Jill McLean Taylor
Carol Gilligan
Amy M. Sullivan

Between Voice and Silence

Women and Girls, Race and Relationship

Between Voice and Silence

Women and Girls, Race and Relationship

Jill McLean Taylor
Carol Gilligan
Amy M. Sullivan

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
1995

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Taylor, Jill McLean, 1944–
Between voice and silence : women and girls, race and relationship
Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, Amy M. Sullivan.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-674-06879-3 (alk. paper)
1. Teenage girls—United States—Psychology—Longitudinal studies.
2. Socially handicapped teenagers—United States—Psychology—
Longitudinal studies. 3. Minority teenagers—United States—
Psychology—Longitudinal studies. 4. Oral communication—United
States—Psychological aspects—Longitudinal studies.
5. Intergenerational relations—United States—Longitudinal studies.
I. Gilligan, Carol, 1936– . II. Sullivan, Amy M. 1958– .
III. Title.
HQ798.T39 1995 95–36209
305.23'5—dc20 CIP

Between Voice and Silence

Acknowledgments

We want to thank all the girls whose voices are at the heart of this book. Their generosity of spirit, their openness in speaking their minds and their hearts, and their willingness to join us in this inquiry into girls' and women's lives have made this work possible. From them we have learned more fully what is at risk in girls' development and what is at stake. To protect their privacy and preserve confidentiality, we have changed their names and altered some details of their lives. We wish that we could thank each girl individually and in public for her contribution to this research. Our thanks to their teachers and to the school staff and administrators for their flexibility and help in finding space and time for research in crowded schools and schedules.

We also want to thank the women whose participation in the Women and Race retreats has made it possible for us to join women's and girls' voices in our discussion of race and relationship. Teresa Bernardez, Lyn Mikel Brown, Katie Cannon, Judy Dorney, Joyce Grant, Kristin Linklater, Wendy Puriefoy, Christine Robinson, and Janie Ward gave of their psychic energy, their experience, and their knowledge. Their commitment to girls' development and education as well as their efforts on behalf of women have been a continuing inspiration.

We are grateful to the many people who went out of their way to make this project possible. Elsa Wasserman's interest in the research and her many years of experience in public education were critical in guiding our study of at-risk adolescents through an urban school system, making it possible for us to interview a culturally diverse group of girls. Wendy Puriefoy's vision brought our research to women working within the racially and ethnically diverse Boston Public Schools, and Joyce Grant's enthusiastic leadership made the Women Teaching Girls, Girls Teaching Women retreats happen.

We want to thank Valeria Lowe-Barehmi and Brenda Jones, the principals of the Mary Curley and the Lewis middle schools, the teachers Mary Ahern, Janet Ferone, Maria-Amy Moreno, Georgina Perry, Suzanne Ricco, Audrey Sturgis, and Patricia Woodruff, and the counselors Emily Carrington, Maria Gonzales-Baugh, and Ceil Parteleno-Barehmi, who took part in the Women Teaching Girls, Girls Teaching Women retreats. Their active involvement in girls' development and education and the diversity of their cultural, racial, and class backgrounds led the retreat discussions into some of the most challenging areas of relationship between women and girls in public education. To Judy Dorney of the Harvard Project, who developed the curriculum for the retreats, and Katie Cannon, who joined in organizing the retreat process and brought race to the center of consideration, our special thanks.

We are grateful to Betty Bardige and the Mailman Foundation for supporting this research in its initial stages and to Wendy Puriefoy and the Boston Foundation for encouraging its expansion and for two years of substantial funding. The retreats were supported by royalties from previous work of the Harvard Project.

The collaborative Harvard Project on Women's Psychology and Girls' Development provided the overarching framework for this study, and we are indebted to our colleagues for their encouragement, their ideas, and their good company. Most centrally, we thank Deborah Tolman, who was a crucial member of the research group. Her commitment to studying culturally diverse girls from poor and working-class families, her insights into girls' development, her interest in research methods, and her research on girls' sexuality have greatly contributed to this book. We also thank other project members who made vital contributions, including Judy Dorney for her work on the retreats and Janie Ward for her consultation to the research, her active involvement in the retreats, her analysis of the retreat transcripts, and her deep and generous commitment to this inquiry into race and relationship. Janie's astute and thoughtful responses to earlier drafts of this book have had a profound effect on our thinking. Elizabeth Debold was also most generous in bringing to this work her insights into mind/body relationships in girls' development and her keen eye for the effects of social class. We are

enormously grateful to her for her willingness to read the manuscript on short notice and for her immensely valuable analysis.

