

Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
Gender and Women's Studies Program

Ethnography of the University Application 2007-2008

Applicant:
Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
Gender and Women's Studies Program
911 S. Sixth St.
Champaign, IL 61820

Narrative Statement of Interest

I am writing to express my interest in participating in Ethnography of the University during the 2007-2008 academic school year. In the spring of 2008, I am teaching a course, Contemporary Girls Issues (Ethnographies of Girlhood) GWS 150 that focuses on academic girls' studies research while also providing student the opportunity to work *with Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths* (SOLHOT). EUI presents a unique opportunity for scholarship on girls' studies to inform community based girl-centered programming and for girls' to represent themselves as experts on their own lives in intellectual inquiry and dialogue.

SOLHOT is an arts-based program for teen girls and young women of color, primarily African American, that develops participants' academic and creative skills and provides them opportunities to improve both themselves and the local community. Following in service learning traditions, university students "mentor" teen girls and all learn civic skills by building relationships and participating in collective decision-making. SOLHOT avoids the replication of existing social inequalities, however, whereby college students are seen as the "experts" who go into the community to "fix" or "enlighten" young people. Rather, SOLHOT aims to create a community of girls and their allies in which the collective community feel loved, safe, and celebrated for who they are and in the communities of which they are a part. Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown created

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SOLHOT based on her research on African American girls' political socialization¹. As the SOLHOT program director she facilitates program workshops as well as organizes program participants.

My course, Contemporary Girl Issues (Ethnographies of Girlhood) GWS 150, will feature 50% of course credit tied directly to EUI activities. As a class we will work with girls in the community to create research projects that addresses the following questions: How does SOLHOT constrain and/or enable Black girl empowerment? For example, students may want to create specific projects on the role of university students at "mentors", blurring the boundaries between the university and community, or girls' perceptions of University of Illinois college students and vice versa. Beyond traditional academic duties, student will be expected to volunteer at SOLHOT, and present a final "performance ethnography" based on their proposed research question. Students must use performance ethnography as their primary method because it will enable them to give back what they learned with the girls, using a medium that is accessible to people under 18. Moreover, students will be asked to present their performance ethnography research projects in a public venue, so that the girls with whom they work may also be present and participate. I believe this specialized focused on performance ethnography will add yet another layer of depth to EUI, as a cross-campus initiative that supports various

¹ Brown, Ruth. "Between Empowerment and Marginalization: A Study of Political Socialization in an After-School Mentoring Program for Sixth Grade Girls." University of Michigan. Dissertation. 2005.

--- "Mentoring on the Borderlands: Creating Empowering Connections Between Adolescent Girls and Young Women Volunteers." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*. Vol.IV, Special Issue, pp.105-122, 2006.

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interpretive methods of ethnographic practices. Students will use the Inquiry Page and participate consistently in EUI cross-campus initiatives.

My course will facilitate growth within the EUI initiative in many ways. As a new tenure-track hire in the Gender and Women's Studies Program, I look forward to having my course designated as EUI from the very beginning of my career. I expect to teach GWS 150 (a core GWS course) on a regular basis and it my goal that as students interested in taking my courses will expect an EUI designation. Also, I hope that my course will add to the various kinds of ethnography practiced by EUI participants. I am also eager to contribute in any way I can to conversations about doing this particular kind of teaching of which I have learned from experience requires extra time and effort. I look forward to joining a community of scholars in EUI that share similar goals and are innovative in their approach to undergraduate teaching.

In close, I must state that my teaching philosophy and practice is a great fit with EUI. I too believe in students as producers of knowledge. I am currently teaching a course where we are applying much of EUI philosophy. My students are in the process of creating wonderful performance ethnographies of Black girlhood. My hope is to continue to teach in ways that promote public work, critical self-examination, and student research. I believe the EUI will provide me with a community of scholars who are interested in similar projects, namely living up to the mission of our land grant public institution.

