits of *The Girl Effect* in an attempt to link investing in girls with an increase in national income. Their argument was framed to "quantify opportunity costs related to lost productivity" and accounted for early school dropout, teenage pregnancy and joblessness (Chaaban and Cunningham 2011:4). In the case of teenage pregnancy, the report suggests that the productivity lost could range anywhere from one percent annual GDP in China to 30 percent annual GDP in Uganda. It is through the girls' clubs of Women First then, that *The Girl Effect* (and economic potential) of Guatemalan girls would be unleashed.

Another key aspect to *The Girl Effect* is data collection. As part of participating in *The Girl Effect* program, girls must consent to being research subjects to create data and prove the theory of change. In stereotypical neoliberal fashion, data collection on program participants presumes a homogeneous marketplace by disregarding ethnic, racial or national origins. For instance, the World Bank Report (2011) on *The Girl Effect* makes no mention of how a girl's access to education, employment or contraception might vary based on cultural context. Instead, the focus lies on the economic potential of girls through data and statistics related to GDP, which are then backed up by "authentic stories" collected during brief site visits to the global south to further branding (Hayhurst 2011).

Existing research on *The Girl Effect* ideology suggests that the campaign relies on a set of mutually exclusive, false dichotomies between autonomy/confinement, productivity/reproductivity and school-girl/child bride (Switzer 2013), integrated with the

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concept of the "third world girl" (Moeller 2013). "Third world girls" need saving, which *The Girl Effect* can do with the help of Western girls who participate in the brand's social networking and fundraising efforts. The project of *The Girl Effect* is thus a universalizing one, with only one route to programmatic "success": to be a girl that stays in school and joins the neoliberal labor force. It is also necessary to interrogate the role of a multinational corporation such as Nike in pushing the agenda of *The Girl Effect* and question how it might exacerbate the very situation it wishes to solve by supporting hypercapitalist, free market practices (Hayhurst 2011).

Source: http://www.globalgiving.org/projects/girleffectfund/

Overview of Findings

This thesis will analyze *The Girl Effect* as applied by Women First in Guatemala. While the Nike Foundation argues that girls have been invisible and need to be made visible through

data collection and educational intervention, *The Girl Effect* and its data set propagate a distorted image of the "third world girl," ironically making the actual lives of the girls they seek to reach invisible (Moeller 2013: 617). This thesis critically analyzes this dissociation between the actual lives of the participants in *The Girl Effect* program and the reductionist, sexualized and universalized images of girls needing "salvation" by Western development. I draw on queer, postcolonial, and feminist theory to discuss the experiences of young indigenous Guatemalan women as they interact with NGOs that seek to fetishize them (as third world girls) in order to be consumed by the Western development industry.

I use Erica James' (2010a) concept of "spaces of security" to explore *The Girl Effect*'s intention to provide a break from insecurity in Guatemala, as educated and employed girls creating safe spaces. I do so by posing the following questions: For whom is *The Girl Effect* NGO a safe space? What types of conversations are permissible in this supposed "safe space?" What constitutes a programmatic "failure" under the singular definition of "school girl" success advocated by *The Girl Effect*? What slivers of agency[2] do individual indigenous young women create in spaces both inside and outside of the program? For the purposes of this study, I conceive of success and failure from the NGO point of view in terms of the embodiment of *The Girl Effect* discourse. While it will be clear that Women First has affected the participants in this study to varying degrees, I do not wish to evaluate whether or not Women First was successful as a whole, but instead wish to share the ways in which these young women conceive of their own lives and how they embody or defy *The Girl Effect* logic. The singular path towards school-girl success, entry into the formal labor market and avoidance of marriage laid out by *The Girl Effect* marginalizes discussion of topics like dating, migration and motherhood that greatly affect rural

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[2] I have chosen to use this phrase, drawing on Cynthia Enloe's discussion of agency in which she says "a sliver of space for agency" (Enloe 2000:248)

indigenous young women. Instead, I argue for multiple models of success by presenting case studies of young women whose lives fall outside of *The Girl Effect* definition of success. By examining the nuances of the NGO space of security, I hope to offer suggestions on how to enhance inclusive spaces of security in response to the needs of the young women *The Girl Effect* wishes to support. This involves viewing young women as willful subjects of a specific sociohistorical context instead of turning them into homogeneous, simplified 'data'. Furthermore, this thesis will contribute to a growing body of cross-cultural (counter)examples to existing research on images of girlhood, as well as to feminist development critiques.

The Guatemalan Context

Guatemala is a post-conflict nation located in Central America. It is the largest country in the region with a population of 14 million and over 60% of the population identifies as indigenous (Carey 2006). The majority of these indigenous people identify with one of 21 Maya language groups in the country. The rest of the population is made up of Ladinos and a small percentage of other ethnic minorities. While historically racist structures begun under colonialism have divided Maya and Ladino people, today's racial and ethnic tension is more muted and indirect, but still ubiquitous (Hale 2006).[3] Moreover, Guatemala is marked by widespread poverty and economic disparity; it boasts some of the highest rates of chronic malnutrition in the world (Gragnolati and Marini 2003). Poverty and the associated social marginalization are disproportionately felt by the country's indigenous peoples. Seventy percent of the population is under the age of 18, making Guatemala an ideal case study for adolescent and girlhood studies (UNDP 2012).

Young indigenous Guatemalan women live in a marginalized position in society, which puts them at risk of gender-based violence, human trafficking, and maternal death due to lack of access to adequate healthcare. Records from the National Police (PNC) show that in 2010 alone 66 percent of victims of violence were female adolescents younger than 19, and 32 percent were girls between the ages of 11 and 15 (UNDP 2012). Access to justice is challenging for indigenous women, and especially for young women and adolescents. The issues discussed in this study are urgent and addressing them appropriately will affect the lives young indigenous women experiencing normalized violence today.

A violent history of colonialism and more recently a genocidal civil war have left Maya

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[3] In fact, normalized racism emerged as a salient theme during my research, but it will not be the focus of this study.

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populations marginalized as second-class citizens. The genocide of the early 1980s was a departure from earlier civil war violence in that it specifically targeted indigenous communities, with over 80% of victims identified as Maya (Garrard-Burnett 2010). As exemplified by the failed prosecution of former dictator Efrain Rios Montt, there has been widespread impunity for war crimes, which in turn has extended to all types of violence (Carey and Torres 2010). This impunity enforces a continued sense of fear and lack of closure for survivors of war crimes: everyday life in Guatemala goes on the same as if the unspeakable violence never happened (CEH 1999). In this sense, impunity today is equally if not more damaging because perpetrators and victims alike know that history has proven the law will not intervene.

Military leaders continue to operate under impunity despite their war crimes, well documented in the Catholic Church's (1998) and United Nations (1999) truth commission reports. The state and army systematically produced and maintained a state of terror through the repeated use of torture and rape as part of their counterinsurgency strategy. This process of terror brought about not only individual trauma but also trauma at the familial and social level with the goal of breaking down any sense of social cohesion. By attacking social organizations— including unions, student groups and the Catholic Church—the government stigmatized involvement in community organizing.

During *la violencia* (the violence), as Civil War massacres are known, Maya communities were deemed to be allies to rebel groups to justify the genocidal attacks taken against them (most acutely from 1981-83). The sense of being afraid for the simple fact of being Maya was palpable in indigenous communities during the war. Survivors report being forced to remove their *traje* (traditional dress) and stop speaking in Mayan languages for fear of being labeled a part of rebel forces. The army often left bodies of victims who were tortured or had

disappeared to be eaten by animals or decay publically in indigenous communities, where relatives were too afraid to recover them. The inability to bury the dead and carry out the proper indigenous burial practices was a source of ongoing pain frequently shared in the truth commissions (REMHI 1998; CEH 1999). Moreover, the use of rape as a tool of war against Maya girls and women has been an ongoing source of shame for families and communities. Women were often raped by multiple men, sometimes in front of their own children or families. Many reported that pregnant women were the target of specifically gruesome attacks of sexual violence and forced abortions (CEH 1999).

As demonstrated in the Kaqchikel area by David Carey, Maya women have been subordinate to the state, Ladinos and Maya men throughout history (Carey 2006: 6). While it is true that women have historically played an important role in the domestic sphere (including raising children) in Guatemala, as in many other patriarchal contexts, domestic work is highly undervalued and restricts women's power and agency. The Guatemalan state has consistently combined violence and patriarchy as tools of control. Carey and Torres (2010) provide a critical historical analysis of how gender-based violence became normalized in Guatemala, arguing that the roots of femicide and gender-based violence of today lie in the lack of punishment for any and all violence against women since the 1900s (143). Even before the civil war, gender-based violence was used by both military governments and communities as forms of power and customary social control. Carey and Torres (2010:160) describe this process of normalization: "instead of being exceptional, violations of women became common and ultimately normal." Though the roots of gender-based violence in Guatemala extend well beyond the civil war, the war's presence in recent historical memory makes it a central factor in the normalization of violence in the country today.

