

Spring 2012

**NHWI**

**Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):  
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session Report  
for Manchester Young Men – April 30, 2012**

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## About the New Hampshire's Women's Initiative (NHWI):

The New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) is a new non-profit organization dedicated to continuing the legacy of success of our merging partners: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's Lobby and Alliance, and the Women's Policy Institute. The NHWI mission is to advance social, economic, and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.

The NHWI has a unique governance structure. Its board is supported by both a Founding Mothers' Panel, comprised of the founders of the merging partners, and a Gender Ambassadors Panel, a group of young women leaders who are interested in better understanding and re-framing the dialogue around gender equality issues in New Hampshire. This multi-generational sphere of influence will help the NHWI leverage both the rich history and accomplishment surrounding women's issues in New Hampshire and at the same time craft a new path forward for gender equality born out of contemporary thinking and needs.

## About the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):

The goal of the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is support the mission of the NHWI by informing its research, outreach, and advocacy with a better understanding of the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them. GAP members will work toward that goal by hosting Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State. The Listening Sessions will be facilitated focus groups consisting of six to ten participants engaged in a formal discussion for up to ninety minutes using pre-determined questions. Results will be documented and shared with the NHWI Board. The first round of Listening Session participants will come primarily from the existing networks of GAP members and are expected to be primarily women, however the method can be adapted to reach other networks and populations, including men.

## About the Authors:

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the fall of 2011 and spring of 2012, the New Hampshire Women’s Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is conducting geographically diverse listening sessions across the state with content centered on “Contemporary Gender Equality”: gender equality issues as they relates to young NH women and men.

The listening sessions are designed to include a small group of women from each region to discuss broadly how the women's movement has, or hasn't, changed. Based on the observation that women in a younger age demographic often don't relate to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s-1990s, the goal of the listening sessions is to tease out what younger women (and men) identify as important gender equality issues so the NHWI can develop programs and policies to support those areas.

The Manchester Young Men’s GAP Listening Session is one of several sessions happening across the state. The other regions include: the Seacoast, North Country, Merrimack Valley, Nashua, Monadnock Region, and the Upper Valley.

The preliminary results from this Session reflect an avid interest in the following topics: fairness in the workplace, reducing violence against women, reduction of domestic violence, and perceptions of the role of men and women in the home and workplace.

## Introduction and Background

The city of Manchester, New Hampshire is located in the southern region of the Granite State in Hillsborough County and is the state’s largest City. According to the United States Census 2010<sup>1</sup>, Manchester has a population of 109,565 with slightly more female than male residents who are predominantly white.

## Methods:

Gaining insight into a community with the use of focus groups is a commonly used approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding human thoughts, behaviors and motivations through thoughtful survey design, observation and inquiry.

The GAP Listening Sessions are designed like focus groups where a facilitator and note-taker work together to gain insight into participant’s thoughts and feelings about contemporary gender equality issues facing young women and men in NH.

Prior to conducting the listening sessions, each facilitator and note-taker was provided a facilitation packet that details instructions for conducting an effective focus group. This includes instructions for the specific roles of the facilitator and note-taker, the length of the session and how to draft the report after the listening session.

## Location

The Manchester Young Men's GAP Listening Session was conducted in the headquarter offices of City Year NH in Manchester, NH.

## Participant Background

Eight male participants ranging in age from 22-31 joined the listening session. The participants were of diverse racial backgrounds, and all have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Each participant is or has been part of the staff of City Year NH. Important subject matters covered by their collective work include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, education, women's health, and advocacy.

All but one of the participants resides in the greater Manchester area.

## Manchester Listening Session Format

The listening session was relatively informal. Each participant had an unspecified amount of time to answer each question, and the conversation bounced around amicably. The session, like the others, was designed to last two hours including introductions, participant feedback, a participant exercise, and concluding remarks.

The Manchester Young Men's GAP Listening Session was conducted using an agenda and script provided in the facilitation packet (Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began at 4:30 pm with introductions of the facilitator, note-taker and the participants. The participants introduced themselves by first name, occupation, age, and town of residence. Sandwiches, salad, cookies and water were provided to participants.

