

“WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A GIRL?”
FIVE TEENAGERS SPEAK ABOUT THEIR LIVES

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by

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Abstract

This qualitative study is an exploration of the lives of teenage girls. Through the use of individual interviews, group interviews, participant observation, member checks, and research fieldnotes, this study documents and interprets the lived experiences of five seventeen-year-old girls. It presents a portrait of the processes involved in the construction of identity through social and cultural discourses, and specifically, the ways in which girls learn to live gender during their years in high school.

During the course of one month, data was collected in the form of conversations held with the girls. Literature in the areas of feminist theory, post-structuralist theory, critical educational theory, and recent developmental studies of teenage girls and women is presented and explored in order to provide a framework for the study. Ultimately, the girls are given a voice.

Through their experiences, I show how they respond to messages from the culture and society, how they struggle with their selves, and what they truly believe about being a girl today.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of contents	iii
 <u>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</u>	
Introduction	1
Rationale for the study	3
The research question	3
An overview of the study	3
 <u>CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</u>	
Introduction	5
Feminist theory	5
Post-structuralist thought and subjectivity as identity formation	9
Critical educational theory: gender, social class, and education	10
A developmental look at girls and women	12
 <u>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY</u>	
Introduction	20
Collection of the data	23
Methods for data analysis	28
Validity and reliability in qualitative research	30
 <u>CHAPTER 4 THE 'FINDINGS'</u>	
Introduction	32
Part I: Responding to society	32
Part II: Struggling with the self	45
Part III: Beliefs about gender	57
 <u>CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	
Discussion: three emergent themes	74
Recommendations	79
My thoughts about this study	87
Possibilities for future research	88
REFERENCES	90
APPENDIX A Ethics committee approval	93
APPENDIX B Cover letter / consent forms	95
APPENDIX C Interview questions	100

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I grew up in a farming community in central Saskatchewan. I lived a few miles outside of Arborfield (population 500) and attended school in Zenon Park (population 200), a francophone community. I have two brothers who are seven and eight years older than I and a sister who is two years younger than I. This makes me the third child of four and the first daughter.

Both of my parents grew up in farming families in the Arborfield/Zenon Park area. While my father spoke French at home and at school, my mother spoke only English at home and learned French at school. They were both brought up in very conservative, strict, and religious Catholic families.

As I was growing up, I remember really loving school and learning. I still do. I always had an unquestioning respect for my teachers. My elementary and high school years were spent trying to get good marks, playing some sports, taking piano lessons, and reading. My parents put strong emphasis on never questioning authority, always being polite, never complaining, and always being happy.

I went to university right after high school and began taking math and science classes (pre-med. turned into pre-vet-med. which turned into finishing a French degree). I spent more time eliminating careers than actually choosing one. After receiving my first degree, I went to work for a finance company. However, it was not long before I felt like I wanted to return to school, so I enrolled in the BEAD program at the University of Regina and graduated with an education degree in 1993. Since then, I have taught grades eight to twelve in both English and French in the subject areas of math and science.

I tend to think that my decision to teach was unplanned. Teaching presented itself at a time in my life when I still did not know what I wanted to “do.” The two-year after

degree education program seemed right at the time. However, upon reflection, maybe there was more to it than that. Maybe I wanted to return to the place that was happiest in my childhood--school. Maybe I wanted a chance to spend time with girls who were like me when I was their age. Maybe I wanted the chance to help and understand teenage girls.

After having taught for a while, I again began to feel the need to go back to school. I could hardly wait the required two years before beginning to work on my Master's degree. I have now finished my seventh year of teaching and must say that, although I have enjoyed teaching, I have enjoyed talking to and getting to know teenagers more. I have always been very interested in what they think and why they think it. I have somehow felt a kind of connection with them that has revealed itself in the most simple and unplanned conversations. I seem to be much more interested in what girls are thinking and feeling. I think that this may be because I see myself in them. Or perhaps talking to them connects me with that time in my life.

It was at the end of my coursework that I met Dr. Meredith Cherland, a feminist researcher who would later become my thesis supervisor. Together we designed an independent reading class, "Feminist Approaches to Research on Girls and Young Women," that would be instrumental in shaping the research question and thesis that I, with her help, decided to do.

I discovered through reading feminist research that "feminist consciousness" is an awareness of women; an awareness that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their condition of subordination is not natural, but is societally determined; that women can join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that women can provide an alternate vision of societal organization in which they, as well as men, enjoy autonomy and self-determination. I felt instantly "at home" with feminism and decided that it speaks to me and for me.

Rationale for the study

It is my belief that schooling and curriculum have addressed male experience and have generalized it to represent all of human experience. In fact, it can be argued that the existing educational system often devalues women by using competitive and quantitative “male” measures of achievement. In Women’s Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), we see that girls in high school are faced with problems like sexual harassment, math and science phobias, curricula that focus on men and male experiences, and surviving in a learning environment where the logical and the rational is valued over “women’s ways of knowing”. It was evident to me that we needed more educational research that studied young women and *their* views of the world.

Because the development of gender identity is central to the experience of adolescence (Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer, 1990), and because schooling is difficult for so many girls (CTF, 1990), I chose to study high-school girls in order to gain more knowledge of girls and their experiences. I am interested in the processes involved in identity construction and, specifically, the ways in which girls learn to live gender during their years in high school.

The research question

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question: What do five seventeen-year-old girls at an urban Catholic high school believe about gender? Questions for which I sought answers included: From the girls’ point of view, how do they see their world and how do they “do” gender? How do they see themselves as gendered people? What cultural messages about gender have figured in their constructions of identity? How are the girls responding to these messages?

An overview of the study

This is an interpretive study that looked at how five seventeen-year-old girls understood and constructed gender. The main assumption of this study was that girls are constantly in contact with cultural discourses through the school, the media, the church,

the family, the government, the medical establishment, and the arts, and that they construct their identities as they interact with these cultural discourses. Since I wanted to learn about what the girls were experiencing and how they were structuring the social world in which they lived, it was necessary that they be allowed to speak in their own voices. For this reason, qualitative methods, specifically the open-ended interview and participant observation, were selected.

The five girls in this study all lived at home with both of their parents. All ten parents were employed. Their occupations included truck driver, secretary, worker for the city, and worker in a hospital. All of these families were white and Catholic and the girls all attended a Catholic school that was situated in a working class neighborhood. This was a school where most parents and students placed more value on achievement in sports than on academic achievement.

This is a qualitative study that is not generalizable to large populations. A possible limitation may arise from the fact that the study included only five girls who were close friends, sharing similar thoughts and interests.

The data was gathered over a one-month period in the summer of 1998. I used group interviews, individual interviews, participant observation, and member checks to gather the data. All of the data collected was then transcribed verbatim in order to analyze the findings. I also kept a journal, a written account of my descriptions, reflections, and impressions throughout the study. During the analysis of the study, I looked for patterns and themes in order to be able to code the data. Using grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I allowed categories to emerge and evolve. During report writing, I used quotations from the data record to support my “findings”, so that the voices of the girls could be heard. I also kept reading. In the following chapter, I will present a review of the literature that is related to my research questions.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature will be divided into four parts: “Feminist theory,” “Post-structuralist thought and subjectivity as identity formation,” “Critical educational theory: gender, social class, and education,” and “The development of girls and women.”

The first part provides a review of feminist theory, giving the reader an historical and cultural look at the feminist movement and the subsequent development of feminist thought. The second part discusses post-structuralism as it relates to thought and subjectivity as identity formation, providing the link between feminist theory and culture. The third part provides a review of critical educational theory as it relates to gender, social class, and education. The fourth part of this chapter will discuss recent studies of the psychology of teenage girls and their experiences of today’s world. Together, these four sections will provide the context for this study and its findings.

Part I: Feminist theory

For the past thirty years, feminist theory has made it possible for researchers to study and value women, and to wonder about the forces that shape their lives. As a movement to end sexist oppression, feminism directs our attention to systems of domination and the inter-relatedness of sex, race, and class oppression. Since my study looks at how girls construct a sense of identity through social and cultural discourses, an exploration of feminist theory was important because it sees knowledge as being socially constructed. Feminist theory also privileges the voices of women and focuses on recognizing “women as subjects who have knowledge and who can act upon the world” (Weiler, 1988, p. 62). It provides justification and explanation for a study like mine.

de Beauvoir (1977) once said that, “In a man’s world, women become the other,

the unmentioned and unmentionable, indeed, the derogated other” (p. 13). She stated that women must begin by defining themselves as women within a society and an intellectual tradition that has denied them subjectivity. Since women have been forced to play a subordinate and yet integral role in a culture governed by males, this redefinition would have to be the result of a rigorous analysis of the relationship of power, knowledge, and the language of patriarchy (de Beauvoir).

Patriarchy is a political institution. Millett (1969) explains that the relationship between the sexes is and always has been a political one. It is a continuing power struggle in which women are sometimes idolized, other times patronized, always exploited. In her book Sexual Politics (1969), Millett defines politics as referring to “power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another group by a set of stratagems designed which maintain the system” (p. 23). It follows that patriarchy is a political institution perpetuated by techniques of control to maintain *its* existence. Although the question of the historical origins of patriarchy appears to be unanswerable, it is clear that the sexual politics formed by patriarchy are firmly entrenched in contemporary social structures such as the institution of the family and the Catholic religion.

Millett goes on to state that a person’s gender “is a status category with political implications” (1969, p. 24). The development of gender identity in early childhood involves a socialization process by parents, peers, and culture. However, because the expectations that culture places on those who are of the female gender are vastly different from expectations for those who are of the male gender, being born female or male leads to life experiences which are entirely different. According to Millett, it is this early conditioning that assures the maintenance of the difference between the sexes, since it “runs in a circle of self-perpetuation and self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 31). If the patriarchal culture’s expectation of a male is that he develops aggressive impulses, aggression becomes the trait of the dominant class and docility becomes the trait of the

subjugated class.

Patriarchal society assumes that what is male is normal (de Beauvoir, 1968). For example, society has traditionally considered psychology from the point of view of men. Feminist theory has made it possible to include women's perspectives, as when Brownmiller writes about sexual violence from the perspective of women. In her book Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape (1975), she refers to rape as "something awful that happens to females" (p. 309). Rape has been man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear, used politically to assure that men retain power over women, keeping them "in their place". According to Brownmiller, rape "is nothing more than a conscious process by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (p. 15). In fact, the threat, use and cultural acceptance of sexual force is a pervasive process of intimidation that affects all women, whether or not they have been actual victims of violence. It is dangerous to oppose patriarchy.

For hooks (1984), the essence of feminism exists when people are in opposition to patriarchy and to sexist oppression. She states that sexist, misogynist, patriarchal ways of thinking are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society, values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. As the crudest and most brutal expression of sexism, misogynistic attitudes tend to be portrayed by the dominant culture as an expression of male deviance (hooks). In other words, the dominant culture minimizes the importance of these attitudes because only a few, the deviant, adopt these attitudes. Like Brownmiller, hooks believes that, in reality, these attitudes are a part of a sexist continuum, necessary for the maintenance of patriarchal social order. While patriarchy and sexism continue to be the political and cultural norm in our society, the feminist movement has created a climate where male domination is called into question (Brownmiller, 1975; de Beauvoir, 1977; Millett, 1969; Weedon, 1997; Weiler, 1988).

But, according to hooks (1984), a central problem within feminist discourse has been society's inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is

or to accept the definitions that could contribute to unification. Without agreed upon definitions, feminists lack a sound foundation from which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful “praxis”. Feminism is often equated with efforts to achieve white women’s rights. According to hooks, feminism is a “struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires” (p. 24).

“Feminism defined in political terms that stress collective as well as individual experience, challenges women to enter a new domain - political consciousness” (hooks, 1984, p. 25). This means that race and class oppression should be recognized as feminist issues with as much relevance as sexism. As hooks said, “When we cease to focus on the simplistic stance, ‘Men are the enemy’, we are compelled to examine systems of domination and our role in their maintenance and perpetuation” (p. 25). Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular class or race of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform our lives in a meaningful way. Most importantly, feminism is neither a lifestyle nor a ready-made identity nor a role one can step into.

One important idea that grew out of early feminist theory was the idea that patriarchal society treats women as if they were only their bodies, as if they were objects (Brownmiller, 1984; CTF, 1990; Kaschak, 1992; Pipher, 1995; Wolf, 1992). Several authors have written about the damage this objectification can do to women. Indeed, for 30 years, feminist writers have also been analyzing the culture’s attitudes toward women and women’s bodies. Our culture says that women *are* their bodies. In The Beauty Myth (1992) Wolf describes how different forms of the media saturate our lives with unrealistic images of beauty and act as destructive social controls. She argues that women’s insecurities are heightened by these images, then exploited by the diet, cosmetic, and plastic surgery industries. Every day new products are introduced to ‘correct’ inherently

female ‘flaws’, drawing women into an obsessive and hopeless cycle built around the attempt to reach an impossible standard of beauty. Wolf rejects the standard and embraces the naturally distinct beauty of all women.

In her second book, Femininity (1984), Brownmiller writes about how the standard for beauty has changed over the years, but argues that its main objective has remained constant. Whether a woman finds in the quest for femininity the pursuit of a positive female identity or a standard that she can never hope to meet, at the root of it all is the fact that femininity’s tools have served to keep women powerless in a man’s world. The struggle for girls and women to have a perfect body deflects their energies from acting in the world.

Part II: Post-structuralist thought and subjectivity as identity formation

This next section is connected to feminist theory because it focuses on the individual woman and how that individual develops a sense of identity. Post-structuralist theories offer the theoretical tools that can help our culture to understand power relations of class, gender, and race in terms of language. Language, through discourse, is useful in understanding both the ways in which society structures the individual, and the ways in which the individual accepts, resists, and transforms societal messages about her position as “subject” (Weedon, 1997). In my study, post-structuralist theory helped me to understand the power relations in the lives of the girls.

Weedon (1997) says that, “as feminists, we take as our starting point the patriarchal structure of society” (p. 1). This means that “the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male” (p. 2). She says that from early childhood girls hear that their primary role in life is to be a good wife and mother. This message “comes to us from children’s books, women’s magazines, religion, the media, romance” (p. 3). Post-structuralist theory, Weedon says, has at its center the “subject”. This means that everything about the subject, her unconscious and conscious thoughts,

her emotions, the ways she “sees” the world, and her sense of her self all come together to help her make sense of her reality and her place in it. However, whereas “in principle, the individual is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality individual access to subjectivity is governed by historically specific social factors and the forms of power at work in a particular society” (p. 91).

Among the feminist studies that explore the construction of subjectivity in teenage girls, are the works done by Cherland (1994), Christian-Smith (1993), and Gilbert & Taylor (1991). Other studies explore the ways in which romance novels influence the way girls construct identity.

Cherland (1994) used Weedon’s ideas to inform her study of a group of grade six girls and the way they constructed gender through the reading of fiction. Using a post-structuralist framework which sees “language and literacy as the place where a sense of self, a subjectivity, is constructed” (p. 14), Cherland showed how the girls interacted with different and sometimes competing discourses, and were able to construct identity, or “subjectivity”. The construction of subjectivity, Cherland says, is a complex process “which is also influenced by that person’s gender, race, and social class” (p. 158). She emphasizes that we “need to ‘see’ gender at work in our children’s lives ... if we are to understand how it is constructed and reproduced” (p. 212).

Part III: Critical educational theory: gender, social class, and education

One of my reasons for doing this study was to look for ways to make the world a fairer, better place for the girls I encounter as a teacher at school. I want to make a connection between teaching and justice. In order to make a connection between education and justice, I explored critical educational theory.

Freire (1981) influenced many teachers with interests in justice. Freire was committed to a belief in the power of individuals to come to a critical consciousness of their own being in the world. Central to his pedagogical work is the understanding that

both teachers and students are agents, both engaged in the process of constructing and reconstructing meaning. He states that, the “interests of the oppressor are rationalized and promoted by a curriculum that pretends neutrality while it advances the ways of knowing, the forms of language and relation, that enhance the privilege of those with power” (as cited in Grumet, 1988, p. 172). It is “not enough for the oppressed to recognize their own oppression. That recognition is only the starting point for a movement to destroy that oppression and to become free in fact and not simply in the mind” (as cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 71). Freire adds that students must embark upon the process of investigating those historical processes that have led to their class’, gender’s, and race’s interests and power (as cited in Weiler, 1988).

Willis (1977) also used the concept of resistance to explore the complex interaction of agency and structure. In his ethnographic study of counter school cultures (that is, those sub-cultures that resist and work against the dominant culture of the school), he uncovered some of the cultural mechanisms that reproduce class and the ways in which working-class boys, resisting the ideology and power of the school culture, ironically helped to reproduce it. Willis found that the boys refused to value the traditional curriculum and did not study to earn academic credentials. In his study, the boys’ resistance led to their continuing to do manual labor as their fathers had done. Their resistance had led to the reaffirmation of the hegemonic control of one class over another. Willis argues that, “focusing on the sphere of cultural production will lead to a clearer understanding of the ways in which society is reproduced” (as cited in Weiler, 1988, p. 21).

In her similar 1984 study of fourteen to sixteen-year-old English working-class girls, McRobbie’s main concern was that of the “reproduction of gender under patriarchy” (as cited in Cherland, 1994, p. 17). The girls resisted and rejected the values of their school (especially those that were directed toward female students) by behaving in ways that flaunted their sexuality. McRobbie indicates that the girls’ resistant behavior

was the result of two oppressive factors in their lives: they were part of the working class and so resisted capitalism, and they were girls and so resisted patriarchy.

