

From Individual to Collective
in *good girl magazine*

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“Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanly?”¹

Over the past year, the evolution of *good girl magazine* has challenged me to grapple with this question, as well as with assumptions I have long held regarding the nature of community, communication, creativity and culture. It is this continued evolution, particularly as it has recently manifested itself in the creation of *good girl's* Volunteer Editorial Board (Spring 2002), that I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on.

good girl magazine began in January 2001 as an independent small magazine “produced by and for young Canadian women”, the goal of which was to provide women between the ages of 18 and 35 with a national, pro-feminist forum to publish their work and discuss and develop their ideas. I was, and have continued to be, the driving force behind the project, acting as founder, editor in chief, and publisher. Two issues of *good girl* have been produced since its inception, and although I have benefited from the support of a number of dedicated volunteers since the beginning of the project, all of the major decisions have fallen to me, and as such the magazine has very much reflected my own personal aesthetics and interests.

It was not until the production of the second issue that I began to wonder whether *good girl* was equipped to successfully speak to/for the broad target audience that I had identified: young Canadian women. I had felt clear from the beginning of the project that the expression of diverse views within the magazine was critical to fulfilling *good girl's* mandate, and that the magazine was not merely for young women who were similar in experience and background to myself. To me, the project of building a ‘Canadian’ community was very much about acknowledging and respecting the diversity of views that Canadians of different experiences have. However, it was not until I began to investigate critiques of Western feminism from anti-racist, anti-classist and anti-heterosexist perspectives that I began to acknowledge the privilege that was symbolised by my hope to position *good girl* as a ‘voice’ for young Canadian women. I began to question my own assumption that all young women have experiences in common, and that young women

¹ Said, 1979, pp.45

with backgrounds and experiences different than my own would necessarily feel included in a project begun and evolved by a White, middle-class, university-educated, heterosexual woman.

I began to think about the ways in which I might be implicated in ongoing systemic discrimination based on race, class, sexuality, ability, etc., not necessarily by my conscious action, but rather by my unconscious action and inaction. I looked at the images in *good girl* and began to reimagine how the ironic use of images of predominantly White women might be viewed by people of colour. Whereas I would have previously recognised stereotypical or negative images of people of colour as being potentially offensive, I now began to consider that the complete invisibility of people of colour in a publication that considered itself inclusive might be as, if not more, problematic. In considering how these issues might be addressed, I imagined for the first time the possibility of a collective decision-making body that could be responsible and accountable for the content and ongoing development the magazine.

Unfortunately, my fears that *good girl* was potentially oppressive were apparently justified, as around the same time I received an email stating that the images on *good girl's* website were found to be offensive. Although saddened by this, I was also relieved that someone had finally said out loud what I had feared. I responded to the email by explaining that I had been thinking about the ways in which the images might be offensive, and I asked the writer to share with me the details of her opinion so that I could gain more insight into the situation and the possible action that could be taken. I also told her that I was considering forming an editorial board to help me take steps towards making the magazine more inclusive. Her response to me was as follows:

“thank you for your response, it is honest, and courageous, i appreciate it.

i think it is your responsibility to ensure that the work you produce is non-oppressive, and that if it is, or if it might be, that you don't publish it, change it, or find out where you went wrong. but, that is your research to do, not the person who is insulted by the images (i.e. me.)

that is like an abuser asking the abused to explain the abuse. nope, not okay.

why don't you ask your friends, peers, colleagues about this - people who share parts of your identity or don't. and/or speak to folks at TWB or something - i'm sure you'll be able

to get some feedback from others.

an editorial board is a great idea, and *who* sits on the board will obviously impact the relevance, character, and success of your publication. great idea!

i will take a look at the publication on-line and let you know what i think.

as for my work, i'll let you know how i feel.

if you live in toronto, OPIRG Toronto is doing a series of workshops an activism and anti-oppression - maybe some of them might interest you.”²

This was devastating for me. Although I understand (and to a certain extent feel I have experienced) the theory that asking people to describe the experience of oppression can be like asking them to relive it (and can therefore be as oppressive as committing a more overtly oppressive act)³, I was still stunned that I had been compared to an abuser. The fear and paralysis that resulted from these comments was debilitating, however, I was able to respond by thanking the writer for her comments and by asking for more information about the OPIRG workshops. I did not receive a response.