Once the introductions concluded, a series of four questions were asked of the participants (a closing exercise was used for the last question). This process began with general questions, designed to get the conversation started. Throughout the process, the participants seemed to warm up to the questions. Their answers became more detailed and thoughtful. As there were relatively few participants, some of whom were familiar with each other, the talk was friendly but focused.

Toward the end of the session, a participation exercise was conducted as a means to extract the top issues that the participants would like to see the NHWI pursue. Each participant received 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a pen; they wrote their top three issues, one per Post-it note and then they put the Post-its up on a blank wall in the room. Then each person placed a pink post it strip on their top issue - which wasn't necessarily an issue that they originally wrote. Please see 'Question 4: The Post-It exercise!' for the results of this exercise.

Lastly, each participant was asked to fill out a participant information sheet which details their age, occupation, zip code and contact information if they would like to remain apprised of NHWI work. We are pleased to report that participants wished to remain informed of the NHWI efforts.

## Summary of Findings:

The Summary of Findings is organized by each question asked at the listening session. Synthesis of material will occur at a later date when all of the listening sessions have been conducted. Please note that participants are identified only by a number to protect their privacy.

### QUESTION #1: What brought you here tonight?

#	<i>Comment</i>	<i>NT-Observations</i>
1	Engaged in discussions about women over the last couple of weeks, and this ties in nicely. Saw no one was signed up, but was confused because he thought it was a women-only discussion.	Nodding & general consensus in the room when he said he thought it was only for women.
2	Signed up because he saw on Monday that there were no men signed up. Might as well have a voice men so there's not a biased discussion, you need both POV's.	First to speak; raised hand right away.
3	[Redacted] asked me, and I'm in debt to her.	
4	Skeptical when he saw it was a women's issues panel, but then thought that the male's perspective might not be heard because men might not stand up and say their opinion. Wanted to give male's perspective.	
5	Came today because roommate & flagship team members are doing it, and it sounds like an interesting discussion.	
6	Sociology major in college. This is one of the subjects you tackle there, wants to see what we have to offer.	
7	Wanted to learn a little more about what was happening. Also, there weren't a lot of people signing up so he volunteered.	
8	Most interesting topic in debate class, so he wants to hear what's being said. Also, no one had signed up.	

**QUESTION #2: How do you define gender equality?**

#	<i>Comment</i>	<i>NT-Observations</i>
1	<p>It's more complicated than just defining roles. If a man is expected to hold a door open for a woman, you have that societal role, those small nuances. Should women be expected to do those same things, or different things? Gender equality is flattening those expectations.</p> <p>I think of feminists as more extreme/hostile than someone talking about gender equality.</p> <p>Definition of feminism seems to come from a chapter in a 1973 textbook, as opposed to being relevant today. We already have a certain connotation from it if you don't have it involved in your life.</p>	<p>Almost unanimously: most of the guys (except #8) would rather get involved with a "gender equality" project than a "feminism" project.</p>
2	<p>Gender equality is an ideal. Similar to ideal of democracy, something that you want but that hasn't been reached yet.</p> <p>View feminism as edgy, doesn't really want to talk about it, but it seems negative. Language can create a strong emotional response, and 'feminism' can have anger, hatred, in its history. It connotes more extremism.</p>	<p>Seemed to have more to say about feminism, but didn't want to offend the women in the room.</p>
3	<p>Equality opportunity on the front end; that they have the same opportunity to beginning with so we can see where people are based on merit. Getting rid of all the other junk that gets in the way of showing who someone is as an individual.</p> <p>Sweden is removing those roles &amp; traditions. It's wrong to say to a little girl, 'You must wear pink,' but you do need an identity, and there are nice, easy cultural cues. If you don't have that at all, it might be harder to figure out who you are. I like the idea of gender equality, but when the car breaks I fix it; when dinner needs to be done, usually my wife makes it, and we're comfortable with that.</p> <p>To me, feminism was about tearing down a patriarchal society, viewing the world through this one scope with the goal of tearing down structures that don't benefit people. (#4: the same can be said for any 'ism'). Gender equality is more about building</p>	<p>Extremely thoughtful responses – must have thought about these issues before.</p>