Maya Gender Studies

Early studies of Maya women often described them in romantic and essentialized ways, mostly in terms of reproductive and domestic activities. They were and continue to be applauded as primary transmitters of Maya culture - language, weavings, food preparation and traditional dress. In the 1970s, feminist critique of the domestic role of women marked a shift in the scholarship. Lois Paul's (1974) study of a highland Maya community suggested that the domestic role afforded to women was highly restrictive to the degree that women were unable to form social networks except for a bond among mothers. As the changing economy demanded that women begin to work outside of the home, the most commonly accepted public activities for Maya women were those that conformed to patriarchal gender norms, including working as merchants and vendors at the market, washerwomen, and other daily chores that took them outside of the household (Carey 2006: 33). Even when traditionally feminine employment opportunities such as weaving surfaced, men ultimately monopolized them (Ehlers 1990). By the 1980s, the economic situation in rural Guatemala demanded that many Maya women leave the home to work in less "acceptable" roles in factories and shops outside of their communities (Ehlers 1990). Whereas agricultural work and women-run weaving businesses were once viable options for men and women, this has been less and less the case. Furthermore, Mayanists have argued that pressures of poverty and rising unemployment among rural Maya men in a changing economy could lead to increased tension for couples as men cannot fill their economic role within the household. This tension has resulted in male alcoholism and interpersonal violence against women (Rosenbaum 1993; Eber 1995).

These studies of market integration and gender change began to critique the restrictive nature of traditional indigenous gender roles, something that continues to be done today.

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Through the example of the Rabin Ajaw or Maya Queen event, Carlota McAllister (2006) showed that the idea of the authentic indigenous woman is socially constructed and a performance, a way of "doing gender[4]." It is important to note that the Rabin Ajaw is a Maya beauty pageant run by Ladinos and thus a center stage for reproducing traditional tropes of Maya womanhood despite decades of change in the participants' own communities. The competition, rather than being about beauty, is about which young indigenous woman embodies what the Ladino judges view as traditional, authentic Mayaness—wearing the appropriate traditional dress, speaking about their community in an acceptably "Maya" form of Spanish, and embodying what viewers think of as the past. This is important in relation to this study because the young women interviewed and Women First as an organization do not embody or promote this "traditional" form of Maya femininity. While all the young women are fluent in an indigenous language, many do not use it in their everyday lives. They do not all wear traditional hand woven blouses, but instead choose to purchase bedazzled tops made in factories. They would not win the Rabin Ajaw with their gender performance.

In a recent study, Liliana Goldin (2009) discussed the ideologies of practice and making a living in the highlands arguing, "we make ourselves in practice." Here Goldin makes a key observation of gendered interactions between Maya men and women in Guatemalan communities:

> "In the central highlands, even in conditions where women are working side by side with men either in the fields or in the factories and processing plants, men describe the relationships with their wives and girlfriends in terms of female subordination." (166)

Whether appearing as the discourse of *machismo* or in acts of interpersonal violence, the daily subordination and oppression of women in Guatemala cannot be understated. Goldin (2009)

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[4] West and Zimmerman (1987) introduced the concept of "doing gender" to argue that gender is an ongoing process and the product of social situations, thus something one must "do" repeatedly.

further focuses on shifts in local concepts of work and the ways in which Maya workers actively participate in the increasingly globalized economy. Globalization has made it such that subsistence agriculture is no longer enough to survive in rural Guatemala. This means that communities are dependent on women working outside of the home and more frequently outside of the community. These new forms of globalized work include garment work in factories, working in export crop business, migrating to larger cities or even the United States, as well as opportunities to work with NGOs and further their education.

Christina Kray's (2007) study of Yucatec Maya communities in Mexico, "Women as Border in the Shadow of Cancun," demonstrates how opportunities for women brought by globalization do not always correspond with increased freedom because of the relationship between poverty and morality, or "tranquility," in Maya communities. Because of their marginalized ethnic and socioeconomic position within society, Maya communities view wealth and morality as inversely related; even though they might be poor, they view themselves as morally superior to rich Ladinos and Americans. The problem for women, especially young women travelling to work, is that these concepts of morality are gendered and keep them oppressed (Carey 2001; Kray 2007). Female virtue in particular is seen as the shield against the pains of poverty and globalization. She suggests that town gossip centers on young women who leave the community to work. This resonates closely with the gossip I heard in rural Guatemala about girl leaders who left to participate in NGO trainings. Such gossip functions to police the newfound freedom of girls by attacking their moral character—when they leave the community they must be having sex or participating in other "morally corrupt" activities, which dishonor the entire indigenous community. The young indigenous women in this study are in this "border" position- pursuing opportunities in a context where there is no longer one "right" way to be a

Maya woman. The traditional domestic role is no longer viable economically and no longer desired, but the pursuit of alternatives such as advanced schooling or factory work also makes them the focus of community critique.

Insecurity and Violence

The country's violent past and normalization of violence over time have made it a place of "civil insecurity" (Menjivar 2011). Danger and violence are often topics of everyday discussion. Kay Warren (1998) showed how the cultural construction of terror took place in one Guatemalan community. In the late 1980s, after most of the war violence had subsided, the community was governed by fear and terror (re)constructed by retelling traumatic stories of war time disappearances and killings. Impunity along with the lasting effects of constructing fear and terror allow a sense of insecurity to police communities today.

When I first moved to the Kaqchikel community of San Juan Comalapa (henceforth Comalapa), I was struck by the violent stories my host family told me when we had conversations about which buses to take and where I would be traveling for work. I was filled with fear and convinced Guatemala was more violent and dangerous than ever. Over time I began participating in the construction of what James (2010a) invoking Giddens (1984) calls ontological insecurity, chiming in to the conversation by retelling the story of the time I was robbed at knifepoint in Antigua in broad daylight or when my former roommate was stabbed.

The normalization of this sense of insecurity was made clear to me during my last visit in 2013 when I went to the town *feria* (local fair) in an *aldea* (small village) of the western highland city of Totonicapán with a group of five young women. Their plan was to take me to the town fair and have me ride the Ferris wheel, despite the fact that many of them were afraid to ride themselves. I looked at the rickety old Ferris wheel, retired from its use in the United States and

now on its last leg at a rural Guatemalan fair. I told them I was scared to ride and what if I died? One girl quickly replied, "Well, then we'll bury you!" and giggled. I quickly realized through this humor that my fear of the Ferris wheel was nothing compared to the experience of living with the daily insecurity of the rural, indigenous experience. Death happens and people are buried.

The way I conceptualize trauma, violence and traumatized communities draws heavily on Erica James' work in post-conflict Haiti. She uses Weldes et al.'s (1999) concept of "cultures of insecurity" to frame Haitian society as one marked by insecurity, uncertainty, trauma and suffering (James 2004:143). Cultures of insecurity are spaces where normalized violence and vulnerability are commonplace. Boehm (2009) uses a similar frame of insecurity in a transnational study of a Mexican community, where the threat of deportation and detention by immigration officials function as a major source of unpredictability in the lives of Mexican immigrants. Many of the interviewees in this study imagined their futures in terms of transnational migration, so Boehm's example is particularly relevant. That combined with a pervasive "culture of insecurity" in rural Guatemalan communities contribute to increased vulnerability to violence, labor exploitation, human trafficking, etc. The young indigenous women interviewed are particularly vulnerable to both labor and sex trafficking due to the intersections of their oppressed statuses as women in a highly patriarchal society and as part of the indigenous Maya population of Guatemala. These particular women are also young and poor, but not necessarily from the poorest backgrounds – the ideal group to be trafficked according to Bales (Bales 2005:141-142).

Applying Feminist Theory

In Guatemala, the culture of insecurity is gendered (James 2010a). Studying "gender" in

Guatemala has most often meant the study of women. Anthropology and its colonial roots, as well as a tendency to speak for others, has been a target of feminist and postcolonial critique (Ahmed 2000; Mohanty 2003). While I use ethnographic methods for this study, I hope to contribute to transformative feminist scholarship by locating agency in a specific, historicized context and resisting the urge to universalize the gendered experience of insecurity in Guatemala (Mohanty 2003).

I will employ an intersectional lens to demonstrate how structural, racial, economic and gender inequalities all merge within the lives of the study participants. The concept of intersectionality, popularized by Kimberle Crenshaw, refers to the ways that gender and race intersect to shape black women's experiences, but has since been expanded to include all social identities as a way to look at how they interact to oppress or produce power (Crenshaw 1991; Gopaldas 2013). In the case of Guatemala, this means that an analysis of gender must also consider the marginalized position of rural indigenous communities in this post-war nation. Feminist Maya organizers in exile in Mexico after the civil war recognized this when they drew attention to intersections of their oppression and sought to address issues of gender, class and ethnicity (Hooks 1991). It is the very intersection of oppressions and the structural and historical nature of their roots that *The Girl Effect* fails to recognize when promoting a "one size fits all" brand of development practice.

Imagined Futures and Girlhood Studies

For the purposes of this study I will review previous research on imagined futures as it relates to girlhood studies. With the original intent of considering how an NGO might affect the connection young women felt to their own communities, I asked participants if they would like to live in or outside of their community in the future and why. Here, I consider the act of

imagining one's future as a performative site of agency because it shapes both the present and the future self (Anagnost 2013:7).

