



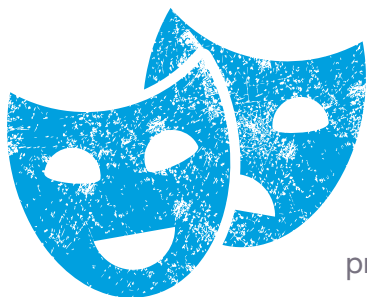
# SPARK-it!



## Through Performance

A series of performance-based activities for teaching artists, educators and activists to guide young people (ages 14-20) to prevent sexual violence in their lives and communities.





## SPARK-it! Through Performance

“Girls always have so much drama!” So let’s use performance techniques to explore, critique and learn about sexism, sexualization, violence prevention and healthy body image.

In spring 2014, a group of six teenage girls in New York City worked with SPARK to write and perform ***UNFINISHED: Girls of Today, Wives of Tomorrow***, an original play that addressed the specific challenges and pressures girls face, particularly the pressure to be “the perfect girl.” We set the play in a not-so-distant dystopian future where girls are sent to a prison-like “finishing school” in order to learn all the skills (cooking, cleaning & “pleasing your man”) they’ll need in their future roles as wives. Each of the six girls plays a distinct character who experiences the rules in different ways. We meet the girls on the day of their final exams where they have to show off everything they’ve learned in order to get matched with their new husband. Drama, conflict, insecurities, rage and rebellion brew and the girls discover that if they work together they just might have the power to challenge and change the system.

In this SPARKit, we invite you to share our process as we provide you with playwriting, dance, music and performance activities to explore the issues girls face and strategize ways to take action personally and politically.





## WHAT IN THE WORLD?

- View the video from the entire performance. Discussion questions:
- How is our world similar to the world created by the girls in *UNFINISHED*?
- How would you define the “perfect girl” today? How are girls under pressure to be “perfect?” How do these expectations impact you personally?
- How would you define the “perfect boy” today? How are boys under pressure to be “perfect?” How do these expectations impact you personally?
- What made the girls decide to push back? How were they successful? Could you use similar tactics in your life?





## WHERE DO WE LEARN ABOUT HOW GIRLS “ARE SUPPOSED TO” LOOK AND ACT?

In *Girls of Today, Wives of Tomorrow*, the rules of the school come from a disembodied voice over a loudspeaker—but in real life, it’s not that simple. We get conflicting messages all the time from everyone around us, from our friends to our family to the movies we watch to the music we listen to and the magazines we read. Some of these messages are good and some are dangerous. How can you tell which is which? Which voices are the loudest in your life?

### *Activity: A Day in the Life (15 minutes)*

Teenagers spend an average of ten hours per day in front of screens. In this game, students will improvise and use their bodies (no speaking) to move through one 24 hour day in 3 minutes. Each “hour” will last 10 seconds. The facilitator should keep time and announce new hours (“Midnight.....1 am.....2 am.....”) while students improvise what they do in that hour (for example, at 4am, students might show that they are sleeping, while at 10am, they might behave as if they are eating breakfast).

Go through this activity 3-4 times, each time calling out a different day and encourage students pay attention to what it is they’re doing throughout the length of the day, hour by hour. Then, discuss with them: how many hours did they spend watching TV, or browsing the internet, or playing sports? How were they using their bodies? How much time did they spend in front of screens or other media, especially compared to more active or “embodied” activities?

Suggested “days” to act out: yesterday, a Saturday, the first day of school, a day during finals, a day in the middle of the summer, New Year’s Day, their birthday, a “typical” day.





### **Activity: *That's not very ladylike. (15 minutes)***

Now that students are thinking about where the messages they're hearing come from, what do those messages say? In this game, students explore the absurdity and power of messages about what girls and boys should or shouldn't do.

Students stand in a circle with two volunteers in the middle. The students in the middle begin an improvised scene or conversation.

As the scene goes on, students outside the circle interrupt by saying "That's not very ladylike! Girls should always \_\_\_\_\_." The students in the circle must immediately adopt that "advice" and continue the scene. As soon as they have implemented this new action, the student who has been in the scene longest needs to find a reason to exit the scene and leaves. Then a new volunteer enters the scene by asking a question and joins in and acts "normal" again. Students call out another "That's not very ladylike! Girls should always..."

After every student has had at least one turn in the middle of the circle, end the activity and discuss with your students. What was it like to have to constantly monitor and change your behavior based on your classmates' whims? What kinds of messages are the media shouting at us? What happens if we don't adjust our behavior? Who do we know who to listen to?



### **Facilitator Tip**

When beginning a scene, ask the students to call out a relationship between two people (sisters, boss/employee, girlfriends, etc...), and a location (the mall, the moon, school cafeteria, etc...)