In his 1986 ethnographic study of an inner city Catholic school in Toronto, McLaren also looked at violence and disorder among working-class schoolgirls. He saw their behavior as unconscious ritualized resistance against an oppressive social order. He observed that masculine traits (such as aggressiveness and competitiveness) were often adopted by the girls as a method of resisting the prevailing norms of the school. “Resistance is as much a matter of self-confirmation as it is a reaction to oppressive ideologies and practices” (p. xii). As a result of his work, McLaren was able to shed some light on how power works and how domination and resistance exist in the hallways and classrooms of schools.

All of these studies have helped me to understand and explain some of the complications related to social class in the lives of the girls I studied.

Part IV: A developmental look at girls and women

Feminist theory, post-structuralist theory on thought, subjectivity as identity formation, and critical educational theory on gender, social class, and education, all contribute to an understanding of the sociological and psychological realities of the girls in my study. Studies of the development of girls and women do too.

About girls:

Since developmental theories have historically been built on observations of men’s lives, Gilligan (1982) believes that psychology has persistently and systematically misunderstood women. In her book In a Different Voice (1982), she provides an important feminist critique of Kohlberg’s research done on boys whose development he followed for 20 years. In contrast to Kohlberg’s model, Gilligan’s model is inclusionary with respect to our understanding of gendered perspectives. In her research she has attempted to correct developmental psychology’s misperceptions and refocus its view of

female development.

Gilligan (1982) argues that the adolescent female's idea of self evolves from the exchange between the individual and the social world in which she lives and of which she tries to make sense. She suggests that women construct their own morality - the moral woman is the one who helps others and who meets obligations and responsibilities to others, if possible, without sacrificing herself. It is precisely this self-sacrifice which constitutes the central moral problem for women struggling between compassion and autonomy, between virtue and power, between self and others.

In this study (Gilligan, 1982), it was found that men and women use fundamentally different approaches to making decisions about morality. The male approach to morality is often to believe that individuals have certain basic rights, and that people have to respect the rights of others. Morality for men, therefore, imposes restrictions on what you can do. The female approach to morality is that people have responsibilities towards others. Morality for women is often an imperative to care for others. Gilligan and her colleagues summarize this by saying that male morality has a "justice orientation", and that female morality has a "responsibility orientation".

They outline three stages in moral development. The first is a *selfish stage*, the second is a *belief in conventional morality*, and the third is *post-conventional* (Gilligan, 1982, p. 99). Girls start out with a selfish orientation but quickly learn that selfishness is wrong and so begin to care for others. In their conventional stage, girls typically feel it is wrong to act in their own interests, and that they should value instead the interests of others. They equate concern for themselves with selfishness. In the third post-conventional stage, girls learn that it is just as wrong to ignore their own interests as it is to ignore the interests of others.

In Making Connections, Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer (1990) look at the moral development of adolescent girls at Emma Willard School. This book is a collection of essays that relate to a longitudinal study involving a series of interviews that took place

between 1981 and 1984. The authors try to give a 'voice' to girls in what they had to say about the meaning of self, relationship, and morality.

Gilligan also studied American girls. A Cappella is a project that was done by the Canadian Teacher's Federation in 1990 involving more than one thousand girls across Canada between the ages of eleven and nineteen. The girls talked about their experiences of being young and female in 1990. Specifically, the girls were asked about how they felt about themselves. Although most of the young women expressed positive views, many comments indicated the struggles that many young women go through to maintain a positive self-image.

The results of the project showed that, "48.2% of the girls strongly agreed or agreed that, 'Being popular is a big worry for me right now' and 85% strongly agreed or agreed that they worry a lot about how they look" (p. 11). Body image was "ranked 9th in the list of interests/concerns in the participant questionnaire, and was chosen by 67.1% of respondents" (p.11). The teenage girls struggled with immediate concerns, and their comments are organized under such headings as: "The need for a boyfriend," "Am I pregnant?" "Math -- I better get caught up soon," "The friendship between me and my best friend," "My family's problems," "The time when I was suicidal," "My friend who became a drug addict," "What others think of me," "Alcoholism/violence in my family," "Why are we told to act like adults and then treated like children?" and "Homework and marks are very stressful."

This report suggests that, although many of the concerns that the young women had have remained the same as those of previous generations, young women may also see themselves as having concerns and problems that are very different from their parents and teachers. As a result, they feel misunderstood and alone. "They feel that there is more pressure on the present generation of youth to make choices, to do well, and to balance friends, school, jobs, and boyfriends" (p. 18).

In her book Reviving Ophelia Pipher (1995) demonstrates how girls constantly

focus on their changing bodies. “At age 13, girls spend more time in front of a mirror than they do on their studies” (p. 55). Since their emotional immaturity makes it hard for them to hold on to an identity for themselves, many allow the culture to define who they should be and what they should look like. “... the pressure to be beautiful is most intense in early adolescence” (p. 183). Developmentally, this is a time when small events can be overwhelming, and girls deal with their emotions in different ways. Adolescence is a time when girls read deep meaning into casual remarks and need to categorize others by assigning them to groups such as “geeks” and “jocks”. They feel enormous pressure to be popular but learn that good grades interfere with popularity. Teenage girls are often extremists who see the world in black-and-white terms, overgeneralizing their thinking from one incident to all cases.

Pipher (1995) also notes that schools treat girls and boys differently. In class, boys are more likely to be seen as role models, five times as likely to receive a teacher’s attention, and twelve times as likely to speak up in class. Because the culture attributes their failure to external factors and their success to ability, boys keep their confidence. With girls the opposite is true. Because her success is attributed to good luck or hard work, any failure to succeed causes a girl’s self-confidence to erode.

In her book Engendered Lives (1992) Kaschak looks at the challenges that girls face in their daily-lived experience. In their relationships, they want to share and yet fear the vulnerability of being open to gender-based assessments by others. The girls feel that, because of their gender, they are constantly subjected to external evaluations of their worth, appearance, and femininity. However, since the girls believe that their self-worth is based largely on their success in relationships, they learn to take care of others and to be receptive and sensitive to the needs of others (Kaschak). Kaschak adds that, “Although there are ideal qualities that are valued in the abstract, in the particular gendered situation, the very same qualities, including self-esteem, are judged differently for females and males” (p. 158). Because “every aspect of the female body is considered

to say something about a woman's value as a person and as a woman" (p. 96), girls and women learn that how they appear is more important than what they do.

In Schoolgirls, Orenstein (1994) provides us with an intimate and provocative glimpse into the lives of adolescent schoolgirls at two West Coast middle schools. This study was motivated by the disturbing findings of a 1990 study done by the American Association for University Women called Shortchanging girls, shortchanging America which revealed that girls' self-esteem plummets as they reach adolescence. Orenstein explores the effect that the "hidden curriculum" has on our children as schools help reinforce stereotypical gender roles, whether they intend to or not. She found that the "lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, and to view those qualities as a virtue" (p. 35). However, "since educators reward assertiveness and aggression over docility, the very behavior that is prized in girls becomes an obstacle to their success" (p. 36). As a result, by sixth grade both boys and girls have learned to equate masculinity with opportunity and assertiveness and femininity with reserve and restraint.

Orenstein (1994) observed and interviewed dozens of young girls inside and outside of their classrooms. She saw that even girls who considered themselves to be feminists tended to recede from class proceedings, while their male classmates aggressively responded to teachers' questions. Girls who were generally outspoken remained silent in the classroom for fear of having the wrong answer and of being embarrassed. Generally speaking, girls were not willing to take the risks that boys routinely take.

According to Orenstein (1994), the girls also seemed to be overly involved with their appearances. In spite of the overt messages of success and achievement proffered to her, a girl comes to learn that her body is her most valuable commodity. Her sexual desirability becomes the central component of her self-image; in fact, she comes to believe it defines her.

About women and women teachers:

While some authors consider the psychology of girls, others study the psychology of women. Miller (1975) was among the first to acknowledge that girls and women are taught that their self-esteem is based, to a great extent, upon having successful relationships, especially with boys and men. She suggests that, since women have become the “caregivers” for the culture, they haven’t been able to explore and express their own needs. In fact, “they are encouraged to transform their own needs ... until they come to see their needs as if they were identical to those of others - usually men or children” (p. 19). Women have always, therefore, devoted themselves to the psychological, emotional, intellectual, social, and physical development of others.

Miller (1975) states that, although women have begun “to celebrate the variety of ways of being in the world that different women have constructed, there are very real pressures attempting to push them into old molds” (p. xii). For example, even though women have careers, they may still feel the pressure to stay at home to be full-time mothers. As a result, there are still very few women who can really believe that they are truly worthy.

In her book Caring (1984), Noddings says that the woman who cares is present in her acts of caring. She proposes an ethics of care in relationships that is based upon connection and intimacy.

Even in the physical absence of the other, she has a desire for the other’s well being. The woman who “cares” is sufficiently engrossed in the other to listen to and take pleasure or pain in what is being recounted. Whatever she does for the cared-for is embedded in a relationship that reveals itself as engrossment, and in an attitude that warms and comforts the cared-for (p. 19).

In Bitter Milk (1988), Grumet takes a slightly different slant. She addresses when and why teaching has become a feminized “semi-profession”, and the subsequent impact feminization has had on the roles of teachers. She examines the pervasive impact of

patriarchy on the social construction of teaching. Grumet notes that in the late 1800's the rise in the number of women employed in the teaching profession was related not only to the tremendous need for public school teachers, but also to a lack of funds to pay that growing body of educational employees. She develops a substantial critique of the feminization of teaching by showing that its inception was synonymous with the economic exploitation of women workers who filled teaching positions. Due to gendered work relations, it was acceptable in the late 19th century to pay women two-thirds the salary of a male teaching colleague. Devaluing women's worth allowed society to devalue their labor. By the 1920s, women constituted about 80% of all teachers in the United States, and to this day women dominate the profession, especially in the elementary grades. In fact, as one moves up in the educational hierarchy, one finds considerably fewer women teachers. In this sense, "high-status" knowledge becomes a masculinized domain - and the school and academy, a functioning body of patriarchy.

Grumet's (1988) work also points to the fact that teachers serve as functionaries for the patriarchal order by transmitting the history and culture of that order via the curriculum. The reader learns that, from their inception, schools were never intended for girls. Rather, they were seen as entities to fulfill the goal of socializing boys in the masculine realm of the public sphere. In this sense, women teachers have been agents of this patriarchal project. As Grumet puts it, teaching "employs many women, even many mothers, as the very agents who deliver their children to the patriarchy" (p. 32).

Applying theory to practice, Weiler (1988) reveals the complexity of being a feminist in a public school setting. Weiler looks at the forces of sexism, racism, and classism, which characterize society as a whole, and at how these are played out in multiracial, multicultural classrooms. She explains how "girls of different class and race subjectivities will be met with varying expectations on the part of white and black female and male teachers, depending on these teachers' own views of what is gender appropriate" (p. 41). Weiler concludes that feminist teachers are out there and are

continuing to struggle and to value “nurturance and caring in themselves and their work” (p. 78). She goes on to explain how these teachers are individuals “who could have some influence over events in their own lives “ (p. 89) and who believe “that their work made a difference in the lives of their students” (p. 97).

In conclusion, the studies described in this chapter have helped me to understand my self, the girls who sit in my classroom, and the need for this study. They have shaped my thinking, my interpretations of the data, and the findings of this study. In the next chapter, I explain the methodology I used for this research.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

It is no secret that much contemporary Western “knowledge” is knowledge of the world as seen through a male ‘lens’. Androcentric bias in educational research has left a veritable void calling for the voices of women (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Since, as a researcher, I was concerned about ‘making room’ for the voices of girls, I needed to align myself with a philosophy that pushed the boundaries. According to Davies (1993), post-structuralism offers those who have never been recognized as having the subject status that men have had, a way of recognizing how they have been subjected, made object, deprived of agency, and inscribed with patterns of desire that hold that oppressive cultural pattern in place. Post-structuralism, coupled with feminism’s need to question male knowledge construction as truth for all, led me to adopt a post-structuralist feminist stance in this research. In fact, since I wanted to understand female subjectivity and girls’ beliefs about gender more fully, post-structuralist feminism became the philosophical foundation of this study.

The purpose of this research has been to explore the question, “What do five seventeen-year-old girls at an urban Catholic high school believe about gender?” As I explained in chapter one, the development of gender identity is central to the experience of adolescence. Because schooling is difficult for so many girls, I chose to study high-school girls in order to gain more knowledge about girls and their experiences. I was interested in exploring the processes involved in identity construction, and specifically the ways in which girls learn to live gender during their years in high school. “How do the girls respond to society?” and “How do the girls see themselves?” were two of the questions I wanted to answer. I was also open to the potential emergence of other questions.

Since it was my intention to try to understand the girls' perceptions, it was necessary that they be allowed to speak in their own voices. This is a study that presents the truths of these girls from *their* point of view and from *their* understanding of gender through social and cultural discourses. For this reason, qualitative methods, specifically the open-ended interview and participant observation, were selected. Furthermore, we (my supervisor, Dr. Cherland and I), decided to proceed with this study using grounded theory where "data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. One begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23).

Since it was my intention to try to understand the girls' perceptions, it was necessary that they be allowed to speak in their own voices about their own 'lived' experiences. Because it privileges the voices of girls, this is a feminist study. It is also a post-structuralist study since it recognizes the dynamic nature of meaning and asserts that reality is what each person says it is. In this research, the truth about what it is like to be a girl came from the participants, and the theory (my explanations) grew out of what *they* had to say. Accordingly, grounded theory provided me with a methodology that required me to concentrate on the girls and what *they* believed to be true.

Studies using grounded theory grow out of questions that researchers have about people in specific contexts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The idea of "discovery, so fundamental to grounded theory, includes discovering first the world as seen through the eyes of the participants and then the basic social processes or structures that organize that world" (Hutchinson as cited in Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 124). Social life is not static. Grounded theory as a theoretical framework is able to capture the dynamic nature of social life through its flexibility and adaptability. The data, which is gathered and analyzed, is contextual because the participants are studied in natural settings by means of participant observation (Hutchinson as cited in Sherman & Webb, 1988.) In grounded research, theory is generated during the research process and from the data being

collected. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this process as being a detailed grounding of the research inquiry by careful analysis of the data, involving the examination of field notes, study of transcribed interviews sentence by sentence, coding of each sentence or phrase, sorting the codes, making comparisons among the categories, and ultimately constructing a theory about basic social processes.

Grounded theory is an inductive method of theory development where, “One begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). “Using the constant comparative method makes probable the achievement of a complex theory that corresponds closely to the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). The researcher learns to see the emerging categories in terms of both their internal development and their changing relations to other categories (Glaser & Strauss). For the purpose of this study, grounded theory methodology allowed me to begin with a few research questions about girls and, through the gathering, sorting, coding, and analysis of the data, gave me the freedom to allow the answers to my questions to emerge. I found this to be both professionally and personally satisfying since it was the girls’ voices that provided the data that then led to the creation of the codes, categories, and three main themes of the study.

Literature in the areas of feminist theory, post-structuralism, critical educational theory, and recent studies of the psychology of teenage girls and women, was presented in the second chapter. This chapter describes the procedures I used to collect and interpret the data obtained from group interviews, individual interviews, participant observation, and research fieldnotes during the summer of 1998.

I conducted this study with five girls who all attended the same high school. As a result, this study will not be generalizable to large populations. It may, however, illuminate the social processes that operate in the lives of other high school girls in other cities and who are in similar situations.

In May of 1998 I requested permission from the Regina Separate School Board to

conduct a research study during the summer with five pre-selected girls who were all going into grade twelve at the school where I was teaching. The Separate Board granted me permission in May 1998, conditional upon approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Regina. In July 1998, I received approval from the Ethics Committee to continue with the research project (see APPENDIX A). I then proceeded to seek and obtain consent for the study from each of the girls, and from their parents (see APPENDIX B). The girls and I then decided to meet for what would be the first of our three audiotaped group interviews together. During this time, I also conducted one individual interview with each of the girls. I began transcribing the taped interviews in September and completed them by December 1998. The girls were then given copies of the transcripts to read and add written comments to. I began to analyze the data in January of 1999.

Collection of the data

Identifying the participants and obtaining consent

This section describes the procedures used in identifying the participants and in obtaining the participants' consent and the consent of their parents.

After I had decided on my research question, I began to think about the study and how I would choose the participants. I was teaching Science 10 at the time and remember watching the students while they worked on an experiment. I noticed Hevin working with her two lab partners and remembered having taught her in another class. She was the type of person who really enjoyed group discussions and sharing her thoughts. For those reasons and because I thought that I'd genuinely enjoy spending time getting to know her better, I decided to approach her to be one of the research participants. She accepted immediately. In fact, she asked me if I needed more girls for the study and suggested four of her close friends. Although I had only formally taught two of the other four girls, I thought that all five of the girls would want to participate and would benefit from talking with me. I spoke to each of the girls individually about the

study to make sure that they were interested in participating and to explain the steps that were involved. All were anxious to sign their consent forms and returned their parent consent forms to me within the week. I recall seeing Emma in the hallway and her palpable interest and excitement when she said, “Couldn’t we just get started?!”

The girls in the study

I would like to begin by saying that these girls had a friendship that had begun in grade nine. Although it was not an exclusive group (they often spoke about other girls who were their friends), it became clear to me during the course of the summer that these five girls were indeed very close.

