

Girls and their Body Image:
Sociopolitical Issues in Art Education

Heather M. Veltman

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of
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ABSTRACT

Girls and their Body Image: Sociopolitical Issues in Art Education

Heather M. Veltman, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2007

The thesis is feminist action research based on girl's body image in art education with a small sample of eleven and twelve year old girls from an elementary school in Montreal, Canada. The purpose of the study was to discover if *art* can assist young girls in resisting cultural stereotypes of feminine beauty. Pre-adolescence was chosen as an age-group to investigate if feminist theory and art-making strategies could promote a positive self image in girls. Issues-based art education was determined to be an appropriate teaching method to explore sociopolitical issues *by looking at art* and *making art*. A secondary goal of the study was to understand the dynamics related to teaching and learning about gender oppression, to identify factors that facilitated, and barriers that impeded the successful implementation of the body image project.

The results of the research indicate that the participants' body image dissatisfaction was influenced by media images, but that it originated in body-based harassment from boys at school. Also, the stereotype that 'girls are nice,' seen as an inherent feature of femininity, was a major stumbling block for the girls that necessitated self-silencing strategies. Nevertheless, it appeared that the girls used the body image workshops to practice their voices to address issues of gender inequity. Through analysis,

what the participants said, in combination with their silence about significant life changes, offered insights into gaps where girls' self-esteem—and body image--can be enhanced through feminist education and art.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research is about girls and their body image as it relates to their art education. Specifically, it is feminist action research based on a small sample of eleven and twelve year old girls in fifth and sixth grades in an elementary school in Canada. The goal of the study was to discover if *art* can assist young girls in resisting cultural stereotypes of feminine beauty. I chose pre-adolescence as an age-group to investigate whether feminist theory and art-making strategies could promote a positive self image. Issues-based art education appeared as the most appropriate form of teaching in this aim.

In this first chapter, I introduce the purpose of the study and the research questions. I explain how my interest in the topic evolved from my prior research on body image. I conclude by addressing how the topic of girls' body image fits into recent inquiry within issues-based art education.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to describe the effects of an art education project on body image that occurred in a Canadian alternative elementary school in Montreal, Quebec. The study aims to shed light on the dynamics related to teaching and learning about gender oppression to identify factors that facilitated, and barriers that impeded the successful implementation of the issues-based art teaching project. The specific questions guiding my research are presented here to explain how the research was structured. The first two questions are:

- 1-*Can art assist adolescent girls in resisting cultural messages that lead to dissatisfaction with their bodies?*
- 2-*Can art contribute to a positive self image?*

In question one, I aim to understand how girls negotiate meanings of femininity by differentiating between cultural ideals of the female body and their own bodies. Although the literature points to such evidence (as seen in Chapter Two), do the actual participants in my body image art workshops express body dissatisfaction and does this lead to efforts to change body shapes or to improve 'looks'? Are *these* girls dissatisfied? What do they already know about stereotypes and how does this influence them? Can critical analysis of stereotypes of femininity lead to a resisting posture?

Question two deals with the relationship between art and a positive self image. Can specific art projects, ones that introduce alternative facets of feminine life not visible in everyday media images and traditional art images, promote personal introspection that leads to a positive image of the female body, and hence a positive body image? In the encounter between feminist ideas and art, can girls move to a critical space that leads to resistance, self-validation and action? And finally, will it be possible within the research to know if the girls evolve from a negative stance to a positive one? I ask the question in this way because of my desire to understand the social and political contexts that lead girls (and eventually women) to be dissatisfied with their bodies while also reflecting on educational and psychological strategies for resistance to stereotypes. I seek to use an issues-based perspective in art education to understand how art can be used as a means for validating a positive self-image in girls.

While these two central questions drive my research, there are other secondary questions that contribute to my focus. They are specifically related to teaching from an issues-based approach to art education. These questions are:

3-What effect does issues-based art education have on students, teachers and curriculum planning?

4-What tools can the art educator learn to adequately cope with student's emotional reactions to new self-knowledge or notions of oppression, in order to move them toward a positive space of empowerment and change?

Question three focuses on the effects of issues-based art education as observed in practice. How are the students affected by this type of teaching for social justice and what does this mean for curriculum planning and teaching art?

Question four aims at understanding how art educators can address issues of social justice within the issues-based approach while also being sensitive to the multi-faceted layers of personal, familial, social and political elements that are brought to the surface by the teaching project. How can the issues-based art educator do her job in ways that are ethically responsible toward the participants as individuals? What educational tools can assist a teacher who directs an issues-based art project?

All four research questions and their related issues imply investigation into the practical applications of issues-based art education to understand the challenges, pitfalls and strengths of the research project on girl's body image.

Interest in the Topic

Body Image Research with Women.

My interest in the topic of body image developed out of my Master's research (Veltman, 2002), when I conducted a 'Body Image Art Workshop' for women at

Concordia University. This workshop was a strong instigator of intense, emotional discussion about what constituted negative and positive images of women. Faced with the myriad media images of female beauty, the women participants revealed their frustration, anger and deep ambivalence toward the ideology of femininity with its consequences of negative feelings of self-worth and over-emphasis on beauty and body. What the women felt was negative were images of women as “sex objects for men, passively on display to sell something.” They were outraged with media images which instilled an unattainable desire for a perfect body.

On a positive note, the women were relieved by the positive images they had found where women were portrayed as active and realistic (working women, women with children, women of colour, women without make-up, older women, etc.). In the second part of the workshop, the participants produced personal artwork, almost exclusively self-portraits that connected the prior discussion of positive and negative images to personal representations of self: active, real women (not models or movie stars).

The women in the workshops said that they felt more accepting of their bodies as they grew older. One participant compared her positive feelings today to the negative feelings she had as a girl, and then talked about her daughter’s negative body image. She believed that contemporary girls suffered as much, if not more, from body image dissatisfaction than did earlier generations of girls. The idea that ‘nothing has changed’ intrigued me. I was also fascinated by the fact that the women’s intense discussion on body image inspired them to do art. They claimed to be less embarrassed about discussing their artwork afterward. These two incidents motivated me to learn more about girls’ body image as a topic for research in art education.

Body Image Research with Teenagers.

A few weeks after the workshop for women, one of the participant's daughters, aged eleven at the time, requested a body image workshop *for girls* on behalf of a small group of her girlfriends. Initially, I was unable to arrange the workshops. Later, I organized a pilot study at Concordia University in the Spring of 2003. I was surprised and intrigued that the girls, now aged thirteen, still wanted the workshops!

I learned in the body image workshop for teenage girls that the girls' definition of a positive body image was completely opposite to the women's definition. For them, positive was defined as "being tall and thin," "looking good," "being in fashion" and being appropriately sexy according to one's age. Negative was described as "bad hairstyle," an "ugly dress," having wrinkles or body fat. The girls in the workshop revealed their familiarity with images of conventional female beauty, their acceptance of double-standards concerning female sexual behavior and the devaluation of women whose bodies did not correspond to the social norms: thin, tall, young, mostly white and good-looking. Not only were the norms of feminine attractiveness unquestioned but they were later reaffirmed in their artwork.

I showed the girls various art images of women to offer them an opportunity to reflect on different ways of representing and thinking about feminine beauty. I began with the artwork of many well-known mainstream male artists. The girls became angry with the images representing gender inequality (a clothed man in the company of a naked woman, for example), images that used the woman's body for something else (as a table or a violin) and by images that smacked of violence against women (a naked woman tied up). They defined these images as "very negative." However, they were equally shocked

by feminist art portraying “fat” women, realistic photography and drawings of real bodies and breasts with goose-bumps, wrinkles, sagging skin, stomach folds, etc. To them, these images were also “very negative.” The girls had great difficulty articulating their surprise and dismay that I would consider the depiction of fat or wrinkles as a form of social critique, and hence positive.

The most poignant aspect of the workshop was when the girls discussed their paintings of “girls going to a party, dressed to be sexy.” When I asked: “Are *you* beautiful girls?” they responded that they felt “more ugly than beautiful” and that “*all* girls consider themselves ‘not pretty.’” One participant gravely said “I know I’m ugly.” This conversation revealed the girls’ very low self-concepts concerning beauty. They said that their strategy for dealing with perceived personal shortcomings was to focus even more on external standards and to work harder to make themselves prettier. It makes sense then, that in their art they portrayed themselves in tight clothing, with exposed navels, lip gloss, dyed hair, jewellery, sparkles and make-up.

The discoveries I made in the body image art workshop conducted with both teenage girls and women revealed the need for more research into girl’s studies in art education. As a teacher of girls, the mother of a girl and a former girl myself, it also put me into contact with my own body image issues. Like the women in my first body image workshop, I have become more self-accepting of my body over time, as I grow older and more confident. Contact with feminism and feminist art education played an important role in my change of consciousness.

Overview of the Problem

Girls and their Body Image in Art Education.

In art there has been considerable literature devoted to women's bodies and body image within feminist art criticism and feminist art theory since the 1970s. Analysis of art images has served to understand how gender inequalities are structured through representations and through gender-biased looking paradigms. Given the widespread attention to the topic of body image in general, and to women's bodies in representational practice, it is surprising that there has been little research on body image within the field of art education. Few studies within art education have exclusively focused on girls as a branch of feminism. Thus, there is a need for more feminist research on *girl studies* within art education to broaden the perspectives of art teachers who work with girls.

The topic of body image is an example of how issues of oppression and empowerment can be actualized through the issues-based approach to teaching art. As such, it represents a fertile area for research in art education. Since the 1990s, body image has been a popular topic in many fields, particularly in sociology and psychology. Numerous research studies have been devoted understanding the sources and solutions to girls' and women's negative body image perception (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Empirical research in psychology, for example, sought to determine how idealized media images of women influence girls' cognitive and affective development (Yamamiya et al, 2005). Some researchers like Frost (2001) have used *art* as a tool for understanding, critiquing and researching girls' body image, from a sociological feminist perspective. If art is considered a valuable research tool in other fields, it also holds potential for research on body image within art education.

Issues-based Art Education.

Recent debates in art education have called for an approach to teaching children that educates for social justice. This involves the idea that education can be oppressive or conversely can liberate individuals from biased beliefs and practices that perpetuate oppression. Schooling is analyzed as a process of socialization informed by historical, political, and social issues (Nemiroff, 1992), while teaching is perceived as reproducing ideological content that serves to privilege some individuals above others. Viewed from a critical position, teaching holds the radical potential for transforming society by revealing oppressive power structures *to students* in the aim of learning “how culture and other social factors affect and influence the development of who they are, what they believe, what they create, how they do it and why” (Nyman, 2002, p. 64). Teaching becomes a tool for creating equitable learning for all students.

Issues-based art education is informed by these critical debates in education and integrates these ideas into the teaching of art. Children in classrooms are encouraged to critically understand, interpret and evaluate art and current visual culture in relation to their own lives (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). Learning in this context is perceived as integrative of all life experiences, acknowledging difficulties and differences, and moving toward celebration and change. Issues-based art education is viewed as emancipatory teaching to empower students while promoting social change. However, some questions concerning the practical implementation of issues-based art education need to be examined in the institutional classroom (Herrmann, 2005).

Need for the Research

In light of the above, there is both a need for research on girl studies within art education, particularly related to the topic of body image, *and* for research on the process of teaching for social justice in the form of issues-based art education. On the one hand, there is a need to develop places for girls to understand and unlearn sexist bias to better resist the oppression of women. On the other hand, it is pertinent to develop methods of teaching controversial subject matter, especially concerning issues of oppression. This study was consequently developed to respond to these needs, while focusing primarily on the topic of girls and their body image.

It was my expectation that contact with feminist art and art-making would improve the girls' feelings about their body image. I aimed to offer the girls the possibility of reflecting, criticizing, rejecting and choosing femininity *before* experiencing what Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Basow and Rubin (1999) describe as a crisis in female development involving body hatred. I therefore offered my workshops to young girls in 5th and 6th grade who were likely on the verge of puberty, a crucial stage in the development of female identity. Lessons were structured around the goal of blurring the sexualized, essentialist and stereotyped readings of the female body in representational practice. By introducing alternative ways of viewing and thinking about women's bodies, as seen in feminist art, it was hoped that feminist art education would encourage "girls to be active producers of their own cultures rather than passive consumers of what is mass-manufactured for them" (Harris, 2005, p. 167).

Furthermore, I believed that it would be profitable for the participants of the body image workshops to go beyond images, art, and feminist theory into the concrete

dimension of the physical body through movement and bodywork. I viewed this approach as a feminist strategy to move through the idea of 'woman as image.' I structured the body image workshops to alternately talk about the female body, look at representations of the female body, but also to encourage the girls to *feel* their bodies in the classroom. Reconnecting with the body was perceived as "highly integrative of academic, cognitive and social effects" (Nikitina, 2003, p. 54). Movement and bodywork were viewed as an *integrative pedagogy* within the body image research.

In sum, it was my belief that the issues-based art education workshops on body image would help participants develop greater resistance to stereotypes, which in turn would be translated into greater self-esteem.

Sketch of the Study

The research outlined here is feminist action research based on girls' body image in art education with a small sample of eleven and twelve year old girls from an alternative elementary school in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The five participants were white, middle-class and francophone Quebecois girls; three participants were in 6th grade and two were in 5th grade. The research took place between April 13th and June 17th 2004 and spanned fifteen two hour workshops, after school from 3:30-5:30 PM. The location for the research was in a regular classroom in the participants' school.

The action research was organized according to an overall unit plan that was meant to introduce themes related to the topic of body image *by looking at art* and *making art*. Each lesson plan was structured to include a discussion of themes, to look at artwork, to do movement exercises and to make art. Fieldnotes were chosen as the

principal means for collecting data to document what the girls said and did, as well as how I felt and acted while teaching from an issues-based approach to art education.

Organizational Layout of the Study

The research is organized into to five chapters. In Chapter One, I introduce the study and provide an overview of the structure and content. I explain how my interest in the topic evolved from my prior research on body image. Then I offer a sketch of the study itself by clarifying the purpose statement and the research questions. I conclude Chapter One by addressing how the topic of girls' body image fits into recent inquiry within issues-based art education.

The remainder of this study comprises of Chapters Two to Six, a reference list and appendixes. Chapter Two presents a review of literature on feminist social critique, girls' body image and issues-based art education. Chapter Three delineates the methodology of action research, the design of the study and the research procedures. A description of the Body Image workshops is presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five is an analysis of the data and a discussion of the findings. Chapter Six concludes the study by making recommendations for further research. A reference list and appendixes are found at the end of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

Conceptual Context and Theoretical Orientation

In this chapter I discuss the three important theoretical strands to my research: feminism, girl studies and issues-based art education. This review of literature is divided into three parts to provide an overview of the conceptual context and theoretical orientation that informed the action research project on girls and their body image.

