

***good girl*: Planning a Socially and Environmentally
Responsible Canadian Magazine**

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Foreword

The following is intended to report and reflect on the accompanying MES Major Project, entitled *good girl: Planning a Socially and Environmentally Responsible Canadian Magazine*. The Major Project, which takes the form of a comprehensive Business Plan for **good girl** magazine, is an example of theoretically grounded alternative media and business planning and practice. The purpose of the Business Plan document is to articulate **good girl's** purpose, philosophy and values, and to outline in detail realistic strategies for the project's future development. This was made possible through extensive practical training within the Canadian magazine industry, research into **good girl's** primary market of women ages 18 to 35, and the ongoing publication of **good girl** magazine itself since 2001.

In addition, locating the business planning process within the context of a MES Major Project has made possible an in-depth reflection on and analysis of the theoretical contradictions, complexities and intersections that ground (and challenge) the project's development. The following paper explores the salient critical questions raised during the business planning process, and includes discussions of **good girl's** various (and at times contradictory) roles as a feminist and anti-oppression media project, an alternative feminist business model and practice, and a critical education project. Although the Business Plan itself is designed to be a comprehensive document for use by present and future stakeholders, the critical analysis that follows shows clearly that the Business Plan is most definitely neither complete nor final, but is rather a fluid, evolving document that will necessarily develop alongside **good girl's** own evolution. If anything, the business planning process has simply reaffirmed the necessity of embracing and engaging the contradictions that make up **good girl's** richness, uniqueness and complexity, a practice that will undoubtedly be a part of **good girl** for the rest of her life.

This MES Major Project has made possible an in-depth practical and theoretical exploration of the corresponding MES Area of Concentration, entitled Feminist Anti-oppression Media: Theory and Practice. The ongoing cultural production of **good girl** combined with the development of the Business Plan document and simultaneous commitment to critical theoretical reflection has resulted in a contextualized theorized practice that fulfils the Plan of Study mandate to use **good girl** as a framework for theorizing and practicing a strongly rooted feminist publishing project committed to social change and anti-oppression through critical education.

I. Introduction: The Realities of Planning a Socially Responsible Magazine Business in Canada

There are two types of people in this world: those who are good at thinking up titles, and those who are not. I remember thinking that the night in December 2000 when I asked my partner for his advice on a title for my newest project: a feminist magazine for young Canadian women. “You’re good at this stuff. What should it be called?”

As I remember it now, it was actually me who came up with the idea to call the magazine “good girl.” It seemed perfect – “good girl” was a concept that most women, and probably most men, would have a relationship to. But the true beauty was that this relationship would be different for just about everyone. Right from the beginning, “good girl” symbolized what the project was all about (even if I didn’t necessarily know it consciously): the intersection of experiences to find ways to relate to one another and communicate across difference. After nearly three years, I still love the title, and it’s amazing to me how the project has continued to evolve within and around the concept of “good girl.”

The main reason I tell this story is because it’s fascinating to me that right from the beginning, from the very moment of its inception, **good girl** has been inextricably wound up in tensions arising from the binary conception of good girl/bad girl – two culturally defined extremes with little space for movement or middle grounds. I have struggled and continue to struggle with the limitations of such binary thinking, but am simultaneously and continually inspired by the possibilities for something different and more open. And I like that I can clearly identify this struggle from the very moment of **good girl’s** birth to the moment I type these words.

Good, not bad. Girl, not boy, or woman, or man. Young, not old. Canadian, not American. Produced by and for women, not men. Feminist, implying political. I am White, not Black. Heterosexual, not Lesbian. Able-bodied, not disabled. Northern, not Southern. Western, not Eastern. For-profit, not not-for-profit, implying Capitalist, not Socialist. My own location is where **good girl** began, and so these are the binaries I have struggled with. And struggle I have, against the myriad limitations (both real and perceived) of my own identity.

Potential writers have demanded a definition of “young”, arguing they were “young at heart” regardless of their age. Government funding demands a minimum of 80% Canadian editorial content for eligibility. Self-identified feminists demand the word be used, while people who don’t identify with “feminism” are alienated. Men have been reluctant to get involved at all, and those who have felt excluded by language and practice. Available funding for “feminist” or “social justice” work generally requires that an organization have charitable status. These are just some of ways that I have been challenged to keep expanding my thinking to theorize and practice a new vision for **good girl**, one that embraces and challenges the contradictions between, within and beyond the binary conceptions that make up cultural meaning, and which conspire to limit **good girl’s** (and my own) evolution. The complexities and contradictions bound up in the project – and embodied in **good girl’s** title – make up the crux of what **good girl** is all about.

In the past year I’ve taken to telling people that if I’d known what was involved with publishing a magazine, I never would have started **good girl**. I didn’t know the first thing about printing, editing, distribution, postage, subscriptions, business planning or anything else involved with making a magazine go. However, what I did and still do believe is that media has incredible influence in our society, and that if the media changes, society will change with it. Having looked long and hard, I found that the media I wanted – something challenging, feminist, fun and Canadian – didn’t exist. So I jumped, with both feet, into something foolhardy and ambitious, and I’ve been struggling to get my bearings ever since. From day to day, I oscillate between wishing I’d known what I was getting myself into, and figuring that it was probably lucky that I didn’t.

The focus of my MES work has been on developing both the theoretical and practical foundations of **good girl** magazine, the purpose of which is to create a widely accessible, alternative media resource and socially responsible, feminist, anti-oppression business. My MES Major Project has taken the form of a theoretically grounded, critical Business Plan for the project, entitled *good girl: Planning a Socially and Environmentally Responsible Canadian Magazine*. While the Business Plan itself addresses the practical realities of planning for **good girl’s** future, this report expands on the challenges and critical questions that have arisen during the business planning process – the process of putting theory into practice, or perhaps more accurately in this case, of grounding practice in theory.

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It is impossible to discuss the development of **good girl** and the corresponding Business Plan without first outlining the current situation for Canadian magazines generally. As an industry, magazine publishing is extremely risky, with the majority of publications failing to survive past their first year. The situation is particularly challenging for smaller, independent titles. Magazine publishing and marketing rely on economies of scale for profitability, meaning that the larger the magazine, the more affordable are the costs of printing and distribution, and the more cost-effective it is for companies to use the magazine as an advertising vehicle. For smaller magazines, advertising is not generally a feasible source of revenue at all, which makes it difficult and often impossible to operate profitably. This is especially true in Canada, where the population is too small to support most magazines, and where 80% of newsstand space is dominated by American titles. Even if it was possible for Canadian magazines to have good visibility on newsstands, it would not necessarily improve their financial situations, since publishers receive only half of the cover price of copies sold, and usually not until months (or even years) after the issue was published. In addition, poor sales efficiency on newsstands result in the vast majority of newsstand copies (around 60-70% for most titles) winding up in the trash. So how do smaller Canadian magazines survive at all? Fortunately, the Department of Canadian Heritage manages the Canada Magazine Fund (CMF), which funds eligible projects for Canadian magazines. Unfortunately, the CMF is not only a bureaucratic nightmare with an unmanageable application process for most small publishers, it is also in danger of being cut altogether¹, which would leave many Canadian magazine high and dry, with few feasible options for sustainability and growth.

In an industry that is plagued by corporate domination, waste and inefficiency, one has to wonder whether there is any place at all for magazines with mandates specifically committed to social responsibility and change. The purpose of this project has been to plan for the creation of such a place for **good girl** within the industry, by 1) developing a strongly grounded, clear and unwavering theoretical vision for the magazine; 2) gaining expertise in the magazine industry itself through practical training and research into the realities of other, similar projects; and 3)

¹ The CMF did receive cuts in June 2003. Although the Small Magazine component was not affected, smaller publishers are affected by changes to the Publications Assistance Program (PAP) postal subsidy, as well as by changes to the Support for Editorial Development component.

articulating a concrete, realistic Business Plan to guide **good girl's** theoretical and practical development. What follows is a critical discussion of the intersections and contradictions between **good girl's** theoretical foundation and practical planning and implementation.

II. Developing a Business Plan for *good girl*

From **good girl's** inception, the concept of a Business Plan loomed large and intimidating. As soon as I started the project, I got all the literature, signed up for online tutorials, even took a business planning workshop. But no matter what I did, terms like “market research,” “cash flow projections” and “cost per thousand” never seemed to lose their original power to terrify me. And so I did my best to ignore them. After all, if I had a great idea, wouldn't the money stuff just sort itself out?