To protect the identity of the girls, the names used throughout this research project are pseudonyms chosen by the girls themselves. I will now introduce the girls.

Hevin

Hevin lived with her parents. She had one older brother and a cat named Bill. She was 17 years old and going into grade 12 in the fall. She enjoyed spending time with her friends. At the time we conducted the interviews, she did not have a boyfriend.

Emma

Emma lived with her parents. She had one older sister, an identical twin sister, and a dog. She was 17 years old and going into grade 12 in the fall. She enjoyed spending time with her friends. At the time we conducted the interviews, she had a boyfriend.

Lynn

Lynn lived with her parents. She had a younger brother and sister, and a little dog. She was 17 years old and going into grade 12 in the fall. She enjoyed spending time with her friends. At the time we conducted the interviews, she had a boyfriend.

Taylor

Taylor lived with her parents. She had an older brother (who had a girlfriend) who no longer lived at home and a nephew. She was 17 years old and going into grade 12 in the fall. She enjoyed spending time with her friends. At the time we conducted the interviews, she did not have a boyfriend.

Victoria

Victoria lived with her parents. She had three older brothers. She was 17 years old and going into grade 12 in the fall. She enjoyed spending time with her friends. At the time we conducted the interviews, she had a boyfriend.

A brief overview of the methods used in the data collection

The data was gathered over a one-month period during the summer. I used group interviews, individual interviews, member checks, and participant observation to gather the data. Each of the five girls participated in an individual interview (see APPENDIX C) with me lasting from thirty to forty five minutes and three group interviews (see APPENDIX C) lasting from one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours each.

We had the first group interview, followed by individual interviews for Hevin and Emma, the second group interview, followed by three individual interviews for Taylor, Lynn, and Victoria, and then the last group interview. I suggested that for our last visit we have supper together before the interview. They loved the idea. Having that meal was like eating with friends and the interview that followed was so relaxed and familial that none of us wanted to leave. I remember it was 8:30 on a *Friday* night and these girls didn't want it to end. It was as though they felt that when our project ended so would their chance to be heard. I could tell that they had really enjoyed talking and laughing and teasing and laughing some more. So did I.

Context and structure of the interviews

Both group and individual interviews occurred and were audiotaped in the staff room of the empty school. Although it was summertime, I always put a sign on the staff room door and alerted the secretaries that we were in there. One or two teachers entered and, after a joke or two, would leave. I could tell that the girls thought it was fun to be in the staff room, especially with other teachers coming in while they were there. Three of the couches were arranged in a close triangle around a coffee table, and lamps providing warm and comfortable lighting were in place for each interview. I had also asked each girl what snacks she preferred and brought them for each interview.

At the first group interview, I reviewed with the girls the importance of keeping confidentiality within group discussions. Both group and individual interviews were semi-structured. I prepared questions (see APPENDIX C) to get the girls talking and feeling comfortable with discussing their thoughts and telling their stories. It was generally the case that these five girls needed no prompting, nor did I really need any formal questions. They were happy and willing to share their stories with me.

A closer look at the methods used in the collection of the data

According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), the most critical aspect of grounded theory that differentiates it from other qualitative research methods is its emphasis upon theory development. They say that theory is said to be 'grounded' when it emerges from and generates explanations of relationships and events that reflect the life experiences of those individuals, groups and processes we are attempting to understand.

Interviewing the girls provided me with rich data and helped me to develop insight into how the girls interpreted their lives. My interview style emphasized the importance of developing a genuine rapport with the girls in the study, which actually contributed to the validity of this qualitative study. My interviewing was reflective and, sometimes self-revealing. I used the language of the girls when asking questions or participating and always actively listened. I made every effort to provide an atmosphere

of trust and engagement that allowed the girls to share their ideas, attitudes, and feelings. My role during this process was that of mediator, assisting the girls in giving voice to their own thoughts. Later, as I spent many hours transcribing every word that was spoken, I was able to read and re-read what the girls had said, attempting to truly understand and unlock the “mystery of the participant’s way of viewing the world” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 137).

During the study I also kept fieldnotes, a written account of any descriptions, reflections, and impressions that I had of each interview (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These fieldnotes provided me with a developmental record of the study in progress and gave me the opportunity to reflect upon my own personal development as a woman, and upon my professional development as a feminist researcher and teacher. Since grounded theory requires an interpersonal interaction on the part of the researcher with both the data and the participants in the study, the researcher must not only observe the participants but must observe self-behavior and so make visible one’s own preconceptions, values, and beliefs (Hutchinson, 1988). Realizing that *I* was the instrument for data collection, I continually reflected on my behavior, my assumptions, and even how my presence in the room may have affected the data that was gathered and analyzed. Qualitative research accepts that each researcher will have her own theoretical perspectives that will inform her research and that her work will be influenced by her own theory of the world (Bogdan & Biklen 1982).

In contrast to quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods do not use units to describe or measure a quality, nor do they claim to be based upon objective assumptions or generalizations surrounding the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whereas one school of thought seeks hard, factual information, the other is a description and personal interpretation of information. In fact, it encourages it. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe qualitative research as being “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 17).

Replacing objective uncomplicated numbers with an interplay of complex thoughts and emotions requires that the quantitative definitions of reliability and validity be set aside and replaced by qualitative definitions of reliability and validity which look at the ideas of authenticity and researcher-involvement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Approximately 6 hours of audiotaped interview data were collected, the transcription of which yielded two hundred and fifteen pages of single-spaced data. This provided me with an enormous body of data on which to begin the process of sorting, coding, and analysis.

Methods for data analysis

I am defining the following concepts because they are fundamental to the understanding of this study. Each one contributed to the analysis of the data.

cultural discourses: According to Weedon (1997), a discourse is a collection of public and private language, both spoken and written, that creates a certain meaning or set of meanings, and thus creates a certain political view. Language can be understood in terms of competing discourses (within a culture).

subjectivity: According to Weedon (1997), subjectivity is composed of the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of individuals, their sense of themselves and their ways of understanding their relation to the world. Post-structuralist theories propose that subjectivity is constructed, or socially produced, and not innate or natural. Subjectivity is constantly changing, because it is constantly responding to the “discourses” of the culture.

construction of identity: According to Cherland (May 6, 1998, Distinguished Scholars Lecture Series), a sense of identity is constructed in interaction with multiple cultural discourses. These discourses help us shape the way we see ourselves and others.

accommodation and resistance: According to Jean Anyon (1984), gender development involves a series of attempts to cope with and resolve contradictory messages regarding

what we should do and be. She argues that this development involves not so much passive imprinting as “active” response to social contradictions. For girls, this active response involves a series of attempts to cope with and resolve the contradictory messages regarding what they should do and be (“accommodation”). A study done by Goode, Hopkins, and McClure (1971) explains that, although girls may be expected to achieve in the world of work, they are also expected to be feminine, and to fulfill domestic roles. As a result, girls actively struggle to come to terms with, or to transcend, the conflicts involved in being female (“resistance”) (Anyon, 1984).

This study uses ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which allows for the emergence of themes and categories and “is guided by the assumption that people have patterns of experience [...] that they order and make sense of their worlds through pattern” (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 125). Grounded theory will give the reader a real sense of the lived experiences of these five girls.

After having transcribed the interviews, I spent a significant amount of time reading and re-reading the transcripts as well as my personal fieldnotes. As I became very familiar with the data, I began looking for patterns and themes, uniting them into categories that seemed to respond to my research questions. To continue to analyze the data, I used ‘open coding’, a method described by Glaser where “the analyst compares incident to incident with the purpose of establishing the underlying uniformity and its varying conditions” (Glaser, 1978, p. 49). While coding and analyzing the data, I looked for relationships among categories, paying very close attention to phrases, patterns of behavior, participants’ ways of thinking, and events that repeated themselves or stood out. This constant comparative method is central to the data analysis in generating grounded theory since it “teases out the emerging category ... by searching out its relationship to other categories” (Hutchinson, 1988, p. 135).

As suggested in the grounded theory method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I stopped frequently to check through the entire data record again, to be sure the patterns I was

seeing were really true for all the data. Coding categories emerged that enabled me to sort out my data. The first codes to emerge were family, family relationships, conflict in the family, managing parents, competition, parents' messages, beliefs about girls, friendship, coping, extremes of feeling, beliefs about love, and beliefs about adults. Although these codes made it possible to sort the data by topic, it was difficult at this early stage to relate the different categories to each other.

When all of the data fit into the established coding categories and no new categories emerged, I considered what the information contained in each of these codes meant to and for the girls and was able to fit them into three categories: "Responding to society", "Struggling with the self", and "Beliefs about gender".

It was at this point that I began to write the findings of the study. I re-read all of the codes and categories, and wrote about each in a way that provided connection and interpretation about what each one showed. When I had finished, chapter four had been written.

Validity and reliability in qualitative research

Qualitative methods of inquiry offer an important link to some of the main concerns of sociological thought, addressing questions of power, ideology, and subjective meaning. This research method can be characterized as the attempt to obtain an in-depth understanding of meanings of a situation as they are presented by the participants, rather than a quantitative 'measurement' of their characteristics or behavior (Sherman & Webb, 1988). This means that it is very important that a qualitative research report express the considered and authentic views of the participant.

Although the researcher is the research instrument, care must be taken not to influence the participants in ways that might distort their behavior or testimony, establishing rapport in order to gain access to authentic responses is vital. Stanley and Wise (1993) stress that the researcher's personal experiences are a vital source of inside information to be tapped as part of the research process.

The process of reflection on the part of the researcher can also influence the validity of a qualitative analysis. While the quantitative researcher may have convincing ways of demonstrating validity (such as random sampling and statistical inference), it remains for the reader of qualitative research to trust in the integrity of the researcher not to knowingly engage in deception (Sherman & Webb, 1988). Beyond this, the qualitative researcher can strive to demonstrate the validity of the analysis by providing 'thick' description in the study (Sherman & Webb). The multiple data collection methods used in this study, including direct observation, interviews, and document analysis, increased the wealth of information available to me and enabled me to compare and contrast what the girls were saying in order provide a check on validity (Sherman & Webb).

One last important factor to consider in assessing the validity of a qualitative study is the extent to which the methods used in the study enable the findings to be generalized to other similar situations. For the qualitative researcher what matters most is gaining an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of the people she/he studies. It is assumed that this worldview will be context specific and that generalizations to girls in different situations will therefore be limited. It will be up to the readers of my study to assess its validity. My findings are presented in chapter four.

CHAPTER 4
THE 'FINDINGS'

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the question: What do five 17-year-old girls at an urban Catholic high school believe about gender? This chapter attempts to answer the questions: How do the girls respond to society? How do the girls see themselves? What do the girls believe about gender?

This chapter has three parts. The first part looks at the girls responses to society, the second explores how the girls struggle with their selves, and the third examines what the girls believe about gender.

I will be presenting the girls' views, beliefs, and perspectives, as I have discerned them from the data.

Part I: Responding to society

I found that the girls' responses to society fell into three categories: responses to school, to religion, and to the family.

Responses to school:

For these girls, school had very little practical meaning or purpose. Victoria and Emma told us a story about being in chemistry class together. Both of them had a very hard time seeing the relevance of that class. According to Emma, the class was "Stupid! Like why do you need to know what 'covalent' is when you're married?" Victoria agreed, "Yeah, there's no point to that." They also had a hard time understanding the reason for so many rules. Emma told me that "At school you get so

many rules that I find are hard to follow. It's so hard not to talk in class." Both girls seemed to agree that they were never going to use or remember anything that they learned in high school. "I'll never remember the stuff. I don't even remember the stuff that I took last semester. I don't think that school is worth (going to)." Emma said it clearly when she stated that, "You go to school and you don't know (or learn) anything and then you go home and you face your problems." The girls could not see the relevance in school because the curriculum did not mean anything to them. It did not connect with their lives.

These girls did not like teachers who expect too much of them and who do not seem to care about them. Hevin and Emma recalled having been in the same math class where the teacher was very demanding. Hevin told me, "He's like, learn this! And he screams at you." Emma agreed saying, "He would just go by the marks that you had. He didn't care about (us)." She felt that he would just look at their marks and say to himself "... if you fail, you fail and, if you pass, you pass." Emma went on to add that it was so frustrating to have a teacher like him. "He's like 'blah, blah, blah'. I'm like 'Shut up!' Maybe I have an interesting story to tell you. Shut up and stop talking about math all the time!" Emma thought that this teacher must hate his job. She added angrily, "You don't tell your students that they should know something. Maybe we don't know it. It's your job, you teach us." She wished that teachers were not so "stupid". "You don't embarrass them (students) and you don't tell them what (you think they should know); *they'll* tell you what they know and you take it from there." Perhaps the girls could only relate to the subject matter (what seemed to be important for the teacher) if they felt that the teacher wanted to hear what they had to say about other things that had nothing to do

with the subject. They were only willing to learn if they felt that the teacher wanted to know about them on a deeper level.

Hevin and Taylor felt that structured classroom settings and teachers who insisted on academic performance were impossible for them. “I can’t work in that kind (of classroom). You just sit there and do the work and you can’t talk. It’s like a jail.” It seemed to be very difficult for the girls to find value in doing work if they could not also talk to their friends.

Girls do not like teachers who treat them like children. On many occasions, the girls expressed their general frustration at being treated like kids. They felt that they had a lot of life experience and that they, in fact, *did* know as much as the teachers did. Taylor remembered a class where she felt that the teacher treated her “like a little kid”. “I couldn’t stand it, I had to cut class. I had to because I dreaded going (to that class).” Emma agreed. “I think that’s what we look like to some teachers. But we’re to the point that we *do* know as much as you guys (teachers and adults).”

Girls need teachers to try to be their friends. The girls very much needed to feel a personal bond with teachers and perhaps adults in general, in order to connect with the world of learning. Emma stated that she “would rather know nothing and be with a nice teacher than know everything and be with a teacher that you know (wasn’t nice at all).” She later added that she would “rather be the dumbest person in the world and be a bum and know that I have a friend (in the teacher), than be the smartest person and know that I learned it from someone who didn’t even (care).” Hevin felt the same way. “I have to have a good relationship with them (teachers). I don’t care if they can teach. I guess you could say that I need their friendship to be able to learn.” Victoria and Lynn

remembered a teacher that they both loved. “We loved her because she cared about our lives and she didn’t make us feel like we were thirteen. She made us feel so grown up, telling us how mature we were.” To this Emma exclaimed “Yeah, don’t you just love it when teachers make you feel like you’re not just their student, but that you’re their friends?!”

For the girls, school is only valuable for its social aspect. At this point in their lives, the girls appreciated being with their friends. Victoria said it clearly. She told us that “if you didn’t go to school, you wouldn’t know when and where the parties were. You wouldn’t know what everyone was doing.” Emma added that she especially loved coming back on the first day of school. “I always *love, love, love* coming back on the first day! And wearing your new outfits, carrying your new books, and seeing who’s in your classes!” To her, socializing was “the best part” of school.

In conclusion, the school curriculum did not have meaning for the girls. It was difficult for them to understand the relevance of the subject matter and to appreciate the need for all of the rules in school. As a result, they had difficulty relating to their teachers and to the importance of learning. However, if the girls sensed that they had *some* kind of connection or friendship with a teacher, they were able to connect much more with the world of learning. At these times, it seemed as though they were able to summon the effort to listen and to learn, not for themselves, but to please the teacher, their friend. Although the school curriculum seemed to be irrelevant in their lives, the girls valued school because it provided them with the opportunity to be with their friends.

Responses to religion:

Religion is not important in the girls’ lives. However, some of the girls found

some religious traditions to be comforting. Most of the girls mentioned that they found comfort in thinking about their deceased loved ones “watching over them”. They also shared a belief in guardian angels. Taylor expressed this when she told us that she thought, “... my grandpa is above me everyday and watches my family.” Victoria told us about how she had never met her grandma because she had died just after she was born. For all of her life though, she remembered hearing stories about “what a wonderful woman she was”. It was her belief that her grandma was her guardian angel, watching over her. She added that, whenever she was depressed, she would pray to her grandma after which she always felt “lifted up”.

Taylor and Emma talked about praying and the comfort that prayer brought to them. Taylor described her “little religious table” where she kept a rosary and her grandpa’s funeral card. She admitted that she does pray. “I do. I’ll admit (that I pray). By myself.” Emma also prayed before going to bed. “I pray to my grandpa to look over me ‘cause I feel that God looks over everyone but my grandpa’s closer to me than God is.”

Hevin spoke about the comfort that visiting her grandma’s grave gave her. Whenever she was upset, she would get in her car and just drive, many times making her way to her grandma’s grave. “I go to the grave and I talk to my grandma. I have a ball when I go there.”

Although the girls were not regular churchgoers, they did seem to find comfort in their religion. They certainly believed that people had souls that live on after death.

The girls expressed negative feelings of guilt and confusion about the Church, and they associated negative characteristics with the Catholic Church, such as sexism,

unquestioned authority, and lack of meaning. Taylor, Lynn, and Victoria all expressed some guilt because they did not go to church regularly, if at all. Lynn told us that she did not think it would make a difference if she went to Church. “I don’t think it makes a difference if I go to Church. Nothing would change. I don’t think it’s a big thing in my life. Like, I don’t think about it that much.” Taylor explained how she felt guilty because she did not know as much about her faith as she thought she should. “I think I should know more than I do. I wish I could understand more about my religion ‘cause I don’t think I know anything.”