We were fortunate to have the assistance of thoughtful and enthusiastic graduate students, Sarah Ingersoll and Mark Schernwetter, who worked with us at the beginning stages of the research, and Pamela Pleasants, who brought her experience in working with girls in public schools, her questions, and her courage into our interpretive community and stayed to work through some of the difficult interpretive problems surrounding racial differences. Our research assistants Kate Adler, Annie Blais, Elizabeth Brewer, Taryn Shea LaRaja, Lisa Machoian, and Ruth Slocum contributed their energy and ideas to the project. Jamelle Gardine and Beverly Smith added to our analysis with their close readings of the interviews with the black girls in the study. Nancy Jacobs transcribed tapes that were often difficult to listen to for a number of reasons.

Michelle Fine drew from her extensive experiences with girls in urban education and was a most helpful and enthusiastic consultant. Teresa Bernardez brought her knowledge of group dynamics, her culturally sensitive analysis of women and anger, and her many years of clinical experience to the retreat process and was most generous with her time in discussing the Women and Race retreats with us. We would like to express our appreciation also to Jane Attanucci and Elliot Mishler for careful reading of earlier drafts, to Marcia Hall and Dorothy Austin for insightful comments, and to Joan Sullivan for her thoughtful questions and suggestions. We owe a special thanks and acknowledgment to George Horner for his significant and ongoing contributions throughout the process of our research and writing. His psychological insights, engagement with the central questions of this work, and innumerable careful and critical readings and rereadings of drafts have been extraordinary.

As in other work of the Harvard Project, the research reported here was conducted in the context of ongoing relationships and conversations among women and men involved in the studies of women's psychology and girls' development. Lyn Mikel Brown and Annie Rogers provided vital links and insights from their work as directors of, respectively, the Laurel School Study and the Strengthening Healthy Resistance and Courage in Girls Project. We also thank Lyn for her careful reading

and responses to earlier drafts of the first chapters. Niobe Way generously brought the insights and findings of her work with urban adolescents into many conversations with us. Our research method and our way of thinking about women's psychology and psychological development in general reflect a process of collaboration that has gone on at Harvard over a period of many years. The voices and ideas of many of our colleagues are woven into our present thinking, and we also wish to thank Dianne Argyris, Jane Attanucci, Betty Bardige, Mary Belenky, Kathryn Geismar, Dana Jack, D. Kay Johnston, Holly Kreider, Sharry Langdale, Nona Lyons, Laura Maciuika, Jane Margolis, J. Michael Murphy, Natasha Mauthner, Lisa Machoian, Kate O'Neill, Dick Osborne, Susan Pollack, Anna Romer, Steve Sherblom, Ellen Snee, Beverly Slade, Catherine Steiner-Adair, Lori Stern, Niobe Way, Grant Wiggins, David Wilcox, and Birute Zimlicki. To Barbara Miller and Mark Tappan, members of the Harvard Project, and to Sarah Hanson, an outstanding project assistant, we owe special thanks. Sarah transcribed the retreat tapes and also assumed responsibility for making the retreats happen.

Our discussion of voice is indebted to ongoing collaborations and conversations with women who work in the theater and to whom voice means the speaking voice. We are grateful to Kristin Linklater for exploring the relationship between her work on voice and the research of the Harvard Project in the collaborative Company of Women/Company of Girls Education and Theater Project. Our thanks to Normi Noel, who collaborated on the Strengthening Healthy Resistance and Courage Project and brought her analysis of resonance, and the relationship between voice and resonance in girls' development, into our work. Tina Packer has talked with us about this book at critical junctures, bringing her unflagging interest and enthusiasm, her ideas, and the encouragement to "speak our passion."

We thank Virginia LaPlante, our editorial consultant in the early stages of this project. She helped to turn a final report into a book. Our thanks also to Linda Howe of Harvard University Press for her vigilance, her skill, and her extraordinary patience. To Angela von der Lippe, our editor, we are most grateful for inspiring and encouraging our boldest visions.

Silence

Too many women
in too many countries
speak the same language
of silence.
My grandmother was always silent—
always aggrieved—
only her husband had the cosmic right
(or so it was said)
to speak and be heard.

