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No More Sugar and Spice: Grades Five and Six Girls

Talk About Growing Up

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores preadolescent girls' interpretations of growing up in light of the often contradictory array of cultural themes surrounding growing up and the female body. Five groups of girls, thirty-three participants in all, met with the researcher for a series of group interviews. In these discussions, participants resisted popular discourses commonly used by parents and educators which frame puberty and growing up as driven by internal biological change. Instead participants constructed themselves as actively choosing to invoke displays of behaviour, consumption and self-presentation associated with growing up. However they also struggled to reconcile their own sense of agency with the cultural emphasis on sexualized styles of female self-presentation which, as they mature, increasingly positions them as objects of another's gaze. This study offers new insights into how girls resist or take up cultural discourses surrounding growing up and the struggles they face in that process.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Rachel and Amy
and to all the girls who participated in this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

GIRLS AND GROWING UP

THE SOCIAL PROBLEM

Adolescence is equaled only by infancy in its rapid rate of biological, cognitive and emotional development (Conger, 1983; Forisha-Kovacs, 1983; Mackie, 1987). A particular focus of research since the late 1970s has been the period of early adolescence (Adelson, 1980; Brooks-Gunn & Petersen, 1983; Levine & McAnarney, 1988; Sugar, 1979). Generally held to begin with onset of puberty, this is a transitional period during which preadolescents gradually become aware of the cultural implications of a more adult-like physical appearance, and, in doing so, become increasingly preoccupied with concerns about social acceptability, attractiveness, and adequacy (Faust, 1983; Hill & Lynch, 1983; Johnson et al., 1999).

There is evidence to suggest that this transition is more problematic for girls than boys. While girls in middle childhood, from ages 8 to 11, are strong, self-confident and outspoken (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), the early teen years are marked by an increased adherence to stereotypical gender role behaviour (Hill & Lynch, 1983) and preoccupation with self-presentation (Faust, 1983; Hill & Lynch, 1983; Simmons et al., 1983; Tobins-Richards et al., 1983). These factors often hinder other aspects of their development (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Johnson et al., 1999; Tobins-Richards et al., 1983). Self-esteem, which is lower during puberty than at any other stage of development for both boys and girls, shows a substantially greater dip for girls (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1983; Faust, 1983; Simmons et al., 1983; Tobin-

Richards, 1983; Zachary, 1940). Psychologists and teachers have been among the first to sound the alarm pointing to increased rates of depression (Koff et al., 1978), self-destructive behaviour, life-threatening eating disorders and alienation from family support systems among preadolescent and adolescent girls (American Association of University Women, 1992; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Canadian Teachers' Association, 1991; Levine et al., 1994; Lovering, 1995; Pipher, 1994).

Girls' loss of self-esteem as they approach adolescence has not gone unnoticed in the media; there has been an increase in articles about girls' drop in school performance and self-esteem, as well as an explosion of articles about eating disorders in young girls (Laucius, 1996; Nickson, 1996; Steinfeld, 1996; Wente, 1996).

As they posit possible explanations for these phenomena, prominent researchers such as Lyn Mikel Brown, Carol Gilligan, and Mary Pipher use the metaphor of the loss of self. Clinical psychologist Mary Pipher argues that North Americans live in a "girl-poisoning culture," a "look-obsessed, dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture . . . that limits girls' development, truncates their wholeness and leaves many of them traumatized" (1994, p. 12).

Though Pipher, Gilligan and others have implicated society-wide factors in the difficulties girls experience in transition to adolescence and adulthood, the bulk of academic research over the past twenty years pertaining to girls' differential experience of early adolescence is to be found almost exclusively within the disciplines of psychology (Adelson, 1980; Sugar, 1979), educational psychology and developmental studies (Brooks-Gunn & Petersen, 1983) and medicine (Levine & McAnarney, 1988). These studies

emphasize the importance of interconnections between biological change, parental and peer pressure and socio-cultural influences in accounting for girls' development of body image and self-esteem (Brooks-Gunn & Petersen, 1983; Forisha-Kovacs, 1983; Petersen & Taylor, 1980; Santrock, 1987; Simmons et al., 1983). Despite the frequent calls for an interdisciplinary approach, these studies nonetheless posit biological change as the foundational bedrock upon which all other factors build. In this sense, this body of literature necessarily sidesteps Pipher and Gilligan's call for a broader cultural analysis.

Yet medical and endocrinological research in the areas of sexuality and gender has consistently revealed this foundation to be fairly mutable. From the vantage point of biology, neither the onset of puberty, which is slow and diffuse, nor its conclusion, the assumed attainment of reproductive maturity, is a clear-cut event (Brook, 1985; Petersen & Taylor, 1980). As a result, Petersen and Taylor, two prominent researchers in the field of early adolescent development, have wondered whether by misguidedly equating "biological" with "immutable," we may, "[i]n our society at least, ... [be] overestimating the significance of biological factors" in accounting for the difficulties girls experience in the transition to early adolescence (1980, p. 117).

This certainly seems to have been the case in the empirical research literature on girls and preadolescence. Models of development which see biological and "natural" developmental processes as *a priori* social practice, have often been unable to suggest causal links between biological development and social phenomena. For example, in one study, researchers were unable to explain why, despite the fact that biological development remains unaffected, a change as minor as the grade at which girls move

from elementary to middle or junior high school has a significant impact on ease of adjustment to puberty (Simmons et al., 1983). Similarly, Alfieri, Ruble and Higgins (1996), in a cross-sectional longitudinal study, have noted how girls adopt more rigid conceptions of gender roles within a year after entering junior high regardless of whether junior high school in their local district begins in Grade Seven or Grade Eight—i.e. regardless of age.

If anchoring explanations of socio-cultural aspects of early adolescence in biological and developmental processes has failed to produce satisfactory accounts, is it not advisable to examine the social practices surrounding girls' experience of early adolescence? Or, as one medical researcher has put it, is it perhaps not time to focus academic inquiry on what Brook terms "the cultural and emotional climate" in which these physical changes take place rather than the physical events themselves (1985, p. 21)?

With both psychologists and medical researchers urging a look at cultural and society-wide factors, it is time to turn to the sociological literature in the hopes of fostering a better understanding of this juncture in girls' lives. What does the sociological literature have to say about the cultural norms and expectations surrounding girls' transition to adolescence?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The sociological literature may provide insight into the apparently problematic aspects of female socialization by offering an understanding of both cultural expectations as regards femininity and the processes through which girls make these cultural messages their own. Such an understanding

may help explain the challenges girls face in their transition to adolescence. Therefore, this chapter begins with an overview of the sociological literature on gender socialization.

Theoretical Perspectives on Gender Socialization

Expectations as to what is considered "normal" masculine or feminine behaviours vary substantially from culture to culture, as well as over time within any given society (Mackie, 1987). To ensure successful membership in society, individuals must orient themselves to these societal expectations of femininity or masculinity. The process through which this occurs is termed gender socialization and, within the disciplines of the social sciences, is generally taken up as a branch of socialization theory.

In the following section I briefly review and assess the major approaches to gender socialization. Interestingly, of the four theories that are consistently referred to in college-level sociology texts, three have been imported directly from psychology. These will be considered first.

Psychological Approaches

There are two predominant streams of socialization theory in psychology today. The first is rooted in John Watson's behaviour-oriented learning theory dating from the early 1900s (1913). It has spawned two models of socialization: learning theory and social learning theory. The second grows out of the developmental theories of Jean Piaget (1954).

Learning theory takes pains to concern itself exclusively with observable behaviour (Watson, 1913). Hence, learning is accounted for by operant conditioning: the reinforcement of desired behaviour or, conversely, the punishment of unwanted behaviour. Those who study gender socialization within this framework focus on how parents and caregivers

positively reinforce children for gender appropriate behaviour, such as choice of apparel, toys and activities, and punish them for unwanted behaviour. However, critics question whether operant conditioning is sufficient to account for how personality traits are shaped in accordance with images of gender stereotypes (Clarke-Stewart, Friedman & Koch, 1985; Huston, 1983).

More recently, a theory allowing for the effects of observational and imitative learning has joined the ranks of learning theories (Bandura, 1977). This approach gives greater emphasis to processes internal to the individual that mediate learning and behaviour (Huston, 1983). Children are said to learn through the observation of others. In the case of gender socialization, children learn gendered behaviour not only through reinforcement for overt behaviour, but also through observation and imitation of same-sex models (Bandura, 1977). Though this theory opens the door to a much wider range of learning experiences for the child, it offers no account of how children perceive gender differences and similarities and why they are drawn to imitate the same-sex parent.

Cognitive developmental theories stress that the child is actively driven to make sense of the world (Piaget, 1954). In contrast to learning theory's exclusive emphasis on the formative influences of the environment on the process of development and socialization, Jean Piaget developed a model of cognitive development wherein children proceed through constant and invariant stages in thought patterns. These stages allow children to make greater sense of the world and lay the groundwork for them to go on to recognize inconsistencies in perceptions that will necessitate further systematic shifts in thought patterns.

Kohlberg was the first to apply Piaget's cognitive developmental model to gender socialization (1966). Because in a Piagetian framework social cognition is dependent on cognitive development, the first step in gender socialization necessarily depends on the child's cognitive ability to correctly label themselves as male or female. This can only be accomplished when cognitive processes have developed to the point that the child, through observation of adults and assimilation of verbal labels, can sustain the conviction that gender is a constant attribute. The cognitive-developmental theory of gender socialization concludes that this gender constancy is gradually acquired somewhere between ages two and seven in much the same way that the "child's thinking about the physical world progresses into concrete operations" (Huston, 1983, p. 397). While this model acknowledges that the content of sex roles may be determined by the cultural environment, it maintains, in contrast to the learning theories, that it is a maturational process internal to the child that both allows these cultural messages to be assimilated and predetermines their salience to the child.

However, contrary to the theory, sex-typed behaviour often precedes the cognitive grasp of gender constancy. For example, it is generally acknowledged that sex reassignment is impossible after three years of age, because children have established a sense of their own gender identity (Clarke-Stewart, 1983). How can this be explained in the framework of cognitive developmental socialization theory, as the child has not yet fully grasped gender constancy?

Gender schema theory, a more recent contribution, both integrates and expands on the theories of social learning and cognitive development (Archer, 1984; Bem, 1981; Constantinople, 1979; Martin & Halvorsen, 1983).

Bem's gender schema theory in particular has had the largest impact (Lips, 1988). Based on information processing models, this theory focuses on the cognitive processes whereby individuals actively structure information about the world through the use of schema, "a set of expectations or a network of associations that guide and organize an individual's perception" (Huston, 1983, p. 399). Interestingly, the gender schema which shape and influence an individual's perceptions are, within this framework, explicitly described as cultural in origin; gender schema are important because gender, functionally linked to numerous other categories and schema, is given primacy in the culture (Huston, 1983; Lips, 1988). Therefore, the content of these gender schema is delineated as beyond the prerogative of inquiry. Reciprocally, in what contexts and under what circumstances the individual takes up the content of gender schema is delineated as beyond the prerogative of inquiry. Instead, the focus remains on the cognitive structuring of the schema themselves (Bem, 1981; Borgatta, 1992).

Psychoanalytic theory, rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud, is the last of the psychologically-based approaches to gender socialization (Freud, 1983). While the previous theories have emerged out of general theories of socialization, psychoanalytic accounts of gender socialization do not share that heritage. Rather than providing an overarching theory of socialization which is then applied to the area of gender, psychoanalytic theory concerns itself directly with questions of gender identity.

Psychoanalytic theory shares with observational learning theory an emphasis on the importance of the child's identification with the same-sex parent. In fact, this identification is crucial to successful gender socialization. However, while observational models take this as the start of the

socialization process, psychoanalytic theory, in this regard much like cognitive developmental models, posits identification with the same-sex parent as the arrival point. This identification, attained somewhere between the ages of three and five years, is the result of a rather torturous and necessarily sex-differentiated internal drama involving repression of guilt and desire.

Psychoanalytic models focus on male gender development as a blueprint. The resulting emphasis on feminine passivity would seem to betray these models unique adaptation to the rhetoric of western post-Victorian gender scripts. In fact, it is difficult to imagine applying this theory to other cultures. More recently, feminist thinkers such as Nancy Chodorow have proposed reformulations of psychoanalytic theory focusing on the feminine influence on childrearing practices in modern society (1978). Chodorow has raised the question of whether the misogynistic element in western gender scripts is a result of boys' need to distance themselves from a dependency on an omnipresent mother.

Sociological Approaches

Sociology has made two major contributions to the explanation of gender socialization. The first, symbolic interactionism, is often categorized as a socio-psychological theory because of its emphasis on the generation of the individual. The second, structural-functionalism, offers a contrasting view of gender socialization whereby differences in male and female behaviour are seen as a function of optimal societal efficiency.

Symbolic interactionism, rooted in American pragmatic philosophy and John Watson's learning theory of the early twentieth century, offers a contrasting and more sociological theory of socialization (Cooley, 1902; Mead,

1943). For symbolic interactionists, what makes human behaviour unique and distinctive is the ability not simply to respond directly to stimuli, as emphasized in learning theory models, but to assign meaning to stimuli and act on the basis of these meanings (Mackie, 1991). Individuals interact with the external world and endow it with meaning; in turn, they themselves are reciprocally constituted by these same socially determined meanings.

Socialization and the development of self-image and identity is central to the symbolic interactionist perspective (Gomme, 1993). Its founder, G. H. Mead, argued that the self is a "social construct", i.e., one constructed through interaction with others (Mead, 1943). Identity is socially bestowed, sustained, and transformed, and gender, as a socially bestowed role, is one of the earliest aspects of identity to be grasped (Berger, 1963).

In contemporary sociological work, the most well-defined application of Mead's concepts of identity formation can be found among researchers working in what is known as the labeling perspective (Gomme, 1987; Schur, 1971). Largely used in the literature on deviance to account for the development of "deviant identities," this perspective holds that if individuals are labeled and hence treated as deviant, they are likely to learn to see themselves as deviant. As Peter Berger, paraphrasing G. H. Mead, writes: "the genesis of the self is interpreted as being one and the same event as the discovery of society" (1963, p. 99).

As with any theory, certain questions are left unanswered, or rather, unasked. What are the processes and mechanisms involved in the "bestowal" of identity? If exposed to the same "labels," would all individuals see themselves the same way? In short, if identity is "socially bestowed" and maintained, how can the diversity of social experiences be accounted for?

Furthermore, what is the role of the individual in the process? Though much of the research from this perspective claims to emphasize the role of the individual's interpretation and meaning-making, the nature of the individual's participation and the processes involved are strangely absent from the conversation.

Socio-structural theories explicitly take society, rather than the individual, as the unit of analysis (Stebbins, 1987). However among socio-cultural theories, only Talcott Parson's structural functionalism directly addresses the question of gender socialization. Parsons is concerned to explain and describe how social structures and institutions function to maintain and reproduce the overarching social system (Collins, 1988; Grabb, 1990; Parsons, 1955; Stebbins, 1987). For Parsons, societal solidarity depends on the internalization of common norms and values. He holds that it is within the confines of the nuclear family that this task is best accomplished. His reflections on gender socialization emerge, for the most part, as an afterthought to discussions of the function of the family as an institution.

Parsons' theory is dominated by the assumption that differentiation of social interaction into instrumental and expressive roles is optimally efficient for the larger social whole (Parsons, 1955). The institution of the family is no exception; increased sex role differentiation is described as one of society's prerequisites to the successful internalization of society's basic values and norms by the young.

Problems

These models of gender socialization emerge out of diverse disciplinary roots and offer complementary, and at times, contradictory,

explanations. Nonetheless it is possible to discern common aspects which underpin many of these models.

The most obvious and consistent similarity is the overwhelming emphasis given to the importance of early childhood experiences for later gendered behaviour. Though none of these perspectives claim that socialization is limited to the early years alone, they have remarkably little to say about gender socialization after early childhood. Family is seen as the most important influence on adult gender socialization, and differences in men's and women's behaviour are cast as the result of differential "training" or "conditioning" received in childhood (Borgatta, 1992, p. 690). Even symbolic interactionism, which by definition does not preclude ongoing socialization through adulthood, still privileges the role of familial figures (Giddens, 1979, p. 50; Mackie, 1987).

The primacy accorded early childhood influences on gender socialization reflects the distinction generally made in the literature between primary socialization, which occurs in childhood and adolescence, and secondary socialization, which occurs beyond adolescence and into adulthood (Mackie, 1987). Those who invoke this distinction are quick to point out that the nature of socialization changes by virtue of the more intense and emotionally charged relationships that occur with family and peers, particularly in childhood and adolescence. This harkens back to another long-standing distinction in sociology: the distinct roles attributed to various *agents* of socialization. Primary agents of socialization are said to be those whose influence on "new" members, or the young, is enacted through frequent and close contact (Mackie, 1987). This would include both family and peers. Schools and religious institutions have traditionally been categorized

as secondary agents; here, the contact is less intense and not at all encompassing. There is still face-to-face interaction, but this takes place in a broader setting. These primary and secondary agents of socialization are usually contrasted with tertiary or symbolic agents of socialization, such as language and media, which have no direct, personal interaction with those being socialized. Characterized as "ubiquitous socializers," these symbolic sources of socialization are said to encompass cultural values, gender stereotypes and a wide range of intangible influences on development (Mackie, 1987, p. 156).

Within the framework of gender socialization models, discussion of various agents of socialization rests on a number of suppositions. These discussions not only reflect a focus on the salience of early childhood experience; they assume a coherent and stable sense of gender identity formed through the actions of the primary agent of socialization, the family, and unproblematically reinforced by secondary and symbolic or tertiary agents of socialization. In fact, though the family, through choice of schools, for instance, can sometimes mediate access to secondary and symbolic agents of socialization, it is not uncommon to find instances where families and public institutions such as school and religion work at cross-purposes (Connell, 1987).

Generally speaking, these models of gender socialization have the least to say about tertiary or symbolic agents of socialization. However Pipher and Gilligan, among others, have suggested that it is the elusive and intangible cultural values, the tertiary and symbolic agents of socialization, that may be playing the larger role in the problems girls face at adolescence. The

remainder of this chapter examines these more elusive aspects of what gender socialization models would term "symbolic" agents of socialization.

Symbolic Agents of Gender Socialization: Media Imagery of Girls, Women and Growing Up

Since the 1970s there has been growing interest in cultural, particularly media, representations of women. Feminist scholars have led the way in interrogating the nature of the relationship between media imagery of women and the lives of girls and women. An examination of symbolic agents of socialization cannot then be separated from the critiques of these feminist scholars.

The explosion of writing and research that accompanied what Jessie Bernard has termed the "feminist enlightenment" of the 1960s and 1970s brought many of these issues to the fore (Lengermann & Niebrugge-Brantley, 1992, p. 324). Writers from Betty Friedan to Germaine Greer expressed concern with both the representation of women in mass media and the pervasive romantic narratives that confined women to isolated domesticity, and relegated them to roles as sex objects (Zoonen, 1994, p. 17).

Initially, these critiques did not find an easy foothold in the academy. Until this time, the dominant paradigm in communications research naturalized differences between men and women, and hence stereotypical portrayals of women were not seen as problematic. Through the 1970s however, as researchers within the academic community began to work within the framework of "sex role theory," issues concerning women began to find increasing expression in academic research (Andersen, 2000; Weinreich, as cited in Currie, 1999, p. 24). Having made a distinction between biologically based "sex" and socially shaped "gender," researchers began to

critically interrogate cultural "scripts" for men and women. A particular focus of their critiques was the representation of women in the media.

Can Media Representations Restrict Girls' Development?

From the standpoint of sex-role theory, the implications of pervasive media imagery that portrayed women as sexual objects solely preoccupied with the realm of domesticity was highly problematic. If negative and restrictive media representations were taken to reflect society's values, then the mass media, by offering models of femininity that in the words of Tuchman "symbolically denigrated women," were perpetuating stereotypes damaging to women and girls (as cited in Zoonen, 1994, p. 17). Reframed in terms of the gender socialization theories discussed in the last section, the media, as tertiary or symbolic agents of socialization, were seen to be acting as "vehicles of women's socialization into subordinate roles" (Tuchmann, as cited in Strinati, 1995, p. 181). If girls and women "internalized" these negative messages through identification with the characters portrayed, they would then reproduce both the *status quo* and inequalities in the structure of male female-relations (Lipman-Blumen, 1984). Researchers could only conclude that the media was playing a critical role in restricting and endangering the development of girls and women (Currie, 1997, p. 456; Currie, 1999; Press, 1984; Zoonen, 1994).

Critics also observed that media representations of women and girls failed to reflect the social changes of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite women's inroads into the workforce, they continued to be portrayed almost exclusively as homemakers and mothers confined to the domestic sphere. The initial solution for some writers was to advocate for more "truthful" or realistic representations of women that would allow these symbolic agents of

socialization to convey images that would not reinforce older stereotypes (Mackie, 1991; Zoonen, 1994).

McRobbie: Adolescent Femininity as Ideology

While there were many concerns about the negative socialization effects of mass media representations of women, there was little scholarly interest in popular material for those at presumably the most vulnerable developmental stages--childhood and adolescence--prior to Angela McRobbie's groundbreaking study of the British teen magazine *Jackie* (1982). McRobbie set out to study this highly successful magazine, targeted at ten- to fourteen-year-old girls, in order to critique media messages surrounding adolescent femininity. In her 1982 article, she specifically states that her aim is to "mount a rigorous and systemic critique of 'Jackie' as a system of messages, a signifying system and a bearer of certain ideology: an ideology which deals with the construction of teenage femininity" (p. 263).

McRobbie uses semiological analysis of visual and verbal signs in the magazine to tease out four inter-related themes or "connotative codes" of adolescent femininity. She argues that these four codes of romance, domesticity, fashion and beauty, and pop music, circumscribe a feminine realm characterized by the absence of social context and an obsessive focus on the "personal." With little or no reference to public issues, education or jobs, the focus of these teen magazines remains on the private sphere, where the presentation of the body through the consumption of fashion and beauty products is of primary concern. Optimal self-presentation serves to help girls attain the ultimate goal: the achievement of a romantic, rather than sexual, attachment to a boy. This emphasis on romantic partnership with boys is specifically constructed in opposition to boys' presumed focus on sexuality, as

girls' sexuality is "understood and experienced not in terms of a physical need of her own body, but in terms of the romantic attachment" (McRobbie, 1982, p. 276). McRobbie further reminds us that this ultimate achievement, romantic attachment to a boy, still situates the girl in the decontextualized realm of the personal.

McRobbie's examination of the magazine is premised on a sophisticated theoretical approach to the study of culture, one that emerged from the critical cultural studies tradition of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham. Scholars working in the "Birmingham School," as it became known, sought to examine the processes whereby working class sub-culture, more often than not adolescent working class sub-culture, both was dominated by and resisted the values of mainstream culture. However McRobbie argues that much of what was unproblematically taken up by the CCCS as adolescent sub-culture was in fact *male* adolescent sub-culture, and sexist in the extreme. The analyses of the Birmingham School were premised on age and class as salient categories; gender was notably absent as a category of analysis. Furthermore, McRobbie found that her own attempts to examine feminine adolescent sub-culture and thereby privilege gender as a category of analysis, did not entirely fit with the CCCS agenda. She eventually had to found her own group (McRobbie, 1991).

Though her work was almost exclusively focused on the ideological content of adolescent magazines, what McRobbie managed to make clear was that girls' seeming invisibility in youth subculture stemmed in part from the tendency to characterize the style of a sub-culture primarily in masculine terms. Adolescence and "youth" are seen to have male connotations, implicitly suggesting, in the words of another British researcher, that

"femininity and adolescence are subversive of each other" (Hudson, 1984, p. 30; McRobbie, 1991; Reitsma-Street, 1991). Adolescent girls face unique challenges in offering resistance to the dominant culture, much as McRobbie herself did in the pursuit of her own research agenda (Zoonen, 1994).

The Active Reader

In looking at *Jackie* as a "system of messages" that bear what she terms the "ideology of adolescent femininity" (1982, p. 262), McRobbie necessarily produced what has been criticized as a rather one-sided view of the cultural values surrounding adolescence and femininity. She herself later characterized her 1982 view of the magazine "as presenting a coercive ideology without examining whether or not it appeared in this way to its readers" (1991, p. 141). As the 1980s progressed, scholarly attention, increasingly under the influence of reception theory and active audience theory, began to focus on the context in which media is engaged with by the reader (Duke & Kreshel, 1998; Press, 1991; Zoonen, 1994). However, little of this penetrated research into girlhood and adolescence until 1987 when Elizabeth Frazer, working once again within the umbrella of the CCCS group in Birmingham, went back to re-examine girls' reading of *Jackie* (1987). Frazer wanted to find out if girls did indeed take up the "ideological" content of these magazines in the seamless and unproblematic fashion implied by McRobbie's original study. Given her vantage point, it is not surprising that she found, in contradiction to McRobbie, a "multiplicity of interpretations to *Jackie*" (as cited in Zoonen, 1994, p. 27).

This is not to imply that prior to Frazer's work the framework for research remained static. Many feminist researchers in the area of cultural and communication studies had already turned to feminist re-interpretations

of psychoanalytic theory to account for how women and girls engage with cultural texts. By focusing on a presumed struggle to resolve inner psychodynamic conflict, this approach allowed scholars to emphasize girls' active readership rather than their passive internalization of media representations. Two authors whose research in the early 1980s called upon this framework, but whose work did not deal directly with preadolescent and adolescent girls, deserve brief mention.

Valerie Walkerdine, in her 1984 paper, set out to examine girls' comics. Specifically referring to McRobbie's work, she asks how pre-teen comic narratives might be implicated in preparing schoolgirls for the "romantic program of getting and keeping a man that featured so prominently in 'Jackie'" (p. 165). Noting the resemblance that these comics bear to fairy tales, she points to a repeated narrative structure wherein victimized girls who rise above their circumstances through selflessness and sensitivity to others are ultimately rewarded with rescue by a male hero. Instead of assuming that girls unproblematically internalize these scripts, Walkerdine turns to a psychoanalytic framework to account for how these texts produce "desire" in readers through the readers' active struggle to resolve inner conflict.

Janice Radway's landmark study of adult women romance readers in Midwest USA struggles with similar themes (1984/1991). However, what distinguishes Radway's study from Walkerdine's work is that she not only embarks on a textual analysis of romance books, but also interviews readers of these books. The specific content of her work, because it deals exclusively with adult married women as readers, takes us somewhat beyond the scope of this study. However, Radway's work remains relevant in the following two ways.

First, as mentioned above, this study is related to research on girls and magazines by virtue of its substantive similarities; modern romance narratives have clear precursors in material for girls and teens ranging from fairy tales and comics to teen magazines. Second, in attempting to make sense of how women themselves interpret those representations which had long troubled feminist scholars, this study goes beyond textual analysis to include input from the readers themselves. Radway uses readers' responses both to contextualize the process of reading the romance and to interpret the romances themselves.

The Active Subject; How do Social Actors Make Use of Cultural Representations?

While Radway and others working within the framework of reader reception theory began to focus their inquiries on how "readers" engage with cultural texts (Press, 1991; Zoonen, 1994), researchers in the social sciences were turning their attention to the question of how social actors take up and interpret the social order.

Gender, as a salient feature of both social structure and individual actors, offers a broad range of possibilities for such a line of inquiry. Much of this research has emerged out of the ethnomethodological tradition which has generated a rich literature avoiding the potential pitfalls of both biological determinism and its sociological counterpart, structural determinism. The former attributes causality for much of gendered behaviours to biology while the latter tends to see institutions like the family or the school as "causing" or "producing" child and adolescent behaviour. This body of literature documents how the presentation of self as a suitably gendered member of society is largely determined by how actors interpret, or *take up*, the

conventions of gendered behaviour specific to any given culture (Garfinkel, 1967; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Ortner & Whitehead, 1981; West & Zimmerman, 1987). These studies exemplify a move away from a focus on gender socialization as an exclusively top-down process wherein individuals are passively shaped to conform to a given social structure, to an investigation of how children create and recreate the social institution of gender through their use of larger socio-cultural discourses (Bailey, 1993; Davies, 1989; Giddens, 1979; Harre, 1986; Henriques et al., 1984; Thorne, 1993).

Bronwyn Davies has been one of the most innovative of these researchers. Her book *Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales*, which explores how four- and five-year-old pre-schoolers learn to successfully present themselves as appropriately gendered members of society, raises a number of issues relevant to this study (1989). First, this study addresses, much as Radway's does, how readers interpret textual messages. In this case, Davies asks how children "read" feminist retellings of traditional fairy tales. Davies, however, focuses primarily on the active process whereby actors struggle to make these texts meaningful rather than on readers' substantive interpretations of text.

The starting point of Davies' investigations for the book was her surprising experience of reading feminist retellings and reinventions of children's stories and fairy tales with four- and five-year old pre-schoolers (1989). These tales had been created to offer children alternatives to the formulaic constraints of traditional fairy tales. These feminist retellings frequently position girls as active and powerful rather than being confined to victim roles and waiting to be rescued by male protagonists. The scope of acceptable roles for boys is also broadened to include their participation in

non-traditional activities such as dance classes and even their occasional rescue by female heroines.

Davies, who assumed the "liberatory" messages of these tales would be readily accessible to the children, read them with enthusiasm to a number of pre-schoolers of her acquaintance. However she was surprised to find that the pre-schoolers for whom these tales had been created were not a particularly receptive audience. In the course of conversation, these children revealed that the stories did not have the same self-evident meanings for them that they did for Davies. In fact, the children often didn't "get" the stories altogether; instead, they found them confusing and generally unsatisfying (1989).