Research on imagined futures of adolescent women in other contexts yields varied results. One line of research focuses on the gendered aspects of the "self" and imagined futures, arguing that patriarchal forces influence young women to imagine their futures in terms of the fear of being alone and childless. In one study that demonstrated this result, Lana Zannettino (2008) emphasizes the mother-daughter relationship in imagined futures and shows that some girls draw a connection between their own mothers' inability to pursue their girlhood dreams and their own desire to live differently. Many of the participants in my own study made this same argument, juxtaposing their mother's failed experience against their own hope for a better future. On the other hand, a different study with young women ages 10-15 in New Zealand contradicted existing literature by arguing that future narratives in their sample focused on career goals and the girls as autonomous individuals (Sanders and Munford 2008). In this counter example, the mother-daughter relationship was no longer the primary unit of analysis for imagined futures.

While the existing research on girlhood and imagined futures is helpful to review, many factors place the young Guatemalan women in this study in a different position—their socioeconomic status, context of violence, ethnic discrimination, *et cetera*. Much of the existing research has been done in more "developed" countries, among white girls of middle to upper socioeconomic class, and in some instances studies have even attempted to remove the variable of trauma by focusing on girls who have not been in contact with child welfare services. Exploring the imagined futures of the young indigenous women in this study contribute to girlhood studies of modernity by expanding to include the perspective of a post-conflict nation, as well as indigenous girlhood.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected over a three-year period from 2011-present, during which I formed a relationship with an NGO that seeks to prevent gender-based violence. I combine the interview data from 2013 with ethnographic and participant observation data collected from October 2011 to July 2012 during my time working at Women First as an intern. Prior participant observation data were collected during girl leader workshop trainings, as well as work in various rural communities such as meetings with local leaders and community mobilization workshops. As an intern, I also lived in the Kaqchikel community of Comalapa for nine months and worked closely with the girls' club there, accompanying the two girl leaders to meetings with community leaders and school directors and visiting homes to organize mothers. As an all-purpose intern, I also worked closely with the monitoring and evaluation team, contributing to the collection of impersonalizing data for various baseline studies, and also helped facilitate Safescaping" workshops in five different communities. I also draw general data from *The Girl Effect*'s website and promotional materials.

Study Population and Data Collection

During a five-week period in the summer of 2013, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 young, indigenous women ages 17-25, met through Women First program participants, in an attempt to better understand how NGO knowledge about universal human rights, gender equity and violence is transmitted and operationalized by program participants. In 2013, no longer having my time limited as an intern, I spent time not only attending NGO activities, but also with participants' families and in activities organized by research participants. Interviews were conducted with young women from the western highland departments of Sololá and Totonicapán and the northern department of Alta Verapaz. Eight interviewees were from

Totonicapán and had recently formed a group (referred to here as La Red) separate from Women First to sustain the work Women First had introduced to their communities. Rosita, a young indigenous woman, founded La Red after working as a Women First mentor to girl club leaders. While interviews were conducted in Spanish, all participants were also fluent in either K'iche' (8), Kaqchikel (1) or Poqomchi' (2).

Interviews were conducted wherever participants felt most comfortable: their places of work, private homes, and community centers. Interviewees were asked questions such as: "What have you heard about the term 'human rights'?" "What have you heard about the term 'gender-based violence?" "Would you like to live inside or outside of your community in the future? Why or why not?" and "Would you like to work outside of your community? Why or why not?" Data analysis included interview transcription and inductive coding of interviews as well as field notes based on participant observation.

While it may seem that the data that follow would not be answers from these general questions about human rights, my interviews elicited rich narratives that made me look for a different frame for this research. I moved from a human rights approach to a development critique with a focus on trauma narratives. These narratives may have come out because of my role as a former Women First employee. Perhaps the young women continued to see me in this role and thought I wanted to hear a version of their life story that resonated with the themes of *The Girl Effect*. I had indeed heard similar narratives shared with funders during my time with Women First. It may have been this conditioning by the NGO to share unimaginable experiences of trauma—what Erica James (2004) terms trauma portfolios—that elicited these narratives. On the other hand, the young women may have also drawn on the history of their communities in this post-conflict nation with indigenous communities still seeking justice. I will discuss this

tradition of *testimonio* (testimony) further in my analysis.

Reflexivity

While working with Women First prior to conducting my thesis research helped me to build relationships and trust, it also implicated me in *The Girl Effect.* I remember shortly after coming to the Women First office for the first time in the fall of 2012 that there was a short term *Girl Effect* social media-based, fundraising campaign. I watched one of *The Girl Effect* videos analyzed by Switzer (2013) and felt the sense of urgency the Nike Foundation was trying to instill in me: I was excited and ready to work hard for this organization. As my time with the organization neared nine months, instead of feeling inspired to "save" girls, I began having conversations with young women about what they felt was lacking at the organization. I noticed some girls were ending their two-year internships and staff members whispered about who might be planning on getting married or pregnant. I noticed that people I had for so long viewed as "girls" weren't girls at all—some of the group leaders were older than I was at 23. As I took more feminism and gender theory coursework in graduate school and built my own experiences, I began to challenge the validity of interventions like *The Girl Effect* and ultimately returned to further investigate some of the questions I had with young women via additional in-depth interviews. I also choose to refer to the study participants as young women instead of girls to distinguish my work from *The Girl Effect* discourse.

In this sense, I was an "insider" when it came to the NGO and its work. Ormond (2004) evaluated her perceived position as an insider while conducting research among Maori youth in New Zealand and looked at the ways this position can silence the very people they are trying to listen to. She warns that focusing on the emotional aspects of what the "other" is saying can further silence by downplaying socioeconomic and cultural forces at play (Ormond 2004). This

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made me critically consider my role as an NGO "insider." I knew some of the young women I interviewed prior to the study and had even heard a few of them give their testimony during Women First activities. Because of this, I tried to choose young women to interview who were not normally chosen by Women First to share their testimony. I hope that in my analysis there is not undue emphasis put on the emotional aspects of the interviews. Though a few of the young women cried while sharing their stories, I worked to contextualize these emotional responses in their narratives to provide a holistic view of their lived experiences as young indigenous women in rural Guatemala.

RESULTS: IMAGINED FUTURES

Specifically highlighted in the case studies below are discussions of imagined futures of the young women as they overlap with or diverge from *The Girl Effect* discourse. Transnational ideas about romance and marriage frequently emerge in imagined futures and therefore cannot be overlooked. Moreover, *The Girl Effect* only facilitates discussions of delaying marriage, therefore making the young women's desire to discuss issues of marriage, dating and sexuality all the more relevant to problematizing the NGO safe space[5]. Table 1 below provides an overview of participant data:

Table 1: Overview of Study Participants

Participant	Department	Graduated High School	Some College	Has Child	Selected Quotation
Nelsy	Sololá	+	+		After everything I have faced, I've realized that yes, I might go back [to the community] but very different. It would have to be in a different space. Maybe it wouldn't be with a partner- that's a different decision to make. But to go back like I am right now, no. I don't want to change other people but I do want to change. I want to be someone different and to arrive there [in the community] so that people see that.
Maria	Totonicapán	+	+		I feel very proud because at the least now I am able to help my siblings go to school. It's true I don't give them everything; it would be a lie to say I give them everything. Clothing, shoes, their schooling-they do one part and I do the other part.
Olga	Totonicapán			+	I am going to show people and they are going to see. This is what I'm going to do,

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[5] Seven interviews were selected as case studies based on their relevance to *The Girl Effect* discourse. Additional interview data are shared in Discussion I and Discussion II, while the remaining three interviews were either not considered relevant to this study or redundant.

					Heather. I know he's [my baby] going to help me. Just work hard and move forward. Thanks to Women First, to the school I studied at, thanks to the DEMI [Defense of the Indigenous Woman where Olga interned]. Many times I say to the girls, my family is Women First. They are my family because my family is the opposite. They are not my family. Because of this I repeat- my only family is my son.
Elizabeth	Totonicapán	+			When I graduated they told us…this coming year they would be hiring [teachers] in February. So we ran to get our paperwork in order. Afterwards we heard there were no jobs, and they told us, "No, at the end of the year, in October, there will be jobs for sure." Well, so we did the same thing. We waited and there was nothing. We went to apply for jobs at other schools, institutes and nothing. You lose hope…and for the same reason people always immigrant there [the United States].
Pati	Totonicapán	+	+	+	And they say to me [neighbors], "But Pati imagine your daughter?" I know that my daughter is going to understand when she grows up. "I am going to tell her the story," I say to them. I am going to tell her the story and I am going to make her conscious of the fact that I was not the one that didn't want it, but that things simply didn't work [between her father and me]. I know that she is going to understand. And, I work for her, I fight hard for her to have a better life and she is going to recognize everything I do for her.
Keila	Alta Verapaz	+	+		So it's because of this, because in the interviews Women First asks if you have a boyfriend… you say no because Women First thinks, "She has no commitments so let's hire her." When they have a boyfriend they are scared- because I've asked lideresas myself-do you have a boyfriend? [And they say] "Yes, but don't' tell anybody because then it might get out and maybe they will fire me."
Diana	Alta Verapaz	+	+		Society pushes you…It's like my [younger] sister says to me; she doesn't