Course Description (existing course syllabus attached for a course I am currently teaching)

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This course is designed to introduce students to Contemporary Girl Issues (Ethnographies of Girlhood). Girls' Studies is an emerging sub-field in the discipline of Gender and Women's Studies. In this course, we will address the social, political, and cultural construction of girlhood in the United States and well as work with Black girls in the community. Analyzing academic text, poetry, film, novels, and music will provide a foundation to critique theoretical, methodological, and empirical claims as well as inspire new possibilities for studying girls and the issues that give meaning to their realities. This course is inherently interdisciplinary. Be willing to participate in class activities that include sharing/questioning personal experiences and performing.

In this course you will have the opportunity to work with African American girls in the community. In this way, we will extend our learning beyond the university boundaries to learn what it means to identify as an African American girl growing up in Urbana-Champaign, IL. This unique opportunity will give urgency to the significance of Girls Studies as a sub-field of academic inquiry as well as provide you with the opportunity to make a positive difference in your own life.

Statement of Commitment

I fully commit to attending summer orientation and EUI faculty and student presentation meetings. I am also aware that my course must comply with the human subjects and intellectual property protocols approved for EUI. It is expected that because students will be working with young people under the age of 18, extra time and effort may be needed to create protocols that insure the protection of young people as a vulnerable population.

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Academic Biography

Ruth Nicole Brown grew up in south suburban Chicago, IL and received her B.A. in political science from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In 2006, she earned her doctorate in Political Science at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor as well as completed a certificate in Women's Studies. Dr. Brown was also a part of the first year cohort in the Performance Studies Certificate Program, where she traveled to Tanzania, East Africa to study political theatre.

Dr. Brown is currently working on a book project on the politics of African American girls' socialization entitled, Endangered Black Girls. She is also organizing Saving Our Lives, Hear Our Truths (SOLHOT), an arts-based program for girls dedicated to the celebration of Black girlhood. SOLHOT is a direct application of Dr. Brown's research findings, exemplifying her commitment to service excellence in the community.

Dr. Brown's areas of interest include Girls' Studies/ African American girlhood, Cultural Politics and Theories of Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality, Critical Race and Feminist Theories and Practices, and After-School Programming and Interventions. Dr. Brown's identification with Hip Hop, feminism, young people, and Black expressive cultures is documented in her academic writing and made visible in her documentary film work dedicated to transgressing boundaries and creating something new out of the old.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



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EUI, c/o David McDonald,
Department of Anthropology
109 Davenport Hall, MC-148
UIUC,
607 S. Mathews Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801

March 1, 2007

Dear Dr. Nancy Abelmann & Peter Mortensen

This letter is written in support of Ruth Nicole Brown's application for the Ethnography of the University Initiative during the 2007-2008 academic school year. Gender and Women's Studies Program is pleased to have Dr. Brown's spring 2008 course, Contemporary Girl Issues (Ethnographies of Girlhood) designated as a EUI course. The size of the course will be capped at 25 students or fewer.

Sincerely,

Jacque Kahn
Associate Director

The Poetics and Politics of African American Girlhood
Gender and Women's Studies Program
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Spring 2007
GWS 490
Wednesdays 1- 3:50 p.m.
385 Education Building

Professor: Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown
Office: Women's Studies Annex (next to GWS House)
Office Hour: 512 E. Chalmers
Office phone: Mondays 1-2:30pm
E-mail: 333-2990
mbrown@uiuc.edu (Please include "GWS 490" in the Subject Line)

Required Texts:

Illini Union Bookstore (or Amazon.com):

Evans- Winters Venus E. (2005). *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms*. Peter Lang Publishing.

Jordan, June. (2000). *Soldier: A Poet's Childhood*. Basic Civitas Books.

Ladner, Joyce A. (1971). *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*. Anchor Books.

Shange, Ntozake. (1977). *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*. Scribner.

Stevens, Joyce West. (2002). *Smart and Sassy: The Strengths of Inner-City Black Girls*. Oxford University Press.

*Assigned articles will be made available via e-reserve or distributed in class.

Suggested, but not required:

Gaunt, Kyra D. (2006). *The Games Black Girls Play*. New York University Press.