Victoria added her thoughts about the Catholic faith and the Bible. She remembered having many unanswered questions and worries about her religion. “The Jewish religion doesn’t believe that Jesus was ... like he was just a prophet.” She wondered about that and worried about Catholics being wrong. “And what happens if we’re wrong? Will we be condemned for that?” For the girls, religion seemed to inspire worry.

The girls expressed the opinion that the Catholic Church is sexist. Taylor told us about how she thought that a “lot of things are sexist because they always say that guys are more qualified than girls. But I think girls should become priests if that is their decision.” Hevin added that the Church says God created everyone equal but that “they” were not practicing that. “I think that that’s wrong. There’s so many women that would probably want to do that (become priests).” Both girls found that it was the women who work a lot around the Church, but they were not rewarded for that work. “The people who volunteer are usually women. They like to get involved.” The girls knew how little the Church values women, and they were resisting the idea that women are of little value,

for the most part.

But Victoria showed me how strong the Church's sexist message still is for young women. I had asked her if she thought that women should be able to become priests. She said that sexism seemed to her to be inevitable. "If women became priests it wouldn't work out. I don't think that anything should change. Women shouldn't become priests because it's always been men who have been priests." She commented that "... when everything's running smoothly, then it should just stay that way." I suggested that some women would probably want to become priests. What then? She admitted that that was "a hard question. But you can't change what is. You can't change it." Victoria believed that there are certain things that have already been decided for women and that women do not have the power to change them.

It was also clear that the Catholic mass did not have a lot of meaning for the girls. Lynn and Hevin told me how they felt about going to Church. "I just kind of sat there and then just went off in my own world", said Hevin. Lynn agreed, finding humor in all of it. "I don't really understand it (laughter). I try to understand it while he's (priest) talking, but he doesn't teach you, he just doesn't make sense." Both girls laughed about this and agreed that going to Church was a waste of their time.

All of these stories clearly show how marginal and unimportant the Catholic Church was for these girls most of the time. Their experience of institutionalized religion was one of guilt, confusion, anger, and frustration, and so they avoided the Church when they could. However, even though the girls' spiritual beliefs were not directly tied to the church, they did have spiritual ideas, as can be seen in their belief in guardian angels.

Responses to the family:

The girls believe that the family provides a place for human closeness and loving interactions. All of the girls felt that their families were very important to them. Their stories indicated that each of them seemed to have an especially close relationship with one or two members of their families. Lynn told us about how her mom had had her when she was very young and how they had grown so close because of the many hardships they had had to endure. “Me and my mom have been through a lot, but it’s made us really close. Everyone that sees my mom even asks me, ‘Is that your twin?’” Hevin told us about the close bond that she had with her dad. “... me and my dad, we’re really, really close. We go to the movies, bowling, and we have so much fun.” Victoria felt that, “... having a family that’s close is the most important thing in the world.” She explained how she used to pray for people who did not have close families and how she felt very grateful to have her family. “I just thank God because I love my family so much and without them I don’t know what I’d do.”

Emma, an identical twin, told us about the special bond that she shared with her sister. When they were younger, they did everything together, “... we even slept in the same bed and held hands when we were sleeping. We were also able to read each other’s minds.” Taylor told us about how close she felt to her family. “They want the best for me ... and that’s why I love my parents to death.” The family provides the girls with unconditional love and acceptance.

The girls believe that the family provides protection. Victoria, Taylor, and Hevin felt that their families protected them, trusted them, and were proud of them. Two of the girls talked about how protective their dads were with them. Hevin joked about

how tough her dad was and how protected she felt when she was with him. “I’m pretty happy to have my dad (laughter). If anybody gives me trouble I can just say, ‘Hey Daaad’.”

Victoria told us about her being able to talk to her dad about anything. She remembered a conversation they had had about a boy that she was seeing and how her dad wanted to make sure that this boy was treating her well. “... he better not be taking advantage of you.” Victoria was very proud that her dad felt so protective of her.

Victoria also felt very close to and protected by her grandmother who had died of cancer before she was born. Although Victoria had never known her, she felt very close to her though the stories told to her by her father.

When I was just born, my grandma died of cancer and there’s one picture of her holding me when I was a baby. My dad would always tell me stories about what a wonderful person she was. I think that she’s my guardian angel and she looks over me. Whenever I’m sad, I’ll pray, ‘Oh Baba, I’m so depressed, help me get through this’, and she just lifts me up. Even though I didn’t know her, I know that she was a wonderful person. I just feel close to her because of that.

The girls believe that their parents trust them. The subject of doing drugs and how it related to trust came up with Taylor and Victoria. Taylor told us about how her parents trusted her judgment and ability to make good decisions when faced with doing drugs. She admitted to having tried it, but decided that it was something that she did not want to do again. “They trust me and my judgment to know what’s right and wrong. I will not go near it (drugs).” Victoria added that her parents had been through so much with her brothers so when it came to her, they trusted her judgment. “... (I) know that they worry about me but they let me experience (things) myself. I know that they trust me and that they’re there to help me (if I need them).” These stories show how the family provided protection and an environment of trust for the girls.

The girls believed that the family provides many opportunities to share the past, enjoy the experiences of the present, and have fun. Almost all of the girls told

stories about sharing and having fun with their families. Lynn laughed when she told us about when her dad was in high school. "... him (her dad) and his friends would just take off on their motorcycles and get drunk and stuff ... and they'd go down to the States and stuff." She seemed to be very proud of her rebellious father.

Victoria joyfully remembered her father telling her about the barn dances that he and his friends used to go to on Friday nights when they were in high school. "... they'd go every Friday night and they'd get drunk. They'd sit up against the barn and trip people who walked by! ... and they got into so many fights." She loved hearing him tell her stories about his youth, "... it was hilarious, the stories he's told me." Victoria was also proud of her father's popularity with the girls and recalled him telling her, "Yeah, I was a stud. I had all the women."

Victoria seemed especially proud of the open communication that she had with her older brother. She explained how they talked about everything, "Okay, you guys, you know what is so cool? My brother talks to me about sex! I always give him advice and he gives me advice and, it's cool!" Victoria also told us about the plans that her family was making to have a family reunion during the summer. She was very excited when she said, "... we're having it at our house. It's going to be so awesome! We're going to have sixty people!" She always looked forward to these events adding, "... I'm so excited. It's the only thing I'm looking forward to this summer." Although the girls spent as much time as possible with their friends during the school year, they seemed to want to spend a lot of their time in the summer with their families.

Taylor talked about her grandma and the many long visits that they had had together. "Cute! I love my grandma. Her and I are really close. She just loves to talk and she tells me all these stories!" She also recalled the family camping trips when her grandma went along. "She loves camping, we all love camping." Summertime also meant family get-togethers for Taylor. She told us about spending time with her relatives, "We have a blast! We're so close and we just all have a good time. I love

spending time with my family.”

Hevin talked about the relationship that she had with her father. It was her father who “brought fun” into the family. She explained to us that her mom was a pretty serious person because she had to be very responsible from a very early age. “... my mom, she got it pretty bad from her parents. She was the middle child so she never got any attention and when something bad happened, it was always her fault.” Hevin’s dad helped to balance this, “... he likes to have fun and he basically taught my mom that she should have fun instead of being so serious.” She said that her dad also helped her and her brother to not care what others thought of them because, “... as long as you have fun, everything’s fine.”

The girls acknowledged that there are growing pains and unpleasant moments in the family, but these are greatly outweighed by the good times and the pleasant memories. Still, they also spoke about the darker side of family life.

Their families had also taught the girls that alcohol leads to violence, both emotional and physical. All of the girls had stories about how drinking in their families had affected their lives. Taylor, Lynn, and Hevin expressed their feelings of disappointment, resentment, frustration, embarrassment, and fear in the following stories.

Taylor told us about how she felt that her relationship with her father was affected by his drinking and how she felt less of an emotional connection to him when he was drinking. “I told my dad, ‘Quit your drinking’, I’m just getting so far away from you.” She went on to explain how alcoholism in her family had led to violence. “My family loves to drink, and when they drink, they always fight.” Her reaction to this was one of sadness and withdrawal. “I always run away from that (family drinking). I go out with my friends, I bawl my eyes out, or I just sit alone.” Taylor felt that drinking was a real problem in her family and in society at large. “I find that everywhere you go where there’s drinking, there’s problems. It causes so many problems. A really big problem is drinking and driving. People who drink aren’t responsible, they drink and drive, and then

they go kill someone.” She recalled her own father having lost his license because of drinking and driving. She explained how she knew about the cycle of alcoholism and her sadness upon seeing so many of her family members abusing alcohol. Finally, she shared with us her fear about dating and possibly marrying an alcoholic. “And that’s what I’m afraid of ... going out with and then marrying a guy who’s an alcoholic.”

Victoria explained that both of her parents were alcoholics and how this had caused her family a lot of disappointment and emotional pain. When she was little, her father used to drink first thing in the morning and all throughout his workday. She had only vague memories of this because he had sought help for his drinking problem and had managed to stay sober for most of her life. However, at about the time when her father quit drinking, her mother began to drink. She told us, “... my mom will come home from work in the afternoon and she’ll just start drinking. And then I’ll come home and see her and I’m like, ‘Ahhh, you make me sick!’ She never came to any of my ball games or nothing.” She told us about feeling embarrassed to bring friends over and how hurt she would feel when she discovered her mother drunk.

I have a lot of resentment toward my mom because when I was growing up my dad basically raised me and she just drank. At the most important times in my life, like grade eight grad, she would just be drunk and I just hated it and I hated bringing people over to my house and I just had the biggest fights with her.

Hevin told us about how alcoholism was a big problem in her family. She explained that her dad had had a drinking problem and that her mom had given him an ultimatum. “My dad is so close to being an alcoholic. My mom said ‘either the bottle or your family’, and he threw a glass at me and my mom.” She went on to explain that he did not drink that much anymore, but that many other members of her family still drank. She recalled when her aunt had been badly beaten by her husband (Hevin’s uncle) who had come home drunk one night. “... but you would never have known her (Hevin’s aunt) because her nose was broken, her cheekbones were broken, her collarbone, her arms, you name it. All because of her stupid husband.” She told us about how her aunt,

in an attempt to push all of the pain and violence away, had turned to drinking herself. “She thought that she could just push it all away, so she just started to drink. And then she became an alcoholic and, the more he beat her, the more she drank.”

These girls had experienced the effects of alcoholism and violence in their families. Their families had demonstrated for them that alcohol leads to violence.

In summary, I came to see that the girls felt a sense of responsibility and duty in regards to school, religion, and family. They did not see the relevance of going to school or going to church, it did not *mean* very much to them. They seemed to be confused about the relevance of both of these institutions in their lives. The school curriculum and the Church’s “curriculum” didn’t connect with them in any practical way. I think that the girls understood how little value girls and women had in both the school and the Church. In spite of this, they did enjoy feeling a sense of community that going to school and church brought them. The girls cherished the fun times that they had with their families. During these times, they felt loved and protected. When they talked about the problems that existed in their families and the sadness this brought to their lives, they remained loyal. They enjoyed feeling needed and yet resented feeling that they were responsible for ‘making everything okay’. The girls felt a lot was expected of them at home, but they loved their families and being a part of a family.

It can be seen that there exist many contradictions in the lives of these girls. They don’t like going to school and yet would never miss it. This is because going to school means seeing their friends and making plans together. They don’t like going to Church and yet treasure the thought that departed family members watch over them, like guardian angels. They love feeling the closeness that family brings but hate feeling responsible for guarding and maintaining that closeness.

Part II: Struggling with the self

Girls suffer with emotional difficulties:

The girls worry about what others think of them. Both Victoria and Emma were concerned about what I thought of them during our time together. Emma had been talking about sex and drugs, explaining how teenagers were going to experiment and that adults should realize and accept this. However, she felt that she had to defend her opinion by saying, “We’re not bad if we try drugs, we’re just curious. It’s just something that we have to do.” When she continued to talk about this in such a way as to include the other girls, Victoria said, “Oh, that’s nice, she’s gonna think we’re all ... we *don’t* sleep around.”

The girls asked me what teachers thought of them. Before I could respond, they had volunteered that teachers probably thought they were, “Just little, insignificant (girls) ... little know-it-all teenagers.” The girls seemed to make a distinction between the teachers they did not like and those they did like. They explained that they liked teachers who made the effort to get to know them as people and they did not like those teachers who treated them solely as students. It seemed as though a bond of friendship was required before the girls could take a teacher seriously.

Girls try to avoid emotional dangers. Hevin, Victoria, Lynn and Emma told stories that showed this avoidance. Hevin had had a very difficult experience with a boy where he had gotten too physical against her wishes. As a result, she had great difficulty trusting boys who were interested in being more than just friends. “Like, because of what happened to me a year ago, I can’t trust ... so any guy that starts to get close to me I basically push away and tell them, ‘Leave me alone’.” She recalled one boy in particular who had been very nice to her, “He was such an awesome friend to have, but he scared me so I quit phoning him.”

Lynn had told us about her trip to BC and the time that she had spent with her new boyfriend and his family. Emma seemed to be concerned about this and asked her,

“Like, were you scared to go to BC? Because you would get so hooked onto him and meet his family and stuff and then if you broke up it’d be so hard.” Emma was considering how quickly girls develop an emotional bond and was worried for Lynn.

When asked how they felt about their futures, Victoria said she was afraid. She thought that if she got too excited about the good things that might happen, it would be dangerous for her emotionally. “I’m afraid that I’ll think about it and I’ll be so excited that something good will happen and then it won’t. And then I’ll be more depressed.”

The girls were not always able to cope with their unhappy feelings. Although she seemed ashamed to tell us, Emma explained that when she felt depressed or stressed over something in her life, she would rock herself.

I get so stressed out over the dumbest things, and what I end up doing is ... Okay, please don’t think I’m crazy or anything, but, if I’m to the point where I can’t handle anything anymore, I’ll go on my bed and I’ll cry and then I’ll just rock myself for hours just to calm myself down and I’ll rock myself until I fall asleep.

When she considered what life would be like without her boyfriend, Emma stated that, “I would be to the point where I don’t want to even live.” When we discussed drinking and going to parties, Emma admitted that she sometimes drank alone. “Look, if there was a case of beer in front of me, I’d drink it all. Even if I was sitting by myself. I don’t think that I *should*, but it would entertain me.”

We talked about difficult experiences that the girls had had in elementary school. Hevin said that she had had a very hard time making and keeping friends in elementary school and at the beginning of high school. She recalled not being able to be herself and not being able to trust other girls. “They (girls) would always backstab me ... I went home crying every single day. I was like really, really suicidal.”

Taylor recalled blaming her teachers when she did not do well in her classes.

I try to blame the teacher but it’s not the teacher ... I’m not too smart in math, I’m okay, but I was blaming the teacher because I wasn’t doing well. I know that it wasn’t her fault, it was me, you know, but I just wanted someone to blame.

Emma said that she had done the same thing with her teachers and wanted to explain why she had blamed her teachers. “When you blame the teachers, it’s not because, ... we don’t *hate* you or anything, we just need something to tell us, like we want to tell ourselves, ‘I’m not dumb, it’s you (the teacher) who’s dumb’.”

The girls were not always able to cope with their unhappy feelings and therefore retreated into themselves or blamed others.

The girls had fears and worries:

The girls worried about their futures. We talked about what the girls may be doing after high school and the subject of having children came up. The girls expressed varying degrees of fear about giving birth. “I don’t want to give birth to a baby. I’m scared,” said Emma. “But it would hurt so much,” said Hevin. “I’m not really scared,” said Lynn.

Each girl had individual fears about her future. Taylor felt afraid about the new experiences and changes that would happen. “I just feel afraid of life, and of other people. I can’t, I just can’t stand meeting new people. I’m so scared.” Lynn was concerned about the decisions that she was making now and how they would affect her future. She admitted that she often looked too far ahead into the future, often taking for granted people or things that may or may not be there.

I’m scared to do things right now because of the future. I always look too far into the future. I’m scared to date or anything because I don’t know what’s going to happen (with us) in the future, and if we go too far ...

Victoria thought that it was best to think of the worst, especially when considering the future. She said that she never looks for the best in anything.

I always look for the worst in things because, when the best doesn’t happen, you’re more disappointed. I say, “Oh, this is the worst, and this is what’s going to happen.” I always do that. With guys I do that, at school I do that. I just can’t

look for the best in anything.

Victoria feared being unhappy in her future marriage. “I’m afraid that I’ll be unhappy. One of my biggest fears is that my husband is going to be a two-timing jerk. That’s what *my* fear is.” Emma shared this fear with Victoria, “I’m scared that I’m going to be unhappy when I’m married.” Like Lynn, Emma feared that the decisions she was making now would affect her future. She was especially concerned about those decisions she had made that she knew were wrong. “Like I’m scared that I’m doing something that’s *too* wrong.” She also feared choosing “a jerk” for her husband, “... because we’re so used to jerks ... I’m scared that I’m going to marry a jerk and then I’ll be unhappy all my life.”

Hevin said that she had many fears about the future.

School and like work. Like not having enough money. Oh I hate that, like I swear I’m like a money freak. If I had a tree that grew money I’d have no stress at all. But I’m scared that in the future I’m going to end up with this dead-end job that I just hate and that I’m not going to make enough money to support a family and stuff. I’m like, I want more money!