					want to get married yet to her boyfriend. She says to me, "If you don't get married first I won't get married." What they want is for me to get married, but then I feel like, what if it's too late for me? What if I'm too old?
Claudia	Totonicapán	+			I was going to go. I told Rosita- "I am going." It's the truth Heather. My sister and I were going to go and we told our mom, "We are going Mom," and she started to cry…she understands more or less but she was sad because we are two women and both of us were going. "What are you girls going to do there? And if you get married there one day what am I going to do. You are going to leave me here alone and I am sick" [our mother said]. So because of that we didn't go.
Lidia	Totonicapán	+			We have had the opportunity to talk to Rosita about this because we trust her. We said, "Rosita, look we want to go." In the past I said, "No, I don't want to go. I don't think about going to the U.S." But after I graduated I went to apply for jobs and there weren't any. You needed prerequisites, experience and everything. What do I do? My mom has been diagnosed with an illness and so how can we help her if we don't have the money to help her?
Gabi	Totonicapán	Current			I heard of it [violence], well like sometimes we hear there are some family members fighting but we didn't know this was violence. So in the program [Women First] they taught us about violence, what is physical violence and all the other types of violence. Maybe at the beginning we didn't know, but through Women First we came to understand.
Carolina	Totonicapán	Current			[laughing] I want to leave the community; I want to live in another place. And sure I want to live somewhere else but work there, too. I'd want to have a job there.

Sanctioned Success, Assuming the Girl Effect Discourse

Nelsy

Nelsy lives in an apartment in Guatemala City. She worked at Women First for two years, was able to use its scholarship money to start studying law, and now works at another NGO. Nelsy told me about a recent work trip to New York City, the highlight of which was seeing her two older brothers. They both had been gone in the U.S. for over five years. Not only did she say that she did not feel tempted to stay in the United States, but she also wanted to return to her rural community to live and work one day:

> After everything I have faced, I've realized that, yes, I might go back [to the community] but very different. It would have to be in a different space. Maybe it wouldn't be with a partner; that's a different decision to make. But to go back like I am right now, no. I don't want to change other people but I do want to change. I want to be someone different and arrive there [in the community] so that the people see that, that she can do it. Also, it will be a problem with my family and people around me because they are always pressuring me and saying the role of a woman is that you have to get married, you have to come back to the community because you have to be here [as a woman].

Not only are Nelsy's ideas of success closely linked to her return to her own community, but her ideas of success are closely aligned with the sanctioned ideals of *The Girl Effect*—achieving a high level of education and not focusing on marriage. Her return to the community as a lawyer or politician takes on a heroic tone—the product of her own good decisions. Achieving this goal would make the post-feminist development fable of *The Girl Effect* come true (Switzer 2013). I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with Nelsy's imagined future, simply that her future is a part of a sanctioned discourse that can be shared within *The Girl Effect* NGO space. She can imagine her life trajectory—remaining single and going to school—well beyond the age of her peers and receive support within Women First for that goal.

Nelsy also talked at length about how individuals, in this case young indigenous women, can change their lives and truly "learn" from NGO programs:

How can I change other people?…I have asked myself this question many times, but here [current job] they tell me, "Look. We can't change everyone and we can't change another person, either." Beginning with ourselves, we start to change and we start to feel a part of all the knowledge they [NGO] gave us and that knowledge is then put to use in our lives.

Nelsy's words reflect an individualistic discourse of change supported by *The Girl Effect* (Koffman and Gil 2013). Change is made when individuals work hard and nobody else can make somebody else change. It is an extension of the heroic individual change exemplified in Nelsy's first quotation- she will work hard to change herself, but she will not be able to change others. It is up to other girls to take the pathway to success *The Girl Effect* is offering them and put it to use in their lives.

Maria

Maria lives in her community and works full-time at a microcredit NGO. She balances studying at a nearby university on weekends, leading a girls' club, and serving as the head of the youth group at her church. She is also a member of La Red. Her life has not always been this way. At one point Maria worked as a domestic servant in the nearby city of Xela. At that time she was the sole provider for her brothers and sisters after her father left them, and her mother subsequently became an alcoholic and died. Despite the fact that she told me she worked long hours for what sounded like unfair wages, she remembered her experience as a domestic worker in an extremely positive light and in stark contrast to the other traumatic experiences of her childhood.

Maria's wants to live and work in her community in the future, despite earlier experiences of trauma, and to serve as a role model for other young women. Here she describes her commitment to working in her home community despite criticism from her sister:

Working in the community is something I've liked. My sister tells me, "It's because you don't have anything else to do." No, it's something I like doing. It's very satisfying work for me. I see the girls start to smile while learning. Honestly sometimes I say…"And what have you learned?" [The girls answer] "About my self-esteem. I know what

debilities I have. I know what my strengths are. And I know when I have high self-esteem and low self-esteem." It gives me great satisfaction that the girls are evaluating themselves. [I ask] "And what dreams do you have?" [The girls answer] "Ahh we want this or that." That gives me great satisfaction.

The activities Maria describes above were taught to her directly by Women First and are a part of the core *Girl Effect* curriculum. She is painting a picture perfect image of *Girl Effect* success by sharing their discourse—girls learn to value themselves by learning from a girl leader in their own community. *The Girl Effect* teaches them to have self-esteem, which in turn leads to being a leader and transforming one's own future. On the other hand, the satisfaction Maria feels by making change in her own community is telling. Leadership opportunities provide a space for her to fully operationalize her own resiliency.

Maria goes on to reiterate how she has imagined a future distinct from her mother's from a very young age:

Since childhood I started to visualize that. I saw how my dad mistreated my mother. I said to my mother, "Why do you let him do that Mom? I prefer to study." There was a neighbor with a daughter who left in her school uniform and I saw her and said, "When am I going to do that? When am I going to study? When am I going to leave?" I always dreamed of studying, I never dreamed of getting married, having children, having a husband. Never. I always [dreamed of] working in an organization or a bank. And thank god that dream has become a reality. What I want in the future is to have a better life and break the role that my mother had of having seven children. I could have two children in the future. My dream right now is to graduate from college.

Not only does Maria want to break the cycle of gender-based violence experienced by her mother, but she also emphasizes that her imagined future does not focus on marriage. Marriage is seen as a potential, if not inevitable, site of suffering in many of these narratives. It is hard to know if marriage is normally viewed in such negative terms, or if *The Girl Effect* discourse has made it as such. *The Girl Effect* and Women First seek to delay marriage in an attempt to increase the girl's assets and productivity, but do not tell girls that they should never get married. The emphasis on delaying marriage limits the space for discussion of marriage despite the fact

that it is a choice many program participants will eventually make. Instead the conversation

mostly focuses on "just say no to marriage." Additionally, Maria's desire to study is exemplary

of *The Girl Effect*'s push for school-girl success (Switzer 2013). Like Nelsy, the future she

imagines for herself is one that can be shared with the NGO and supported.

Migration

Elizabeth

> When I graduated they told us…this coming year they would be hiring [teachers] in February. So we ran to get our paperwork in order. Afterwards we heard there were no jobs and they told us, "No, at the end of the year, in October, there will be jobs for sure." Well, so we did the same thing. We waited and there was nothing. We went to apply for jobs at other schools, institutes, and nothing. You lose hope…and for the same reason people always emigrate there [the United States].

While *The Girl Effect* pushes young women to be successful by finishing school and

entering the neoliberal labor force, it does not account for the fact that many young women like

Elizabeth who are able to graduate high school still cannot find jobs due to economic scarcity in

their communities. Furthermore, *The Girl Effect* does not discuss the risks of migration—it does

not discuss migration at all despite the reality that young women are increasingly migrating for

work worldwide.

Elizabeth lives in a community that is about a 15-minute walk from Maria's community.

She graduated from high school with training to be a teacher along with two other young women

I interviewed. In her community transnational migration is the norm. On a walk to a small corner

store, a man greeted me in English and told me that he had lived in Tennessee for many years

before being deported. This has become an increasingly common occurrence throughout

Guatemala. Patterns of chronic transnational migration and deportation like those found in

Elizabeth's community make uncertainty and vulnerability a part of life and imagined futures, as

shown in Boehm's transnational study of deportation in a Mexican community (Boehm 2009:

367). When Elizabeth started talking about migrating to the U.S. and I asked how common it was, she not only stated that migration was very common, but so was deportation. This instability and high turnover rate of migrants made talking about the U.S. a common occurrence in the community and the option of going there an even more imaginable future.

Elizabeth, unlike many other young women, was able to graduate high school. Widespread unemployment makes the ability to dream of living in one's own community unrealistic, and the thought of leaving very common, especially when other women and family members are migrating on a regular basis. Elizabeth explains these various forces in the following excerpt from our interview:

> Yes, I want to live somewhere else. Not in Vasquez [laughs]…Last year actually in November I was going to go (to the US). My cousin went and I was going to go with her when they called and scheduled us for the training [from Women First] and then I said, "No, I'm not going." But I have thought about it, not just once, but many times because here I've realized that sometimes you won't find a job even if you graduate.