Davies was confronted with what could be described as the apparent inverse of what McRobbie had posited. McRobbie initially had seen an unproblematic relationship between the cultural messages embedded in teen magazines such as *Jackie* and the internalization of these messages by readers. Davies was faced with a textual message that was being taken up by pre-schoolers in a very different fashion from how she and other adults "read" these stories. The "readers," in these case the pre-schoolers, were patently not internalizing the overt textual messages. A number of implications must necessarily follow from this observation. First, it became obvious that questions of meaning could not be addressed by limiting analysis to the cultural "text" or message: no amount of textual analysis, particularly by an adult, could have generated the meanings the children ascribed to the text. Second, the pre-schoolers could in no way be construed as naive in regards to cultural expectations about gendered behaviour. Their critiques of, and indeed dissatisfactions with, the non-traditional narratives clearly arose out

of an acquaintance with discourses surrounding culturally appropriate gendered behaviour. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as the children struggled to make sense of contradictory messages, the process through which individual actors make sense of textual and cultural messages became at least momentarily transparent and accessible to investigation.

What makes this a particularly rich opportunity for inquiry is that children, while cogniscent of cultural messages about gendered behaviour, are not as adept as adults at suppressing in their talk their struggles to integrate contradictory messages. To make this point, Davies quotes from an interview with one little boy, Robbie, about the story *Oliver Button is a Sissy*. In this story, a little boy called Oliver likes to do things that girls usually like to do; for instance, he wants to take tap dancing lessons. Robbie clearly thinks that Oliver wanting to take dancing lessons is "wrong" and condones the other boys in the story when they tease Oliver about this. At the same time, Robbie also thinks that it is all right for Oliver to pursue dancing lessons, because Oliver really wants to do it, and it is something at which he excels. Davies points out that an adult, recognizing the inconsistency of this reasoning, might suppress such contradictory viewpoints, thus denying the researcher the opportunity to interrogate what often appears to be the seamless internalization of cultural mores and standards.

In her second stage of data collection, Davies took the insights gleaned from listening to the children talk about gender out into the social world of pre-school playgrounds. Here she follows children engaging in fantasy play in order to observe the "narrative structures" they need to call upon to "be a member of a children's group" (p. 35). In doing so, Davies accomplishes two things. First, it serves to collapse the oft-made distinction between purely

textual narrative and the social world, by focusing on the ever-present interplay of the symbolic and rhetorical in social interaction. Second, by neither denying the import of social structure, nor privileging the agency of individual social actors, Davies allows us to observe the struggle of individuals as they orient themselves to contradictory cultural messages.

Adolescent "Mags" Revisited

Even as the concept of the "active reader" came to the forefront of discussion within communications studies, analysis of content did not remain static. In light of Frazer's re-examination of teen readers of *Jackie*, theoretical developments in reception and audience theory, and continuing critiques from Walkerdine and others for neglecting the possibility of active readership on the part of teen girls, McRobbie herself went back to re-evaluate British teen magazines for girls. In a 1991 article entitled *Jackie and Just Seventeen*, she examined both *Jackie*, now a magazine in decline, and the highly successful magazine *Just Seventeen* aimed at a slightly older market. Acknowledging how her original work "seemed to assume that the contents of the magazine were somehow reproduced inside the heads of the girls" (1991, p. 141), she now argues the need for an understanding of a "more fluid, more active and ultimately more engaged process of reading" (p.142).

It is important to note, however, that this call to understand a more "engaged" process of reading hinges primarily on speculation about the *possibilities* for negotiated meanings and opportunities for resistance that the *text* offers the reader. McRobbie, along with some of her critics, focuses attention on the multi-layered nature of the text rather than on how readers themselves take up that text. Nor does she seek out, as Radway does, readers' voices to make sense of the process of interpretation. Her findings

nonetheless deserve careful consideration, both for her astute assessment of the cultural messages relevant to this study that the magazines carry, and for problems posed by approaches premised on the actor as a passive consumer of cultural influences.

McRobbie sees a substantial change in the "ideological content" of the magazines she is examining a decade after her initial study of *Jackie*: romance is no longer the predominant theme or code of girls' magazines of the 1980s. Instead fashion and pop music have "eclipsed romance" (1991, p. 136). This increased emphasis on fashion and beauty is predicated on an ever more "sophisticated and discerning young consumer" (p. 146) whose goal is no longer the attainment of romantic attachment with a suitable male, but the possibility of self-satisfaction found in the judicious creation of a desirable feminine identity. The precise nature of this desirable identity remains unclear. However, as McRobbie begins to analyze the problem page or advice column in these magazines, she finds intimations of a changing focus in feminine adolescent identity.

A perennial feature of women's and girls' magazines since the turn of the century, problem pages initially offered advice on social etiquette, strongly laced with moralistic overtones (Currie, 1999, p. 155). The changes of the past twenty years have resulted in pages generally offering supportive and accepting advice on a variety of topics. Questions about body shape, relations with parents, sexual abuse, contraception, and homosexuality pepper these pages. McRobbie, noting both the prominence of these pages in the new magazines of the 1980s and their increased frankness in discussions of sex, argues that "problem pages trade in sexual knowledge since it is this which is so uneasily avoided in our culture" (1991, p. 157). It is less discomforting to

send an anonymous question into a magazine than to directly ask it of parents and educators, no matter how liberal and supportive they may be (McRobbie, 1991). McRobbie argues that this preoccupation with sexual knowledge and the construction of female sexuality serves as a focus for contemporary feminine identity (1991, p. 165). It is this newly emphasized feminine sexuality, not romantic attachment, which has become the core of a new feminine identity: "It is in the problem page, rather than in the realm of romance, that identity is given shape" (McRobbie, 1991, p. 165).

In much the same way that McRobbie's original research on adolescent teen magazines for girls spawned research attempting to dispute her findings, her second look at teen magazines over a decade later triggered critiques as well. Many authors have continued to take issue with McRobbie for, in Carrington and Bennett's words, "construct[ing women] as hapless products of patriarchal culture" (1996, p. 149).

Carrington and Bennett, for instance, in their analysis of Australian teen magazines of the 1980s and 1990s, take issue yet again with McRobbie's concept of a unified or homogeneous ideology. They too note the prominence of these same discourses of sex and pleasure in the problem pages, but from their vantage point, these pages and the discourses of sex are inherently liberating rather than restrictive in nature (1996). They argue that discussions of masturbation and sexual pleasure on the problem pages offer girls novel opportunities to engage in *public* discourse surrounding sexuality. In their view, the pages provide a "means for a positive transformation of sex into discourse for teenage girls" (p. 159). They also take note of the unprecedented focus on consumerism and the body. Once again, for the purposes of their analysis, this offers opportunities to de-stabilize, rather than reinforce, the

boundaries of feminine identity. The endless and repetitive presentation of cultural products in the form of advertisements, self-help articles, tips, advice columns and make-over narratives, in their view only serves to "expose femininity as an artifact—the production of a series of fashion devices and make-up techniques" (p. 163).

Where are the Girls?

It is interesting to note that most of McRobbie's critics, much like Carrington and Bennett themselves, have left their concerns partially in the realm of speculation by choosing not to engage with readers' interaction with texts. Recently, however, two studies have appeared which do solicit teenage readers' interpretations.

Dawn Currie's 1997 article presents part of her research on adolescent magazines and their readers which is more fully dealt with in her 1999 book *Girl Talk*. Both article and book are concerned with the construction of subjectivity and concerns about what Currie, after Valverde (1991), takes to be the uneasy interface between techniques of feminist scholarship rooted in literary disciplines, and thus concerned primarily with symbolization and representation, and the explication of agent behaviour in the "social" world (Currie, 1997). In the 1997 article, she focuses on twenty-five "typical" glossy advertisements for beauty and fashion products, taken from *Seventeen* magazine, and how they are "read" by forty-eight girls between the ages of thirteen to seventeen years of age (p. 465). In her study she does find evidence of support for critics of McRobbie who argue that teens as situated and contextualized readers can offer multiple interpretations of textual femininity. Girls negotiate the meanings of the ads by drawing on their own lived experience, often debating whether or not an advertising depiction

looks realistic or not. However Currie also finds that the readers gravitate toward "stereotypical meanings of adult femininity," particularly those concerned with consumption and the female body. Although the readers are all too willing to dismiss the ads as "only texts" (p. 471), they nonetheless compare themselves to the visual texts in such a way as to put themselves at a disadvantage. "[G]irls in this study engaged in a manner of reading that brought their construction of self rather than the magazine discourse into question" (1997, p. 471). For instance, they criticize the exclusive use of beautiful female bodies in the ads, but still feel inadequate if they don't measure up to these standards of self-presentation. In the girls' view, in order to feel good they have to look good, and in order to look good, they have to try and emulate the women in the advertisements.

The second study, undertaken by Duke and Kreshel, consists of in-depth conversations with ten girls aged twelve and thirteen about popular American teen magazines (1998). Their findings both concur with and shed light on Currie's findings. Again, much in the same vein as Carrington and Bennet suggest, the girls pick and choose among the various messages in the texts. However, Duke and Kreshel find consistent differences in the way that girls react to various *categories* of text. For instance, advice on fashion, make-up, and tips are often disregarded by interviewees. Instead, girls give priority to styles and techniques of self-presentation prevalent among and endorsed by their peers. By contrast, images of beauty ideals, such as perfect skin, slender bodies, etc. are taken as a benchmark to be achieved. "...[T]he physical ideal was identified as a goal that, with rigorous effort, girls might one day attain" (1998, p. 57).

Duke and Kreshel argue that both the selective and critical readings of tips and techniques of beauty and the blanket acceptance of the ideals of physical attractiveness are part of a larger issue for girls at this age: how they use "outside authorities in formulating personal standards" (p. 57). One of their most interesting observations is the extent to which girls rely on the magazines' use of boys' voices in their formulations of personal standards. Interestingly, all the magazines offer girls "feedback" from a teenage male point of view, through columns by boys, or feature articles about what boys really want from girls, etc. Girls rarely question the reports of boys' opinions, though they admitted this failure to question may not be wise.

DISCUSSION

This chapter began by asking what factors, outside of biological and developmental factors, could help account for girls' difficulties at adolescence. It first explored models of gender socialization which attempt to account for the processes whereby individuals orient themselves to societal expectations of femininity and masculinity. These models, despite their varied origins, share a number of characteristics which limit their immediate applicability to the question at hand, the two foremost being their almost exclusive focus on the salience of early childhood experiences to gender socialization and the implicit assumption that there is a stable gender identity uniformly reinforced by all "agents" of socialization. Particularly problematic for the purposes of this study is the fact that although these models do allow for symbolic socialization through language and media etc., there is often little room to interrogate the interplay between changing cultural representations as "agents" of socialization and the individuals being "socialized."

Feminist critiques of representations of women have offered the opportunity to explore this question. McRobbie's work, as well as the work of those who challenged her, has revealed consistent substantive themes surrounding girls' circumscription within the realm of the personal, the dramatic increase in the commodification of the young female body, and the new developments surrounding female sexuality as a focal theme for female identity.

Perhaps more important have been the dramatic changes in theoretical and methodological approaches precipitated by these researchers--most notably a shift away from the somewhat simplistic notion that individuals merely absorb and enact cultural messages to an attempt to address the question of what girls take up from the cultural environment and how they do so. Semiotic analysis still remains strongly focused on textual analysis, but there is growing recognition that texts are multi-layered and subject to a multiplicity of interpretations by diverse readers. Davies and others have made it clear that these interpretations cannot be accessed without engaging with the "readers" themselves. Davies, in particular, has pushed this even further by dissolving the sometimes artificial distinction between "textual" messages and the more elusive and formless "cultural" messages, or discourses, that inform social interaction. She has thus opened to inquiry the process whereby individuals interpret these various "texts" or messages.

Unfortunately, much of the traditional sociological literature on gender socialization has neglected to interrogate this process, instead choosing to portray gender socialization as a one-way process in which various agents convey societal gender norms to the future "members" of society. These members are construed as being passively trained or initiated into the

customs and conventions of the society. Lipman-Blumen's definition of socialization succinctly captures the flavour of this approach: "[S]ocialization is that set of mechanisms and processes through which society trains its members to take their place as full fledged social beings" (1984, p. 53).

However it has become obvious that we can no longer take for granted such a simple correspondence. It is necessary to interrogate both the nature of social structures and how individuals orient themselves to these social structures in order to comprehend how subjects both constitute and are constituted by historical forces. As Giddens argues in *Central Problems in Social Theory*, this approach is all the more relevant to any questions concerning socialization:

. . . [W]e have to avoid any account of socialization which presumes either that the subject is determined by the social object ... or by the contrast ... which takes subjectivity for granted, as an inherent characteristic of human beings not in need of explication. (1979, p. 120)

This thesis attempts to follow this line of inquiry by asking how girls on the brink of adolescence make sense of growing up. How do girls create and recreate the social institutions of gender at this juncture in their lives? How do they account for the bodily changes they experience? Which socio-cultural discourses do they draw upon in these accounts?

Hopefully, the following chapters will take a small step towards illuminating some of the dynamics at work as preadolescent girls approach their teen years.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Joel Smith argues that methodology should be determined by the "nature of the question" and the "sort of answer that will satisfy us" (1991, p. 2). The questions driving this study arise out of the apparent inadequacy of heretofore developed perspectives on gender socialization to account for difficulties girls experience in transition to adolescence. The "sort of answer" that is sought is one that will foreground the social construction of puberty and growing up, as well as provide insight into how preadolescent girls make use of collective representations of the female body.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded within the theoretical framework of interpretive sociology, in particular, within the framework Holstein and Gubrium term "interpretive practice" (1994). With roots that trace back to Schutz and Garfinkel, this tradition argues that social scientists need to examine the ways in which everyday social life, often taken for granted by those who participate in it, is produced and experienced (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263). While Garfinkel's ethnomethodology focuses on how "members accomplish, manage, and reproduce a sense of social structure through talk," interpretive practice places these observations in a broader context by highlighting the fact that the social reality constructed by members through talk and interaction is not constructed from "scratch," as it were, but constructed within the framework of socio-historical constraints

(Garfinkel, 1967; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 263). Meaning is "socially rather than privately constructed" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 267).

Working within this theoretical framework of interpretive practice, the focus of this study is less on the individual preadolescent girl's unique experience than on preadolescent girls' collective understanding of cultural messages and how they make them meaningful in their talk and interaction. This thesis attempts to ask how girls on the brink of adolescence collectively make sense of growing up. How do girls create and recreate the social institutions of gender at this juncture in their lives? How do they account for the bodily changes they experience? Which socio-cultural discourses do they draw upon in these accounts? Are the socio-cultural themes they draw upon similar to the ones that parents and educators engage with in the widely available popular literature?

Theoretical Assumptions

The theoretical assumptions that inform this research can be explicitly stated as follows:

- 1) Because girls are competent members of our culture, and as such privy to the cultural resources surrounding puberty and the developing female body, these socio-historical cultural themes are *displayed* in their talk (Holstein & Gubrium 1994).
- 2) The girls are *active*, not passive interpreters of such cultural messages in that they actively use, internalize, take up or resist these resources in the process of endowing them with meaning.

- 3) The process of making sense of cultural resources is *collaborative*, in that reality is an "interactional and discursive accomplishment" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 265).
- 4) This genre of study opens the door for the *integration* of cultural and structural frameworks into analysis of human action and talk, thus providing a possible "middle ground" between what is typically taken as the two poles of sociological research--micro and macro analysis (Giddens, 1979; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Silverman, 1985).

Applied Assumptions

These guidelines have informed the research in two overarching ways. First, in order to analyze and locate girls' talk within a socio-historical framework, a literature review that goes beyond the confines of the academic literature is necessary. Therefore, this thesis begins by examining relevant academic research in a number of fields, but goes on to review popular historical and contemporary discourses about girls and growing up.

Second, as this research starts from the theoretical premise that the process of making sense of cultural resources is collaborative, the chosen method also must place in the foreground, girls' *collective* understanding of cultural discourses and how they make them meaningful in their talk and interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). A method of inquiry is therefore needed that offers the opportunity to hear preadolescents talking to each other about these issues.

METHODOLOGY

Focus group interviewing offers the opportunity to foster informal group interaction and access "collective notions shared and negotiated by the group" (Berg, 1995, p. 78; Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Morgan, 1988). Although the group interaction generated in focus groups may be seen as less "naturalistic" than interaction observed through participant observation, focus group interviewing does have the capacity to elicit useful material with "relatively little direct input from the researcher" (Morgan, 1988, p. 21). This methodology also produces more interaction in shorter periods of time and can bring forth material "that would not come out in either the participants' own casual conversations or in response to the researcher's preconceived questions" (Morgan, 1988, p. 21).

Focus Group Interviews with Children

When conducting research with children, focus group interviewing also offers the adult researcher a consistent and self-explanatory role in the eyes of participants. The nature of the adult researcher's role in other methodologies, such as participant observation, can often be problematic due to the social distance created by the adult's inevitable position of authority (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). At the same time, however, the adult researcher cannot go unnoticed; there must be some sort of explanation offered for the adult's presence (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). However, the nature of this explanation may not always fit with the researcher's need to clarify and probe participants' comments. Focus group interviewing presents the researcher in a consistent role to child participants--that of researcher and facilitator rather than participant, observer and periodic interviewer.

Canadian researchers Doan and Morse, in their discussion of the methodological problems they faced when researching early adolescents' adjustment to menarche, suggest that group interviews may well be the optimal methodology when researching body-related issues with girls in this age group (1985b). In their review of the substantive literature on similar studies, they found that semi-structured group interviews were most likely to attract and encourage participation from girls in a school setting (1985b). Indeed, same-sex focus groups with preadolescents have been used by researchers in Britain to explore attitudes to menstruation. Centered around issues of "growing up," these discussion groups were enthusiastically participated in by 11- and 12-year-olds (Lovering, 1995).

Setting

Once the decision was made to use focus group interviewing, there were a number reasons to suggest that conducting the present research within a school setting would enhance the quality of data gathered. Both Lovering's study and Doan and Morse's substantive studies were conducted in school settings (Doan & Morse, 1985b; Lovering, 1995). Schools are also the primary site for interplay of the peer relations that play so prominent a role in middle childhood (Mackie, 1991). Since, as Johnson and Roberts put it, "schools frequently are the arena in which many aspects of a girl's self, relationships, community, and societal influences, come together" a school setting would be optimal for the study of how girls collaboratively make sense of cultural themes of growing up (Johnson & Roberts, 1999, p. 13).

Furthermore, to foster the informal group interaction necessary to satisfy the theoretical assumptions cited above, it was essential to locate groups of participants who knew each other prior to the study and who

were comfortable interacting with each other on a daily basis. Finally, from a practical standpoint, in order to encourage the girls to feel as relaxed as possible about their participation, it was important to conduct the research on the girls' own "turf" as it were, in surroundings that would be as familiar as possible to them. All these considerations led to the conclusion that a school setting would be the optimal location for this study.

Unfortunately, gaining access to schools for the purposes of social science research has become increasingly difficult. These chances are further reduced when the topic of research is considered "sensitive," as is certainly the case with body-related issues. Attempting to access a population similar to the one proposed for this study, Doan and Morse encountered difficulties in enlisting the participation of the girls, obtaining parental consent, and addressing the concerns of school boards and ethics committees (1985b).

Given these concerns, I decided that any attempt to proceed without prior consultation with those at the school-level would be unwise. The then Advisor on Gender Issues with a local school board (a position that has since been eliminated) was approached as to the feasibility of conducting this research in the schools. She suggested conducting preliminary special respondent interviews with elementary school principals who might be interested in seeing the study take place, in order to better assess the situation.

Special Respondent Interviews

Three elementary school principals suggested by the Advisor agreed to meet with me. All were confident that such a study could be mounted and expressed interest in seeing this project undertaken at their schools. They offered invaluable practical advice regarding location, scheduling, and

size of possible group interviews, and provided feedback on a tentative working protocol. They also responded to my inquiries about appropriate debriefing and counseling options that each principal had at their disposal in the unlikely event that a participant might find these sessions upsetting. Although there was no mention of this risk in the literature, particularly given the proposed methodology of group rather than individual interviews, prior consultation with University Ethics Committee members had revealed concerns of this nature. Finally, the principals volunteered to write letters endorsing the study and expressing their willingness to have this study undertaken at their respective schools. These letters were crucial to the three stages of ethics approval later granted by the Department of Sociology, the Faculty of Education and local board of education.

Participant Recruitment

Among the methodological assumptions listed earlier is the premise that because girls are competent members of our culture, and as such privy to the cultural resources surrounding puberty and the developing female body, these cultural themes would be displayed in their talk (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). From this perspective, wherein the interview is but another meaning-making, interactional event, the aim of respondent selection is not so much to ensure an entirely representative segment of the population, as it is to seek participants and researchers who are "competent organizers of the meanings they convey" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 19).

In order to allow for a greater variety of possible meanings, the four schools recommended by the then Advisor on Gender Issues offered the opportunity for research with diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Two of the schools, though not "inner-city" schools in the usual

sense, were situated on the periphery of downtown and drew students from disparate neighbourhoods that included families of mixed middle and lower economic status living in housing such as co-operatives and affluent families living in single-family dwellings. Because both these schools had small populations of under 150 students, they also depended on, and purposely sought students from outside of their school districts to keep their numbers up. These out-of-boundary students came from a variety of neighbourhoods, often quite a distance away from the school, and it was therefore virtually impossible to characterize the school population as homogeneous from the point of view of socio-economic status.

The two other schools were not only substantially larger, with populations of approximately 550 students, but somewhat more homogeneous. One school was located in a "middle class" suburban community. The other, where in fact two sets of group interviews with different participants were conducted (one in the Spring term and one in the Fall school term), was located in a lower middle-class suburban neighbourhood with a large diverse ethnic population, the majority of which were East Indian in origin.

Participants were sought from among Grade Five and Grade Six girls who typically ranged in age from ten to twelve years of age. As over 50% of Grade Seven girls but only 21% of Grade Six girls have begun menstruating, girls in Grade Five and Six, in anticipation of menarche, are the most likely to have had exposure to popular discourses surrounding puberty (Morse et al., 1993).

The decision as to which classes were selected was determined on the basis of class configuration. Girls in Grade Five, Grade Six, and split Grades

Five/Six classes were given priority, whereas Grade Five girls in a Grades Four/Five split classroom were approached only if the number of participants was below the minimum of four participants. As well, girls in a Grades Four/Five/Six split classroom were approached only when the number of participants was low, as was the case in one school where students in Grade Five and Six were only to be found in the single Grades Four/Five/Six split classroom of under thirty students. Because one of the goals of this methodology was to foster talk among friends and peers in as naturalistic a social setting as possible, no girl was asked to participate if she was the sole potential participant from her class.

The school principals were invaluable in helping me assess how best to make parents and potential participants aware of the project. In all cases, the principals chose to inform classroom teachers themselves about the study, as well as introducing it to potential participants by making an announcement in the classroom. I also made it clear to the principal that I was available to answer any questions from teachers, parents or students about the proposed research.

Informed Consent

Informed consent presupposes agreement on the part of those with the legal authority, in this case the parents or guardians, to allow girls to participate in the study. Although the girls themselves did not have this legal authority, it seemed important that they too be formally consulted. Therefore two different information sheets and consent forms were prepared, one for participants and one for parents, that explained the research goals and format (see Appendix A).

Potential participants were informed that the group interviews would be audio-taped and then transcribed. They were also informed that, although some of the material would be used as direct quotes, no names would be used and every effort would be made to ensure that the material quoted would not allow for identification of individual participants nor the schools where the sessions were conducted.

Format

Group interviews were conducted with five groups of Grades Five and Six girls at four different elementary schools in Calgary. Participants were acquainted with each other prior to the group interviews. Most were drawn from the same class. I spent anywhere from four-and-a-half to six hours with each group of 5 to 8 girls over lunch hour at their school.

Rather than attempting to conduct a single lengthy, in-depth session, I decided to conduct three shorter group interviews. This not only better conformed to the girls' attention span, but also fostered a greater sense of trust between myself and the participants, defusing misconceptions that can so easily arise with this age group as to what a researcher might really want to know (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988). On the suggestion of the principals, it was decided to schedule the sessions as closely together as possible. In all cases the sessions took place within a time span of ten days or less.

During the course of the sessions, we ate pizza and doughnuts, looked at magazines the girls brought in or found in art supply cupboards at school, and, using these materials, created a joint collage about "Growing Up." Most importantly, we talked about growing up, about participants' expectations of junior high, and about "teenagers." Throughout the sessions, which took place in as private an area as possible within the school, a relaxed and casual

atmosphere was fostered so that the girls felt comfortable sharing with me and engaging in discussion and debate with each other.

The collage, though interesting in itself, was introduced as a technique to encourage discussion and participation from as many girls as possible, including those who might have been initially reticent about voicing their opinions. At three of the schools, where time permitted, a fourth session was added in order to view the finished collages that they and other groups had assembled in the second and third sessions. No collage was displayed to another group without permission from the group that created it. Since the sessions at two of the schools took place just before the end of the school year, there was not time to prepare the collages or plan for such a session.

Interview Schedule

Since this study was exploratory in nature, sessions were conducted as semi-structured group interviews aimed at facilitating participants' discussion around issues of growing up rather than discovering if the girls themselves were aware of any particular information (Gorden, 1980). By asking general open-ended questions, I fostered conversation *among* the girls about their common thoughts and interpretations.

The first session started with general requests to tell me about growing up. The use of open-ended questions offered participants the opportunity to frame their interpretations of growing up in a number of ways. The questions posed below allowed the girls themselves to clarify how they saw this transition:

- What's different about being in Grades Five and Six?
- What is different now than before?

- What are you interested in that you weren't interested in before, or is it the same?
- How would you describe yourselves?
- If you had a pen pal overseas and wanted to let them know about what it's like to be you right now, how you're feeling, what you're thinking about, what would tell them? What about if you were going to put together a collage about what it's like to be you, what would it look like?

It was not until the group was sufficiently at ease with the research that more specific questions, such as "What are some of the signs of growing up?" were introduced. The order of the questions was determined by the flow of participants' discussion. In fact many of the questions did not have to formally "posed" to participants as the topics emerged unprompted in the course of interaction. Frequently, I simply communicated interest, and encouraged the groups to express their opinions and ideas while probing for clarification of ideas and terminology that they themselves had already introduced.

In Session Two, girls were invited to bring in material with which to assemble a joint collage about "growing up." Material consisted of magazine pictures, articles, advertisements and any other items they thought relevant. Frequently participants brought in material, if they brought anything in at all, without having looked at it in any detail or singled out certain images as relevant. At two of the schools participants forgot to prepare material altogether and decided to draw some of the material for their collage themselves. They also went rifling through art supply cupboards at the school for magazines they could use. These ranged from *Equinox* and *National*

Geographic magazines to the children's literary magazine *Highlights for Children*, as well as *Chatelaine* and *People* magazines.

Some of the most spontaneous and interesting conversation was elicited during the second session where participants perused the magazines on hand together, offering their impressions of the material. At times they were sometimes reticent to share these reactions with me and other group members. I pointed out that bringing material to the group's attention and sharing their impressions did not mean it would necessarily be included in the final collage--that was up to the group to decide. This made it easier for girls to share material that seemed to make them uneasy or that they considered "bad." Their comments about content not directly related to body issues, or growing up, often provided a number of clues about what the girls viewed as expected behaviour at this age as they moved closer to teenage status. For this reason, content for the collage was not restricted to advertisements and photographs of women and girls alone.

Questions for the second session were framed around the specific material brought in, and included questions like the following:

- What's your opinion of (this style of clothing/ make-up/ way of modeling clothes/ style of photography/ way of advertising a product/ etc.)?
- Have you ever wondered why people make these decisions to ... (wear make-up/ shave their legs/ shave under their arms/ wear this style of clothes/ diet/ etc.)?
- Is it important to know how to (wear make-up/ remove leg hair/ shave under your arms? etc.)?

- What's different about you now? What's different about (your relationship with your family/ siblings/ parents/
- Why (if appropriate) do you think that has changed?

Once again, many of the questions were not formally posed to the group as much as they were framed as requests for clarification about issues and terminology the girls themselves brought up as they shared their reactions to the material at hand.

Session Three was devoted to clarifying and confirming some of the statements brought up in earlier sessions. Having established a level of trust and rapport in the first two sessions, I used the last session as an opportunity to pose more sensitive questions, such as those surrounding the importance and relevance of medical discourse to normal development.

Conversation was encouraged through use of some of the following questions:

- How does growing up feel? Do you feel like you are changing all at once, bit by bit, or something else?
- How do you think a person goes about deciding whether she is going to wear a bra?
- What kind of things does a girl need to know about before getting her first period?

In order to conclude the sessions with a sense of closure, the opportunity was offered to wrap up any "loose ends" by asking questions such as the following:

- Are there any issues or topics that have come up that you want to continue to explore?

- I take a lot of notes on topics that come up that are interesting for me. Are there any conversations that are unfinished for you? What's been particularly interesting for you?

Where feasible, the girls were also asked whether they were willing to share their collage with the groups at the other schools and, in turn, see another group's efforts.

Session Four, where it was possible, was devoted to viewing the final laminated version of each group's collage as well as the collages created by the other groups. This session consisted primarily of participants' impressions and interpretations of these collages as well as whatever discussion and debate that evolved.