Sister Souljah. (1999). *The Coldest Winter Ever*. Pocket Books

Walker, Rebecca. (2000). *Black, White, and Jewish, Autobiography Of A Shifting Self*. Putnam Press.

General Course Information

This course is designed to introduce students to African American Girls' Studies. *Girls' Studies* is an emerging sub-field in the discipline of Gender and Women's Studies. Importantly, Black feminist theory and practice have always remembered and valued the experiences of Black girls. In this course, we will address the social, political, and cultural construction of African American girlhood in the United States and well as the lived experiences of Black girls. Analyzing academic text, poetry, film, novels, and music will provide a foundation to critique theoretical, methodological, and empirical claims as well as inspire new possibilities for studying African American girls and the

issues that give meaning to their realities. This course is inherently interdisciplinary. Be willing to participate in class activities that include sharing/questioning personal experiences and performing.

In this course you will have the opportunity to work with African American girls in the community. In this way, we will extend our learning beyond the university boundaries to learn what it means to identify as an African American girl growing up in Urbana-Champaign, IL. This unique opportunity will give urgency to the significance of *Girls Studies* as a sub-field of academic inquiry as well as provide you with the opportunity to make a positive difference in your own life.

Course Goals and Objectives

The following are goals of this course:

- To introduce students to the theories, methods, and analytical approaches to the study of African American girlhood.
- To enable students to critique and envision new ways of thinking about African American girlhood.
- To facilitate a responsible and respectful learning environment whereby we all learn from each other.
- To encourage students to develop their own intellectual trajectory. By that I mean students should voice/ make known what they want to learn in this course. I look forward to incorporating the knowledge, expertise, and interests you bring to this class in order to co-create a classroom experience that reflects your needs and intellectual desires.
- To support praxis and reflection about what students are learning, how they are learning it, what has been left out of discussions/readings, as well as how student's life experiences influence the way they learn and listen.

Format of the Course

The format of the course will vary from lecture and large group discussion to small group activities. It is very important for the quality of our interactions that you come prepared to each class by reading the assignments. I encourage you to take risks, share your ideas, and ask many questions. There will be a lot of content covered in this course and we will move at a fairly rapid pace. It is your responsibility to stay current with the readings and to come and see me if you are in need of any assistance. Please feel free to come and talk with me during my office hours. I am looking forward to working with you and will do my best to be available and responsive to any questions or concerns that you may have.

Evaluation and Grading Standards

Your grade in this course will depend on your scores on a midterm and final paper and project, two journal exercises, and class participation.

Journal Exercise #1	30 points
Journal Exercise #2	30 points
Participation	20 points
In Class Midterm Exam	30 points
Evidence of Interview	30 points
Final Paper	30 points
Final Performance	30 points
	200 points

* More information with details about these assignments will be forthcoming.

The grading scale is as follows:

200 - 196 = A+	179 - 176 = B+	159 - 156 = C+	139 - 136 = D+
195 - 186 = A	175 - 166 = B	155 - 146 = C	135 - 126 = D
185 - 180 = A-	165 - 160 = B-	145 - 140 = C-	125 - 120 = D-

Work in this course will be evaluated based on the following characteristics:

Grade	Characteristics of Work Evaluated
"A" Work: Outstanding Roughly 90-100%	<p>This work extends above and beyond average expectations of an assignment by demonstrating strong evidence of original thinking; excellent organization, capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.</p> <p><i>For written assignments:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Responds fully to the assignment; Expresses its purpose clearly and persuasively; 2. Is directed toward and meets the needs of a defined audience; 3. Begins and ends effectively; 4. Provides adequate supporting arguments, evidence, examples and details; 5. Is well-organized and unified; 6. Uses appropriate, direct and inclusive language; 7. Correctly acknowledges and documents sources; 8. Is free from errors in grammar, punctuation, word choice, spelling and format; 9. Maintains a level of excellence throughout, and shows originality and creativity in demonstrating #1 through #7 above.
"B" Work: Very Good Roughly 80-90%	<p>This work demonstrates a good grasp of subject matter, some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature. <i>For written assignments:</i> Demonstrates 1) through 9) above well, but not fully and completely. Demonstrates overall ability but shows little apparent originality or creativity.</p>
"C" Work: Fair/Average Roughly 70-80%	<p>This work demonstrates an understanding of the subject matter and an ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material. <i>For written assignments:</i> Demonstrates 1) through 9) above, and adequately demonstrates overall competence. Contains a few minor errors or flaws.</p>
"D" Work: Barely Passing Roughly 60-70%	<p>This work demonstrates some evidence of familiarity with subject matter and some evidence that critical and analytic skills have been developed. <i>For written assignments:</i> Fails to demonstrate elements of 1) through 9). Contains several serious errors or flaws, or many minor ones. A "D" assignment often looks and reads like a first draft.</p>
"F" Work: Failing Below 60%	<p>This work shows little evidence of even superficial understanding of subject matter; demonstrates weakness in critical and analytic skills, and incorporates limited or irrelevant use of literature. <i>For written assignments:</i> Fails to demonstrate several elements of 1) through 9). Contains many serious errors or flaws, and many minor ones as well. An assignment that violates the university's policy on academic dishonesty (e.g. cheating or plagiarism) will at minimum receive a failing grade.</p>

Dr. Brown's Course Policies

PAPER FORMAT

Papers for this course should be typed, with 12-point Times Roman font, double-spaced, and with standard margins. Please include a cover page with your name, assignment title, and date on all papers and no other identifying information on subsequent pages. Please also proofread carefully, spell-check, and staple! *Note:* All papers are due at the beginning of class time. A "printer problem" is not a valid excuse.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I TURN IN MY WORK LATE?

In order to be fair to students who submit work on time, late papers will result with a penalty. If you decide to turn in your work past the due date in class, you can expect your grade on the assignment to drop by 5 points. Assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class on the designated due date.

May I Email My Paper To You?

No. I do not accept any written assignments by email. All assignments should be turned in at the beginning of class or if late, dropped off at my office.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism includes turning in writing that is not your own, copying sections of someone else's work into your own, cutting and pasting material from websites, and failing to cite your sources. It is YOUR

responsibility to understand the full definition of what constitutes plagiarism and ensure that you do not turn in any work that even *remotely* suggests such a practice. Evidence of plagiarism on any assignment may result in a zero for that assignment, a failing grade for the course, and the possibility of disciplinary action by the university. If you have questions about citing sources or what constitutes plagiarism, consult the following website http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/research/r_apa.html.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance and participation from all students is critical to the success of this class. Although I will not deduct a set number of points from your course grade for a rare absence or two throughout the semester, you need to be aware that *patterns* of continual absences or tardies will reflect negatively in other ways (i.e. missing critical information central to exams or papers) and excessive tardies and absences from class will accordingly result in a lowered participation grade. Unless you have a good excuse (e.g., religious holidays, documented illness), you should attend every class. **There will not be any opportunities to make-up the midterm exam or final performance.** If an absence is absolutely unavoidable, please contact a classmate to get caught up on material that was missed.

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Active participation is an important part of learning in this class. Your participation grade will be based on your contributions to discussions and thoughtful completion of in class assignments (e.g., at the beginning of class, you may be asked to write about your understanding/ reaction to a topic covered in that day's readings). In order for us to have a dynamic, lively learning environment, I would like to see participation from everyone. We all express ourselves in different ways and I encourage you to use all of your talents and abilities to relate to the course material and each other.