Apart from being devastating, these comments did inspire me to further consider my own role in the process I was trying to support. The experience also challenged me to consider the meaning of silence as a form of resistance, and to ask myself whether the general reluctance of people, and particularly people of colour, to comment on issues of oppression and exclusion within *good girl*, might be as clear a message as explicit criticism. As Gillian Rose says of her own experience with Community Arts workers: “what if the most challenging, the most subversive aspect of the politics articulated in these interviews isn’t the words at all?... Some things beyond discourse, representation, interpretation, translation?”⁴ Although I respect this idea of silent resistance, at the time I wondered how it would be possible for *good girl* to evolve without communication. “When we speak our story, we make meaning of our lives, and we find

² Email received 01/19/02

³ “To turn to us and ask that we offer the knowledge of our experiences – in short, to explain our absence and educate the oppressors how they oppress us – is hardly evidence of anti-racist feminist pedagogy or feminist inclusionary praxis, but a denial of responsibility, and an act of exploitation. It is not the responsibility of women of Color the victims of racism, to teach white feminists how they practice racism or how it is manifested on a daily basis.” Graveline, 1998, pp.230.

⁴ Rose, 1997, pp.184

connection with other stories.”⁵ Although my own ideas about speech, silence and communication had been battered, I continued to hold on to the hope that this connection might be possible. My only choice was to following this advice: “Embrace the contradictions and find within them the possibilities for moving forward”.⁶

This was my mind frame upon entering the Cultural Production Workshop in January 2002. I was looking for the strength to be able to walk into my mistakes and lean into their wisdom, and to do this in a public way, using *good girl* as my vehicle. I decided that an editorial board was the only way for *good girl* to take its next positive step towards inclusive, feminist, anti-racist work. By February 1, 2002, after putting out a call for volunteers, I had received 30 formal applications from across Canada. I decided to interview each candidate in order to get a sense of the full range of interest and experience.

I had rarely been in a position to have to articulate my position on *good girl's* purpose, particularly since the recent crisis, and I realised that it was critical to clarify my own beliefs and values before beginning the interview process. I had become extremely conscious of Gledhill's warning against the dangers of 'feminist' representation: “Early feminist approaches...attacked (media) images for not representing women as they really are or really could or should be – for being **stereotypes**, rather than positive images, psychologically rounded characters, or real women.”⁷ The over simplistic, mimetic desire to replace 'bad' images with 'good' images leads to the following questions: 'Bad' in whose opinion? What is a 'real' woman? and who decides?

I began to rethink the mandate of the magazine, at least the one that had existed in my own head. I had wanted *good girl* to be a place where all young Canadian women could be represented by the 'right' feminist views and by 'positive' images. But as my ideas began to evolve, I started to wonder whether the purpose of the project could in fact be something completely different. Perhaps *good girl* could become a space where young women could come to be responsible for *representing themselves*, and for communicating with others across difference through their self-

⁵ Barndt, 2001, pp.38

⁶ Ibid, pp.51

⁷ Gledhill, 1997, pp.346

representations. Through this reconceptualising of the role of ‘representation’ in *good girl*, a new working mandate was shaped:

good girl's mandate is to support the creation of a space where young women can come to express and represent themselves, challenge and be challenged by the ideas of others, evolve and learn, and work to develop a community that works against oppression.

In addition to reworking *good girl's* mandate to try to better express the project's changing goals, I also reflected on how ‘accountability’ could be achieved through the collective decision-making process that I was striving to implement through the formation of the editorial board. For myself, accountability had come to mean a willingness to take responsibility for one's own position in the world, and to be open and critical about how our experiences interact to influence each decision that we make. This willingness was of utmost importance to me in my selection of board members, and communicating this was probably the most challenging part of the interview/selection process. I shared with each candidate my own idea for a possible way to start building accountability through the production of a creative self-representation. Using the technology that we would rely on for our cross-Canada communication, my suggestion was to use the medium/media of our choice (ranging from text to images to sound) to introduce ourselves to each other and ultimately to the readership of the magazine. The resulting creative productions will be discussed further later in this paper.

During the interview process I came face to face with many difficult questions about what the shape of the board should be. Although I was pleasantly surprised by the regional and age diversity of the applicants, I was nonetheless faced with a moral dilemma with regards to how most appropriately to choose the board. Obviously, one of the main purposes of forming a board was to include a more diverse range of voices in *good girl's* decision-making process, and racial diversity was something that I was explicitly hoping for. However, I was uncomfortable with the idea of making my decision based on ‘diversity’ alone, and I felt that this would have been particularly inappropriate since I would have had to explicitly ask people to identify themselves by ‘race’, ‘gender’, sexual orientation, etc. And although I felt it was inappropriate for me to require people to identify themselves to me during the interview, I did feel strongly that in order to be accountable for our decisions, it would be necessary for board members to feel comfortable

identifying themselves to each other and to the magazine's readership. This was extremely difficult to navigate, but in the end I made the imperfect decision to simply explain my feelings about the need for board members to be accountable for their own locations and identities, while simultaneously emphasising that I did not expect people to identify themselves to me during the interview.