## WHAT ARE GIRLS SUPPOSED TO BE LIKE, ANYWAY?

There are lots of rules for girls at the school in *Girls of Today, Wives of Tomorrow*. The students are expected to apply makeup, learn to cook, be beautiful for other people, be submissive, and constantly work to please others. Girls who don't do these things are punished by not graduating. What kind of pressures like this exist in your life? What are you told that girls are "supposed" to do? What kind of expectations do people put on you because you're a girl? What expectations do you put on yourself? Have you ever not done something because you felt like it was "for boys?" Were you ever not **ALLOWED** to do something because it was just for boys?



### Facilitator Tip

Students can call out statements such as "That's not very ladylike! Girls should talk quietly" (so students lower their voices)

"That's not very ladylike! Girls should always be doing jumping jacks" (so students continue the scene doing jumping jacks). If students do not call out any demands then the facilitator should call out several examples. If several students call out at the same time, facilitator should say, "I heard first that 'Girls should \_\_\_\_\_!'"



### **Activity: Build a Girl Machine**

What's a "perfect" girl? Let's build one and find out. In this game, students will construct two "girl machines." The first one will be based on the play, and the second on their personal experiences.

To build the first machine, ask a student volunteer to think about the play and recall one physical movement/ gesture and sound that is part of being a student at the fictional school. For instance, a she might say something like "I must cover this blemish" while powdering her nose (as a reference to makeup class), or "I cooked this steak for you" while serving an invisible partner (in reference to the cooking scene). She should repeat her sound and movement over and over again. Then one by one, other students add onto the "machine" by joining each other and repeating their own sound and movements as if they are all part of one machine. Once everyone is working together as part of the machine, let it "run" for 30 seconds. You can invite them to speed up and slow down.

To build the second machine, ask students to choose a sound and motion related to a time they felt proud, happy, successful, or otherwise good. This can be anything from any moment

in their lives, or even something they simply want to happen one day. Once all students are part of this "machine," let it run for at least 30 seconds.

Discuss: What did it feel like to be part of the two machines?







### **Activity: “Because I’m a girl”**

(video CLIP) Watch the video clip of girls finishing this sentence. Give every student a piece of paper and invite them to write their own piece following two prompts. First: “Because I am a girl, I am supposed to \_\_\_\_\_.” Then, “because I am a girl, I will \_\_\_\_\_.” Give them 15 minutes to write and encourage them to write in any form they desire – a poem, monologue, story or song. Ask for volunteers to read their pieces aloud or pair them up to rehearse with each other and practice their pieces and then share them with the whole group.



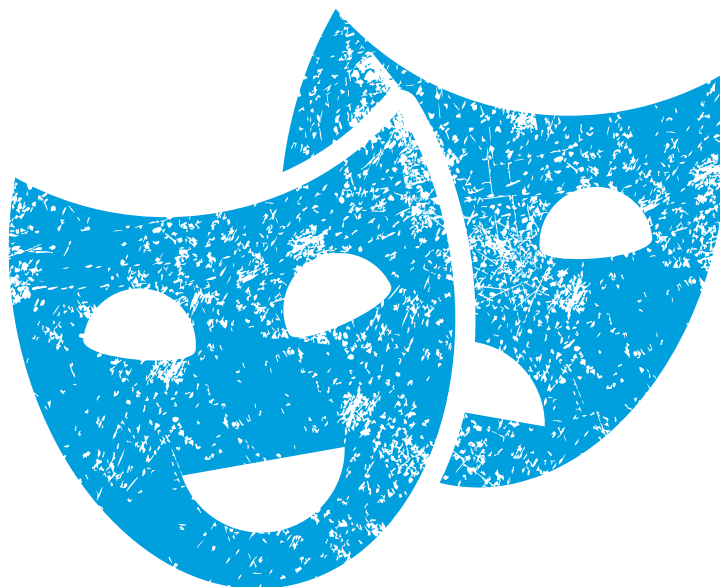


## OK, BUT WHAT ABOUT THOSE BOYS?

At the boys' school, what are boys not allowed to do? What do they have to do instead? How is that different than what the girls are expected to do? For example, one boy says he wants to go to the spa and pamper himself, but other boys or men would make fun of him. Compare this to the girls' school, where girls **MUST** take a makeup class. What other dynamics like this do you see in your life? Are boys allowed to be emotional? To be sad? To be sensitive? What happens when boys are constantly expected to be "strong?"

### *Activity: Collage It*

Flip through both men's and women's magazine. What kinds of boys and men are represented? What kind of activities are they doing? What are they talking about? What do they look like? Cut some images out and create a collage of the "perfect" man according to these magazines. What are this "ideal" man's physical and emotional attributes? What's missing? How are these images different from the images of women in women's magazines? How are men represented in women's magazines?