The decision to leave the community or not is a fragile one. Elizabeth often framed the decision to leave the community as one of necessity. Economic necessity has prompted her to consider migration, but any reason to stay in Guatemala would be reason enough not to go. In this case, an opportunity from Women First, though not a full-time job or lucrative by any means, was an opportunity and a reason to stay. *The Girl Effect* and Women First in Guatemala do not address migration in their official discourses, but it seemed to be an off limits topic much like marriage and pregnancy. While opportunities to participate have kept Elizabeth from migrating, it is hard to know whether Women First will be enough to keep someone like her in rural Guatemala after a few years without a job. In general, Elizabeth's interview did not reflect *The Girl Effect* discourse. Her exposure to *The Girl Effect* is more recent and secondary; she first joined La Red and had only recently attended two larger trainings with Women First. As an unemployed high

school graduate, she does not fit the mold of a *Girl Effect* participant because she is not contributing to the neoliberal labor force to bring her community out of poverty.

Lidia and Claudia

Lidia and Claudia are sisters from a community of Totonicapán. They met Rosita through her young sister during high school and only recently became involved with La Red. They graduated high school with Elizabeth as well, and have faced the same challenges of finding a job as teachers. They talked to me about migrating to the U.S., and talking to Rosita about it, it is clear that the economic motives were strong since their mother was sick. But Rosita and their mother often tried to assuage their urge to migrate by emphasizing opportunities like La Red:

> Lidia: We have had the opportunity to talk to Rosita about this because we trust her. We said, "Rosita, look we want to go." In the past I said, "No I don't want to go. I don't think about going to the U.S." But after I graduated I went to apply for jobs and there weren't any. You needed prerequisites, experience and everything. What do I do? My mom has been diagnosed with an illness and so how can we help her if we don't have the money to take her to the doctor, take her to the specialist for this illness? And to be able to help my mom and be able to move forward because nobody wants something bad to happen to their mother where she could die. What you want is for her to be cured and everything. So that's what happens sometimes: we think about it and say that it's a good idea to go there [to the US] because there are some people that have achieved their objectives when they went there, but there are others that don't. But yes, in our minds it's always there.
> Claudia: I was going to go. I told Rosita, "I am going." It's the truth, Heather. My sister and I were going to go and we told our mom, "We are going, Mom," and she started to cry…she understands more or less but she was sad because we are two women and both of us were going. "What are you girls going to do there? And if you get married there one day what am I going to do. You are going to leave me here alone and I am sick" [our mother said]. So because of that we didn't go.
> Lidia: She said when we come back, surely I will already be dead because nobody will take care of me, and nobody will look after me.

Lidia and Claudia have had less exposure to *The Girl Effect* through Women First. They have mostly participated in La Red and done community organizing in Toto. Just recently, they attended a training with Women First, but their interview did not strongly reflect its discourse. Very much like Elizabeth, they embody an imperfect version of *The Girl Effect* success as

unemployed high school graduates. Their entry into the neoliberal labor force might not come unless they migrate to the United States, a reality for many young Maya women that is largely not discussed by many development projects like *The Girl Effect*. There are not limited job opportunities in rural Guatemala for young indigenous women, especially educated ones. This means that if they are able to find one of the limited jobs available within Guatemala, they will most certainly have to commute or migrate or another city. The limited number of employment opportunities makes the U.S. a viable option, despite the various risk factors associated with migration.

Programmatic Failures?

Olga

Olga is an incredibly charismatic young woman with an addictive smile. After receiving an internship a few years ago, Olga quickly became one of the Women First program director's "favorite" girl leaders. She was often selected to share her story with funders and ultimately received the opportunity to travel to the U.S. to talk about the situation of violence against women in Guatemala. Olga's testimony is a moving one. She was disowned by her parents at a young age and has lived with an aunt and uncle who reluctantly took her in. It would be more accurate to say that her uncle took her in. His wife was never happy having Olga there and makes her life as difficult as possible, making her responsible for all the household chores and demanding large portions of the benefits she received from her participation in various NGO programs.

I remember when one of the Ladino Women First employees told me that Olga was pregnant. It was a framed as gossip. She'd had so many opportunities, and then this? That was the way Olga's pregnancy was framed to me—as a programmatic failure. Given various

opportunities to work and continue her education, a clear path to *Girl Effect* success, Olga had

chosen to get pregnant and would have to deal with the consequences. When I interviewed Olga

her son was only a month old. He was quickly becoming her best friend, as she told me, so her

imagined future was dominated by what was best for him as seen below:

> No, I don't think about doing that [marrying or dating again]. I don't think about it
> because, we don't know with men. Never ever will I get married. Because if I am going
> to get together with someone else then I will have two children and it will be divided.
> And what if the man hurts my son because it's not his son? Because many men do that.
> My son will suffer like I'm suffering here. And what I am suffering is unbearable.

Olga's reflection on her own future and her desire to not get married reflect the trauma of the

courtship with her son's father (they are no longer speaking)**.** After the various empowerment

programs Olga participated in, she still believes her best option would be to not ever get married

rather than take the risk that her new husband would abuse her son because he is not his

biological child.

Olga's community is greatly affected by transnational migration, too. When I asked about

her future, she provided two options: start a business in the community if she could get a loan or

go to the United States. Her imagined future was hopeful:

> If you dream, it comes true. If you don't even dream then it doesn't come true. Now if
> God says to go to the other side (the US) we will go. I am thinking about it, but I won't
> leave my son here. If I go, I will bring him. If God permits we will go forever. We will
> change countries.

She expresses the same feeling that Elizabeth shared about transnational migration: it is no

longer about simply going somewhere to send money home, but there is hope to stay in the U.S.

and never return to the community. Olga went on to tell me that if she and her son were not able

to migrate together, then she knows one day he will go on his own and be able to build a house

for her. The possibility of success in her future was always tied to the United States, again a topic

not discussed within Women First.

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As our interview closed, Olga returned to assume a discourse more in line with *The Girl Effect*, one that emphasized the opportunities she had to go to school and a sense of hopefulness for the future:

> I am going to show people and they are going to see. This is what I'm going to do, Heather. I know he's going to help me. Just work hard and move forward. Thanks to Women First, to the school I studied at, thanks to the DEMI [Defense of the Indigenous Woman where Olga interned]. Many times I say to the girls, my family is Women First]…my family is not my family. Because of this I repeat, my only family is my son. Thank God for giving me my son. I don't have anyone to talk to because I don't have anyone. Sometimes I hug my son and I start saying, "My love, what are we going to do. We are going to work, you are gonna help me.

It was difficult to listen to her make such strong supportive statements for Women First and its work, while knowing what they thought of her and that she had not been a success to them after having her son. Olga's life was the subject of gossip from the moment she was pregnant through her current struggles to make ends meet. She had followed their formula for success, but it did not give her the space to talk about the fact that she was older than many of the other girl leaders and wanted to begin dating. She did not have space to talk about pregnancy there, either. While Women First did throw her a baby shower, it also doubled as a going away party. Her participation with Women First ended when she was deemed a failure by *The Girl Effect*'s standards since she dropped out of high school and became a single mother.

Pati

In addition to Olga, I interviewed another single mother, Pati, who previously worked at Women First. She seemed more vibrant than ever when I visited her at her current job, another NGO close to her home community. She giggled and showed me pictures of her daughter wearing a gift I had given her at her baby shower. After talking briefly about human rights and how she first learned about them, Pati wanted to give me an example based on her own life:

In my case, at one point in time the father of my child violated all of my rights. He demanded so much [from me] - that I stop attending the university. He didn't even want me to work. I even remember one day when I had exams at the university and I said, "Come with me, let's go together." And he said, "Good god, what kind of crap is that." But for me it was important. So I said, "I know my rights. I know how to defend myself, I can make my own decisions, I am prepared, but this person is making me feel like I can't exercise them [my rights]." In that moment I realized it and put a stop to it [the relationship]. I said, "I'm sorry, but I am not going to be able to live with this person." But I had that argument because I had to fight to confront the issue. There are young women that decide it makes more sense to stay with him or sometimes they blame themselves. I even said to myself, "Maybe I am the one that provokes these things [his behavior]. Maybe it's better if I don't work so I can stay with him," when in reality the one that is sick, the one who was not right- was him.

Despite the fact that some of the following incidents happened while I worked at Women First from 2011-12, I did not know about them at the time. The only information I heard about Pati's pregnancy and relationship with the baby's father came in the form of office gossip. According to this gossip, Pati's "poor" choices had landed her pregnant by a bad man who would ultimately leave her. But despite the fact that aspects of this gossip did come true, I did not visit a Pati who was suffering from her life's bad choices. Instead, I met a woman who had clearly developed a strong sense of resilience to fight back against a violent relationship and make a better life for herself and her daughter, despite being let go by Women First at the end of her contract- just a month before her daughter's birth. During our interview Pati told me that one day she will tell her daughter about how she suffered violence and left her father. She felt empowered enough to leave the relationship and knows it will serve as a way to teach her daughter about violence and women's rights:

> And they say to me [neighbors], "But Pati imagine your daughter?" I know that my daughter is going to understand when she grows up. "I am going to tell her the story," I say to them. I am going to tell her the story and I am going to make her conscious of the fact that I was not the one that didn't want it, but that things simply didn't work [between her father and me]. I know that she is going to understand. And, I work for her, I fight hard for her to have a better life and she is going to recognize everything I do for her.

