

Institution: University of Northumbria at Newcastle		
Unit of Assessment: 20 (Social Work and Social Policy)		
Title of case study: Girl-Kind: Collaboration in mediamaking as a catalyst for the expression and celebration of girlhood in disadvantaged communities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sarah Ralph	Senior Lecturer	01/09/15 - present
Mel Gibson	Associate Professor	16/03/98 - present
Amanda McBride	Research Assistant	01/08/19 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Researchers at Northumbria University have explored the function of media culture within girls' relationships – how it is consumed, critiqued, and reinterpreted by younger female audiences. These studies informed the creation of Girl-Kind, a creative programme that utilises mediamaking to advance agency among young women (aged 11-16), from disadvantaged backgrounds. Motivated by a 2016 report, which identified North-East England as the 'worst place to be a girl' in the UK, Girl-Kind has improved awareness and the approach of education practitioners in how they support female students and is now an embedded annual scheme in 10 Schools across the region and growing. This success led to a new approach to practice at children's charity Plan International UK and the Young Women's Film Academy – the only all-female film academy in the UK. Furthermore, Girl-Kind has improved the mental wellbeing of over 300 girls, fostering newfound confidence to challenge issues such as body-dissatisfaction, sexual harassment, and restrictive gender expectations. Girl-Kind will become a social enterprise spin-out company in Spring 2021 (delayed due to COVID 19).</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Growing up as a girl in the UK is challenging. Despite increasing public awareness of the barriers facing young women, girls in the UK are still subjected to harassment, discrimination, and limiting gender stereotypes that perpetuate cycles of inequality. Where a girl lives also has significant consequences. Statistical analysis of life expectancy, reproductive health, and educational outcomes shows that girls in the North East of England face the greatest struggles. Research from Northumbria University by Dr Sarah Ralph, Dr Mel Gibson, and Dr Amanda McBride on the link between the representation of girls in UK mainstream media and negative experiences among young girls revealed a need for an action-centred and critical exploration of the ways media products shape the development of girls' identity [R1-R5].</p> <p>Since 2016 Ralph and Gibson have examined the portrayal of women's agency and activism in post-war graphic literature and film, exploring how media products are utilised within familial and close peer relationships, as well as everyday social interactions [R1-R4]. Through a qualitative and quantitative survey that garnered over 1,000 responses, combined with in-depth interviews with key mother-daughter pairs, Ralph's research demonstrated how exceptional viewing experiences encountered during a transitional life phase remain with and shape the outlook of younger audiences [R1]. Ralph also demonstrated how mother's and daughter's mutual enjoyment of similar films and actors can provide a shared context in which to relate to each other and the issues explored on screen [R2]. This experience and use of media by women and girls in their familial and social relationships provides a 'currency of communication', especially for girls transitioning to adulthood [R1, R2]. Research findings such as this demonstrate the extent to which girl's social relationships and their awareness of gender identity are influenced by the portrayal of women's agency and the gendered expectations arising from both positive and negative perceptions of female behaviour in media [R1-R4].</p>		

Further to this, Ralph and Gibson's research has evaluated the critical skills necessary to challenge media portrayals when they present a gendered or otherwise restrictive framework for girls' capacity [R1-R4]. For example, Gibson conducted semi-structured interviews to explore women's engagement with, and reflections on, representations of girlhood, feminism, and activism in the comic genre [R3, R4]. This highlighted the importance of early development opportunities for young girls, which allow them to explore and discuss media portrayals of strong female characters (e.g. superheroes), in ways typically associated with older women reflecting on their girlhood experiences of media [R3, R4]. Similarly, Ralph and McBride examined the empowering potential of collaborative mediamaking, such as film production, as a tool for offering girls insights into how the creative process does not just reflect women but is also a form of social action and expression of agency [R5]. These insights, particularly the potential for mediamaking to accelerate and enhance girls capacity to perceive, discuss, and challenge restrictive media portrayals [R1, R3, R4], led Ralph to create and lead the ongoing development of Girl-Kind, a creative, mediamaking programme designed specifically for girls aged 11-16.