The girls worried about what others thought of them. In our discussions, the girls seemed to worry most about what their teachers and other adults thought of them. Victoria told a funny story about her having asked a teacher if she was pregnant. The teacher hesitated when answering and Victoria thought that she had made a big mistake. She was worried that the teacher would not like her anymore.

Do you want to hear the most embarrassing thing? I asked Ms. MacIntosh if she was pregnant and she goes, “No, I’m not pregnant Victoria ... I’ve been pregnant for 6 months!” I felt so stupid. I didn’t know what to do. And they were laughing.

Victoria also worried about what *I* thought of the girls during our group interviews together, especially when they spoke about their relationships with their boyfriends/boys. “Oh, that’s nice. She’s gonna think we’re all (easy).”

Emma was concerned about my reaction as well. She asked me if I had ever asked a student to leave the classroom so that we could talk in private. I said that I had,

explaining the teacher's rationale when doing so. She said, "Yeah, I know. But I hate that. It scares the crap out of students and they think that they're bad." We talked about how the girls do not always feel that they were being taken seriously when they express their opinions in class. Emma asked me if I ever had opportunities to ask girls for their feelings or opinions. I said that I did have opportunities to do this and really enjoyed doing so. She then stated, "But you don't believe them."

Taylor explained how she had always had difficulty with the pronunciation of words and their sequence in regular speech and how others had laughed at her because of this. She had gone to speak with the vice-principal and,

we were talking and, right there, I broke down. And I don't cry really, you know. But, it's like high school and I don't want people laughing at me. I feel embarrassed because I want to make new friends but, because I can't speak right, I'm afraid to talk.

The girls worried about having made bad decisions about boys. They questioned their past decisions to stay in relationships and they worried about having invested their time and themselves in a boy who was unworthy of them. Lynn told us how worried she was that her younger sister, who was just beginning to date, was seeing a boy that Lynn had heard treated girls very badly. "So my sister was going to go out with him. She has no idea. She knows what sex is but she doesn't really know. Like, so many guys can just try stuff." Lynn had tried to talk with her sister about this boy but her sister insisted that, even though he may treat other girls badly, he would never treat her badly.

Victoria talked about feeling out of control and unsure in a relationship with a boy. She recalled how difficult it was to feel rejected by her boyfriend of two years and yet know that he was not the right guy for her.

I'm like, "Why do I have to love him so much?" Did I ever ask him to not do something but he still did it? Did I bawl my eyes out and say, "Jeff, don't leave me", and grab onto him and say, "Don't go, don't go", but he still went? Yeah.

Emma explained that she regretted having spent most of her high school years with her boyfriend. She felt that she had made too many sacrifices for him and commented,

Who cares? I've spent too much time with Ryan and now I have no memories. That's the worst. High school is supposed to be what you talk to your children (about). I'll be like, "I went out with Ryan", and that's all I'll remember.

The girls felt pressured within their families to do well and to behave. The girls explained how they worried about succeeding in school and in life. Their parents would often compare them to other more successful family members. This had the effect of making the girls feel that they were not smart enough, pretty enough, or that they were not loved. Hevin told us she did not feel loved by her mother.

I honestly don't think that she loves me that much. She always says "I always wanted to have a daughter" and then talks about my cousin like *she's* the world ... and then she (her mom) says "she's (cousin) got good grades, she's living on her own, she's in university, she's got a car."

Whenever this comparison was made, Hevin would become very angry. "Well, I'm NOT her (cousin)! I hate that and it makes me want to punch her (my mother)." When Victoria asked Hevin if her mom had actually ever told her that she (Hevin) was a disappointment, Hevin told us, "I hear it from my mom all the time."

Hevin also worried about looking pretty. "My mom puts a lot of pressure on me to look pretty. She'll tell all her friends, 'Oh, my daughter is so pretty, she went on this modeling thing, she's so pretty!'" Hevin felt very uncomfortable with this because she did not think that she could live up to this high standard.

And so, when I meet them (her mother's friends), I'm scared because I feel that I'm going to let them down, like I'm not going to be as pretty as they pictured me. I hate that and it makes me want to cry.

Taylor expressed her fear of disappointing her parents and the pressure associated with trying to meet her parents' expectations for her. She recalled having had a discussion with her parents about drugs and their concern that she was doing drugs. "I

told my mom and dad that I had tried it, because I tell them everything, but that I didn't like it. I'm scared to let them down. That is my biggest fear, is letting my parents down."

Taylor and Emma made the following comments when the subject of promiscuity among girls and the possibility of pregnancy came up. Taylor said that it (getting pregnant) would never happen to her. She explained how her parents were the reason for this. "That's what I think stops me from being with so many guys ... that I never want to let my parents down." Emma stated that she just could not tell her parents if she found out that she was pregnant. "They don't understand my life ... I just couldn't come out and give them this big surprise. I'd have to face it on my own and have to give them all this pressure and stress. They'd be very disappointed." Emma added that she generally felt a lot of pressure in her life. "There are expectations from everyone, from boyfriends, from parents, ... to make the right choices ... so many expectations."

Victoria told us,

the worst pain that I could ever have is to disappoint my dad. 'Cause I just love my dad so much and I can just tell when he's disappointed (in me). He won't talk to me, he'll just mope around the house, ... and that's the worst punishment, ... and my heart hurts so bad.

These stories serve to show us how important it is for the girls to feel validation and acceptance from their parents. It would seem that the fear of disappointing their parents serves as a motivation for them to make the "right" decisions in their lives.

The girls judged others:

The girls judged a former friend. The girls talked about another girl (Lisa) who used to be in their group. Lisa had many problems at home and so, when her parents moved out of the province, she decided to stay in Regina. She was sixteen, living on her own, having problems in her relationship with her boyfriend, and having a hard time making ends meet financially. She was under a lot of stress because she was going to school full time, trying to find a cheaper apartment, and trying hard to make the

relationship with her boyfriend work. The girls commented on her situation and her choice in a boyfriend. Victoria could not understand why Lisa had not asked to live with her.

She could have lived at my house. She could have paid room and board. My family would have taken her in like that (finger snap), but she took off with this guy. If she would have had respect for me, respect for herself, and respect for anyone else that tried to help her, she wouldn't be where she is today.

When Emma said, "When she was with us she was fine", Victoria added, "Yeah, when she was with us she was happy, she had a good time." Taylor, Emma, and Victoria commented on Lisa's boyfriend. "Yeah, I don't think he's the right guy for her." "He's a psychopath." "But she ain't gonna get it (love and support) from him. She ain't gonna get it from him. I say she can do better."

The girls seemed to approve of Lisa when she spent time with them and was their friend. However, when Lisa had to spend a lot of time looking for a cheaper place to live and working to pay her bills, they began to judge her behavior and her choices. Perhaps they judged her because, by not spending time with them, she was choosing to leave the group. Perhaps they were judging her because they felt hurt.

The girls judged other girls. They tended to criticize other girls quickly for taking drugs and for sexual promiscuity. Hevin talked about not liking her brother's girlfriend.

She is, she is a little whore. My brother is not her first. He thinks that *he's* her first, but he's not. Because she'd like go out with these guys and they'd get ready to leave her because she wouldn't have sex with them and then they'd tell her that, and so she'd go and have sex with them just to keep them. Or, she'd have sex with somebody just so that they'd go out and I'm scared that that's what happened to my brother. There's even a big rumor that she's trying to get pregnant!

Taylor commented on a girl that she knew at school. "You know Heather? She was like totally against, you know, drugs and black people? Now she's slept with 3 black guys and she's the biggest pothead I've pretty much known, you know."

Emma told us about having gone to a movie with her sister and another friend. As they were walking back to their car after the movie, a girl they did not know had approached them. Emma described this girl as looking, "... like a dirty prostitute. She was wearing a leather jacket, she looked like a prostitute, that's what she looked like. She could have had AIDS or whatever. I'm sure she was on coke or something." On another occasion, the girls had been talking about a group of girls at school called "the pucks" who, they believed, had sex with as many of the city junior hockey players as they could. Emma commented, "We have our steady boyfriends (at least). Like I've only been with one guy in my life." Victoria added,

I just wanna, I just want to be above them (better than them). I want to do better than them. I don't want to be a girl who sleeps with 30 guys and says, "Oh, I'm above you because I've been with 30 guys." Excuse me, I haven't been with anyone and I think it should be a fact that I'm better than you.

The girls judged some adults in their lives. Emma seemed to judge some of the adults in her life. She talked about an interning teacher who, she felt, was not fair with question distribution in class.

Like we'd all be like holding up our arms high to answer and she'd always ask the same people. And I was like, "Ms. Smith, why don't you give everybody a chance? You're just being a snob, and I hope that you don't get a job."

Emma felt great frustration with adults who, she felt, did not take her seriously when it came to a topic that they felt she did not have the maturity or the life experience to really understand, namely love.

I'm like, "Sshh, be quiet (to adults)." We are to that point where we can say, "Be quiet", because we know just as much as you guys (adults). *I* think we do. You might look at me like I'm a little girl and you might think that you know (more than I do) but, I know everything you know. We're not educated yet, we don't live on our own yet, but we have that bond (in their relationships with their boyfriends), we have what you, as a married couple would have.

She went on to say that she *did* know what love meant and that she was aware of what saying, "I love you" really meant. "It may sound crazy but I *do* know what you

mean (when you say, 'I love you' to someone)."

Emma talked about her parents who, she felt, did not really understand teenagers and yet felt they were able to judge them. "Parents think, 'Jeez, that's a bad person to be hanging around'. You know what? They're not bad, they just don't have something that we do, you know, they're missing something." She also talked about her friend's parents whom she felt did not show love or support when they should have. "They (parents) just don't give her anything to follow. They don't give her any morals or anything like that. Her parents have to take responsibility ... They just didn't raise her the right way."

The girls seemed to judge adults who did not respect them as being their equals in knowledge about life and love. The girls seemed to have rules for judging the behavior of others that they shared within the group, perhaps for the purpose of defending and valorizing the rules by which they and their families lived. They also seemed to judge those parents who, they felt, were not competent as parents.

But while the girls condemned some people, they idealized others.

The girls idealized certain aspects of their lives:

The girls idealized some of the relationships they had with their teachers and family members. The girls enjoyed talking about the special friendships that they had with some teachers. Lynn recalled an elementary teacher who had taken her and another student to Dairy Queen as a reward for having obtained outstanding marks.

And we'd go to Dairy Queen and talk and stuff ... and she was like, a good friend to me kinda thing. (I'll) never forget that. She was like, she'll always be like a great teacher and friend in my memory.

Victoria said that she would always remember her science teacher because, "She was awesome. That was the best. I loved it. I loved going to that class 'cause she let us slack off but got us working. I had so much fun in that class."

Victoria felt that the time we had spent together as a group had been fun for her. She enjoyed being able to spend time with a teacher out of school and just talking. "(I

like) being friends! Like this is the stuff that I'll remember when I look back. I'll be like, 'I remember when I did this with my teacher and she was so cool'."

Taylor had never had the chance to meet her grandfather since he had died when she was very young and yet she felt a very close bond with him through the stories told to her by her grandmother.

That's what makes our family so close ... my grandpa is above us and watching us because he never got to see any of his grandchildren, he never really got to live. I feel that he's in me and surrounding me.

The girls idealized their social lives and their time spent at school. Since they were going into their last year of high school, they enjoyed remembering grades nine, ten, and eleven. They talked about the fun they had had at the dances and the football games. They enjoyed meeting for the group interviews. "It's already been two and a half hours and it feels like it's been one". The girls also looked forward to the rest of their summer. "It goes by so fast, it's unbelievable. We want to go to the beach, and stay up all night, and laugh, you know."

The girls took pleasure in idealizing some of the group activities of their high school lives.

The girls appreciated each other and enjoyed spending time together. The girls seemed to have developed a close friendship, a sisterhood of five that would last beyond their high school years. Many comments were made that showed this. Hevin said that, "Honestly, I don't know what I'd do if anything ever happened to any one of these girls." Emma said that, "We all love each other ... we're always gonna love each other and that's what counts." Victoria said that, "I just like sitting around with you guys. Even on a Friday night and being like, 'This sucks!' as long as I'm with you guys." Taylor said that,

Basically all of us friends look out for one another, all of us do. I don't need to make any other friends, I've got my closest friends. I find that we're so close we're like a sorority and I don't want to stop it.

The girls shared a very close friendship. Each girl felt like she belonged to the group and was accepted for her self. All knew that they could depend on each other and enjoyed knowing that they, in turn, were being depended upon.

The girls believed they were grown up, and wanted to be respected as being grown up. One of the ways in which the girls attempted to show that they were grown up was by taking care of others. Hevin explained how her family, although close, had many stormy disagreements. She tried to take care of everyone saying, “I’ll try my best. I’ll be there for my mom, my dad, and my brother.” She recalled when her grandma died and the role that she played taking care of her dad, “I had to be there for my dad. I couldn’t break down, I had to be strong for him.” It would seem that the girls wanted to take responsibility for caring for others.

The girls also wanted to show that they were experienced in life. Emma and Victoria revealed this in the way that they spoke about their lives. Emma seemed to be concerned about how teachers (and adults in general) viewed her and other girls her age. She felt that most adults did not give her the credit that she felt she deserved for the knowledge that she had.

You (adults) might look at me like I’m a little girl and you might think that I don’t know as much as you, but ... ever since I was 15 years old, I’ve been experiencing ‘real world things’. I know everything you know.

She went on to say that girls her age might even know too much of the adult world. “I think that we grew up too fast. We experience the drugs, the cigarettes, the sex ... all the things that parents don’t want to know about, but as a teenager, you experience that stuff.”

With knowledge of drugs and sex came knowledge about love. Victoria spoke about having gone out with a boy for quite some time and feeling that she truly loved him. She felt that no one really understood or respected the deep feelings that she had for this boy. “I’ve known him since I turned 13 and I still want to be with him for the rest of

my life.” Emma added that, although she thought that most adults did not appreciate the knowledge that she had of boys and love, she too knew what it was like to really love a boy. “My parents are like, ‘Oh, you don’t even know what love is, you have no idea, you’re young’. Well, when things come to us early, we learn just like you guys.”

Victoria and Emma desperately wanted their thoughts and feelings about love and loving to be validated and respected. Perhaps this validation would, in turn, validate them as women. Maybe they felt some regret at having experienced so much so soon and needed to feel that they were accepted as equals among adults, if only in the area of love and relationships.

In summary, I came to see that the girls struggled with worries and fears about their self-worth, their relationships, and their futures. In their struggles, and within their friendship group, they came to an understanding of gender.

Part III: Beliefs about gender

Beliefs about girls:

The girls believed that some girls have some positive qualities. They knew that their good friends within the group had good qualities. The girls valued their time together and felt a sisterly affection for each other. They also described a protectiveness and trust that they had toward each other. “I think that we’re pretty close to being sisters. We’re so close, and we have trust in each other,” Hevin said. “We watch out for each other,” said Taylor. Victoria said that, “Girls are cool. We can sit and talk, like this.” Two of the girls described some of the qualities of the girls in their group. Emma explained why she felt that Taylor was such a good friend. “I love her! She’s easy to talk to, she’s fun to hang around with, and she likes people for who they are.” Victoria felt that Emma was a great person to have in their group because, “... she’s got her own view of life, which is very mature. I just think that she’s very, very smart and that she’s got a good head on her shoulders.” The girls seemed to share a friendship that made each

of them feel accepted and loved. Although they did not always agree, they seemed to respect each other and support each other.

The girls believed that other girls have negative qualities. According to Victoria, Hevin, and Taylor, most girls become obsessed with boys and relationships. Being in a relationship was, to most girls, the most important thing in their lives. Victoria told us about her belief that girls worry a lot about boys and about needing to have a boyfriend. “I think it’s just that girls are more obsessed with the whole relationship thing. Guys don’t worry about having girlfriends but girls worry about guys, always about guys. That’s the way it is.” Hevin agreed, adding that girls look more for love in their relationships than boys do. “Girls fall for love harder than guys.” In addition to looking for an emotional bond in a relationship, girls also tend to plan too far ahead into the future. They romanticize the relationship they are in and plan their futures with that boy. According to Taylor, “... girls just look too far into the future (in a relationship), and too deep in it.”

These comments illustrate the girls’ belief that other girls place too much importance on being in relationships with boys. Although they felt a sisterly closeness among themselves, the girls all agreed that most other girls were not trustworthy, were too emotional, were too competitive with other girls, and were too insecure. As a result, it was very hard to like other girls.

Hevin talked about her elementary school experience of being treated badly by the girls in her class. “I went home crying every single day and it got to the point where I was suicidal just because of the way girls were to me. They’d pretend to be my friend and then they’d backstab me.” Hevin said that she found it to be very difficult to trust girls, stating that it was only in high school that she was able to find a few good girlfriends. She felt that one of the reasons for this was the fact that girls are very competitive and often threatened by other girls. “I think that it’s because they (girls) feel threatened by other girls. Whenever a girl wants a boy and he likes someone else, the girl

feels so hurt and thinks, ‘Why is she better than me?’” Hevin’s frustration with girls could be seen in the comment, “You feel like smacking them and knocking some sense into them.”

Emma said that, in her opinion, girls were too emotional, weak, and competitive with other girls. She described her own inability to control her emotional state of mind. “I get depressed over the dumbest things in the world.” She added that it was difficult to like girls because of their “weakness and ditziness.” Emma said that girls compete too much with each other. She could see this in herself, in the way that she felt when getting ready for school. “I feel that I’d rather do my hair for girls than I would for guys. You want to look better to girls than to guys.”