Sadly, that isn't how things work in the “real world.” But it's easy to stay wrapped up in an idea of things just “taking off,” magically guided by enigmatic qualities such as “talent” and “potential” – qualities that generally remain in their ethereal imagined future realm permanently if not harnessed into a realistic, concrete plan. Ultimately, it was the fear of stagnating in my own potential that challenged me to come face to face with the realities of cash flow, cost analysis and credit head-on, and finally buckle down to create **good girl's** Business Plan.

Because I chose to make it my MES Major Project, business planning necessarily took on a depth and self-consciousness that it may not have had without an academic context. At the same time, using a business model for my project forced me to keep my work located within the real world of practice (and specifically money). The result: my academic thinking continually challenged my assumptions about what is and is not possible within business, and the reality of a concrete Business Plan kept my theorizing firmly grounded in the reality of what is viable.

The desire to stay grounded in what is actually possible was one important reason why I consciously chose a relatively standard magazine Business Plan model for my project design. My primary goal was to create a document that would have a real, meaningful and practical life, and which would serve not only to guide **good girl** as it continues to evolve, but also to articulate our philosophies and goals to a range of different audiences and stakeholders. Just as I hope that **good girl** will succeed in offering an accessible alternative to the mainstream media by fitting in alongside other women's magazines on the newsstand, so too do I aim to have **good girl's** Business Plan fit in alongside other, standard business models in order to offer a meaningful alternative to standard business practice.

In the end, the model I chose supported a surprising amount of depth, despite the fact that it conforms to a relatively standard format. It is primarily based on two models², the first being a general Business Plan template that is applicable to any business, and the second being specific to independent magazines. By combining models I was able to come up with a more complete structure, from which I then shaped sections to serve **good girl's** specific context. In some cases it was also necessary to add entire components, for example the Editorial Strategy (Section VIII), in order to sufficiently address all aspects of **good girl's** development. For the purposes of creating a complete picture of **good girl's** evolution, it was also important to include a range of supporting documents, ranging from the media kit to the reader survey to a glossary of terms.

Although I began **good girl's** Business Plan with the intention of creating one complete document that could stand alone in any circumstance and speak to all audiences, I have come to realize that it is likely the variety of potential **good girl** stakeholders will necessitate as many different Business Plans as different audiences. As such, the version I have chosen to submit as my MES Major Project may only serve for this particular, academic context. Although the prospect of writing innumerable Business Plans is overwhelming, it has been crucial to re-conceptualize the purpose of the document as one that can (and must) morph and evolve into whatever role is demanded of it. Who knows? It may end up being easier than publishing the magazine itself, since each issue exists as one unique (and permanent) expression of **good girl**.

* * *

So is it actually possible to reconcile **good girl's** social and political vision with the realities of magazine publishing, or will we be forced to compromise too much of our vision to act as a truly meaningful alternative to mainstream media and business? For some, simply structuring an organization as a “for-profit” business is too much of a political sacrifice, making it part of the problem and not part of the solution. However, as the business planning process brought me face to face with issues of unpaid work, assumptions about the “charitable” nature of social

² Carla Kendall's *Prepare a Powerful and Persuasive Business Plan Painlessly* and the IPA's *Building a Business Plan: A Kit for Starting and Growing Independent Publications* (Cheryl Woodard).

justice work and serious questions about my own quality of life, **good girl's** financial sustainability, viability and independence became an increasingly important priority. (This dilemma is discussed in greater depth in Section III.c – The Paradox of **good girl** as Feminist Business.) At the same time, **good girl's** political vision has only ever continued to become stronger, deeper and more grounded as the Business Plan has developed. So as we come to the end of this particular leg of the journey, we have both a solid vision for the project and a comprehensive plan. What we are left with now are the two crucial questions that all other businesses must also answer: Will investors support our product enough to make it possible to implement our Business Plan? And will we be able to sell our product to our market?

These nagging questions have followed us throughout the business planning process. Ultimately, the main challenges to developing all aspects of **good girl's** Business Plan can be boiled down to one fundamental issue: identifying what sets **good girl** apart from everything else out there enough to cause people to want to read it. In other words, who is our market and what do they want from **good girl**?

In **good girl's** case, a major difficulty arises from the way the project was originally conceived. One of my primary inspirations for starting **good girl** was the lack of a Canadian alternative to the American dominated women's media (mainstream *and* alternative). Although magazines such as **BUST** and **Bitch** have provided meaningful alternatives to the mainstream media for years, their primarily American perspectives left me feeling that a similar Canadian niche was crying out to be filled. From the beginning, this conscious Canadian identity always made it easy to articulate **good girl's** unique position in the market. I don't know how many times I've described it as a "Canadian mix of **BUST** and **Bitch**," and the media has always been similarly content to describe **good girl** with reference to its American competitors.

Unfortunately, the more I learned about the realities for independent Canadian magazines, the more I questioned whether a Canadian audience would be enough to make **good girl** into a financially sustainable business. With only a fraction of the population of the US, Canada simply cannot support most of its own magazines. Using an industry formula to calculate a magazine's potential "universe" of readers (please see Appendix A – Market Analysis), I discovered that based on the circulation of **good girl's** main competitors in the US (**BUST**, **Bitch**, **Venus** and **Nervy Girl**), **good girl** could only expect a total Canadian universe of approximately 10,000

readers (as opposed to a total North American universe of approximately 100,000 readers). Although the market for youthful, alternative women's magazines is still young and will no doubt continue its growth over the next number of years, it is possible that the Canadian portion of the market will never reach the numbers necessary to make **good girl** financially viable. The reality of numbers stopped me dead in my tracks, and forced me to consider what else might be possible for **good girl**.

One alternative was to consider if and how **good girl** could reach and speak to an American readership. It was at this juncture that I was forced to seriously consider for the first time what, if anything, makes **good girl** special apart from the fact that it is Canadian. Imagining how **good girl** might possibly be appealing to American readers was particularly difficult for me, since I had, from its inception, relied primarily on our Canadian identity as an easy way to distinguish ourselves. To this day, articulating **good girl's** unique position remains one of the most challenging aspects of the entire project, most likely because I have been so close to it for so long.

In the end we chose a Circulation Marketing Plan that targets both Canadian and American readers, and puts **good girl** on both Canadian and US newsstands. In many ways the odds are not in our favour, with most Canadian magazines avoiding the challenges of the often very different American industry altogether. Although some Canadian magazines have successfully crossed the border (e.g., **Ascent, Adbusters, Vice**), most do not have the desire and/or the resources to risk entering into the American market, or if they do they make sure to have a very strong foothold in Canada before venturing into the US.

This balance will have to be negotiated for **good girl** as the Business Plan continues to develop over time, and any steps that we do choose to take into the US will have to be made only with careful planning and research. However, regardless of whether or not **good girl** ends up speaking (and selling) primarily to Canadians, Americans or both, envisioning the potential of the US market was useful in that it forced us to express **good girl's** unique market position beyond a Canada/US binary. The Business Plan articulates six concepts in a unique way that has the potential to set **good girl** apart from most, if not all, magazines currently available (although none are necessarily fully realized in **good girl's** current manifestation): responsibility, complexities and contradictions, gender, diversity, play, and contextualized personal voices

(please see Section V – Unique Position for elaboration). These concepts, though not necessarily unique when taken individually, combine to create the potential for something significantly more complex than is generally available in the media, whether mainstream or alternative.

In addition to forcing a deeper, more meaningful consideration and articulation of what can and does set **good girl** apart from other, similar projects, the process of creating a concrete, realistic Business Plan very quickly clarified my own priorities for the project. Specifically, it became increasingly clear that there are three key requirements that are necessary in any potential **good girl** Business Plan: 1) a clear, deeply grounded social and political vision for the project; 2) a wide enough reach (i.e., large enough readership) to warrant the effort required to publish **good girl**; and 3) a financially sustainable structure that would see **good girl** financially independent and able to pay a small staff a living wage. Each of these are developed in greater detail in this report, however I would like to introduce each here within the context of the development of **good girl's** Business Plan.

First, a solid political vision for the project is necessary, since **good girl** is first and foremost a social justice project. This vision has to be clearly defined and solidly in place so that it is not neglected as the rest of the Business Plan takes shape, but rather can be integrated into all other aspects of the business. This is particularly relevant to **good girl**, since part of our vision is to challenge our readers to expand their own thinking. As such, it is less important to *give our market what they want* than it is to expand our content past what is easiest or most comfortable for them. Clearly defining a vision of the magazine (and the world) we want will hopefully support us in negotiating the realities of business while always staying true to this commitment to challenge and push the boundaries of what the media can do.