The Girl Effect model of success does not accommodate single mothers, but Olga and Pati both

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demonstrate that after all of the skills and human rights discourse imparted to them by NGOs, there should be a way for their continued inclusion in these spaces. They are portrayed as NGO failures in office gossip and in their ultimate termination from the program, but their lives appear incredibly successful when measured by standards outside of *The Girl Effect*.

DISCUSSION I: PEER NETWORKS

La Red

Women First's most recent promotional video emphasizes the formation of friends as one way of increasing a vulnerable girl's assets. This is an explicit part of *The Girl Effect* package, i.e., that girls are isolated and need friends during adolescence more than ever. The program's solution to this lack of social assets (or friends) is to make safe spaces for girls to come together. The safe space is constructed as an environment that "girls need to unleash *The Girl Effect*" (*The Girl Effect* website). I saw Women First staff in Guatemala integrate this concept of safe spaces into the program during my two years there. According to Women First, safe spaces in rural Guatemala were preferably rooms in a community building where the girls' club would meet. If the girl leader could not negotiate and get the permission of the community leaders for that, then the girl club meeting could be held in a home. A private home was not preferable, as it was not seen as safe or neutral enough, and according to Women First, could make some girls not attend based on perceived community rivalries. The safe space was key to *The Girl Effect* success.

Source: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Klciw9qf888

Women First shares their safe space ideology with all program participants during a weekly lesson in the girl club curriculum. I was present for this lesson one week during the Summer of 2013 when Maria led the 8-12 year old girl's club in her community. The lesson was called "I see the dangers close to me." Maria drew a map of the community on a large piece of paper and handed out red, yellow and green arrows to all of the girls. She asked them to come up and mark spots they considered dangerous, somewhat safe (or dangerous) and safe on the map. This was all without much explanation from Maria, but the girls still took the activity seriously and started marking spots on the map according to their own logic. After marking on the map, the group was divided into two and given a big sheet of paper to write down dangerous places and safe places.

Dangerous Places	Not that dangerous/Safe Places
Molino	Home
Corner store	Church ("because there is God"
Street	School
School (sometimes there are teachers who are teachers who hit you)	Community Health Center
Highway	During the day
In the mountains	Streets with houses
Arboles	Soccer field
Cornfields	Girls Club
Dogs	With family members
At night	
Cantinas (When asked why, they said because there are drunks. When asked, "Who are the drunks?" they said men.	

During the presentations of the group work, Maria closed with a mention of rape. I was consistently struck by how open rape and sexual assault were discussed by lideresas and ultimately group participants. In this moment it seemed clear that these girls were not thinking about rape- they weren't even thinking

about their own family members as being dangerous- but Women First wanted to make sure they started to. Making rape a part of the discussion seems to be a goal of the program.

But from my fieldwork and interviews, I saw a different system of peer networks that had little if anything to do with the safe spaces program of *The Girl Effect*. The formation of these networks of young women as sources of support led me to focus on spending time with La Red in Totonicapán. While La Red helped them with the paperwork and sometimes influenced the agenda of their work, in many ways La Red was truly run by young women, for young women. I was able to attend two of their meetings this past summer and interview five of their approximately twelve members.

Rosita is the president and founder of La Red and the group's meetings were held at her family's home. Rosita worked at Women First for about three years and had also begun receiving funding through a Central American women's organization to do work in her own community, thus La Red was born. With this outside grant and the guidance of Women First, Rosita and the other members of La Red were able to become a fully registered organization in Guatemala. This meant that they could now apply for grants to fund their projects, have a bank account, *et cetera*.

Their biweekly Saturday night gatherings were referred to as meetings, but my first reaction was that they felt a lot like sleepovers. The members started arriving in the late afternoon, depending on how far they were coming. Sonia was the group's youngest member at just 13 years old. She arrived first and jumped right in to work around the house, helping Rosita's mother prepare dinner. I remember meeting her last year as Women First's youngest lideresa at 12, and she was just as bright eyed and bushy tailed as I remembered her. We went for a walk around the community along with another young woman, and they bought me French fries. While she mostly smiled and stayed quiet throughout the night, she was in the company of

many young women far from her rural community and family. She had social support and a huge smile on her face thanks to the people she had met through Women First.

During the second meeting I attended, it was also the feria in the community. One member of La Red called and said it was too dark to walk alone to Rosita's house. She was too scared to come to the meeting, so some of the girls who had already arrived and I decided to walk down to her house to pick her up. I walked down the main street through the busy feria linking arms with one girl on each side of me, a common way for young women to walk with each other. These networks of peers were making the physical space of the community and the feria safer by increasing young women's mobility.

By 8 or 9pm most of the girls had arrived and Rosita's mom had finished making dinner, so we sat together in the kitchen along with the rest of her family to eat. Then the young women of La Red all shuffled upstairs to start the meeting. Rosita talked to me about the meeting agenda beforehand, which was helpful since the meeting took place in a mix of Spanish and K'iche' that is common to hear in Totonicapán. Upon realizing one member was not at the meeting, three girls volunteered to visit her family the following week and find out what was wrong. Some of them had heard a rumor that she had migrated to the US or was going to, but La Red wanted to visit her family in support or talk to her before she went. There was a strong sense of accountability and support. The members of La Red care about issues like migration, marriage, and pregnancy and would visit their friends to talk about these things even when they stopped coming to meetings.

The leadership role Rosita played in the formation of La Red and the support she provides to other indigenous young women cannot be understated. Rosita was in her late 20s and worked at Women First for a few years, the longest consistent young indigenous woman working

in the main office. But the network was not solely formed through Women First; it was made up

of many of her younger sister's classmates who told me that they met Rosita when they became

friends with her sister in high school. One of her sister's classmates, Claudia, spoke highly of

Rosita in her interview:

> I thank Rosita for supporting us. It's the truth. She has supported us [Claudia and her
> sister Lidia] so much and is a great person I thank God for having found her because she
> motivates us and says, "Let's keep going girls, we have to keep going." And because of
> her we have stayed [in our community] fighting hard.

Rosita would talk to members of La Red or any young people she knew who were considering

going to the United States and tell them about the realities of the danger along the way. Rosita's

own best friend from high school had migrated and told her the honest details of what happened

to her along the way, and she made it a point to pass that information along to young women

considering migration.

Rosita was talked about as a mentor and dear friend in nearly all of the interviews. She

has consistently brought people together, with or without Women First. Women First has simply

put her in contact with even more young women throughout the country. For instance, Elizabeth

talked about getting involved with La Red and how her interactions with Rosita and Women

First affected whether or not she would migrate to the United States:

> Thanks to Women First and Rosita, I have decided not to leave. Because we have friends
> in La Red that have already gone. But I said, and my dad told me too, it's better for you
> to stay here and fight hard [for a better life] with her [Rosita]. I know that you are going
> to be able to do it Rosita said. And that's what I've done, I've fought hard and I didn't go
> with my cousin who went.

Due to the peer support she has in La Red and with Rosita, along with the opportunity to attend a

few workshops with Women First, Maria has chosen to stay in her community for the time being.

Rosita came up throughout the interviews as a source of support and a person that many people

had great *confianza* (trust) with. During the time I would spend with Rosita, who I also have trust

greatly, her phone would be ringing off the hook with calls from girl club leaders or friends wanting to chat or ask her for advice.

Carlota McAllister (2007) noted many of the same patterns of social support among participants at the Rabin Ajaw beauty pageant. She described the behavior of the young indigenous women as "enabled by girlish liminality" (McAllister 2007:122). She saw young women swapping traje with other young women from different parts of the country, snapping photographs and exchanging contact information for future visits. These are things I would see the young women do at Women First's trainings all the time. These young single indigenous women are working and traveling outside the home and building peer networks on a national level. Instead of banding together to unleash *The Girl Effect*, they band together to enjoy themselves and to talk about issues that matter to them: migration, dating, sexuality, and marriage. *The Girl Effect* does not allow for open discussions about deciding to marry or healthy dating; it only permits counseling young women not to marry. Similarly, the only discussions *The Girl Effect* has around sexuality are in terms of contraceptive use. This means that the NGO is not a safe space for girls to talk about their upcoming marriages or healthy concepts of dating without running the risk of being scolded by NGO staff.

In a recent Facebook post, I noticed that a former lideresa had gotten married. On her wedding day, there were photos uploaded by two other lideresas whom she had met through Women First. There was one photo of the bride and her husband, and another of the bride with her two friends from Women First. These young women did not need to meet in a safe space and convince their friend not to get married; instead, they showed up to support her on her special day, despite the fact that they both lived over three hours away. While NGOs provide spaces for peer networks to be made, the safe spaces model in practice does not necessarily promote the

formation of these "social assets" in the way *The Girl Effect* brand hopes they would. La Red serves as an (counter) example of what an organization could look like that responds to the varied needs of its participants. Not all of the members of La Red are in school. They are not all employed. But, they come together and support each other to confront issues like migration and marriage and serve as an informal peer network. They make their own safe spaces.