Part one presents a review of literature on feminist social critique and explores how the topic of body image emerges from longstanding feminist interest in the body. Cultural conceptions of femininity, popular and visual culture representations of ideal beauty and the construction of gender identity are examined. I give an overview of some feminist strategies to understand how stereotypes can be challenged through art-making and art viewing.

Part two focuses on girls and their body image. I review research known as ‘girl studies’ to understand the influence of the ‘Girl Power’ movement in shaping ideals of girlhood. I also look at issues that affect contemporary girls born into feminism that are contextually different from those of other generations of women. Then, I examine the topic of body image by reviewing some empirical research from the field of psychology.

Part three investigates the world of teaching within an issues-based approach to art education. The issues-based philosophy of teaching sociopolitical issues is examined, while also making comparisons to current debates in art education. Some criticisms are explored to understand the practical difficulties involved in teaching issues-based art education.

Feminist Social Critique

Critical feminist literature establishes the theoretical underpinnings of this action research in art education. Feminist social theory, feminist art theory and feminist art education provide the conceptual context and theoretical orientation to the topic of body image. Generally, the topic of body image is perceived as a single-focused concern that narrows onto women's weight and eating disorders. In fact, body image research is a diverse field with a variety of theoretical positions, of which feminism is one (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). According to Cash and Pruzinsky, feminist thought has nevertheless permeated most body image research since the 1990s.

To fully understand the complexity of body image for girls in relation to its significance for art education, I will break the topic into its two parts: body and image. Each part will be addressed from a feminist lens. First, I give a historical overview of women's struggles to regain control of their bodies. I make a connection between violence against women and the cultural reinforcement of stereotypes through *images*. Second, I review important theories from feminist art. These concern representation of the female body as seen in canonical and mainstream art involving privileged viewing practices. I also take a rapid glance at some of the strategies employed by feminist artists to challenge stereotypes of women. These involve using art to resist stereotypes and to express women's experiences of their bodies. I will return to the specificities of body image as a topic of its own, in part two of this chapter.

The Female Body

Women's bodies within feminism.

The history of feminism is bound up with concerns for the female body, particularly since the 1970s (Davis, 1997). In Quebec, as in the rest of Canada and elsewhere, women were deeply impressed with the idea that their private lives (and their bodies) were connected to a social system of domination that made women dependent on, and subservient to men. Originally inspired by Marxist thought, patriarchy was conceptualized in terms of men's power as a dominant sexual class. Power over women was perceived as enacted through the female body by control of maternity and female sexuality (Toupin, 1997). For feminists then, the body was viewed as a transformative site for political struggle to gain equal rights for women through a process of self-determination.

Feminist activism was consequently solutions-focused, and sought to use the theory to change the world. Activists worked to gain control over contraception, the right for abortion, and women's reproductive health in general (Davis, 1997). Issues like violence against women, sexual abuse, harassment, incest and rape were brought to public attention as crimes. Support groups and centers were established for women, such as health centers, shelters for victims of violence, rape crisis lines, and self-defense courses (Toupin, 1997). Women's groups staged attacks on patriarchy such as manifestations against pornography, beauty contests, military parades, genital mutilation, and more (Davis, 1997; Toupin, 1997).

At a grassroots level, women's collectives were inspired to celebrate women's achievements by creating alternative spaces 'for women only' such as women's studies

courses, women's theatres, women's festivals, women's libraries and more (Toupin, 1997). Sexuality became a major feminist theme where women were encouraged to discover their bodies for themselves, not only for reproduction or in service of male sexuality. Thousands of women participated in sexual re-education courses, where they overcame the fear and self-loathing of their female bodies (Heinman & Lo Piccolo & Lo Piccolo, 1976; Kitzinger, 1983; Barbach, 2000).

Academic feminism.

In the academy, feminist research exploded within all the traditional fields such as education, psychology, anthropology, sociology, art, etc. (Davis, 1997). Sexist bias was discovered to be everywhere: within education, the workplace, the church, political parties, the government, the justice system, the economy, the family, and the heterosexual couple (Toupin, 1997). As a response, much research was devoted to the analysis of stereotypes in the perpetuation and maintenance of patriarchy. Feminists aimed to discover how stereotypes resulted in differences in status and privilege that adversely affected women's life chances for happiness and success (Frost, 2001).

Feminist interest in debunking stereotypes about woman's nature based in biology led to inquiry into female identity construction. Although originally focused on white, middle-class women and their bodies, feminism quickly moved to examine how women were discriminated against within the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, ableness and much more (Davis, 1997). The idea that womanhood was a shared (or universal) experience was replaced by the understanding of a

multiplicity of female experiences in the body, where gender remained nevertheless a distinguishing site of oppression (Toupin, 1997).

In this sense, feminist theory can be seen as deconstructing and reconstructing female subjectivity through two interrelated strategies. The first strategy concerns naming social injustices to raise consciousnesses about change. The second strategy involves empowering women through celebration of the feminine-identified (Harris, 2004). Both naming and celebration work together to break with stereotypes and to create new identifications with the feminine. Feminist theory-through-activism has been engaged in the active desire to position women as knowing subjects (Gaudelius, 1998). This is an important breakthrough that continues to live on in postmodern theories (although it is not always acknowledged as such) (Broude & Garrard, 1994). Davis (1997) maintains that feminist interest in the female body--as subject--can be largely credited for “putting the [female] body on the intellectual map” (p. 1).

Embodiment theory.

The topic of body image is directly related to feminist embodiment theory, which was addressed by feminists in the later 1990s. Embodiment feminism addresses the idea that female biology creates the possibility of women as a group (Davis, 1997). Although this idea is not entirely new,¹ it stands in opposition to postmodern feminisms that fragmented subjectivity into intersecting parts (race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and more), arguing against the possibility of women as a coherent group due to differences in

¹ There was a large debate on the question of essentialism, for example, especially Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, in the 1980s.

status and privilege (Davis, 1997). Embodiment feminism looks for commonality through a “thin reed of biology” (Fine, 2004, p. xii) but makes the point that women are not to be *defined* by their commonality. A shared gender nevertheless constitutes a tentative terrain of affinities and possible empowerment (Davis, 1997). By the same token, violence against women, particularly sexual assault, is one of those problems that profoundly influences women’s ability to live autonomous lives *in* and *through* their bodies. It is an issue that has a serious psychological impact on women and girls. Patriarchy and the climate of violence against women affect girls in their body image, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

The issue of sexual violence—as an everyday preoccupation for women—has not been solved by women’s greater access to power. In fact, visual culture reminds us that stereotypes about women and their sexuality, circulate in the form of images. Although sexist language is less tolerated in society, images are still justified as ‘freedom of expression’ regardless of their sexist content. Images normalize male and female positions in regards to power and sexuality—unequal ones—where female sexuality is shown to be at the service of male sexuality, according to pornographic codes (Paul, 2005; Levy, 2005). Stereotypical ideas and images are related to the ways women’s bodies are treated in real life. On the most basic level, equality between the sexes can be established by how women are treated by the men in their lives...in their homes, in their families, in schools, in the culture and on the street.

Violence against women and girls in Canada and Quebec.

The topic of violence against women conjures a misogynistic image of male dominance, where men—as a group—are portrayed as dangerous. Paradoxically, women

and girls are trained to believe themselves incapable of violence against men, even to defend themselves (Clarke, 2005).² It can be argued that for women to live normal lives, without excessive paranoia yet without knowledge of self-defense, it is necessary to occult statistical evidence about men's private lives. Statistics convey a social reality that girls and women live in an unsafe environment where sexual violence is a threat. It demonstrates that the feminist project of creating social justice has not achieved all of its goals. Canadian and Quebecois statistics confirm that women, especially young women, are the principal victims of rape and that they should expect, and be prepared for, violence. According to Statistics Canada (2003), sexual assault was the *fourth* most frequent criminal act of violence between 1999 and 2003.³ The fifth most frequent criminal acts of violence were "other sexual offences" (p. 1). Women and particularly young girls were reported as predominantly the victims of sexual assault (see Appendix 1).

The government of Quebec produced a research report on sexual assault in 2001 entitled *Governmental Orientations toward Sexual Assault*.⁴ Like the Canadian statistics, the Quebec report found that young girls--from all socioeconomic groups--are the most at risk for sexual assault. This report correlates its findings with an earlier study that estimated that one out of three girls and one boy out of six will be sexually assaulted before becoming an adult (Tourigny & Guillot, 1999).

² In this regard Clarke (2005) says that the "only violence permitted [women] is the sneaky kind: conspiracy, manipulation, deceit, poison, a stiletto in the back...when women are violent, we see it as shocking" (p. 315) and sensationalist. A good example of this is the recent media attention given to the Canadian rapist/murderer Karla Homolka and her bizarre sado-masochistic sexual life in prison.

³ The first three were homicide, attempted murder, and robbery

⁴ In French: *Orientations gouvernementales en matière d'agression sexuelle* (2001).

The researchers who wrote the Quebec report on sexual assault (2001) make clear that 98% of perpetrators of sexual aggression and assault are male, “coming from all social groups and independent of ethnocultural affiliations, age groups or educational levels” (p. 35). Nineteen percent of aggressors are under eighteen years old and the research shows that more than half of adult aggressors began committing sexual assaults when they were teenagers. This shows that the rate of recidivism is very high. In Quebec, 70% to 80% of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim. The reports states: “A husband, lover, friend, acquaintance (friend of husband, brother of a friend), therapist, co-worker, employer, co-student, neighbor or family member” (p. 30).

The major obstacles to fighting against sexual assault, according to the writers of the report, are “the stereotypical conceptions of women’s behavior” (p. 36). They say:

A strong proportion of the Quebec population believes that women accept sexual relations and then report to being assaulted; that women are ambivalent and that when they say ‘no’ they mean ‘yes’; that women provoke sexual aggression through their attitudes, behavior or clothes; that women are generally attacked by strangers; that sexual aggressors are ‘crazy maniacs.’ (p. 36)

The researchers argue that these erroneous beliefs distract public attention away from the real responsibility of sexual aggressors by doubting or justifying the reality of aggression. These social myths, prejudices and stereotypes also discourage women and children from making formal criminal complaints.

Living in a rape culture.

As if violence itself was not enough, the Canadian (2003) and the Quebec (2001) reports make clear that most women live in *fear of violence*. This is what Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth (2005) call “a rape culture” (p. xi). They say:

A rape culture is a culture of intimidation that keeps women afraid of being attacked and so it confines women in the range of their behavior. That fear makes a woman censor her behavior--her speech, her way of dressing, her actions. Fear undermines her confidence in her ability to be independent. Living in fear takes up a continent of psychic space. (p. 219)

For Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth (2005), there is a connection between the attitudes expressed toward women in the culture and a reality of sexual violence. They see evidence of a rape culture the representation of women on “t.v. programs and in advertisements, newspapers, novels, poetry, songs, opera, rock, rap, on billboards, shop windows, museum walls” (p. xiv). These authors believe that transforming a rape culture involves understanding—and changing--gender stereotypes and power relations seen in *images*.

Feminist Theory in Art

Within feminist theory in art, a connection is made between the representations of women and the construction of female subjectivity in relation to stereotypes of the feminine (Gaudelius, 1998). Viewing traditions in art, the definition of the artist as typically male, and the portrayal of the female nude are analyzed from a feminist lens (Parker & Pollock, 1981). It has been argued that representations of white women’s bodies have reinforced cultural stereotypes about women’s nature and that images of female beauty have played a role in constructing femininity as an essential element of women’s identities and lives.⁵ Within patriarchal binary oppositions, woman is marked as ‘other’ (Gaudelius, 1998) and femininity is depicted and viewed as body/beauty/sex

⁵ It is important to note that white male artists in the western canon of art history have focused most of their attention on stereotypes of white western women as representatives of an idealized femininity. These stereotypes have been applied to women of colour as well but with the additional stereotypes of race and class. The focus on white women in art has also marked the erasure of ‘other’ femininities.

(Mulvey, 1975/84). The unseen, neutral, unmarked or disembodied mind/hero/power can be identified as male (Mulvey, 1975/84).⁶

The beautiful woman as 'objet d'art.'

In the patriarchal context where art making has privileged male dominance, an unequal power relationship is signified through the visibility of female sexuality and invisibility of male sexuality, where the male is portrayed as active and the female as passive (and dependent on the male) (Parker & Pollock, 1981). Inequity is evident in historical conceptions of art, artist and viewer that revolve around a masculine art making/viewing paradigm. Art, in this sense, is a social and ideological activity that engages the viewers into the gaze of the artist, who is defining subject matter through 'the look.' According to Parker and Pollock (1981):

Woman is present as an image but with the specific connotations of body and nature, that is passive, available, possessable, powerless. Man is absent from the image [as artist or viewer] but it is his speech, his view, his position of dominance which the images signify. (p. 116)

In art this gaze is directed at female nudes in innumerable paintings and drawings, sculpture and photography. Often reclining, women, culturally defined as beautiful appear as willing objects of male sexual scrutiny and desire. According to Mathews (1991):

[The] genre of the female nude originates in antiquity, but its modern format of a passively seductive woman's body laid out across the canvas was popularized Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538). From Titian to Ingres to Tom Wesselman and David Salle, the convention of the nude as used by males remains largely unchanged in its objectification of women, whatever other meanings may be present in the work. (p. 416)

⁶ Parts of this section have been adapted from my unpublished paper, Veltman (2001) *Looking and Looking Back, Representation and Art*.

A link can be drawn between a woman's beauty and her sexuality. A beautiful woman is understood as sexy but not too sexual, in the sense of overly powerful or overpowering (of the male). "Rather than being inhabited by a consciousness, these bodies become vessels to be inhabited by male desire...[and] female sexuality is only represented in male terms" (Mathews, 1991, p. 416). Paradoxically, this type of imagery appears to capture a fragment of reality. Responsibility for the pose is displaced from the artist onto the sexual nature of the model (Parker & Pollock, 1981). The erotically charged image seems to imply that woman's sexual nature, like nature itself, wants to be tamed (Bordo, 1993).