Established in 2017, Girl-Kind is delivered in partnership with local creative arts organisations and 10 North East schools, who provide the physical space for a series of workshops that take place outside of the normal school timetable. Running annually from September to early December, Girl-Kind consists of four phases, beginning with the provision of a safe space to share ideas and experiences, before moving into the facilitation and showcasing of creative expression. The programme culminates in a Celebration Day held in October for UN International Day of the Girl [R5]. Supported by Sarah Winkler Reid (Newcastle University), whose experience as a social anthropologist provided the team with key data-capture techniques, Ralph's action-centred and skills-focused methodology fostered the co-creation of media-related artefacts among the young female participants. The supportive environment allows girls to enact their own solutions to problems by using contemporary media content, including filmmaking, photography, and comic-book artwork. The programme thus facilitates group cohesion, increasing participant confidence by initiating discussions and expressing experiences to adults that might not otherwise be conveyed [R5].

Girl-kind was awarded 2 ESRC Impact Accelerator Awards (2017 and 2018). Ralph and McBride have also demonstrated how the programme, and those which adopt a similar approach, can adapt to remote learning if required, an issue faced by many creative youth projects as result of COVID 19 restrictions [R5].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Barker, M., Egan, K., Philips, T., and **Sarah Ralph** (eds)*, *Alien audiences: remembering and evaluating a classic movie* (London: Springer, 2016) doi.org/10.1057/9781137532060

*Ralph solo-authored chapter 4 and co-authored all other chapters

R2. Sarah Ralph 'Using stars, not just 'reading' them: the roles and functions of film stars in mother-daughter relations' in Holmes, S., **Sarah Ralph**, and Barker, M. (eds) *Celebrity Audiences* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016) [ISBN: 9780367002398](https://www.routledge.com/9780367002398) Available on request

R3. Mel Gibson (2018) Let's hear it for the girls! Representations of girlhood, feminism and activism in comics and graphic novels. *MAI: A Journal of Feminism and Visual Culture* 1(1) <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/34619/1/>

R4. Mel Gibson (2018a) "Who's the girl with the kissin' lips?' Constructions of class, popular culture and agentic girlhood in Girl, Princess, Jackie and Bunty in the 1960s', *Film, Fashion & Consumption*, 7:2, pp. 131–46 doi.org/10.1386/ffc.7.2.131_1

R5. Amanda McBride and Sarah Ralph (2020)** 'Girls shift digital: Reflecting on the impact of moving online in girls' creative youth projects', *MAI: A journal of feminism and visual culture*, 6 maifeminism.com/girls-shift-digital-reflecting-on-the-impact-of-moving-online

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Research impact funding

G1. Sarah Ralph CI, ESRC Impact Accelerator Award, 2017 and 2018, GBP15,000 in total (ES/M500513/1)

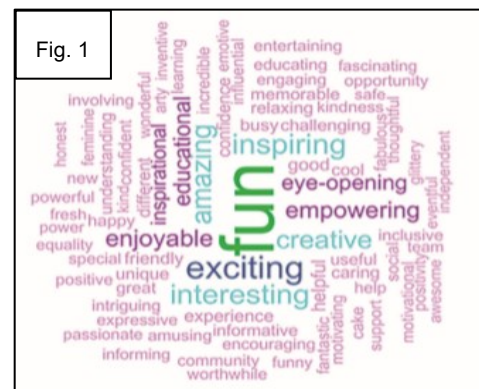
4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

From 2017-2020, over 300 girls have benefited from the opportunity to develop mediamaking skills and the confidence to showcase those new abilities to express their experiences of girlhood. The Girl-Kind methodology has informed the work of education practitioners, and shaped strategic thinking at Plan International UK (Plan-UK), a global children's outreach and development charity. Girl-Kind is now an embedded programme in 10 secondary schools across the North of England, with elements of the model also adopted by the Young Women's Film Academy (YWFA), the only all-female film academy in the UK. The decision has been taken for Girl-Kind to become a social enterprise spin-out company (expected completion, Spring 2021. Delayed due to COVID-19) [E1].

4.1 Fostering shared experiences of girlhood to improve mental wellbeing and confidence

Girl-Kind has worked with schools from a range of demographic, socio-economic, and educational-attainment profiles to capture the shared experiences of girls [E2]. The work has fostered improved mental wellbeing among the participants, and the acquisition of new mediamaking skills to enable creative exploration of, as well advocacy for, girlhood.

Girls from the 2017 cohort have explained how they were able, for the first time, to communicate their shared experiences of issues like catcalling, and the negative impact it has on their mental wellbeing. As one participant explained, the programme fostered a '*totally different perspective*' on issues facing women [E2, p4]. Comments from other members demonstrate growing confidence, '*usually ...loads of thoughts will go through my head, "I can't do this", "You are not supposed to do that!" ...ever since I went to Girl-Kind I can open up more, and just tell people [how I feel]*' [E2, p4]. A sense of empowerment appears frequently in the collated feedback, illustrated by a word-cloud taken from a 2020 evaluation report (fig. 1) [E2, p5].