They say it is different now
(After all, I am always vocal
and my grandmother thinks
I talk too much).
But sometimes, I wonder.

When a woman gives her love,
as most women do, generously—
it is accepted.
When a woman shares her thoughts,
as some women do, graciously—
it is allowed.
When a woman fights for power,
as all women would like to,
quietly or loudly
it is questioned.

And yet, there must be freedom—
if we are to speak.
And yes, there must be power—
if we are to be heard.
And when we have both
(freedom and power)
let us not be misunderstood.

We seek only to give words
to those who cannot speak
(too many women
in too many countries).
I seek only to forget the sorrows
of my grandmother's
silence.

Anasuya Sengupta
Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi

Between Voice and Silence

Contents

Prologue

In this book, we enter a landscape that is strangely silent—where girls for the most part are not heard in public, or if heard are generally spoken about in the third person. These girls have voices, they are perfectly capable of first-person speech, but as they will say repeatedly, nobody listens, nobody cares, nobody asks what they are feeling and thinking.

This common adolescent plaint becomes compelling when it has the ring of truth. In the study we will report in this book, we asked twenty-six girls who were designated "at risk" for high school dropout and early motherhood what they were feeling and thinking about themselves, their relationships, their lives, their futures, their experiences in school, and their decisions around sexuality. Our purpose in initiating these interview conversations stemmed from our conviction that the inclusion of these "at-risk" girls is essential to understanding women's psychology and girls' development. Most of the girls are poor and working class; many are members of the groups that compose the "ethnic minorities" of this country.

In the course of our research, we discovered the magnitude of their contribution. From a small group of twenty-six girls, interviewed annually over a three-year period, we learned to ask "Who is listening" as well as "Who is speaking" and to see more deeply into the psychological and political implications of this joining. We found that it was in fact a risky business, this listening to girls.

Women have always been listening and not listening to girls, caring and not caring about what happens to them, because women have al-

ways been in the company of girls, if only of the girl they once were themselves. In the course of our research with this small group of girls attending an urban public high school, we discovered that it was the women in these girls' lives who seemed most often to listen, to care, to be interested in knowing them. Many of these women were themselves at risk, and the girls sometimes spoke of the women who listened and spoke with them as "crazy" or different.

We will struggle in this book with the word *different,* mainly to hold it apart from its common mistranslation, "deficient." Our group of twenty-six girls was so informative in part because of the cultural and racial differences among them: eight are African American or Caribbean; four are Latina; eight are Portuguese; and six are Irish or Italian American. All are from working-class or poor families. In the course of the project, six girls dropped out of school and five of them became mothers; twenty graduated from high school and five went on to college; fourteen entered the job market after high school at a level that suggested a continuation of their poor or working-class status.

Difference, in our understanding here, is the essence of relationship. In our efforts to come into relationship with girls who differ from us in ways that are potentially profoundly illuminating—who live in many respects in different cultures and in some ways speak a different language—we quickly realized our own limitations. In this project, as in all of our research with women, we would depend on an interpretive community to create a place where women's and girls' voices could be resounded without serious distortion, and where we could listen and try to hear without being distracted by premature judgment, by dismissiveness or idealization, or by the pervasive stereotypes that surround girls (see Gilligan, Brown, and Rogers, 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, and Noel, 1992; and also Jordan et al., 1991).

In our study with the twenty-six "at-risk" girls, the composition of the interpretive community became central. We quickly discovered that we had to learn new ways of listening, become attuned to different voices, different cultures, and different languages even when English remained the spoken tongue. The question "Who is listening" now became an integral part of our voice-centered, relational method—inte-

gral to our understanding of both voice and relationship. We realized that our previous emphasis on "Who is speaking" reflected in part our own and our research participants' class and cultural location. Girls who by virtue of their class position, their cultural status, or their educational privilege have been led to believe that people are interested in who they are and what they have to say, worry about jeopardizing these relationships by revealing what seem like unacceptable parts of themselves. They will often modulate their voices to blend in or harmonize with the prevailing key. In short, girls who believe that the world of relationships is open to them and that they have access to the bounties of the world—to honor, riches, marriage, and blessing, which the goddesses offer Miranda, Prospero's daughter in *The Tempest*—will often be persuaded, as Miranda is in Shakespeare's play, to change their voices and give up their questions in order not to jeopardize their chances. This is what Virginia Woolf once called "committing adultery of the brain" (Woolf, 1938).

