The second stage emerges as the young women begin to relate with each other on a more personal level. It is often at this point that stereotypes become evident. Subtle and overt media-generated misperceptions can foster misunderstanding, divide girls and women of different cultures, and impede mutual support. The role of the educator is to help the young women achieve an awareness of the biases they have of women from different cultures—which have often been informed by mainstream media—and overcome them so that they can engage in grounded dialogue and really learn.

For example, through dialogue with a group of young Pakistani women, the girls of the Spotlight crew were confronted by the stereotypes of African American women that American media propagate to audiences abroad. In the first video conference, the Spotlight crew entertained, and then painstakingly challenged, a line of questioning from Pakistani girls that focused exclusively on hairstyles of an African American music video-vixen. The Spotlight girls gently navigated the discussion and were able to redirect the conversation to social issues.

In a guided conversation after that conference, the Spotlight girls recognized that the same lack of first-hand exposure to African American women, coupled with the messages conveyed by the mainstream media, produce similar stereotypes of African American girls within the culture of the United States. Armed with this understanding of the relationship between the media and stereotypes, the Spotlight crew was prepared to move forward in dialogue with a more critical eye.

In the third stage of conferencing, discussion around key social issues reveals the complex dynamics and multiple perspectives necessary to produce accurate, sensitive and sophisticated reporting around a key issue for the television audience. For example, a video conference session with young women from India developed into an opportunity to observe and evaluate the ways in which social class status to a certain extent impacts the experiences of women across societies.

Accustomed to openly discussing the barriers facing girls and women of color in the United States, Spotlight girls had anticipated that in cross-cultural video conference discussions, their Indian peers would:

- be willing to talk about sexist oppression;
- have experienced some form of sexist cultural practices firsthand; or,
- be concerned about culturally sanctioned discrimination against disadvantaged women in India.

To the contrary, the predominantly upper class Indian girls engaged in the video conference found it difficult to relate to the conversation. It was only later, when engaging with young women expatriates of India and Pakistan (currently living in Dubai), that the Spotlight crew was able to elaborate a discussion around the oppression of women in India. This experience brought the Spotlight crew to understand that all over the world, social status and gender intersect in ways that shape women’s experiences of themselves, their personal relationships and their professional lives.

Following their videoconferencing experience, the African American Spotlight crew decided to sustain their focus on Indian culture, but to strategically partner with girls and women of the African and Indian diasporas who are minorities in countries to which they have immigrated (e.g., the UK, the US, Trinidad, the Gulf states). The decision, triggered by the distance learning wake-up call, reflected African American
girls' need to speak to, share with, and gain insight specifically from young women abroad who have found their voices, were not satisfied with the status quo, and were ready to advocate for an improved situation for girls and women.

**Video Conference Research: Creating Young Advocates**

Young women of minority status have a unique vantage point on social issues—a vantage point that, when communicated, can seed positive social change for women throughout the world. The research and production process that supports Spotlight embraces a therapeutic group dynamic component, a consequence of the cross-cultural dialogue and research that is a necessary component of the media production process. At the same time, Spotlight consciously translates feminist thought into action to improve the quality of life for girls and women who are part of oppressed minorities, disadvantaged, or have experienced or continue to experience discrimination or persecution. Individual young women, as a result of participating in the Spotlight media production process, change themselves and often become empowered and skilled advocates.

For example, Chante', the Newark TV crews' beloved resident diva, was catapulted out of her whirlwind of perpetual self-involvement as the girls researched the use of mass rape as a political destabilization tool in the Republic of Congo for a Sisters' Space segment. Bounced around from foster home to foster home and having run away as a ward of the state multiple times, Chante' had learned—from an early age—to do whatever it took to fend for herself in New Jersey's urban shelters. Her resilience was extraordinary. When the curtain came down on that phase of her life she translated her aggressive street savvy into shamelessly marketing her truly exceptional vocal talent and star-quality stage presence at every opportunity. Over time, fellow TV crew members learned to patiently and lovingly cope with Chante's self-absorption. They therefore watched in amazement as Chante', transfixed by the unfathomable depth of tragedy and trauma girls endure in Central Africa, was pulled into the irresistible vortex of socially engaged documentary filmmaking. Crew members began receiving Facebook notifications from her in the wee hours of the morning exhorting them to watch one film or another that had rocked her world.

The crew still occasionally has to abide the diva's self-indulgence on set; however, Chante' was the first to recognize the interconnectedness of causes that underlie girls' abuse and suffering in American core cities and their counterparts suffering elsewhere in the world. Her ability to create videoconference programming that engages and elicits enlightening conversation from girls' groups at multiple sites around the world has been refined. Chante's broadened perspective, redoubled engagement with the TV production process, and commitment to crafting girls' advocacy messages with an impact has been total.

**Lessons Learned**

We have found that broadband distance learning:

- cultivates girls' confidence in and competency with new technologies;
- provides information about girls and women elsewhere in the world that Spotlight crews can report to American audiences;
- generates girl-driven strategies for learning that proceed from a global perspective on relevant issues; and,
- creates a transnational girls' support system for collaborative work.