It can be argued that canonical female nudes partake of a visual continuum with contemporary media and pornographic images that are bound up with issues of male ownership of female sexuality, images that are bought and consumed (Dines, 2005). As Pointon (1990) says:

The female nude functions, not as a category with clear parameters but as a form of rhetoric. It is the way the body functions in the grammar of representation, invoking ideologies of the body and its economy, that is significant rather than its erotic power as estimated by any particular viewer, or its pose, or the extent of its covering. (p.14)

As such, the female nude in representational practice reflects the "symbolic violence" inflicted on women "meant to reinforce patriarchal hegemony" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). Desjardins (1989) believes that:

No matter how complex or mediated the relationship, there is a connection between cultural representations of woman/woman's body and not only how political power is distributed among the sexes but also how gender identity is reinforced and perpetuated in that culture. (p. 67)

The social prescriptions of gender as expressed through stereotypes--contained within images—can be interpreted as “a means to regulate and organize women and men in different locations and value systems” (Grosz, 1988, p.100).

When beauty becomes censorship: representations.

The social construct of gender defines a female identity that is narcissistically bound up with the image of woman. Signified foremost as ‘body,’ women--just like their image--are to be looked at as objects of beauty, in *real life*. The recurring images of female beauty in art and in the media instruct women how to act and how to be sexual just in the right way---a perfect body with a perfect attitude.⁷ These images affect women’s feelings about themselves.

In relation to beauty, women’s active participation in the ideal of femininity is most troubling and riven with contradictions. Foucault (1980) explains this in terms of how power structures individuals into *a priori* subject positions, such as male or female from birth. These cultural signifiers serve to construct gender definitions, meanings and identities (Hall, 1997). For Foucault, representations are not only related to power, but are the result of it and work in a circular way. Power does not operate from above but rather works *through* and *in* individuals in their everyday life, demanding the active participation of the subject (Hall, 1997).

As a result, representations *reinforce* pre-existing power positions, often using “seductive images as a means to persuade and gain consent of the targeted group”

⁷ The images also represent women as invariably affluent and white (Davis, 1997) which leaves out a large proportion of women who are not.

(Gledhill, 1997, p. 348). Hall (1997) calls this the “*poetics* of stereotyping that underlies the *politics*- which is invested with power” (p. 263). In this way, art and media representations promote an ideal femininity that is culturally fabricated and that appears stylistically enticing. Sherlock (1992) calls this “culture disguised as nature” which attempts to evade “the history of the body as disciplined and punished, the body subject and subjected, which is produced in institutional contexts and not merely born” (p. 18).

Linker (1984) goes further:

Since the fabrication of reality depends on repetition to fix or stabilize meanings, most texts within cultural circulation serve to confirm and reduplicate subject positions. Over time these positions acquire the status of identities...Hence the forms of discourse are at once forms of definition, means of limitation, and modes of power. (p. 392)

Analysis of the stereotype of women’s beauty illustrates how representations serve to construct reality, by instilling a desire for female perfection that is oppressive. Images of female beauty in art and in the media, as well as their underlying ideology influence the reaction of real men to real women, as well as women to themselves (Sherlock, 1992). The ‘look’ or ‘gaze’ is internalized and follows women everywhere (Berger, 1972). Women resort to self-surveillance that includes monitoring clothes and movements. Many women become engrossed with ‘body projects’ to transform the body according to social ideals by use of makeup, fashion, dieting, fitness regimes, and cosmetic surgery. Better looks become a means for achieving a better self (Davis, 1997).

In this way, the stereotype of women’s beauty is involved in creating an identity *perceived* as feminine, yet women work hard to achieve the ‘right look.’ At the same time, comparisons with idealized images in the media (and in art) are known to cause women’s dissatisfaction with the real body (Tiggemann, 2005; Yamamiya et al, 2005).

Female spectatorship.

Women's attempts to embody the ideal of femininity demonstrate ample practice in looking through a masculine viewing paradigm. Mulvey's (1975/84) thesis of the male gaze argued that women are constrained within a passive female spectatorship and therefore can only see other women in terms of the male gaze. According to Gledhill (1997) however, there may also be a "disjuncture between patriarchal text and female audience" (p. 373). This brings forth the notion of female spectatorship.

Desjardins (1989) believes that Mulvey's definition women's "oscillation between a feminine and a masculine position" (who variously identifies with the active subject *and* with the objectified female body), does not offer "an optimistic view that a spectator can transform a text at the level of reception." (p. 71). Sherlock (1992) feels that the definition of female spectatorship "as a male masquerade....fails to deal with the multiple and often contradictory positions all human beings assume" and finds it to be "a position without political hope" (p.52). These thoughts are similar to the arguments of Smith (1990) who sees women as 'secret agents' behind the gendered constructions of femininity. For Griselda Pollock (1993) viewing art is much more complex than 'either/or,' 'masculine/feminine' frameworks. She says: "The psyche is indelibly marked by the culture which forms it, while also containing more than any culture will officially sanction...[Therefore] we can read art symptomatically for meaning shaped by the drama of the subject" (p. 11). This suggests that women (and men) may be able to find ways of interpreting art that do not strictly adhere to the male gaze or to objectification of the female body. It testifies to women's active sexuality and desire, and active gazing as

opposed to a passive one. It also points to the varying degrees with which the male gaze objectifies women.

Nuance on the theory of the male gaze is enlightening for teaching cultural codes and the ways that images are 'read.' At the same time, it invites learning about other artistic visions of women, ones that express women's experiences. Alternate images of women are seen by many feminists as a good means to give girls and women more power to define themselves. By viewing images that are different from the mainstream, "spaces of liminality," become apparent, that is, "in-between places...that are central to how adolescent girls construct a sense of self" (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 10). In bell hooks' (2003) words, freedom within system of domination is in the "margins and gaps, on or through the body, where agency can be found" (p. 94). These gaps are apparent in feminist art.

Feminist Art-making Strategies

Feminist artists have been involved in challenging stereotypes of women through strategies and counter-strategies to critique dominant modes of representing women's bodies and these can be useful in the teaching of art. The following section explores some approaches toward representing women's bodies or experiences. These were sources of inspiration for the body image art workshops.

Reclaiming the female body in art.

In response to a male dominated art world that represented woman as the negative rather than the alternative of man, the Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s spurred

artists to explore (and reject) the stereotypes of femininity. Feminist artists sought to reclaim 'woman' by giving it a new meaning, one that was about female experience rather than about male fantasy. The idea that personal experiences of oppression were related to a larger sociopolitical reality inspired women to create autobiographical art. Frequently, they used their own bodies as subject matter. This emphasis on new visions of the female body "forced into view the underlying erasure of 'woman' from the aesthetic and epistemological structures of western culture" (Irigaray, 1985, p. 78). Thus, by using the body as a site for political struggle, the re-appropriation the female body was a way of asserting an active female subjectivity in opposition to stereotypes of femininity. Although complex and problematic, many feminist artists hoped to reclaim 'woman' and 'body' outside of patriarchal discourse, and to explore what the 'male gaze' cannot or does not wish to see.

Lippard (1993) has suggested that feminist artists engaged in what could be called "talk back" to the culture that oppresses women (p. 4). 'Talk back' as a feminist strategy is concerned with confrontation as a means to explode stereotypes. Some artists challenged the idea that women and girls are *innately* feminine or *naturally* concerned with beauty or image. By playing with different forms of representation, femininity is shown to be a cultural disguise that girls/women put on, and by extension can take off. This is the case when feminist artists use the nude to disturb voyeuristic pleasure. By placing women in conventional viewing poses intended for aesthetic pleasure, but subverting body size or other features of idealized femininity, viewing pleasure is denied. As such, the body becomes a site for political intervention. By making direct reference to

physical experience by portraying goose bumps, moles, sagging skin or cellulite, the female body becomes a canvas on which to inscribe meaning.

Other feminist interventions on the body involve addressing issues of domesticity, motherhood, menstruation, aging, sexual abuse or rape. These examples demonstrate the various ways feminist artists have made political art to raise awareness about women's experiences, while also addressing the viewer's expectations of art and "what's contained, or expected, within art's 'frame'" (Cottingham, 1994, p. 29). The idea that art is essentially concerned with aesthetics and beauty (especially feminine beauty) is defied.

Feminists who infringe on taboos by breaking the codes of voyeuristic pleasure work to create what Wolff (2003) has referred to as the 'grotesque' nude "which has orifices, genitals, protuberances" (p. 416). She asks:

What happens when the female body is affirmed and displayed, in defiance of the dominant ideals of the 'perfect body' acknowledging the reality of actual women, the diversities of shape and size, the functions of corporeal existence (eating, excreting, menstruation, sex, pregnancy, aging, illness)? (p. 418)

As a response, Wolff refers to Rosso's (1986) notions of the grotesque and the 'carnavalesque.' She says: "Women and their bodies, certain bodies, in certain public framings, in certain public spaces, are always already transgressive-dangerous and in danger" (p. 418). Wolff (2003) argues that hardcore pornography uses the grotesque body as a *justification* for sexual domination. Thus, as a feminist strategy, the grotesque is likely to be neutralized, although there is nevertheless the hope of what she calls "leakage" of new ideas into consciousness (p. 418).

In another vein, some feminist artists set out to create a 'feminist erotic' that would portray women's autonomous sexual self-identity, replacing the oppressive fantasy of woman with representations of women's sexual experience, specifically *by and for*

women. As such, female sexuality was portrayed by looking through the eyes of the 'embodied' artist to empathize with female experience. Other strategies involved tantalizing the viewer's curiosity by alluding to female sexual body parts without explicitly showing them, revealing life-like aspects such as body hair and round shapes.

The purpose of expressing ideas of sexuality through art is to celebrate women's autonomy and also to counter the self-loathing that many women experience in western culture. Other celebratory feminist art-making strategies intended as a means for empowerment involved depicting feminine experience not usually seen in art. Images of women from a variety of ethnic, racial, cultural, and class-based diversity, as well as images of women in childbirth, breastfeeding babies and in company of children became suitable as subject matter for art.

Certainly the artwork proposed by feminist artists offer more depth to the total number of representations of women that have circulated in art and in popular culture during all these years. However, it can be argued that if viewing pleasure is still located within women's bodies and women's sexuality, "the inevitable recuperation of the female body to the patriarchal spectacle of women" remains (Nead, 1992, p.68). When images intended to resist the male gaze are subsequently co-opted by it, then they have failed to alter the traditional identification of women with their biology, with nature or as objects for male sexual possession (Pollock & Parker, 1981). This quandary illustrates the importance of the political agenda in feminist art that actively (and overtly) seeks to resist patriarchal inscriptions of the feminine.

It can be seen that representation of the female body is complicated and fraught with difficulties. Many feminist artists abandoned the representation of the female body

altogether. Instead, they chose to suggest the body (and its experience) through clothing, text or blurred forms. Other artists aimed to transform the figure into an androgynous being, where 'gender bending' would create confusion about sexual identity and prevent the automatic categorization of individuals into gender roles.

Challenging the gaze.

Is it then possible to challenge, resist or change a dominant regime of representation? What are there counter-strategies that can be proposed, in the effort of subverting current representational practice? (Hall, 1997). Are there ways to function both inside and outside dominant viewing codes? Hall discusses a counter-strategy that he calls "through the eye of representation" that seeks to contest representation from *within* representation (p. 274).

He says:

[This counter-strategy] is more concerned with the *forms* of representation than with introducing a new *content*.... It positively takes the body as the principle site of its representational strategies, attempting to make the stereotypes work against themselves...It makes elaborate play with 'looking,' hoping by its very attention, to 'make it strange'--that is, to de-familiarize [the gaze], and so make explicit what is often hidden--its erotic dimensions. (pp. 274-275)

Therefore the postmodern counter-strategy seeks to challenge the illusion of reality within representation by emphasizing the modes of construction. In other words, the mechanisms of the gaze are made obvious or disturbing, similar to what Mulvey (1975/84) termed "intrusive camera presence" (p. 367). Through various pictorial signifiers, the actual subject of the artwork becomes 'looking at looking' and the viewer is made aware about her/his complicity in dominant forms of viewing (Hall, 1997). As Bal (1991) notes: "The awareness of one's own engagement in the act of looking entails

the awareness that what one sees is a representation, not an objective reality, not the ‘real thing’” (p. 142).

In sum, the feminist artists analyzed above shed light on the varying strategies to create awareness about gender stereotypes in representational practice and to find an authentic place for women in art and in society. There is no consensus among feminists, however, about the best approach to take. Faced with the difficulty of challenging a malestream viewing tradition, it becomes apparent that there is no perfect feminist artwork, nor ideal theory of representation. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that by focusing on the interactive processes in art as a means to raise consciousness, the ‘feminist meaning’ can reside in the production and reception of viewing, the success of which depends on the individual spectator (Hall, 1997). Art-making and spectatorship can be a means to think through the gendered body in order to break the logic of the disembodied objectifying (male) viewer (Meskimmon, 1998).

In this way, the gazing “I” of female subjectivity can be expanded through art, in the form of resistance, ‘talk back’ or celebration. The viewing/criticizing/making of art can provide opportunities to grapple with lived contradictions related to subject positions, as opposed to fixed identities that derive from ideals or stereotypes (Ellsworth, 1992). For girls this can mean understanding the stereotype of femininity and re-evaluating its effects on the body and mind. This is the goal of the issues-based project devoted to exploring body image with young girls.

Summary

This section of the literature review focused on how feminist theory provided the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the action research on girls’ body image. In

the first part, a historical overview of women's struggles to regain control of their bodies was presented to show how the female body has been an important feminist site for personal and social change. The social climate of gender oppression in which images and ideas of women circulate was described. As such, the content of images is seen to play a role in shaping and reinforcing stereotypes of women's submissive sexuality and men's dominant sexuality, which is played out in real life.

In the second part of this section, feminist theories in art were reviewed. Canonical art representations of the female body were explored as well as typical viewing practices which are related to unequal gender positions. Feminists have argued that stereotypes of the feminine and theories of the male gaze are both informed by and inform real life practices. In corollary, feminist art-making strategies shed light on different ways of thinking about women's experiences and representing their bodies. This is useful for teaching girls how to define themselves—their lives and their bodies—in empowering ways. Feminist art serves as an inspiration for “girls to be active producers of their own cultures” (Harris, 2004).

Girls, Bodies and Body Image

To discuss the relationship between girls and their body image, it is useful to look at what it means to be a girl, what girls' lives are like and what issues concern them today. I have divided Part Two of this literature into three sections: girl studies, girls' issues and girls' body image.