This is but one of the challenges that I faced during the interview process. I felt keenly aware of my own privileged position as a White woman, and the struggle that I experienced with my own biases was tangible. I was trapped within the contradictions of multiculturalism, expressed so well by Khan: "In moving away from assimilationist paradigms – 'become like us as quickly as possible' - multicultural policies continue to be a positive step in the validation of 'difference'. However, the need to focus on difference reinforces the centrality of an original white Anglo culture."⁸ I felt lost in the labyrinth of 'diversity', and found myself trying to create a 'super' board.

Another major problem facing me was the calibre of applicants. There was so much energy and talent that I became completely overwhelmed and had no idea how to choose. This also challenged me to question my own role: I had all the power to select the people I wanted to work with, and no one else had any say in the matter. I began to realise that the transition from a model where I literally had all the decision-making power to one that was to be 'collective' might be more challenging than I had anticipated. Not only was it necessary for me to face the reality of the situation, which is that *good girl* is a registered business in my name, for which I am responsible, but I also had to ask myself whether I was prepared to let go of the control of the shape and content of the magazine.

In the midst of these challenges, I finally decided to create a (very subjective) committee made up of two friends and myself to make the final decisions regarding the board. It was suggested to me that rather than attempt to create a perfectly representative (and thus impossible) 'super' board, I should instead start by surrounding myself with the people I felt I most wanted to work

⁸ Kahn, 2000, pp. 13

with. I embraced the subjective, took their advice and chose 12 women, plus myself, to take *good girl* on the next leg of her journey.

Although having so many energetic, brilliant young women to choose from made the selection of the board extremely difficult, seeing so much sincere interest in *good girl* was extremely invigorating, and during the interview process many of the candidates raised interesting and important questions that will require ongoing, critical consideration. For example, one question that came up during several interviews had to do with the role that ‘quality’ plays within *good girl*, and there was clear concern at the prospect of ‘high quality’ writing and artwork being overly important in a project that claimed to support the development of young women’s work. This has challenged me to question *good girl*’s priorities, as well as the clear contradictions between a magazine dedicated to raising the profile of ‘high quality’ young women’s work and an educational project designed to support young women in the development of their skills. What is quality, and who does it exclude? Does this put people whose first language is not English at a disadvantage, and does this make their work of a ‘lower’ quality? What about people who have not had the privilege of a university education? I continue to grapple with these questions. For one thing, I do believe that it is necessary for work published in *good girl* to be of a good quality, in order for the magazine to be legitimate and commercially viable. However, this raises challenging questions about the nature of market versus audience⁹, and about just who *good girl* is accountable to. By keeping the quality of work ‘high’ and/or by over editing submissions, is *good girl* really fulfilling its mandate to create a positive space for self-representation? This is a difficult area that I continue to struggle with.

A related concern exists around the board itself. With a wide range of ages and educational and cultural backgrounds, some board members are stronger, more experienced writers and editors than others. This leads to questions of hierarchy within the group, and how to successfully negotiate hierarchy and leadership within a collective. In addition, yet another concern arises with regards to the relationship between the board, the contributors, and the readers. What is the relationship of hierarchy here? Is it possible for everyone involved to feel empowered and that they are playing an active part in the process? Or does the board, as a decision-making body,

⁹ Philip, 1995, pp. 139

simply risk of falling into the role of mainstream media producers, with our resulting role in the lives of young women being no different than any mainstream magazine? This all too common role is cogently expressed by Barndt: "...we have a sense of someone with more power than us making those decisions, creating those images, not even bothering to ask us if we want to digest them as daily fare."¹⁰ A fundamental goal of *good girl magazine* is to disrupt this powerlessness, by supporting young women to feel empowered to subvert the media and develop a different, more equitable relationship with those who produce what we see and read. Although by no means a perfect solution, I feel that a transparent decision-making process is crucial to be able to develop a sense of trust between the producers and the readers of the magazine. My dream continues to be to support and encourage young women to actively name and represent their own experiences, in order to foster a reconnection to ourselves and others.¹¹

These issues of participation and connection are related to the question of audience, which was another important point that was raised in my discussion with board applicants. I have been asked many times over the last many months why diversity is important to me, and it has seemed difficult to articulate, since for me there has never been any question. But I was challenged again when one of the applicants to the board wrote the following:

I had a thought after we got off the phone the other day about the whole issue of multiculturalism and varied backgrounds and representation within good girl -- perhaps you should stop feeling badly about good girl and it's white-straight-university educated-ness. You ARE a white, straight, university educated woman -- no matter what you do, if you're the editor, the magazine is going to reflect that to some degree. And there is nothing inherently wrong with a magazine that is more focused on a particular group -- all that means is that it fills a particular niche. It doesn't mean that all the other niches will necessarily go unfilled. Women of colour, and Asian women, and lesbian women, and so on, still have outlets to make their voices heard. I don't mean to discredit your applaudable intent to make good girl more inclusive -- that's just a thought I had.