	<p>up, bringing people up.</p> <p>My brain goes to affirmative action. If you're going to give one group advantages over others, the general population needs to see the end goal. Now, feminism doesn't seem to have an end goal. What's the goal? When do you know when you're work as a feminist is done? Gender equality seems like more of a goal.</p>	
4	<p>Breaking away from specific, traditional general roles, so society isn't dictating what someone 'should' do in a masculine or feminine role. Once you can look past expectations, this is true gender equality.</p> <p>You should choose to accept a role; it shouldn't be forced on you.</p> <p>For me, feminists are looked on as revolutionaries, radicals. I'm from the south, and part of my brain thinks of angry, crazy women, but part of me thinks of passionate people. Haven't studied feminism as much as I should have.</p>	<p>Lots of nervous, hesitant laughter when asked about the word "feminism" versus gender equality.</p>
5		
6	<p>When terms like "throw like a girl" don't exist. Also, when something heavy needs to be lifted, it's not "we need some guys to go do this," it's people.</p>	
7	<p>Gender equality doesn't need to mean everything is equal. Girls probably won't play in NFL because they're not built for it. But if you have an equal partnership, you have an identity but don't have to fit the mold to be equal, i.e. yin &amp; yang.</p>	
8	<p>Once that bias is removed and everyone has a chance to succeed in what they want to do.</p> <p>Unfortunate that 'feminism' gets a bad rap because people don't know what it stands for NOW, versus when it originally came about (bra burning, etc.).</p>	

**QUESTION #3: How have you, in NH, experienced gender equality or gender inequality?**

#	<i>Comment</i>	<i>NT-Observations</i>
1	<p>When I was working in middle school, we had to move these boys into a state of mind to think about whether something is disrespectful to women. Working in City Year, it seems to be filled with women in high positions, same thing in Philadelphia where I used to work. It's normal, natural. That may be perceived differently in a corporate world.</p> <p>Conversations about gender roles, or sex... it's less awkward to talk to students if they have those questions, boys rather than girls. Sometimes I'd get questions and deliberately shuffle them off to my female core members with the girls, and I would be more comfortable talking with the boys.</p>	
2	<p>I was hugged by a little kid; he just grabbed on to me, and I was nervous because of how I'd be perceived.</p> <p>I've never been in such a caring organization as this. You feel like, it's overwhelming sometimes. I'm quiet and independent, and people are always asking me, how you doing, are you okay? I feel the love &amp; trust flowing here.</p>	
3	<p>One of the great things: sometimes, a paper will be handed in without a name on it, and I'm not judging by any sort of prior knowledge. But at the same time, I can usually tell if it's a boy or a girl based on cultural references, etc. It's insidious, the fact that by the time kids get to me as juniors in high school, I can identify a girl's beautiful handwriting versus a boy's scrawl all over the paper. Where does that come from? They don't have different muscle structure.</p> <p>We had a staff meeting in high school about the dress code, and they encouraged us to talk to girls who were dressed inappropriately. No way. No way would I EVER have that conversation with a high school girl. There's an inherent bias about men in that way. Women are sort of innocent until proven otherwise. With men, we're perceived as nefarious. How did this turn into a conversation about men instead of women?</p>	
4	<p>You start off your school career at age 7, and I think I got my first male teacher in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. High school was 50/50. In college, I had mostly male professors. It appears that the profession for women in education is concentrated at the elementary school level. Is this cultural? Biological (more sensitive than men can be)? (#3: Same</p>	