To learn in a meaningful way is to contribute ideas in discussions, pose questions, and be sincerely engaged in the learning process. **Everyone is expected to sign up for a date to lead discussion on the assigned readings/topics. On the day you are to lead you should provide the class with a brief synopsis of the readings, a comment about the readings, as well as a question to pose to your classmates (or a creative in-class activity).** Participation points can be lost if you do not lead a discussion or are not being respectful or responsible to yourself or your classmates (talking during class, reading the paper during class, not allowing others a chance to talk, etc.). Classroom participation will be evaluated using the following rubric:

+ Excellent participation

- Active, enthusiastic involvement in class discussions and activities
- Using understanding of course materials to explain or support comments
- Asking thoughtful questions relevant to course materials
- Promoting discussion through engaged listening and encouraging responses from classmates without dominating the conversation
- Valuably contributing to small group discussions and keeping group on task
- Mindful completion of written tasks

✓ Acceptable participation

- Actively listening during discussion
- Demonstrating some understanding of course materials
- Participating in small group activities
- Demonstrating some understanding of course content in written responses

0 Unacceptable participation

- Failing to attend class
- Attending class, but not being physically or cognitively engaged (e.g. not listening nor attempting to participate in class discussions or small group activities, reading newspapers, working on other work, etc.)
- Making non-constructive comments during discussion
- Attempting to distract others or redirect class discussion off topic
- Little or no thought given in written responses

OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Need Help Writing? Please take full advantage of the resources available to you on campus. The Writer's Workshop is an EXCELLENT place for you to get help with writing and academic work. For further information about the Writer's Workshop and its services, call the central location in room 251 of the University of Illinois Undergraduate Library at (217) 333-8796. ***If you document use of The Writer's Workshop and incorporate their suggestions***

into your writing, you may receive up to 5 points of extra credit for the course. For more information on the Writer's Workshop check out the following web site, <http://www.english.uiuc.edu/cws/wworkshop/>

Counseling Services: There are often many pressures and stresses associated with balancing school, work, family, life, and all the complexities in our lives. If you are having personal difficulties, please consider the University Counseling Center (217) 333-3704. For more information on the Counseling Center check out the following web site, <http://www.couns.uiuc.edu/>

Course Schedule
Topics and readings are subject to change

Week	Date	Topics	Assigned Reading
1	1-17-07	Introduction, Syllabi, Course Overview	
2	1-24-07	What is Black Girl Studies? Why is Black Girlhood Important?	<u>Evans-Winters: Chapter One</u> <u>Stevens: Prologue and Pgs.3-29</u> <u>Brown: "Persephone's Triumph" (e-mail)</u>
3	1-31-07	Critical Foundations: Beginning On Our Own Terms	<u>Shange: For Colored Girls...</u>
4	2-7-07	Critical Foundations: Black Girlhood and Black Womanhood Is Not A Dichotomy	<u>Shange: For Colored Girls...</u> <u>Ladner: Chapter Four</u> <u>Gaunt: Intro and Chapter One</u>
5	2-14-07	Controlling Images: Explaining Those Highly Visible Black Girls JOURNAL #1 DUE!	<u>Ladner: Chapter Five</u> <u>Collins: "Controlling Images and Black Women's Oppression" (e-reserve)</u> <u>Harris: "Being Seen and Being Heard" (e-reserve)</u> <u>Fordham: "Those Loud Black Girls.."(e-reserve)</u> <u>Gonick: "Between "Girl Power and Reviving Ophelia" (e-reserve)</u>
6	2-21-07	Methods: Loving the Black Girl Within	<u>Dominquez: "For A Politics of Love and Rescue" (e-reserve)</u> <u>Biklen: "Trouble On Memory Lane" (e-reserve)</u>
7	2-28-07	Resiliency or Strongblackwomen In Training?	<u>Evans-Winters: Chapters Four and Five</u> <u>Jarrett: "Resilience Among Low-Income African American Youth.."</u>