Analysis of 211 respondents indicates a dramatic increase in confidence, when talking with their peers, parents, and other adults about the problems they faced as girls [E2, p4]. Perhaps the most valuable outcome, however, is the realisation of the extent to which they share difficulties with their peers. Comments such as '*it made me more aware of what others around me face daily*', appear frequently in participant evaluation [E2, p6]. This shared experience fostered a community of girlhood '*we thought if we put all of our experiences together it would work to encourage other people to not only accept that they could need help, but to get it*' and, '*we really wanted to help girls our age and younger, because we have had these experiences now and before*' [E2, p5]. These open discussions have led to significant benefits, one member explaining how '*before Girl-Kind I thought that everyone was judging me and talking about me. But now I don't have all that paranoia. It helps me to concentrate, I have been getting better grades as a result*' [E2, p5]. This newfound confidence led participants from one school to contribute to plans for a new school building (opened in 2020) to ensure it would be girl-friendly for the 800 female pupils (e.g. redesigning the toilet facilities to address concerns about privacy) [E3].

4.2 New creative skills and enhanced capacity for expression of girlhood

Girl-Kind collaborated with YWFA to develop the 'Film-in-a-day' workshop, providing girls from participating schools with hands-on training in storyboard creation, filmmaking, and camera operation. Ralph and Gibson's research into how the exploration of strong female characters in media can benefit the development of younger audiences, provided the inspiration for the girls to

co-produce films that challenge gender conventions [E4]. Material created by the girls was utilised extensively in a crowdfunding campaign, which raised GBP5,520 to produce the short film, *Ms Venture's School for Super Lasses* (subsequently match-funded by the Community Foundation of Tyne and Wear). The film premiered online in May 2020 (due to COVID-19 restrictions), with an in-person premiere planned for 2021. Other productions include *Cleo* (2017), *Whispers* (2018), and *Misjudged* (2019) [E4, E5]. Girls from the 2017 cohort went on to organise their own film festivals, attend award ceremonies (*Cleo*, nominated for North East Young Filmmaker Award, 2019), and speak on BBC Radio about their experiences of girlhood and the importance of creative skills in sharing those views [E4].

Through their engagement with Girl-Kind, and the research behind it, YWFA increased the reach of their own Saturday Club membership, with the Girl-Kind 'film-in-a-day' workshops, '*acting as an important 'pipeline' for new sign-ups*' [E4]. A third of registered young women who have joined the Saturday Club (2017-19) had taken part in the film workshops, with new members now attending from across the North East. These new attendees, as with other YWFA support, are young women, aged 12 to 25, who come from diverse, predominantly disadvantaged backgrounds. The Girl-Kind model has therefore helped to support one of the charity's key aims, the promotion of resilience and mental wellbeing through film making practice and creative expression [E4]. The film-in-a-day concept has also been requested by YWFA partner organisations across the UK, these commissions have increased the incomes streams of YFWA '*beyond a reliance on charitable funding and enabled [the organisation] to deliver sustained and enhanced ...outreach programmes to more young women across the region*' [E4].

4.3 New strategic thinking and policies at Plan International UK

In 2020 Ralph and Gibson were invited to contribute to a national report by Plan-UK, as a follow-up to the earlier *State of Girls' Rights in the UK* (2016), that had described areas within North East as '*the worst place to be a girl*'. Ralph and Gibson used insights from Girl-Kind and new participatory research to incorporate girls' voices directly into the updated report (published April 2020) [E6a, p147]. Their study highlighted the risks of using sweeping negative statements to describe the localities that girls' experience, without first considering their own perceptions of the environments that are personal to them. This prompted Plan-UK to rethink their use of such headlines [E6b]. The Head of Girls' Rights and Youth confirmed how working with the researchers from Northumbria '*has been a powerful opportunity for Plan-UK to take stock of our approaches to research and subsequent media coverage, and to consider ways to better align with girls' experiences*' [E6b]. The research has given Plan-UK an opportunity to '*embed a principle of 'do no harm', improving management of press work and policy dissemination in a much more strategic way*' [E6b].