Although my reaction to this was one of frustration, it did bring up some interesting questions. First, I disagree that "women of colour, and Asian women, and lesbian women, and so on" necessarily do have (enough) outlets to make their voices heard, and this is one of the reasons why I think diversity within *good girl* is important. Second, I feel strongly that having only different outlets for every group of people of different experience will only lead to increased

¹⁰ Barndt, 2001, pp.31

¹¹ Ibid, pp.33

separation. These questions of audience community are critical to *good girl's* ongoing development, and are full of rich contradictions that need to be grappled with.

For example, the innocence I have carelessly placed on the notion of 'community' is challenged by authors such as Gillian Rose, who equates the notion of 'community' with a claim to complete knowledge of the 'other': "...it is the ways in which 'community' constructs the distinction between its members and non-members that are intolerable for a radical politics. These processes of inclusion and exclusion are based on the assumption that members know themselves and each other absolutely."¹² To Rose, community either includes the 'marginalized other' and thus 'denies' its own difference, or it excludes and makes invisible.¹³ However, it is not *good girl's* claim or goal to 'know' or 'produce' the other¹⁴, but rather to look to difference to expand our knowledge of our own limitations and to develop compassion and make connections to those of different experience. This is why silence, although a form of resistance that I respect, is one that I want to struggle against in my own work. "Building community does not mean obliterating our differences either; telling our stories may uncover conflicting interests just as they may help us find common ground."¹⁵ These consciously problematized connections through communication are ultimately my dream.

But is it really possible to make these connections with each other? "Can you ever have a valid completion of a work by an audience that is a stranger to the traditions that underpin the work?"¹⁶ Or is apparent connection merely an example of the following: "We are, at times, even better able to understand and respond more positively to works from the dominant culture than we do to work coming out of our own traditions – such is the pernicious effect of racism, sexism and colonialism."¹⁷ Is it possible to extricate the experience of cultural assimilation from the possibility of true connection that might exist, or is connection and empathy merely a mirage, handed down to us by Western imperialism?

¹² Rose, 1997, pp.185

¹³ Ibid, pp.185

¹⁴ "To be named is to make sense, to be made sense of; it is to be positioned in the realm of the legible, the knowable, the translatable. It is to be made vulnerable to knowledge; to be produced through discourse; to be produced." (Rose, 1997, pp.187)

¹⁵ Barndt, 2001, pp.34

¹⁶ Philip, 1995, pp.134

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.134

These are just a few of the dilemmas I began to struggle with even before the formation of the editorial board, and it is my hope that the board can work together to continue to grapple with these issues, so that they can escape the limitations of my own intellect and experience. Not surprisingly, since the formation of the board a whole range of new, unanticipated questions has arisen that needs to be addressed individually and collectively by myself and other board members. In closing, I would like to briefly discuss one of the processes that has contributed to our initial comfort and experience with each other. As I described earlier, my own idea for a possible way to start thinking critically and creatively about issues of representation, privilege and communication, was to participate in an exercise in creative self-representation that would be used to introduce ourselves to each other and, ultimately, to the magazine's readership. In my initial orientation package to board members, I wrote the following:

During the interview process I spoke with most of you about the possibility of doing an individual project in self-representation, whereby we each consider what we bring to the Board and decide how best to introduce ourselves to each other, and ultimately to *good girl's* readership. I hope that such a project will provide us with a solid, creative foundation on which to build our relationship as a group. Approaching this process creatively may feel less limiting than simply sticking to standard introductions – for example, using a combination of words, images, and sound to talk about ourselves will hopefully be challenging *and* fun, and get us thinking and working creatively right from the start.