In section one, I establish current theories in the field of girl studies, particularly Girl Power's influence on the new generation of young girls. I have done this to understand how girl's lives are contextually different than other generations of girls, in light of the influence of feminism. Then, since the research study on girls' body image takes place in a school environment, I review the educational research to understand how schools become major sites for the reproduction of gendered identities. Next, I explore the issue of sexual harassment in schools which is a trivialized yet significant aspect of girls' educational experiences and which strongly influences their self-esteem and body image. In section two, I carefully examine Brown's and Gilligan's (1992) research on girls and women's psychological development. Although their research is more than a decade old, their findings are very insightful for working with girls today. I also review the work of educator JoAnn Deak (2002), a partner on Brown and Gilligan's research team, who provided insights about issues that preoccupy today's girls, particularly concerning important turning points in their lives. In section three, I look specifically at the topic of body image by reviewing empirical research from the field of psychology. I examine some of the strategies suggested by various researchers to improve girls' body image.

Girl Studies

Girl studies have been part of feminist interdisciplinary work for a long time, as girls and women are often seen in their relationship to one another. The term 'girl studies' has only been coined since the 1990s when an explosion of research on girls became a

subspecialty of feminism—a girl’s movement (Harris, 2004). Michelle Fine is often credited as one of the first feminists to bring gender into to the male-focused ‘youth studies’ within sociology (Harris, 2004). And Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan (1992) are renowned for having pioneered feminist research on girls in their groundbreaking work *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development*.

Within education, Arnot (2002) is well-known for feminist research identifying schools and schooling as important sites where femininities were constructed. In 1992, the American Association of University Women published *How Schools Shortchange Girls* and in 1994 Sadker & Sadker published *Failing at Fairness: How America’s Schools Cheat Girls*. Both books revealed discriminatory practices within schools that favored boys over girls. Mary Pipher’s (1994) bestselling hit *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* created a whirlwind of concern about the sexualized, media-saturated, violent culture that ‘poisoned’ girls. In all of these books, girls as a group were portrayed as experiencing a common psychosocial crisis that silenced their voices, as they entered adolescence. Later research provided important insights about how girlhood, as womanhood, was not a common experience that could be generalized but rather constructed within different intersections such as race, class, gender and anglocentric (hetero)sexuality (Harris, 2004). Nonetheless, the research in girl studies made relevant connections between the cultural definitions of girlhood and the ways girls negotiated these meanings into their lives. The ‘girl’s movement’ was focused on developing strategies to build a healthy resistance in girls to combat oppression (Harris, 2004).

Early feminist work in girl studies was premised on the idea of transforming the culture to give girls greater freedom and more opportunities than was given to other generations of women. According to Taft (2004), the idea of girls as powerful originated “in the riot grrrl movement and third wave feminism, as an explicitly political concept” (p. 69). It was expected that girls would reap the benefits of feminism. Harris (2004) contends that “feminism has furnished young women with choices about sexuality, chances for education and employment, and new ways of asserting autonomy and rights” (p. xvii). However, she maintains, mostly “privileged young women are reaping the benefits in a world of greater choices and opportunities but fewer structures of support” (p. xvii). One of the structures of support is feminism, which is portrayed as irrelevant in commercialized versions of Girl Power. I will return to this point further on in my discussion.

Reviving Ophelia is often cited as having triggered widespread popular interest in girls’ issues, which eventually led to the ‘girl’s movement.’⁸ According to Ward and Benjamin (2004), vast programs were launched to improve student-teacher classroom interactions in relation to gender expectations in schools, while curricular reforms were introduced to include more achievements by women. Girls were encouraged to enter male-defined fields like mathematics, science and technology. Similar ideas circulated in Quebec educational circles, as can be seen in the report produced by the Quebec Council of Higher Education (1999) *Improving School Success for Boys and Girls*.⁹

⁸ *Reviving Ophelia* spent three years on the New York Times nonfiction bestseller list and sold over 1.5 million copies (Ward & Benjamin, 2004).

⁹ In French: Le Conseil Supérieur de l’Éducation (1999), *Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles*.

Along side with the new concern for girls came literature about ‘mean’ girls (Harris, 2004). Bestsellers like *The Secret Lives of Girls* by Lamb (2002), *Odd Girl Out* by Simmons (2002) and *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Wiseman (2002) portrayed girls as experts in relational aggression and female bullying. This new image depicted insult-hurling, gossipy and back-stabbing girls as equally violent as boys, whose relational aggression was possibly more damaging in the long term than was boys’ physical aggression (Ward & Benjamin, 2004). Many feminists saw this negative vision of girls as part of the backlash against feminism that served to contradict Belenky’s (1984) portrayal of girls as caring and nurturing and Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) research on the sophisticated relational awareness and interpersonal skills of girls (Ward & Benjamin, 2004). For Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004), the ‘mean girl’ image served to neutralize arguments about gender discrimination because female and male aggression were placed on par. Problems like sexual harassment or assault were rendered invisible. They argue:

Alternative aggressions are, fundamentally, weapons of the weak. As such, they are as reflective of girls’ powerlessness as they are of girls’ meanness. Women and other oppressed groups have not, historically, been permitted direct aggression without terrible consequences. (p. 51)

Girl Power: anti-feminist, postfeminist, individual power, consumer power and fashion statement.

By the later 1990s, the notion of Girl Power shifted to combine both feminist and anti-feminist representations of girls. Girls in Girl Power were portrayed as intelligent, ambitious and autonomous, yet fashionable and sexualized with the appearance of a ‘talk back’ (not nice) attitude. The notion of *feminist* ‘talk back’ or girls as political agents was lost in mainstream girl power (Griffin, 2004). Taft (2004) identifies four meanings

associated with Girl Power: anti-feminism, postfeminism, individual power and consumer power.

The Spice Girls can be seen as the epitome of the 'new girl' image, also defined as anti-feminist by Taft (2004). As an all-girl pop band, the Spice Girls were presented by the media as empowering and celebrating girls' strengths while emphasizing a 'sassy' attitude. Girl Power asserts its difference with feminism by making it "softer, sexier, less active" while highlighting "beauty and appearance [therefore] kicking feminism up the arse" (Taft, 2004, p. 71). In this sense, Girl Power has an irreverent 'talk back' attitude to *feminists* (stereotyped as unfeminine 'butches'¹⁰). The Spice Girl/Girl Power image fit well with mainstream culture's investment in sexualized female beauty in antagonism with feminism. Feminist values are "invoked only to be dismissed" (Mc Robbie, 2004, p. 8) while maintaining the central role of appearance in feminine identity (Fritzsche, 2004).

Girl Power as a form of postfeminism implied that feminism was over (or dead) because equality between the sexes had been achieved. If anything, girls had too much power or were too dominant (Taft, 2004). The question was raised repeatedly in the media whether feminism was to blame for turning boys into 'losers' (Sommers, 2000; Bouchard, et al, 2003).¹¹ Young girls are incited to disengage with feminism, or at best, resist calling themselves 'feminists.' According to Mc Robbie (2004), the disempowering of feminism was achieved by focusing the media's gaze on the Girl Power image, thereby directing public attention away from 'girls as victims' and onto 'failing boys.'

¹⁰ This unfeminine and homophobic portrayal of feminists is ironic given that feminism put forth the notion of female sexual agency, for and by women *especially* in heterosexual relationships..

¹¹ Many television specials in Quebec, between 2002 and 2003, such as on 'Enjeux' and 'Le Point' on Radio Canada (SRC) for example, were devoted to the topic that boys were dropping out of high school at alarming rates. The overly feminized world of education and the cultural influence of feminism were often cited as somehow conspiring in an 'unfair' situation for boys.

Taft (2004) describes how Girl Power affirms that “girls can do or be anything, so long as they work for it” (p. 72). This idea of individual power presents the world as a “meritocracy” and “hides the material and discursive forces shaping identity and the ways that these gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized identities may give privileges or pose challenges” (Taft, 2004, p. 73). Similarly, Girl Power conflated as consumer power reduces the notion of girls’ power to their ability to consume. Popular culture presents girls as “voracious consumers” who love to shop and are “inappropriately (hetero)sexualized for their age” (Ellen, 2000, p. 35). This idea is also related to capitalist interests in making girls into targets for marketing.

In all cases, Girl Power was above all a fashion statement (a ‘look’) that involved tight spandex clothing, spaghetti strap t-shirts, low cut jeans that expose skin, profuse use of makeup, glitter and platform shoes. It was essentially concerned with *image*. The sexy, young, ferociously independent, glamour girl was itself a highly consumable representation within a tradition of sexualized images of women in art and the media. All of the types of Girl Power demonstrate how an idea originating in feminism, (i.e. girl’s political power) can be recuperated by patriarchy into a spectacle of the female body and by capitalism to sell goods.

It is important to note that Girl Power is exclusive to affluent, white, thin girlhood (Harris, 1997). By representing only one type of idealized girl, other girls whose bodies are rounder, taller or shorter, or who feel in any way embarrassed about growing up, are marginalized.¹² By implying that gender equality has already been achieved, Girl Power denies the fact that “all girls are influenced by, and must negotiate, persistent gender bias

¹² The same can be said of girls whose personalities are not outgoing or sassy, or who are reserved about their budding sexuality.

in institutions” (Ward & Benjamin, 2004, p. 21). For Mc Robbie (2004), this represents “a complexification of Faludi’s (1992) backlash thesis...that presents neoconservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life” (p. 4). Girl Power is not about helping girls deal with the unequal gender organization of society. Mc Robbie says: “The new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern, sophisticated girl” (p. 9). Even with a sassy *attitude*, young girls are still nice. For Mc Robbie, freedom, choice and consent within Girl Power are closer to constraint than social change

In sum, the key issues for feminist research in girl studies today are concerned with providing safe (non exploitative) spaces where girls can experience their agency and power, through naming, knowledge and “analytic tools...to gain personal fortitude to navigate and thrive in the shadow of cultural bias” (Ward & Benjamin, 2004, p.24).

Harris (2004) suggests further feminist inquiry into:

The relationship between popular cultures, material conditions and gendered identities, the role of social institutions such as school and the media in shaping femininities, and the places and voices young women utilize to express themselves. (p. xix)

Schools as sites for the construction of gender.

Since the research on girls’ body image took place in an elementary school, it is useful to review educational research that analyzes the role of schooling in the construction of gender. As such, feminist research has shown that schools are important sites for the reproduction and construction of gendered identities (Arnot, 2002). This is significant in understanding how girls’ relationships to their bodies are constructed through daily life interactions.

In this regard, the Quebec Council of Higher Education published a report in 1999 entitled *Improving School Success for Boys and Girls*.¹³ It cites educational research demonstrating that the “socialization into stereotypes [is] responsible for differences between boys’ and girls’ achievement in school” (p. 37). It states that gender not only colors childhood but that it “structures different cultural experiences for girls and boys” (p. 40).

The report on education in Quebec (1999) revealed that girls enjoyed school, persevered, were motivated, “receptive of mind and inhibitive of aggression” (p. 52). In stereotypical terms, the social expectations to be docile, cooperative, self-reflexive and nice coincided well with teachers’ classroom management and resulted in positive evaluations of girls. Clearly, girls functioned well in the classroom. However, the report offers more complex explanations for understanding girls’ success in learning. It was discovered, particularly by Bouchard and St-Amand (1996), that the success of girls was largely related to the perception of education as an opportunity for women’s social mobility. Within the last thirty five years, feminism has played an important role in making girls aware of inequality and opening up the field of female possibility. This has influenced girls “across all social levels” (p. 63). The report gives evidence that mothers play an important role in this process. Working class mothers, for example, encourage their daughters to succeed in school to ensure a better future than they had. This is reputed to increase the motivation of working class girls. These findings from educational research contradict earlier ideas that girls were more conservative and more attached to gender stereotypes than boys (Bouchard and St-Amand, 1996).

¹³ In French: Le Conseil Supérieur de l’Éducation (1999), *Pour une meilleure réussite scolaire des garçons et des filles*.

Thus research in education reveals that contemporary girls are less threatened by masculine-associated activities than earlier generations of women and hence more flexible in their gender identity. Flexibility is an advantage that girls profit from in school, particularly in the primary years. As they get older, however, research demonstrates that girls are more influenced by gender stereotypes and predominantly choose careers that are person or relationship-oriented, such as teaching, where the status and pay is relatively low. Boys choose “instrumental” or practical careers that are more lucrative (p. 75).¹⁴

The report on education in Quebec (1999) cited research showing that boys succeeded far less well in school than do the girls because boys are “prisoners of contradictory expectations” (p. 52). While the social stereotype of masculinity fosters behavior and attitudes in boys that are “independent and aggressive, competitive, impulsive” (p. 52), these traits stand in the way of good classroom functioning. Also, boys were shown to strongly reject what they perceived as feminine-identified subjects essential to school success, especially reading and writing (including legible calligraphy). School attitudes like perseverance, application or compliance were viewed as feminine attitudes, and as such rejected by boys. Worse yet, adopting feminine-associated behavior like paying attention or working quietly was reported to be “a factor of unpopularity” for boys (p. 53). Popularity was associated with “causing trouble” or “being a class clown”

¹⁴ According to the report, boys chose “instrumental” or practical careers that are more lucrative (p. 75). However, this was also evident in choices within the classroom. Girls preferred to read poetry and novels whereas boys preferred to read technical information on a computer screen.

(p. 53). The stereotype of masculinity involving the “abnegation of the feminine” resulted in boys being more rigidly attached to their gender-identification (p. 54).¹⁵

The report also described research demonstrating that fathers were strong role models for their boys in the production and reproduction of masculinity, a factor noted to create distance between boys, learning and school success. Particularly working class fathers (but not exclusively) distanced themselves from their children’s learning and rarely participated in homework. This is what Arnot (2002) calls “domestic pedagogic work” (p. 9) and contributes to the idea that school is feminine-identified.¹⁶ School-based researchers discovered that the stereotype of masculine identity, more than any other factor, was responsible for boys’ lack of school success.

Teachers and gender.

The Quebec report on education (1999) demonstrated that teachers were also influenced by gender expectations. The report reads, “Although it has been established through research that girls in mixed classrooms speak three times less often than boys, they are perceived [by teachers] as always talking too much” (p. 51). This relates to the stereotype of women as ‘verbal,’ ‘gossipy’ and ‘talkative.’ On the contrary, research in education revealed that “boys mobilize more of the teachers’ attention than girls, taking unrequited initiatives, monopolizing ‘the linguistic space’ and speaking without having been interrogated. Girls seem to fade into the decor” (p. 51). The report reveals that

¹⁵ According to the report, boys whose parents had a high level of education adhered less strongly to the stereotype of masculinity, and succeeded far better in school.

¹⁶ The report also addresses the suspicion that boys fail because early childhood education is a field dominated by women. Although 98,4% of preschool teachers and 85% of primary school teachers in Quebec are women, research studies in education have found no substantial evidence to correlate failure in school with the gender of the teacher.

teachers remember boys' names faster and better than girls' names. Girls "appear more as something of an indistinct mass" (p. 51). This is partly due to the teachers' desire to keep the class under control. Noisy boys and calm girls reflect social stereotypes, yet "since boys are always a menace of disruption," girls are often forgotten (p. 52).