Conversation in any given session ranged over a number of topics including those ostensibly slated for a different session. As this study allowed for issues to emerge in discussion across more than one session with each group, the opportunity therefore arose to hear a group discussing issues from a number of different perspectives. For instance, talk about clothing choices arose in discussion of participants' own preferred fashion styles, in discussion of teens' fashion styles and in discussion of material participants were working with when planning their collages.

As one the goals of this research was to foster interaction and discussion among participants, every effort was made to intervene as little as possible in participants' discussions. I positioned myself as wanting to know more about their lives, experiences and opinions about growing up. I generally restricted my direct questions to those listed in the interview schedule and I focussed my research efforts on probing for clarification of their responses in light of their own previous talk.

Analysis

Because videotaping is usually considered too intrusive, sessions were audio-taped using a portable tape recorder and a multi-directional microphone (Morgan, 1988). Furthermore, given the fact that at the last minute the locations of the sessions within the school often changed, audio-taping was far more convenient and didn't pose a logistical challenge. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcription process was challenging because the girls tended to talk all at once, making it difficult to distinguish who was speaking or what they were saying. Additionally, acoustic properties of the research locations were often poor and made it hard to distinguish between individual speakers on the tape. Although it was possible to recognize when speakers changed, it was often impossible to ascertain which participant was speaking.

A modified form of notation for discourse analysis developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) was used in transcription. This notation allowed much of the nuance of talk, such as emphases on words (underlining) and changes in volume (capitals), to be captured in transcription. A pause before the next word is signified by three periods; the use of the symbol (.) indicates a significantly long pause on the part of a speaker, depending on the number of periods contained within the bracket. Square brackets indicate that the dialogue has been edited and some material left out in order to focus on one line of thought. When a line of text begins or ends with a dash, this indicates that the speaker is either interrupting the previous speaker, or being interrupted by the next speaker. When the speaker cannot be identified, a question mark is employed to signify that the speaker was distinct, but unknown. In all other cases, a

pseudonym was used. When a number of participants were enthusiastically speaking at once, and it was not possible to hear what was being said, the transcriber recorded "XXX" for both speaker and content. Individual giggling was notated by "ggg," while loud generalized laughter or giggling by a number of participants was notated as "XXX" for speakers and "GGG" for content.

The five groups of participants are identified by the letters A through E. The session from which the talk is excerpted is identified by the a numeral preceded by a number sign. For instance, A#1/23 identifies that excerpt as being from page 23 of the transcript of Group A's first session. On occasion, the tape counter number, rather than the page number of the transcript, is used to identify the location of a particular excerpt.

In keeping with the theoretical assumptions informing this research, I focussed my analysis on how the girls displayed cultural resources in their talk. However I also recognized that if I initially focussed my analysis too strongly on looking for evidence of these resources, my own understandings of them might well interfere with my hearing how participants themselves took them up. I wanted to generate as close a reading as I could of the girls' talk in order to make it more likely that the girls' constructions of growing up could better emerge. I repeatedly returned to the talk itself, in the form of audiotapes as well as transcripts, in order to remind myself not only of the content, but also the nuance and context of various conversations.

I followed two general approaches to analysing participants' talk. The first, and most obvious, was to look for the consistent themes in participants' talk around growing up. I was particularly interested in any

consistencies and disparities across sessions, since as noted above, issues emerged in context of a number of discussions. I also gave priority to themes that virtually all the groups addressed as salient.

The second approach was to look at patterns in the flow of participants' talk. I looked for changes in emotional intensity, volume of talk, interruptions, and pace of discussion. Generally speaking, after the initial discomfort of acclimatizing to the format, conversation flowed well. Even when participants disagreed with each other, or changed the subject of discussion, there was little interruption to the flow of conversation. Against this backdrop, silences, when they arose were particularly conspicuous and deserving of closer consideration.

I also looked for persistent contradictions in talk, particularly those contradictions which emerged around topics that arose repeatedly in conversations. These contradictions did not appear to be problematic for the participants themselves; conversation continued despite them. They did suggest, however, that those topics which consistently generated the most contradictory answers to both my probes and participants' questions were particularly problematic for the girls and warranted careful examination in all their talk.

The material presented in the chapters that follow are necessarily brief excerpts from over eighteen hours of taped conversation. They are chosen because they best capture the flavour of a number of similar conversations or illuminate themes corroborated by other groups' discussions.

SPECIAL ISSUES

Researching with children presents unique practical challenges and requires a fine-grained analysis of ethical considerations. In the case of this study, conducting research within the institutional context of the school system required planning and coordination far beyond what would be expected. For instance, despite repeated inquiries about how best to schedule and arrange the sessions, there were always unexpected hurdles to overcome. Last minute changes in scheduling, double-booking of designated rooms, and interruptions from staff were such frequent occurrences as to make them the rule rather than the exception. Discussion sessions were frequently interrupted by people needing something in the room, caretakers cleaning up and school-wide announcements over the intercom.

This highlights one facet of conducting research within an institution, namely, the general lack of privacy for participants. With the exception of the principal's office, there was little space within the schools where any assured degree of privacy existed. Explicit requests for privacy were always met with assurances that this would be the case. In fact though, the rooms where the sessions were scheduled to take place were often rather public. For instance, in one school, the library had been chosen by the principal as the appropriate location. When the first session took place, it became apparent that there was a lunch time workshop for library volunteers taking place at the same time. The librarian graciously offered to set up the research at a table at the back of the room somewhat apart from the activity. However, there was no acknowledgment that the girls might want a greater degree of privacy for their conversations. In the end, I simply moved the group across the hall to an unused classroom. This type of occurrence was not unusual. It became a

challenge to ascertain whether changing locales might upset someone or cause further complications, such as setting up somewhere that might be unexpectedly required for another activity. In effect, as an interloper in the school, I found it challenging to exercise the optimal degree of control over the setting.

Ethical Considerations

Another consideration was the ethical obligations by which I was bound. Certainly, an adult researcher, regardless of the degree of friendship cultivated with participants, still finds herself in a position of some authority when researching with children. That position must not be abused. More subtle were my implicit obligations to both parents and the school board. Occasionally, participants raised sensitive concerns and questions about their bodies that I could not address. Although it was gratifying that they trusted me enough to bring their questions forward, I could not impart even readily available information to the girls, since this might have offended some parents and breached my position of trust as a researcher. Nor, under the terms of my ethics approval, was I allowed to bring any magazine material into the school for participants to comment on. When participants themselves failed to bring in magazines or other material for the collage, the group made do with whatever they could access in the course of their daily school activities.

Group interviewing can also pose challenges to the question of confidentiality, particularly in a school setting (Berg, 1995). In the case of research with children, particularly children at a school where not all students would be participating in the interview process, this question must be carefully considered. During the course of the first session, I made a clear

link between the confidentiality participants expected from me, and the confidentiality they should expect from each other as well. However, two further points need to be made in regard to concerns about confidentiality between members of focus groups as it impacts this study (Berg, 1995).

First, it should be reiterated that the focus of this study was less on preadolescent girls' individual and unique experiences than on preadolescent girls' *collective* understanding of cultural messages and how they make them meaningful in their talk and interaction. The interview schedule was therefore designed to foster inclusivity and joint activity, and the primary focus was on fostering interaction around shared observations and impressions rather than divulgence of individual personal history. Therefore, if a participant began to bring up material that could prove particularly revealing or at odds with generally held views expressed by the group, my clear ethical priority, one which was not at all at variance with stated research goals, was to protect that participant by redirecting the conversation.

Second, this research was designed to foster interaction in an informal, everyday atmosphere among participants who were already acquainted with each other and who interacted with each other on an ongoing basis. No participant was required to answer particular questions or put in a compromising position for not doing so. Instead, participants were encouraged to engage in conversation that approximated the naturally occurring discourse they partook in on other occasions throughout the day. Obviously, there was no guarantee that participants did not repeat some of the content of these discussions to others who chose not to participate. However, assuming that these sessions approximated naturally occurring

discourse, neither is there reason to expect that participants imparted information, chose an uncharacteristic manner of self-expression, or failed to use the usual discretion they exercised throughout the course of the school day when talking to groups of friends. Principals reported no such problems arising from the experience.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT: GIRLS AND BODY PRESENTATION IN
POPULAR CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

The last chapter clarified two important theoretical assumptions derived from Holstein and Gubrium that underpin this study (1994). The first is that girls as competent members of our culture are privy to cultural themes about puberty and the developing female body, and will therefore display these cultural themes in their talk. The second is that girls will actively take up, internalize, or resist these themes in the process of endowing them with meaning. More broadly, then, this study is premised on the proposition that an understanding of both the received discourses surrounding femininity and growing up which are part of the dominant cultural landscape and the processes whereby girls make these cultural messages their own may help explicate the challenges girls face in their transition to adolescence.

In this chapter, I consider the former, and present a brief analysis of some important cultural themes pertaining to femininity and the body which have woven persistently through modern Western society since the Enlightenment. This chapter takes a three-pronged approach to understanding these cultural themes. It first looks at shifts in meanings ascribed to the female body and the rise of the discourse of adolescence itself. It then looks at how these historical themes found expression in popular cultural representations for women and girls such as fashion and the conventions of body presentation. The chapter concludes by exploring the

relevance of these themes and patterns of cultural representation to an understanding of one symbolic agent of socialization for pre-adolescent girls today: contemporary self-help literature.

This overview of cultural themes surrounding femininity and adolescence and their expression in popular culture is not intended to be exhaustive, but to suggest the diverse vehicles or symbolic agents that carry cultural information and expectations about girls' bodies and growing up. Though brief and highly selective, the analysis is intended to provide a historical and cultural context for the material in the chapters which follow.

SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In this section I begin with a brief and necessarily simplified account of two historical themes pertaining to girls and growing up. The first concerns changes in the symbolic meanings associated with the female body, and the second concerns the rise of the developmental stage known as adolescence. In order to explore how these changes in ways of talking about the female body and growing up may have impacted girls' choices surrounding self-presentation, I then turn to a summary examination of clothing styles and styles of body presentation. Throughout this section I ask how the new meanings ascribed to the female body and the shifting boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood are reflected in girls' clothing and body presentation styles. I am seeking to understand not only the cultural values surrounding young girls and growing up, but also the unspoken ways these values are given form by what are commonly seen as symbolic agents of socialization.

The Changing Meaning of the Female Body in Popular Culture

Pre-Enlightenment thinkers had held male and female to be hierarchically ranked by their position in a social order but cut, as it were, from the same cloth. As Thomas Laquer has written in his fascinating and detailed book, *The Making of Sex*, to be a man or woman during pre-Enlightenment times was "to hold a social rank, a place in society, to assume a cultural role, not to *be* organically one or the other of two incommensurable sexes" (1990, p. 8). As a result, relatively little was made of physiological differences between men and women. As a matter of fact male and female bodies were seen as parallel; ovaries were female versions of testicles, and the vagina was the inverse of the penis. Both men and women were assumed to be driven by much the same desires and needs; for example, it was generally held that conception couldn't occur without both the man and woman experiencing an orgasm.

In contrast, Enlightenment thinkers came increasingly to view men and women as different--as opposites, in fact. The body, at both the visible and microscopic level, represented to these philosophers and scientists the divergence of male and female. The social order, wherein women were relegated to positions of substantially less power and status but qualitatively different realms, emerged apparently "naturally" out of this interpretation of intrinsic biological difference. The rising disciplines of the Enlightenment, particularly medicine and science, dichotomized male and female, femininity and masculinity, and focused their scrutiny on physiological phenomena, such as menstruation and conception, that distinguished between the sexes. These phenomena came to represent more than physiological events; they became a metaphor for how sexual differences were viewed (Laquer, 1990).

The dominant view of the time held that menstruation was equivalent to estrus and that therefore women were most fertile during, or shortly after, their period. The sometimes explicit metaphor of women, and particularly young girls, coming into "heat" on a regular monthly basis triggered implicit concerns about threats to the social order that might result from this biologically driven and potentially unfettered female sexuality. As a result, the maturing female body, and, in particular, preparation for menstruation, became a subject of interest to the rising medical thinkers of the Enlightenment. For instance, as can be noted from the increase in medical manuals on female "hygiene," the question of how best to inform girls about the "facts of life" came increasingly, under the purview of experts scientists and doctors (Ehrenreich & English, 1978).

The French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault has argued that medicine, concerned both with the optimization of the individual body and the propagation of the population as a productive force, is one of the disciplines of modernity that has sought to manage, organize and control life in the interests of the state (Foucault, 1984). Certainly the female body, situated at the juncture of the scientific understanding of the individual body and the social reproduction of the state, was quickly claimed by the young discipline of medicine as lying within its preserve of expertise (Arney, 1982; Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Martin, 1987; Rothman, 1982; Turner, 1984; Weeks, 1986).

This "hystericization" of women's bodies, according to which women's bodies were sexualized, medicalized, and recast as solely devoted to reproduction, had a marked impact on the lives of middle-class girls and women (Foucault, 1978, p. 104). Girls and women were to avoid any

intellectual or physical activities that might drain them of energy that should be devoted exclusively to procreation. Exercise was restricted to more demure activities such as walking and carefully regulated gymnastic activities. It was argued that studying would produce uterine atrophy, resulting in sickly, irritable babies (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Vertinsky, 1988).

The Invention of Adolescence

The invention of adolescence was but one among the many profound changes in social life that accompanied industrialization. As mechanization and urbanization increased the demand for education and training, schooling became compulsory throughout most of North America (Santrock, 1987). Against this backdrop, many psychologists, social workers, urban reformers and educators began to debate the meaning, usefulness and dangers of children's now prolonged state of economic dependency. Most prominent among these was G. Stanley Hall, whose widely read book, *Adolescence*, was first published in 1904. In it, Hall, a strong believer in social evolution as well as an admirer of Freud, argued that while childhood was a period in which the phylogenetic past was recapitulated, adolescence was the period when "higher and more completely human traits are born" (p. xii cited in McGraw, 1987, p. 20). Interestingly, one of the most prominent of the perceived threats to the successful completion of this period of development was the danger of sexual development (Santrock, 1987).

It was, however, the shift of productive labour out of the home and into the workplace setting that would have the greatest impact on the socialization of adolescent girls. Now defined primarily by the absence of paid labour, home was increasingly represented as a place of retirement and retreat, a haven from a cruel and competitive workplace. In contrast to young

men, who now found themselves engaged in professional training or study beyond the family, where they could receive a liberal education in preparation for their future public sphere roles, girls were increasingly confined to the domestic sphere (Wynne & Frader, 1979). Here, under the watchful eye of family members, particularly their mothers, they were "groomed" for their future roles as caregivers and guardians of the next generation.

The most important ingredient in this "grooming" process was to ensure that girls remained innocent of sexual matters. Purity and virtue were seen as being incompatible with sexual awareness. Hygiene manuals confirmed that the more genteel the woman, "the more is the sensual refined away from her nature" (Ehrenreich & English, 1978, p. 121). Increasingly, sexual knowledge was thought to have a negative effect on biological and social fitness for motherhood, and every effort was made to ensure the protection of the purity and virtue of young women from potential contamination (Ehrenreich & English, 1978; Wynne & Frader, 1979). As early as 1831, Lydia Child, in her book entitled *Mother's Book*, urged mothers to inform their daughters about the facts of life before they reached their teen years. However "once the young girl received this knowledge, her instinctive modesty must prevent her from dwelling on the information until she was called upon to use it" (Wynne & Frader, 1979, p. 74).

As can be seen by this brief summary, there have been drastic shifts in the meanings surrounding the transition from girlhood to womanhood over the past two hundred years. The dichotomization of the sexes and the resultant pathologization of the female body, the withdrawal of middle class women from the public sphere, and the resultant prolongation of the period

between childhood and adult status which accompanied urbanization and mechanization, all contributed to increased uncertainty about the role and status of girls and young women. Many of these tensions hinged on often unspoken concerns about the sexuality and innocence of young women. An interesting way to explore how these tensions were expressed is to examine the shifting relationship between girls' and women's clothing styles.

Presenting the Young Female Body: The Body Shaped by Clothing

Enlightenment and Children's Clothing

Children's clothing, both boys' and girls', underwent a substantial transformation with the Enlightenment. Until approximately 1750, children had played, worked, and slept alongside adults, participating in virtually all aspects of communal life. Childhood did not exist as a qualitatively distinct period of development, nor did there exist a style of clothing unique to children. Instead, from the time they were out of their swaddling clothes and the care of mother or nurse, children were dressed in miniature versions of adult garb (Aries, 1962; Rose, 1989; Schorsch, 1979).

But as family life withdrew from the public domain into a sentimentalized private sphere, childhood increasingly began to be seen as a distinct period of development. Children's clothing reflected this change in experimental designs that sought to capture the character of the new vision of childhood. Two themes emerged from debate over the appropriate regimes of care and education for children which were to have an impact on young people's clothing for much of the two centuries that followed: 1) the sexual innocence of children and childhood; and 2) the need for relative freedom of movement and lack of restriction during childhood (Aries, 1962; Cleverley & Phillips, 1986; Hardyment, 1983; Schorsch, 1979).

Because sexuality was seen as a threat to the natural innocence of children, it was deemed important to protect children from the more "wordly" aspects of life by distracting them from noticing the differences between the sexes (Cleverley & Phillips, 1986; Schorsch, 1979):

...if small children of both sexes were not dressed identically, the attention of children [would] be excited to the differences of the sexes, a circumstance which would deprive them, at an early age of their innocence, and happy ignorance. (Dr. Struve, *A Familiar View of the Domestic Education of Children*, 1802; cited in Schorsch, 1979, p. 42)

By the mid-1800s this advice was being taken much to heart. In England, where *Cassell's Household Guide* recommended boys wear dresses or tunics up to the age of eight, female and male siblings were virtually indistinguishable by dress style alone (Rose, 1989). Instead behaviour and toys informed the observer as to their sex.

Because children were also positioned as closer to nature and the natural world than adults, they were therefore in need of clothing that permitted physical activity (Rose, 1989; Schorsch, 1979). By contrast, adult clothing, particularly women's, was highly restrictive:

The dress of children should be different from that of adults. – It is disgusting to behold a child disfigured by dress [. . .] A suitable dress for young people ought to show, by the contrast it forms to that of adults, how far the latter have trespassed upon the laws of decorum, and how little attention is generally paid to health and convenience. (Dr. Struve, *A Familiar View of the Domestic Education of Children*, 1802; cited in Schorsch, 1979, p. 43).

What can be discerned in this new era of children's clothing is the construction of a boundary between childhood and adulthood based on the display of what is taken to be female sexuality. Childhood, as a period of sexual innocence and proximity to nature, warranted unrestrictive clothing,

while adulthood, particularly female adulthood, which was defined as inherently sexual, demanded physical restraint through clothes and corsetry.

Women and Children's Clothing and the "Invention" of Adolescence

In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century, adolescence began to be talked about and accepted as a distinct stage of development in western societies. Its emergence is reflected and reproduced in a wide range of sites across the cultural landscape of the period. Below, I turn to one of these sites, the fashion catalogues of the era, to see how these new ways of talking about growing up may have affected clothing choices.

The three decades from 1880 to approximately 1910 are a particularly fertile period in which to examine how changes in girls' clothing reflected the new concept of adolescence. The 1880s saw children's clothing divided into three distinct stages of childhood. Both boys and girls wore long dresses until at least age two, with the prerogative for boys of wearing a "child's dress" until the age of four or five. For boys, the remaining stages consisted of early childhood or "small" boyhood (two to six years of age) and "older" boyhood (six to sixteen years of age). Childhood for girls was also divided into three stages, but the stages were of different character and duration. A "child's dress" of infancy, suitable for both boys and girls, could be worn by girls up to age four or five after which they moved into "small" girls' styles until the age of eight or nine.

Despite shorter hemlines and unrestricted waists, these "small" girls' dresses, as well as the "Misses" dresses girls moved into at eight or nine years of age, were clearly modeled after contemporary mature styles for women. By way of contrast, "small" boys' styles bore little resemblance to adult men's

wear of the time; "small boys" often found themselves in some form of skirts until age six, for the recommended apparel for boys was kilts with tailored jackets (Felger, 1984; Rose, 1989). At age six boys could move into tailored suits with short pants but they were only allowed to start wearing long pants at age sixteen (Bryk, 1988; Felger, 1984; Rose, 1989).

By way of contrast, the defining feature of ladies' fashion was corsetry, which exaggerated breasts and hips while simultaneously restricting and containing the female figure. A close look at the 1901 Eaton's catalogue reveals that "infants'", "child's" and "misses'" waists for ages one through seventeen, were all available in a range of sizes 20 to 26 inches. However a "lady's" waist started at 19 inches, a size smaller than that of the youngest infant child!

The point of interest is that while these stages of childhood remained constant for boys through to the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, this was not the case for girls. "Misses" dress styles continued to be modeled closely after "Ladies" fashions, but by 1894, the age at which it was deemed appropriate for girls to wear "Misses" dress styles began to rise. By 1909, "Misses" styles were being advertised as suitable only for girls *over* the age of thirteen or fourteen. Small girls' styles had changed substantially as well; now all girls younger than twelve or fourteen years of age wore dresses featuring loose-fitting long waists, shorter skirts and box pleats, which contrasted increasingly with "Ladies" styles (Eaton's Catalogue, 1911; McCall Catalogue, 1909).

In 1911 Eaton's announced a new policy: They would offer "Junior" dresses, styles appropriate to a stage of development intermediary between childhood and young womanhood. These "Junior" garments would have:

[a] longer skirt than is made with our regular children's dresses of 0-14 years and yet not so advanced in style as the Misses. These junior garments are specially modeled to fit girls at this age and skirts come to the shoe tops. (Eaton's Catalogue, 1911, p. 26)

Once again it was the restriction of corsetry and longer skirts that distinguished girls' and "Junior" styles from "Misses" and "Ladies" styles. Junior dresses retained the more "child-like" dimension of a 26-inch waist while the waists on "Misses" and "Ladies" styles began at 23 inches:

[junior garments are] especially designed and proportioned for those otherwise overlooked ages of girlhood viz., 13, 15 and 17 years, or between the fast-growing child and the young Miss who aspires more to the stage of form-fitting apparel. (1912-1913, p. 46)

Concurrent with the new styles that were evolving to accommodate girls in their teen years, "Ladies" fashion styles were also beginning to change. A more tubular line and drastic reduction in the bodice understructure of blouses allowed substantially more of the natural female figure to be revealed (Laver, 1995; Routh, 1993). The fact that "Junior" dresses, though not severely restrictive, were modelled on the silhouettes of the new "Misses" and "Ladies" styles did not find favour with everyone. One Canadian reader complained to the *Hamilton Herald* in 1912 that the new "freakish fashions . . . shamelessly display the physical rather than the innocent charms of young girls ..." (Routh, 1993, p. 27).

Styles for younger girls six to fourteen years of age continued to diverge from higher-waisted trends in "Misses" and "Ladies" fashion. With their long waists and short box pleated skirts, these styles provided a sharp contrast with ladies' fashions (Rose, 1989). As the decade drew to a close, girls as old as sixteen began to wear loose fitting, long-waisted middy blouses and gym slips. In part this was driven by the increasing importance of another important development associated with adolescence: formal schooling for girls. These

new styles of school clothes and casual wear for older girls downplayed curves. They proved to be reassuringly unrevealing of the young natural female body which had been so unsettling to the reader of the *Hamilton Herald*.

For the first time, older girls' clothing choices were determined in part by context, not solely by age. A formal school setting might require a nautical-style middy blouse, whereas a more shapely "Junior" style garment could be worn when a girl was being tutored at home (Rose, 1989). It was deemed more acceptable for girls to wear form-fitting clothes in the privacy of the home, suggesting that a more sexualized style of presentation was best relegated to the domestic private sphere. Though girls were re-entering the public sphere through formal schooling, they were not doing so dressed as "women" *per se*. School uniforms reflected the influence of styles derived from childhood and in particular, boyhood. In fact "Ladies" styles were increasingly marginalized in the world of fashion; from the second decade of the century onwards, the seeds of new fashion ideas for women were to be sown by styles originally designed for young boys and girls, not for women.

The styles of the 1920s provide ample evidence of the influences of boys' styles of a century earlier on girls' and women's fashions. The simple, long-waisted and virtually shapeless silhouettes of the flapper represented a radical departure from previous women's styles (Laver, 1995; Ribeiro & Cumming, 1989; Routh, 1993). For the first time in over a century, women were free from the constraints of corsetry. Gone were the hourglass, figure-shaping corsets of the nineteenth century. Women turned instead to "flatteners" to effect a more boyish look:

A new type of woman had come into existence. The new erotic ideal was androgyne: girls strove to look as much like boys as possible. All curves - that female attribute so long admired - were completely abandoned. (Laver, 1995, p. 233)

As hemlines rose, even the traditional distinction of the youngest girls' styles, the shorter skirt, had all but disappeared. There was again a homogeneity of styles across most women's and girls' clothing but, ironically, one derived from boys' and children's clothing of the nineteenth century!

The rise of adolescence had a marked impact on girls' clothing styles which was not paralleled by changes in boys' clothing. As the boundary between adulthood, adolescence and childhood became more problematic, a plurality of dress styles emerged. Style of self-presentation was now at least in part determined by context. Self-presentation in the public sphere demanded less sexualized conventions of dress derived from boys' and children's wear. In the private sphere, on the other hand, girls and young women were allowed to display a more revealing silhouette. Whereas the "discovery" of childhood over a century earlier had spawned a variety of experimental dress styles primarily for young boys, the prolongation of childhood through the "invention" of adolescence spawned virtually no reaction in clothing styles for older boys (Rose, 1989). Whatever the implications of the "invention" of adolescence for boys, they did not centre on or express themselves through dramatic shifts in the presentation of the young male body. However, the "invention" of female adolescence, necessarily concerned with the emergence of a culturally charged, sexualized female body, had had profound implications for girls' styles of presentation.

Presenting the Young Female Body: The Body Itself

By the 1920s, the exaggerated female silhouette that corsetry had made possible, and which for almost a century had remained a symbol of adult female sexuality, was a thing of the past. Girls' and women's attire which now drew attention away from the waist and minimized bust size had, not surprisingly, originated in men's and boys' styles of the mid-nineteenth century. Did this mean that concerns about how to manage growing up and the presentation of the young female body would no longer be problematic for girls' self-presentation? Did the meanings ascribed to the female body with the rise of modernity still continue to impact conventions of body presentation for girls through the twentieth century?

The next section traces how, in the twentieth century, the focus shifted away from a preoccupation with clothing as the primary factor in the presentation of the female body, to a preoccupation with the presentation and management of the body itself. Throughout, there can still be discerned the prominent themes of the Enlightenment as regards the female body: medicalization and sexualization of the female body and the underlying dichotomization of male and female. An important factor in this new focus on the body was the explosion of consumer products devoted to modifying the female body and the concomitant exponential growth in the advertising industry dedicated to the promulgation of these products.

Management of the Body

Through the 1920s and 1930s, the female body, increasingly revealed by fashions eroticizing arms and legs, became the target of intense advertising campaigns (Bocock, 1993; Byrde, 1986; Fetherstone, 1991; Laver, 1995; Routh, 1993). Girls as well as women were constantly bombarded with reminders of

just how important body presentation was: "You're in a Beauty Contest every Day of Your Life" reads a soap advertisement from *Chatelaine's* January 1932 edition (p. 53). Physical attractiveness was touted as crucial to a girl's ability to compete for boyfriends and husbands. As one writer put it, "An ounce of complexion is worth a pound of grey matter" (Robins, 1931, p. 3).

Even as hemlines dropped and the flapper made way for the more glamorous and mature stars and celebrities of the 1930s, the explosive growth in the beauty and cosmetics industries continued unabated: Almay, Clairol, Wella, Maybelline, Revlon, and Max Factor were all founded in the 1920s and 1930s. These industries were fueled by advertising calculated to stimulate new needs and new buying habits (Banner, 1983; Bocock, 1993; Brumberg, 1997; Fetherstone, 1991). Prior to being introduced to personal care products designed to sanitize and beautify the female body, women had to be "informed" about their physical shortfalls. Advertising played a crucial role in the process. Companies spent increasing proportions of their budgets on advertising, a practice that continued through the post-war period (Fetherstone, 1991). By the 1950s these companies would be devoting over 80% of their budgets to advertising (Banner, 1983; Brumberg, 1997). A corollary of this stimulation of interest in consumer products was the creation of a world in which women and girls were constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections.

Hygiene and Management of the Body

Much of the impetus for the explosion in personal care products emerged out of advertising rhetoric aimed specifically at girls and their mothers about hygiene and puberty (Brumberg, 1997). Menstruation, which had long been pathologized, was now presented as a challenge to hygiene

which could be resolved by recourse to the new consumer products. Kotex, which had begun to advertise feminine napkins in 1921, launched campaigns touting the sanitary aspect of their product (hence the name sanitary napkins) (Brumberg, 1997). Interestingly, menstruation was not the only focus of the cosmetics and "personal products" industries' hygienic crusade. Acne, body odour, and body hair, all normal developments for girls, were also targets of the sanitary imperative.

The advertising industry's shift to encompass ever more aspects of female self-presentation under the umbrella of sanitation and hygiene became more evident in the 1920s. Advertisements in Canadian women's magazines of the 1920s provide a vivid example. Mothers were held responsible not only for informing girls about the "facts of life" but also for instructing them on how to avoid disfigurements including body hair, unpleasant genital odour and unsatisfactory complexions. Girls were informed that they were unknowingly "afflicted" with the disfigurement of leg hair: "Pick any twelve girls - ten have to be told" reads an advertisement for Odorno depilatory cream in the popular Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine* in May 1928. Women were advised to use Lysol disinfectant to eliminate "obnoxious female odour" (Strong-Boag, 1993, p. 85). Girls and women were no longer subject to restrictive corsetry, but the now omnipresent imperative that girls learn to control myriad "normal" body manifestations, from sweat to hair, was, it can be argued, equally restrictive.