Although the realities of business do define what is possible for **good girl** with regards to our reach and financial viability, the way they have developed is not necessarily in opposition to our vision and values. For example, I have always been clear that one of **good girl's** primary goals is to be a *widely accessible* alternative to the mainstream media, and this is why I chose to use media as a vehicle in the first place. If reaching people with **good girl** was not a priority, I may have been content to publish a small, inexpensive zine instead of a glossy, nationally distributed magazine. With this in mind, if **good girl's** greatest reach extends to only a few hundred

readers (as it does now), it will be necessary to evaluate whether the purpose of the project is being fulfilled, and whether, importantly, it warrants the time, energy and money of the people involved. This may be best exemplified by the very first five-year financial projection that I attempted, the result of which was an increase in circulation to 3,000 per issue after five years. These initial numbers spoke to me loud and clear. Was I willing to spend five years of my life so that **good girl** could reach a few thousand people?

The answer was a resounding no, in part because of my own ambition, no doubt, but also because I realized that the reality of the numbers had more to do with the magazine industry itself than with **good girl's** message or vision. And because I am committed primarily to **good girl's** vision, and secondarily to the fact of it being a magazine, I would not be sad to discard magazine publishing if I felt there was a better medium with which to communicate **good girl's** message. In many ways, this realization created a healthy new detachment from the project, which made it possible to approach the Business Plan from a less emotional place.

Not only did my initial projections clarify that reaching readers was a major priority for **good girl**, it also confirmed the financial realities of magazine publishing. In addition to seeing circulation increase to only 3,000 per issue, after five years **good girl** would have accumulated a loss of approximately \$135,000.00, and would have managed to pay two part-time staff people a poverty level wage. If we'd paid no wage at all, we would have almost broken even after five years. Having worked for nearly three years on **good girl** without any pay (and with a significant amount of personal financial loss), this was very clearly not an option in my mind. This clarity is rooted in several important factors, which will be examined in much greater detail later in this report. In short, for my own physical, mental and emotional health, it is no longer possible for me to contribute my own free labour to **good girl**. I will not martyr myself for the sake of this project – I would prefer instead to look for a different way to express **good girl's** vision. Throughout this process, it has also become increasingly important to me that feminist and other social justice work begin to exist as businesses in order to challenge and create socially responsible alternatives to standard business practice. I feel strongly that this would not be achieved by **good girl** continuing as a project that is based on the generally accepted association of feminist and social justice work with “charitable” work, and relies on the unpaid, culturally devalued labour of women for its survival (please see Section III.c for elaboration).

The remainder of this report will examine in more depth the major conceptual challenges and contradictions that were raised through the development of **good girl's** Business Plan, including issues of identity, diversity, work and education.

III, Reflections on Theorizing Practice

a. The Limitations of Binary Thinking: Is Third Wave Feminism the Solution?

A critical (over)sensitivity to the perils of universalism is nothing new in academia, but the realities of non-binary, non-universalizing practice in the context of cultural production, and specifically critical pop cultural media production, are fraught with challenges that are neither acknowledged nor addressed within a purely theoretical framework. This messy context is where **good girl** is located, and in order to undertake a truly revolutionary practice, the practical challenges must be identified, unpacked, re-imagined and rearticulated.

One of the primary challenges in developing **good girl's** Business Plan has been to find language that adequately represents the mandate and vision of the project. This process has required a critical awareness of three important factors: 1) **good girl** exists within a historical and cultural context that informs, defines and constrains the meaning and use of language; 2) the meaning of language is constantly being represented, reshaped and reformulated by cultural productions such as the media; and 3) such cultural representations (or misrepresentations) do play a role in defining – and therefore limiting – the scope and meaning of that which they represent. In other words, the cultural meaning of whatever language and/or symbols we choose to represent **good girl** will affect how the project is both represented and perceived. So in order to fulfil a mandate to “create and support non-oppressive alternatives to the mainstream media,” **good girl** must be represented in as broad, open and revolutionary terms as possible. The following section explores the process of analyzing and articulating these terms, and specifically addresses **good girl's** continued struggle to understand if and how a “feminist” self-identification may limit the scope of the project.

Originally conceptualized as a “feminist” magazine “by and for women,” **good girl** has, since its inception, been identified (and self-identified) primarily in terms of gender, and targeted primarily at women. The concepts “woman” and “feminism” have remained at the forefront of **good girl's** discussion and evolution, and this gender focus has raised two critical questions: 1) what possibilities exist for a practical media project such as **good girl** to develop gender analysis beyond a “man/woman” binary, and 2) is it possible for a feminist media project to not be limited to a discussion of gender? In an analysis of selected related media projects such as **BUST**,

Bitch, **Herizons** and **Venus** magazines, it became evident that these current feminist media projects still tend to define their audience as “women”, and feminism as pertaining primarily, and often exclusively, to “women’s” and/or “gender” issues. Over the course of developing **good girl’s** Business Plan, it has been essential to analyze the ways in which more complicated, open conceptions and articulations of gender and feminism may help to both expand the boundaries of feminist practice and distinguish **good girl** from other, related projects. The purpose of this expansion is not necessarily to change **good girl’s** demographic, but rather to carve out a clear and unique position within the market of magazines targeting women ages 18 to 35, by challenging the “women” and “women’s issues” focus of similar projects (please refer to corresponding Business Plan Sections I – Editorial Vision, IV – Market Analysis and V – Unique Position for elaboration).

Because feminism itself originated as an analysis by women of “women’s” issues, any historically contextualized feminist project must necessarily be informed by questions of gender to some extent. However, just as the nature of “Woman” has evolved beyond a monolithic, universal definition, and just as “women’s” issues have changed over the history of feminism, so too must the relationship between feminism and “women” evolve. What constitutes a woman? What constitutes a women’s issue, and who chooses, defines and speaks for such issues? And importantly, are “women’s” issues alone enough to ensure the survival of compelling, relevant feminist practice in the 21st century? Is it instead possible for feminist practice to truly expand within and beyond gender to make real connections to other, intersecting forms of oppression?

Although meaningful connections do exist between feminism and different movements for social change, the narrow “man/woman” gender binary and “feminism=gender discussion” definition seem alive and well within feminist magazine publishing. As noted above, established and relatively far reaching magazines such as **BUST**, **Bitch**, **Herizons** and **Venus**, which are all consciously feminist publications, practice feminisms that are limited in their ideas of “women” and “gender”: their mandates are women-specific and their respective focuses are primarily on “women’s” or “gender” issues. Although these well-established media projects no doubt reflect the realistic possibilities currently available to feminist magazines, their limitations have also helped to open up new avenues for **good girl’s** own unique position within the market, by pointing to a lack of feminist media content that reaches past being “by and for women.”

For **good girl**, creating this unique position means re-imagining a feminist model that involves intersecting, interacting differences, tensions and contradictions – a politics of difference that recognizes communication as an intersection of and mutual respect for different experiences and realities, and social change as the action that can result from this intersection and respect. Not only does such an approach create space for innumerable possibilities beyond “women,” “men” and “women’s issues,” but it also acknowledges the existence of multiple feminisms and frees feminist practice from the notion that there is a singular “good” feminism. On theoretical and practical levels, this allows **good girl** to envision and become a “feminist” magazine that is about much more than “women,” “women’s issues” or “gender issues”; one that can address all forms of oppression and include people of all genders³.

In fact, it would seem that such an approach may already have a name. “Third Wave” feminist theory embraces a politics of difference, and offers **good girl** one possible approach to conceptualizing feminism and gender within the mandate, philosophy and content of the magazine. Third Wave theory acknowledges multiple feminisms, as well as the complexities and fluidity of gender and the diversity of experiences of oppression. Although this sounds promising for **good girl**, the critical question is what happens when such a theory interacts with the real world, where it takes form and is represented (or misrepresented) by the media. Like any other social movement, Third Wave feminism relies not only on theoretical foundations, but also on real relationships, communities and generations. It also depends on the popular media for iconography, spokespeople and plain-language articulation of complex ideas in order to speak to a popular audience. Any theory that is tossed into this mixed bag of human thought, interaction and communication is bound to be transformed in the process – such is the nature of theory in practice.