Taylor felt that girls were very “annoying”. She also thought that, for the most part, girls were weak, very emotional, immature, and untrustworthy. She described starting grade nine and feeling very alone and afraid. “Grade nine was hard because you didn’t know anyone ... and everyone’s afraid ... and you couldn’t find any friends ... and high school has so much backstabbing and rumors. You don’t know who to trust.” She also described how girls seem to only think about boys and the way that they (girls) look.

I find girls have been immature ever since I was a little girl. They’re so annoying. They break a nail, they start crying ... Like who cares if a nail breaks?! I think, you know, there’s more in the world than just looks and getting all these guys.

Victoria shared her view that all girls were the same; too sensitive and too emotional. When asked what she liked about being a girl, she responded, “I don’t think there’s one reason I like about being a girl. I hate it sometimes, it’s so hard!” She explained that she felt that girls were too sensitive and emotional because she herself was. “I know I’m like that.”

From these comments, it would appear that the girls are very critical of other girls and of themselves. They perceive girls as having many negative qualities.

The girls believed that appearance is related to a girl’s self-worth. In general,

the girls knew that a lot of importance was placed on a girl's physical appearance. However, their personal thoughts about this were conflicting. On one hand, they felt that it was wrong to value appearance so much, but, on the other hand, they really enjoyed trying to look good. They also seemed to feel that they needed the makeup, clothes, etc., to be accepted and pretty. Hevin explained how she could not possibly leave her house without makeup. I asked her what would happen if she did. She quickly responded, "Oh, people would be scared of me! They'd have to really, really get to know me before they'd approach me." When asked why she thought that women cared so much about their physical appearance, she explained that this was something that had probably gone on for a long time. If you went back in time far enough, she thought that, "Women probably started it all. To please the men." Hevin thought that, although guys just wanted to relax and have fun, girls wanted, "... to be the prettiest, have the nicest clothes, and have the nicest car." Girls were competitive with other girls about their physical appearance.

Hevin found that girls never seemed to be satisfied with their looks.

But girls, girls are so stupid. "Oh, I wish I had her eyes. Oh, I wish I had her hair. Oh, I wish I had her body. Oh, I wish I had her boyfriend, her clothes", ... blah, blah, blah. Why are you (girls) wishing for that? You're you, just be you.

The girls were aware of the stress involved in looking good. Hevin described a talk show she had seen where the husbands were not happy with their wives because they no longer dressed and looked the way they did when they were first married. "... and they (wives) just wanted to be themselves, they didn't want to have to put on a front for anybody ... not like the women that wear those suit dresses and makeup, and have their hair all done up." Hevin very much enjoyed the work she did modeling, but she explained how hard it was for her because she felt that models had to look a certain way. "I don't like putting on all the makeup and stuff just to impress, not only the guys, but the girls too."

Lynn agreed that society seemed to pressure girls to put a lot of energy into their physical appearance. She explained how a lot of this could be seen on television and how this must be affecting girls in a negative way. “The women all have to be good looking ... a lot of the girls aren’t normal, like what you’d see on the street. They’re just the perfect ones. I think that bothers a lot of girls.” When we began to talk about how the girls might be affected by this message, Lynn thought that it would be especially hard for girls who were overweight. “Cause every time they see a magazine, they’re like ‘oh, those are so fake’.” She talked about one of her friends who was overweight and the problems that she had finding nice clothes. “... all the shirts (in the stores) are kinda small, even the large ones ... so her (friend’s) clothes aren’t as nice as everybody else’s.”

However, although Lynn did agree that the importance placed on a girl’s physical appearance was not fair, she admitted that she liked to get dressed up and try to look her best.

I don’t really like being like guys ... like all grubby, they’ll just wear whatever. But we actually have to try to look good, and I think that it’s the trying to look good that makes it fun ... because you want to look good.

Victoria felt that the message that girls were receiving from society placed too much importance on their appearance. “... no one on TV ... like they’re all beautiful and skinny and there’s nothing wrong with them.” She explained that this was very negative for girls because they could not possibly compare themselves to those girls.

I think that if someone, say like me, was trying to audition for a part, even if I had the best talent in the world ... I’m not 6’3” or 110 pounds so I don’t think they’d pick me. You have to look a certain way, beautiful.

She also saw how these messages were responsible for girls not feeling happy with their bodies and wanting to lose weight.

When you open up a YM, they have total sex symbols portraying how teenage girls should look. And a lot of girls are stupid and they’ll be like, “I’ve just got to lose weight because I’ve got to look like her and I’ve got to wear all my make-up like that.”

Taylor thought that she was different from most girls in that she did not worry about how she looked. "... that's why my friends always say I'm an individual because I could care less about my looks. Like I can care less what a guy thinks of me." It bothered Taylor that so many girls did take a lot of time with make-up and clothes. "But there are girls who put on make-up and you wouldn't believe it. Like, 'who are you trying to impress?' I just can't stand girls being so (into their looks). It's annoying. It bugs me!"

From these stories, it would seem that, although the girls realized that society was telling them to look a certain way, they still accepted the message and would strive to meet the expectation. Failing to achieve this ideal appearance had consequences for girls' feelings of self-worth. If they thought that they looked like the girls in the magazines or on television, they felt good about themselves. If they did not or could not look like those girls, they felt bad about themselves.

The girls believed that most girls valued their relationships with boys over those with other girls. Consequently, girls often had difficulties in their relationships with other girls. Victoria, Hevin, and Emma shared this view. Victoria explained that it was difficult to be friends with girls. She compared the friendships that she had with girls with those that she had with boys, stating that it was much easier to talk with boys and be accepted by boys than it was to talk with girls and be accepted by them.

Girls are very hard to be friends with ... if you don't say "hi" to them right away, they say that you're a snob. With guys, they might not understand, but they'll listen ... they just take things one day at a time. It's so hard to find a (girl) friend who understands me.

All of the girls agreed that the biggest obstacle that stood in the way of having friendships with girls was the fact that girls considered their friendships with boys to be more important than any friendship they had with other girls. They explained how, although they themselves wanted to have lasting relationships with girls, they were also guilty of choosing to spend their time with a boy over spending time with their

girlfriends. Victoria and Emma described personal experiences where they had made this choice. Emma explained that if you have girlfriends and then meet a potential boyfriend, you just automatically spend all of your time with him, causing your girlfriend to feel hurt and abandoned (because she's single).

Like if you have a boyfriend but your best friend doesn't, they (she) have only you ... and then if you jump from your boyfriend to your friend, they'll (she'll) be like, "Hey, I don't want to be your second choice anymore."

Victoria recalled dating a boy, ignoring her girlfriends, and adopting his friends as her own. Even when she had plans made with her girlfriends, she would break them if this boy called and wanted her to go out with him. "I was going out with this guy for like two and a half years and I dropped all my friends." Eventually, her girlfriends did not want to do anything with her since they did not feel that they could count on her.

I'd have a boyfriend and only spend time with him and my friends got sick of it and then when I broke up with him, I had no one for the longest time. I was so lonely and so I went to another guy and then another guy ... because the girls wouldn't be there.

These stories show how girls, when made to choose, spend their time with boys, and then are often made to suffer for it.

Beliefs about boys:

The girls believe that boys are self-centered and have no worries. The girls believed that boys were carefree, not worrying about school, the future, or girlfriends. Victoria told us about being in class and seeing boys not care about how they did academically. They did not seem to worry about not doing well.

We're so surprised if a guy gets an 80 on a test or if they beat you ... it's all the girls that get 90's. There may be a few guys that are kinda smart, but none that are really, really smart.

She suggested that it was not because they were not as smart as the girls, but that they were not really trying. "It's maybe because the guys don't care." To Victoria, doing well in school was very important and stressful. "... I know that school's a big pressure

for me, a big stress in my life. Just 'cause I have to succeed in it." She said that when she talked to boys about this, they did not seem to have an answer. "You try to talk to them about it and they're not stressed out, they don't care ... they don't, you know. And it's like a big deal (to me) and I think 'what's wrong with you?'"

Hevin saw a real difference between girls and boys and their attitudes about life. Whereas she thought girls wanted to be popular, to have a long relationship with a boy, and to be the prettiest, she saw boys as only wanting to have a good time. "Cause boys, they really don't care, they want to party and have fun and just do whatever." Victoria agreed with this, adding that boys did not seem to need girls and that they were just as happy to do things with their guy friends. "It's so hard being a girl because guys, they just ... I think that guys don't care about anything." She added that, although girls would rather spend time with their boyfriends, and even cancel any plans that they had to see a boyfriend, boys would never do that. "Guys just take one day at a time, they just let it flow. 'Let's go play golf ... okay, ... Let's go do this ... okay'. Call your boyfriend and they're like 'No, I can't, I'm going out with my friends'." Victoria thought that this was hard to understand, since girls *would* care about spending time with boys. "I think it's just that girls are more obsessed with the whole relationship thing. Guys don't worry about not having a girlfriend. Girls always worry about guys, always worry about guys."

The girls were disappointed with boys' irresponsible behavior, immaturity, and lack of understanding and respect for girls. The girls discussed their feelings of disappointment concerning boys. Lynn began by stating that boys their age were very irresponsible with drinking and driving.

The guys in our grade are really irresponsible, I think. On weekends and stuff they don't care if they drink and drive ... or they do stupid things, like climb up hills in their trucks ... and they could roll them so easily.

Taylor agreed, adding that she felt that boys were very irresponsible when it came to doing drugs. She recalled having gone out with a guy who did drugs and having to

break up with him because he would not stop.

I think that people that do it (drugs), they screw up their lives. I dated a guy for like 2 years ... like he did it ... he wouldn't do it in front of me until about a year after or whatever, but that's his life he screwed up. I'm not going to waste my whole life being with this type of guy, ... so I never called him.

Hevin felt that, although boys displayed irresponsible and immature behavior, it seemed to be acceptable. She talked about how when a girl gets pregnant, only she is held to be accountable. The guy seems to have the freedom to just walk away, and so they do. "Guys can get away with (so much) ... like if they got a girl pregnant, they can get away with it, boom, you know their parents won't do anything about it." Emma added that this double standard also existed when you considered that a girl will be labeled differently than a boy will when it comes to sexual activity. "You know what, you guys? You know how guys aren't sluts if they sleep around? Like that's what they say? Well, I don't agree. I think that girls or guys that sleep around are sluts." The girls talked about how the label of "slut" for a girl was most often perpetuated by girls, whereas boys perpetuated the label of "stud" for boys. Taylor commented that, "It's always been like that," to which Hevin matter-of-factly added, "The guy's a stud, the girl's a slut."

The girls also felt that the boys did not try to understand them and that they did not treat girls with respect. When we discussed the girls' futures and how some of them were looking forward to having children, Lynn told us how some boys had commented on this. "They always say, 'Sucks to be you', since we have to have the kids. They just cut it down."

Hevin thought that boys competed with each other by bragging about the girls they were dating. They often made comments to other boys that showed their disrespect for these girls. "... guys compete ... they'll go back to their friends and go like 'Yeah, you know, I've got her, I laid her'." Emma said that boys don't really see the girls as people, they just do what they want. "Guys are so disgusting ... guys are so horny. Like at

Craven ... look at Robert ... he's such a dirty pig."

The girls believed they cannot depend on boys, nor can they trust them. The girls talked about the fact that you cannot depend on boys to take responsibility if a girl becomes pregnant. They seemed to think that boys would never stay involved with the girl or with the baby. Victoria said, "But you know that the girl is stuck with that kid and it's more her responsibility. If you were to get pregnant you guys, do you think the guys would stay with us? More than likely not." Emma agreed with Victoria saying, "Yeah, I really highly doubt it. Whether it's three years, four, they're not going to be there through that whole child's life. I doubt it."

Victoria told us about how undependable her boyfriend was. She remembered a fight that her parents had had that had left her sad and confused. She needed her boyfriend to come over and comfort her, but he did not understand her need. "And he wasn't there for me. He knew about the situation but, like guys usually are, he wouldn't talk about it. It was just hurtful how he showed (that he didn't care)."

Hevin talked about not being able to trust boys. She had had enough painful experiences with them to know that they would say anything in order to gain a girl's trust. "Guys kind of manipulate that, you know? They're like, 'Oh, but I love you', and stuff, and 'We'll always be together'." When it came to boys and the way that they could charm a girl, Lynn said that she was afraid for her little sister. Lynn had found out that her sister was seeing this boy who had a very bad reputation for treating girls badly and had tried to tell her sister that she should not see or talk to him. However, her little sister did not appreciate her concern, or accept her view of the boy.

Loving a boy can make a girl feel powerless and desperate. The girls assumed that, since they felt powerless to leave a relationship, they must be destined to love that boy and to stay in that relationship. Emma had been in a relationship with a boy for over two years and felt helpless to leave. Although she was not happy with him, she thought that she should stay. When her friends encouraged her to leave him, she said,

I've tried so many times to break up with this guy. It's so hard. Like you know what I do? I'll tell myself he's such a bad guy, then I'll break up, but then, when I hang up the phone, I'm like, "I just made the biggest mistake." I just think to myself, "Emma, you know you're going to want to see him tomorrow, you know you're going to talk to him tomorrow, you're going to do the same exact thing as you always do. You're going to go back to him because you're weak." It's just that everything, everything reminds me of him. Is that good? Is that like, a sign ... that we should be together? 'Cause it's like, we have to be together.

On one occasion when they had broken up, Emma recalled having been very upset because another girl was interested in her boyfriend.

That's *my* boyfriend. So when she (another girl) liked him, I was like, "Jeez, you don't like him, look at him, he's such a geek." Of all the guys she could (want to go out with). I've already been with this guy for how long? Like 3 years off and on and so I was like, "Don't like him", and I was trying to convince her. And I'm like, "Ryan, don't be with her." It's so hard because he doesn't quit calling, and he'll push me until I go back. And then he'll give the sweet talk. He'll be like, "Yeah, I really like you, and, you know, I love you a lot." And then I'll be like, "How sweet", and be so dumb and go back ... I've wasted most of my high school years (being with him).

Emma explained that girls who stay with one guy, whether they are happy or not, end up not being able to leave the relationship. They feel that they have invested a lot of their time and their selves in the relationship and cannot imagine leaving.

Girls that stay with one guy, no matter how ugly he is, no matter how annoying he can get, there's something there. It's not because you're dumb, it's because you guys shared something at one point that you don't want to walk away from. Like with me, there's something that just won't let me walk away from this guy.

She admitted that she had no control over her feelings for him, "I can't handle it, I'm not happy. But I just can't control my feelings for him. I said to him last night, 'What's holding us together?' And I'm scared that it's love. I know it's love."

Loving a boy can be disappointing for girls and maintaining the relationship can take priority over a girl's happiness. Emma said that she was presently in a relationship where her boyfriend knew that she was unhappy, but did not care enough about her to find out why. She explained how he did not take her seriously and how he knew that she would never leave him.

He'll say, "This is such a joke, you're such a joke." I'm like, "No, you just don't take me seriously." But I'm too weak to let go of him for good because I'm too scared. I'm scared of being alone. I don't know what it's like to not have him.

Emma did not hold her boyfriend responsible for not taking her seriously or for not treating her in a more respectful way.

And he never takes me seriously, so he doesn't care. But it's not like he can care because, I sort of just lead him on. I'll say that I want to break up and we will for a while and then I'll go back. But, still, I don't think the way he treats me is right. He's never, we never went to a movie in all 3 years, we just rented them. And he never took me out for supper in my whole life. He asked me to but I felt he was only asking because he knew that *I* wanted to, not cause *he* wanted to.

The only place that her boyfriend had wanted to take her to was his parents' cabin so that they could be alone.

He's always, "Do you want to go to my cabin?" I'm like, "No, I don't always want to be alone. Can't we maybe go to a dance? Or, can we go shopping?" I don't want to go sit at his cabin where it's like, you know, too much of an adult situation.

Beliefs about the female self:

The girls came to believe that they were not smart, deserving people. For example, Taylor came to believe that she did not deserve kindness. More than once, she spoke of incidents that revealed her underlying assumption that she did not deserve kindness and the attention of worthwhile people. In one instance, Taylor spoke to me about the female Vice Principal (a former counselor), the conversations that they had had in her office, and how kind she had been to her. She had consulted the Vice Principal about a variety of personal problems, and had enjoyed the attention she had received. But Taylor did not feel she deserved this kindness. "I felt like I was doing something stupid," she said. "I felt I was over reacting, over exaggerating (my problems)." Taylor did not feel that she and her problems deserved this good person's time and attention.

Emma spoke about how sweet a boy had been to her at a graduation. Although he had only been courteous and attentive, she had felt uncomfortable with this attention. She had told him, "Don't do that! I don't like it." She told me, "But I should. I should

like it. I should like him being sweet. All girls should like it if a guy's being sweet. But for some reason I don't." Perhaps the reason had to do with Emma's lack of feelings of self-worth.

Lynn, Emma, and Taylor all told stories that revealed their belief that girls are not smart. Lynn and Emma told us about how they became discouraged and would skip going to class. However, if they were having trouble in a certain subject, they would make sure to go to class on the day of the review. Lynn did this, "Cause I know that I would fail (otherwise)" and Emma added, "We were so scared that we were going to fail." It would seem that, to these girls, just passing certain classes was all that could be hoped for.