Increased Importance of Consumption

As the decades progressed, mothers were less prominently featured in promotional material. As advertisers sought to encourage girls' autonomous consumption, it was the girls themselves who became the focus of

advertising campaigns stressing ever more rigorous standards of "hygiene" (Brumberg, 1997). A booklet put out by Canadian Cellucotton Products and available in Canada throughout the 1940s and 1950s encourages girls to shop for themselves:

And you need never feel the least embarrassed to ask for a box of Kotex in a store... even if it's a tall, young red-haired lad on the other side of the counter! He'll give you a box already wrapped without batting an eye. He is so used to selling Kotex it's just all in the day's work to him. Like selling tooth paste or talcum powder. Honestly! (*As one girl to another*, 1940, p. 8)

However the news is not all that comforting. Girls are warned that "personal daintiness" could be compromised during their menstruation because "perspiring equipment is working overtime, and in unexpected places" (*As one girl to another*, 1940, p. 10). The solution is to change Kotex sanitary napkins frequently and use Kotex deodorant powder.

The consumption of cosmetic products related to the hygienic care of the body is no longer equated primarily with reproductive capacity as it was at the beginning of the century. Instead, throughout the Cellucotton booklet, the use of lipstick, nail polish and hair products, as well as feminine sanitary products, is naturalized. It is as if the labour involved in such grooming is presented as invisible or negligible, and young women spring fully formed out of childhood. In fact, the metamorphosis to young womanhood, the attainment of an identity as a woman, hinges on the carefully hidden work of self-presentation. The author(s) of *As one girl to another* capture just this flavour:

From lollipops to lipsticks is a long jump! Pigtails change to perky curls... grubby nails grow long and lacquered...[...] And all of a sudden it dawns on you- You aren't Mama's precious baby any more! You're YOURSELF! (1940, p. 1-2)

The post-World War II consumer lifestyle only intensified these patterns. Producers were well aware that the young were now the emerging major market in the West, and for girls in particular, consumption was focused on display of the body (Bocock, 1993). Exhortations to girls to invest time and energy into grooming, body maintenance and careful dressing multiplied as female identity was increasingly linked to purchases in the marketplace (Brumberg, 1997, p. 53; Carter, 1984; Fetherstone, 1991).

For the female consumer, the focal point of leisure, pleasure and personal freedom is . . . the body itself. It was therefore the "image industries" - the female mass media, and fashion and cosmetics industries - which constituted the largest sector of the post-war market in leisure commodities for girls. (Carter, 1984, p. 205)

Summary

This section has examined how changes in symbolic meanings ascribed to the female body and shifting boundaries between childhood, adolescence and adulthood have been reflected in clothing and body presentation styles throughout much of the modern era. This abbreviated study has nonetheless revealed surprising thematic continuities.

The medicalization of the female body early in the modern era, at first evidenced as a tendency to pathologize physiological phenomena unique to women, gradually shifted to include a preoccupation with sanitation and hygiene that might help control these same phenomena. These concerns increasingly led to a focus on the management and control of the body through consumption of body-related products. The dichotomization of the sexes, itself related to the scientific community's commitment to the fundamental divergence of male and female, also played a role in

determining what was considered appropriate displays of a female body. This was seen both in fashion and presentation of the underlying body itself.

At every period under consideration, the presentation of the mature body was circumscribed by assumptions about women's inherent sexuality. It was the sexualized presentation of the female body, whether achieved through the containment of corsetry and fashion or through the management and control of natural bodily changes, that marked the transition to maturity.

The next section asks whether these themes have persisted in contemporary material for girls, specifically self-help literature aimed at helping them prepare for the transition to puberty and adolescence.

CONTEMPORARY MATERIAL FOR GIRLS

Though the material surveyed for the purpose this thesis includes newspapers, teen magazines, and a decade of the popular Canadian women's magazine *Chatelaine* (1985-1995), the primary focus for this portion of the literature review remains books which attempt to prepare girls, and in some cases their parents, for puberty and adolescence.

The past twenty years has seen a small explosion in popular material for girls focused on menstruation and preparation for puberty and adolescence (Bell & Rooney, 1993; Bourgeois & Wolfisch, 1994; Doan & Morse, 1985a; Gardner-Loulan & Lopez, 1991; Gravelle & Gravelle, 1996; Madaras, 1988; Rue, 1995; Thomson, 1995). Many, though not all, of these books also include information that at first glance might make them unappealing or perhaps irrelevant to younger girls: detailed diagrams of fertilization of the ovum, information about contraception, and even information about alcohol

and drug abuse (Bell & Rooney, 1993; Bourgeois & Wolfisch, 1994; Madaras, 1988). Nonetheless, all these books claim to be written for girls on the brink of puberty and do include other sections dealing with external pubertal changes that precede menarche as well as sections addressing concerns about social and family life.

These materials for girls and their parents are firmly rooted in the themes reviewed earlier in this chapter. They evidence a preoccupation with a medicalized view of the female body and its reproductive capacity, as well as a firmly established link between ostensible "hygienic" concerns and the consumption of cosmetic and "sanitary" products. There are generally two predominant discourses in the materials examined. The first concerns the nature of puberty, its onset, normative order and timing; the second concerns what constitutes the appropriate and attractive presentation of the young, developing female body. Here is a brief thematic analysis in light of previously examined themes.

Puberty Through Medical Eyes

Throughout this material, discussion of pubertal development is marked by a pervasive deferral to previously noted medical discourses on reproduction, an emphasis on the determination of "normal" pubertal development through reference to "pubertal stages" based primarily on the work of one medical researcher, J. M. Tanner (Bell & Rooney, 1993; Bourgeois & Wolfisch, 1994; Brook 1985; Brooks-Gunn & Petersen, 1983; Madaras, 1988; Petersen, 1979; Tanner, 1962). In fact, contemporary popular material for girls often includes careful illustrations of Tanner's five stages of breast development, a separate series of illustrations of pubic hair development and

accompanying discussion surrounding the question of how, if at all, these stages are inter-related.

The degree to which this medicalized view of the body permeates these materials can be captured in the following example. Because this material generally takes as its mandate the task of reassuring girls that the changes they perceive in their bodies are perfectly "normal," it seems inevitable that the rhetorically posed question "Am I Normal?" is always answered with the reassuring response: "as far as your body is concerned everyone develops at her own speed" (Bell & Rooney, 1993, p. 11). Yet such a message begins to ring hollow when girls are also asked to assess their progress along a normative growth sequence (Bell & Rooney, 1993; Madaras, 1988, pp. 14-15). The cachet of medical research adds an implicit importance to the taxonomy of pubertal stages :

Doctors have divided pubic hair growth into the five different stages shown in Illustration 8. [] ... See if you can find the stage you're closest to. (Madaras, 1988, p. 27)

This would seem to confirm Foucault's contention that in modern society, individuals are increasingly called upon not only to conform to the normative judgments of disciplinary expertise, but also to assess and monitor themselves according to these same standards (Foucault, 1979).

Of course, there is no reason to assume that a similar emphasis on medicalized normative stages do not appear in material for boys. What is noteworthy about this material for girls is the overwhelming priority given to scientific explanations of female internal development and reproductive capacity. This is all the more remarkable given that this information is of little relevance to younger girls. Though there may be no reason to avoid offering this information to pre-pubescent girls, the question arises whether

this view of the internal female body through the lens of science is meaningful or interesting to girls.

Puberty and Hygiene

When the external changes of puberty are addressed, the theme of hygiene and sanitation that figured prominently in the earlier eras comes prominently to the foreground. In fact, what is surprising in this material is the relentlessly negative attitude taken to the female body at puberty:

Katie's 12, and she's grossed out every time she looks in the mirror. Check out all those blackheads and pimples. Justine is in seventh grade. She's grown four inches this year, and all she sees are the tops of boys' heads. She feels like a giant. Cianna wakes up one morning and suddenly - at least it seems so to her - she has breasts and hips and hair under her arms. . . . What Katie and Justine and Cianna are experiencing are the changes that take place in the body when the reproductive system matures and the hormones start to function. (Rue, 1995, p. 12).

While readers are reassured that the appearance of "zits," "sweat" and unwanted hair is all "normal," they are also constantly reminded that these events are problems to be managed in much the same way that in the 1920s "ten girls [had] to be told" about the benefits of Odorno depilatory cream. Changes that are common to both boys and girls are explicitly portrayed as problematic:

You used to tease your brothers about how gross they smelled after hours of sweaty football practice. Now, suddenly, you may be experiencing a few sweat stains yourself-on your favorite T-shirt, no less! To add insult to injury, you've taken a few whiffs of yourself lately, and, well ... phew! (Bell & Rooney, 1993, p. 30)

Embedded in the previous excerpt is the unspoken belief that while it is acceptable for boys to sweat and smell "gross," this is not case for girls. Books that are otherwise down to earth, non-judgmental and accepting of differences, unwittingly play into these stereotypes of masculinity and

femininity, and hence reinforce the theme of dichotomization of the sexes. In *Have you started yet?; Getting the facts straight*, Ruth Thomson uses two simple, side by side cartoon-like line illustrations to highlight what male and female bodies look like "Before Puberty" and "After Puberty" (1995, pp. 16-17). Although both female and male naked figures in the post puberty illustration show a heavy growth of pubic hair, only the male figure has hair on his legs!

There is one notable exception to the negativity surrounding pubertal changes; the topic of breast development receives unparalleled positive press. Acquiring breasts is portrayed as a generally felicitous experience. Perhaps because breast development is one of the few changes of puberty not shared with boys, and therefore not tainted by association with lack of femininity, discussion surrounding breasts is usually contrasting, upbeat and free from the undercurrent of shame and embarrassment associated with acne, sweat and leg hair.

Much of the talk about breast development, as is the case with talk about development of pubertal hair as well as change in size and shape, is concerned with reassuring girls about is considered "normal." Many books spend time delineating medically sanctioned stages and rate of breast development.

Whether one has breasts, how big they are and whether or not one ostensibly needs the aid of a bra is often portrayed as a matter of curiosity and competition among peers:

And no matter what stage your breasts are in, you can't help but compare yourself with your girlfriends. You're also dying to know: *Do they or don't they wear bras yet?* (Bell & Rooney, 1993, pp. 13-14)

The pleasures associated with acquiring breasts, or at least acquiring bras, are amply represented in this literature. Girls are informed how best to decide if they need a bra, how to measure for one and how to shop for one. The status and allure of owning "the whitest thing I'd ever seen in my life besides snow" is presented as irresistible:

There was a tiny pink flower in the middle, with a fake pearl in the center. . . . I had a bra--and loved it. And I loved the idea of wearing it so much that I slept in it for the first couple of weeks, taking it off only to wash it. (Jukes, 1996, p. 2)

The decision of whether to wear a bra seems to have less to do with breast development than with the prestige and rite of passage which wearing one represents. One author humorously reminisces about shopping for a first bra even though it "wasn't necessary, since I was practically flat." (Jukes, 1996, p. 2).

However, developing breasts, according to this literature, may have its downside. Many of these books mention that breasts are a source of much interest to others. Being looked at for your features rather than yourself is acknowledged as being something unpleasant, but something that girls just have to get used to:

Even strangers, people on the street may tease us about developing breasts, and this may make us embarrassed at times Often there isn't much you can do about this unwanted attention, beyond simply ignoring it. (Madaras, 1988, pp. 55-56)

No mention is made of who these "strangers" are who offer the "unwanted attention." One can only assume that this is because it is self-evident to the readers that these will be men.

Consumption and Self-Presentation

What is at stake here? Well for one thing, by presenting biological change that is common to both sexes as problematic for girls' self-presentation, these cultural gender scripts buy into the further dichotomization of male and female that originated with the Enlightenment. All aspects of the maturing female body come under scrutiny and consideration. Body hair and perspiration are all rendered problematic. As the back cover blurb on the book *All about you* proclaims:

It's your body... what's happening to it? Your first period. Breaking out. Shaving your legs. Needing deodorant. . . . What are you supposed to do?" (Bell & Rooney, 1993)

The solution, as this literature makes clear, lies in girls committing themselves to a lifelong project of shaping and modifying the female body in a fashion that highlights the "natural" differences between male and female. With the help of consumer products, hair can be shaved, waxed, or removed chemically and electrically; acne can be controlled through the use of over-the-counter products, or concealed through the judicious use of make-up; body odour can be reduced with the use of deodorants; and breasts can be shaped through careful selection of bras.

Problems

What may first strike the reader of these descriptions as merely "telling it like it is," begins, on second reading, to resonate with the vision of the female body as a site of ongoing work, casting both girls and women in the role of perennial consumers of body care products. As the number of articles and self-help columns offering advice on techniques of body culture have multiplied exponentially, girls have been asked to assume more and more responsibility for their appearance (Bartky, 1988; Fetherstone, 1991; Hudson,

1984; Miller & Penz, 1991). This is not to say that standards of grooming are necessarily any higher, but rather that more of the body has come under inspection and more products are necessary in order to manage these challenges to feminine presentation.

The unspoken question is, of course, "To whom is this body being presented?" If earlier trends around the management and control of the female body have been persistently linked to the display of female sexuality, can it be extrapolated that today's demands on girls to conform to specific standards of female self-presentation are also linked to the symbolic sexualization of the young female body?

DISCUSSION

This chapter first described historical themes relevant to girls and growing up, such as the change in meanings ascribed to the female body and the confusion surrounding the boundary between childhood and adulthood. It then went on to explore how these meanings are reproduced in a variety of symbolic agents of socialization for girls.

Although there is a surprising degree of consistency to the underlying themes about girls and growing up, the ways in which these themes have been manifested in cultural representations of women often shifted considerably. For instance, late nineteenth-century control of the adult female body, once achieved through restrictive corsetry, is now virtually unheard of. However contemporary expectations of thinness, firmness, hairlessness, etc., are now virtually as restrictive and demanding of time, energy and resources as any prior clothing style. These expectations of appropriate self-presentation have also been linked to the exponential growth in the cosmetic and

advertising industries, highlighting the increased emphasis on the commodification of the female body.

Looking at contemporary self-help literature for pre-adolescent girls, it is possible to discern two dominant themes which can be traced at least as far back as the Enlightenment. The first is the pervasive medicalized discourse on the female body. If no longer intensely pathologized, the female body today nonetheless remains within the purview of medical expertise. Medicalized and scientific discourse continues to dominate discussion of the bodily changes of adolescence, and lengthy scientific expositions of internal reproductive processes often take precedence over discussions of bodily changes that pre-adolescent girls might themselves notice.

The second theme concerns the shifting but always problematic conventions of self-presentation for girls at adolescence. Whatever the shifting meanings ascribed to boys and men with the rise of modernity, they have not hinged on body-related presentation. Changes of modernity have been reflected in changes in men's clothing--for instance the association of the increased use of stovepipe pants with changing definitions of "work." However, self-presentation was never the key to boys' passage from childhood and adolescence to adulthood. By contrast, the boundary between child and young adult female has, since Enlightenment times, been predicated on some form of symbolically sexualized presentation, most often one based on the restriction and management of the female body. The implications for girls and growing up are that for girls to attain adult feminine identity, they would have to manage and control their bodies to conform to these cultural expectations.

Chapter One outlined how scholars studying representations of women today found similar themes in adolescent and pre-adolescent magazines. For instance, McRobbie's discussion of the "connotative codes" of adolescent femininity reinforce the historical construction of male and female as opposites with little in common, particularly as regards physical and emotional needs. Her discussion of girls' circumscription within the realm of the personal strongly echoes the doctrine of separate spheres and its impact on the lives of nineteenth century adolescent girls. Most striking, however, is the more recent focus on the body as a site of consumption. This theme, which rose to prominence in the early 1920s, has remained a remarkably consistent concern in the academic literature on girls and magazine reading and clearly remains, from this overview of self-help literature, a prominent feature of popular culture for girls today. Possible new developments of interest have been the decline of romance as a dominant theme in these magazines, and the increasing emphasis on female sexuality as a focal theme for the construction female identity.

Cultural messages are not monolithic; puberty and the developing female body are portrayed in a variety of interwoven ways. Neither is the material where these messages can be found, homogenous. A text may call on medical ways of talking about the female body in a section on the progression of "normal" pubertal development, and in the next section portray the developing female body as the site of consumption. How these cultural expectations are interpreted, resisted or taken up by girls is central to this study. In the following three chapters I explore this question.

CHAPTER FOUR

HORMONES OR ATTITUDE?
GIRLS TALK ABOUT GROWING UP

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Two, I argued that the "sort of answer" that might address concerns about the difficulties girls experience in transition to adolescence needs to be one that examines how preadolescent girls construct growing up in light of commonly available representations of female puberty and growing up. I want to know which, if any, of the available representations are invoked in the girls' talk and, more specifically, how they are used.

The previous chapter provided an historical overview of many of these representations and showed how underlying much of twentieth century discourse about the developing female adolescent body is the legacy of how the female body has been sexualized, pathologized and medicalized. Vestiges of these themes are still present in contemporary popular discourse that unproblematically attributes the changes of puberty and early adolescence to biological phenomena, and consistently defers to medicalized frameworks for the explanation and interpretation of adolescent behaviour. Parents talk of having to keep their daughters busy and preoccupied during the years of eleven to thirteen so as to mitigate the unpleasant effects of their being "hormonal," while teachers casually implicate hormones in the difficulties they face dealing with young people in junior high school classroom settings.

A 1997 article, run in both the *New York Times* and the *Globe and Mail*, highlights how contemporary popular discourse casts puberty as a

clearly delineated biological or medical event whose locus of control lies within the individual body in the unseen work of hormones. It informs readers that researchers have isolated a protein, dubbed "the perpetrator of puberty," which is responsible for "unleash[ing] the hormonal tides" not only of estrogen or testosterone but ultimately of all the "comic disasters" of adolescence (Angier, 1997). The "perpetrator of puberty" is constructed as causing both visible changes in bodily appearance associated with puberty and other more culture-specific social practices:

One minute you are the sovereign of a perfectly respectable, smooth, blade-shaped body, and the next, out pops the hair, the acne, the inexplicable taste for tongue studs and Herman Hesse. (Angier, 1997)

Similar themes resonate through popular self-help literature for girls. Girls are informed that puberty, a signal that the body is maturing, has "a lot to do with the chemical substances in your body called hormones" (Bell & Rooney, 1993, p. 10). Triggered by hormones, puberty is also held accountable for far more than physical changes:

You're also wrestling with new and powerful feelings. Those boys who used to be pests or pals may now start looking pretty cute. You might even be in the middle of your first crush. Your feeling towards old girlfriends may be on a roller-coaster ride too. You may find you'd rather meet new friends than hang out with your old ones. At home, you want to be alone more. You love your family but need your privacy. . . . It's all part of a process called puberty. (Bell & Rooney, 1993, pp. 9-10).

Within this framework, puberty begins unproblematically and abruptly with the development of secondary sexual characteristics, and culminates in the attainment of reproductive capability. Emotional, behavioural and social changes--different feelings towards friends and family--are also unproblematically attributed to the hormones that trigger pubertal change.

However, newspaper accounts and "self-help" literature are written primarily by adults—concerned parents, educators and doctors. As such, these articles and books do not necessarily reflect the views of girls themselves. We have little sense of how girls themselves account for the transition to adolescence. Nor do we know what they see as the important signs of growing up. What sense do girls on the brink of adolescence make of cultural messages, images and ideas about growing up? In particular, do the girls themselves claim, as their parents and educators seem to, that hormones and "biology" are at the root of these changes?

ANALYSIS

The open-ended questions posed early in the early group interviews were designed to allow girls to focus answers on those areas of their lives that *they* saw as relevant to growing up. It was important that I put aside any expectation that they would invoke medicalized discourses of puberty, and that I give them the opportunity to shape their own responses. It was striking how little of their talk was focussed on any physical aspect of growing up, let alone on any medicalized talk of "puberty." Their initial conversations about growing up centred overwhelmingly on descriptions of the differences between the toys, activities and clothing they were now interested in and those they associated with younger children. Even in answer to a question such as "What are the signs of growing up?", where it might be expected that they would address more apparent, or physical, aspects of growing up, their talk remained focussed on newfound interests.

For instance, they frequently claimed that they no longer played with Barbie dolls. They pointed out how, when they were younger, it was a given

that playing with friends would have included "playing Barbies" or "pony" dolls. Now, they claimed, social activities with friends, such as sleep-overs, were taken up with experimenting with make-up and listening to music rather than imaginary play with Barbie dolls. The following excerpt, taken from early in the first session with Group C, exemplifies many of the groups' vehement rejection of Barbie dolls:

? ... we don't play with the Barbies...
 ? ... boring...
 Res OK someone brought up the subject of Barbies. So you're saying you find Barbies...
 XXX ... GGG
 XXX XXX
 Nola BABEE..
 XXX XXX
 Nola ... Why do you call 'em boring?...
 XXX GGG
 Nola ... why do you even play with them?
 (SILENCE)
 (C #1/4)

Note how Nola's challenge to the group, "Why do you even play with them?" is met by silence as if there were no acceptable explanation.

Similarly they claimed they no longer watched "little kids" television shows such as *Barnie*, and other Saturday morning shows. Ongoing discussion revealed this not to be entirely the case. On occasion they did watch these shows; however, they justified these instances by arguing that this occurred only when they had been "forced" to watch by their younger siblings.

Kay My little sister forces me to watch *Barnie*-
 XXX GGGGGG
 Res Pardon me? Your sister watches *Barnie*? Forces you to watch *Barnie*.
 Meg And *Barnie* is a baby show.

Kay ... makes me sit down with her... sit down with her... (*starts to sing and talk babytalk*)

XXX GGGGGGG

(C#1/5)

They also explained that they now would watch almost any kind of movie, as long as it *wasn't* a "kid" movie--a distinction that apparently hinged on whether or not there was "violence" in the film. Group D offered the following succinct explanation of what was *not* considered a "kid" movie:

? I like any kind of movie as long as they have like, as long as they're not kid movies I'll watch them.

Res What makes it not a kid movie?

? Well, they've got more violence in them.

Res OK. One way to tell if it's not a kid movie is if it's got more violence...

? It's got more violence.

? Freddy Kruger.

? I l-o-v-e Freddy Kruger. I'm obsessed with him.

? I like him.

Res What's interesting about him?

? Oh, he's just cool he like (.) kills people.

(D#1 /6)

This overt reference to violence as an important feature of more "mature" material was reinforced later in the same session when, in the context of a discussion about "growing up" and what the girls were "interested in now that they hadn't been interested in when they were younger," group members offered a similar explanation of what constituted a "cool" television show--in this case John Woo's *It Takes a Thief*.

? ... and well it's really cool. It's just this thing, it's got a lot of violence.

? Um mmmm good.

Res Violence. You like violence.-

? Power to the people!

(D#1 /38-39)

I probed further, humorously inquiring whether the girls saw this predilection for violence as intrinsic to "growing up":

Res So let's see. If I said what are the signs of growing up, what am I supposed to write? Likes violence?

? Likes fake violence-

? -all the special effects, uhuh-

? I like violence as long as it doesn't happen to me, and that's... that's how you can tell.

? Yeah.

(INTERRUPTION FROM INTERCOM)

(D#1 /39)

Two themes began to emerge from these early discussions that were to become more prominent as the interviews proceeded. First it was very important to the girls to *actively* display their transition from being a "kid" to being more "grown up." According to the girls, growing up didn't just happen; it was in part something they accomplished by avoiding certain activities and products in favour of others. Second, as the example of violence in television and movies suggests, one tried and true way to demonstrate this was to challenge expectations as to what children should or *should not* do. That is to say, if parents spent time trying to direct their daughters' media consumption away from violent content, then movies and television shows with violence in them were now going to be construed as "not a kid's movie" and of particular interest. As 10- and 11-year-olds, these girls were already acutely aware of transgressing parental expectations.

Creating an Identity: No More Sugar and Spice

One of the prime means through which the girls sought to differentiate themselves from younger children was manner of dress. All the groups were anxious to mention that they now spent time thinking about fashions and experimenting with make-up. They didn't want to be seen as

wearing "little kids" clothes--which they described as consisting of pink outfits and ensembles featuring prominent displays of cute animals. They felt that such clothes were too childish for them. Instead, throughout their discussions, they consistently answered questions such as "What are the signs of growing up?" and "What's different about you now than before?" with reference to the importance of dressing *fashionably*:

Ann I like fashions and I like to dress wacky and stuff like... and like disco stuff... and like bell bottoms... like the 60s and like 70s are like... back. Clothes and stuff , you know...

(B#1/4)

Underlying this newfound fashion consciousness was an emergent awareness of the idea that what they wore was a statement about who they were or at least who they thought they should present themselves as. As Sara, from Group E, who was in Grade Six at the time of these interviews, put it, when she was younger (in this case only one year younger!) she still thought that "clothes were made to *wear* and not to match." As a more mature Grade Six student, she now felt that what clothes looked like to others was the priority:

Jo When you're in like Grade Two, you could just throw anything on. Any clothes on. But now you have to match. And your hair has to be perfect.

Sara Yeah. Like sometimes I still don't match. But like in Grade Five. Like I had this little, um... theory that clothes were made to *wear* and not to match. But...

XXX GG

(E#1/13)

Sara continued on trying to account for this change in her approach to clothing:

Sara But now I think differently... I guess I really think that... I don't know why... (gg) um...

(E#1/13)

When she failed to offer a satisfactory account, Nora picked up the thread of conversation, explaining that it is important not only to keep up with fashions but to make sure that one clearly *displays* this knowledge:

Nora And then, like now... you're like watching like the fashions 'n stuff. You know what's in and what's out to wear 'n stuff. And so, you like.. so you know... so you like... want to but like stuff that's in and not just like.. like bright... pink shirt like that a really big lion (ggg) shirt with like a.... cat on it (ggg) or something.

(E#1 /13)

Just how conscious a move it was on the girls' part to present themselves as no longer children was brought home in later sessions as they were looking through material for collages. It was precisely the photos and advertisements featuring pets and animals that consistently attracted their attention and drew the loudest and most uninhibited exclamations of pleasure and approval. Yet when asked to describe how they wanted to present themselves, they carefully described avoiding these same symbols.

Maintaining Boundaries

Participants' job of distinguishing themselves from younger childhood was, of course, made more challenging by the fact that they were just barely into what is commonly referred to as "middle childhood." It seemed crucial to the girls to distance themselves from younger children by demonstrating that they knew what was in fashion or "cool." In fact, the girls not only made a point of distinguishing themselves from younger girls and, for that matter, their younger selves. They also sought to avoid any contamination, as it were, from contemporaries who weren't as adept at conclusively demonstrating these distinctions.

In the following excerpt from Group B, Session One, Ann, Tina, Jill and Erin discuss fashion and make-up in response to the question "What are

you interested in now that you weren't interested in before?" Note how Ann makes a point of explicitly distancing herself (see italicized dialogue below) from some members of Group B she felt weren't as "cool" as the rest of the group:

Res Then let me ask what you are interested in now
 Tina Oh makeup. I like to put on make-up.
 Ann Make-up rocks!
 ? Yeah!
 XXX XXX
 ? Make-up's cool-
 Ann -and magazines...
 Jill Yeah.
 Ann I think everyone, *except for these two*, are into shoes.
 Erin Yeah. Shoes and clothes, man.
 ? Shoes and clothes...
 ? Yeah, I love shoes...
 (B#1/3-4)

It is possible to observe a similar process at work in the earlier discussions of music and play activities. Any reference to toys or clothing they might construe as childish came under immediate censure. In the earlier excerpt from Group C's discussion of Barbies, Nola at first seemed to challenge the description of Barbie as boring ("Why do you call 'em boring?"), but in fact ended up arguing that if Barbies were so inappropriate an activity, they didn't merit any attention whatsoever ("Why do you even play with them?"). Similarly Kay precedes her admission of watching *Barney* with the disclaimer that she watched it only because she was "forced" to do so by her little sister.

Consumption and Identity

Overall, the descriptions offered by these 10- and 11-year-old girls of the distinction between themselves and younger children did not depend on

actual *change* in activity. With the exception of one passing reference to later curfews and increased privileges, there was no talk of increased responsibility at home or school, different family roles or any other qualitative change in the patterns of their lives. The girls still talked about playing with toys, but the toys had changed; they claimed that nanopets, gigapets and computers now substituted for Barbies and Pony dolls. They talked of watching television and movies and listening to music. However they were careful to point out that they were watching different movies and listening to different music.

These descriptions of "growing up" hinge on a conscious and demonstrable change in consumption patterns which necessitated familiarity with and access to a wide range of consumer goods. Writers such as Bocock, Featherstone and Kellner have noted this late twentieth century conflagration of consumption and identity (Bocock, 1993; Featherstone, 1991; Kellner, 1992). Whereas previously one's identity may have been closely linked to what one *did*, today identity appears to be intricately entwined with patterns of consumption (Bocock, 1993).

The conflation of consumption and identity construction was most transparent in the girls' talk surrounding company logos and branding. In the following excerpt I tried to clarify the relative importance of identifying logos and "branding" to the establishment of certain items as fashionable or "cool":

- Res When I asked what was in, and Jo said Nike,
Adidas and Levis... Are you talking about styles of
clothes, or clothes that actually have these names
on them?
- Jo A lot of boys in the classroom wear Nike...
- Barb Levi's jeans...
- ? Yeah!