How has this transformation played out for Third Wave feminism? One example is the perceived divide that persists between the “Second” and “Third” waves of feminism, in other words between feminists of different generations who have participated in significantly different

³ This recognition and inclusion of difference must in turn be reconciled with the business necessity of focusing on a clear target market that is generally connected by common demographic and psychographic characteristics. In the case of **good girl**, it is important to emphasize that although we are attempting to expand our vision beyond a gender focus, it is unrealistic to attempt to “please everybody” by expanding our demographic beyond primarily women ages 18 to 35.

struggles for social justice. This Second Wave/Third Wave binary, which is based in preconceived, essentialist ideas about the values of different generations, has and continues to affect communication, understanding and collaboration between generations of feminists. The practical implications of this generational binary are significant to youth-driven projects such as **good girl**, which often rely on support and mentorship from more established generations. Whether or not this support is available will become a crucial question as **good girl** enters its next stage of development by using the Business Plan to approach potential investors and funders. Such a process may speak all too well to the particular challenges involved with reconciling differing values of multiple generations of the same social movement; (perceived) differences that can be expressed as indifference, ambivalence or even animosity.

Another relevant aspect of Third Wave practice is the way that the movement is portrayed by the media. As with any other movement, the question of who gets to speak for the Third Wave is of critical importance, since the most common and/or far reaching representation(s) (no matter how accurate or inaccurate) will inform how **good girl** is perceived, regardless of what we actually do. With this in mind, it is necessary to ask who is speaking for the Third Wave, who is hearing them, and how these often contradictory representations affect the practical possibilities of the movement.

To address these questions it is necessary to look to the other magazines that can be categorized as “Third Wave.”⁴ Of the established publications mentioned earlier, American magazines **BUST**, **Bitch** and **Venus** all aim to reach **good girl’s** audience of (primarily) women between the ages of 18 and 35 who are looking for media alternatives to mainstream women’s magazines. Because of their relatively large distribution and longevity, their publishers have, to varying degrees, taken on roles as spokespeople for “younger women’s” feminism, and the magazines have come to represent the Third Wave. As noted previously, all three publications have women-specific mandates, which locate them firmly within the women’s media (please see Section IV – Market Analysis). Their editorial focuses are primarily on “women’s” issues and accomplishments, they each publish the writing of women almost exclusively, and other forms of

⁴ The selected publications mentioned here are not necessarily included because of their own self-identification as “Third Wave” feminist, but rather because of their positions within the women’s media as alternatives to mainstream magazines, their demographics of educated women ages 18 to 35 and their origins within the last decade.

oppression, for example those based on race, class, ability, ethnicity etc., are only ever addressed secondarily⁵. Unfortunately, although they have come to represent a Third Wave politics of difference, their manifestations are remarkably monolithic, exemplifying a Third Wave that is significantly different in practice than in theory.

The Canadian feminist media is also complicit in representing the Third Wave in narrow terms. Although **good girl** is the only Canadian magazine targeted primarily at younger, politically-minded feminist (self-identified or not) women, other members of Canada's (struggling) feminist print media industry do attempt to speak to and on behalf of the "Third Wave" generation. After the 2001 publication of *Turbo Chicks: Talking Young Feminisms*, a Canadian anthology of diverse young feminist voices, editors Lisa Rundle, Allyson Mitchell and Lara Karaian became the Canadian spokespeople for "young" feminism, and were subsequently featured on the cover of **Herizons** magazine for an issue themed "The Future of Feminism."⁶ The cover story marked an exciting step for **Herizons**, which is Canada's most established (having been in publication for ten years) and "popular"⁷ feminist magazine. **Herizons** has never been targeted specifically at young feminists, however the 2002 interview with Rundle, Mitchell and Karaian provided an open, challenging representation of the Third Wave. This move by **Herizons** to attract a younger, more diverse crowd, demonstrates a commendable, if at times laboured, commitment to representing more generational as well as cultural diversity within the magazine.

This initial step was followed up with the launch of **Herizons**' "Third Wave" column, written by Lisa Rundle and entitled, somewhat ironically, "Beyond the Box." Unfortunately, Rundle's column in the Spring 2003 of **Herizons** managed to keep the third wave exactly there – in its box – and is an excellent example of how complicated, open theoretical possibilities can be unsatisfactorily summed up by the media in a single work or symbol. Near the beginning of the article Rundle writes, "'first wave: the vote.' Slow nods. 'Second wave: bra-burning.' Nods again. 'Third...' pause, scanning brain for word. 'Third wave: vibrators!' Nods, smiles."⁸ Though not the

⁵ It should be noted that **Bitch** magazine is significantly more conscious in its coverage of different oppressions than is either **BUST** or **Venus**.

⁶ **Herizons**, 2002, Vol. 16. No. 2.

⁷ "Canada's most popular feminist magazine." www.herizons.ca

⁸ **Herizons**, 2003, Vol. 16. No. 4.

intention of the article⁹, the approach taken felt alarmingly similar to how feminism has been represented by the mainstream media throughout its history. It seems that even the feminist media (and even Third Wave cultural producers themselves!) is complicit in placing limitations on the possibilities of what a Third Wave feminist politics could mean.

Such narrow media representations of feminism, and the apparent limitations to representing more diverse and intersecting experiences of oppression by women and men is testament to the fact that Third Wave politics may not be as open or inclusive in practice as hoped, and may as a result be ironically inappropriate for representing **good girl**, a self-identified feminist project. Unfortunately, by labelling **good girl** Third Wave feminist practice, we become limited by whatever definition of the Third Wave is most commonly represented. And because of its origins and history, feminism (and even Third Wave feminisms) may always necessarily be understood as being primarily about gender and women, a connotation that will continue to limit, to some degree, a feminist discussion to a discussion of gender and cause potential readers to make assumptions about the content of the magazine before ever reading it. It is for this reason that we have consciously avoided labelling **good girl** as feminist within our mandate and Business Plan. By doing so, it is not our hope to remove **good girl** from feminist communities and discussions, but rather to inspire contributors and readers to expand their own understandings of what feminisms can mean.

⁹ Rundle goes on to write, “This isn’t the first time a feminist symbol has been used to trivialize instead of mobilize. Thatbra burning I mentioned in the meeting? It never happened. But that didn’t stop it from becoming The Symbol of second wave feminism, used for good and for evil.”

b. Diversity vs. Difference: Moving from Feminism to Anti-Oppression

...Don't look at me with guilt Don't apologize Don't struggle
with the problem of racism like algebra
Don't write a paper on it for me to read or hold a meeting in
which you discuss what to do to get us to come to your
time & and your place...

- Chrystos¹⁰

How should **good girl** choose to identify itself, if not as feminist? If the purpose of **good girl** is to attempt to open itself as broadly as possible to a discussion of multiple, intersecting oppressions, and to engage an audience as wide as possible in such a discussion, then it needs to define itself in terms as broad as possible. For this reason, we have begun to consider a politics of anti-oppression as a sufficiently far reaching philosophy, one that is not only akin to feminism in its aims, but which also encompasses all forms of oppression.

The hope for **good girl** is that it will be possible to create and sustain a discussion that does not default to gender issues to the exclusion of other forms of oppression. Our goals are two-fold: theoretical, in that we hope to critically reframe feminist discussion in a way that connects it meaningfully to other social movements; and practical, in that by expanding **good girl's** editorial mandate beyond a discussion of gender/women's issues to instead use anti-oppression perspectives to explore a wide range of topics that are not generally covered in the "women's" media, we will in effect be carving out a niche within the magazine industry that is not currently being filled. In order to explore the practical realities of building diversity within **good girl** however, it is necessary to first consider some of the critical questions around the issue of representing difference and diversity.

Perhaps one of **good girl's** most fundamental challenges has been to clearly understand and articulate the differences between "diversity" and "difference." Canada's version of multiculturalism cannot be celebrated unproblematically or ahistorically, and as publisher my own privileged place as a member of the "core community...a national we", with the relative power to define diversity, must be consciously and consistently acknowledged.¹¹

¹⁰ Chrystos. 1988. Pp. 13

¹¹ "The core community is synthesized into a national we, and it decides on the terms of multiculturalism and the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated." (Bannerji, pp. 42)

Himani Bannerji argues that within the specific historical context of multicultural Canada, the concept of diversity depoliticizes the complex social relations between people of different cultures. Because the concept of difference lends itself to comparison and judgment based on an accepted norm, Bannerji argues that it (difference) is “a much better heuristic device...for understanding situations which both imply and call for politics.”¹² Within the context of **good girl**, no difference can remain neutral – all communication across difference must be consciously politicized.