	<p>reason we have no male babysitters, people aren't comfortable with males and kids at that age. You have a principal running the show.) I might be misperceived as too tough, too male.</p> <p>I've never been treated as more of an equal anywhere than here. When I get into the real world, I know there's that corporate mentality where the glass ceiling is still in effect. It's almost kind of weird where it's almost complete equality here. I haven't seen much inequality.</p>	
5		
6	<p>I've seen it with kids I work with from different cultures. In my American mindset, things they do seem like an odd way to think about things.</p> <p>I work in recruitment here, and we get comment cards back from people. I've thought about their handwriting all year. It's strange.</p> <p>I immediately assume a teacher is a woman. It's odd.</p> <p>Peers &amp; GE: I have dreadlocks. One day, I had my dreads in pigtails, and I was told that I wasn't taken seriously. Same day, a female counterpart had the same hairstyle, but nothing was said.</p>	Paused, laughed when asked about peers & gender equality.
8	<p>For me, at my elementary school, there has to be some type of issues where you have far more female teachers than male. I'm wrestling with, is this inequality or equality.</p> <p>I don't want to be misperceived when I'm working with younger kids. It just takes one time, but it's always in your mind. No one ever thinks that with women.</p> <p>There's a woman on his team who hugs kids, has them in her lap, etc. If I had my hand on a kid for too long, it wouldn't be okay. No one is thinking twice about her actions, but they would for mine. When kids hug me, I put my hands in the air and count to two before I make them stop. I have a fear – I make sure to be extra careful.</p>	Energetic/passionate when talking about his fears about being around the kids & how he's perceived as a man around kids.
7	<p>In middle school, everything is awkward for everyone, and if anyone strays away from the pack. Could be anything, dressing differently &amp; getting made fun of.</p> <p>One of the first things to come out in evaluations: whether or not a</p>	(General laughter at middle school analogy)

	<p>man was hugging kids for too long.</p> <p>There are more women here than men, so I feel in the minority. I find myself seeking out my male friends sometimes just for some guy time. It makes you think about how a woman feels in the corporate world.</p>	
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Note-taker's observation: Guys warmed up, laughed & relaxed when asked if they needed more food. Can feel the camaraderie & trust in the room. We took a quick break & everyone started chatting about their schools & work.

#### QUESTION #4: The Post-It Exercise!

All ideas on the wall (ideas in red were the ideas flagged by the group):

- Explaining gender equality – what does it look like?
- Ignorance on the topic
- Corporate world
- Creating more resources for women in abusive relationships
- Shelters for women (especially for homeless, abused, etc.)
- Teaching basic job skills (especially women immigrants)
- Youth gender equality forums
- Business incubation
- Alternatives to have kids (competing success stories)
- Career change assistance
- Gender bound expectations
- Determining where gender equality barriers are
- **Young women's leadership (institute?)**
- Income equality
- What can be done to see gender equality increase?
- Girl bias in school (today's education model is like a straightjacket for boys, testing, sitting, drugging, trying to keep everything under control, versus letting boys be boys; outside the classroom (camp, etc.), boys are quicker to be reprimanded than girls, and sometimes a girl's behavior is explained away by her 'trying to be cute,' even though sometimes it's the exact opposite.)
- Positive male role models (don't favor girls over boys – over-correcting)
- Divorce law (which may be biased in women's favor now)
- Men are victims, too / affect by issues
- **What does it mean to be a young woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?**
- **What can males do to help women have a positive view of themselves?**
- **Role empowerment, leading towards women's empowerment.**
- **Awareness for men on this issue.**
- **Making it known to males that they have a voice in this discussion so they feel more comfortable supporting it.**

- What can we do as positive male role models to help boys, especially in middle schools or during difficult or awkward times?

**QUESTION #5: Closing remarks from participants.**

#	<i>Comment</i>	<i>NT-Observations</i>
1		
2	It's important to get the word out about what 'gender equality' means.	
3	I agree, especially so it doesn't turn into the same kind of word as 'feminism'.	
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

**Closing remarks from participants:**

The general feeling at the end of the session was appreciation at being asked to participate and positivity about the continued work of the NHWI.

**Limitations:**

The methods designed by the GAP members to conduct the state-wide listening sessions were well thought and academically sound. While the GAP members worked hard to minimize the effects of bias on the thoughts and opinions of the participants, limitations to these methods still remain.