### Activity: *Boy Symphony*

This activity is similar to “Girl Machine” above, but vocal. Students stand in a circle. One student should begin by making a noise or sound that is associated with the stereotypical masculinity shown in the play—for example, a grunt or a chest slap. The sound should be repeated on a continuous loop. Then the next student adds a new sound/rhythm while the first student is still repeating her sound. Continue around the circle until everyone is contributing a sound. Find the “rhythm” of the group. Listen to the noises—is this what men sound like?







## WHAT DO WE PROMISE EACH OTHER?

*UNFINISHED* is based on the plot point that girls and boys need to be “trained” for their future relationships. With such narrow views of what girls and boys are like, what kinds of expectations can we have for relationships? What does a healthy relationship look like? What does it feel like? How do we know when our relationships are healthy, or if they’re bad for us?

### ***Activity: I solemnly swear I will smash gender roles***

Rewatch the two pledges from the play, What do they have in common? What’s different about them? What does each pledge emphasize?

Write your own pledge. What do you pledge to do? How do you pledge to act? What values are most important to you? How is that different from what’s shown in the play? Recite your individual pledges in small groups. Discuss common themes and ideas. Write a group pledge that incorporates lines and phrases from each student’s pledge.

### ***Activity: Not everyone is straight, you know.***

Both of the schools in this play assume that everyone is heterosexual—that all the girls are interested in being with boys, and that all the boys are interested in being with girls. In fact, in the boys’ pledge, one character even says that acting the way he wants to makes other people think that he’s gay.

The truth is that everyone—straight or not—is harmed by gender stereotypes.



**Activity: Just because I \_\_\_\_\_, doesn't mean I \_\_\_\_\_**

In this writing activity, announce the writing prompt, “Just because I \_\_\_\_\_, doesn't mean I \_\_\_\_\_.” Each student fills in the two blanks and then writes a monologue. She should think about a person in her life who misunderstands her in some way or someone who she really needs to communicate something specific to. The prompted sentence is the first line of the monologue. Each student should think about the following questions before he starts writing: Who are you talking to? What do you want from this person? Why do you want it *now*? Where are you? What's your obstacle from getting what you want? What tactics will you use? What do you discover during the monologue? How do you change?

After writing the monologue, take some time to rehearse and then perform for each other.





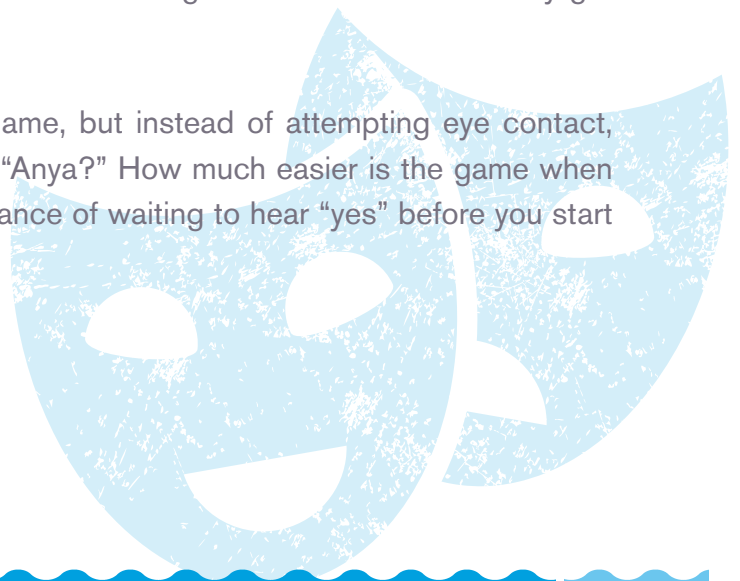
### **Activity: Yes means yes**

Narrow gender stereotypes lead to violence in many ways, including sexual assault. Sexual assault is any kind of sexual activity without consent, or express permission from everyone involved. But girls are taught that it's important to please others, and boys are taught that it's important to get what you want (including sex), so talking about consent often makes people nervous or uncomfortable. You often hear that "no means no"—and while that's true, it's equally important that "yes means yes."

In this activity, students stand in a wide circle facing one another. The goal of this game is to trade spots with other people in the circle with, and only with, their express permission. The catch is that nobody can speak except to say YES. Students must communicate entirely with their eyes and faces; they cannot say each other's names, use their hands, or touch one another.

To start, one student ("A") must make eye contact with another student ("B"). "B" says YES and then "A" starts walking towards "B"'s spot in the circle. Before she gets there, "B" must choose another student ("C") to make eye contact with and then when "C" says YES, "B" can walk towards her place. Then "C" needs to find a new spot and on and on and on. It may take several runs before students find their rhythm—run the game a few times until they get the flow of it.

Reform the circle. This time, the goal is the same, but instead of attempting eye contact, students can use one another's names—as in, "Anya?" How much easier is the game when we communicate verbally? What is the significance of waiting to hear "yes" before you start moving?







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