This brings us back to the issue of finding ways to speak about identity without essentializing it. Historically, Western feminism has commonly been criticized for its assumption of a universal experience of “womanhood,” an assumption that does not adequately take into account differences such as race and class. The historical tendency of White, Western feminism to homogenize all women into a shared experience of “woman” is, by its very nature, potentially alienating, exclusionary and oppressive, and fails to address the ways in which different forms of oppression necessarily intersect with the experience of being a woman.

Drawing instead on our “multiple intersecting differences” as resources, in order to work against interlocking oppressions,¹³ might facilitate the navigation of both the presence of difference and the need for a commitment to social equality more successfully. Through this understanding of difference, the title “good girl” represents not a shared experience, but rather an intersection point around which participants might orient themselves in order to explore their differences. And by acknowledging that “all knowings are partial, (and) that there are fundamental things each of us cannot know,”¹⁴ we can embrace difference as a resource across which we can communicate to work against oppression. “Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening.”¹⁵

It is impossible to explore how one is oppressed without acknowledging how we are all also always implicated in oppression, often privileged in some aspects of identity while

¹² Bannerji, pp. 52

¹³ Fraser, 1996.

¹⁴ Ellsworth, pp. 101

¹⁵ Lorde, pp. 112

simultaneously marginalized in others. Although there has, within **good girl**, been some limited acknowledgement of the dual role of oppressor and oppressed that all humans share, there has tended to be a focus on the role of women as oppressed people, and the ways in which women might also oppress has remained largely undiscussed. This “race to innocence”¹⁶ has made it possible to focus on the experience of sexism without understanding how this may exclude other experiences of oppression.

By using only standard written English, **good girl** may exclude not only people with different levels of education, differing abilities and those for whom English is not their first language, but also people who simply choose forms of communication other than writing to express themselves. This process of exclusion may speak to the limitations of print media generally, including the independent press and even zine culture. For Iris Marion Young, the expansion of the definition of acceptable forms and styles of speech is a fundamental aspect of developing truly communicative democratic and educational settings.¹⁷ One factor that may support this expansion in projects such as **good girl** is the Internet, which makes possible the wide and inexpensive dissemination of information in a variety of mediums (e.g., video, animation, sound, etc.). But even if **good girl** was able to include all forms of expression, is it ever possible for people not part of the hegemonic “core” to express their experiences without being condemned to represent the symbolic Other?¹⁸ Does homogenizing language, for example “visible minority” or “women of colour”, make it impossible to be inclusive of difference without creating an us/them relationship?¹⁹ How do we overcome fear and become accountable for the privilege that we have? When we do consciously bring forward issues of difference, is it possible to do so without recreating the pain of the discrimination?²⁰ As Fyre Jean Graveline reminds us: “The painful reality is that retelling our experience means reliving it.”²¹

These are all questions that need to be explored, but perhaps the most fundamental question to ask is this: why is difference important for **good girl**? Our mandate is to create a non-oppressive media resource. It is therefore impossible to consider one form of oppression without

¹⁶ Razack, pp. 14

¹⁷ Young, pp. 124

¹⁸ Adams, pp. 3

¹⁹ Bannerji, pp. 29

²⁰ Adams, pp. 7

²¹ Graveline, pp. 231

considering all the others, and it is impossible to work against being oppressed without also working against being oppressive. Beginning to understand these complex systems of oppression is a process that is impossible to undertake without the support of all of **good girl's** participants – my own partial knowledge cannot navigate difference alone, and it is for this reason that the partial knowledges of many different voices must come together.²²

One of the primary reasons for considering a move away from “feminism” towards a more “anti-oppression” based approach came from a simple analysis of **good girl's** editorial content to date, through which it was possible to note some troubling tendencies. Specifically, there are two significant struggles that we have confronted in developing **good girl's** content: 1) the cultural and experiential “diversity” of **good girl's** contributors has generally been relatively limited, and 2) contributors to **good girl** have generally seemed content to use personal narrative to explore their own experiences of oppression (generally this has been limited to an analysis of personal gender oppression) without acknowledging the ways they themselves may be implicated in oppression or making meaningful connections to a broader social context.

The work towards developing difference in magazine publishing is not unique to **good girl** – cultural diversity in particular is a recognized challenge within the independent press. Although the issue of diverse, non-oppressive representation has not yet been adequately addressed within the independent magazine publishing community, there have been some practical steps taken to support independent magazines in broaching the issue. In particular, the Independent Press Association (IPA), an American organization that represents independent press in the US (and to a lesser extent Canada), has taken initiatives such as publishing a handbook entitled *No More Excuses: Building Diversity at Your Publication*, and developing fellowships for journalists of colour within the independent press. The IPA's “diversity handbook” reflects a sharp contrast between theoretical and practical approaches to cultural diversity, with many of their recommendations seeming simplistic and lacking in sensitivity. However, it may be that in practice such a forthright, heavy-handed approach might be what is necessary to make real strides, even if it seems to rely on tokenism for its initial steps.

²² Ellsworth, pp. 101

In terms of possible approaches that **good girl** can take for developing difference within its editorial content, the IPA's approach is both appealing and troubling. On one hand, the acknowledgement that progress will not be made without tackling the problem head-on, in straightforward, proactive terms, is refreshing in that it discourages tip-toeing around the issue and recommends instead being completely upfront about the goal to improve the diversity of representation within a publication. On the other hand, such an approach may lack the subtlety needed to avoid problems such as tokenism and pigeonholing. For example, although having a "race" column within a magazine may be preferable to having no race analysis within the editorial content, it would be preferable still to include race analysis and awareness throughout the content, and not simply coming from the "diverse" contributor whose implied job and expertise are that they can represent race issues.

Similarly, although having access to more diverse contributors may improve access to and coverage of specific events, communities or issues, it would be neither desirable nor acceptable to limit contributors to a discussion of their own experience of oppression. For example, it is already a recognized challenge that **good girl** contributors have tended to limit their analyses to their own personal experiences of oppression (mostly related to gender), so it would be no different to develop the diversity of contributors only to have them limit their discussions to analyses of their own oppressions, whether those be based in class, ability, culture or race.

Instead, we hope to develop **good girl's** editorial content by fostering a different approach to journalism that will support the creation of a diverse, engaging, non-oppressive and socially responsible discussion.²³ This approach is twofold: first, it involves a conscious effort to expand editorial content to include discussion of a wide variety of topics, with an overt focus on anti-oppression awareness and analysis. In other words, in moving towards an "anti-oppression" mandate, **good girl's** goal is not to limit itself to a discussion of "anti-oppression" *topics*, but rather to explore a broad range of relevant social, political, cultural and environmental topics from an anti-oppression *framework*. This approach also challenges contributors (and readers) to

²³ An important part of this process will be for an outside consultant to undertake a "diversity audit" of **good girl's** editorial content and help us in further developing our Editorial Strategy. Please see Section VIII – Editorial Strategy for elaboration.

explore all kinds of topics with a consistent critical awareness of their implications to social justice.

The second aspect of **good girl's** approach to editorial development addresses the apparent reluctance of many writers to make meaningful connections beyond their personal experiences to a broader social context. Writers often tend towards focusing on the personal to the point of sacrificing social, cultural or political context. This can result in a sense of extreme individualism that favours the personal to the exclusion of context or communication across difference.

Although **good girl** has found itself in something of a rut of “personal narrative,” the validity of making personal location, experience and accountability a focus of meaningful, contextualized writing continues to be recognized. However, what has become increasingly apparent throughout **good girl's** development is the need to find a meaningful balance between “objectivity” and “subjectivity” (yet another problematic binary) in our published writing. Our goal is to move towards this balance by seeking out and encouraging contributors who are willing to consciously contextualize their writing both personally *and* within a larger social context. Moving in this direction will address both the inability for traditional, “objective” journalism to acknowledge and address the subjectivity of representation, as well as the tendency for personal narrative to overlook the importance of using personal voice and subjectivity to speak *beyond* personal experience, *for* an audience and *with* broad social meaning.