Sibling Support and Mentoring

As I have shown, Women First and *The Girl Effect* may overlook the agency of young indigenous women to form their own peer networks when the "safe space program" is branded as the only acceptable way to form social assets. Peer networks form on their own through leaders like Rosita, or around events like marriage and dating that *The Girl Effect* does not embrace. Marriage and dating cannot be a part of *The Girl Effect* success because they take away time from the neoliberal subject's participation in productive activities.

Another area of peer support completely absent in *The Girl Effect* discourse is support between siblings. Keila, a nursing school student from Alta Verapaz who formerly worked with Women First, told me that her little brother. He was not even in school yet, but accompanied his mother and sisters to workshops and had begun talking about human rights. He came home and told her: *"I have the right to play, to have a father, a mother, to have my own name and to not hit my siblings or women."* In this case, the systems of intergenerational learning and support from siblings, or in this case mother, could also bring on discussions of gender roles when brothers learn from sisters, mothers, etc. *The Girl Effect's* encouragement of neoliberal self-making and individualism among participants fails to address the familial level by emphasizing girls outside of their home context.

Moreover, Nelsy described, as many participants did, an imagined future for her young

sister—a future shaped by the life she has led herself:

> One of the parts of my experience and with my little sister is that I have seen so much potential in her. She has gone through a process with me, too. I evaluate her and I say, she is going to be different than what I had. I go about fighting, and she is there seeing things.

She views her own process of resilience as connected to her younger sister's well-being, demonstrating the importance of the imagined futures of siblings. Nelsy's future is not only about her, but her younger sister as well. *The Girl Effect*'s heavy focus on individual agency and the ability of an individual to make change does not necessarily look to strengthen the connections between siblings or young women as part of their model. Moreover, reducing their interactions to "girlish" behavior overlooks the agency young women have in making friends from far away communities and supporting and visiting them throughout their lives. I do not wish to romanticize the benefits of female friendship, but simply to note that it creates safe spaces outside of the NGO that are overlooked by *The Girl Effect*.

Similarly to Nelsy, Maria's own imagined future is closely tied to the future she imagines for her siblings. She directly correlates her own success to their success in the future:

> In my dreams, I want to live here and study. What I want is to have a better life and to help raise my siblings. Because if I prepare myself more, they are going to have more opportunities. And I will make the difference. Because if I hadn't studied, they wouldn't be studying. They might be married with 3 or 4 kids. And my little brothers might be at home suffering.

By making the difference, Maria hopes that both she and her siblings will prosper in the future and break cycles of trauma and abuse lived out by their parents. Maria's description of her own heroic actions changing for the lives of her siblings is more in line with *The Girl Effect* discourse. She places an incredible amount of pressure on herself in making this change; literally, she has to study and work hard so that her younger siblings do not suffer. Social suffering could come for not just Maria, but her siblings as well, as a result of her failure to make

individual change.

DISCUSSION II: NGO "SPACES OF SECURITY" VS. INEVITABILITY OF VIOLENCE

Thus far I have discussed the slivers of agency that young indigenous women carve out for themselves both inside and outside of the NGO space, as well as potential models for *The Girl Effect* success and "failure." In this section I will further the discussion by considering how *The Girl Effect* NGO functions as a "space of security" within the greater insecurity of rural Guatemala and the relationship between this insecurity and the sense of inevitability surrounding violence and trauma.

Safe Spaces for Whom?

In many ways Women First does indeed view itself as a space of security: the safe spaces element of the curriculum (adopted from *The Girl Effect*) attempts to carve out a room in the community to hold the weekly girls club meeting and views this space and place as "safe" as opposed to potentially unsafe spaces throughout the community An entire unit of the newly updated curriculum is devoted to the concept of safe spaces. Girls in the program talk about where they feel safe and unsafe in the community. Unsafe areas named often include the cornfields, the bars, anywhere at night, and sometimes even their own homes. By emphasizing the unsafe nature of all these places, the program (re)constructs the idea that the only safe space in the community is one filled with other girls—the "safe space" that they are in at that moment for the meeting. While discussions of safety and violence may be useful in the context of normalized violence in Guatemala, having these discussions with 8-year-old girls who are already incredibly marginalized in their communities could create undue stress for program participants. If the NGO is the only safe space, and the club only meets once a week, what are they to do the rest of the time? Is violence outside of the NGO space inevitable?

When viewing the NGO as a space of security—a break from the insecurity and violence

occurring within Guatemala--the question must be asked, for whom is *Girl Effect* NGO a safe space and under what conditions? As Switzer's analysis of *The Girl Effect* ideology points out, it "ultimately risks valorizing only those subjects who are best positioned to succeed in sanctioned ways" (Switzer 2013). The space is safest for people like Nelsy and Maria who have chosen to pursue further schooling and dream of their future without marriage or children. Conversations that fall outside of the school-girl model of success are not permitted. The space is only safe for those young women who toe *The Girl Effect* party line and embody the NGO's desired outcome. The desired outcome is not just staying single and in school, but to become neoliberal subjects who *The Girl Effect* has helped escape their oppressive local circumstances (Gil and Koffman 2013). *The Girl Effect* relies on the Western audience's belief in this local, "cultural" oppression without having to explicitly discuss it. It relies on victimizing assumptions of women and girls that need to be "saved," regardless of their particular socio-historical context in the world.

Taboo Topics: Marriage, Motherhood and Migration

If there is only one form of success to be had within this safe space, the flipside is that conversations of other issues relevant to indigenous young women in Guatemala often do not occur. For instance, topics that are not part of *The Girl Effect* discourse that appeared throughout the interviews included marriage, motherhood and migration. As Kathryn Moeller (2013) similarly noted in her ethnographic study of a *Girl Effect* NGO in Brazil, successful management of young women's heterosexuality is a key element of the program, and as a result, discussions of sexuality and parenthood are marginalized. In Elizabeth's interview, she expressed fear of marriage and of her future mother-in-law. Moreover, she told me that marriage is a large part of the imagined futures of single, female migrants, and perhaps even male migrants too:

> Afterwards we hear that they are married. They don't go to do anything (for the community), to buy something or for the future. The women go to find husbands. The

men, too. And they don't come back.

Marriage then becomes a part of the transnational imagined future. I heard various accounts of young couples eloping to the U.S. together on a romantic journey to a better life. Not only can young women not talk about their romantic hopes and dreams or desires to get married, but in this case the taboo nature of the topic is compounded by transnational migration. If these are the types of conversations being had between young indigenous women in rural communities, then why are they not happening in the NGO space? Lideresas who were planning on getting married often gave no warning of their upcoming wedding and simply disappeared. As an observer, it seemed like they viewed their own choice to marry and "fail" out of the program as too shameful to discuss.

Motherhood and sexuality are other topics not covered by *The Girl Effect* curriculum. At the program center in Guatemala, there was a substantial unit of the curriculum that focused on reproductive health, but the information about sexuality ended there. As Moeller (2013) described, the preoccupation with managing participants' reproductive health "resulted in the young women being monitored for fear of programmatic failure as a result of pregnancy." As I described in the discussion of Olga, this was a common occurrence at the NGO in Guatemala. When talking with NGO staff, the newest pregnancies and marriages of the lideresas were the most common form of gossip. This office gossip led me to start questioning why there were not married lideresas or lideresas with children. The answer I was always given was that their husbands would not let them leave the house after marriage—a likely possibility.

Keila, a former mentor for the NGO, used to oversee lideresas in her region. We talked about why the lideresas or program participants would not talk about their boyfriends or upcoming weddings and then disappear. She told me that the program actively screened girls to

find out if they had boyfriends, at least at one point in time while she worked there, in hopes of finding girls who would not be marrying anytime soon:

> When they [Women First] interview lideresas, they say, "Do you have boyfriend?" So the girls say no. They lie sometimes, and it's not because they don't want to say it. It's because Women First tells them that having a boyfriend is a big commitment, so they view it that way. [The lideresas think] "It's going to take up time; this is an opportunity for me. I'm better off lying because that way nobody will know about my boyfriend." It's out of fear. I have asked them and they tell me that. "So that they don't fire me and I have no commitments, I tell them no." So it's because of this, because in interviews [to become a lideresa] Women First asks if you have a boyfriend… you say no because Women First thinks, "She has no commitments so let's hire her." When they have a boyfriend they are scared—because I've asked lideresas myself, "do you have a boyfriend?" [And they say], "Yes, but don't' tell anybody because then it might get out and maybe they will fire me." Because of this when they have a boyfriend and everybody finds out, the lideresas think, "I better leave because I'm ashamed and I said I didn't have one." But I haven't heard this question recently, do you have a boyfriend. More for the internships they have asked it.

Keila worked with Women First for a nearly five years, and it seems clear that the shame surrounding dating and having a boyfriend was prevalent given Women First's stance on marriage. But the reality is that many young women in the program are dating and have boyfriends, and the focus on prohibiting marriage may actually deny them the space and support they need to think through dating issues and decide whether or not to get married, while instilling a sense of shame for their sexuality.