Jo It's a little checkmark (g)
(E#1/22-23)

I probed further, restating the question in the hopes of having Jo clarify whether it was the style of the clothes or the identifying logo itself that made these items desirable. Jo did not directly address the question; she merely reiterated the importance of displaying this "right" logo:

Res If you see shoes, runners or jeans that are that style... but don't have the Nikes on them... Are they less fashionable?

Jo Nikes have the checkmark...
(E#1/22-23)

A similar question arose in Group B as the girls were assembling their collage. As they sorted through their magazine clippings and drawings, they debated what should be assigned to the "fashion" portion of the collage. Having already decided that shoes fell under the category of fashion, they were asked whether the Nike runners were to be included in the fashion section.

Erin Well, the make-up sort of goes with the fashion. And the shoes sort of go with the fashion. So it sort of like goes together.

Res But are these (*indicating shoes*) sort of like fashion?

Ann Yeah.

? Nike! They're Nike.

Res They're runners, yeah...

? Cool... They're pretty heavy duty runners, right?

? Yeah!

Ann They're fashionable.

(B#2/13)

This group was also asked whether the fact that the shoes were fashionable depended on the display of the Nike logo. Though two members agreed that they would be fashionable anyway, the group eventually decided that shoes displaying the logo should fall under the collage category "fashion" rather than "sports" or "activities."

Res What if they didn't have Nike on them... Would they still be fashionable, you think?

? Yeah-

? -probably-

Ann So maybe not.

Erin Well, it depends. They're really nice though...

(B#2/13)

As the following discussion about the relative merits of Adidas as opposed to Nike clothing demonstrates, the girls sometimes made do with a verbally negotiated acknowledgement of what was cool. Here Erin begins by asking the group to look out for pictures of Nike shoes to be included on the collage:

Erin You guys, if you see any Nike shoes... I probably would like them. Because I just like Nike shoes. I just like 'em. I think Nikes are the best.

XXX XXX

Erin Who likes Adidas-

Ann -I do-

Erin -more than Nikes?

Ann I love them.

Erin What?

Ann I like all Adidas clothes.

Erin But, do you still like Nike more?

Ann *(laughs)* Yeah...

Erin So... it doesn't matter if you have Adidas clothes... you still like Nike more!

Ann Yeah.

(B#2/3)

The last word on the close link between girls' emergent sense of identity and the salience of "branding" will be given to Ann in Group B. While assembling the collage, Ann noticed someone had included a picture of a *Caravan* van in the collage. Upset, she challenged members of the group to account for its inclusion:

Ann Why is there a car? Who cut out the car?

? XXX

Ann Why did you put a car in there?

Erin 'Cause cars are part of our life.

Ann Not those kinds of cars!

(B#2/8)

The group erupted in animated discussion. When Ann was asked to explain what's "wrong" with using the image of the van, she offered the following explanation:

XXX XXX

Res What's wrong with the car?

Ann It's ugly.

Jill It's ugly.

Ann You don't dream about Caravans. You dream about... like (ggg) Porsches.

(B#2/8)

Growing Up: Talk About Boys

Talk about interest in boys was an omnipresent theme in all groups. In fact, when asked what they were interested in now that they hadn't been previously, all groups responded "boys." As Nora in Group E put it, "It's embarrassing, but you start to like boys" (E#1/5). The following excerpt, accompanied by cascades of giggles, is characteristic of such discussion—particularly the first time that the subject of boys was brought up in a group's discussions:

Res What are you interested in now that you weren't interested in...

? Oh,-

? -um,-

? -computers-

Jan -boys... -

Jan I'm interested in boys! ggg

XXX GGGGGGG

(C#1/13)

These comments triggered a meandering discussion about the specific items the girls in Group C were interested in—what computers and toys they liked to play with etc. When asked specifically how their interests had

changed from when they were younger, conversation immediately returned to the questions of boys:

Dee When I was younger I hated boys.
 Res You hated boys when you were younger?
 Dee Um.
 Res How has that changed?
 ? It happens.
 XXX GGG
 Res Do you feel differently now?
 Dee Um yeah
 Res Yeah, how?
 Dee Uh...
 Kyla Boys were (...) boys were annoying when they were little and now they're cute.
 XXX GGG
 XXX XXX
 (C#1/13)

Some girls made an implicit link between their recent interest in appearance and self-presentation and their newfound interest in boys:

Res So what are you interested in now that you weren't interested in before?
 ? Uh... boys!
 XXX GGG
 Nora Um, make up-
 ? -clothes-
 Nora -'n stuff.
 ? yeah.
 Nora Just to make yourself look good.
 (E#1/26)

A few minutes later Nora makes the connection more explicitly:

Res Let's get back to what Nora was saying. Make-up. Make-up is for-
 Sue -cool people (g)!
 Res -for cool people and Nora said it was to make yourself look good-
 Nora -for like boys or for like-
 Barb -your appearance.
 (E#1/28)

Boys are Rude

There was one aspect of boys' behaviour or public presentation that the girls found particularly intriguing. Although they described a general and growing interest in boys, they returned again and again to the topic of boys' "rudeness." They seemed to both revile and admire boys for their rude behaviour. In the following sequence of excerpts, the girls in Group C invoke the concept of rudeness as they discuss, with much irreverent laughter, what makes a boy "cute":

- Res Can I ask you what makes a boy cute?
 Kyla Their personality
 ? Yeah!
 XXX XXX
 Res ... if they're cute, what makes them cute. Someone said their face
 and then after someone said no their personality...
 XXX XXX
 Kay Their hair!
 XXX GGG
 ? Their nose!
 XXX GGG
 Kyla Their butt!
 XXX GGGGGGG
 (C#1/15)

When I redirected the conversation to their first claim that it was "personality" that made a boy "cute," the group offered the seemingly contradictory explanation that being "rude" or "annoying" actually contributed to a boy's being considered "cute":

- Res Can I ask you about personality When you say personality...
 ? All rude...
 ? -my brother's nice...
 Res Is rude part of a personality that's cute?
 XXX XXX
 Kyla They're all annoying
 (C#1/15)

Surprisingly, participants in Group C claimed they could tell that a boy liked them by his "rude" behaviour! However, they also claimed that they could tell that a boy *didn't* like them by virtue of a display of this very same "rude" behaviour

- ? Some boys, like, if they push someone down by accident, they'll, like go back and say they're sorry 'n all that..
 Kyla Yeah right...
 XXX GGG
 XXX XXX
 Res So like you mean they're a little more considerate...
 XXX GGG
 Res What else? Personality...
 Jan They're RUDE!
 XXX XXX
 (C #1/15)

The girls' tentative admiration for boys' rude behaviour fits nicely with their earlier avowal that the movies and television shows they were now interested in all featured violence. Interest in both rudeness and media violence suggests a conscious shift away from compliance with parents to behaviours they see as challenging parental expectations and approval. It is also interesting to note their shift away from the traditionally "feminine" stance, epitomized by pink outfits and traditional girls' toys such as Barbie dolls, to a more "masculine" stance as suggested by their stated preference for black clothing featuring sports brand names, violence and "rude" behaviour.

Growing Up: What Makes Someone a Teenager?

A number of the themes that emerged in participants' talk about boys also coalesced in the girls' discussions of teenagers. In some ways it seemed easier for them to reflect on the prominent themes of growing up when they were asked to talk about teenagers and growing up, rather than when they were asked to reflect on their *own* process of growing up. In answer to

questions about how they recognized someone as being a teenager, they made frequent reference to clothes, make-up, and defiant behavior and "attitude":

- Res How do you recognize someone as being a teenager?
 ? Well, they're grown up. They're ... they're taller, right.
 Res They're taller...
 ? Not necessarily...
 ? Oh ... yeah ... Well I know some short teenagers...
 ? There's some short teenagers
 Res Well, aside from that they might look bigger-
 ? Sometimes, like ...
 ? They wear weird clothes.
 Res Weird clothes ...-
 ? -act... dress-
 ? -the way they dress-
 ? -their attitude towards things-
 ? -their make-up-
 Res Their make-up ... so-
 ? Yeah, girls they wear like ... lots ...
 ? Heavy make up. They wear like dark, dark, eye stuff and like really, really-
 ? -looks like they're dead-
 ? -Yeah and really, really dark lipstick.
 ? It's disgusting.
 (D#2 /13)

In fact, "rudeness" was talked about as an important distinguishing feature of teens; teenagers, it would appear, took up where the "rude" boys of elementary school left off:

- Res What else is different about you now that you're growing up a little?
 SILENCE
 ? You're smarter.
 SILENCE
 ? My sister's more rude. She's twelve. ... She's becoming ruder 'cause she's beginning to be a teenager.
 Dee My brother's becoming RU-U-DE!
 Res Yeah? How old is he?
 Dee He's fourteen. And he acts different. His friend acts weird.
 Res His friends act weird?
 Dee I know that. He even told me (ggg).
 (C#2/4-5)

Though the girls claimed that teenagers' "rudeness" extended beyond the family to all those around them, they singled out the family as bearing the brunt of this newfound "attitude":

Lori I have an older brother.

Res How old?

Lori He's in Grade Eight and he's going to be 14 in a few months.

Lori Uh huh. Well he hasn't' really changed since he went to junior high, he's still sort of like brotherly mean to me, but it's sort of like normal meanness - like you sort of expect it. But he's nice to me a lot of the time. But like one thing I notice he's changed though is like when he's around his friends, he'll like act like he hates me and everything when he's around his friends. And then his friends will start like making fun of me...

(D#1/14)

The girls already foresaw that the display of rude behaviour, particularly rude behaviour towards parents, would form part of the expected transition to adolescence. Whereas parents and educators commonly attribute early adolescent outbursts of anger and truculent behaviour to hormonal changes, these girls saw such behaviour as a virtual rite of passage. In the following excerpt, hoping to encourage the girls to address what they saw as the physical changes associated with growing up, I asked, "What makes someone a teenager?" and was surprised to receive the following response:

Jo Oh, I know. There's um,... You go through stages in the life..... And if you're a good (*inaudible* - ["teenager"]?) You have to go through... you have to hate your parents...ggg...

(E#2/S1)

During the course of these conversations, participants consistently discussed growing up in *social* rather than physical terms. Even in answer to questions about the "signs of growing up," the girls responded, much as they had in discussions about their own growing up, with animated discussion

about teenage *behaviour* and *self-presentation*. As one girl put it, "attitude and behaviour" are the important signs of growing up.

The Absent Body

When considering these girls' conversations about growing up, we might well ask where is discourse about the body? Where is talk about the physical changes of puberty? Is there any acknowledgement of the medicalized discourse of puberty that figures so prominently in contemporary adult discourse?

The girls made few if any references to bodily changes. When comments about the maturing body did crop up in discussions about teenagers, they were frequently interspersed with comments on teenagers' behaviour and self-presentation, and drew little reaction from fellow participants:

Res What makes someone a teenager?
 ? Make-up-
 ? -big shoes-
 -busts-
 ? -tight leather jackets-
 (C#1/S2/475)

Talk About the Body

The girls' conversation took a decidedly different turn when, in answer to probes about the physical signs of growing up, participants were encouraged to focus discussion on growing up exclusively in terms of physical signs. In contrast to the previous excerpts, where talk about self-presentation and body characteristics were integrated into ongoing conversation, exclusive talk about the body at first appears to present a serious challenge to conversation. In the following excerpt, two participants spontaneously respond to a question asking about the "signs of growing up"

with references to bodily changes, and find their approach censored by the other group members. A third participant tries to limit discussion, while a fourth chooses to redirect conversation to the less highly charged topic of popular music:

Res What are signs of growing up?
 Jill Zits!
 Tina -Boobies!
 XXX GGG
 Ann Let's skip all the gory details!
 Erin -we like to listen to music!
 (B#1/10)

A few moments later, following further discussion about what kind of music they like to listen to, Jill interrupts and the following exchange ensues:

Jill Take those things off.
 Res Why?
 Jill 'Cause they're stupid.
 Res What things?
 Ann She said boobies.
 Jill They're stupid-
 Tina -grotty!
 (B#1/12)

At first reading, this excerpt might suggest that participants were uncomfortable with talk of the body. They attempted to avoid any permanent record of their having introduced what a classmate refers to as "gory details" ("boobies" and "zits") into their conversation about growing up. However this may be too simplistic an interpretation. As previous excerpts demonstrate, conversations did take place that successfully integrated passing reference to bodily changes into discussions of teenagers and growing up. In fact, at various points in their sessions, four of the five groups did discuss bodily matters in highly concrete terms. Topics ranged from practical issues, such as when and how leg hair should be removed, to more abstract

speculation about how informed their mothers and grandmothers had been about menstruation prior to getting their periods. One group even went so far as to repeatedly ask questions about mucous stains on their underwear,—questions that I deemed would be interpreted by the parents and the school as beyond the scope of the project's ethics clearance and that I therefore left unanswered.

Talk about Puberty

Body-related topics, despite the attendant giggling, teasing and hushed sidebar conversations, were persistently broached and pursued in discussion. It was talk of "puberty" however that usually resulted in protracted silence:

Res What are some of the signs of growing up?

? Puberty...

? Periods...

(SILENCE)

(C#1/S2 /370)

Even when the girls themselves introduced the topic, it was talk about puberty that consistently faltered:

Res What are the signs of growing up?

? Puberty-

Res Tell me about puberty...

Pat Do we have to?

Res Well, I just want to know in general, what people tell you about puberty...

(SILENCE)

(A #3/880)

Participants did demonstrate a familiarity with widely held popular beliefs about puberty such as those exemplified in the above *Globe and Mail* article. They made a point of informing me that they had come across such information in the human sexuality school classes that they consistently described as awkward and boring. However they either failed or refused to

make these ways of talking about growing up meaningful and useful in their own talk.

In the following excerpt from Group C, Session Three, Kyla successfully demonstrates both her familiarity with and resistance to these discourses of puberty by a deft reinterpretation of my questions. She is eventually saved from any serious engagement with this way of talking about growing up by the intercession of the omnipresent intercom announcement that effectively brings the conversation to a close:

Res In human sexuality class, what do they say causes all these changes of growing up? How do they explain it?

(SILENCE)

Res What do you remember?

XXX GGG

Kyla My brain doesn't work that well....

(INTERRUPTION BY INTERCOM ANNOUNCEMENT)

Res What do they tell you in human sexuality classes about what causes changes? How is it explained to you?

(SILENCE)

Kyla It's explained by movies.

Res By movies... and what do the movies say about why people's bodies change?

(SILENCE)

XXX GGG

Kyla All I know is that they're hormones.....

(INTERRUPTION BY INTERCOM ANNOUNCEMENT)

(C#2/3)

In the following excerpt, Group E struggles to integrate their way of talking about growing up, one that holds displays of suitable attitude and behaviour as of primary importance, with the more common "adult" version available in magazines and self-help literature that posits hormones as driving both physical and social development. Jo's lack of facility with the discourse is patently obvious and two other group members try to enlighten her as she attempts to describes what accounts for pubertal change in girls:

Res What makes these changes happen?

Jo It's something in your body.

Sara Hormones.

Jo No! GUYS get hormones.....

SILENCE

Sara No they... don't.

XXX GGG

Jo Yes they do.

Sara Not only guys...

Jo Yes only!

Sara No.

Nora My cousin, um, he lives in Red Deer and the last time I saw him his voice hadn't changed and he was still like... funny and he picked me up and throwed me around and stuff. And then the next time I saw him 'cause I don't get to see him much, he was like totally different and his voice changed and he acted differently.

(E#3/11)

Note how the disagreement between the two girls about precisely how and what hormones do is resolved by an appeal to *behaviour*. The last speaker strategically describes how the cousin not only looked different but *acted* differently—a true indicator that he was now, indeed, "growing up."

When the girls do invoke more "adult" ways of framing talk of growing up, their talk is frequently contradictory. For instance, as previously noted, girls often associate interest in boys, which they claim occurs in grade four if not earlier, with puberty and growing up. At other points in the conversations, they consistently link mention of puberty to periods. Taking into consideration that only 50% of twelve-year-old Canadian girls have had their periods, it is unlikely that the majority of these ten- to twelve-year-old girls, had, according to this definition, started "puberty" (Doan & Morse, 1985). Yet, in the following excerpt, they not only deny a link between interest in boys and puberty, but also, by claiming that puberty "starts around grade four..." they also deny a link between menstruation and puberty:

Res When did you start liking boys ?
 Sara A long time ago
 Nora Like grade four....
 Res Is that when puberty starts?
 XXX XXX
 ? No-
 ? -not for me
 ? -not for a long time yet.
 ? I started liking boys when I was in grade two.
 ? Yeah, I was in grade two.
 ? I think puberty starts around grade four...
 ? Not for me!
 ? ...Like you like boys....
 (E#3/7)

The contradictions in their talk belie the multiple interpretations of growing up inherent in the various discourses and bear witness to the difficulties the girls face when they try to integrate them into a seamless account of growing up.

DISCUSSION

Popular discourse in the media and self-help literature unproblematically subsumes the social and behavioral changes of growing up under the more pressing rubric that biological change drives puberty. By contrast, girls' talk privileges attitude, behaviour and self-presentation, that is to say the social signs of growing up, over any reference to the medical or physiological body. Whereas popular adult discourse on puberty situates the locus of control for this transformation within the individual body in the unseen work of hormones, girls' talk emphasizes their own active role in negotiating an appropriate display of maturity.

In their talk, girls also demonstrate not so much an awkwardness with reference to the body *per se*, as much as a resistance to framing talk about the body within the parameters of popular discourse on puberty commonly

invoked by parents and educators. Whenever possible, they avoid talking about the body in terms of puberty and hormones. However they are willing, albeit with some discomfort, to pursue discussion on subjects generally taken to be more discomfiting such as hair, blood and mucous.

The insights of Lynda Madaras, a well-known author of books on pubertal changes for preteens and their parents may help make sense of this apparent contradiction. She laments the fact that despite children's need for reassuring *puberty* education focused on the physical and emotional changes of puberty, what parents and schools usually offer is sex education which "focus[es] more on intercourse, contraception, the dangers of AIDS, and rules for sexual conduct" (Madaras, 1988, p. xxiv). As Madaras points out, this "push for more extensive and earlier sex education is more a reflection of adult anxieties about AIDS and adolescent sexual activity than it is a true concern with and understanding of the needs of children" (1988, p. xxiv).

The *Globe and Mail* article cited above seems to confirm Madaras' exact point. It moves on from a discussion of the "perpetrator of puberty" to an account of the experimental results of what happens when leptin, the protein in question, is injected into rodents. The following description might trigger anxiety in any parent:

Their ovaries and uteri grew larger; their reproductive tracts opened; their levels of sex hormones soared; and, most persuasively, they began copulating and bearing young at an earlier age... (Angier, *Globe and Mail*, 1997)

If Madaras is correct, then in family life and human sexuality classes girls are exposed to discourses on puberty whose manifest agenda may be puberty education, but whose latent agenda is control of sexuality. Re-examined in this light, girls' pattern of talk becomes clearer. Their resistance

to talk about puberty may indicate a discomfort with framing talk about their bodies in terms of a discourse that sexualizes their bodies and then seeks to control this newfound sexuality.

This chapter began by asking which of the themes that have pervaded representations of female growing up these 10- and 11-year-old girls on the brink of adolescence use in their talk, how these discourses are invoked, and what that might tell us about some of the difficulties girls apparently experience at this juncture in their lives. A partial response is now possible. These girls resist contemporary popular discourse which accounts for the behavioural, social and developmental changes of early adolescence by deferring to medicalized explanations of puberty. They do so despite the fact that these explanations are in the main sanctioned and supported by parents, teachers and indeed the provincial curriculum. On the other hand, they are much more adept at, and comfortable, with framing growing up as an active process in which they have an important role to play. They see it as important to position themselves as grown up, or no longer "kids" through the consumption of fashionable products, as well as the display of defiant attitude and behaviour directed, in particular, at their own family. Their talk suggests that violating or transgressing parental expectations of early childhood such as "cute" outfits and non-violent movies and toys is central to positioning themselves as more grown up.

This begins to answer questions about which representations of growing up are or are not invoked by the girls. It does little, however, to suggest an answer to what is so problematic for them. The next chapter seeks to explore in greater detail the more gendered aspects of self-presentation associated with growing up that figured prominently in the girls' talk.

CHAPTER FIVE

REVEALING CONTRADICTIONS:
GIRLS TALK ABOUT CLOTHING STYLES AND
GROWING UP

Barb Well, I've been seeing these sort of styles... these girls. And they go around wearing these extremely high shoes and like they're wearing these tight little... Well I've actually seen somebody wearing a bikini top. I think it's really stupid.

Res How do you feel when you see it?

Barb Well I feel like I'm watching a movie of tiny adults.

Group E, Session One

INTRODUCTION

Grades Five and Six girls use self-presentation to signal their distance from early childhood and proximity to teenhood in a number of ways. Some have already been mentioned: for instance, they distance themselves from the traditional femininity of early childhood by studiously avoiding pink clothes and gravitating to clothing marked by traditionally "masculine" features such as dark colours and sports logos. They also look forward, with both disapproval and fascination, to the more "transgressive" aspects of adolescent self-presentation.

Many of these changes in self-presentation are part of the male as well as female experience of moving toward early adolescence. However, for girls, there is another way to signal their arrival at this new stage of development: the display of their bodies through the wearing of tight-fitting or revealing clothes. When participants were asked how they recognized someone female

as being a teenager, the wearing of such clothing was the most frequently cited response.

While the subject of tight-fitting and revealing clothes may at first glance appear mundane, it is relevant to this study for a number of reasons. First, previous review of popular literature over the past century has already revealed a pervasive theme concerning adolescent girls and how much of their figure should be revealed by fashion styles. Second, because the topic is a distinctly gendered phenomenon, it offers the possibility of providing insight into girls' unique experiences surrounding growing up. Third, *any* topic that generates the intense interest, controversy and debate among participants that this one did merits further investigation. Furthermore, the exploration of this theme was made even more intriguing by the fact that the themes and expectations that informed parents' and educators' talk of growing up did not play a substantial role in the girls' talk of growing up. Girls were clearly thinking of growing up differently from how their parents and teachers were; therefore any of the ways in which the girls discussed growing up merited investigation.

ANALYSIS

The topic of at what age and under what circumstances participants deemed it appropriate to wear tight-fitting clothes was the most intensely contested topic of discussion among participants. It was also a topic upon which groups, and at times even individual participants, regularly contradicted themselves between and even within sessions. The following excerpts provide only a small sample of the dizzying array of responses offered by participants on this topic.

In the following excerpt from Group B's third session, Erin boasts about how "grown-up" she is. She does so by pointing out that she is allowed to wear make-up and "do" anything she wants. But when Rona, another group member claims the same privilege for herself, Erin goes one step further and claims that she can wear "belly" tops that reveal her midriff:

Erin I'm allowed to wear make-up. I'm allowed to wear [?]. I'm allowed to do anything.

Rona I'm allowed to wear make-up and stuff like that.

? Me too.

Erin Well I'm allowed... I can like wear tops that go up to here...

Res Belly tops or even shorter than belly tops?

Erin Like hat tops...

(B#3/5-6)

A few moments later Erin abruptly retracts her claim that she can dress entirely as she likes. Instead, she specifically identifies "skimpy stuff," that is to say short or revealing clothing, as a boundary which she won't cross between herself and older girls who are teenagers:

Res I know you feel really like you're not little kids anymore-

Erin We're not!

Res At the same time you pretty well, you all agree about certain things you wouldn't wear or ways you wouldn't want to dress-

Erin -I wouldn't want to dress in skimpy stuff !-

XXX XXX

(B#3/12)

To confuse the matter yet again, Erin insists a few moments later that she does indeed wear short "bikini" tops, that is to say tops that reveal her navel. However, she now qualifies this statement by pointing out that she does so only under specific circumstances. In the following excerpt she claims that she wears such clothes under her overalls and preferably in warm weather:

Dana That was like a bikini top

Ann Yeah. A bikini top.

Tina Maybe if you wore it in summer...

Erin I go around right now wearing my bikini top... but with my overalls 'n stuff like that. But I wouldn't do that in the middle of a winter-

Tina -me neither-

Erin -because that would be too bare.

(B#3/14).

Despite the fact that participants identified tight-fitting clothes as an important marker of growing up, they were remarkably inconsistent in their responses to any question about when tight-fitting or, in their words, "skimpy" clothes were appropriate. These contradictions made it difficult, on first reading, to understand what the girls were getting at.

The Parable of JonBenet Ramsay

In order to try to make sense of such a dizzying array of responses, it is helpful to turn to a related topic of conversation where participants could more freely articulate some of the assumptions underpinning these contradictory statements. One such topic arose spontaneously in all the groups: JonBenet Ramsay. JonBenet Ramsay was a six-year-old model who had been murdered less than a year before these interviews took place. The girls' talk about JonBenet Ramsay was impassioned, outspoken and surprisingly unanimous. The subject never failed to arouse their interest and outrage. When the collages the groups constructed were shown to other groups in the study, the image of JonBenet Ramsay always elicited an immediate response.

While it had been difficult, if not impossible for the girls to agree on at what age and under what circumstances they themselves could or could not wear "belly shirts" and use make-up, they all vehemently drew a line in the sand about how clearly wrong it was that JonBenet Ramsay, a six year-old, dressed in such a fashion. It might be helpful to take a moment to

contextualize their discussions by summarizing the kind of media coverage that was going on as these interviews took place.

Background

Only six years old at the time of her murder on Christmas Eve, 1996, JonBenet Ramsay had been modelling since the age of two. A veteran of the American child beauty pageant circuit, she was well-known in the media. At the time that these group interviews took place, the murder remained unsolved and continued to be the subject of unrelenting media coverage, prominently focussed on the implied guilt of family members, particularly her mother.

The media coverage took full advantage of the many available images of JonBenet Ramsay as a model. In fact, although media coverage had peaked in February, the summer periodicals and talk shows continued to feature the story extensively. It was common to see photographic images of JonBenet Ramsay splashed across the front of supermarket tabloids. These images showed JonBenet heavily adorned with make-up and holding modelling poses characteristic of the fashion runway.

JonBenet Ramsay: A Line in the Sand

JonBenet Ramsay's death horrified and intrigued the girls, but it was her life--the beauty pageants, and her career as a child model--that dominated their talk. They were particularly preoccupied with how much make-up she wore, whether that was "appropriate" as well as what kind of clothes she wore and whether they were too "skimpy." In short, JonBenet Ramsay's style of dress was subject to extensive examination and, ultimately, censure and criticism by the participants. After the drawn-out debates and lack of consensus surrounding the question of when participants deemed it

acceptable for themselves to wear make-up and short and revealing clothes, JonBenet Ramsay's manner of dressing and overall presentation style provided a line in the sand, a boundary upon which all could agree without dissenting voices or argued exceptions. They disapproved of JonBenet Ramsay's clothes, comportment and self-presentation, and this disapproval was noteworthy for its unanimity and lack of ambiguity.

The girls' critique of JonBenet Ramsay always began with the argument that she was "too young" to be wearing the kind of clothes that she did; participants argued that her style of presentation was more appropriate for teenagers or adult women than young girls. However, their talk was frustrating, in that it rarely offered insight into *why* they considered JonBenet Ramsay's style of presentation deviant, and under what specific circumstances such a style of presentation would be considered "OK."

The following excerpt, characteristic of much of the discussion about JonBenet Ramsay, offers evidence of the girls' inability to define what it is that strikes them as so "wrong" about JonBenet Ramsay's self-presentation. As this excerpt demonstrates, it is as if they lack the vocabulary with which to articulate their concerns:

Barb She looks pretty.... uh... ggg-

Nora And 'cause she's six years old and she's a model that goes around in these little-

Barb -and she got murdered!.

Sara She looks like she's twenty-three or something.

Nora She's wearing like all that make-up . Like I saw this show about her and they showed her when she was... and she was like... singing 'n stuff and she was wearing all this... like stuff that if you're a model seems to me you should be old enough...

(E#2/4)

By characterizing the way JonBenet Ramsay dressed as making her look like she's "twenty-three or something," Sara makes the claim that JonBenet

Ramsay's comportment and presentation were deviant; they were out of step—asynchronous with her biological age. But the girls only offer hints as to what it is that was so wrong. Barb starts by saying, "she [JonBenet Ramsay] looks pretty... uh..." but trails off into a giggle. Nora jumps in and makes reference to JonBenet Ramsay being a model; however her talk fades away after alluding to what the listener has to infer to be the short or revealing features of JonBenet Ramsay's clothes ("...she's a model that goes around in these little..."). Eventually Nora's talk trails off, leaving her thought unspoken. A few minutes later Nora tries once more to articulate her concerns: she cites JonBenet Ramsay's use of too much make-up as an example of what's "wrong" with how JonBenet Ramsay dresses. However, once again, she begins to falter. As she continues she pauses and stumbles with increasing frequency and eventually resorts to the use of ever vaguer terms (e.g. "all this.... stuff"). She makes an incomplete allusion to JonBenet Ramsay being a model ("if you're a model...you should be old enough") but then retreats back to the original claim that someone "should be old enough" to wear that "kind of stuff." Nowhere does she actually say what she finds problematic.