Will a broader anti-oppression approach have implications for **good girl** in the marketplace? Possibly, since in order to successfully market a business it is important to have a clearly defined demographic. Can a defined demographic, such as “women ages 18 to 35,” be reconciled with the goal of opening up **good girl's** social and political vision beyond the limited approach that typical feminist media is currently taking? If it cannot, would it make sense for **good girl** to attempt to open its focus up to include other demographics entirely? Probably not, however what we are committed to is pushing the boundaries of what is currently being represented in the media. And generally, what this means for the “women’s media” is that women as a monolithic group are perceived to be interested in only a narrow scope of issues, those deemed “women’s issues”. So the priority for **good girl** is not necessarily to change its demographic, but rather to challenge and change the assumptions about what our demographic is and does and thinks. We acknowledge that this will probably involve changing not only the attitudes of the media itself, but also changing the attitudes of our own demographic, by

challenging them to be more open to issues and analyses that are not generally provided to them by the rest of the media. Whether or not we succeed in this is something that only time will tell.

c. The Paradox of *good girl* as Feminist Business

In addition to **good girl** existing within the context of feminist media, it is also, and perhaps primarily, a feminist business run by women. Many assumptions exist about the nature of running a feminist business, and **good girl** continues to struggle with reconciling theory and practice to find a non-oppressive but realistic organizational model. Interestingly, many of the challenges that we have faced are binary in their nature, resurrecting a recurring theme and begging the question of whether a more complicated, intersecting mode of thought would be of value when reconciling **good girl's** organizational structure as theorized practice.

In the process of developing **good girl's** Business Plan, it has become increasingly clear that **good girl's** location as a feminist, women-run business is relevant to more than our organizational structure. It is also a part of our ongoing political statement. For **good girl** to be able to act as an example of a socially and environmentally responsible, feminist business is a crucial aspect of the project's mandate. It also necessitates that **good girl's** structure and all of its processes are located within the historical context of women's work in Canada. In the course of developing **good girl's** Business Plan, several critical issues related to work arose, including the nature of paid vs. unpaid work, feminization and racialization of labour, the school-to-work transition for young Canadians, individual vs. collective processes, and the commonly held association of feminist work with charitable work. The following section will explore these issues in greater depth.

* * *

Historically, the majority of women's work has operated outside of the paid economy. The tradition of women's unpaid labour, which ranges from childcare to domestic labour to volunteerism, has resulted in a devaluation of women's work that is ever-present, and which is compounded by the fact that the skills that women often bring to their work, such as listening, communication, empathy, etc., are in many cases considered to be "natural talents" rather than legitimate skills²⁴.

As a project with limited resources, **good girl** relies heavily on unpaid volunteer labour, primarily that of women, for survival. This reality places all women who have been involved with **good girl** in a position with significant historical, socio-economic and political implications, whereby

²⁴ Buchanan, 2000, pp. vi

the work involved with the project has not been recognized as part of the paid economy, and therefore falls into the unpaid sector, which is historically most associated with women and less valued. **good girl** is not alone in this position, with most other feminist magazines rarely offering payment to contributors.

This structure, which will most likely be the continued reality for **good girl**, even in the most optimistic situation projected within the Business Plan, must nonetheless be critically and historically contextualized, with the understanding that in our society, labour recognized financially is generally more highly valued than that which is donated on a voluntary basis. Not only must **good girl** recognize that it has been and will most likely continue to be unable to compensate its participants in the most culturally valued way, but we must also reconcile ourselves to the fact that most of our contributors will most likely never value their work for **good girl** as greatly as work done for financial remuneration. Even if/when this is not the case, our expectations as publishers must necessarily be less because we are relying on the free and voluntary work of contributors. In addition to the social implications of this work dynamic, there are also real legal implications, for example the relevance of contracts, as well as implications for **good girl's** ability to compete alongside publications with greater resources.

The evolving relationship of Canadians to unpaid work is also exemplified by the changing relationships to work of young Canadians. This is also extremely relevant to **good girl**, since as a magazine with a younger demographic it has been mostly younger people at the beginning of their career paths who have participated in the project. The changing way that young people are making the transition from school to work is of utmost importance to an analysis of **good girl's** structure as a work environment. For example, it is becoming increasingly necessary for young people to gain experience through unpaid labour (e.g., internships, volunteering) in order to become employable. There are many consequences of this, ranging from a longer, more difficult transition into the paid workforce, to increasing student debt. Since **good girl** has and will continue to rely on the unpaid work of young people, this "school-to-work" transition is extremely relevant. In essence, **good girl**, like many other organizations, both for- and not-for-profit, is capitalizing on the expectation of free labour from youth that positions them as less valued within the structure of the paid economy. Additionally, although internships are now a given for many young people looking to begin careers in journalism, the reality is that they are being trained for a field that does not necessarily have enough paid jobs to accommodate them. This

is particularly true of jobs in media that is more socially responsible and can therefore rarely offer sufficient financial compensation. The result: a student may be able to participate as an unpaid intern in a media project for social justice that would never actually be able to hire them on a paid basis.

Because **good girl** relies mostly on young women for their unpaid labour, there is an added gender dynamic that cannot be ignored. The documented growth of the service industry combined with the move towards a more “flexible” labour force has resulted in the creation of an increased number of so-called “bad” jobs, in other words jobs that are more poorly compensated, less secure, and non-standard (part-time, temporary or casual). Theorists have coined these changes the “feminization of labour”, and identify two phases in the process: not only have women entered the work force en masse in the past 30 years, thus “feminizing” the labour market, but the types of jobs being created are representative of the devalued or “bad” jobs that have traditionally been associated with “women’s work”²⁵. The end result is that there are fewer “good” jobs to go around, and although this ultimately impacts both men and women, it has been shown that women are still disproportionately represented in “bad” jobs. This is despite the fact that women invest and succeed as much as men in post-secondary education.

There is also growing evidence to suggest that a related “racialization of labour” is occurring in Canada, whereby there exists an increasing socio-economic polarization between Canada’s racialized and non-racialized groups.

Income, sectoral occupation, and unemployment data show that a racialised labour market is an endemic feature of the Canadian economy. Characteristic of the racial and gender labour market segmentation is the overrepresentation of racialised (particularly women) members in low paid, low end occupations and low income sectors, and also temporary work. They are especially over-represented in low end service sector jobs and precarious and unregulated temporary or contingent work. Conversely they are underrepresented in high paying occupations and high income sectors²⁶.

It is clear that race and gender interact to position racialized women as a particularly vulnerable group of the population, and these findings are particularly disturbing within a Canadian context, where racialized groups make up nearly one fifth of the population. Unfortunately, since

²⁵ Buchanan & Koch-Schulte, 2000, pp.4

²⁶ Galabuzi, 2001, pp.6

Canada's approach to addressing ethnic and racial differences has tended to be largely romantic, coating issues of race and ethnicity with the unproblematic veneers of "diversity" and "multiculturalism", there is insufficient research available on the effects of racialization on young people entering specific fields.

Post-secondary education cannot continue to be unproblematically offered up as a panacea for youth in their transition from school to work without careful consideration of the following questions: What jobs await Canadian youth as they enter the labour market? And do some groups of youth, for example young women or racialized groups, benefit less in the long term from their investments in post-secondary education, due to continued inequity and the rise of the feminization and racialization of labour? For **good girl**, these are all relevant and necessary questions to consider in present and future relationships with young people, whether paid or unpaid.

In addition to the commonly referenced service sector, it may also be possible to add new examples to the list of "feminized" industries. For example, a so-called "pink collar" is becoming recognized in the publishing industry, where women remain underrepresented in high power, corporate industry positions, but over-represented in smaller publications, particularly those focused on social justice, or those structured as not-for-profit organizations. In addition to this lack of balance in representation between women and men, it is also notable that the areas in publishing where women are over-represented exhibit the same symptoms of "feminization" as do other feminized sectors, including low or no pay, part-time hours, temporary contracts, etc.

Other feminized sectors that are developing include the small business sector and the not-for-profit sector. With more women launching new small businesses than men, and with countless programs available to support them in the start-ups, the critical questions arise fast and furious: Are most women actually able to make a living wage through small business, or is another marginalized sector simply being created, one that may not be economically viable enough to support women and their families? Similarly, while the increasing representation of women at all levels of the not-for-profit sector may seem positive, one must ask whether this overrepresentation is simply an example of women being ghettoized into sectors that require so-called feminine characteristics, such as empathy, caring, compassion, etc. While women may be finding greater representation and better opportunities in both the small business and not-for-

profit sectors, it can be argued that neither industry is generally perceived to participate on the same level as “real” or “big” business.

What does this mean for **good girl**? Well, as a small business, **good girl** has never provided a living wage or standard working conditions to any of its participants, despite taking up more time than typical volunteer positions. And as a business committed to increased social justice, in some ways **good girl** does fall into the charitable or not-for-profit sector, despite being technically structured as a for-profit organization. Finally, as a small magazine, **good girl** operates outside of big business publishing, which is where the majority of men and money reside. All of these aspects of **good girl's** context have informed the business planning process. What should **good girl's** structure be and why? And how can we achieve such a structure once it is chosen?