When we were discussing future goals and plans, Taylor told me about how much she loved spending time with kids and of her hopes of someday becoming an elementary teacher. She quickly added however that she did not think that that was possible. "Like *that'll* happen, I don't have good (marks)." It seemed that she was already convinced that this goal was unattainable for her, because she did not feel that she was smart enough.

The girls believe that girls cannot control their feelings. Victoria and Emma told stories about how they were not always able to control their feelings. Victoria explained how she had been in a serious, if somewhat unsatisfying, relationship with a boy and how she had felt so out of control about her feelings. She felt helpless and desperate in her love for him and asked the group "... and don't you ever ask, I always ask, God, why did you choose him for me to love?" Emma seemed to relate to this when she spoke about the relationship that she was still in with her controlling and unpredictable boyfriend. He expected to know her whereabouts when they were not together and always asked her to phone him as soon as she got home, "So I phoned him when I got home and I told him I don't want to be with you anymore". She explained how she had to force herself to tell him this since she could not control the feelings that

she had for him. She felt so emotionally tied to him that she could not imagine being without him.

All these stories show the girls acting on the belief that they did not have control over their feelings and their lives.

Beliefs about girls in relation to boys:

Girls sacrifice themselves in relationships. Emma and Victoria told us about how relationships had hurt them. Emma's experience with her boyfriend shows that she felt that she had sacrificed her self in this relationship. She told me a story about their having had a disagreement and her having wanted to go home, but his having locked the door so that she could not leave. She asked me if this was "normal", saying, "I wouldn't know because I've never dated any other guys. I don't know what's normal." She had not been able to exert her will and act as she chose to act. On another occasion, the girls were talking about feeling sad that their life in high school was almost over. Victoria explained how, because she spent all of her time with her boyfriend, she "had missed out on so many awesome (parties)." Emma also told us about her feelings of having "wasted all of her high school years" with the same boy. We could hear the sacrifice that she had made when she said, "I don't know myself without him." These girls felt that they had sacrificed their selves, their agency, their self-esteem for boys and had been hurt and deprived as a result.

Girls get hurt when they are loyal to boys. Emma explained that she knew that her boyfriend had many bad qualities but that she "ignored them and looked at the good qualities." Although she found that "the negative overpowered the good," she still wanted me to know that he did have some good qualities. Perhaps she felt that she only deserved someone who had some good qualities (and not too many?) Her loyalty required that she put his welfare before her own.

Girls feel that they are not complete without boys. Victoria and Emma certainly felt this way and were afraid to try to get along without boys. Emma told us

about her many failed attempts at breaking up with her boyfriend. “I’m too weak to let go for good, and I’m scared of being alone. I don’t know what it’s like to not have him.” She went on to say how if she was to never get attention from him again she would “fall apart.” Victoria related to this because she recalled the loneliness she felt when waiting for her boyfriend to call. The moment was especially poignant because she told us that she felt very sad about going home after our group interview. “I don’t want to be lonely anymore and I don’t want to go home right now and just sit there and wonder if he’ll call.” I recall the pained silence after she made that statement.

In the girls’ experience, it is easier to be a boy. All of the girls agreed that boys do not seem to care about anything. If “you try to talk to them about it (what they care about), they’re not stressed out, they don’t care, they just don’t.” The discussion then turned to reputations at school and how boys seemed to acquire a different label than girls did. Taylor, Hevin, and Victoria explained that “if a girl lays a guy she’s a slut. Yeah, the girl’s the slut and the guy’s the hero.” Boys had more sexual freedom than girls did.

Feeling owned by boys. Among the five girls, Emma seemed to feel this the most. She told about how having gone out with the same boy for three of her high school years had made her feel owned. “I feel like I’m already taken, like somebody already owns me.” When she discussed with us the many faults that her boyfriend had, she quickly tried to explain why it was that he had these faults. She seemed to think that his childhood had a lot to do with his inability to treat her with kindness and trust. She told us about different people having “come in and out of his life” and how this must have been the reason for his controlling behavior with her. “Maybe he just wants to own something. He doesn’t have a car, he doesn’t have a job. You know how you just want something to yourself?”

Emma also recalled having been a grad escort for a friend, not her boyfriend. Although this boy had been nothing less than a perfect gentleman, she felt that his gallant touching was somehow wrong. She did not like it when he helped her out of the car,

when he opened the door for her, and when he sometimes touched her. She felt that she was her boyfriend's property. "I don't like it when he touches my shoulders (to escort her into the dance) 'cause I feel like he's not on the right property." Perhaps Emma felt that her only worth was linked directly to being her boyfriend's possession and no one else's.

All these stories show the girls acting as part of the culture and living in relationships that hurt them and do not support them.

Resistance:

The girls believe that they are good people. In spite of everything else they believed, Lynn, Hevin, Taylor, and Victoria all made comments that showed their belief that girls were good people. Lynn stated that, from what people tell her, she "is a good listener." Hevin stated that she is "outgoing, responsible, and fun to be with. I'm a nice person." Taylor added that she's "athletic, fun to be with, outgoing, and a good listener." Lastly, Victoria said that she was "friendly, very active, and easygoing." It seems that, although the girls were hearing many negative messages about girls from the culture, and judging girls harshly, they were still able to find some good qualities in themselves.

Girls want to do what is right. Taylor and Victoria both had stories that show this. Taylor explained how difficult it was to have failed a grade in elementary school and to have only had one boy as a friend. Although they had only "hung around together" for a few years, theirs was a very close relationship in which she felt she had learned a lot about how boys think. As a result, she felt that she was better able to understand both sides (the girl's and the boy's point of view) of many issues, unlike her girlfriends. "I take things, like other sides, into consideration. I always look at everybody's point of view."

Victoria talked to us about having felt the peer pressure involved with doing drugs. She had been going out with a boy who "was into it" and told us how she felt about drugs. "I would never (do drugs). I've never done it and I don't have any desire to

do it.” Whenever they went to parties, drugs were always present. She explained how she felt at these parties. “We’d go to his (a friend of her boyfriend) house and they’d be doing drugs or whatever and I’d just sit there. I’d be like, ‘Let’s leave, I don’t want to be here’.” Victoria felt that doing drugs was wrong.

These stories show us that girls see themselves as good people and that they want to do what is right. In the next chapter, I will discuss the three themes that emerged from this study. I will also make recommendations to parents and teachers that are related to these themes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is located at the nexus of sociology and psychology, of gender and social class, of home and school. It is a qualitative study that attempts to present lived experience in all its complexity. Throughout the study, I consciously returned to my research question while thinking about the girls and their stories. My purpose was to focus on what *they* believed about gender and how these beliefs worked to shape their identities as young women. This chapter discusses three themes that emerged through the analysis of the data, and then offers the reader a list of suggestions that may help girls to achieve their best potential and overcome traditional cultural stereotypes.

Discussion: Three emergent themes

Through the course of the analysis, three main themes emerged from the data.

Theme 1: The world is a hurtful place for girls. It is harsh, unfriendly, difficult, and unfair.

Theme 2: Girls suffer. They feel punished by their gender.

Theme 3: Girls resist and hope.

Theme 1: The world is a hurtful place for girls. It is harsh, unfriendly, difficult, and unfair.

The first theme is a conclusion I reached after examining the data to see how external factors affect the lives of the girls. These factors include their parents and family members, their boyfriends, their friendships with other girls, the school, their teachers, their part-time jobs, the church, and their social lives. Together, these factors make life difficult and unfair for girls.

From my data, two sub-themes of the first theme can be identified. The first sub-

theme is: girls equate their worth with how closely their physical appearance approaches that of society's ideal for girls and women. The second sub-theme is girls not thinking they deserve respect in their relationships with boys. Both make life difficult and unfair for girls and women.

In my data, the girls believed that they needed to meet society's physical and emotional ideal for girls and women, an ideal that can never truly be achieved (Brownmiller, 1984; Kaschak, 1992; Wolf, 1992). Because girls are socialized to believe their physical appearance constitutes their worth as girls, their self-concepts are affected by how closely their appearance matches the cultural ideal (Brownmiller, 1984; Kaschak, 1992; Wolf, 1992).

The girls' relationships with boys were often difficult. They were often not treated with respect or consideration and yet did not really feel they deserved more. The societal message to girls was that they are not very important (de Beauvoir, 1977).

Both of these sub-themes show how unfair the society and the culture are to girls. First the girls are forced to compete with each other, and then are condemned for being competitive. In my study, the girls explained that, although they felt a sisterly closeness among themselves, they also felt that most other girls were not trustworthy but were insecure and competitive with each other in appearance and in relationships with boys. Early feminist theory points out that patriarchal society treats women as if they were only their bodies (Orenstein, 1994). In fact, the media has been instrumental in perpetuating this destructive idea as a form of social control over women, which serves to keep women the prisoners of their insecurities about their bodies (Brownmiller, 1984; CTF, 1990; Wolf, 1992). Much of their time and energies must be devoted to worrying about achieving beauty. They can rarely feel confident and secure.

Since the culture helps girls to make sense of their lives and their 'place' in it, it also provides them with the framework to form their 'selves' (Cherland, 1994; Christian-Smith, 1993; Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Sernich, 1995; Weedon, 1997).

Society tells them that they should be more kind and caring, and punishes them for competing. From a very young age, girls hear the message that they should strive to be good wives and mothers and should want to take care of others' needs (Kaschak, 1992; Miller, 1975; Noddings, 1984; Weedon, 1997).

On the one hand, they are rewarded for succeeding at having been the 'prettiest' and, as a result, having 'won' the boy. On the other hand, we (the society), also punish their success. Society tells them their behavior is bad and labels them 'sluts'. They are made to pay the consequences for pregnancy all alone. They are told that it is most important to spend time with boys, the really valuable people, but then are made to feel bad for not choosing their girlfriends first. I found this to be true in my data when the girls talked about competing for a boy's attention, and then felt badly if they were not 'chosen'. They felt hurt and would ask themselves, "Why is she better than me?" Since their self-esteem is based to a large extent upon having successful relationships with boys, self-doubt created through the rejection of a boy affects their self-worth and self-esteem (Miller, 1975). The competing messages that girls receive from the culture work unfairly to make girls unhappy.

The cultural message that underlies the first theme is that the most important thing about a girl is the way she looks and that boys are people of more value than girls. The message seems to be, "Don't worry about feeling good or about being good ... just worry about looking good!" This is evident in both the data in the study and in the literature. We can also see in the data the many ways in which boys are disrespectful in their treatment of girls. Both messages contribute to girls' low self-esteem and hurt them psychologically.

Theme 2: Girls suffer. They feel punished by their gender.

The second theme considers how the girls feel on the inside. It states my conclusion that girls suffer because they are girls. From the data, two sub-themes can be identified. The first has to do with the overwhelming sense of responsibility the girls are

made to feel by society for human relationships, and for the welfare of others (their family members, their boyfriends, each other). The second sub-theme has to do with the inevitable sense of failure they feel when everyone around them is not happy. This 'failure' results in girls having low self-esteem. Again, this is extremely hurtful for them.

In the data as well as the literature, it can be seen that girls feel that boys have a much easier time in life. Because of their gender, girls are taught to be responsible and to think of others first (Noddings, 1984). Women and girls are the caregivers in the culture (Cherland, 1994; Geller 1998; Miller, 1975; Weedon, 1997). In my study, the girls believed that boys had no worries or stresses in their lives. In fact, they felt that boys their age were irresponsible and immature.

Girls do not have the same self-confidence or self-esteem as boys do (Orenstein, 1994; Pipher, 1995). As a result, they are always wondering whether or not they are meeting everyone else's expectations of how they *should* act and what they *should* look like (Cherland, 1994; Gilligan, 1982). In this study, the girls talked about how they worried about what their teachers and other adults thought of them. They also worried about what *I* thought of them during our visits together, especially when they talked about their relationships with their boyfriends. The girls in my study also talked about how their parents would often compare them to other, more successful family members. This had the effect of making the girls feel that they were not meeting their family's expectations. They were not able to fulfill their responsibility for making their parents happy.

My study revealed that these girls felt a lot of pressure to look a certain way. The message they got from the culture is that they should be tall, slim, beautiful, and feminine (Brownmiller, 1984; Kaschak, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Wolf, 1992). When they thought they had not met these standards, they ended up not feeling happy with their bodies.

No wonder these girls have periods of depression. Hevin said, "You have to be miserable to look (good) ... like a proper lady". Lynn added, "... I know a girl who

doesn't even want to *look* at magazines and all the clothes 'cause she says she can't fit into any of them. She gets really down." The data further shows this when one of the girls said that women were probably to blame for society placing so much importance on the way they look. "To please the men," she thought. This is a telling comment. It says that some girls and women accept the blame and responsibility for their own oppression. The society is constructed in ways that are unfair to girls and women.

Theme 3: Girls resist and hope.

The third theme is one of hope. It shows that girls are not just the passive recipients of cultural discourses that work against them, they are also agents, and each has a will of her own. Each girl can interpret what she sees around her and resist some of the messages that bombard her (Cherland, 1994; McRobbie, 1984).

In this study, the girls resist the messages that cause them to feel badly about being girls. To do this, they draw strength and courage from the group. They may not always agree on any given topic but they *do* agree on being there for each other. The group provides a real sense of belonging and acceptance. In a society that makes them feel powerless and inferior because of their gender, this group of five girls resists. They unite and dare to believe that girls *are* good and *are* worthy people.

The theme of resistance and hope is a conclusion that is supported by the data. The girls felt that they were good people and that they had good qualities. The data also shows that these girls wanted to do what they felt was right. This reminds our society that girls *are* strong and that they *can* to some extent resist cultural messages that attempt to objectify, belittle, and control them (Freire, 1981; McLaren, 1986; McRobbie, 1978; Willis, 1977). In spite of a society that works against them, the girls *do* have loyal friendships with other girls. They *do* have good relationships in their families. They *are* able to act as good people. At the age of seventeen, these girls *have* to hope. They have not given up. This means there is hope for change.

Recommendations

Society needs to work together to provide *other* cultural discourses and messages about gender. We need to counter the ideas from the media, school, church, family, and popular culture that are harmful to girls.

Equity for girls is equity for everyone. Serving girls better does not mean doing less for boys. Valuing girls can help everyone (boys and girls) learn more about the strengths, capabilities, and contributions of girls and women. It is important for teachers and parents to help decrease the pressure many boys and girls feel to conform to traditional gender roles, behaviors, and ways of thinking. In many everyday ways, we, as a community, can help girls transform the ways they think about themselves so that they begin to think, feel, and act more confidently.

In the following section, I have cited valuable recommendations from three on-line sources: Expect the Best from a Girl (Women's College Coalition, 1999), Let There be Equity (Kelly, 1999), and Strong, Smart, and Bold (Dee, 1995). Although many other resources are available that have been designed to address other problems, I have referred to the resources that seemed best suited for dealing with the problems *my* study brought to light.

What can teachers do?

Gender equity is not only about women's rights. It is an issue that has far-reaching effects on boys and girls, men and women. School boards and their teachers need to examine the topic of gender equity and understand how it applies to their students, themselves, and society. The following are suggestions for teachers.

- Use time allotted for professional development to provide information and opportunity for discussion around the whole area of gender equity and education. Questions to be considered may include: What exactly is gender equity? How successful have we been

in combating gender prejudice and misunderstanding among our students? Have we become complacent in thinking we are doing all we can? How might we become more aware of the problems created by lack of gender equity in our school? How can we get started?

- Arrange to pair teachers up to conduct peer observations and post-conferences examining equitable behaviors in the classroom. Teachers may wish to keep a reflective journal during this process in order to grow as professionals and to have notes that may be used for discussion purposes with other teachers. Questions to be considered may include: What signals about gender am I sending to my students? Did I discover anything new about my teaching practices in the classroom? Are materials used in my classroom promoting or discouraging gender equity? Do I value and address *both* male and female learning styles?
- Brainstorm ideas with colleagues about how to promote gender equity in the classroom.
- Develop a unit for teaching students about gender equity and develop a school initiative to address gender equity in the overall plan for effective schools.

A voice for all students: Realizing gender equity in schools (Saskatchewan Education Diversity Series on Gender Equity, 1991) also has many tips to help teachers successfully teach for both genders. Among these are: using non-sexist inclusive language, avoiding sexist humor, avoiding practices that reinforce stereotypes, identifying biases and confronting discrimination, understanding and adapting instructional strategies to account for gender, and praising and affirming both boys and girls.

Students who have experienced an equitable environment will be better prepared

for leading successful, productive lives. Incorporating activities, behaviors, and materials that promote gender equity in our schools will ensure a more healthy and happy existence for males *and* females. We could *all* win.

Teachers should also be made aware of the ways in which the curriculum can be limited for girls. For example, Failing at Fairness: How Our Schools Cheat Girls (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), comments on the short-circuiting of girls' technical learning. Girls need more exposure to technology, particularly during the critical teenage years. They tell of the research done two decades ago (by Lisa Serbin & Daniel O'Leary) which documented the way teachers gave boys extended directions on how to accomplish tasks themselves, while often completing tasks for girls. There are many factors in and outside the classroom that result in girls being turned away from computers. Such things as the media depicting men as experts in technology, societal expectations of different life goals for boys and girls, the structure of learning tasks, the nature of the feedback in performance situations, and the organization of classroom seating arrangements are a few factors.

What can parents do at home?