Other research referred to in the report, demonstrated the ways gender dynamics incited teachers, both male and female, to spontaneously proffer more attention to boys by asking them more questions, exchanging ideas with them more often, offering them leadership roles in the class, and appreciating the content of their work in depth. It was found that girls were praised more often for the presentation and neatness of their schoolwork and less for the content. In addition, various research experiments demonstrated that when teachers made special efforts to be more equitable in their interaction between the sexes, "the boys became more agitated and redoubled efforts to get the teacher's attention" (p. 52). It can be concluded that boys are apparently aware, perhaps only dimly, of the extra attention they receive.

To conclude, the Quebec report on education (1999) addresses the idea that although girls of different backgrounds have an impressive record of school achievement "with the same diploma, women have more difficulty getting recruited on the workforce and they continue to receive lower pay" (p. 73). It states: "In spite of social progress, women are still subjected to 'systemic discrimination'" (p. 73). In their conclusion, the researchers recommend that teacher-education programmes in university include the unlearning of stereotypes, so that students can be made aware of the connection between gender roles in relation to learning and the workforce. Also, schools should be involved

in informing parents, especially fathers about the process of gender socialization in relation to learning and success.

Sexual harassment in schools.

The existence of sexual harassment targeted at girls by boys in schools has been confirmed by the report Quebec Council of Higher Education (1999) described above. It reads: "Most research on education demonstrates that girls are victims of a high level of sexual harassment, as soon as they get to high school" (p. 71). Larkin and Rice (2005) have demonstrated how sexual harassment has a powerful effect on girls' body image. In a recent study conducted in Montreal, Kingston and Toronto, 3000 high school students reported to being sexually harassed, that is 75 % of students (three out of four) were harassed over a three month period (Meunier, 2005, p. 9). This finding is similar to American studies that confirm peer-to-peer sexual harassment as a part of everyday life in schools (Stein, 2005). Although sexual harassment becomes more prominent in high school, girls have reported being harassed as young as eight and nine years old (Larkin & Rice, 2005). Harassment causes heightened body self-consciousness which has a negative impact on body image perception (Larkin & Rice, 2005).

Examples of sexual harassment are "attempts to snap bras, groping at girls' bodies, pulling down gym shorts, flipping up skirts, nasty personalized graffiti, sexualized jokes, taunts and skits that mock girls' bodies, staring, leering or stalking" (Stein, 2005, p. 64). Harassers use the Internet to spread rumors about girls. Sometimes girls are harassed to participate in unwanted sex to recuperate a stolen purse. In everyday talk in Canadian high school hallways, girls are regularly referred to as 'sluts,' 'bitches'

and 'cock teasers' (Meunier, 2005. p. 9). Stein argues that sexual harassment is often rationalized by teachers and educators as 'teasing,' 'flirting' or is seen as developmental 'interest' in the other sex.

The normalization of harassment disregards how the female body becomes the focus of inequitable gender relations (Larkin & Rice, 2005). For the victims, the effects of harassment range from "absenteeism, lower grades, sleeplessness, physical symptoms, dropping out of class or school" (pp. 60-64). Girls report to developing phobic attitudes such as "fear of separation from adults, fear of taking the schoolbus, fear of recess or lunchtime" (p. 60). Since harassment rarely gets punished, girls' trust in adults is diminished and they withdraw their belief that school is a safe or fair environment (Stein, 2005). Generally, students view harassment "as a public performance which is normalized, expected and tolerated" (p. 61). For boys, it is often viewed of proof of virility within their peer group.

Sexual harassment specifically "interferes with a student's right to receive equal educational opportunities" and lessens the quality of school life in general (p. 61). Stein sees schools as training grounds for gender violence. She argues that sexual harassment is an important problem which is rendered invisible in the school setting, and which demonstrates male sense of entitlement to sexual domination. Rooted in sexual stereotypes, harassment reminds girls, on an everyday basis, that their bodies are subjected to the male gaze.

Girl psychology.

In light of gender-related difficulties that girls experience in their daily lives such as harassment or unequal treatment from teachers, Brown and Gilligan's (1992) research is insightful for understanding the development of girls' psychology. Although their research dates from the early nineties, Brown and Gilligan are often cited as the pioneers of girl studies. I have found their analysis useful for working with girls today, since most of the issues they describe have not been fully resolved. Three of their ideas are particularly relevant for understanding how girls can resist oppressive circumstances that negatively affect female development. These are: encouraging girls to develop their voices, teaching them to be critical of the social injunction that 'girls are nice,' and building stronger connections between women and girls. According to Brown and Gilligan (1992), voice, breaking from 'niceness' and relationships are the keys for empowering girls.

Naming and voice.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) originally conceptualized voice as the key element (often missing) in girls' development and women's psychology. Their research was based on interviews with young girls, and they traced the girls' abilities to name their experience over a period of ten years. They discovered that girls, aged seven and eight years old, were outspoken and unafraid to face situations of conflict. Young girls appeared to navigate relationships realistically, expecting people to disagree or have different feelings. They accepted conflict as a normal part of life and were therefore willing to speak out about injustices. The researchers refer to younger girls' fearless

attitudes as the “whistle blowers in the relational world” (p. 42) because they use their voice.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that as girls moved into puberty, around ten or eleven years old, they lost their willingness to use their voices to defend themselves. On the edge of adolescence they appeared to “lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character” (p. 2). Pre-adolescent girls seemed to lose their voice, which was analyzed by Brown and Gilligan as a factor that contributed to making women passive about their oppression. Finding ways to help girls develop voice was seen as a way to empower women.

Being nice.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) argue that girls’ gradual loss of voice is related to the stereotype of femininity and the social expectation that girls will be nice *at all times*. Girls learn early on that to be loved and accepted they must be “‘nice girls’ who ‘wait their turn,’ ‘be polite’ or ‘be patient.’ Nice girls ‘make more friends’” (p. 45). They learn from the culture that they must choose between stereotypes of good and bad women. Their choices are to be nasty or nice, selfish or self-silencing. The necessity of ‘always being nice’ orchestrates behavior to keep girls from “saying too much or speaking too loudly” (p. 52). The authors say that “girls learn to separate what they know from what good girls should know, what they do from what girls should do, what they feel and think from what nice girls should feel and think” (p. 91). Through disassociating from their feelings, girls are less able to recognize their thoughts and emotions, especially in situations of conflict with others. This conundrum, at the developmental turning point of

adolescence, divides women between themselves, and in themselves. This is what the authors call “the tyranny of niceness” (p. 53).

According to Brown and Gilligan (1992), niceness--a typically white, middle-class, Christian norm of femininity--is oppressive as a form of social control that appears as self control. The injunction to be nice makes it increasingly difficult for girls to face conflict as they get older. Bad feelings that are “too loud, or too sad, or too sexual” go underground because of “displeasure with fighting...distaste for conflict, [and] the wish to make everyone happy” (p. 180). Girls’ anger is so socially unacceptable, that they resort to relational aggression, such as “‘whispering,’ ‘telling secrets,’ ‘making fun of’ and ‘laughing at’ which are ways to prevent girls from risking too much or acting in ways that are too threatening, too different” (p. 45). Brown and Gilligan say:

Open conflict and free speaking that were part of girls’ daily living thus gave way to more covert forms of responding to hurt feelings or disagreements within relationships, so that some girls came to ignore or not know signs of emotional or physical abuse. (p. 218)

They argue that since “women’s voices have been traditionally trivialized, dismissed, and devalued” (p. 41), women’s and girls’ unhappiness should be taken seriously and listened to. Girls need to be encouraged to express conflict and anger in public situations or within relationships, without the fear of consequences.

Connections between women and girls.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) affirm that girls’ empowerment to express conflict comes from building better and more authentic connections between girls and women. This is because of the way girls feel that they must choose between ‘having a voice’ or

having relationships. If girls are 'not nice' because they express conflict, then their relationships are at risk. This is a process Brown and Gilligan (1992) call "giving up relationship for the sake of 'relationships'" (p. 232). When teachers break with the idea that 'girls are nice' and encourage girls to use their voices in relationships, they help counteract the negative influence of cultural stereotypes.

To have genuine relationships with girls, Brown and Gilligan (1992) argue that teachers need to invite the girls' "most urgent questions into conversation, into relationship" (p. 230). They found that when teachers expressed their desire to get closer to girls, the "girls responded with a desire for even greater closeness with their teachers" (p. 230). Brown and Gilligan analyze girls' development and women's psychology as a process that is "inescapably political" (p. 16) within patriarchy. They affirm that it is necessary for "a healthy resistance to turn political and for political resistance to turn into psychological resistance" (p. 16).

They conclude:

When women and girls meet at the crossroads of adolescence, the intergenerational seam of patriarchal culture opens. If women and girls together resist giving up relationship for the sake of "relationships," then this meeting holds the potential for societal and cultural change. (p. 232)

Girl Issues

To get a good grasp of what pre-adolescent girls are like, and to be able to invite girls into conversation, as Brown and Gilligan (1992) have argued, it is useful to understand some of the developmental and social issues that affect them. Themes that are

important preoccupations for girls such as menstruation, first sexual experiences and relationships with peers and parents are explored.

Age group characteristics of pre-adolescent girls.

The work of Deak (2002), a clinical psychologist specializing in girls, offers some good insights as to how complex the lives of pre-adolescent girls really are. Deak worked on Brown and Gilligan's original research team during the ten years of the Laurel/Harvard study on girls, described above. Deak's subsequent research is based on twenty years of observations and on "the responses of thousands of girls over decades of professional work in schools" (p. 198).

Deak (2002) describes pre-adolescents girls between the ages of eight and thirteen years old as the "pollywogs of homo sapiens" (p. 70). They are no longer little girls and not yet teenagers, caught somewhere between the two. That is why Deak refers to them as "tweens," a cross of the words 'teen' and 'between' (p. 71). She argues that girls this age often say, "Don't treat me like a baby" while later insisting that they are "too young for responsibilities" (p. 71). For Deak, tweens' bodies and hormones are in full effervescence, giving them a "changeling energy" that changes from "girl to girl, day to day, and hour to hour [and] makes a girl seem alternately goofy, sweet, serious, crabby, distressed, and defiant" (p. 70). Girls' bodies are involved in a dramatic transformation that will propel the girl into a 'new' womanly self.

Deak (2002) offers recommendations for working with pre-adolescent girls. She suggests encouraging girls' sense of autonomy and agency, while emphasizing the necessity for parents and teachers to establish a core philosophy and bottom line about

behavior. Especially helpful is Deak's advice about staying connected to girls by remaining sensitive to "crucible moments" and "crucible events" in their lives (p. 48). These are important events or turning points that have a major influence on how a girl negotiates her experiences into her identity. For Deak, menarche and early sexual experiences are central 'crucible events' that require gentle guidance from the adults in girls' lives.

Important turning points for girls: menarche and sexuality

Menarche, or the first menstruation, is the beginning of girls' physical sexual maturation. For Fingerson (2005), "menstruation is a central experience for [girls and] women" (p. 116). Deak (2002) affirms that menarche is "the most obvious crucible event of the tween years, making the start of what amounts to a complete physical transformation" (p. 78). It causes girls to become very self-conscious about body functions and body image. Deak says:

Menarche is more than a milestone, it is the main event. These changes will affect every aspect of a girl's life, from academics to athletics, from the shape of her body to the shape of her thoughts, from her most social moments to her most intimate relationships, including the relationship she has with herself. (p. 78)

In the past menarche happened during adolescence, somewhere near twelve or thirteen years old. Today, it happens at earlier ages, sometimes as early as third grade for early maturing girls (Deak, 2002). Deak describes how 'hormone talks' were commonly given in fifth grade but have been moved down to fourth grade in recent years. Now, faced with

increasing evidence that girls are maturing earlier and earlier, many educators are considering giving the ‘talks’ in third grade (Deak, 2002).¹⁷

Deak (2002) describes how, in practical terms of every day life, young girls live with the anxiety of getting their first period in school. This involves the possibility of staining their clothes, being embarrassed in front of classmates and/or becoming the object of taunting. These issues are related to a tension between what Fingerson (2005) calls “a private menstrual identity” and a “public menstrual identity” which involves managing bodily needs in the privacy of one’s home and managing them in public spaces (p. 115). A girl learns to negotiate this new physical reality, while psychologically adjusting to the idea that others know about her menstrual status because of her age. To some extent, girls need to develop the ability to discuss menstruation with her friends and her mother. In this sense, a change in physiology leads to “shifting and changing identities” (p. 131).

While most women would agree that menstruation is a landmark of physical and social transformation, it is also stigmatized by a taboo. Fingerson (2005) remarks: “It is surprising that menstruation—an integral and continuing event with significant implications for health and well-being is considered a taboo topic....and has generally been neglected in mainstream social research” (p.116). She argues that dominant cultural biases that view menstruation in pejorative terms as disgusting or unspeakable “are detrimental to women’s health and psychological well being” and negatively influence a girl’s self-esteem and relationship to her body (p. 133). Fine (2004) calls this “the politics

¹⁷ In the school where the action research on girls and their body image was undertaken, there was no sexual education whatsoever. The responsibility for discussing issues of physical maturation was entirely up to the the parents, in the privacy of their homes. Teachers advised parents, for example, to ask their pre-teens to wash and brush their teeth!

of intimate daily life” (p. xii). As an alternative to the negative evaluation or shame surrounding a normal biological process, Fingerson (2006) affirms the need to provide girls with more support by celebrating menstruation. New cultural traditions are needed to redefine female embodied experiences in positive terms, which would include rituals for menarche, childbirth, menopause and other important ‘crucible’ events. Says Fine (2004):

Through the collective body of girls and women...where live the outrage, analysis, knowledge, critique shouted and stuffed back into our bodies...we need to invent traditions of passing down oral histories, secrets, whispers, and screams of girls/women—before, within, and across homes, communities, cultures, and nation-states. (p. xiv)

By shedding the taboo of the female body with its ‘messy’ reproductive capacities, it is radical to think that girls and women can come together to ‘speak the body’ and create the possibility of an ‘us.’