* * *

One common myth associated with feminist organizations is that they operate collectively and not hierarchically. Such issues of hierarchy, leadership and collectivity have challenged **good girl** since the formation of an editorial board in 2002. Over the course of publishing the first two issues of **good girl**, I began to recognize the need for more perspectives than my own in order to move the project in a less oppressive, more accountable direction. So I put out a call for volunteers and formed a 12 person “editorial” board. Having little previous experience in collective processes, I hoped that we could develop our roles and processes as a group, democratically and collectively.

While the board has had some successes during the year it has been together, there have also been several serious challenges to functioning as an effective body. These included a lack of resources on my part to manage the board, a lack of clarity on the part of board members as to what their responsibilities included, a lack of communication, unequal levels of commitment and initiative, an expectation (coming from both myself and others) of me to fulfil the role of leader or “boss”, and in some cases a resentment of me as the “owner” of the business who was “benefiting” from the board’s unpaid labour (although my labour has also always been unpaid). Unfortunately, because the board was formed before I had assessed the actual needs of the project, I found myself with a group of volunteers interested in **good girl's** editorial

development, while in reality it has turned out that support is mostly needed in the areas of fund development, circulation and marketing. All in all, it has been a difficult process, with little decided apart from the necessity for the structure to change.

What was interesting about the process was that I had to come to terms with the fact that collective does not mean leaderless, and that in any group dynamic there will be certain people who take on more of a leadership role. I also came to understand that working collectively does not require that everyone's role be the same – in fact, it was detrimental to the process to lack clear roles for the individuals making up the board. These are all issues that are addressed in more detail within the new board guidelines, written by Candis Steenbergen (please see Appendix G – Board Guidelines).

Several positive developments have also come out of the original editorial board, most notably the involvement of certain individuals who have shown great commitment to the project. Most notably, Candis Steenbergen, an original board member, has increased her involvement with **good girl** by taking on editorial responsibilities, and is included in the Business Plan as one of two part-time staff members (Editor) and business partner. All in all the experience of developing the role of the board has been extremely valuable, and has huge potential for future evolution.

It is important to recognize yet another myth associated with feminist organizations, which is that feminist and other social justice work is most often expected or assumed to operate only within the not-for-profit or charitable sector. This means that examples of for-profit feminist businesses committed to social justice and to creating alternatives to mainstream business models are rare. To act as such an example is one of the reasons that **good girl** has remained committed to operating in a for-profit model. It has been suggested countless times that **good girl** consider becoming a not-for-profit organization, with some people even going so far as to imply that a for-profit, “capitalist” model is incongruent to a feminist, social justice mandate. The fact that for-profit feminist businesses are so rare, and that feminist organizations are often expected to operate within a not-for-profit or charitable structure is disturbing in that it not only positions typical feminist and social justice projects well outside of the mainstream, but also that it forces such projects into organizational structures that are not generally self-sufficient, but

rather rely on philanthropic, government, academic or charitable funding, much of which is unreliable over a longer term.

The larger structure supports this dependency. For example, eligibility for funding generally requires charitable status, which makes it difficult or impossible for organizations functioning within a for-profit model to find funding. On the other hand, because the for-profit business environment is not set up to facilitate the sustainability of socially and environmentally organizations, it is also difficult for such organizations to find success as for-profit businesses. It may be a lose-lose situation for an organization such as **good girl**, which firmly believes in the need for feminist businesses to be able to sustain themselves financially and challenge the accepted “feminism/social justice=charity” framework. This association of feminism with charity is symbolic of so much, ranging from the marginal position of social responsibility as a priority within the standard business model and society as a whole, to feminists’ own conceptions of the value of their own and their colleagues’ work as somehow being charitable in nature.

As this association between feminism and charity has become more pronounced in my experience, I have become increasingly committed to **good girl’s** “for-profit” organizational structure, and to the general importance of alternative for-profit models to the standard business structure, which marginalizes social responsibility rather than keeping it front and centre. At the same time, the reality of the magazine industry is such that profitability is unlikely within a for-profit model. This means that something new will have to be created – a kind of hybrid – if **good girl** is to find a way to survive and thrive.

Also wound up in its feminist implications is **good girl’s** role as my personal project, one with significant implications to both my personal life and the political articulation of my feminist practice. I have put in countless hours of unpaid labour which will unlikely ever be recouped, and I have sacrificed physical, mental, emotional and spiritual quality of life as a result of the project. Unfortunately, the sacrifices I have made for **good girl** beg critical questions about the nature of feminist and activist work. Is the cost of activist work too great if limited resources and rewards result in a negative impact to well being? And can feminist work be considered successful if it strives for better quality of life for all but does not respect or care for its own? Is **good girl** simply perpetuating unreasonable expectations by working for the betterment of others but to the detriment of oneself (not coincidentally a long standing cultural tradition for

women)? These are the questions I've been forced to grapple with as **good girl's** evolution has coincided with my own struggle with depression, burnout and decaying health and relationships. Alongside all of the ambitious planning for this project has simultaneously existed serious dilemmas: Is this worth it? And at what cost? Where does work end and life begin? And can work be meaningful without it being all consuming and self-destructive? These aspects of **good girl's** existence as a feminist work environment are not inconsequential as we begin to use our Business Plan to move towards **good girl's** continued growth. Within the Business Plan itself, this issue is addressed in part by the conscious inclusion of a living wage for key participants, including myself and Candis, the purpose of which is to avoid, at all cost, working two or even three jobs as part of our feminist practice. Although money is certainly not enough to address quality of life issues, valuing our own positions within the project is a first step in creating a truly feminist work environment.

d. Possibilities for Critical Education through *good girl*

In North America, the media plays an important role in mediating people's understanding of the world, and it is because of this intervention that it is possible to understand relationships with the media as forms of education. The current role of the mainstream media can be understood as education in its most conventional sense: the people who "know" (the experts) provide answers to questions, thus imparting "knowledge" to the people who do not "know" (everyone not involved with the production and/or control of media). However, because the mainstream media is increasingly driven by corporate interest and profit, the information and representation provided are answers to questions that are not necessarily asked by those who are "learning" from the exchange. This can result in the discouragement of critical and independent questioning (what Paulo Freire calls the "castration of curiosity"²⁷), and constant bombardment by the mainstream media can make it difficult to avoid this effect. This process is overtly exemplified by mainstream women's magazines, where the editorial content is driven (and in many cases dictated) by corporate advertisers²⁸ that often take up 80% or more of total pages and inundate women with damaging answers to (unasked) questions regarding how women should be and live. This representation of women is not only negative, but it also excludes the majority of women and erases the richness of women's different experiences.

good girl was inspired through a realization of the potential for alternative forms of media to educate in critical and transformative ways. Over the last decade, the increasing availability and accessibility of communications technologies have made possible an explosion of small-scale, independent forms of media. The result had been the emergence of innumerable independent media projects, many of which have taken the form of zines, e-zines and small magazines. This is one factor that has helped facilitate the development of Third Wave feminism, with younger generations of feminists having the opportunity to represent themselves in ways that subvert representations upheld by the mainstream media. Within alternative media it may be possible to create spaces in which people can draw on their own knowledge and experience to subvert the mainstream media's representation of them and instead represent themselves. Through this, alternative media may have the potential to become a truly communicative educational tool,

²⁷ Freire, pp. 35

²⁸ Steinem, Gloria. 1994. *Sex, Lies, and Advertising in Moving Beyond Words*. Simon & Schuster: New York. In this article, Gloria Steinem provides an exposé of advertising in mainstream women's magazines, and describes her own struggles with advertising ethics at **Ms.** magazine, until 1990 when **Ms.** went advertising free.

through which we might use difference as a resource, and travel across differences to work against oppression.

Although small publications such as **good girl** are independent and, in many cases, progressive, there are limitations to using zines and other types of small alternative print media as forms of critical and anti-oppression education. In many cases zines reach only a limited number of people in a narrow community, and are therefore often not an effective way to communicate across different groups. This aspect of zine culture seems somehow reminiscent of the tendency discussed previously for contributors to **good girl** to write from personal experience without making connections to the broader social context²⁹. Critiques of alternative media in general also suggest that it may still exclude many types of expression, for example oral forms of communication such as storytelling, spoken word and hip-hop, which may not yet have entirely legitimate voices within alternative media. This potential for exclusion is but one example of obstacles that exist that may limit the transformative educational potential of alternative media. In **good girl's** case, we have decided to take the form of the mainstream (in that we are distributed in the same way and to the same stores as mainstream magazines) in order to extend our reach as far as possible. Although there are benefits to this approach, there is undoubtedly also exclusion that occurs and sacrifices involved in trying to exist simultaneously in both counter and mainstream cultures.