The project was largely successful, although it predictably raised many questions that I did not anticipate.¹⁸ One issue in particular that came up was around individual relationships to and definitions of 'creativity'. I know from my own experience that the concept of 'creativity' can be intimidating, and that many people have a difficult relationship with the word. Although everyone had expressed enthusiasm at the prospect of using means other than straightforward textual introductions to begin our process of working together during the interview process, when it came time to actually create a self-representation I met with some resistance. Barndt's description of her experience with Community Art captures my own experience well:

Community art challenges the definition of who gets to be an artist... participants had described their own early experiences with art in school as formative and often

¹⁸ The creative introductions function as my major process for the Cultural Production Workshop (please see journal).

oppressive, where some were castigated as ‘talentless’ and others praised as ‘geniuses’, with very little room for a middle ground. In a culture where art has become commodified, mediocre artists are considered failures, while successful artists are identified by a cabal of art critics who scorn the pretenders to the throne. With all this anxiety around cultural production it’s no wonder that most people instantly throw up their hands and cry out ‘I can’t draw’ when you propose the concept.¹⁹

Although the process of encouraging alternative means of expression was difficult, I think the feelings that came up were important to go through, especially at the beginning of a process involving the support of young women who may be putting their creative expressions forward for the first time. Although this support is one element of the board’s work, however, we are ironically also in a position to ‘accept’ and ‘reject’ submissions from other young women, including each other, should we choose to contribute our own work to the magazine.

Our first board meeting, to be held online, planned to focus on sharing reactions to the creative introductions and providing further explanations if needed. Unfortunately, due to outrageous technical difficulties, we all spent the majority of the scheduled time hopelessly lost in cyberspace, searching for one another. Although stressful, the result was also ironic in that I could not have planned a more inspiring or successful bonding experience had I tried. The hilarity and chaos of being ‘newbies’ lost in random chat rooms brought out the playfulness in most of those involved, and the result was a lot of engagement and laughter. Overall, the experience was a positive one that I could not have planned.

Essentially, as much as I plan, it seems that I am destined for contradictions, irony and challenges. This is just the very beginning of our process, and I can only imagine what a reflection will look like in another two months. For now, there is one approach that I find particularly inspiring and relevant, and which I would like to take into my work on the upcoming issue of *good girl*:

The products were never represented, never described as artifacts awaiting interpretation for community arts workers. Instead, they were always placed in the context of performances, both in their making and in their audiencing. These products were understood as moments of ‘communication’, not as representation...²⁰

¹⁹ Barndt & Lee, 2000, pp.9

²⁰ Rose, 1997, pp.193.

Perhaps this can support me in my efforts to become a facilitator of a project that seeks not to define but to discuss, and not to represent but to communicate.

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Appendix A – Interview Questions to potential board members

How familiar are you with *good girl magazine*?

Why do you think *good girl magazine* is a worthwhile project?

Explain what you feel *good girl's* strengths and weaknesses are, and the concrete steps you feel the board could take to make improvements?

What qualities do you think are important for this position?

Can you explain what qualities you feel you would bring to the project?

What sort of commitment (time and otherwise) are you willing/able to make to this project?

Are you willing to work with contributors one on one?

Explanation of my view of accountability and description of planned 'creative' introduction, using text, images, music, etc.

Appendix B – Board Orientation Package

Dear new Volunteer Editorial Board members:

The following document outlines some of my initial ideas about the key issues that will need to be addressed in order for us to start working together as a group. Please keep in mind that this is only meant to be a starting point for our discussion, and that none of my own ideas are written in stone. The following thoughts are based on my discussions with many of the people interviewed for positions on the Board (including most of you), as well as Professors, friends, classmates, family, etc.

I'd like you all to read the following carefully, and be prepared to base our first group discussion on the comments, questions and concerns that this will hopefully raise. I'm positive that many of you have a lot more experience than I do in certain areas (e.g., collective decision making), so I expect and hope that you'll all have a lot to say about my initial ideas!

After everyone has had a chance to think about this information, I'd like to try to determine when we can schedule our first online meeting. Although it will be possible to contact each other regularly over email, I think that organizing actual online meetings would be the best way to hold discussions. Although I don't want to support Microsoft more than I absolutely have to, the easiest way to hold a virtual meeting is probably to make use of Hotmail's Instant Messaging. This would require that we all sign up for a (free) Hotmail account (although I think many of us already have one), and that we all be online at a pre-arranged time. Due to limited resources, this option is probably the most feasible. Please let me know if there are other ideas.

I would like to arrange a first meeting for as soon as possible, ideally sometime during the week of March 18 – 25. In the first meeting I propose that we begin to discuss the following:

- Introductions
- Ideas around Board communication and interaction
- Ideas around collective decision making within the Board

When we have come to an agreement about how we will interact and make our decisions (hopefully after our first meeting), we will be able to move to the next step, the selection and editing of content for *good girl* volume 3, Spring 2002. Our second meeting will be held when everyone has read and prepared comments and criticism for all the submissions. At that time I would also like to begin discussion around ideas for new directions for *good girl's* content.