Another important issue that strongly influences young girls’ relationships to their bodies is sexuality (and what to do about it). For Deak, sex is a “key crucible event of adolescence” and “all high school girls feel an incredible pressure to deal with sexual issues” (pp. 121-123). Because there is a “mismatch between outer growth and inner maturity and wisdom,” Deak (2002) believes that it is imperative to talk about sex and sexuality with girls (p. 78). She sees this as cultivating “survival savvy” to “protect girls from innocence and ignorance” (p. 84) because “sexual activity is part of the social conversation as early as the tween years” (p. 85). Deak recommends that educators provide age-appropriate information to “give them a comfort level” to “dispel the mystery, and to help them manage the uncertainty without excessive anxiety” (p. 85). Although she recommends talking “gently” to tweens, Deak advocates discussing “the

sociological backdrop” to shed light on the “slut-look, the push to date or have a boyfriend...or the do-whatever-boys-like” behavioral theme (pp. 85-88). As research has shown, girls are more sexualized and actively sexual, yet more dissatisfied with sexuality than ever (Frost, 2001).

According to the report from the Quebec Council on the Status of Women (2002) *News from Her, Young Women from Quebec—15 and 29 years old*,¹⁸ girls in Quebec become sexually active on average at sixteen years old. However, many girls engage in sex at fourteen or fifteen years and some at thirteen years old and younger. Younger and younger girls (ages 12-13) are pressured to perform oral sex (Deak, 2002). On average 21% of girls aged fourteen and fifteen are sexually active and reported to not using condoms. This puts them at a higher risk for AIDS, in addition to the fact that they get infected with sexually transmitted diseases in 75% of reported cases.¹⁹

Research on sexuality found that young girls’ precocious sex is linked to girls’ strong desire to be loved and accepted, making them “afraid of affirming themselves or displeasing” (Quebec Council on the Status of Women, 2002, p. 7). To not seem displeasing or demanding to their boyfriends, and to be nice, young girls put themselves at risk for pregnancy or disease.

Bouchard and Boily (2005) make a connection between girls’ acquiescence of precocious sexual activity and the pornographic culture that eroticizes girls’ childhood through fashion, popular culture and magazines for girls based on stereotypes of

¹⁸ In French, Le Conseil du statut de la femme, 2002, *Des Nouvelles D’Elles*.

¹⁹ One result of such statistics is that hepatitis shots were administered to all children in fourth grade in Quebec schools in 2004, including the school where the action research was undertaken. On inquiry, the nurse explained to me that children today are at risk because they are sexually active earlier than ever before. As such, ten year old boys and girls received the vaccine, including all the girls in the body image action research.

femininity. Robert (2005), a clinical sexologist, believes that the pornographic culture has found its way into children's bedrooms—through images--and has turned adolescent sexuality into a “performance of genitality” (p. 129). Sexually active girls complained to Robert that they are stigmatized by the sexual double standard. This creates a struggle for contemporary girls who want to be ‘sexy’ and ‘cool’ but do not want to be viewed as disreputable ‘sluts.’

Sexual equality narratives.

For Milnes (2004), teenage sexuality is tightly woven with gender stereotypes. She argues that popular culture fosters what she calls “sexual equality narratives” which imply that girls have the freedom to engage in the sex they desire (p. 153). She contends that Girl Power encourages girls to see a masculine-identified sexual identity as progressive for women by embracing “promiscuity, rejection of intimacy, romance, commitment, fidelity and love” (pp. 158-163). Promiscuity is presented as the choice of the ‘liberated,’ ‘independent,’ and ‘modern’ girl. Milnes asserts that other narratives of female sexuality are insinuated as “conventional, less daring, [belonging to] ‘older’ people in the old days” (p. 164).

In this paradoxical way, Milnes (2004) argues, girls seek to challenge romantic models that portray women as sexually passive by adopting alternative, more active models. Casual sex, however, does not seem as fulfilling to girls as they expected, either in terms of the actual experiences themselves or for their reputations as ‘sluts.’ Milnes research findings show that girls and women “reported to participating in unpleasant sex four times more often than men” (p. 153). She concludes that young girls did not

experience casual sexual relationships “on the same terms as men” (p. 166). She adds: “Transgressing the dominant cultural construct of female sexuality can have profound implications for young women” (p. 165). For her, sexual freedom has not yet been achieved for girls. She recommends more opportunities for girls to discover a middle-ground between the stereotypes of male and female sexual identities.

In Robert’s view (2005), sexual liberation has become a sexual oppression that has traumatized young people, especially girls who are ‘educated’ by the media and the pornography industry, which promotes unequal sexual roles...How can girls take charge of their sexuality by making wiser decisions and becoming more resistant to pleasing others? For Robert (2005), like Deak (2002), this can be achieved by better sexual education that ‘gives the facts’ yet layers sexuality in feelings, relationships, and not just technique and performance. Better self-knowledge can support girls, who already struggle with the selfish-selfless constructs that make them vulnerable to peer pressure and exploitative sex.

Girls and Their Body Image

Up until now, I have reviewed research that gives evidence that stereotypes of femininity negatively influence women’s and girls’ experiences of themselves in their bodies. This section investigates research on the topic of girls’ body image specifically. It examines research on body image, statistics on girls’ body image dissatisfaction and feminist analyses of body image issues. Approaches for improvement of body image are also reviewed.

Research on body image has been strong in the last fifty years, particularly in the field of psychology. Within popular consciousness, body image refers principally to women's and girls' common dissatisfaction with their bodies and their body image, what Rodin et al coined in 1985, as 'normative discontent.' As such, body image is generally perceived as a 'single-focused' concern on women's weight issues and eating disorders. In fact, body image research is a field specialized in diverse theoretical positions and conceptual foundations (Pruzinsky & Cash, 2002). Pruzinsky and Cash (2002) acknowledge however that feminism has played a pivotal role "in shaping the theoretical foundations of the field" (p. 6). It is intriguing for art educators to discover that a common tool, used in the field of psychology for assessing body image, is *drawing* (Radika & Hayslip, Jr., 2002).²⁰

Body image can be defined as "the intersection of the physical body with cognitive and emotional activity" within a mental self-representation of the image the body (Wiederman, 2002, p. 287). This definition makes apparent a link between an image of the body, the real body and girls' feelings and perceptions about themselves.

Girls and body image dissatisfaction

Feminist literature on girls' body image reveals how the binding nature of gender stereotypes leads to low-self esteem and body image dissatisfaction which is one of the characteristics of women's oppression under patriarchy (Frost, 2001; Tiggemann, 2005). As seen with Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Deak (2002), female adolescence is a

²⁰ According to Radika & Hayslip, Jr. (2002), "the earliest projective technique used to examine body experiences was the Draw-A-Person (DAP) test" in the early 1940's. The DAP is based on the "body image hypothesis"...however there is recent debate about the reliability of the method. Body image is also regularly treated within the field of art therapy.

particularly stressful time of change where girls are negotiating great physical, psychological, social and environmental changes. Not only are adolescent girls' bodies changing shapes, but they are moving out of the relatively protected space of grade school into the larger more gendered, heterosexist arena of high school (Striegel-Moore & Cachlin, 1999). Although physiological and cognitive developments contribute to the stresses of adolescence, "sociocultural factors appear most critical in girls' dissatisfactions with themselves" (Frost, 2001, p. 45).

Whereas girls aged 8 to 11 tend to be "strong, self-confident and outspoken," with little regard for gender 'appropriateness,' early adolescence is characterized by the search for a stable gender identity (Basow & Rubin, 1999). In the United States, after only one year of high school (grade 7 in Quebec), white middle-class girls show a significant drop in self-esteem and academic performance, going from 55% 'happy as I am' to 22% (Basow & Rubin, 1999, p. 36). Rather suddenly, girls move out of a space of relative freedom to 'be who they are' to being perceived as objects of 'the gaze.' Or they are depicted as "psychologically unstable beings locked in enfeebled and unreliable bodies" in need of rescue by a male hero (Frost, 2001, p. 7). All of these messages work to make girls feel firmly locked inside their bodies and contribute to feelings of worthlessness (Frost, 2001). Levine & Smolak (2002) call the multiple challenges girls face "synchronous stressors" (p. 75).

For girls in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada and the United States, body image dissatisfaction is normative and obsessive. The report from the Quebec Council on the Status of Women (2002) showed, for example, that 57% of girls want to lose weight for aesthetic reasons. 35% of *nine* year old girls feel that they are 'too fat' (Lavallée, 2002).

The writers of the report linked body image dissatisfaction to psychological distress and depression, which is high in the teenage and pre-teen age group: 30% of girls reported to being “highly distressed” (p. 4).

To alleviate the stresses involved in negotiating change, teenage girls look rigidly to available social models of acceptable adult female behavior and gender roles, a process often referred to as ‘gender intensification’ (Basow & Rubin, 1999). Popular culture bombards girls with idealized images women—as objects. Girls turn their gaze onto themselves for comparison, and when dissatisfied, they resort to increased “body monitoring, anxiety about appearance, dieting to lose weight” (Striegel-Moore & Fanko, 2002, p. 185). Striegel-Moore and Fanko (2002) say: “Anti-fat attitudes are part of a social ideology that holds individuals responsible for their life outcomes. Fatness is correlated as a defect of character” (p. 187). It is not surprising that negative attitudes toward ‘being overweight’ are already present in three year olds (Striegel-Moore & Fanko, 2002). Yet, as the authors argue, this comes into contrast with sedentary lifestyles and the fast-food industry, where girls and young people in general are encouraged to eat unhealthy foods. In contemporary times, the cosmetic surgery is perceived as a rapid and easy way of removing ‘fat.’ In Canada, it is estimated that 2000 young girls, under the age of eighteen, undergo plastic surgery every year (Larkin & Rice, 2005).

The cultural obsession with fat makes girls unhappy with their changing bodies and this influences their self-esteem. According to Levine and Smolak (2002), “Pubertal development in girls is accompanied by an average weight gain of fifty pounds. This includes twenty to thirty pounds of fat, much of it deposited in the hips, thighs, buttocks, and waist” (p. 74). Hence, normal female development involves fat, which is also the

trigger for menstruation. When girls attain approximately one hundred pounds, the required degree of fat signals the onset of menstruation which moves the body further away from ideals of thinness. This normal developmental event is reported to create great distress among girls aged eleven to fifteen years old (Levine & Smolak, 2002).

Beauty and idealized images.

The media is greatly responsible for perpetuating idealized images of women. Yamamiya et. al (2005) found that in the United States “94% of female characters on television programs are thinner than the average American woman” and that “these were characters whom the media associate happiness, desirability and success in life” (p. 75). Striegel-Moore & Fanko (2002) argue that not only are women “over-represented in all visual media, [but] that certain media, especially video, computer games and music videos have high stereotypical content” (p. 188). The media also plays a role in instructing girls and women how to attain the ideal body shape through diets, exercise, steps in the application of make-up, hairstyles and fashions. These ‘how to’ suggestions further embroil girls into the idea that they *can* and *should* be thin (Yamamiya et. al, 2005).

Girls and women, as well as boys and men, are conditioned to recognize what is culturally defined as attractive for women. The current ideal of feminine beauty involves “white, young, tall, firm but not too muscular, and somehow both slender and full-breasted” (Levine & Smolak, 2002, p. 78). Particular facial features like almond shaped faces, high cheek bones, small noses, long eyelashes, plump lips and perfectly smooth complexions are preferred above others. Within a culture that places extreme emphasis

on the female body, girls feel pressured to conform to images of thin and beautiful movie stars, singers and fashion models. They learn that “power, prestige, wealth and male attention are bestowed on women who are culturally defined as ‘attractive’” (Basow & Rubin, 1999, p. 36). Striegel-Moore and Cachelin (1999) argue that beauty is not only demanded of girls, it is viewed as “a core aspect of female identity” (p. 85). Striegel-Moore and Fanko (2002) say:

To understand the powerful influence of the beauty myth on girls and women, we need to appreciate that beauty is a central component of the female gender stereotype. Experiencing herself as beautiful serves to affirm a girls’ or woman’s identity as female. (p. 187)

Mazzarella and Pecora (1999) go even further by arguing that the culture instructs girls that their body is their voice. They state:

While one could make the argument that in today’s culture girls are socialized to believe it is more important to have a “perfect” body than a voice, it may be more appropriate to argue that our culture inundates girls with messages that their bodies are their voices—their identities. (p.2)

It can be said that the prevalent normative body ideal is one that is unattainable for the majority of women and girls and that this is oppressive. Equally disturbing is the fact that girls whose bodies *do* fit the norms are also dissatisfied with themselves. Many who are considered beautiful and underweight believe themselves to be fat or ugly (Levine & Smolak, 2002). When girls experience a discrepancy between the mental image of their bodies and the representations of idealized images, they tend to magnify their body size and features and consequently feel dissatisfied. Empirical research in psychology demonstrates that “an idealization of thinness is positively correlated with body image dissatisfaction” *regardless* of actual body shape (Yamamiya, et. al, 2005, p.

75). This reveals the extent to which idealized representations of women's bodies "can adversely affect psychological well-being and the quality of life" of girls (Striegel-Moore & Fanko, 2002, p. 183).

Harassment and body image.

Sexual harassment has been shown to contribute significantly to negative body image in girls because the heightened body self-consciousness it causes (Larkin & Rice, 2005). Girls have reported being sexually harassed by their peers in school as young as eight and nine years old. According to Larkin and Rice (2005), "Body-based harassment was a major cause of body dissatisfaction that led girls to adopt body modification strategies that had serious consequences for their physical and emotional health" (p. 223). They argue that girls' body dissatisfaction was more strongly related to harassment than to ideals of thinness per se or distorted self-perceptions. In their research, they found that although comments about being fat were the most common, girls were also harassed for being too thin or 'flat as a board.' Their research shows "that girls get negative comments about their weight regardless of their body size or eating patterns" (p. 225). Also, girls were teased about "early" or "late" breast development (p. 225). Other research demonstrates that boys are more "likely than girls to make critical, harassing comments to girls...about weight and shape," and brothers are well-known perpetrators (Levine & Smolak, 2002, p. 81). Levine and Smolak (2002) say that "females in developed countries receive a clear message from multiple sources that the female body, much more so than the male body, is to be looked at, evaluated, possessed by men, and in general, treated as an object" (p. 81).

In response to the pressure, Larkin and Rice (2005) have found “evidence that early maturers start dieting sooner and late maturers are dissatisfied about a body that does not qualify as ‘womanly’” (p. 227). The fact that harassment is normalized as teasing “does not take into account the intersection of the body with inequitable social systems” (p. 220). The authors advocate “mainstreaming body equity through the elementary school curriculum...[because] interventions on body image and weight preoccupation are most effective at the elementary school level before they become firmly entrenched” (p. 229).

Resistance to negative body image.

So far the discussion on girls’ normative negative body image has focused on the challenges of pubertal development, involved in negotiating powerful stereotypes, idealized images and harassment. I will now look at the strategies for change proposed by feminist researchers to help girls resist messages that lead to negative body image. These include the use of media literacy education, feminist education, and movement approaches which have been shown through research to be effective in dealing with body image dissatisfaction.