The Girl Effect's heavy focus on delaying marriage framed marriage and motherhood as programmatic failures. I interviewed two such "failures", both single mothers, who left the program following the birth of their children. They were not directly fired, but their contracts with Women First were not renewed and there was an understanding that it was because of that chapter in their life was ending. Both incorporated their experiences of motherhood into the narratives and emphasized just how happy they were to have their children. There was a deep sense of empowerment and desire to show their children what hard work and success look like

for an indigenous woman in Guatemala. As opposed to being a failure, I see her life as a programmatic success in many ways- one affected positively by the support system offered by Women First rather than the singular route to success of *The Girl Effect*

Agency in Assuming The Girl Effect Narrative

Within the NGO space, assuming the NGO's (and in this case, *The Girl Effect*'s) narrative structure is key for agency. *The Girl Effect* demands narratives to prove its vision; it needs the data to show that it is making third world girls visible and productive. In exchange for assuming *The Girl Effect* narrative structure, program participants can potentially receive tangible benefits. At one program training of all the lideresas, a group of foreign photographers came along and took photos and video of young women sharing their stories. Two young women who evoked strong reactions from their audience received scholarships that the visitors spontaneously decided to donate to them. Opportunities like this, promotions within the NGO, and trips to share their testimony at other venues—sometimes even outside the country—are all potential benefits of successfully mastering the NGO's narrative structure and proving the *The Girl Effect*'s efficacy.

Narrative analysis in Guatemala must take into account the role of the testimonio genre in shaping how people share their stories. Following the civil war and genocide, survivors began sharing testimony of human rights violations with human rights NGOs and truth commissions led by the United Nations and Catholic Church. As Kay Warren (1998) found in her study of the community of San Andres Semetabaj, "human rights narratives are but one of a variety of ways Mayas have used to express the consequences of war for their lives." Beyond the truth commissions and NGO projects, testimonio has become a literary genre popularized by Guatemalan authors like Rigoberta Menchu and Victor Montejo. One distinct aspect of

testimonio is that it relays a great deal of suffering without undue focus on the individual; the suffering and oppression are often collective experiences of an entire marginalized group.

The narratives collected in this study, then, are shaped by the tradition of testimonio. Even though the young women did not experience the civil war or genocide personally, their communities may have, and there has certainly been some exposure to the practice of giving testimonio. As Erica James' work on the political economy of trauma in Haiti demonstrates, sharing experiences of trauma happens through a process of appropriation, transformation and commodification of suffering into Western terms of trauma (James 2004: 140). Though some interviews more closely resembled trauma narratives (e.g. Olga), others were at different stages of being molded. *The Girl Effect* does not spend much time dwelling on the girls' suffering or traumatic experiences in the past-they want to hear how their model of success has worked in program participants' lives. Despite this, trauma and suffering still emerged as key elements in not only the interviews I collected, but the testimonies I heard told while working at Women First. Therefore, there is agency in the process of young indigenous Guatemalan women repackaging their stories for *The Girl Effect* consumer. The "truth" is partial, contextual and affected by uneven distributions of power (James 2010b). The validity of the account does not matter, as long as it reifies the image of the third world girl who the Western consumer already "knows," while also proving the success of *The Girl Effect*'s model for changing girls' lives.

An Inevitable End to the "Safe Space"?

One of the main premises of *The Girl Effect* is that girls must be disconnected from local context to take advantage of development (Switzer 2013). In many ways, this very premise propels them to inhabit a border space (Kray 2007) in society as their lives diverge from the available gender roles laid out to them in rural indigenous Guatemala. The inability to discuss

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issues such as marriage and motherhood, while simultaneously placing a large emphasis on gender-based violence, can be scary and stressful to program participants. It makes the life that awaits them outside of Women First seem like an inevitably violent one. The time in the NGO seems like simply a delay of the inevitable. One Women First staff member described it to me as just that when discussing a young woman who recently announced she was pregnant and would be getting married: "Well, at least we got her for a few years."

Indeed, inhabiting a queer time and place in Guatemalan society affords these young women new spaces for agency and autonomy they may not have previously had (Halberstam 2005). In many ways, despite my focus on the constraints of *The Girl Effect* model of "success," the experience with Women First is a positive one. Young participants lobby for their own rights to do what they want to do by negotiating with parents to attend Women First's workshops, attend weekly girl club meetings and go to school outside of the community. Then one day, regardless of the age they marry or have their first child, perhaps these young women will support a new model for what it means to be a Guatemalan woman. A model that allows for extended adolescence, if desired, while also weighing the pros and cons of pertinent issues such as marriage and migration.

CONCLUSION

> Yes, [I would like to live in my community] because there is solidarity. In urban areas there is not because of globalization which brings individualism.
>
> <div align="right">Diana, Age 24, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala</div>

> It is especially on the bodies and lives of women and girls from the Third World/South-the Two-Thirds World- that global capitalism writes its script, and it is by paying attention to and theorizing the experiences of these communities of women and girls that we demystify capitalism as a system of debilitating sexism and racism and envision anticapitalist resistance.   (Mohanty 2003)

The "safe space" of the NGO may be too restrictive when ruled by the ideology of *The Girl Effect*, but through peer networks and imagining their own futures, organizations like Women First and young indigenous women like Rosita can create safe spaces in the relationships they have with others and their own communities. As shown in this study, young indigenous women in Guatemala are already using their agency to create spaces of security in new and innovative ways by building on connections made through NGOs, as well as peer and familial leadership structures that already exist in their communities, for themselves and their peers. When there is only one pathway to success, certain experiences will always be privileged and others deemed failures. But by evaluating *The Girl Effect* framework and its implementation on a local level, NGO staff should support participants previously seen as "programmatic failures" to succeed by acknowledging multiple paths to "success."

The findings in this study are important because they respond to the macro level *The Girl Effect* discourse with voices of NGO participants. Young indigenous women often want to question and challenge gender norms within their own communities, but rarely are their own voices heard. Paths available to them to change gender norms may be offered by an NGO, but the norms are shaped by the ideology of that organization. In the case of *The Girl Effect* and many other Western-based NGOs, this often looks like the exportation of Western capitalist

gender norms as the only route to "true" equality. Just as NGOs do not exist in a vacuum, neither do rural indigenous Guatemalan women. Their lives are affected by family, economic pressures and their own ideas about what they would like their lives to be. For many of these young women, *The Girl Effect* has given them the opportunity to achieve just what they have always hoped for: to become a lawyer or a psychologist or to work at an office. It provides lideresas with an opportunity to be a local leader of other young women within their community.

This a development critique from within. I believe in gender equity and reducing rates of gender-based violence in Guatemala, but I do see the urgent need for NGOs to do more listening and support young indigenous women in creating their own interventions. It turns out groups like La Red are doing it already. I would like to end with some suggestions for increasing spaces of security within development work in Guatemala.

Family Mentoring

Many of the young women in this study discussed either serving as a mentor for others or talking about their future plans with a mentor as an informal means of support. Nelsy and Maria both discussed hopeful imagined futures for their younger siblings who might benefit from the hard work and challenges both had faced in their own lives. Research on youth mentoring points out that while it can indeed foster resilience, the duration and stability of the mentoring relationship matter. Mentoring should also be paired with other activities to strengthen intergenerational ties (Rhodes 2008: 14). In this way, development projects can build on the familial ties already expressed by study participants—for example, between sisters and their younger siblings—to maximize the amount of resiliency being fostered within each family unit of the community. I would suggest that the possibility of interfamilial mentoring, regardless of gender, be explored. Gender-based violence is not just about women, so shifts in gender norms

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will not be successful if they only involve women.

Transnational Ideas about Gender and Romance Matter

Women- and girl-centered NGOs often focus on implementing universal human rights for women and do not think critically about gender in the context o rural indigenous communities. They focus on delaying the age of marriage, while simultaneously solidifying the idea that marriage in rural indigenous communities is like prison and a site of gender-based violence. While addressing potentially violent cultural norms and normalized violence could yield positive benefits to women, the solution to avoid marriage tends to build fear of marriage among program participants. Marriage is inevitable as part of life in a Guatemalan community, and thus violence during marriage becomes seen as inevitable to many of these young women. Leaving the community then becomes a space for young indigenous women to exercise agency over their lives and avoid the restrictive nature of marriage in their home community.

Limitations and Future Research

There were certain methodological limitations to this study. I conducted the research with an NGO where I formerly worked. Future research should include an example from *Girl Effect*-funded NGOs I am less familiar with, as well as an NGO that is not funded by *The Girl Effect* to better understand whether these findings are more a reflection of *The Girl Effect* or impositions of Western values concerning gender and morality through aid projects in general. Moreover, it may be helpful to study an NGO that is not in Guatemala for purposes of contextual comparison. The universal nature of *The Girl Effect* NGO ideology also makes specific socio-historical comparison of its implementation especially important. Finally, this study is not a comprehensive evaluation of *The Girl Effect*. While initial critiques of *The Girl Effect* ideology were cited in this study, none have taken on the task of a holistic evaluation as to whether or not *The Girl Effect*

lowers the important health indicators that it claims to target in the places where it is implemented. The completion of a comprehensive evaluation by a social scientist would be an ideal place for future research.

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