Please let me know if you have any immediate concerns or questions about any of this information. Also, please send me your schedules for the week of March 18 – 25, so that we can begin scheduling a meeting time.

I'm really excited to be working with all of you, and I'm looking forward to when you finally get a chance to introduce yourselves to each other!

nikko

Mandate (a work in progress)

good girl's mandate is to support the creation of public, creative, respectful, playful space where young women can express and represent themselves, challenge and be challenged, learn and evolve, and participate in a community that works to change the world.

Identity and Accountability

good girl magazine is a project that aims to create a space where young women can safely come to express and represent themselves. It is therefore crucial that *good girl's* Editorial Board be accountable for how we come to our decisions about editorial content. Accountability is one of the primary goals of the Volunteer Editorial Board, which will operate collectively and transparently to direct editorial content towards fulfilling *good girl's* mandate.

As individuals we each bring our own experiences and histories to every situation and decision. In order to communicate with each other across our differences, we must be aware of how we each come to our ideas, beliefs, speech and decisions. In order fulfil the function of *good girl's* Volunteer Editorial Board, which is to develop an ongoing discussion about the experiences, identities and expressions of young women, it is necessary to think critically about our own identities and how our experiences affect how we communicate with others.

How do we talk about identity without limiting each other and ourselves? And how can we be accountable for representing ourselves without stereotyping each other and ourselves? It's impossible to sum up the complexities of our individual experiences with a few catch phrases or key words. However, it's important that we have starting points from which to approach each

other as we begin to develop a positive working relationship. In addition, it's crucial that *good girl's* readers and contributors have a starting point from which to understand how and why decisions are being made, and who is shaping the content of the magazine.

During the interview process I spoke with most of you about the possibility of doing an individual project in self-representation, whereby we each consider what we bring to the Board and decide how best to introduce ourselves to each other, and ultimately to *good girl's* readership. I hope that such a project will provide us with a solid, creative foundation on which to build our relationship as a group. Approaching this process creatively may feel less limiting than simply sticking to standard introductions – for example, using a combination of words, images, and sound to talk about ourselves will hopefully be challenging *and* fun, and get us thinking and working creatively right from the start.

This process is by no means entirely clear in my mind, and I welcome questions and discussion around this. My idea is to make our representations available to each other before our first meeting, and to use them to help us to introduce ourselves and start to get to know each other. As a way to explore the idea of group identity, it might also be an interesting challenge to eventually attempt to create a **collective** expression of the group to share with *good girl's* readers. These individual and collective expressions could eventually be posted to the website (words, black and white or colour images, audio, multimedia, etc.) and/or published in the magazine (words, black and white images).

Think about how you would choose to creatively introduce and represent yourself to the group before and during our first online meeting. Because this project requires access to technology, please let me know what your technical resources/limitations are – I'd be happy to help by making use of my own access to technology.

Communication in Online Meetings and Group Discussions:

8 Guidelines for good girl's Volunteer Editorial Board (VEB) Meetings and Discussions
(Thanks to Stacey for this initial version. Keep in mind that this is only a first draft – comments are encouraged!)

The first and most fundamental principal for participating in editorial meetings and discussion is respect. It is the responsibility of each Board member to do her best to treat everyone with respect, and to help us start this process, the following are suggested guidelines to be further discussed, developed and articulated as a group.

#1 During the meetings and discussions take your fair share of meeting time to ask questions and speak, but do not take more than your fair share. Keep in mind that not everyone is equally confident about speaking in group discussions. Leaving room for others, and allowing for periods of silence, is usually necessary to give everyone an equal chance to be heard. Ask yourself once in a while if you are taking more (or less) than your fair share of speaking time, especially if you know yourself to be a talker.

#2 Do not pressure anyone else to speak. (Of course, it's O.K. to ask someone a question about something s/he has already said). Part of treating others with respect is to remember that there are cultural and individual differences concerning speaking in group discussions.

#3 Speak respectfully to and about everyone in the meeting, and about people who are not there. Remember that there are differences among us that may not be apparent to you. For example, a casual disparaging remark about 'mental patients' may be hurtful and inhibiting to someone on the board who has a mental illness.

In addition, *good girl magazine* does not support racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, anti-Semitic and other remarks that stereotype people as members of groups and/or express prejudices against them. The publisher of *good girl* will object to any such remark she hears in discussion or meeting, and she encourages you as the Volunteer Editorial Board members to do the same.

