girlsecurity

PREPARING GIRLS FOR A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD SYMPOSIUM READ OUT

The 2021 Newmark Symposium on National Security, Technology, and Society
On October 20-21, 2021, Girl Security hosted its first symposium, “Preparing Girls for a Rapidly Changing World.” This symposium was sponsored by Craig Newmark Philanthropies. The event convened key stakeholders working alongside Girl Security to ensure girls' and women's political and economic mobility is not impeded by gendered and racist challenges arising from advancements at the intersection of national security, technology, and society.

Registrants participated in the two-day event, which featured keynote speakers, panels, and roundtables from across government, industry, academia, and the social sector.

The goal of the symposium was to provide a closed space for candid discussion around nuanced issues, including education inequity, removing barriers to girls’ and women’s advancement in the services, the security experiences of girls and women from tribal nations and indigenous communities, and more.

The following is intended to provide a summary of keynote and discussion highlights from this two-day event.

Girl Security wishes to thank Craig Newmark Philanthropies for its generous support; the Girl Security team for organizing this event; and the mentors, supporters, and mentees who participate in this work.

Attached is the final agenda and a welcome letter provided to participants by Senator Jeanne Shaheen.
National security is the most powerful political realm in the world. Decisions made in the name of national security have shaped America, defined who wields power, and determined the world order. National security is also a series of pathways, including STEM, government and policy, law, academia, industry, the social sector, and more.

Until recently, the emphasis on the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in national security has focused primarily on senior levels of leadership. Girl Security is working to revert structural barriers that have and continue to impede equity in national security pathways. These early barriers include:

- Education inequity
- Lack of access to resources and opportunities
- Lack of mentorship and sponsorship

Additional later stage barriers include systemic discrimination, unsafe workplaces, and exclusionary promotional practices.
Girl Security’s model begins in high school. Girls and gender minorities, ages 14+, can participate in Girl Security’s stipended fellowship, mentorship, and sponsorship activities. Girl Security works closely with schools at the community level to embed an understanding of national security and its pathways. To advance this conversation around the need for earlier intervention in national security DEI efforts, Girl Security invited experts across academia to share best practices and areas for opportunity in the education space.

As part of a panel titled “Education Inequity and the Implications for Girls’ Participation in a Future Security Workforce,” panelists agreed that education inequity is perhaps the most fundamental starting point in a discussion of the lack of DE&I and accessibility in national security pathways. As one panelist noted, schools are “the epicenter to catapult equity.”

"Without access to knowledge of pathways and opportunities to advance beginning in middle and high school, young people - and specifically girls, women and people of color - are simply unaware of national security careers."

In addition, as experts noted, studies show that girls, women, and other marginalized groups opt for lower-paying majors (in college) or pursue lower-paying jobs in fields such as STEM, because they lack a sense of belonging. One expert noted that learning environments designed to be explicitly identity-affirming so as to foster a sense of belonging, coupled with mentorship and rigorous programming, are shown to deliver better outcomes.
Experts also noted the importance of adolescence as a “critical window for occupational identity formation and decision making” and the need for efforts and data that capture the impact of cultural biases on particular pathways as early as middle school.

When asked about the impact of the pandemic, experts agreed that the pandemic highlighted and exacerbated pre-existing challenges around access to technology and other supportive learning tools. In addition, one panelist cited data around increased anxiety, rates of suicide, and other trauma impacting adolescence and subsequent learning.

Coming out of the pandemic, panelists agreed that schools must center around students’ needs and design educational and other opportunities that reflect their needs, which may include more social and emotional learning and trauma-informed frameworks. In addition, aligning student needs with good careers in emerging fields such as STEM and cybersecurity is also a priority.
During a discussion entitled, “Girls and Gender Minorities Aspiring to Service: Removing Barriers to Engagement and Advancement,” experts interlinked complex topics to present a challenging but critical call to action.

“During her opening remarks, Deputy Secretary Kathleen Hicks recognized the work of Girl Security to support a more diverse future workforce and stated, “The Department [of Defense] cannot afford for individuals to never consider a career in national security...because of real or perceived barriers to entry or hostile or unfair working conditions.”

Experts began the discussion recognizing that service to the nation extends beyond the military, and highlighted the importance of girls’ civic engagement at home, in school, and in their communities. One panelist also noted the strides the U.S. military has made in recent years with the repeal of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, President Biden’s recent executive order to allow transgender service members to serve as themselves, and the opening of all roles to women.
However, one panelist also noted the need for the right leadership to lead the implementation of these policies. In addition, another expert noted the need to move this conversation away from strictly “women’s issues,” towards emphasizing the competitive advantage America can gain from increasing access to opportunity for all across the services.

Experts emphasized the importance of recognizing the role of pre-existing trauma among current and new service members and the need for more trauma-informed programming to support the advancement and inclusion of all who serve.