The girls in our study were not living under similar constraints. They could speak, but for the most part felt that few cared or listened to what they had to say. Having a "big mouth" often got them into trouble, but silence, the slow slipping into a kind of invisible isolation, was also devastating.

A main finding of our present research is that the vitality and psychological brilliance we have encountered in our previous studies with girls in more privileged school environments, and also among public school girls who were not identified as being "at risk," were also evident in our interviews with these "at-risk" girls at the time when they were roughly thirteen and in the eighth grade—in the first year of our project. Over the three years of the study, we observed a fight for relationship that often became dispirited as girls experienced betrayal or neglectful behavior and felt driven into a psychological isolation they and others readily confused with independence. Girls' descriptions of their increasing isolation and psychological distress, including their experience of having no effective voice, regularly preceded overt manifestations or symptoms of psychological trouble, highlighting the opportunity for prevention and also guiding preventive strategies. In contrast to other girls whom

we have studied, there were few safety nets available to these girls when they made mistakes, took wrong turns, acted on impulses that turned out to be misguided or foolish or simply unlucky, or sank into a kind of depressive lethargy and withdrew from the world. It was here that the combined effects of race, ethnicity, and class were so powerful.

Women were perhaps the best protection against the risk of disconnection and psychological dissociation. A resonant relationship with a woman, meaning a relationship in which a girl can speak freely and hear her voice clearly resounded as a voice worth listening to and taking seriously—a voice that engages the heart and mind of another and calls forth response—was associated with psychological health and development and what are commonly regarded as good outcomes for the girls in this project: no early motherhood, graduation from high school, for some, higher education and social mobility, and a continuing sense of psychological vitality and involvement in life.

It is important to note that the women with whom girls found it easy to speak their minds and their hearts were women who spoke from their own experience. Because adolescents lack first-person experience in the worlds of adult sexuality, relationships, and work, they tend to rely on second- or third-person voices. These voices are at times misleading or confusing in the sense of speaking at a far remove from, or in direct contradiction to, what girls and women know through experience. Then the voice of women's experience affords a crucial resonance for girls, providing girls with an echo—a compass or gyroscope for centering themselves in what can otherwise be a disorienting and dangerous time.

Analyzing this phenomenon, we have come to the following formulation. At adolescence, girls in general are at risk for losing touch with what they know through experience, in part because the changes of puberty and adolescence may render girls' childhood experience seemingly irrelevant, in part because women's and girls' experiences tend to be idealized or devalued or simply not represented within patriarchal societies and culture, and in part because girls often discover in adolescence that their relational strengths and resilience (their ability to make and maintain connection with others and to name relational violations) paradoxically begin to jeopardize their relationships and undermine their

sense of themselves (see Gilligan, in press; see also Miller, 1988). When girls' experience comes into tension with what are called "relationships," or girls' sense of themselves is at odds with images of good or valuable or desirable women, then women's voices can be psychologically life-saving in providing an internalized counter to what otherwise becomes an almost necessary process of dissociation that drains girls' vitality and energy. When women can stay with girls so that girls do not have to absent themselves in order to be with other people, relationships between women and girls can be of immense value in providing girls a place for sorting out and thinking through their responses to confusing and complicated realities. Because experiences of sexuality, relationships, and work are all deeply imbued with cultural meanings and are affected by race, class, and sexual orientation, girls tend to name women who are similar to them in these respects as important in their lives.

The gap between what girls and women know firsthand from experience and what is socially constructed and institutionally held to be reality or truth or common knowledge becomes starkly apparent in public discourse about "teenage pregnancy"—a discourse frequently raised when speaking of the poor. In a recent study based on a survey conducted by the National Center for Health Statistics between 1989 and 1991, researchers discovered, from interviewing 10,000 girls and women, that "half of the fathers of babies born to mothers between 15 and 17 were 20 or older, and that 20 percent of the fathers were six or more years older" (Steinhauer, 1995). Commenting on these findings, David Landry, a co-author of the study, observed: "To most people, these numbers are counterintuitive . . . This research highlights that teen-age pregnancy is not just limited to teenagers, but that in fact adult males bear a lot of the responsibility." To some people these numbers may be counterintuitive, but to half the girls and young women who become pregnant, the numbers simply reflect their experience and perhaps, more to the point, convey a prevalent, although unspoken, reality.

The present work is part of an ongoing effort to give voice to a fuller range of human experience within psychological research and theory. A