It has been demonstrated through research that some strategies are effective in helping girls resist negative self-appraisals of their bodies. Basow and Rubin’s (1999) research, for example, gives evidence that not all girls are equally influenced by media images or uncritically accept the mainstream gender stereotypes of women. Larkin and Rice (2005) believe in developing prevention programs to help girls consider the broader socio-cultural factors that influence their lives and their perceptions of their bodies. The

idea that girls are naively controlled by images does not take into consideration the many ways gender narratives are constructed, nor girls' ability to transform the narratives upon reception (Larkin & Rice, 2005). In this sense, Basow and Rubin (1999) believe that it is useful to look at the experience of African American women, since they stand out as a group with "high self-confidence in relation to beauty and body image" (p.36). The authors describe how African American girls construct their identities in resistance to racist notions that define the black body as unattractive. Therefore, African American mothers raise their daughters to actively deconstruct the white culture's ideals of white, emaciated beauty (p. 37). The authors say:

[African Americans] emphasize truth telling, strong female role models, deep connections to the broader community, and an androgynous female ideal—aspects that appear to empower girls. (p. 42)

Levine & Smolak (2002) found that black adolescents are more likely to:

- 1-Associate positive characteristics with large, more buxom women
- 2-Define beauty in terms of 'working with what you've got' instead of a narrow range of slender body types
- 3-Want to gain weight. (p. 77)

These factors are intriguing and can serve as models for helping girls with their body image. However, the authors caution against clichés that portray African-American women and other women of colour as immune from media images of white, heterosexual femininity. According to hooks (2003), racist erasure of the black body within mainstream femininity has a negative impact on African-American responses to their body. Also, references to African-American ideals frequently disregard others body issues such as higher rates of teenage pregnancy, abuse and delinquency (Larkin & Rice, 2005).

To positively improve girls' body image and self-acceptance, Basow and Rubin (1999) identify "athletics, strong female role models, feminist beliefs and knowledgeable educators" (p. 40). Along with physical exercise and involvement in sports, movement exercises have been shown to be particularly effective for dealing with body image issues (Levine & Smolak, 2002; Totenbier, 1995). Totenbier (1995) says: "Movement has a primary influence on both development and change in body image" (p. 194). It allows girls to experience the body and body image in dynamic ways that "make [the body] more realistic...hence less frightening and more acceptable" (p. 205).

Media literacy education.

Empirical experiments in psychology give credibility to the belief that strategies can be effective in helping girls and women improve their body image. Yamamiya et al (2005) describe their laboratory research that had a positive effect on a group of women and girls. The first part of their research demonstrated that five minutes of exposure to 'thin-and-beautiful' media images affected the participants for over two hours and resulted in a 'state' of negative body image. However, not all the women were equally affected by images. The differences between the women were understood in terms of their "level of internalization and socialization process" (p. 75).

The second part of the research involved a media literacy intervention program involved two approaches. The first approach, called 'Artificial Beauty,' helped the women to understand that "media images are inappropriate as 'standards' because their flawless looks are created by techniques such as make-up and air-brushing" (p. 75). The second approach, called 'Genetic Realities,' involved "understanding how genetics

influence body weight/shape and that most women are biologically predisposed to be heavier than women in the media” (p. 75). Participants were shown a variety of images of women with different body sizes and shapes.

The results of the research revealed that two approaches of Artificial Beauty and Genetics Reality “prior to media exposure prevented the adverse effects” of negative body image (p. 74). These findings showed that images played a powerful role in women’s evaluation of their body image. It was concluded that a positive body image could be fostered by understanding how images are made, in conjunction with viewing alternative images of women’s bodies. Research on media literacy demonstrates that girls can be aided in the construction of their self-image—through images.

The influence of mothers and fathers.

Feminist research has found that mothers strongly influence girls’ body image perception, by shaping a girl’s understanding of what it means to be a woman. According to Levine and Smolak, (2002), mothers who have a positive body image themselves influence their daughters’ self-perceptions in positive ways. Inversely, mothers whose daughters were hypersexualized, were themselves hypersexualized (Robert, 2005). Also, mothers who work, as well as nontraditional mothers, directly and indirectly teach their daughters to recognize their own agency (Basow & Rubin, 1999). The Quebec report from the Council of Higher Education (1999) demonstrated that mothers from all social classes incited their daughters to resist stereotypes and to seek higher education. Mothers are important figures in girls’ lives and generally help girls understand the cultural and sexual biases that pressure them.

Researchers have found that girls perceive their mothers as “important sources of support” (Debold, et al.,1999, p. 193). In Deak’s (2002) words: “Mothers, as women, generally bring advanced relationship skills, empathy, and other tools of emotional literacy to the task of parenting” (p. 173). Girls and their mothers, as a result, generally have a strong bond whether they actually get along or not. Girls look up to their mothers as role models for what it means to be female.

Fathers and their daughters share different struggles than do mothers and daughters, according to Deak (2002). During pre-adolescence and adolescence the father-daughter relationship frequently breaks down, which negatively affects girls body image and self-esteem. Deak analyzes the deterioration of communication between girls and their fathers in light of gender stereotypes. The psychologists Kindlon and Thompson (2000) and Kimmel (2005), who specialize in boy’s and men’s psychology, affirm that men have difficulty expressing their emotions. Trained in the stereotype of masculinity which emphasizes being “stoic, strong and silent,” boys and men have not learned the “complexities of emotional awareness, empathy and self-expression” (Deak, 2002, p. 173). Deak describes the contrast between girls—who are generally highly sophisticated in relational awareness from a very young age—and their fathers who “don’t practice emotional literacy or connectedness very easily” (p. 173). As a result, girls reported to feeling estranged from their fathers who no longer seem interested in their lives. The breakdown in the father-daughter relationship is unfortunate because “an engaged father-daughter relationship is essential to a girl’s self-esteem” (p. 182).

Othermothers.

The idea that girls need and want better connections with their mothers and fathers echoes Brown and Gilligan's (1992) and Debold et al's (1999) research findings that showed that girls also had a strong desire for a genuine relationship of closeness with their teachers. Debold et al (1999) call for "othermothers" to play a role in girls' lives by acting "as a bridge across generations and perspectives" (p. 194) in a way that mothers cannot usually do. Othermothers are feminist teachers who create safe places for girls to practice their voices and to learn "a variety of ways to use tone, pitch, and volume" (Bentley, 1999, p. 220). Debold et al (1999) argue that othermothers are sorely needed for dealing with body image issues because "girls cannot act alone to move beyond their bodies as their only realm of power into a larger arena of possibility. They need adults, and the institutions that adults create and are part of, to join them" (p. 196).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been demonstrated that idealized images of women do affect girls strongly, yet messages circulating in the culture play a role in structuring responses. Although girls are particularly vulnerable in early adolescence because of multiple and 'synchronous stressors,' resistance can be developed to face unequal gender relations. As seen in the educational research on gender, and the research on sexuality, girls are less rigidly attached to stereotypes than boys and want to be 'liberated.'

Feminist research on girls shows that when girls and women come together in safe places to learn about gender, a healthy resistance can be cultivated so that oppression can be viewed as political and not solely personal. Armed with more knowledge, girls can

make wiser choices about their ‘looks,’ their sexuality and their lives. Media-literacy education highlights the importance of images in the process of rebuilding a positive body image for women and girls. Since images are at the heart of art education as a specialty, including how images are made, what the content and issues suggest, and the appreciation of a variety of alternative images, art education can contribute to structuring new ways of looking and feeling, and being in relationships for girls.

Summary

Part two of this literature review focused on girls in general and girls’ body image in particular. I began by charting the history of issues within girl studies to understand current thoughts in the field to situate girls’ experiences. Although girl studies are a part of feminist scholarship and, as such, the issues of girls are related to issues that affect women, girls born into feminism have contemporary concerns that are contextually different from those of other generations, as can be seen in the idea of Girl Power with its sexual rhetoric. Other issues, such as sexual stereotyping within schools or harassment of girls affect girls’ educational experiences and their body image.

Next, Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) research offered important insights into girls’ development and psychology whereas Deak’s (2002) helped understand important turning points in a girls’ developing identity. The topic of body image was explored by reviewing research from the field of psychology to demonstrate that representations *do* affect girls negatively in their self-appraisal and what can be done about it. It is noteworthy that media literacy and movement exercises were shown to improve body image in conjunction with the presentation of varied *images* of women.

Issues-based Art Education

The third theoretical strand to my research investigates the world of teaching from an issues-based approach to art education. This section provides an overview of the philosophy for teaching sociopolitical issues, while making connections to larger debates in the field of education and to current debates in art education on the topic of visual culture. Some criticisms are explored to understand the practical difficulties involved in teaching from an issues-based approach.

Overview of issues-based art education

Issues-based art education inquires into social justice issues utilizing art. As an approach to teaching, it has been gaining in popularity, as can be seen in Gaudelius and Speirs' book *Contemporary Issues in Art Education* (2002). Important figures within the field of art education, such as Freedman, Duncum, Wyrick, Nadaner, Barrett, Krug, Stankiewicz, Gaudelius, Speirs, Sacca and others argue that art can serve to understand *issues* of social justice within education.

Reflection on social justice issues within art education has its origins in the feminist and human rights movements of the 1970s, in multiculturalism as well as in the critical and political emphases of postmodernism (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). According to these authors issues-based art education finds its rationale in the educational theories of Friere's liberatory pedagogy, critical pedagogy, social reconstruction and visual culture studies in art education. As such, it is an approach to teaching that partakes of a larger critique of education in general. Within recent debates in education, schooling is

analyzed as a process of socialization informed by historical, political, and social issues (Nemiroff, 1992). Teaching is perceived as reproducing ideological content that serves to privilege some individuals above others. Although education has traditionally asserted itself as “universal and gender neutral” (Garber, 1992, p. 213), a relationship can be drawn between canons of education and the socio-economic dominance of white, middle class males (Walsh, 1990; Silvers, 1990; Jackson, 1997).

Conversely, teaching also holds the potential to transform individuals and society by creating equitable learning for all students. As a reform movement, the quest for social justice through education is particularly associated with educational theorists and radical thinkers such as Gramsci, Marx, Marcuse, the Frankfurt school of critical theory and more recently Giroux, Aronowitz, and Apple (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). Current theories in education inform the issues-based approach to art education.

According to Gaudelius and Speirs (2002), issues-based art education can be defined as a combination of “contemporary art, contemporary issues and teaching in the elementary classroom” (p. 1). Nyman (2002) states that children need to know “how culture and other social factors affect and influence the development of who they are, what they believe, what they create, how they do it and why” (p. 64). Issues-based art education “develops critical thinking skills, explores the construction of the multiple identities that students hold, causes them to see the familiar in a new way, and builds school and community relationships” (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002, p. 141). It is a form of teaching that seeks to neutralize the oppressive aspects of difference and marginality in a racist, sexist, classist culture by making the overt and covert political issues visible in *art*.

In parallel, the making of art is perceived as a means to strengthen students ‘selves’ by building a stronger sense of personal identity—and voice—through art (Gaudelius and Spears, 2002). In this sense, the most significant ‘issue’ within the issues-based approach is personal empowerment through critical knowledge. This, in turn, leads to increased individual agency which is seen as a vehicle for social change. As Picard and Potter (1992) state: “In this era of political and socially committed art...those who have been ignored, ostracized and colonized in history can begin to define their own identities” (p. 54). It is proposed that social change *can* and *should* be achieved through art education.

Critics of the issues.

Some art educators however have reservations about making social issues central in art education. Efland (2004) has rejected the idea of turning art education into a sociology of art. Tavin (2005), Duncum (2003) and Gaudelius & Speirs (2002) have responded to this by arguing that art is *inherently* sociological and inseparable from the conditions of producing and diffusing art, which are related to privilege. Tavin (2005) says:

All forms of art education are political through commission or omission in the curriculum, through the choice of methods and materials, and for the simple fact that much of art education takes place in institutions that are designed and operated by those in power. The political is embedded in the language, codes, and routines of daily classroom life. (p. 112).

In another vein, Smith (2003) claims that the focus on issues within art education is “inherently talk-oriented” (p. 112), an idea backed up by Efland (2004) who believes that lessons based on issues take away from the time allotted for art-making. What these

authors do not discuss, is when and under what circumstances issues can be exposed to children. What kinds of schools, teachers, special time slots and permissions are needed for this kind of teaching? Do teachers teach issues *without* permission of parents, principals, etc.? What type of imagery is unacceptable? How should teachers deal with the problem of discipline? These questions illustrate that even though the goals and theories of transformative teaching are significant, there is a lack of practical methodology for implementation in the institutional classroom (Herrmann, 2005).

Teaching issues, some examples.

Cohen-Evron (2005) offers some useful examples for teaching issues-based art education. She identifies four strategies for integrating critical issues into the teaching of art. Although Cohen-Evron is dealing specifically with the issue of violent conflict in Israel, much can be gained from her descriptions of how teachers taught controversial topics through art.

1-Art creation as an act of therapy involving the expression of feelings and thoughts related to violent experiences.

2-Art education as a means to broaden the gaze on the “Other” and beyond the conflict

3-Art education as dealing with political art and imagery without detaching it from the students’ reality

4-Confronting students with “difficult knowledge,” knowledge they resist because it presents them with moral conflict in their own reality. (p. 311)

Cohen-Evron’s four approaches demonstrate how art teachers interested in social reconstruction can approach the teaching of issues. The first point analyzed by Cohen-

Evron is a passive approach to teaching about difficult issues in the classroom because it is open-ended. The topic of violence was suggested for art-making but the teachers did not discuss the art with the students. In points two, three and four, the teachers used art to stimulate reflection on the ways art and/or the mass media influenced students' identities. A moral dilemma was provoked which forced students to come face to face with their own participation in the *ideology of the images*. Teachers helped the students identify the ways "authoritative discourses and institutional knowledge work to construct their positions and identities" (p. 315). Representation was revealed as an ideological discourse and students were able to make distance with the messages embedded in images. They became more critical through art appreciation and they created new images through art-making. The result was that social issues became personalized into 'real' knowledge within the school.

Unpopular culture.

What is poignant in Cohen-Evron's (2005) research is not only that students were confronted in their implication with knowledge or that they shifted their original "racist" discourse (p. 319) but that she does not pretend that this kind of teaching is *easy*. In her words: "The teachers took risks by teaching 'unpopular things'" and worked "against the grain of the discursive practices of schooling which did not encourage critical and feminist pedagogies" (p. 315). Cohen-Evron acknowledges that principals censored students' critical artwork within the school, and teachers had to find ways to "avoid conflicts with the educational system" (p. 316).