It is often a struggle to recognize our false assumptions and our hurtful behaviour. For example, most people occasionally say something that assumes that everyone else is like himself or herself, such as something that assumes that everyone shares their own ethnic or religious background, or something that assumes that everyone can walk or see. These remarks can make people who are present feel ignored and left out, and they can make it seem that we are describing or theorizing about everyone's experience when we are not. Learning to be more inclusive and/or more modest in our statements is a process, one that may never be complete. One of the ongoing goals of the Board members will be to try and avoid stereotyping and prejudiced behaviour. At the same time, moral and political perfection is not expected or claimed.

#4 Please feel free to criticize points of view, beliefs, opinions, statements, behaviour, institutions and social patterns at meetings and discussions. Please avoid criticizing people. For example, say "I think what you just said is racist (or whatever) because..." and not "You are racist (or whatever)". Or just say that you disagree or object and say why.

Wherever there is social injustice, it is deeply entrenched in institutions, systems, and *individuals*. The *good girl* Volunteer Editorial Board is just one place for us to confront it in ourselves, and processes of self-examination are made more difficult when the focus is on accusing others. People can re-think their own statements and actions much better when they are not forced to defend their characters or intelligence.

#5 Remember that everyone's first language is not English, and that even among those whose first language *is* English, not everyone is equally able to express her/himself clearly. Be patient with one another. Give people time to finish what they want to say. If something offends or puzzles you, check your understanding of what was said with the person who said it *before* you respond.

#6 Please keep personal stories and information shared in the Volunteer Editorial Board confidential, or at least anonymous, when discussing the meetings with others. For instance, use the expression, "Someone on my VEB said..." rather than using names.

#7 Don't expect other VEB members to "represent" or "give the opinion of" groups to which they apparently belong. For example, don't ask a VEB member with a disability what people with disabilities think about such and such. Unless we are explicitly empowered to do so, none of us represent anyone but her/himself.

#8 Everyone on the Volunteer Editorial Board and at *good girl* has the right to make mistakes. The goal for the *good girl* VEB is to create the best possible setting for ideas to grow. Jumping on other people's mistakes, or being afraid to make a mistake yourself will defeat this goal.

Roles in group discussion (adapted from the Prison Activist Resource Centre's "Toward Collective Decision Making – Some Guidelines for Activists")

These positions can hopefully rotate from meeting to meeting so that everyone has a chance to experiment and develop their skills.

Facilitator: An effective facilitator solicits input, creates and distributes a proposed agenda, brings the meeting together and keeps it on track, calls on people to speak in turn, clarifies, summarizes, focuses discussion, brings out various viewpoints, draws out quiet people and limits overtalkers, and looks to synthesize different ideas or suggestions into a workable proposal for all.

Note taker: Date, names, highlights of discussion, detailed (re)wording of proposals, decisions reached and who's responsible for what – *action items*; makes sure notes get typed and distributed.

Timekeeper: Updates group of impending time limits, keeps track of time left and time needed.

Tools

- Start on time
- Plan and review agenda before and/or at the start of meeting
- Set times for agenda items, choose time-keeper, bargain for more time if item goes over
- Use check-in and check-out / evaluation process whereby folks can know both what to expect from each other in the meeting and what needs to be improved for future meetings (constructive criticism / self-criticism can be helpful)
- Facilitator uses a speakers list or 'stack' to keep track of who should be called on to speak next
- Rotation of tasks so that all participants can become adept at various roles, and power does not become concentrated in one or a few individuals
- Balance between **brevity** and **levity**

Collective decision-making:

Reviewing submissions

Step 1. All submissions (written pieces and images) will be distributed to Board members to be read and discussed.

(Several people have suggested that keeping the identities of contributors anonymous during the first reading may help manage certain potential difficulties. For example, members of the Board are encouraged to contribute to *good girl*, which will no doubt result in challenges during the editing process. Keeping the contributors names anonymous will hopefully help to keep our individual and group biases to a minimum.)

Step 2. After submissions have been reviewed by the Board, all initial comments and concerns will be put forward and discussed by all Board members.

It is crucial that all major concerns be raised and discussed at the beginning of the selection process. The editing process often requires a significant amount of time and energy from both the editor and contributor, so I think it's important to choose which pieces we want to commit to publishing **before** the editing process begins. In some circumstances it may not be possible to publish all edited work, but in general it's important that we don't spend time editing work that will not ultimately be published.

It is imperative that all Board members be respectful and supportive of all contributors. For this reason it is important that all comments and criticism be tactful and respectful. One thing to keep in mind is that the comments you make may be about the work of a colleague on the Board. At the same time, it is important that we all feel comfortable raising our concerns, even if not everyone agrees or if it raises difficult questions.