Through their engagement with Girl-Kind '*and the critical research driving it*', Plan-UK has enhanced their approach to delivering programmes and content directly to girls in the UK, '*this was not only a project built upon trailblazing research, but one that was clearly resulting in truly life-changing benefits for its participants (girls and practitioners alike)*' [E6b]. On seeing the impact of Girl-Kind's work first-hand, specifically how the girls had acquired new confidence and '*clearly gained knowledge about their rights*', Plan-UK were able '*to embed this approach to delivering our programmatic work across the UK in a new three-year UK Programmes Strategy, which was finalised in June 2020*' [E6b]. As a result they also adopted a new methodology to develop their UK programmes, drawing on the Girl-Kind model of 'Girl-Centred Design' [E6b]. This mechanism for designing programmes of depth to, and for, girls, has ensured that Plan-UK '*place girls needs at the heart of the solutions [it] create[s]*' [E6b]. Furthermore, as a large NGO with significant access to funding, Plan-UK recognised how the Girl Kind methodology could serve as a model for grassroots organisations across the country, '*aligning research with impact by developing a meaningful programme to engage girls, underpinned by evidence ...providing space and opportunity for girls to explore [themes associated with girlhood] and more*' [E6b].

4.4 Embedding Girl-Kind as an institutional support tool to improve teaching practices

All 10 partner schools have adopted Girl-Kind as an embedded annual programme [E2, E3]. Against a backdrop of reduced youth services and increased financial pressures, Girl-Kind has

provided these institutions with a much-needed resource for reinforcing girls' sense of agency. A Schools North East Trustee and Headteacher at a participating school stated how the students had *'benefited enormously [they are now] more assertive in their language and behaviour ...[there is] improved attendance, behaviour, and engagement within lessons ...[the programme has] enriched their experience and emotional connection with school'* [E3].

Girl-Kind has led to new practices at the participating schools, one teacher stating how their institution had now adopted storyboarding workshops as forum to explore the girls' feelings about stereotyping [E7, p7]. The programme has been integrated into the pastoral structures of St Wilfrid's Roman Catholic College as a *'support mechanism'* to assist more vulnerable or withdrawn students [E2, p9]. Staff describe the changes they have witnessed as revelatory in terms of their own understanding, *'girls I never thought would be interested were coming up to me in the corridor and asking "Miss, can I be on it? I was blown away ...they've got so much valuable stuff and they just need that forum to share it'* [E8, p1]. The Associate Assistant Headteacher confirmed that *'Girl-Kind proved that when done right [project-based learning] ...can be really, really positive'* [E2]. She also outlined (in a publication that explores methods for empowering female leadership in education) how Girl-Kind was transformative for her own continued professional development:

The ethos of the project and bravery of the girls inspired me to evolve as a leader ...as I saw the girls flourish in this challenging environment ...I realised that each had a unique nature and there was sense of strength and beauty in the way that they articulated what we're saying in their very different ways. Thank goodness I did, because Hollywood films and media would have had me that as an introvert I was only ever going to be seen as difficult ...I returned to the senior leadership team with a new perspective and an energy rooted in the confidence that, actually, my introvert traits were my strength [E9].

Girl-Kind has clearly resulted in lasting benefits for all those involved, as a member of staff from Framwellgate School Durham remarked, *'I can't begin to describe how moved and proud I feel by the transformation [of the girls] ...I can't wait to see how they change the world'* [E7].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Ref.	Source of corroboration	Link to claimed impact
E1	Social Enterprise Spin-out Status Documentation.	Confirms that Girl-Kind is in process of becoming a social enterprise spin-out company
E2	Published Report, incl. longitudinal evaluation from Girl-Kind North East Programme, 2017-20	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind improved girls mental wellbeing, agency, creative skills, and shaped thinking among education practitioners
E3	Testimonial - Headteacher (Schools North East Trustee)	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind has improved girls mental wellbeing, agency, and confidence
E4	Testimonial - Vice Chair, Board of Trustees (YWFA)	Confirms how Girl-Kind has improved and supported work/aims of YWFA
E5	Listed Girl-Kind films (YWFA)	Confirms how research has led to new creative skills among girls with film-in-a day workshops
E6	a) Plan-UK Report, State of Girls' Rights in the UK 2019 b) Testimonial - Head of Girls' Rights and Youth, Plan-UK	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind has shaped strategic thinking and led to new policies at Plan-UK
E7	Feature Article (Youth Library Group, 2019)	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind shaped thinking among education practitioners
E8	Interviews/Feedback, Teachers (St. Wilfrid's School)	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind shaped thinking among education practitioners
E9	Teacher Reflection in Featherstone, K., Porritt, V. (eds) Being 10% Braver (London, 2020)	Demonstrates how Girl-Kind shaped thinking among education practitioners