			(e-reserve) Ladner: Chapter Six
8	3-7-07	Resiliency or Strongblackwomen In Training? Cont'd.	Ladner: Chapter Seven Stevens: Chapter Four
9	3-14-07	IN-CLASS MIDTERM	
	3-21-07	SPRING BREAK- Have Fun!	
10	3-28-07	Memories of Black Girlhood	Jordan: Soldier (at least be half way through the book!)
11	4-4-07	Memories of Black Girlhood cont'd. JOURNAL #2 DUE!	Jordan Soldier
12	4-11-07	Identity: If We Are Not Our Hair, Then Who Are We?	Collins: "Color, Hair Texture, and Standards of Beauty" (e-reserves) Hooks: "Chapter 31 Good Hair..." (e-reserves) Agbaw and Agbaw: "Mommy, I Just Want to Fit In!" (e-reserves) Carroll: "Jo-Laine" & "Alaza" (e-reserves) Stevens: Chapter Six http://www.mediathatmattersfest.org/6/a_girl_like_me/
13	4-18-07	Identity: If We Are Not Our Hair, Then Who Are We? Evidence of Interview Due!	In-Class Film "Booty Nation" Morgan: "Hip-Hop Feminist" (e-reserve) Gaunt: Chapter Five http://www.toniblackman.com/ http://www.urbanedjournal.org/archiv/e/vol3issue2/notes/notes0018.htm
14	4-25-07	African American Girls Empowerment and Critical Pedagogy	Brown: "Mentoring On The Borderlands" (e-reserve) Delpit: "The Silenced Dialogue" (e-reserve) Stevens: Chapter Five and Eight
15	5-02-07	African American Girls Empowerment and Critical Pedagogy	Evans-Winters: Chapter Six http://www.boggscenter.org/

<http://www.sistersong.net/>
<http://www.incite-national.org/>
<http://www.projectbutterfly.com/home.php>

16	Final Schedule Time TBA	* FINAL PAPER AND PERFORMANCE DUE! * There will be no make-ups. Please see me by the 2 nd week of class if this current schedule poses a problem in your schedule	
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The Poetics and Politics of African American Girlhood
Gender and Women's Studies Program
University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Spring 2007- Dr. Ruth Nicole Brown

Final Paper and Performance Assignment

Final Paper (30 points)

For the final paper you will interview an African American girl on a subject related to the course material including (becoming a woman, meanings of girlhood, hip hop, images of girlhood, self-expression, family, peers, and school, and memories of girlhood). The goal of the interview is to get an understanding of the obstacles, challenges, and celebratory influences that are important to the person you are interviewing.

The paper should be between 5-7 pages, 12-point font, and double-spaced. The paper should address the following:

Part I (2-3 pages): Describe who you interviewed, where, how (Did you take notes? Use recording devices? How long did it last?) and why you chose that particular person and their relationship to you. You should also address how the person you interviewed as well as yourself experienced the interview. What did you learn about the science/art of conducting an interview? What was most challenging aspects of the interview?

Part II (3-4 pages): Describe the content of the interview as it relates to the course material. You should use citations from course readings as well as found readings to support your thesis and analysis. When thinking about your thesis and analysis- reflect on the interview as a whole. What was significant to the person you interviewed about being young, black, and female? What was significant to you about this person's experiences? How are their experiences similar and/or different than some of the perspectives shared in class (films, class discussions, readings, etc.)?

Performance (30 points)

During the time scheduled for our final exam you will come to class with your final paper as well as be prepared to give a short (7-10 minutes) performance. The performance should convey to the class what you learned from your final paper exercise. The goal of the performance is to step into the shoes of the person you interviewed and convey the poetics and politics of their life experiences. This assignment should make the class aware of issues that perhaps we did not have time to cover during the course, or address an issue we did talk about in class only in more detail. The performance may take the form of a monologue, skit (I'm sure classmates will assume other characters if you write their lines), scenario, artistic expression (rap, poem, song, photography), or short video. You may consider dressing the part, assuming the voice, and conveying the wisdom of the person you interviewed. You should NOT create a caricature of the person but rather strive to give a performance that speaks to the complexity of the person interviewed. Be as creative as you can!

* Since we are meeting at the Urbana Free Library during class time you will have the opportunity to talk with a girl there for this project. As a result, your project may be much more of a collaboration between you and the particular girl you interview and this is a good thing. You may want to consider making time to talk in more detail with the girl at the library-when we are not meeting there as "SOLHOT". You should expect that your final performance will be viewed by the girls you interview.

IMPORTANT:

When we first meet at the Library I will have a sheet explaining this project to the girls as well. I will be sure to state that this is for all of our learning purposes only. How we make what we create public will be up to the girls.