In exploring **good girl's** potential to act as a critical education project, it is also necessary to critique my own dual, contradictory role as critical educator and “neutral” facilitator. By refusing to acknowledge the struggle between political and neutral, I risk falling into a trap described by Elizabeth Ellsworth: “Strategies such as student empowerment and dialogue give the illusion of equality while in fact leaving the authoritarian nature of the teacher/student intact”³⁰. In other words, it is difficult to find a non-oppressive, effective balance between facilitating the expression of **good girl's** contributors and using my authority to manipulate and coerce them in the direction of the project's political agenda. This raises questions that harken back to our discussion of leadership within a collective group: is it possible to be in an accountable

²⁹ However, networks such as the grrrlzine network (www.grrrlzines.net) demonstrate a definite interest and willingness to make connections and share and listen to ideas.

³⁰ Ellsworth, pp. 98

leadership role that directs the political agenda of a project without also being coercive and manipulative? I honestly don't know.

What I do believe is that if anything can help change the world, it has to be the media. The media has an undeniably extensive reach, and if it evolved towards greater social and environmental responsibility, the world would necessarily be affected. I have and continue to see **good girl** as a critical education project, and as problematic as media is (even critical media), my belief in its revolutionary power is one of the primary reasons that I am still publishing **good girl**.

In addition to its critical anti-oppression and feminist mandate and content, **good girl** has the potential to promote critical education in two other specific ways, by offering professional skills development opportunities for youth, and by acting as a media and consumer literacy project. However, both of these roles must be reconciled with the practical realities of running **good girl** as a business. For example, **good girl** cannot claim to provide opportunities to young people to develop professional skills without a critical awareness of its own position within the school-to-work transition, as discussed above. In other words, can a professional skills development program based on free labour operate non-oppressively as a critical education project? Or is it simply a convenient, complicit justification for doing what everyone else in the industry (and larger business world) seems to be doing: taking advantage of the changing nature of education to benefit from the free labour of young people. These questions are especially relevant to the magazine industry, which is profiting from the free labour of youth who are being trained in an industry where there are few good jobs available, and where free or "volunteer" labour is often a life-long expectation. If **good girl** is to seriously consider developing a professional skills development program as an aspect of its critical education work, we will have to consciously bring these critical questions into our working relationships with volunteers, in order to be able to critically name, engage and challenge the contradictions involved with the situation.

The possibility for **good girl** to promote consumer and media literacy as part of its mandate has been a focus since its inception, and is one of the primary reasons for the ambitious planning for growth and expansion. Magazines are unique in that it is possible for progressive, independent voices to exist in the same format as the mainstream, fitting in with and sitting on the same shelves as the corporate giants. Although it is certainly no easy feat for small, independent

magazines to find this space on the newsstand next to their mainstream counterparts, smaller magazines nonetheless have the potential to access a wide range of people who may not generally have access to alternative, critical media. By existing in the same format and environment as the mainstream, it is possible to challenge the media from the inside. By making a conscious decision to take the form of a magazine and not a 'zine, and in so doing existing in the form of and yet also being critical of mainstream magazines, it is possible for **good girl** to truly reach and engage people that may not have interest in or access to ideas about social and environmental justice, to facilitate an awareness in their own agency and accountability as media consumers, and to reach them on a large scale.

Unfortunately, although the purpose of **good girl** is to provide a widely available alternative to the mainstream media, the reality for the majority of independent magazines is that a lot of work goes into reaching very few people. In order for **good girl** to reach beyond simply “preaching to the converted” (i.e., those people who already come to media with some degree of critical literacy and awareness) and actually reach and engage new people with challenging ideas, it is necessary for our Business Plan to be comprehensive, addressing both marketing and editorial issues related to reaching, engaging and keeping audience.

Another factor that affects **good girl's** reach is the way that ideas are expressed and communicated. It is not uncommon for writing about complicated, progressive or challenging issues or ideas to default into an academic style that is most commonly used for explorations of theoretical ideas. Because **good girl's** audience (and hence pool of contributors) of the “already converted” tend to be educated through the academy, our contributors have tended towards writing in a more academic style that is not necessarily accessible without academic experience and background. If it is to survive as a magazine rather than academic journal, the challenge for **good girl** will continue to be to take complicated ideas and express them in an accessible, engaging, entertaining way. **good girl** must be responsible for making content accessible to as many people as possible in order to succeed as a critical education project (as well as a business that knows who its market is and what they want).

IV. Conclusion: Where does *good girl* go from here?

The purpose of creating a Business Plan for **good girl** was to articulate and organize possibilities in order to make them into realities. Because of the nature of such a project, however, innumerable irreconcilable contradictions persist, no matter how consistently or critically they are addressed. To a certain extent, this reality leaves us with little choice but to simply “embrace the contradictions and find within them the possibilities for moving forward”.³¹

While this may necessarily continue to be **good girl’s** philosophy, the planning process has, somewhat surprisingly, led to a place of increased clarity in some areas, with certain key priorities being identified, explored and grounded: 1) that our feminist politics need to be expanded beyond the current practices of the feminist media, which focuses primarily on “women’s” issues, to include a broad-based anti-oppression analysis of a wide variety of socially and culturally relevant issues; 2) to focus on being as accessible as possible, both by publishing engaging, relevant editorial content, and by reaching out as broadly as possible to as many readers as possible; and 3) to operate within a for-profit structure as an example of a self-sustainable, feminist alternative to the standard business model. If these priorities are clear, the next most crucial question is how to most effectively share and develop **good girl’s** message with the widest possible audience.

In Canada particularly, magazine publishing is probably one of the most difficult industries to succeed in. Now that I know much more about the industry and have formulated a plan based on practical realities and my own goals, resources and limitations, it is necessary to re-evaluate what is possible, and how to get there. In some ways, this involves experimenting with and developing new and uncommon ways to do business. Practical examples may include:

1. Collaboration with other magazines to coordinate production of magazines and marketing materials. Pooling the resources of smaller magazines would make it possible to improve the cost-efficiency of production, and perhaps even make it possible to access materials that are often neither available nor feasible, such as

³¹ Barndt, pp.51

recycled paper. Through collaboration, small magazines could benefit from the same economies of scale that larger magazines exploit for profitability.

2. Developing ethical advertising content with the aim of media and consumer literacy. This could involve not only the conscious research and selection of socially and environmentally responsible advertisers for publication in **good girl**, but also a commitment to providing readers with sufficient information about advertising companies to be able to make informed decisions about their consumer choices, as well as information and resources to develop their media and consumer literacy.
3. Creating a model of investment that combines for-profit and philanthropic models. This will involve approaching socially responsible investors with opportunities for investment in **good girl**. Although there would be some risk involved with such an investment, a reasonable return is also possible over several years. In this way, investors are offered the chance of a return as with other business investments, however their main interest in **good girl** would ideally primarily be in its potential to affect social change.

Ultimately, most discussions inevitably return to two simple questions: Can **good girl** be a healthy business? And can I be a healthy person within it? One thing that has remained clear for me is that **good girl** is not the last project I will work on, nor is magazine publishing the last industry I will work in. Maintaining this detachment will hopefully support light-heartedness in my practice – one that will also let me know when it is time to move on. One aspect of this light-heartedness is **good girl's** commitment to humour and play.

Although it is important to stay conscious of the reality that exploring issues of oppression and communicating across difference are not safe or comfortable processes³², I maintain that it is important to focus on play within **good girl**. As Denise Nadeau points out, “Organizing must do more than just get people to think critically; it must wake up bodies and spirits numbed by overwork, exhaustion, or the tyranny of the dominant culture.”³³ An emphasis on life, awakening and fun makes it possible to stay sane and engaged. “An Iglulik proverb says, ‘Those who know how to play can easily leap over the adversaries of life. And one who knows how to sing

³² hooks, pp. 41, Reagon, pp. 359

³³ Nadeau, pp. 6

and laugh never brews mischief.”³⁴ Fostering such laughter is, ultimately, my vision for both **good girl** and myself.

³⁴ Graveline, pp. 213

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