Lastly, experts emphasized the personal responsibility of the broader national security community to forge fairness across the military as a predicate to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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C. THE DIGITAL AGE

In a special fireside featuring Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency ("CISA") Director Jen Easterly and Camille Stewart, Head of Security Policy for Google Play and Android] and Girl Security Board Member, participants learned about the ways in which CISA is committed to advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion in cybersecurity pathways.

Director Easterly began with a reflection on her own career in both the public and private sectors, including over two decades in the Army, the National Security Council, and then Morgan Stanley. She reflected on her own career failures and noted the importance of accepting failure, personally and professionally, as a profound learning experience. In addition, she highlighted the importance of sponsorship alongside mentorship in national security, explaining that a sponsor is someone who will “fight for you” and help advance one’s career through active advocacy.

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When speaking specifically about cybersecurity, Director Easterly noted the benefits of increased digital connectivity, but also cautioned about its "perverse impacts," especially those with gendered impacts on girls and women, such as online harassment. She also emphasized the looming challenge of misinformation and disinformation and the myriad impacts on the U.S. electoral process. (To learn more about Girl Security’s work on fighting election disinformation, visit: https://www.girlsecurity.org/girlsguide)

Both Director Easterly and Camille Stewart centered their comments on the importance of representation in the cybersecurity workforce and the value of diverse teams in confronting our most pressing cybersecurity challenges, ushering innovation in technology and security, and inspiring future generations of diverse cybersecurity leaders.
During two concurrent sessions on the role of media in fully representing women in national security, and the importance of Native and Indigenous girls' and women's voices in a national security narrative, experts discussed the importance of understanding women's experiences.

In journalism and media, experts emphasized the importance of understanding the perspective of women “on the ground” in those countries in which the United States may maintain a presence.

Developing an informed narrative - especially one that advocates for women's rights - necessitates the inclusion of women's stories and female storytellers.

However, as media experts noted, "corrupt foreign governments...are basically doing everything to stop [women journalists] from doing their work." Lastly, experts noted the importance of accountability in newsrooms and in boardrooms to implement and advance responsive policies to ensure women can grow and stay in their careers.

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On the importance of Native and Indigenous girls’ and women’s voices in a national security narrative, participants were able to join a special listening session, featuring leading Native and Indigenous women from the education, public policy, and civil society sectors advocating for greater visibility for their communities and the particular challenges and threats they confront vis-a-vis security.

Panelists shared their own experiences in seeking to advocate on behalf of their communities to raise both awareness of and investment in combatting security challenges, from missing and murdered indigenous women to the environmental impacts of U.S. national security actions. They highlighted the impact of COVID-19 on communities of girls across the nation who confront worsening challenges, from trauma to access to education and healthcare.

Most poignantly, the panelists agreed that a discussion about the national security narrative, vis-a-vis Native American and Indigenous communities, must continue given the fraught history and resultant and pervasive mistrust of national security, law enforcement, and government.
D. BUILDING A GLOBAL COMMUNITY OF GIRLS IN SECURITY

During the final symposium session, leading experts from government and civil society discussed the challenges and opportunities for uniting girls from around the world through their shared and distinct security experiences. From health to sexual violence to online harassment, experts agreed that more can and must be done to build equity for girls and women globally.

Once again touching on the potential of technology, experts noted the potential to harness technology to connect, educate, and empower girls globally in security, advance their leadership across government and industry, and build networks of supportive peers.

All agreed that a more secure community, nation, and world requires the full participation of all stakeholders, and most importantly, the majority population who have been and remain historically excluded.

Lastly, experts emphasized the importance of equal rights and equal access to opportunities in the United States and globally to girls’ and women’s advancement. One expert noted that more can be done to educate boys about the pervasive and adverse impacts of toxic masculinity and their role in shifting the status quo.
During two critical sessions on exploring the impact of technology on girls’ learning, advancement and the gendered impacts of new domains such as climate change, experts from the social science, adolescent health, government, and private industry sectors emphasized the need to carefully follow emerging trends around the impact of technology, climate, and other national security issues on girls’ and women’s self-esteem, occupational identity, professional development.

With respect to neurodiversity, experts agreed that additional investment is required to ensure that girls who identify as neurodiverse have the support they deserve to advance into pathways in national security. As participants learned, girls are often later diagnosed as neurodiverse in comparison to their peers and the ways in which girls’ cognitive behaviors may differ from boys is still being understood. In addition, experts emphasized the need to shift norms around cognitive diversity to ensure that the national security workforce can benefit from the unparalleled insights and competencies of all thinkers. Finally, experts working at the intersection of technology, climate, and space agreed that girls are already leading efforts to combat climate change, but emphasized that more must be done to ensure girls’ and women can advance into all levels of leadership and decision-making to ensure their unparalleled insights are part of 21st-century solutions to these complex global security challenges.