Step 3. The Board will decide which pieces to take forward into the editing process (for eventual publication), and which to return to contributors with comments and regrets.

Even pieces not chosen for publication will be returned to the contributor with comments. Therefore, as noted above, it is necessary that criticism always be presented in a respectful and supportive way.

(At some point it may be necessary to make the names of contributors known, since in some cases it may be important to take a contributor's identity or context into consideration. (For example, a story about rape would have a different meaning if written by a man than it would if written by a woman.) However, I feel unclear about if and/or when we should bring names and contexts forward into the discussion. Keep in mind that as Editor in Chief I will be aware of contributor's identities the whole time. This question of anonymity may raise some challenging dilemmas, and I think it will be important for us to discuss this point as a group.)

Deciding what to bring forward into the editing process may be one of our most challenging tasks. It is very important that the concerns of each Board member be taken into serious consideration when deciding what to edit and eventually publish. For this reason, we may agree that it's not acceptable to simply hold a vote, since the result could be that dissenting voices are silenced. We'll need to decide whether we want to commit to making decisions by consensus, and if so, which process to follow.

One option may be to bring our comments forward using the following framework:

- 1) Submission is suitable for publication, suggestions made
- 2) Submission is suitable for publication, only when specific reservations are addressed
- 3) Submission is unsuitable for publication, but with possibility of acceptance after specific changes made
- 4) Unsuitable for publication, no possibility consideration (blocked)

In many cases it may be difficult or impossible to reach decisions by consensus with 13 people. Using the above framework, it is possible that one Board member could block the publication of a piece that everyone else wants to publish. To be able to move forward at all, it will be important for all board members to be willing to discuss their concerns and have a certain degree of flexibility. However, it is also crucial that the concerns of Board members be taken seriously, discussed and acted on.

Others factors (e.g., finances) will have to be taken into consideration when determining how many pieces we will be able to publish at a given time. For example, *good girl* volume 3, Spring 2002 has a budget of \$300.00 for payment of contributors, so only a limited number of pieces can be published.

One of the biggest challenges to our development of a truly collective process may be the fact that the magazine started as my own individual project. By taking steps to form a Volunteer Editorial Board, I've made the conscious decision to re-evaluate the use of a hierarchical decision making process within the magazine and begin to move towards a more collective one. I anticipate several problems with this transition, primarily related to the fact that *good girl magazine* is a registered business in my name, and that I am both legally and financially accountable for the content of the magazine. For this reason, I do necessarily have more power as a board member than anyone else. It will probably be an ongoing challenge for us to navigate this imbalance of power, but I think it's important to begin by at least acknowledging it and bringing it out into the open.

Step 4. Pieces chosen for eventual publication will be matched up with volunteer Board members for editing. It will be the responsibility of these volunteers to compile the comments and concerns of the Board, communicate them to the contributor and work one-on-one to edit the work.

During the editing process, the editing board members are encouraged to bring forward specific questions or concerns to the rest of the board.

During this process, images will need to be chosen/matched up to articles/poems. Submitted images will be critiqued in the same way that written work is, however, there will be no editing process, except in appropriate circumstances. Illustrations for many written pieces will need to be solicited during the editing process, and discussed by the board during this time. Image content is one of the most important elements of *good girl*, since images are what people see first, and often what they judge first.

Step 5. When the editing process is complete, the finalized pieces will be reviewed again by the entire Board.

The final review is not the time to raise important points or serious concerns. By this time, we will have committed to publishing the piece – serious concerns should be brought up earlier in the process. Only in extenuating circumstances should the Board back out of publishing a piece at the last minute.

New Directions and Editorial Content

It is also important that we begin to discuss as a group areas of the project that need further development. For example, I hope that people will bring forward their ideas around new directions for content (e.g., recurring columns, specific topics, potential contributors etc). Based on your readings of *good girl* volumes 1 and 2, I'd like for us all to bring forward specific comments and criticisms, and be prepared to brainstorm ideas for the future direction of the magazine. (This will be discussed no earlier than our second meeting.)

Informed Consent

I am currently working toward a Masters in Environmental Studies, with my Area of Concentration relating specifically to my work on *good girl magazine*. In order to use my work on *good girl* in an academic setting, I'm obligated to follow the ethical guidelines laid out by the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. The primary guideline is that participants in research projects provide informed consent of their participation in the project. I have to review these guidelines further to clarify how they may impact on our work as a Board, however, if any of you have any immediate concerns or questions about this, please let me know.