In Group B, Ann launches a similar but more vehement attack on JonBenet Ramsay's behaviour and comportment. She begins with the adamant claim that what JonBenet Ramsay both "wore" and "did" was "gross," and her talk holds the promise of elucidating just why this strikes her as being so. However Ann, much as Nora did in Group E, too starts to hesitate and stumble as she attempts to describe exactly what it is that bothers her about JonBenet Ramsay's self-presentation:

Ann Well I think that like... I think that what she wore like and what she did... I think that was just... GROSS. [] They like showed some of the videos and stuff... and some of the things that she was wearing was... like Baywatch. Like you know, like... (ggg)... pin up girls and all that stuff and she was just like... just dancing around and... stuff... the stuff that she did 'n stuff... was just like... really bad. Like a six-year-old doing that kind of stuff, I don't even think that the stuff she was doing would be fit for like (.) a FIFTEEN year-old, let alone a 6 year-old.

(B#3 /6)

Ann's talk fails to reveal what is so "GROSS" about what JonBenet Ramsay both wore and what she did. She does offer an allusion to the television series *Baywatch*, and, with much giggling, "pin-up girls and all that stuff," but from this point on her talk is also full of hesitations, pauses and vague generalities (e.g. "the stuff that she did 'n stuff.... was just like... really {....} bad"). At the end of this excerpt she repeats the now-familiar claim that whatever JonBenet Ramsay was doing wasn't even fit for someone older, "a FIFTEEN year-old." But nowhere is there a clear articulation of what it is that is so problematic. Although both Ann and Nora are outspoken and articulate members of their respective groups, neither are able to articulate their concerns.

What is this Line in the Sand all About?

So the questions still remain: What exactly is it that outrages them? What "kind of stuff" is so "bad," and so "gross"? What boundary do they perceive JonBenet Ramsay as having crossed? What is it that a six-year-old should not be "doing" that a fifteen year-old or a twenty-three-year-old can? Group B's conversation that continued on from the last excerpt is notable, as many of the JonBenet Ramsay conversations were, for its animation and flow. It took on an almost brainstorming-like quality as girls finally leapt into the conversation interrupting each other and finishing off one another's

sentences. This joint conversation generated one of the first explicit clues about what the girls were struggling with. (Note: A brief review of transcription conventions used here may be appropriate at this point. "XXX" in the speaker column indicates a number of people talking simultaneously; "XXX" in the dialogue column indicates that it was impossible to distinguish individual lines of talk; "?" in the speaker column indicates that it is unclear exactly which participant is speaking).

Res What was she [JonBenet Ramsay] doing exactly?
 Ann -...little skimpiest outfit...-
 Res Dressing like what?
 Ann Yeah. Like in little skimpy outfits.
 Dana -lingerie-
 Res But how old would a person be to dress... like... you're talking about?
 ? Twenty?
 Ann Fifteen. No, not fifteen.
 XXX XXX
 ? -thirteen at least.
 Jill Thirteen? No. That's like WAY too early.
 Res Can you find me an example?
 XXX XXX
 Tina Prostitutes. Like they wear REALLY skimpy clothes.
 Erin Prostitutes wear ... things that just basically cover up-
 Jill -yeah-
 Erin -they want to look attractive. So that they can get money.
 Dana Prostitutes.
 (B#3/6-7)

Here in answer to probes about what JonBenet Ramsay was doing, Ann reiterates that JonBenet Ramsay wore the "little skimpiest outfit." Dana tries to explain this further with a reference to lingerie. In answer to the question of how old a person should be to dress in these "little skimpy outfits" participants disagreed vehemently with each other. Debate rages on; participants leap into conversation, interrupting each other to the point that it is impossible to hear any one particular view. Finally, seeking some way to

pursue this question which is evidently of concern to participants while avoiding the apparent impasse of the girls trying to find consensus about *when* it is "OK" to wear this type of clothing, I ask for an example of *who* wears skimpy clothes. Tina and Erin, with the support of Dana and Jill, jump in and link skimpy clothing to what prostitutes wear.

Group B was not the only group to make the connection between skimpy clothing and looking like a prostitute. Group E also used the example of prostitutes to try to explain their discomfort with styles of dressing the group had previously deemed "inappropriate":

- Sara OK... some kids, some teenagers. I guess they kind of... pick out too many inappropriate things... from TV that like... My mum saw this girl and she was like wearing make-up all over her face.. I saw it too. And then she was dressed in a little mini-skirt (gg) just like that big, You could practically see her BUTT! And then she a a tight little T-shirt that said... Um... "Love to hate and hate to love". And um... she was like... I swear she was like only, like only like eight or like seven or eight...
- Res But how do you feel when you see people dressed like that?
- Sara Well I just think they... like... just look like... like... they kinda look really BAD.-
- ? -inappropriate-
- Sara -Like for their age... They look like... hookers.
(E#1/32-33)

Although Sara starts off criticizing "teenagers... [who] pick out too many inappropriate things... from TV...", she quickly reverts to an example of girls of seven and eight years-old dressing in skimpy clothes in which they look "really BAD." Another participant chimes in that they look "inappropriate"- a word frequently used by participants when referring to the use of skimpy clothes or make-up. But Sara goes on to describe them as looking like "hookers" and makes explicit the argument that may have been

underpinning much earlier talk: a sexualized style of self-presentation is premature or developmentally deviant in younger girls.

These excerpts of talk help to illuminate the many inarticulate earlier conversations about JonBenet Ramsay's style of self-presentation. These conversations inevitably had begun with condemnations and expressions of horror, but so often failed to articulate the source of disapproval. In previous conversations, much as Sara did in the above excerpt, participants consistently juxtaposed young girls and styles associated with older teens and women ("make-up," "mini-skirts" and "tight little t-shirts"). Participants drew attention to cultural assumptions about the asexuality of childhood and the presumed sexuality of adolescent women. This juxtaposition served to mutely suggest that a sexualized style of self-presentation among children was deviant.

What the Parable of JonBenet Ramsay Tells Us About How Girls See Growing Up

The above excursus into talk about JonBenet Ramsay offers several important clues about how girls construct growing up. First, they see a more overtly sexualized style of female self-presentation as crucial to presenting oneself as more "grown up." While they expect younger girls, "children," to avoid make-up and revealing clothes, they expect female teenagers to adopt just such a sexualized style of self-presentation. How and when this transformation should take place presents them with challenges. They constantly debated when it does become "appropriate" for teenagers to adopt a more revealing style of dressing. But they were frequently stymied by the ways they themselves talked about sexuality: as prostitution.

A more productive approach was to ask not where participants positioned themselves along the continuum of child-to-adult but *how* they chose to justify their choice. Exploring their use of socio-cultural discourses in determining when and where certain styles of self-presentation are or are not "appropriate" offers insight into how they take up and use these discourses. In the remainder of this chapter I would like to take a step back and look at the various themes that emerged during these conversations.

The Absent Body

As discussed in the previous chapter, one topic of discussion notable yet again by its absence from participants' talk is the physical body. In light of their previously explored views that the biological processes, to which parents and educators attribute so much weight, are of little import, it is not surprising that physical changes, internal or external, are almost never brought into the discussion. However, given that the main topic under perusal in this chapter is participants' talk about the wearing of "revealing" clothes, the absence of any discussion surrounding the body purportedly "revealed" is striking. No allusions were made to any attributes necessary to wearing these styles; nor did any participant make the claim that a mature figure was necessary in order to look good in these revealing clothes. Out of all the participants interviewed, only Erin in Group B made a passing reference to her sister whom she described as having a slimmer figure than herself and "the body to wear all the tight stuff" (B#3/18). Other than this, there was no mention made of the body which tight clothing might reveal.

Instead, participants invoked a number of arbitrary *social* markers to determine whether they deemed the wearing of "skimpy clothes" as "appropriate." These are outlined below.

Private Vs. Public

Girls often struggled with the nature of the setting in which a sexualized style of self-presentation could be worn. One theme that emerged from their talk was the distinction between public and private spaces. Participants thought it crucial that girls in their own transitional stage of development experiment with a more sexualized style of presentation only in a private rather than public setting.

A few examples of how participants talk about this division of public and private may help to clarify this point. In the following excerpt, participants from Group D discuss the use of make-up. While make-up use is one of the features frequently cited as associated with teenhood, the girls claimed an interest in make-up for themselves as well. They describe their enjoyment experimenting with it at "sleepovers" and proudly position images of cosmetic advertisements prominently in their collages. However they are careful to explain that while they consider make-up to be fun and appropriate, it should be worn by those their age in *private*. In the following excerpt, three participants from Group D carefully make the point that at their age, wearing make-up in public, that is to say at school, is not desirable. In fact the excerpt begins with Deb talking about her nine-year-old cousin who wears "lots of make-up." My response, which simply echoes back what Deb said, is taken as a possible critique of the cousin and Deb comes to the defence of her cousin by explaining that she herself wears make-up. However she is also careful to justify her cousin's use of make-up by clarifying that this takes place in the private setting of her home:

- Deb My cousin's only nine and she wears lots of make-up.
 Res She's nine and she wears lots of make-up?

- Deb Well I wear like a little bit...
- ? I'm eleven and I wear make-up for fun.
- ? I wear make-up.
- ? Yeah I wear like lip stuff, that's all, like, just...
- ? Yeah I wear lip gloss.
- Deb I wear this stuff... and I have another, it's sort of like lipstick, but it colours you lips. It's like this tube sort of looks like mascara...
- ? Yeah, I have one of those-
- Deb - it has a little foamy brush on the end and it has stuff and it colours your lips....
- Res So when do you wear that?
- Deb Uh... after school... Sometimes a little bit at school. But not very much.
- (D#2/15)

Nora of Group E addresses the same issue from a different perspective. She describes being uneasy about school friends presenting themselves differently at home, in the private sphere, than at school, in the public sphere:

- Nora feel scared in a way. Because, um, sometimes when it's a weekend and stuff and I see my friends walking around they don't... It's like they're different, they're, in a new world like... They don't dress the same as they would in school and like have make-up on and it kind of makes me scared like...
- (E#1/35)

Note how strongly linked the theme of self-presentation in public is to growing up. As the group begins to extrapolate Nora's concerns into the future, Sara worries that if that particular cohort is wearing make-up and dressing differently at home or on the weekend, this is an indication that they will grow up too fast, thus finding themselves "in trouble."

- Sara Like if they're dressing like this already, like what are they going to be like when they grow up?
- Jo Freaks or something...
- (E#1/36)

The girls' concerns about wearing tighter or revealing clothes in a public setting rather than a private one brings to mind the debates from 1910 onwards about young ladies' clothing styles. At that time, designers and

department store catalogues had begun to introduce clothing for girls "between childhood and young womanhood" which, though modelled on mature women's styles which emphasized the hourglass figure, were not, the public was reassured, form-fitting. These styles were considered appropriate for wear at home or for private parties. However in school settings, which were becoming more common for girls over the age of twelve, girls were expected to wear loose-fitting middy blouses and such. The choice of how to dress was determined not by age or physical maturity but by context, i.e. whether the setting was private or public.

Institutional Settings

Of all the relevant public settings, school is clearly the most crucial for girls this age. Of particular interest is the extent to which participants differentiate between expectations of self-presentation in elementary school and junior high school. In the following excerpt two members of Group B who only moments earlier had decreed that bikini tops were *not* appropriate for girls their age, try to explain why they themselves had indeed worn modified bikini tops to perform in a school talent show the day before.

Res But you were wearing tops yesterday that looked like-

Ann -oh those were our dance things though. I mean...

XXX XXX

Ann Like for our dance like we... we like thought it wasn't like really appropriate for people like our age just to wear half tops even just for the dance. So that's why we wore like longer shirts sort of over them. (.) That went down to here...

Res belly tops 'n stuff... You were saying how you thought at your age that... it would be appropriate to wear something a little longer..

Tina Yeah-

Ann -yeah-

(B#3/5)

However they definitely expect that things will change in junior high. As the conversation continues on, I ask at what age group they thought it might actually be appropriate to wear such clothes in school on a regular basis. Ann offers the following reply, which no one in her group takes issue with:

Res So what age group is it not a question?

Ann I think, I think that like maybe... like from maybe like... Grade Seven and up.

(B#3/5-6)

No one challenges Ann's suggestion that Grade Seven is somehow a boundary, after which they take for granted that girls will use a more sexualized style of presentation—make-up at school, tighter clothes etc. In fact, over and over again, the arbitrary boundary of attendance at a junior high school was cited as a turning point in determining whether a sexualized style of self-presentation was deemed "appropriate":

Res So what happens in Grade Seven?

Nora OK like everybody like wears makeup in Grade Seven ... and everybody's like... [?] And I've heard about people like teasing 'n stuff. And then I hear about people like always like asking them out and like dances 'n stuff.

Res So you hear about dances and teasing and wearing make-up to school....-

Nora -yeah, like... like... dressing like... sort of.... inappropriately
(E#1/31)

It is important to keep in mind just how arbitrary a division the boundary between Grade Six and Grade Seven actually is. Although the majority of schools in the city in which this research took place presently separate elementary school students from junior high school students at Grade Seven, not all do so. Some districts have middle schools which encompass Grades Five to Nine in one setting. Occasionally junior high schools, though deemed separate, actually occupy the same premises that

elementary schools do, and have the same administration, thus creating, in effect, a Grade One to Nine setting. In short, the division of schooling into different institutional settings varies both by location and history. Yet these participants in Grades Five and Six cling to the idea that moving on to junior high school is a crucial turning point in their lives. This harkens back to research cited in the introduction which documents how the grade at which girls moved from elementary school to middle or junior high school had a significant impact on ease of adjustment to menarche and puberty. It serves to remind us that there is always the risk that by unreflectively assuming age to be the critical factor, some research may be confounding biological age with an artifact of institutional settings.

Vulnerability to Peer Pressure

Participants' generally accepted assumption that being in junior high school demands a more sexualized style of public self-presentation is often fraught with worry about peer pressure. Sara in Group E articulates this succinctly:

Sara When you go to junior high you want everybody to like you. So, ... you like you try hard to... like have a little... short skirt, really short dresses 'n like...

(E#3/3)

The theme of peer pressure—doing something in order to be considered "cool"—comes up repeatedly in discussion. Group D's earlier discussion about Deb's nine-year-old cousin who used make-up continued with one of the girls (it is impossible to distinguish who) reflecting not only on how much *more* make-up she expected teens to wear than she wore but *why*. She argues that putting on a lot of make-up is done to please others and that teens are more vulnerable to this type of pressure than she, a pre-teen girl still in

elementary school, would be. Other group members corroborate this as well; the generally held view is that teenagers do these things because they "care." In this case "caring" is not construed necessarily as a "good" thing, but rather a vulnerability to peer pressure:

- ? Yeah, I don't put that much [make-up] on .
 ?'cause I don't care what people think I look like. I don't care.
 Res Hmmm. Do teenagers care?
 ? Yes.
 ? Uh huh!
 ? Yeah!
 (D#2/17)

Girls in Group E in particular seemed to be looking ahead to Grade Seven with a fair bit of trepidation. This may have been because interviews with this group took place relatively early in the school year. Many of them were barely adjusted to being in their last year of elementary school; the spectre of Grade Seven and junior high school seemed altogether daunting. They were the group most inclined to bring up fears about moving on to junior high school.

- Res What are you thinking about Grade Seven?
 Sara Well I'm scared because I don't want the older people to make fun of me because I'm the littlest at the school.
 (E#1/4)

Much later in the same session Nora returns to this theme of worrying about being made fun of in junior high. This time, although she starts off seeming to globally address the issue of peer pressure, she explicitly links her worries to pressure to demonstrate a more sexualized style of self-presentation:

- Nora I know what I'm scared about. If people in like Grade Six on the weekends, cause I know at school like, they don't want to be wearing loads of make-up 'n stuff at school but like on weekends when you see them... and they're in Grade Six and that's what

they're like. So if they're like, 'cause in Grade Seven you're in a higher grade... you think like most people think they're like so... cool... And they're in Grade Seven. And so, if they're like this NOW then if they're going to be like that in Grade Seven then... like... I want to be their friends 'n stuff 'n like what are they gonna do? And like, um, I know that like it makes me think that they'll just, there's gonna be like... everybody is gonna be like beating me up 'cause I'm like... different 'n that... sort of...

Res You said that they might be beating you up 'cause you're different when you go to junior high?

Nora Uh huh. Like... I'm not gonna wear like... (.)... a belly top like up to here... and then. Like if that's what they're wearing now... then... like ... they might start picking on me or something.

Res Does anyone else feel like that?

Jo I do.

Res How many? Raise your hands. (.) So , mostly... all of you....
(E#1/35-36)

DISCUSSION

This chapter set out to further explore girls' use of self-presentation to signal their distance from childhood and proximity to being a teen. In light of girls' lack of engagement with popular adult discourses of puberty, it seemed appropriate to investigate ways of talking about growing up that girls themselves privilege. Certainly the topic of tight-fitting and revealing clothes was brought up with a frequency and intensity that suggested it did indeed merit further consideration.

Despite the girls' insistence that wearing tight-fitting and revealing clothes was critical to successful self-presentation as a "teen," they had persistent difficulties articulating when it was "OK" to dress that way. They all agreed that "little" girls shouldn't dress that way while older teens probably would. Negotiating this transition, one which ironically they themselves were about to embark upon, proved problematic.

Sorting through the various issues revealed consistent patterns to participants' talk. The previous chapter showed that participants emphasized the active role they play in presenting themselves as "grown up." Similarly, in their talk about tight clothing, they display their own active role in deciding to present themselves as more grown up.

Much as the body was absent in their generalized discussions of growing up, it is also surprisingly absent from their talk about tight clothing and revealing styles of self-presentation. The "real" body that is revealed by tight-fitting clothes seems to be of little interest to the girls. Rather it is the fact that the clothes *reveal* that participants find of interest. The more they talked about growing up, the more it became apparent that it wasn't only the maturing physical body that was absent in their discussions and which thus failed to provide them with a foundation upon which they could base what they considered appropriate displays of "growing up." There seemed to be little in the way of the concept of a maturing individual upon which they could base appropriate displays of "growing up"; they could not find a continuum of development. They did not talk of age or maturity as markers that would help define when it was appropriate to dress in tight clothing they considered indicative of being more "grown up." Instead they looked to contextual or situational markers in considering the appropriateness of certain behaviours and styles of self-presentation. Choosing to wear make-up and tight clothes was a function of whether the setting was public or private, or the institutional setting was an elementary or junior high school.

Whereas being "rude," watching violent movies and wearing dark clothes all seemed relatively straightforward means of demonstrating "growing up," the wearing of tight clothing was a much more highly charged

act and one the participants did not share with male preadolescents. They repeatedly pointed out how important it was, but they couldn't really say why. Nor could they agree on when it was appropriate to do so. They fretted about what made it "appropriate" or "inappropriate" and when faced with someone who did so "inappropriately," for instance JonBenet Ramsay, they were merciless in their criticism.

It was in their discussions of JonBenet however, that they finally managed to articulate what they found problematic about revealing clothing: they worried that JonBenet Ramsay looked like a "hooker." It is ironic that in the late twentieth century when "human sexuality" classes are offered as part of the school curriculum starting in Grade Four, the discourse that 10-, 11-, and 12- year-old girls turn to first when they want to discuss female sexuality is prostitution. Despite some groups' hesitancy to use words like hooker, or even prostitute, this was, for most of the conversations, the primary metaphor for women and sex. And of course, it did not have positive connotations for the girls. Even on the rare occasion when they alluded to women and sex without invoking the terminology of prostitution, they nonetheless used disapproving language.

Here the girls in Group D are discussing an advertisement for whiskey which they chose not to include in their final collage:

- ? She looks devilish...
- Res She's looking... rather...
- ? -Queasy!
- ? -Devilish!
- ? Wanting to take someone home with her...
- Res Wanting to take someone home with her?...
- ? That's the look that she gives someone when she wants to take them home....

(D#2/31-32)

There can be no doubt that the advertisers are using sexualized imagery in this advertisement. However what is of interest is that the girls' reading of this sexuality is relentlessly negative and this negativity is entirely directed at the model: she's "queasy"; she's "devilish."

There are a number of ways to look at the girls' more general discomfort with their own directive about wearing tight or revealing clothes. First and most obviously, the girls' talk uncannily echoes historical discourses that cast women as either virgin or whore and, at that, necessarily place women on a continuum of sexuality. More specifically, their talk addresses many of the issues surrounding sexuality and self-presentation traced in Chapter One. Perhaps, then, it is their awareness of negative cultural messages that give girls pause in their discussions of sexuality and self-presentation. This certainly fits with the theoretical assumptions derived from Holstein and Gubrium and delineated in the methods chapter that girls, as competent members of our culture, would display in their talk socio-historical themes surrounding the female body (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). Their talk does reveal elements of socio-historical themes about women and the female body.

Does this imply a straightforward correspondence between socio-historical discourse and girls' behaviour, views and opinions? Is it an example of girls' "internalizing" an ideology of female sexuality? Is this in a sense, an example of successful, if possibly negative, socialization?

To try to answer these questions I would like to first return to the initial question this study is trying to address: "What can the way girls talk about growing up tell us about the problems they face as they negotiate the transition to adolescence?" Framed in terms of the specific issues at stake in

this chapter, the question becomes: "What is so problematic for girls about the recognition that growing up means adopting a sexualized style of self-presentation?" For instance, why is this more problematic for them than choosing to be rude to their parents, throw out their Barbie dolls and smoke in public places?

I would like to bracket for the moment the more obvious and already established response that a sexualized style of self-presentation is, for the girls, a more problematic means of demonstrating their being "grown up" than being rude, smoking or so on because of the negative socio-historical attributions about women and sexuality. Instead, I would like to turn to an exploration of *how* girls interpret these cultural messages and representations. I would like to explore, much as Davies does with pre-schoolers and gender, the struggles and costs involved for girls in assuming the role of "grown up" or at least "teenage" female. Perhaps if we understood more of the process whereby they internalize, take up or resist these resources, we might understand even more of what makes them so problematic for girls (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). This will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

WHOSE GAZE IS IT ANYWAYS?

GIRLS TALK ABOUT LEARNING TO BE LOOKED AT

Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object of vision: a sight.

John Berger, Ways of Seeing (p. 47)

INTRODUCTION

I have argued in the previous two chapters that girls envision the process of growing up in a drastically different fashion from the ways their parents and educators do. Not only do the girls not posit internal biological processes as determining puberty and growing up, they make little reference to the body or to bodily changes altogether. Girls focus on the active role that they can play in the creation of an identity as a teen through appropriate displays of consumption patterns, dressing styles and behaviour.

The previous chapter focussed on aspects of self-presentation and dressing style that are unique to girls' experience of adolescence. It looked at how participants in this study used the wearing of tight clothing to negotiate the boundaries of childhood and adolescence. However, as they encountered ever more difficulty agreeing on when and under what circumstances displays of revealing clothes were appropriate, an important theme emerged. Although the girls were clear that to signify maturity or

"growing up," they themselves would at some point invoke a more sexualized style of self-presentation, they were often profoundly uncomfortable with the meanings they associated with the wearing of tight clothing. The sexualized display of the female body was a theme to which they repeatedly returned whether in the context of their discussions of growing up, observations they shared about teens, or comments they made about their own and other groups' collage material.

This chapter seeks to explore further the nature of these girls' discomfort with constructions of female sexuality by interrogating participants' interpretations of commonly available visual representations of women. As discussed in the methods chapter, the creation of the joint group collages, though designed primarily to ensure optimum participation and inclusivity in the research process, also offered the unique opportunity for discussion on a variety of issues related to representations of women. Unfortunately, to comply with the guidelines set by school board and the ethics committee, material could not be brought into the schools. This meant that the material the groups were commenting on was not uniform. Not surprisingly then, the groups' final collages differed substantially one from another. Some groups chose to focus their attention on celebrity, fashion and make-up, while others concentrated on the images of semi-clad women that pervade magazine advertisements (see Appendix B). However, all of the groups did include some imagery of women in tight and revealing clothes. More importantly, there was a fair degree of consistency in the groups' discussions of visual representations of women in the material available. What was particularly striking in those groups which had the opportunity to view the final versions of their own and other groups'

collages, was the similarity of participants' responses and reactions to the collages that prominently featured partially-clad women or women wearing only lingerie.

ANALYSIS

Barbie Dolls as Representations of Women

I begin exploring girls' interpretations of visual representations of women by returning to their earlier-cited discussions about toys. One toy in particular both falls within the preserve of "childhood" activities and touches on the issues of representation of the female body: the Barbie doll. In the course of answering the question, "What's different about being in Grades Five and Six?", all of the groups spontaneously brought up Barbie dolls as an example of a toy that they no longer felt comfortable playing with. They claimed the dolls were "boring," and complained that the "parts" on a Barbie "don't move well." They explained that Barbies were only for "little kids": "My sister plays with them but I don't any more" was a common refrain. They compared Barbie dolls to other toys such as Sailor Moon dolls, usually to Barbie's disadvantage. One girl even expressed a preference for GI Joe dolls, arguing that at least she could play "action" games with GI Joes as opposed to Barbie dolls. Generally, participants vehemently rejected Barbies and the feminine activities which the doll is supposed to represent. They certainly were not interested in using Barbies to model clothes or experiment with feminine fashions. Nor did they seem interested in playing imaginary games centred around Barbie's many career possibilities.

As conversations continued, it became apparent that there were underlying issues associated with Barbie dolls that made the girls increasingly loathe to play with the dolls. In these instances, the conversation didn't focus on Barbie's fashion and career potential but on the doll itself as a representation of women:

Nola And the one thing about Barbies.... my [younger] sister likes to have Barbies NUDE all the time ggg.

(SILENCE)

XXX GGG

(C3#1/8)

After the initial moment of shock and silence that greets Nola's mention of nudity, Kay jokingly claims the explanation for this rests primarily with the Barbie doll rather than with Nola's sister!

Res Is that [being NUDE] Barbie's fault or your sister's fault?

? Um.

Kay Barbie's fault!

? She likes to have the Barbies nude

? Barbie's fault!

XXX GGG

(C3#1/8)

A few minutes later Nola renews the attack on Barbie with the now familiar complaint that Barbie is "too revealing":

Nola Well, it's just disgusting ...[...]. Why didn't they just paint a bra and panties on her? ggg...Wouldn't be that.... It wouldn't be so much REVEALING.

(C#1 p. 8-9)

What, I inquired, was "too revealing" or "disgusting" about Barbie?

Kay What I think about Barbies that's disgusting and about boys, they're sort of together... But when boys come along and see the girls playing with Barbies.... they like to take off of their (ggg) their clothes....

XXX GGG

Nola ...and..(..) ..rip off their heads-

Kay -and STARE...-

? -yeah-

? -yeah-

? -ooh ooh

XXX XXX

Nola We don't want it to be so revealing. (*sounds angry*)

(C#1/9)

Here Kay has explicitly linked Barbie dolls' attributes with boys' behaviour by saying, "What I think about Barbies that's disgusting and about boys.... they're sort of together..." She doesn't describe Barbie dolls as "disgusting" by virtue of *their* specific characteristics as much as by what boys do to them ("... they [boys] like to take off their [Barbie dolls] ... clothes... [...] and STARE"). Nola, meaning to summarize and concur with Kay's point, does so not by commenting on boys' behaviour but by complaining about Barbie dolls being "too revealing!"

Despite the lack of any visible display of pubic hair, underarm hair, nipples, or any other kind of genitalia or "private parts" on the doll that in real life are usually deemed unacceptable for public display, participants continue to condemn Barbie dolls as too revealing. Of course, it is not the Barbie dolls themselves that are the problem; the problem resides with how girls think the dolls are perceived by others.

A few moments later, Kay recounts what appears to be an anecdotal version of the above incident. Incidentally, note how carefully she distances herself from play with Barbie dolls by clarifying that it was her younger sister, not she herself, that was playing Barbies when the following events took place.

Kay Um, (...) um, ... a boy... that's one thing I hate about them... is that... when they're young they like to play GI Joes, I know that, and then they like to play with Barbies too, and, the only thing I hate about them is when get a little older, like when they're six

or five they start to take (...) ggg the Barbie's clothes off and they start (...) (ggg) just staring and (ggg) going...[?]

XXX GGG

Kay 'Cause I had a friend over and he was only five and (.) he (.) and my little sister had the Barbies out and (.) he (.) came into my bedroom and he took off her clothes and said (.) (ggg) (?) he said-

XXX GGG

Kay -and he was pointing at (.) the (.) you know the (ggg)-

XXX GGG

(C #1/10-11)

Barbie dolls are spoken of as unacceptable not on account of the qualities or characteristics directly associated with them, but because of behaviours they appear to elicit in others. It is ironic to note that participants do not position Barbie dolls as originally intended by the inventor, that is to say as vehicles for the girls' *own* fantasies and projections about career and clothes; instead they talk about Barbie dolls as vehicles for what they take to be *boys'* fantasies and projections. And because the girls are uncomfortable with these presumed fantasies and projections, participants reject the dolls themselves. The view they attribute to boys ultimately supersedes their own.

Magazine Imagery of Women: Internalizing the Male Gaze

Participants' complaints about Barbie dolls' being too revealing and too disgusting are paralleled in their comments about many of the visual representations of women they found in magazines and advertisements. As the girls looked through magazines that they used to construct their collages, the same refrain could be heard. They described the images of women they found as "disgusting." However, they were notably less forthcoming in their explanations as to why this might be so than they were in discussions about Barbie.

Most of these advertisements promoted lingerie and body-related products for women such as feminine napkins or depilatory creams,

providing further evidence for the all-pervasive link between consumerism and the commodification of the female body. Participants in Groups C, D, and, to a lesser extent, E, often giggling and whispering among themselves, were quick to take notice of these images of partially-clad women. Would their comments about what makes these representations of women "disgusting" parallel their accounts of why they considered Barbie "disgusting" as well? To explore this question I'd like to focus on Group C's discussions.