The session was characterized by the similar ages and experiences of the men present.

The timeframe for the listening sessions proved sufficient. Though the number of participants was small and allowed for each participant to flesh out his ideas and speak when ideas came to mind. The informality of the session was ideal for the size, though a larger variety of work experience and age would perhaps have been more indicative of the region.

Many of the participants either currently, or in the past, have worked directly with City Year NH, which means they are already well versed in social issues. This serves to influence their thoughts and opinions

because it primes them to discuss issues that they are exposed to at their employment or volunteer efforts.

Lastly, each participant was selected based on a connection to the executive director of the hosting site.

## Conclusion:

The results of this New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) Listening Session are promising. They reveal a community of young men ready to engage in the meaningful work necessary to close the gender equality gap in New Hampshire. It also reveals a complex and dynamic environment in which this work will be accomplished.

Top concerns identified by the participants include raising awareness about economic inequalities. Though these issues earned "red dots/fuchsia flags," the group was sensitive to many other issues: reducing domestic and sexual violence, and involvement and examination of ways men can be positively engaged in the issues.

To engage younger women and men in New Hampshire, NHWI can begin to think about ways to involve young people in New Hampshire using college networks to engage young women and men in addressing the issues outlined above. Using the energy and enthusiasm of the existing GAP listening session participants, the NHWI can begin to reach out more broadly through the academic community since each region has a college or university affiliation.

## Appendix A: Listening Session Script

### I. Welcome and Introductions

- Thank participants for coming
- Distribute participant information sheets (and agendas if using)
- Introduce facilitator and note taker
- Overview of New Hampshire Women's Initiative
  - The New Hampshire Women's Initiative is a new non-profit organization
  - A unification of:
    - The Commission on the Status of Women
    - The Women's Lobby and Alliance
    - The Women's Policy Institute
  - ***NHWI Mission: To advance social, economic and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.***
  - Has a Board of Directors and two advisory panels
    - Founding Mothers

- Gender Ambassadors Panel
- Objective of Listening Sessions & GAP
  - Gender Ambassadors Panel will support the mission of the NHWI through researching and better understanding the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them.
  - Members of GAP will host a series of Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State.
- Introduction of participants: *First name, age, town, occupation*

## II. Overview of the Process

- Description of plan for Listening Session by facilitator
- How discussion will be documented during the Session
- How a report will be prepared after the Session
- Assurance of confidentiality (inform participants that any report will only identify participants by age, zip code, and industry/occupation)

## I. Establishment of Ground Rules

- Ground rules encourage active and honest participation and a safe discussion environment.
- If a participant violates a ground rule, they will be politely reminded of the ground rule.
- If a participant continues to violate a ground rule, they will be asked to leave the group.

### Ground Rules (The 5 A's)

#### Participants of this group...

- Agree to maintain confidentiality
- Agree that there are no “right or wrong” answers to the questions
- Agree to speak honestly based on our own experiences
- Agree that only one person will speak at a time
- Agree to respond to one another politely and respectfully

## II. Discussion of Contemporary Gender Equality

1) What made you interested in attending today’s listening session on gender equality?

2) How do you define the term gender equality?

What does gender equality mean to you?

What does gender equality not mean to you?

What issues or subjects do you think about when you think of gender equality?

3) In New Hampshire, have you experienced or observed gender equality or inequality?

### III. **Post-it Note Exercise**

What issues relating to gender equality do you think are most important for the New Hampshire Women's Initiative to address?

**(Each participant receives 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a black sharpie; they must write their top three issues, one per Post-it note. Ask them to put the Post-its up on a white board or wall. Then each person gets one red dot. They must place their red dot on their top issue, which doesn't have to be one of the ones they originally wrote.)**

*\* Facilitator must collect the Post-its and return to the GAP Committee when complete*

### IV. **Wrap-up**

- Do you have any other thoughts or ideas that you really want to share about gender equality in NH?
- Thank you to participants by facilitator
- Collect participant information sheets; distribute NHWI information sheets

### V. **Adjourn**