- Suggest activities and experiences for girls that may be traditionally reserved for boys. Girls may not ask to fix a leaky pipe but can be enthusiastic participants when given the opportunity. Encourage girls to explore non-traditional areas of interest and praise demonstrations of daring and curiosity.
- Stereotypes are powerful. Encourage girls, as well as boys, to question stereotypes. As parents, your words are powerful and can influence your daughter's attitude and performance in school and at home.
- Praise your daughter for her skills and ideas rather than for her appearance. Girls are

judged harshly by other girls if they do not fit within the bounds of our society's narrow definition of beauty. To help a girl develop a healthier self-image, compliment her for her achievements, thoughts, and actions. Remind her in various ways that she is a smart, valuable person with great ideas and lots of potential.

- Resist rescuing girls or providing ready answers. Research shows that this kind of "help" undermines girls' confidence in their abilities.
- Encourage new, non-traditional thinking and methods of problem solving. Help foster an environment where girls know it is acceptable to get dirty and sweaty in pursuit of a goal.
- Call girls' attention to media deception. One reason girls feel so negative about themselves is that they are continuously barraged by picture-perfect images of girls and women in magazines and on television. Become a media critic and encourage that approach in your daughter. Discuss with her the portrayals of girls and women on television, in movies, in magazines, and in popular music. Does the media offer positive or negative role models for girls? Explore the messages and assumptions that the media is sending. These discussions provide ideal opportunities to explore the roles of girls and women in society.
- Give your daughter a journal. Girls experience many conflicting emotions during their teen years, and expressing their thoughts and feelings by writing in a diary or journal is a proven way for them to boost their self-esteem. In Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls (1995), Mary Pipher explains how, when encouraged to write, girls are able to clarify, conceptualize, and evaluate their experiences. In so doing, they strengthen a sense of self.
- Workbooks have been written to help young women become more self-aware and more self-confident. Don't Give it Away! (Vanzant, 1999) is an example of one such workbook.
- Build your daughter's technological mastery and competence by finding a way for her to use a computer regularly.

- Do not assume that she is not interested in technical things. Invite her to explore any interests that she may have in this area.
- Encourage your daughter to take advantage of volunteer opportunities, internships, and work-study programs, especially in her areas of interest.
- Support your daughter's interests and participation in extracurricular activities. These activities will allow her to find new interests, take on new responsibilities, learn leadership, be part of a team effort, and build a résumé. Being part of a team is also a way for a girl to divert some of the energy focused on traditional concerns, such as her appearance, toward healthy physical activity and personal achievement.
- If you are a woman, be an example. By respecting yourself and other women, you set a standard which girls can follow.
- Encourage girls to:
 - Ask questions and not always accept the answers that are given.
 - Take risks, seek challenges. Girls develop self-reliance when they are given the space to solve problems and make mistakes in the process.
 - Speak up and speak out - make sure their voices are heard.
 - Try and try again - it is acceptable (even necessary!) to make mistakes.
 - Take on leadership positions in student government, sports, or extracurricular activities. A girl who has learned to lead is better prepared to take charge of her own education and career.
 - Stick with math and science classes even if they are not her strong suit.
 - Play organized sports and participate in physical activities.

What can parents do in regards to school?

- As parents, learn more about the role you play in your daughter's education.
- Ask your daughter about her school experiences. Find out if she is comfortable speaking out in class or asking for help, and whether the teachers hold the boys and the girls to the

same standards.

- If possible, try to visit her classes to observe how the teachers interact with the students.
- Get involved in your daughter's school activities by volunteering to drive, coach, and/or chaperone.
- Ask your daughter's teachers about specific math and science projects and express interest in her progress.
- Encourage schools to celebrate the accomplishments of women.
- Promote participation in debating clubs, school newspapers, and student government.
- Find out if girls have equal access to computers and other equipment. Be sure that she gets "hands-on" computer time at school.
- Check out the textbooks. Are there women represented in all disciplines?
- Read what your daughter is reading.
- Stress the importance of math, science, and technical classes. These are opportunities for students to learn and practice problem-solving and independent thinking - skills that are critical to building personal confidence and competence, to being creative, to being flexible and adaptable in dealing with life, and to accessing high-paying work.
- Consider your own feelings about math and science. Even if these subjects were hard for you, do not impose your feelings on your daughter.
- Support your daughter's interests in all of her subjects and hold high your expectations for her success.
- Engage your daughter in projects that develop spatial reasoning and analytical skills.
- Find out how many girls are enrolled in advanced math, science, and computer courses.
- Encourage teachers to monitor female enrollment and seek to increase it.
- Encourage the parents association to share and discuss information about classroom climate and gender equity.
- Ensure that your daughter is involved in a girls-only group (sports, workshops, camp). Any single-sex learning experience can be valuable because it offers girls a chance to

experience a world in which females are in charge.

- Debunk the myth of ‘Prince Charming’. Encourage self-reliance by supporting all that interests, excites, and challenges your daughter both professionally and personally.
- Foster your daughter’s interests in science fairs. For your own daughter, require a minimum of one year’s participation in a science fair.

What can Dads do?

Fathers can play a very important role in helping their daughters develop a positive sense of themselves. The on-line magazine Dads and Daughters (1999) provides many useful tools to strengthen relationships of fathers with their daughters. It also seeks to transform the pervasive messages that value girls more for how they *look* than who they *are* as people.

The following list helps fathers think about how they are doing being their ‘daughter’s father’.

- I can name my daughter’s three best friends.
- I take my daughter to school.
- I volunteer to help her with her extracurricular activities.
- I know my daughter’s goals.
- I comment on my wife or partner’s weight.
- I am physically active with my daughter.
- I make dinner for my family.
- I take my daughter to work with me.
- I talk to my daughter about managing money.
- I talk to other fathers about raising daughters.
- I restrict my daughter’s activities in order to protect her.
- I tell my daughter what her strengths are.

- I comment on my daughter's weight.
- I know what school project she's working on.
- I protest negative media portrayals of girls.
- I view pornographic material.
- I participate in parenting organizations.
- I suggest my daughter go on a diet.
- I object when others suggest that my daughter go on a diet.
- I talk with my daughter, and she does most of the talking.
- I help boys learn to respect girls.
- I tell my daughter stories about my own youth.

Fathers need to listen to their daughters and to focus on what *they* feel is important. If a girl learns to use her voice confidently on a regular basis, and people listen to and respect her, she develops a greater self-esteem. Fathers have a profound influence on how their daughters view themselves and should take every opportunity to value a daughter's true self and to give her confidence and strengths to use her talents in the world in order to achieve her goals. They can also help their daughters learn to recognize, resist, and overcome barriers.

Fathers have to make the world a better place for their daughters. Over-protecting daughters does not work and gives girls the message that fathers do not trust them or their abilities. Fathers can work with other parents to demand an end to violence against women, the media sexualization of girls, advertisers using anorexic-looking models, pornography, and all "boys are more important than girls" attitudes. Fathers should respect each daughter's uniqueness and remind girls that they are whole and capable of doing anything.

What can other adults do?

- Write letters of complaint to toy and publishing companies that produce sexist toys, books, and materials. Buy only non-sexist products.
- Urge the fashion industry to expand its definition of beauty by featuring more diverse models, and to celebrate women in ways that go beyond physical appearance.
- Write to members of various levels of government to insist on legislation that makes career and family a survivable combination, focusing on parental leaves and childcare.
- Ask questions and take action if you see something unfair or biased on television. Write a letter to your local station or to the producers of the show expressing your concern.
- Support the work of women campaigning for girls' and women's rights and equality.

To grow into healthy adults, Pipher (1995) stresses that girls need love from family, friends, meaningful work, respect, challenges, and physical and psychological safety. They need identities based on talents and interests rather than appearance, popularity, or sexuality. They need good habits for coping with stress, self-nurturing skills, and a sense of purpose and perspective. They need to feel that they are a part of something larger than their own lives and emotionally connected to a whole.

With the right kind of support and encouragement from key adults, girls can potentially avoid many common problems (such as low motivation and low achievement) that are rooted in low self-esteem. A sensitive, loving appreciation of every girl's individual potential fosters in girls a strong sense of self. A spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually centered girl is one who is less likely to submit to someone else's idea of what she should be.

My thoughts about this study

At first I thought it would be very difficult to put into words what I had learned as a result of having done this study. Upon many hours of reflection I realized the difficulty

lay in the fact that what I have learned has filtered into all aspects of my life. I am a changed person.

As a high school math and science teaching professional and a woman, I have a very important role to play in the lives of young women while they are in school. I provide them with a visual model of women as teaching professionals in a subject area that has been previously dominated by men. I can make these subjects more relevant for them and can work with other teachers to develop strategies whereby girls do *not* feel afraid to answer questions, to share ideas, and to be themselves.

As a woman who used to be a girl, and who is in many ways still a girl, I can represent hope and possibility. This study has helped me to see that times have not really changed. The themes that emerged as a result of this research are age-old socially-constructed themes. Even though realizing this has caused me great frustration, anger, and a feeling of powerlessness, it has also made me appreciate the enormous impact the culture has on the psychological and social development of girls, and the enormous responsibility that we, women and men, have to change society. I am finally questioning the messages inherent in the culture that permeate *my* everyday life. I have a responsibility to help other girls and women do the same.

The process of ‘doing’ this research and of finding answers to my research questions has also caused me to consider other essential questions. For example, why is our culture misogynistic? How did it come to be that way? And finally, don’t we *all* deserve to live in a society that is equal, evolving, and based on human dignity and respect?

Possibilities for future research

Doing this study has made me think about other possibilities for future research.

These possibilities include:

- Doing a study about boys to better understand ‘what it’s like to be a boy’.
- Waiting five years and following up on the study that I’ve done with the same five girls to see ‘what it’s like to be a young woman’.
- Doing a study which looks at five 17-year-old girls who are white, and from affluent families that value and encourage academics for their daughters, to see ‘what it’s like to be a girl’ from their point of view.
- Doing a study which looks at five 17-year-old girls who are aboriginal and poor who may or may not be living with their families, to see ‘what it’s like to be a girl’ from their point of view.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics Committee Approval



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 16, 1998

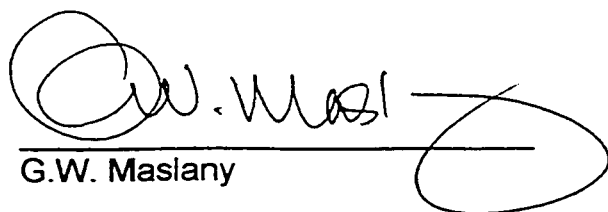
TO: Barbara Riou
Education

FROM: G.W. Maslany, Chair
Research Ethics Review Committee

Re: **Young Women Understanding Gender: Cultural Discourses and the Construction of Identity**

Please be advised that the committee has considered this proposal and has agreed that it is:

1. Acceptable as submitted.
(Note: Only those applications designated in this way have ethical approval for the research on which they are based to proceed.)
2. Acceptable subject to the following changes and precautions (see attached):
Note: These changes must be resubmitted to the Committee and deemed acceptable by it prior to the initiation of the research. Once the changes are regarded as acceptable a new approval form will be sent out indicating it is acceptable as submitted.
Please address the concerns raised by the reviewer(s) by means of a supplementary memo.
3. Unacceptable to the Committee as submitted. Please contact the Chair for advise on whether or how the project proposal might be revised to become acceptable (ext. 4161/5186.)


G.W. Maslany

cc: M. Cherland, supervisor

APPENDIX B

Cover Letter and Letters of Consent

Sample Letter to the Participants

Dear _____ (Participant's name)

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am undertaking in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Master's Degree in Education. This research will explore the questions, "What do girls believe about gender? What cultural messages about gender have figured in the construction of their identities? Since there has not been a lot of research done on this subject, this study is of potential benefit to teachers and other researchers. If you agree to participate, I believe that you will find it interesting and personally rewarding.

The project will involve five girls who will be going into grade twelve. I have chosen to invite participants on the basis of age and availability, and because I believe that your maturity, and your ability to reflect on and articulate your life experiences will be of direct benefit to my research.

The research project will involve three or four interviews, for a total interview time of approximately six hours. Interviews will be both group and individual. I will audiotape interviews and later transcribe them. Participants will then be asked to read and comment on the transcriptions of group interviews and on individual interviews in which they were involved. Participants will also be asked to review my conclusions and comment on them. All interviews will be conducted at (name of High School) in the staff room outside of school hours during 1998.

In keeping with University of Regina requirements, every precaution will be taken in the course of the study to ensure confidentiality of data. All data collected will be kept confidential, with access limited to myself, my research supervisor, and the members of my research committee. It is important that, if you agree to participate in this project, you agree to maintain the confidentiality of group discussions. All participants will be given pseudonyms to protect anonymity, and the location of the research will not be revealed in writing the thesis. Original data will be destroyed approximately one year after completion of the project. Should you consent to participate, you are free to withdraw from this project at any time.

If you agree to participate, the consent of your parents/guardians is necessary. Please ensure that they have read this letter and that you have discussed the project with them. If you agree to be a participant, I will contact your parents/guardians and arrange to have

them sign a form of consent.

I am very excited about the potential of this project to offer you insights into your own beliefs and values, and to help teachers and researchers to better understand the experiences of being young and female in our culture. I hope that you will agree to participate, and I very much look forward to working with you.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Barbara Riou

Parent Consent Form

I, _____ (parent's name), parent/guardian of
 _____ (participant's name), hereby grant
 consent for my daughter to participate in the research project being conducted by Ms.
 Barbara Riou as outlined in her letter to my daughter dated
 _____, and discussed with Ms. Riou.

I understand that this research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Meredith Cherland of the Faculty of Education, University of Regina, and that approval has been obtained from the Human Subject Research Ethics Review Committee, University of Regina, and from the Regina Catholic Board of Education.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary, that my daughter can withdraw at any time without repercussions, that Ms. Riou is not teaching her at present, and that interviews will be conducted in Ms. Riou's place of work. I understand that all interviews with my child will take place outside of school hours during 1998.

I further understand that data obtained for this project is confidential, and that access to the data is available only to Ms. Riou, her supervisor (Dr. Meredith Cherland), the research participants, and the research committee at the University of Regina. I understand that the identity of the participants will be protected in the thesis, and that data will be destroyed approximately one year after the completion of the project.

(Signature)

(Date)

Participant Consent Form

I, _____ (participant's name), hereby consent to participate in the research project being conducted by Ms. Barbara Riou as outlined in her letter dated _____ and discussed with me. I understand that this research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Meredith Cherland of the Faculty of Education, University of Regina, and that approval has been obtained from the Human Subject Research Ethics Review Committee, University of Regina, and from the Regina Catholic Board of Education.

I understand that participation in this study is voluntary, that I can withdraw at any time without repercussions, that Ms. Riou is not teaching me at present, and that interviews will take place outside of school hours at the school during 1998.

I further understand that data obtained for this project is confidential, and that access to the data is available only to Ms. Riou, her supervisor (Dr. Meredith Cherland), the research participants, and the research committee at the University of Regina. I understand that my identity and those of the other participants will be protected in the thesis, and that the data will be destroyed approximately one year after the completion of the project.

(Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Sample Questions for Group Interviews

Introductory Questions:

1. Tell me about yourselves and your families.
2. Which do you think is hardest ... being the oldest, middle, or youngest child in a family? Why?
3. Is it harder to be a girl or boy in your family? Can you explain why?
4. Which year do you think is the hardest in high school? Why?
5. What do you think about school?
6. How do you see yourself as a student?
7. What kinds of pressure do you feel at school?

Questions about the self:

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. Is there anyone who really depends on you?
3. What things do you have no control over in your life?
4. What things about yourself would you not want to change?
6. What things about yourself would you want to change?
7. What things in life stress you out?
8. What sort of books do you like to read?
9. What movies or TV shows do you like?
10. What worries do you have in your life?

Questions about friends and boyfriends:

1. What are the qualities of a good friend?
2. What kind of boy would you like to have a serious relationship with?
3. Do you think that it's easier to be a boy or a girl at this school?

Questions about parents and family:

1. Can you describe the kind of relationship you have with your Mom?
2. Can you describe the kind of relationship you have with your Dad?
3. Do you have a special relationship with a brother or a sister?
4. Are boys and girls treated the same way in your family?
5. In general, do you think that parents treat their children (boys or girls) the same?
6. Which do you think are easier to raise boys or girls?
7. Would you rather have a boy or a girl (or does it matter)? Why?

Questions about the Church:

1. What messages do you get about women when you go to church?
2. Do you think that men and women are considered to be equal in the church? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think that women cannot become priests in the Catholic religion?
4. Do you think that Jesus loved men and women equally?

Questions about Images from the Culture:

1. What kinds of messages about women do you see on TV?
2. What kinds of messages about women do you see in magazines?

Sample Questions for Individual Interviews

Questions about the self:

1. What things do you have no control over in your life?
2. What things would you not want to change about yourself?
3. What things would you want to change about yourself?
4. What do you dislike about being a girl?

Questions about friends and boyfriends:

1. What do you think a good friend is?
2. What does having a boyfriend mean to you?
3. Do you think that it is easier to be a boy or a girl at this school?

Questions about parents and family:

1. Talk to me about your Mom.
2. Talk to me about your Dad.

Questions about the Church:

1. Do you enjoy going to church?
2. Do you think that going to church helps you to become a better person?
3. Does the fact that only men can become priests bother you?
4. In your opinion, do women play an important enough role in the church?

Questions about Images from the Culture:

1. What kinds of messages about women do you see on TV?
2. What kinds of messages about women do you see in magazines?