Advertising Representations of Women

Group C, whose talk coincidentally offered the most vivid condemnation of Barbie dolls, also spent the most time engaged in conversation about the representation of women in magazine advertisements. Most of their third session was devoted to compiling their collage. Because this group had neglected to bring in material from home, the material on this collage was drawn *exclusively* from old magazines found in art supply cupboards at the school, namely, old copies of *National Geographic*, *Equinox*, *Geographic World*, *Flare* and *Chatelaine* magazines. Fairly early on in this third session the girls took a moment to reflect on the material they had chosen for the collage and shared the following impressions, which sent them into gales of giggles:

Res Most of the pictures we cut out were...
 ? -disgusting!
 ? Yeah, disgusting!
 ? Very sick.
 XXX GGG
 (C#3/2)

How do participants account for their claim that this material is so "disgusting"? In the following excerpt, Jan and Dee, accompanied by much giggling, discuss one of the advertisements that they had included in the final

collage. This image shows a three-quarter view of a woman sitting in an armchair clad in bra and panties. While Jan and Dee attempt to articulate their views about this image, Karen, under her breath, tries to offer a dissenting opinion. Karen's views will be returned to later in this chapter, but the focus, for now, will remain on how Jan and Dee interpret the image in the advertisement:

Res So when you first saw it [the ad they cut out], what did you think?
 (SILENCE)
 Res You didn't want to cut it out at the beginning... I remember... and I said I wanted to know your opinion.
 ? It's just shocking.
 Res It's shocking...
 Jan It's disgusting.
 ? (ggg) Yeah.
 Res Disgusting and shocking....
 Kay -it's not disgusting and shocking....(*under her breath*) It's fine.
 Res Can you tell me what makes it look like that for you?
 Kay She's outside.
 Jan She's inside.
 Kay Well it looks like she's outside...
 Dee She's wearing her under-
 Kay -background is outside-
 Dee -she's wearing her underwear....
 XXX GGG
 (C#3/2)

The first explanation offered as to why this image is so "shocking" or "disgusting" is simply that the model is wearing underwear. This explanation resonates with the group's previous complaint that Barbie dolls were simply "too revealing." However, as the conversation continues, Jan, Kay and Dee begin to hint, albeit with some hesitation, at a more in-depth reading of this image.

Res Anything else?
 XXX GGG
 Dee (g) No!

Jan Well... it's just the thought...
 Res ...The thought of wearing your underwear?
 XXX GGG
 ? No.
 XXX GGG
 (C#3/3)

The group knows full well what their take on this advertisement is. As the conversation continues, Jan finally makes an overt reference to the "thought of sex" and participants take the plunge and explain what, it is presumed, has been preoccupying them for some time:

Jan The thought of something...
 ? -of what? -
 Jan Sex!
 Res The thought of sex... She looks like she's.....
 ? Getting ready-
 ? -she's getting undressed-
 ? -she's getting ready (g)
 XXX GGGG
 Res Getting ready for-
 XXX GGGG
 Res -for.... what?
 XXX GGG
 Res for....?
 Dee GGG Sex!
 XXX GGG
 (C#3/3-4)

Trying to probe how the participants might account for this reading, I gently challenge Dee and the other members of Group C to articulate what it is about the model in this advertisement that distinguishes her from how they themselves act at home, and allows them to make the claim that she is getting "ready for sex." "In the privacy of our homes, when we're wandering around the house, is this how we are every day?" I ask. The girls giggle and answer "no". "So, what," I continue, "is she [the model] doing differently?" "She's making herself... comfortable," Jan answers accompanied by giggles

and the outright laughter of the rest of the group. A number of girls then jump in all at once with fragments of criticism and concern about the model such as "Isn't she cold," and "Couldn't she wear a housecoat?" The girls are once again criticizing the model for being "too revealing." The model in the ad under discussion is dressed in underwear that does not display more of the female anatomy than what might be readily worn in public today as swimwear, or even sportswear. But the girls continue their attack.

Eventually one of the girls tries to bring the group's point home by asking "What if somebody looked through the window?" The focus has shifted from what the model *does* to how she is *perceived* by an absent but apparently taken-for-granted observer. Walking around the house in underwear may not be that "disgusting" but how that might be interpreted by an observer might very well be! The girls' talk about the model seems to turn, much as their talk about Barbie dolls did, on their concerns about what they assume to be *others'* interpretations of the model's behaviour and comportment. Once again, their own evaluation of a situation has been deferred to that of an imaginary authoritative male gaze over which they have little control.

Becoming a Woman; Subject as Object

In the case of Barbie dolls, participants had justified their interpretation that Barbies were "disgusting" through recourse to accounts of boy' interactions with the dolls. How do they account for their parallel characterization of models as "disgusting"? Do they offer any clues as to what they base these interpretations on?

The following excerpt does provide some insight into how they have taken up the cultural messages about the representation of the female body.

As group C embarks on the process of deciding which images to include in their collage, they begin to become preoccupied with the category they have called "underwear." Here, Kay is looking at an ad entitled "Obsession for Men," an ad for men's fragrance that prominently features naked women. Jan, and a few others join in. The similarities with the girls' earlier discussions about boys looking at Barbies are once again striking:

Kyla That's an underwear one.
 Kay There's a doggie one!
 ? Obsession for MEN
 XXX GGGG
 Kay Obsessions for MEN.
 XXX GGG
 ? ...[?] for Playboy...
 Jan I'll tell you something I find really disgusting.
 Res OK... Yeah...
 Jan My Dad has a Playboy calendar.
 XXX Aw...
 Nola -and he got a boxful of magazines and Playboys.
 Jan -so does mine-
 (C#3/9)

The conversation slides almost imperceptibly from their *own* experience of looking at advertising imagery of naked women, to an imagined perspective—one they think their fathers might take when looking at *Playboy* magazines and calendars. As the dialogue continues, one of the participants challenges Jan and the other girl to bring their fathers' magazine collection to the group for discussion. Note how Jan deflects this challenge:

? -so bring 'em!-
 Jan Bring 'em! Oh yeah, right. I don't really want to look at myself.
 Neither do you guys.
 Kay Myself... (ggg)
 (C#3/9)

Jan's deflection hinges on her claim that it would not be of interest to bring in her father's "magazines and Playboys" because it would be like *looking at herself*! That is to say, she identifies herself and other group members with the models being looked at in the magazines. Within the space of only a few moments, participants have gone from positioning themselves as observers of and commentators on displays of the female body, to taking on a perspective they believe their fathers, or adult males, might have of the female body, to inserting *themselves* in the position of the female being observed. They have, in effect, abandoned their own perspective and simultaneously identified themselves with both the male gaze and the object of that gaze.

A few weeks later, Group C reconvened for their fourth and final session to take a last look at their own finished and laminated collage as well as the completed collages of three other groups. As they admired their work, they continued to talk about their discomfort with the prominent display of women's bodies throughout the collages. They once again note the ad discussed at the beginning of the last excerpt, describing it as "shocking":

- Dee It's shocking.
 Res What makes it shocking?
 Dee Because they're naked...
 XXX GGG
 Dee They shouldn't have naked people in magazines.
 Res They shouldn't have naked people in magazines?
 ? -especially that one about the perfume (*the ad for Obsession*)
 (C#4/1)

Regardless of previous lengthy debates and analyses, their discomfort is palpable--it has neither dissipated nor resolved. When again presented with this imagery, they again express their discomfort.

Becoming a Woman: Becoming a Model

Throughout the fourth session, Group C displayed an unprecedented degree of comfort and candour not only with me but with each other. They asked if I could come back to the school on a regular basis and, taking advantage of the more unstructured fourth session, asked a number of body-related questions. Not all of these questions could be answered within the ethical parameters of the research project. It was during this very relaxed session that one of the most interesting exchanges occurred. A few moments after the conversation excerpted above, and while the girls were continuing their discussion of advertisements featuring scantily clad models, the following interaction occurred. Kay, who had for some time remained uncharacteristically silent, burst into the conversation. A young looking, ebullient nine-year-old, she had led the way in discussion in previous sessions condemning Barbie dolls, but had remained somewhat more aloof during discussions of advertising images and models. It was she who had tried to provide an alternative reading of the advertising image of the woman sitting on a chair modelling underwear. Kay had argued that the model was "outside" rather than "inside" and, under her breath, had contradicted the other participants by muttering that the image was *not* disgusting and shocking. However in this session she has apparently recapitulated to the position that the ads on their collage were, indeed "shocking." She suddenly interjects the following with great passion and agitation:

Kay What's ... shocking about that is... that... Why do they do this?

XXX XXX

Kay Like they shouldn't do that. Why do they... How do they feel comfortable doing this?

Res You mean the models. Are they comfortable? Like why do they do it?

Kay Yeah.

Res These people there? Well that's their job.
 Kay [??] men... They look at girls. They go "OOO"....
 XXX GGG
 Res Who looks at the magazine that way?
 ? Men. Boys.
 Kay Men... and boys.
 XXX XXX
 Res How does that make you feel?
 Kay Worried. What happens one day when they turn eight and then
 a totally naked woman just standing there-(*demonstrates pose,*
hand on the hip)
 Jan My sister found a box of *Playboys* under my Dad's bed.
 (C#4/2-3)

This is the only instance out of all the group interviews when the subjectivity of the model was overtly addressed. Kay asks "Why do the models do this? How do they feel?" In effect she is asking what is it like for them and what is their moral position. Karen brings all these questions to the fore for the first time. Although the other group members allow her to pursue this line of thought, they don't entirely agree with her, or at least see it as a problem; they do not respond or carry on the conversation. A few moments later, Kay once again interjects in a similarly agitated fashion. As she continues to criticize the model, she provides the group with a revelation that stuns them into a momentary and uncharacteristic silence:

Res How does she [the person in the ad] look different?
 Kay (*Agitated*) She's naked! Would she go out there like that?
 Would she do that on the beach? (*strikes seductive pose with*
hand on hip)
 Res What's different about these pictures of ladies in underwear?
 Kay The only thing that's different about that is we wouldn't stand
 like that.
 Res We?
 Kay I was a modeller.
 (SHOCK AND SILENCE)
 Kay We wouldn't stand like that.
 (C#4/4)

The silence lasts for some time. Kay quickly attempts to deflect any of the aspects of modelling which have concerned the group. She explains that she is a child model. She is careful to point out that although she is a model, she doesn't model revealing clothes; for instance, she explains that she models pajamas rather than lingerie. She also makes specific mention of the fact that, to date, she has never modelled with a boy--although she does anticipate that this might occur within the year.

The girls in her group are profoundly intrigued by her revelation. The atmosphere among group members shifts from disapproval and shock to cautious fascination. However, as the next fragment of conversation suggests, their censure is never far below the surface. Here Kay confesses that it makes her embarrassed to see men looking at pictures of women. Another group member immediately takes the opportunity to challenge her:

Kay I get embarrassed at men looking at pictures.
 ? Then why are you a model?
 Kay I am a TEN year old model...
 (C#4/7)

Notice how Kay meets this challenge by invoking the distinction between child and teen. Analysis in the last chapter suggests that this boundary may hinge on the absence or presence of sexual readings of self-presentation. What Kay is doing by insisting that she is "a TEN-year-old model" is reassuring the group that she does *not* use a sexualized style of self-presentation in her professional modelling activities, and will not be seen by boys as sexual.

In the course of this fourth session, Jan, who had, in the third session, complained about her father's "disgusting" collection of *Playboy* magazines, returns to the topic of her father looking at pictures of women in magazines.

This time, instead of commenting on her father's interest in magazine models, she describes her *own* embarrassment at his reactions to the type of images that the group has featured so prominently in their collage. Note how she, much like Kay, now uses the term "embarrassed" to describe her own reactions rather than "disgusting" to describe the images.

- Jan Like my Dad will take a catalogue or magazine and tear... cut out the pages of bras and panties (ggg). And then he'll take out pictures like these... and he'll take out all these pages like this one and post them on his wall...
- Res His wall...
- Jan At work or home....
- Res How does that make you feel?
- Jan Embarrassed...
- Res Embarrassed?
- Jan VERY.
- (C#4/8)

DISCUSSION

The current chapter's analysis of girls' talk surrounding representations of women has offered some insight into their apparent discomfort with sexualized representations of women. In a word, the problem for these girls is not how *revealing* a piece of clothing actually is or even how much of the body it actually reveals. Their concerns revolve around how this display might be taken up or interpreted by an abstract, unknown observer.

This can be profoundly disconcerting, for the girls. Despite their enthusiastic talk of the *active* role they take in negotiating suitable displays of growing up, they are aware that they have little control over the perceptions of others. Just how aware they are of this is evident in their talk about their own impressions: they may "read" an individual's display of the female body as sexual one minute and innocent the next. Is someone wearing a "belly

shirt" because the weather is hot or because they want to appear sexually alluring? Group B articulated this dilemma particularly succinctly in their last session:

Rona Part of dressing 'n things is also... getting into things that are comfortable 'n things.

? Yeah.

Rona So like I'd... you only wear belly tops because they're comfortable. You find them like really awkward then you shouldn't wear them just for [?].

Ann But how do you know that somebody just says they're comfortable... and ... but they're really just like... sleazy?

(B#3/12-13)

Though they defended girls' right to wear whatever they wanted to wear or whatever they felt was comfortable, it was the observer's perspective, rather than that of the person wearing the clothes, to which they gave priority. Here is an excerpt from Group B's discussion as they grappled with concerns about how self-presentation might be taken up or read by others.

Ann Well uh... I anyway, I don't think that..[wearing skimpy clothing] should be allowed and I don't think it's a freedom of choice because if they are growing up knowing that they can wear that, then they're going to attract the wrong crowd and they'll get into lots of trouble.

? I agree with Ann because, um, people normally don't know... who they are looking at [?] and they... and they judge them by their appearance.

Res So what are they going to think if someone's wearing skimpy clothes?

Dana That they're...

Res that they're what?

Dana [?] Bad words.

Res Go ahead.

Dana No.

Res Nobody's going to know who said what...

Dana NO.

Res Alright. Try and explain the bad words with some other words.

Silence

Res Just give me the same idea...

Dana Prostitutes.

XXX GGG
(B#3/11)

It is interesting to note that although Group B had frequently taken quite a liberal view of what constituted appropriate attire, *no one* disagreed with Ann when she argued that freedom of choice was in fact secondary to the risk that if certain clothing was worn, people might misinterpret the wearer's intentions.

On an even more fundamental level, the positioning of the female body as object of another's gaze, so prevalent in advertising material, both fascinates and deeply disturbs these girls. These nine- to eleven-year-old girls already construct the female body as seen through the eyes of an observer. They already "watch themselves being looked at." They have already learned to be, in Berger's words, "an object of vision" (1972, p. 47).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This study began with the observation that while both boys and girls experience stress at early adolescence, girls consistently demonstrate significantly greater reduction in self-esteem and continue through adolescence to experience difficulties ranging from increased rates of depression to life-threatening eating disorders. Although researchers in a variety of fields have called for an interrogation of the cultural climate surrounding growing up and early adolescence for girls, there have been few studies which survey girls and cultural expectations about growing up female, more particularly, the processes by which girls make these cultural expectations their own.

In this exploratory study I set out to ask how ten- and eleven- year-old girls, positioned as it were on the brink of early adolescence, make sense of growing up. In particular, I wanted to know how participants in this study understood socio-historical discourses surrounding female puberty and adolescence and which discourses they drew upon in their own accounts of growing up.

It is now time to take a step back and ask what insights this research may have to offer. I will briefly discuss the results of this study with particular reference to material presented in the method and review chapters. I will then move on to discuss both the possible implications of this study for

future research and practical application before concluding with a last look at what participants have to say about growing up.

DISCUSSION

One of the most surprising and consistent aspects of how participants in this study frame growing up is their virtual rejection of the popular discourses surrounding puberty that permeate much of the literature directed at preadolescent girls. As discussed in Chapter Four, these discourses frame puberty as driven by internal hormonal changes that directly affect mood and behaviour. Changing bodies are taken to be indicators of internal hormonal changes to which are then attributed mood swings, interest in the opposite sex and a myriad of social manifestations associated with being a teenager.

The views of these ten- and eleven-year-old participants diverge markedly from such discourse. Although the girls display both familiarity with, and resistance to, the medicalized discourses of puberty that inform much of adult-generated material for girls, the girls themselves rarely make a direct association between changes they associate with growing up and the body or internal physiological processes.

Instead participants construct growing up as a distinctly social phenomenon. They focus on their own active roles in negotiating displays of appropriate behaviour and self-presentation that they see as crucial to demarcating teenhood from childhood. The displays of behaviour and self-presentation that make someone recognizable as a teen generally fall into two categories: clothing and fashion choices which frequently feature brand name logos, and displays of transgressive behaviour such as smoking, swearing and defiance of authority figures.

A particularly interesting aspect of participants' talk about growing up traces a shift away from trappings associated with the femininity of early childhood in favour of interests more commonly characterized as masculine. Barbie is out; GI Joe is in. Pink is out; dark-coloured clothing associated with boys' sports activities and labelled with Nike and Adidas logos are in. Interest in violent movies and television shows, always a theme of boys' movies and games, is used by girls to indicate that they are more grown up. Barbara Hudson's observation of almost two decades ago, that adolescence and femininity are subversive of each other, still seems applicable today (1984). With the exception of tight clothing and make-up, much of what seems to represent growing up to participants is associated with a rejection of the feminine.

Despite offering many surprising insights into girls' construction of the transition to adolescence--a process in which this group of girls saw themselves already involved--initial conversations with the girls offered little in the way of clues as to what might account for the documented differences in boys' and girls' self-esteem at early adolescence. In the hope of gaining an understanding of this phenomenon, I began to analyse girls' talk surrounding the one aspect of their descriptions of the transition to "teen" status they did not share with their male cohort: the wearing of tight fitting clothes.

Tight clothing for girls emerged as both the most prominent *and* the most problematic aspect of the girls' discussions about growing up . While the girls were almost cavalier in some of their claims about watching violent movies and television shows, and demonstrating rude behaviour to parents and teachers, their talk about girls and tight clothing was plagued by debate,

disagreement and contradictions. Participants fretted, and worried about when and where it would be appropriate for them to wear tight clothing. They debated endlessly about questions such as: how were expectations for self-presentation different at school than at home; could specific activities, such as dance class, dictate style of self-presentation; does the weather; or could a girl just choose to wear tighter clothing wherever and whenever she pleased.

As the girls' discussions progressed, it became apparent that tight clothing was synonymous with a more sexualized style of self-presentation. In fact participants constructed the progression from child to teen primarily along this continuum of increasingly sexualized presentation. As part of the study, each group of girls produced a collage, and the collage that Group C produced captures this preoccupation with sexualized styles of self-presentation most vividly (see Appendix B). It portrays a progression from "childish" interests, signified for the most part by pets and animals, to early womanhood, depicted by women modelling underwear in a "sexualized" fashion. The final arrival point, at the complete right of the collage, is represented by scantily clad, svelte young women engaged in rapturous lovemaking with attractive males. Although this group's collage is by far the most "explicit" of the collages, all, with the exception of Group B's, give prominence to depictions of women wearing tight clothing, whether in sporting outfits, lingerie advertisements or celebrity poses.

The idea that sexuality is a prominent component of female adolescent identity is not new. As summarized in Chapter One, McRobbie has already argued that feminine sexuality, along with beauty and fashion, has become the core of feminine identity for girls at early adolescence (1991). However

McRobbie's work is based on a textual analysis of girls' magazines; she notes changes in materials girls are exposed to, not how girls take up these messages. Because of this, there is little in McRobbie's work that might suggest why this focus on sexuality might engender, for participants, the degree of discomfort that it does. Although the symmetry between McRobbie's findings and the girls' talk is encouraging, it can take this inquiry no further.

Perhaps participants' discomfort around sexualized styles of self-presentation can be accounted for by looking to larger cultural discourses. As reviewed in Chapter Three, there is a well-documented legacy of contradictory cultural themes in western culture that casts the female body, particularly the sexualized female body, in a negative light. In the case of this study, parallels can certainly be found between these socio-historical discourses and girls' talk. Participants persistently attribute negative connotations to female sexuality. They criticize models in advertisements for looking as though they're "getting ready to have sex" and they equate looking sexual with looking like a "hooker." In fact looking like a prostitute is almost the primary metaphor invoked to characterize sexualized styles of self-presentation.

Can we then account for girls' discomfort with sexualized styles of self-presentation by pointing to participants' internalization of negative socio-historical attributions about women and sexuality? Can, by inference, their "difficulties" and drop in self-esteem at early adolescence be attributed to their ambivalence and discomfort with situating themselves within these discourses? I would like to step back from the substantive issues and reframe this question in more theoretical terms. Does an analysis focussed primarily

on tracing the parallels and divergences between girls' talk and larger cultural discourses, satisfy the goals of this research?

In order to answer this question and clarify the direction taken in the remainder of the analysis, it would be valuable to briefly review both the general theoretical context of this study and the particular theoretical assumptions that underpin the present research.

The substantive questions driving this study arise from concerns about difficulties preadolescent girls experience in the transition to adolescence. These questions, however, are also closely linked to concerns about the seeming inadequacy of heretofore developed perspectives on gender socialization to offer an explanatory framework in which girls' difficulties might best be understood and studied.

Two aspects of these perspectives are particularly problematic when attempting to study preadolescent girls and their larger cultural environment. The first is the lack of focus on symbolic and culture-wide factors in socialization. Concentrated as these perspectives are on primary and secondary socialization in early childhood, tertiary or symbolic agents of socialization receive little attention.

A partial exception can be found in the symbolic interactionist approach, which does focus attention on language and meaning-making as central to human development. Within this approach, identity is seen as socially bestowed through individuals' interactions with and struggles to make sense of the social world. However within this framework the means by which identity is "bestowed" remains uninterrogated.

This brings up the second limitation of these models: a pervasive view of socialization as the internalization of societal norms. As a result, these

perspectives tend to privilege social structure in their explications of human behaviour. In order to avoid this pitfall and ensure that the present study integrates, as Giddens put it, "notions of human agency with structural explanation" (1970, p. 234), I set out, as outlined in Chapter Two, to work within the framework of what Holstein and Gubrium term interpretive practice (1994). Specifically, I made four assumptions that informed this study. I would like to re-examine girls' constructions of growing up in light of these assumptions before finally answering the question of whether an analysis focussed on the parallels and divergences between girls' talk and larger cultural discourses satisfies the goals of this research.

One of the fundamental theoretical assumptions underlying this study is that girls, as competent members of our culture, would display in their talk socio-historical cultural themes related to puberty and the female body (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). As documented above, participants did indeed display knowledge of socio-historical themes related to puberty and the female body. In fact, in many ways their talk revealed an acquaintance, albeit rudimentary and simplistic, with cultural themes surrounding the female body that parents and educators might find surprising and somewhat disturbing.

Another important assumption is that the girls are active, not passive interpreters of such cultural messages in that they actively use, internalize, take up or resist these resources in the process of endowing them with meaning. Analysis of girls' talk has indeed demonstrated that participants are selective in their engagement with cultural resources: all socio-historical discourses are not created equal, as it were. Girls as *active*, not passive interpreters of such cultural messages, selectively use various cultural

resources. For instance, they actively resist the medicalized discourses of puberty--the predominant discourse of parents and educators--while enthusiastically engaging with western culture's often contradictory legacy about the female body.

The third assumption underpinning this research is that the process of making sense of cultural resources is collaborative in that reality is an "interactional and discursive accomplishment" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994, p. 265). Since all material for this study is derived from focus group discussion, it would be difficult to speak to whether or not girls' talk has borne out this assumption. What can be said is that each group did focus their discussions differently, although generally speaking, it has been the commonalities among group discussions that have been raised here for discussion.

The last assumption is less an assumption than a statement of intent, a commitment to integrating cultural and structural frameworks into analysis of human action and talk, thus providing a possible "middle ground" between what is typically taken as the two poles of sociological research--micro and macro analysis (Giddens, 1979; Holstein & Gubrium, 1994; Silverman, 1985). As Davies (1989) has argued, and perhaps more importantly, demonstrated in her research with pre-schoolers, the interpretations of social actors should be sought by researchers not only in order to access their diverse "readings" of cultural discourses, but to open to inquiry the *process* whereby individuals struggle to make these cultural messages meaningful.

I can now return to the question, "Would an analysis that focuses primarily on parallels and divergences between girls' talk and larger cultural discourses satisfy the goals of this research?" The answer must be no; merely

mapping the correspondences between cultural frameworks and human talk would not satisfy the goals of this research. Taking such an approach would not in fact further the integration of micro and macro levels of analysis. In order to explore the costs and struggles for individuals in taking up various positions in culture-wide discourses, it is necessary to look to another level of analysis, one that focuses more on process than content.

In Chapter Six, I attempt to focus on some of the processes whereby girls both internalize and resist cultural resources surrounding the presentation of the female body. Much of the material upon which this analysis is based has emerged from participants' discussions of a variety of visual representations of women, ranging from magazine advertisements to Barbie dolls. Participants were particularly fascinated by advertisements that showed women modeling tight clothing or underwear. Dropping whatever else they were involved in, participants would huddle around the offending image complaining about how "disgusting" it was. Their concerns were often based on assumptions about how particular displays of the female body might be interpreted by an unidentified observer, an "other," who, it was often implied, might be male.

Participants attribute little importance to the intent of the model or woman in the representation. For instance, Barbie was seen as too revealing because others, brothers, or friends who are boys, might remove her clothes and stare at her. The models in the underwear advertisements were considered too "revealing" because others might think they were "getting ready for sex." In the girls' eyes, the model or "actor's" perspective is clearly subordinated to interpretations of their behaviour and attributions of their intent by "others."

Here at last is some small insight into participants' simultaneous discomfort and fascination with advertising representations of women, their endless and unproductive debates about when, where, and who can or should wear tight-fitting clothes, and perhaps even a possible hint about girls' differential experience of early adolescence. In the *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman eloquently argues that an overriding goal of individuals is to try to control the impression they make (1959, p. 24). Yet participants in this study know only too well that presentation is subject to *multiple* interpretations and that sexualized styles of female presentation are particularly dependent on *others'* interpretations. Participants recognize that adopting such a sexualized style of presentation necessitates abdicating some degree of control over their own impression management.

I suggest that it is this persistent lack of control over how their self-presentation might be interpreted that accounts for much of the "costs" girls incur at early adolescence as they struggle to take up cultural discourses about growing up female. If the question that concludes Chapter Five is "What is problematic for the girls in assuming a somewhat more sexualized style of self-presentation?" the findings discussed in Chapter Six suggest that it is *not* so much the connotations associated with a particular style of self-presentation that is problematic for the girls, as much as it is the costs involved in abdicating control for its interpretation.

There are a number of reasons that I find this avenue of investigation productive. First, it makes sense of some minor observations which arose in the course of this research which otherwise might have been left unaccounted for. Specifically, it offers an explanation as to why participants so often rely upon context to justify whether it is or isn't appropriate to dress in

tighter, more grown-up, clothing styles. School or home, public or private, dance class or casual setting, these contextual details offer girls the promise of some greater degree of control as to how their presentation might be interpreted.

Secondly, it ties in nicely with other research on the topic of teen readers of girls' magazines, which has suggested that girls defer to outside authority, particularly male outside authority, in formulating personal standards of beauty and self-presentation. As discussed in Chapter One, Duke and Kreshel, in their study (1998) of twelve- and thirteen-year-old girls' interpretation of magazines have shown that while girls happily disregard magazine hints and advice about fashion and beauty techniques, they avidly seek out magazine pages which convey boys' opinions as to what makes a girl attractive or what style or tone of self-presentation boys find most interesting in girls. Outside authority, in this case in the form of boys' impressions, holds great authority. Similarly, participants in the present study give priority to the perspective of an unnamed, implicitly male observer in assessing their own, or other girls', style of presentation.

Thirdly, and most importantly, this tendency to defer to others' perspectives of necessity works at cross purposes to participants' construction of growing up as a social accomplishment. For these girls, growing up—acting like a teen and being recognized as a teen—has more to do with conscious choices in fashion and behaviour than biologically maturing bodies. Girls describe teens as actively creating a public persona, a public identity. To borrow from ethnomethodological terminology, they see growing up as a social accomplishment; they see teens as "doing adolescence." Yet "doing" *female* adolescence, that is to say using a sexualized style of self-presentation,

entails, or might entail, the abdication of control over how that presentation is taken up.

What happens when this anticipated trajectory, the construction of growing up as an active undertaking, is undermined and challenged by participants' own readings of female self-presentation as subject to multiple interpretations? More specifically, what happens when girls anticipate demonstrating a more "grown-up" status as a female teen, that is to say adopting a more sexualized style of self-presentation, only to realize, based on their own readings of sexualized female styles of presentation, that one of the core features of this style of self-presentation is the positioning of the female body as the object of another's gaze? What happens when they try to reconcile their role as social actors "doing adolescence" with this patently disempowered role of object of another's gaze? Or more particularly, what happens when they, in Berger's words, find themselves both the surveyor of themselves *and* the surveyed?

It is not too great a leap to consider the possibility that what "happens" to girls when faced with their own contradictory and fluctuating interpretations of their self-presentation, might entail some loss in sense of agency, some loss of, what might otherwise be termed in works by Brown, Gilligan and Pipher, "voice" or "sense of self" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 1994).

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This analysis has now come full circle by tracing a tentative line of argument back to the concerns and speculations that initially led to the study. It is now time to consider the possible implications for further research.

This study has sought to examine girls' difficulties at adolescence in a manner that takes as its starting point girls' own construction of growing up while nonetheless acknowledging the larger socio-historical context in which growing up takes place. This approach has proved to be particularly productive in that it makes visible participants' perspectives on the larger cultural framework and ensures that the researcher does not merely assume, based on the researcher's *own* readings of cultural messages, which resources are of interest to participants and how participants will take these resources up.

A brief remark on the methodology used in this study might be appropriate here. Though challenging to transcribe, focus group interviews have proved particularly useful in creating an environment where debate and discussion among young people can take place. This methodology cannot entirely approximate participant observation but it can, as demonstrated here, provide an opportunity to at least partially circumvent the status differential between interviewer and single respondent that can arise when the respondents are much younger than the researcher. I would caution, however, that it seemed crucial to participants that the group interviews were conducted in familiar surroundings with other girls they already knew. In retrospect, I doubt that the usual format associated with focus group interviewing, that is to say conducting interviews on a one-time basis with a group of respondents who were not acquainted prior to the interview, would work with young people.

The use of collages in this study also deserves brief mention. Initially collages were incorporated primarily as a means to offer all participants, even those who tended to hold back during discussion, an opportunity to engage in

debate and conversation. Furthermore, it was hoped that creating a collage would help sustain a more casual atmosphere and stimulate fresh approaches to the issues under discussion. It must be said that all this proved to be the case. However collages also proved to be particularly useful in engaging participants in discussion and debates surrounding images of women in the media. In short, they were an invaluable tool in addressing questions that arose in the course of the present study about the *visual* representation of women.

Because this study has been exploratory in nature it has also generated a number of possible avenues for further investigation. One such avenue would be to pursue more detailed discussions with girls about visual representations of women. The argument developed here has hinged on the suggestion that girls' developing sense of agency, apparently so critical to their vision of how to enact being seen as a teen, may be compromised as they position themselves within larger cultural discourses that cast women as objects of another's gaze. As indicated by this research, media imagery does play a crucial role in girls' construction of growing up. It would therefore be of interest to pursue further in research centred specifically around how girls take up the visual representation of women. This particular study has been limited by the fact that no material for discussion could be brought into schools. A study where all participating groups could discuss the same material might prove productive.

Given participants' trepidation about moving out of elementary school settings, a second avenue of investigation would be to mount a similar study with girls in junior high school. In what ways might the accounts of junior high school students differ from those of participants in this study? If ten-

and eleven-year-old girls characterize teens as preoccupied with peer-driven conventions of self-presentation and transgressive behaviour, how does a similar cohort of girls collectively describe themselves once *they* are "teens"? What might the ways girls in junior high schools, or even senior high schools, talk about some of these same phenomena tell us about the expectations implicit in their institutional contexts?

A third avenue of investigation would involve exploring boys' talk about growing up in order to explore the ways in which boys draw on larger cultural discourses about adolescence and growing up. Do boys see growing up as an intrinsically empowering experience? Do they see it as a social accomplishment in much the same way as way girls do? What do they anticipate will be the costs and struggles associated with their positioning themselves as "teens"? Are these costs and struggles similar to those suggested by girls in their talk?

Another possible avenue of investigation would depend in large measure on the results of the previous three. It would entail integrating these understandings into an overarching approach to socialization—one that does not take as its starting point reified entities such as agents of socialization or biologically determined individuals, but instead looks to the multiple positions individuals take up within socio-historical discourses. Such an approach is not original; it has been pursued by various researchers such as Henriques et al. (1984) and Davies (1989). However of particular interest to the line of inquiry suggested by the present study would be the rhetorical strategies by which teenage girls construct their choices in self-presentation given that their prior constructions may very well have been, as suggested by this study, clearly contradictory and ambivalent. This line of inquiry may

open for exploration not only the processes whereby individuals take up cultural discourses, but also the processes whereby they incorporate the various positions they have negotiated for themselves within these discourses into a personal narrative. If growing up involves learning how to see oneself at least in part as others might see one, and growing up within multiple discourses involves taking up multiple subject positions, how do individuals then integrate these sequences of multiple positions into coherent personal narratives? What cultural resources do they invoke in this process?

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The wide disjuncture between popular medicalized discourse surrounding puberty and growing up, and girls' focus on the social and active aspect of negotiating displays of maturity, must necessarily give one pause: it offers ample opportunity for misunderstanding, and may in fact lead to lack of communication, between educators and parents on the one hand and the girls themselves. More specifically it raises a number of questions regarding the current tone of interventions taken with young people, particularly young girls.

Does the language or framework of various health program interventions with girls at puberty, frame discussion in a manner that connects to girls' experience of growing up and adolescence? Certainly the girls' subtle but persistent resistance to discussion of the body as framed in the medicalized discourses of puberty that characterize their human sexuality classes suggests that educators may be framing their material about puberty in a manner that does not connect to girls' experience of growing up. Girls are

more ill at ease with medicalized talk about puberty and the body than with talk about the body itself. The same group that fell silent or claimed ignorance of hormonal influences, comfortably plied the researcher with questions about mucous stains on underwear and joked about periods and bodily functions.

What would human sexuality courses look like that began with the girls' own concerns and talk about growing up? What would anti-smoking programs look like that started from the premise that transgressive behaviour such as smoking is often seen by girls as an active means of displaying transition to adolescence rather than as a passive acquiescence to peer pressure? How many opportunities are lost by adults who approach girls from a perspective which is so at odds with what, it would appear, are the girls' own perspectives on growing up?

A LAST WORD

Preadolescent girls this age see themselves as positioned on the relatively "safe" side of a large rift between childhood and teenhood. Though they take pains to distance themselves from childhood pursuits, they nonetheless actively distinguish themselves from "teenagers" whom they perceive to be treading dangerous and rebellious paths. Located in a no-man's-land between childhood and adolescence, they see themselves in a unique position to move freely between the two worlds. They can play and compete with their male friends, or develop "romantic" interests in them. They can take on the fashionable trappings of high heels and make-up, or choose to ignore such imperatives.

However, they worry that moving on to junior high school will abruptly restrict their ability to access both these worlds. They wonder if they will be ostracized if they do not dress fashionably at all times or if unspoken gendered codes of behaviour will prevent them from playing sports with the boys. Regardless of age or actual level of physical maturity, girls are particularly preoccupied with concerns about mastering the conventions of self-presentation that they see as a prerequisite to adolescent status and acceptance by peers at the junior high or middle school level. Avid students of popular culture, they know how important it is to emulate styles of clothing and make-up associated with models or celebrities. The core feature of such a display of growing up as a female is to invoke a more sexualized style of dressing.

The transition to a more sexualized style of self-presentation in order to signify "growing up" is not a new phenomenon for twentieth century females. (Brumberg, 1997). What is new is the age at which girls are portraying themselves as fashionable, and the amount of time and money that nine- to fourteen-year-old consumers are spending on self-presentation (Habib, 1999). Even more central to this study has been the observation that adopting a sexualized style of self-presentation, with its attendant deferral to another's gaze and abdication of control for its interpretation, undermines girls' active negotiation of early adolescent status-- a central feature of how they construct growing up in general. Choosing to watch violent movies of which their parents disapprove or dressing entirely in black and smoking in public may yield fairly predictable results. However reactions to wearing tight clothing is harder for girls to predict. This is made all the more vivid for them by virtue of the fact that they *themselves* have difficulty interpreting

sexualized styles of presentation in teens and women. If a girl wears a "belly shirt," and says she is doing so because of the heat, can she be trusted? Is she trying to look sexy and just saying she needs to wear a belly shirt because of the heat or is she wearing a belly shirt because of the heat and might mistakenly be seen as "slutty" (Group B #3/12)? The girls become, in Berger's (1972) words, both subject and object, surveyor and surveyed. In the process they lose the sense of agency associated with their own claims about the social accomplishments of adolescence for which they so yearn.

While girls are eager to demonstrate their competency and their knowledge of styles, fashions and celebrities, of what's cool and what's not, of what boys like and what there is or isn't to like about boys, it is sobering to observe how little pleasure they seem to derive from it all. This absence of pleasure, or at least some sense of future pleasure, is made all the more apparent when juxtaposed with their unreserved displays of appreciation for animals and pets. Under no circumstances did they miss an opportunity to comment upon, cut out, or display images of animals or pets. All such images were greeted with uninhibited exclamations of joy and enthusiasm. No collage is without prominently displayed images of animals and pets; yet these are in all cases relegated to the past—to childhood. Images of pets and animals never appear in the parts of the collages designated as "future" or "grown up." The "future" is rarely something about which participants express pleasure. Growing up seems to be about sport, fashion, sex, and achieving a relationship with a man. Growing up seems to be about consuming—cars, clothes, or make-up—and being consumed, or at the very least desired.

I will leave the last word to Sara in Group E. Sara has often been quoted through this study as she elaborated on appropriate clothing choices and the challenges awaiting in junior high school. Here she succinctly captures a sentiment so many of the girls expressed as they looked ahead to their future lives. Perhaps it applies to us all as we contemplate the inevitability of change, but I would argue that its poignancy is, at least in part, a reflection of the dwindling sense of pleasure and agency she and the other girls anticipate as they look to their immediate future:

Well, like being in Grade Six.... Like it kind of makes me feel weird because like... I ... Well I'm going on to Junior High next year and ... (.) ... Like it's kind of weird. Like because when I was in like Grade Two or Three time passed by s-o-o-o- slow and now like when I was in Grade Five the time seemed to just f-l-y-y- by!
(E#1 /3-4)

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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION SHEETS AND INFORMED CONSENT FORMS FOR
PARENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

**University of Calgary
Consent Form**

Research Project Title: Growing Up: Fifth and Sixth Grade Girls Talk About Their Changing Selves

Investigator: Judith Grossman

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask. Please take the time to read this form carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am a graduate student in Sociology at the University of Calgary, specializing in family and gender studies. This research, part of my M.A. thesis, is concerned with trying to understand how girls make sense of growing up. In books, TV and magazines, our culture offers girls a variety of messages, images and ideas about what it means to grow up. For example, we already know that many Canadian girls are dieting at a younger age and that many are increasingly dissatisfied with what they think they look like. One way to find out which of these cultural cues girls use as they begin to construct their identities as they become young women, is to sit down and listen to them talk to each other.

That's what this project is designed to do. The emphasis of this study is not on each individual girl's experience but rather on their common understandings of their changing selves. Girls will be asked to participate in a series of three group discussions with up to five other girls from school, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. These discussions will take place over lunch hour, but still allow for recess time before afternoon classes begin. Examples of possible discussion topics include: what's different about being in grades five and six, how the girls would describe themselves to imaginary pen pals overseas and their thoughts about how teenage girls dress and act. As well, we will be undertaking a group activity - creating a collage using material the girls themselves bring in that will help express some of these ideas.

These group conversations will be audio taped and then transcribed. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity: names will be removed from interview transcripts, and nowhere in them will there be reference to school names or the year in which the research took place. However, some quotations used in the thesis could identify participants to readers of the thesis who knew the girl or knew the situation she describes. The interview transcripts will be used in preparing my written Master's thesis, and shared only with my supervisor, Dr. Leslie Miller, Department of Sociology, University of Calgary. Both tapes and transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet in Dr. Miller's office for two years, at which time they will be destroyed.

These discussion groups are intended to discover how girls jointly make sense of growing up, not to access personal or individual information. Participants will be encouraged to talk just as they would normally with their friends in the course of the day, thus I hope to minimize concerns about girls repeating elsewhere what is said in the groups. When girls bring up personal material, my role will be to redirect conversation to protect participants from disclosures that they may regret later. Though I will point out to the girls the need to respect each other's privacy, I can offer no guarantee that discussion will not continue outside the research context.

Dr. Leslie Miller, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology: 220-6506

If you have any questions concerning your daughter's participation in this project, you may also contact Dr. Janelle Holmes, Accountability Services Supervisor, Calgary Board of Education at 294-6325; or Dr. Madeline Kalbach, Chair of the Department of Sociology Ethics Committee, University of Calgary at 220-5037/5720.

Investigator : Judith Grossman

I give permission for _____ to participate in
(participant's name)
this research project.

Date _____

Date _____

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

**University of Calgary
Participant Information Sheet**

Research Project: Growing Up: Fifth and Sixth Grade Girls Talk
About Their Changing Selves
Researcher : Judith Grossman

This information sheet is designed to help you decide whether or not you want to be part of my research project. Please read all of this before you make your decision. And if you have any questions, please ask!

First let me tell you a little about myself and this project. I am working on a Master's degree in Sociology at the University of Calgary. Sociologists study how people get along in society. We don't just ask why one person finds themselves in a good or bad situation, but we look around at the "big picture." We try to find out if there are lots of people in the same situation and how that came to be.

I am interested in finding out what the situation is like for girls growing up these days. I can remember a lot from when I was your age, and I can ask my daughter, who just turned eleven, but to be honest I don't want to be asking all the questions. I am much more interested in listening to a group of you discuss some of these things with each other.

So here is the plan. I want to get together with you and about four or five other girls from your school who have also signed up. We will get together for three meetings in a quiet spot at school, possibly at lunch time. We will be having conversations on what's been different about being in Grades Five and Six, and what your impressions are of how young women and teenage girls are portrayed in magazines, books and TV. During one of those sessions we will be working on a big collage together. If we meet at long recess (lunch) we'll always quit before the end of recess so you can still get some time to play.

Because I need to think about our discussions after they happen, I need to bring a small tape recorder and tape them. When I am writing up my report though, I might quote a little of what you said but I promise never to tell anyone the names of who was in the discussion group. When I am finished the project, the tapes will be locked away at the University of Calgary so no one else can ever listen to them.

You should also know that you can leave the project at any time. Please keep this information sheet. That way if you have questions at any time, you'll have these phone numbers handy:

**Judith Grossman: 282-0643
or, my supervisor at the University of Calgary,
Dr. Leslie Miller, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology:
220-6506**

**University of Calgary
Consent Form**

Research Project: **Growing Up: Fifth and Sixth Grade Girls Talk
About Their Changing Selves**

Researcher : **Judith Grossman**

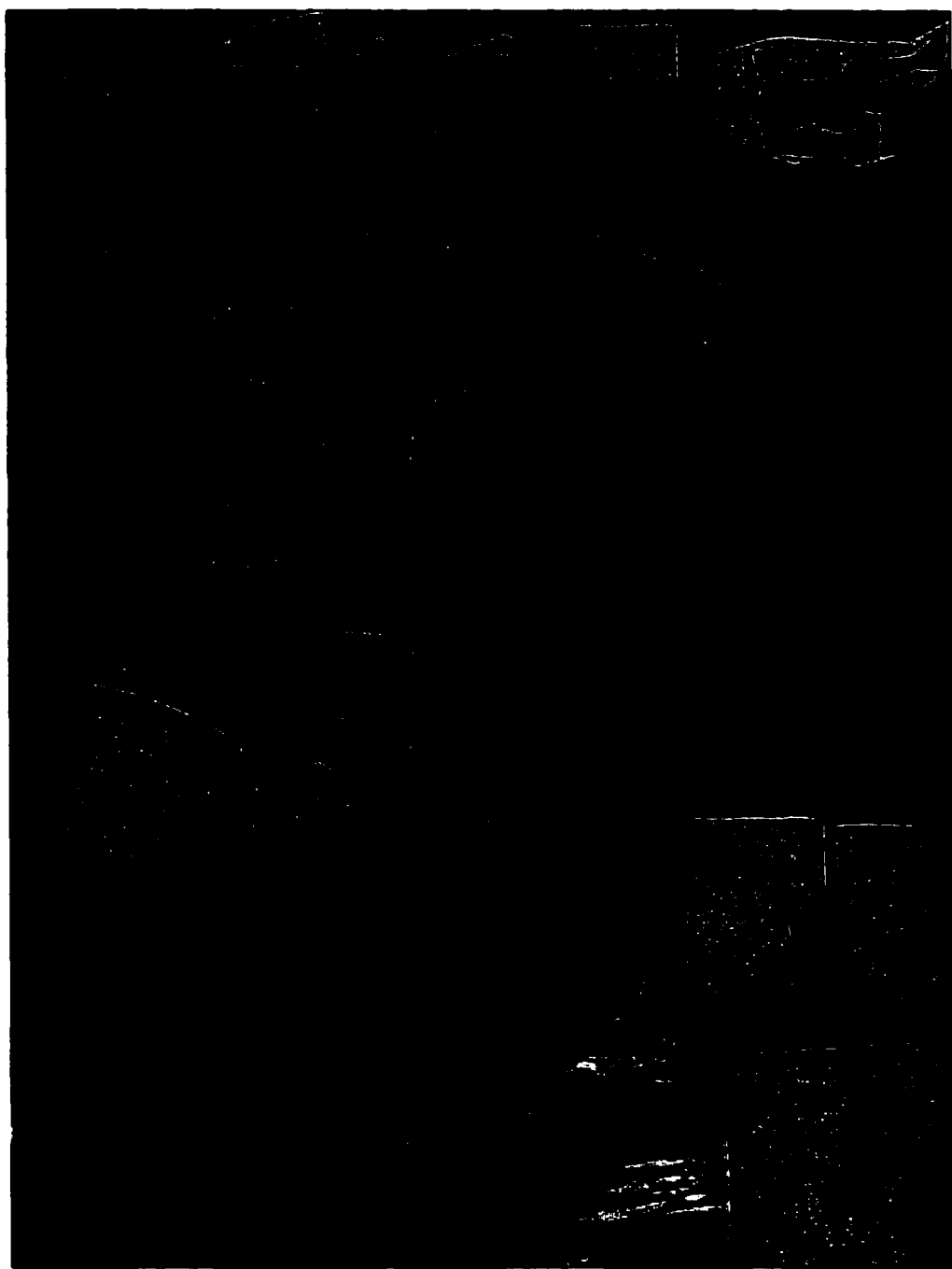
I agree to participate in this research project.

(name)

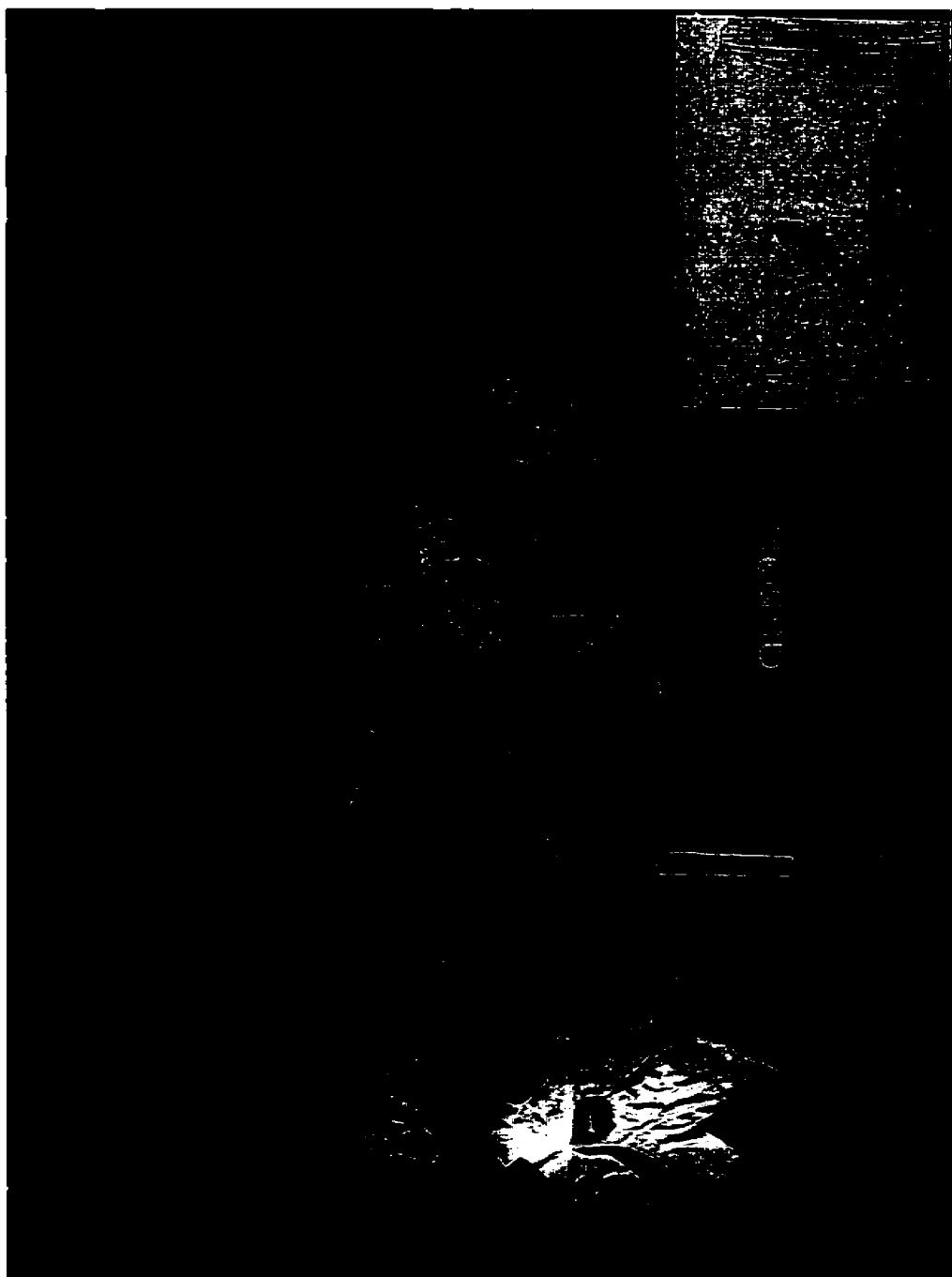
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APPENDIX B

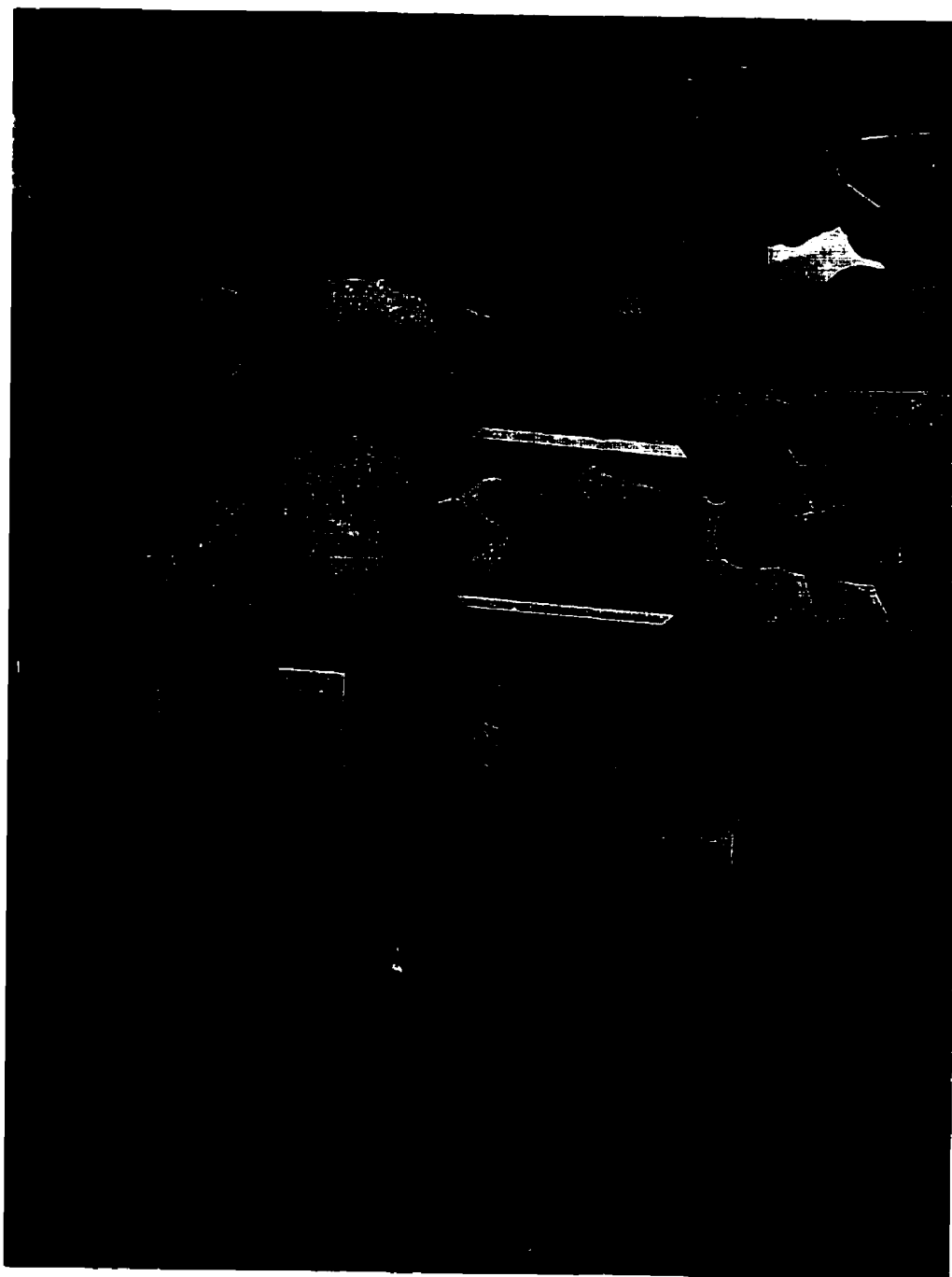
PARTICIPANTS' COLLAGES



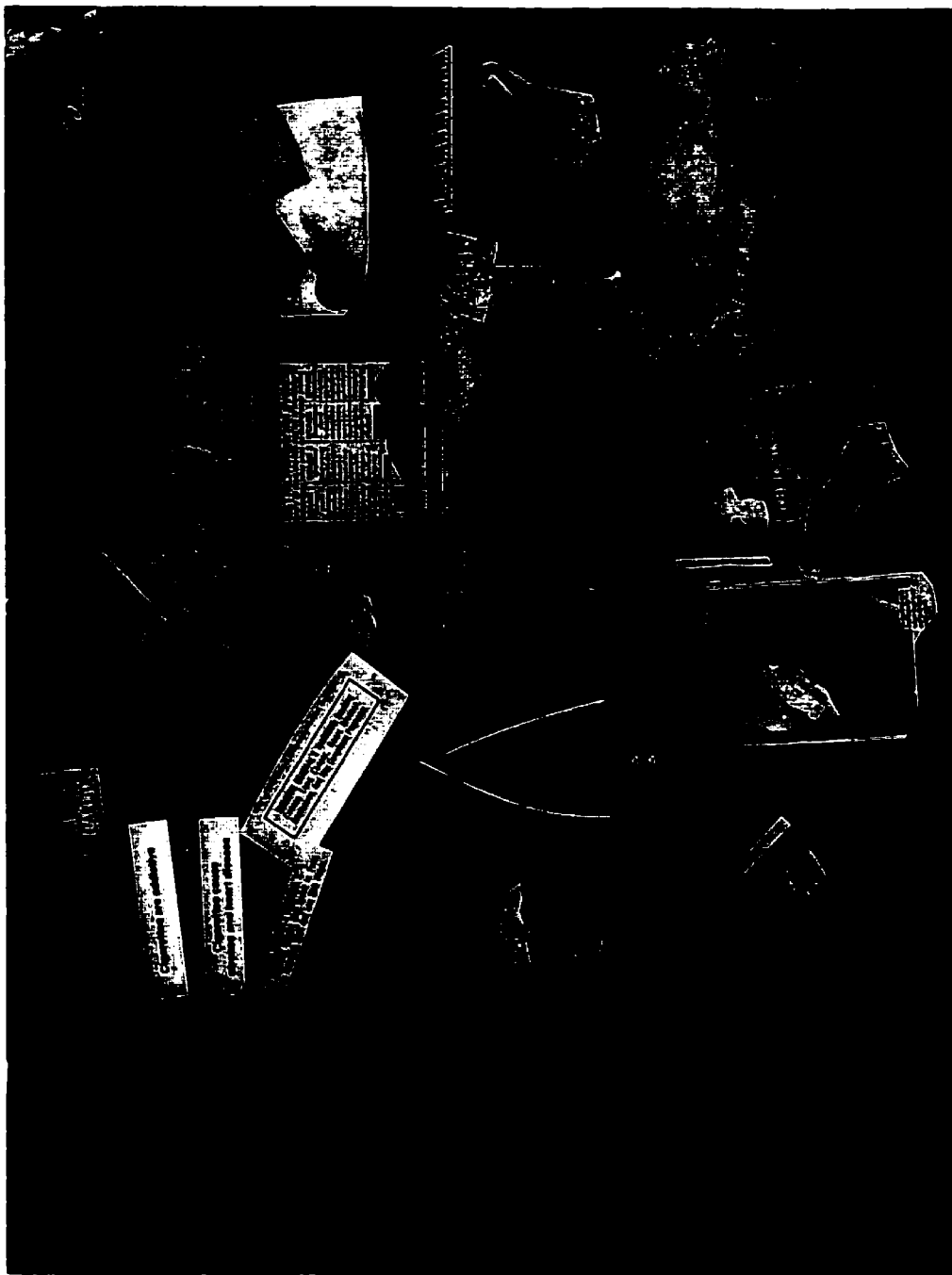
Collage: Group A



Collage: Group B



Collage: Group C



Collage: Group D



Collage: Group E