In the classroom, students were thrown into “emotional and social disarray” and they “started an uncontrolled noisy and emotional argument” (p. 319). “The art teachers who invited the students’ voices confronted racist discourse” (p. 319) and they encountered “pedagogical difficulties” (p. 321). However, Cohen-Evron rationalizes these difficulties in terms of teachers’ level of experience. She says: “The experienced art teacher was not threatened by losing control over her class and by the many racist slogans which were shouted by the students” (p. 320). However, the inexperienced teacher was very conflicted and almost “burst into tears” (p. 320). “She did not want to use her authority and repress the students’ voices, yet being silent made it seem as if she agreed with the horrible slogans” (p. 320).

Garber (2005), a well-known art educator who teaches for social justice, says: “Anti-discrimination pedagogies where race, class, gender, age, abilities, nationality, cultural background, religion, and other factors that pre-define people [should be] explored consistently” (p. 9). She argues that students need to face their discriminatory biases “not as expressions of individual perspectives that are relative and equal [but] as historical, cultural and social practices” (p. 9). Although Garber believes in social justice through an issues-based approach to art education, she asserts:

I have found discrimination the most difficult topic I have ever incorporated into my teaching. Whereas students readily learn the cultural narratives of “others,” they find this confrontation with themselves an extremely emotional process. The process of learning sensitivity to forms of prejudice and discrimination is lengthy. (p. 15)

This contradicts Cohen-Evron’s assertion that years of experience will facilitate issues-based teaching. Garber maintains that issues of implementation are not the only difficulties to consider. She says: “Although there are teachers developing social justice

practices in isolation from the rest of the school, the barriers to doing so need to be recognized” (p. 13). She argues that social justice teaching from an issues-based approach “can be high risk behavior” and that “teachers can be retaliated against or fired from their jobs” for critiquing the status quo (p. 13). Instead teachers need a “professional community of support to teach emancipatory education” (p. 13). Finally, Garber cautions that teachers interested in social justice issues need to keep students’ interests and needs in mind. By encouraging them to ‘cross borders,’ they are placed at risk for social stigmatization. Also, teachers need to be sure that students are not simply passive recipients of issues-based art education but that they become producers of knowledge. In this respect Garber (2005) says: “In our zeal to convince our students about the need for social change, we may silence their voices” (p. 13).

Anticipated Problems in Practice

As discussed above, issues-based art education aim to bring ‘real life’ issues into the school to dismantle ‘distance’ and to reinvigorate art learning in a way that brings about meaningful change. However, literature on occupation stress reveals that teaching is already difficult, without any kind of controversial material. What difficulties do teachers already experience in the classroom?

Research on teachers’ occupational stress reveals that “30% of teachers are leaving the profession within 3 years of taking a first position” due to discouragement and difficult student populations (Kottler & Zehm, 2000, p. vii). In Quebec, 41,3% of teachers present symptoms of high psychological distress (Soares, 2003). Difficulties with student behavior stand out as the number one cause of stress and dissatisfaction with

teaching. Teachers reported to Greenberg (1984) that the most draining aspects of teaching were related to the use of authority in classroom management. Dunham (1992) writes that teachers struggles most with:

Disruptive student behavior, class size, lack of time, role conflict, role ambiguity, conflicts with colleagues, parental pressure, organizational and curricular changes, targets, reports, pedagogical reforms, evaluation of teacher performance, poor working conditions, low status and low pay. (p. 84)

To complicate matters, Maher and Ward (2002) assert that the very *idea* of a teacher, especially in elementary school, involves a feminine-association of ‘women’s work.’ They argue that “sexist assumptions and practices, enforced by gender differences and gender expectations, shape the ways we think about school, our teachers, and our children in schools” (Maher & Ward, 2002, p. 111). Bouchard et. al (2003) confirm that women occupy 87% of teaching positions elementary school and 97% in preschool in Quebec. The cultural injunction for girls to care for others, eventually leads women to choose female-associated jobs in the workforce, regardless of their high levels of school success in other areas (Bouchard & St-Amant, 1997).

It is thus through structural inequalities that the care-giving of children is attributed to women. Teachers are expected to be pedagogically appropriate and generally nice. Luttrell (1997) argues that the organization of school is highly gendered with its “structural, but hidden reliance on *ideal*, not real, women” (p.116). And, “many people believe teaching is easy, comes naturally to women because of their inborn capacities for care-taking and nurturance” (Maher & Ward, 2002, p. 111). The feminine-identification of teaching, as Maher and Ward (2002) argue, makes it a stereotyped, undervalued and underpaid profession. The view that women are *naturally* suited for teaching is

oppressive since caring is not always straightforward due to the complex dynamics in large groups of children.

In response to these problems, Luttrell (1997) proposes recognizing the emotional labor of teaching while valuing the care-giving dimensions, rather than making them into an “‘extra’ demand on top of a load that is already too heavy to carry” (p. 123). To do so, Maher and Ward (2002) assert that “caring must be learned” as opposed to believing that it is part of feminine identity (p. 113). In other words, support for teachers involves breaking with stereotypes of femininity, while also finding ways of supporting the person behind the role, to foster the ‘good enough’ teacher who can better attend to children’s development in the classroom (Luttrell, 1997).

The research above demonstrates that teachers face a good deal of occupational stress in *regular* classrooms and schools. Cohen-Evron (2005) and Garber (2005) argue that art teachers need to be prepared for the strong emotional reactions of students, administrators (or even the teachers themselves) when teaching *controversial* subject matter. That is why research is needed to help teachers successfully teach issues-based art education in the classroom, without going into burnout. It is for these reasons that this study on girls’ body image makes teaching a related inquiry: to understand which factors enhance or inhibit the process of social justice education in the form of issues-based art education.

Summary

Part three of this chapter reviewed literature related to issues-based art education. An overview of the philosophy for teaching about sociopolitical issues in the classroom was

given, while also making comparisons to current debates in art education. Some criticisms of issues-based art education were explored. Difficulties related to the *practical* applications of the issues-based approach were considered, while also taking a rapid glance at some of the literature related to the difficulties of teaching in general.

Summary of Chapter 2.

Chapter Two was devoted to reviewing the literature on girls and their body image. Three important theoretical strands stood out: feminism, girl studies and issues-based art education. Another way of viewing Chapter Two is to understand it in terms of the feminist strategy of naming and celebration.

Naming involved describing the everyday context of discrimination in which women and girls live. The purpose of this discussion was to describe the social backdrop to sexualized images of women and to demonstrate how gender inequities are reflected through images. It was argued, at length and in many ways, that stereotypes of women structure ideas, behavior, and attitudes toward girls that have negative social outcomes, including a negative impact on girls' body image.

The feminist strategy of celebration was concerned with looking for solutions to the problem of girls' negative body image. Feminist knowledge was proposed as a principal means for developing a healthy resistance in girls. It was suggested that girls need safe places within a community of women and feminist othermothers who would help girls negotiate cultural bias while also affirming their strengths and agency. Understanding sexism in images, seeing alternative images, learning how images are made and making images oneself are viewed as empowering strategies for girls to move

beyond the silent and self-silencing images of female beauty. Contact with feminist social theory, feminist art and feminist art education was seen as a principal means for empowering girls' to have better self-esteem and body image.



Figure 1. Large scale paintings done by the girls in the body image workshops.

CHAPTER 3

Research Method, Design and Procedures

In this chapter, I discuss the method of action research that informed the study on girls' body image. First, I give an overview of the method to understand educational action research, research in art education and the role of reflection and critical theories of action research. I explore the applications of action research and take a brief look at the validity of the method to situate my study as *critical/feminist educational action research*. Next, I describe the research design and elements such as timing, the research site and context, steps toward action, the participants and the unit plan. The research procedures are described in the third section. These are: fieldwork strategies, researcher role, nature of anticipated findings, data collection strategies, data analysis procedures, credibility and ethical considerations.

Research Method: Action Research

The research questions described in the Chapter One aimed to explore the topic of girl's body image from a feminist lens while also shedding light on practices within an issues-based approach to art education. Action research, particularly educational action research appeared as the most appropriate method for investigating critical social justice issues inherent to teaching about body image.

Action research

Action research is a method for learning about actions through inquiry and reflection as the basis for new action. Kurt Lewin (1946) is often cited as the founder of action research, although Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), and many others have added to its development in the last sixty years (Stringer, 1996). The “intellectual roots of action research are diverse” and can be linked “to Moreno, Freire and the critical theory of Habermas” (Stringer, 1996, p. xvi). According to Stringer (1996), “Action research represents an approach to research that takes seriously the critiques of traditional research methodologies that are inherent in postmodern, feminist, and critical theory” (p. xvi).

Stringer defines action research as:

- 1- Rigorously empirical and reflective (or interpretive)
- 2- Engaging people who have traditionally been called “subjects” as active participants in the research process
- 3- Resulting in some practical outcome related to the lives or work of the participants. (p. xv)

This kind of research aims to be “*democratic, equitable, liberating from oppression and life enhancing*” for the participants of the research (p. 10). Stinger (1996) posits that “if action does not make a practical difference by enhancing the lives of the participants in some way, it has ultimately failed its purposes” (p. 11).

Educational action research.

Action research has been present in educational work for more than fifty years, often focusing on teaching, student learning and the interplay between the two, in the aim of improving the teaching profession (Noffke, 1995). Simply described, action research in education is based in action (primarily teaching), while the research/reflection is used

in the service of self-improvement for future action (Sagor, 2000). This is what Stringer (1996) calls “inquiry in use” (p. 11). Educational action research aims to improve teaching practices in ways that have a positive impact on student’s experiences in school.

Conducting action research in the classroom involves the teacher in a dual role of teaching as usual while simultaneously doing research in the work environment. The main research technique revolves around the notion of a reflective practice before, during and after the action of teaching. Teachers are involved in a self-monitoring procedure to uncover and understand their behaviors, motivations, choices, values, prejudices, biases, etc. that influence their teaching. Acknowledging personal influences is part of the research process of action research (Noffke, 1995). As Hatch (2002) states:

The capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one’s influence on a setting, to bracket one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses are the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on. (p. 10)

Research in art education.

Qualitative research methods, such as action research, are commonly used in art education for improving the practice of art teaching. This has been done within different qualitative genres, some focusing on individual art teachers, on individual art students, on the interactions between the two, on artwork, artistic development, art process, and much more. According to Emery (1996), qualitative research can tap “at the heart of the art teaching process...to articulate the fundamental knowledge base of art teaching” (p. 23). She argues for probing deeply into the subjective experiences of teachers since “many teachers find it very difficult to articulate what it is they actually do” (p. 29). She also believes that research on art teachers will confer more professional recognition and

status, which is achieved by privileging the teacher's voice. Emery recommends introspective research methods "to get deeper inside" the experiences of art teachers by using such genres like reflection-in-action, action research, phenomenology, and heuristic inquiry (p. 27-28). In these genres of qualitative research in art education, data is often collected by means of fieldnotes, journals, participant observation, interviewing, engaging in dialogue, audiotaping, photographing, collecting documents, student writing and especially artwork (Bresler, 1994).

Critical action research.

Although it is essential to validate teacher's practical knowledge (something that has traditionally been undervalued), Zeichner and Gore (1995) maintain that educational action research is often devoid of political problematizing of the social context of teaching. As a result, research on teachers often "appears in a social and political vacuum" (p. 19). This disregards the fact that "all educational relationships" and institutional pedagogical situations are tainted with power, even at "micro levels" (Berge and Ve, 2000, p. 31). Reconnecting action research in education with its earlier roots of empowering participants, while focusing on analyses of power is what Zeichner and Gore (1995) name "critical action research" (p. 19). They affirm that action research has the radical potential to disturb the "deep structures" of schooling by working toward removing social and educational inequalities (p. 19), what bell hooks (1994) calls "education as the practice of freedom." The action—in this case teaching—involves helping students become critically aware of social injustices to move them to a place of action for social justice. Accordingly, critical action research involves more than a social

critique but a critique of the institutional contexts of education which also come from unpacking “the historical and ideological baggage of everyday things in the life of education” (Noffke, 1995, p. 5). In short, critical action research focuses on teaching and how students are affected by the teaching. It pushes researchers to become explicit about their practices to understand the multifaceted personal, social, contextual, political, historical issues imbedded in the day-to-day interactions in the classroom. It is what Lather (1991) describes as “an emancipatory social science...premiered upon the development of research approaches which both empower the researched and contribute to the generation of change enhancing social theory” (p. 70).

To this end, Lather (1991) asserts the need for feminist efforts “to create empowering and self-reflexive research designs” (p. 70). May (1993) brings up an ethical dimension. She notes:

Many of us may be clumsy in helping teachers make sense of their feelings and experiences in responsive but re-constructive, educative ways. Those who propose critical reflection and action research walk a thin line. We are not trained therapists, but our commitment to teaching as inquiry requires more sensitivity, personal introspection, theoretical grounding, and ethical consideration from us than quoting others in the literature or skirting the moral dimensions of our work altogether. (p. 123)

To frame the research in ethical ways, Zeichner and Gore (1995) recommend that researchers commit to *guiding values* to orient the action, *social justice* and *fidelity to persons*, for example. The idea of establishing core values for research relates to what Noddings (1984) defines as an “ethic of care” (p. 17).

Applications of action research

According to Stringer (1996), action research is collaborative. Supported by the researcher, the participants:

Reflect on their situation, repudiate social myths, misconceptions and misrepresentations, formulate powerful accounts and analysis of their situation, and create solutions to their problems within the overall aim of improving the quality of their community life. (pp. 10-15)

The role of the researcher in this context is to become a resource person, acting as a catalyst to help the participants define their problems and work toward solutions. Stringer believes that the researcher should promote:

Feelings of equality, maintain harmony, avoid and/or resolve conflicts, accept peoples as they are, encourage personal/cooperative relationships, be sensitive to people's feelings, listen attentively, be truthful and sincere, act in socially and culturally appropriate ways, ensure inclusion of all participants. (pp. 10-25)

Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue that successful action research that takes into consideration its impact on participants' social and emotional lives is likely to "unleash energy, stimulate creativity, instill pride, build commitment, prompt the taking of responsibility, and evoke a sense of investment and ownership" (p. 227). The routines of action research are commonly visualized in Lewin's (1946) "look, think, act" framework (p. 16). Stringer defines this as follows:

Look:	Gather relevant information (gather data) Build a picture: Describe the situation (define and describe)
Think:	Explore and analyze: What is happening here? (hypothesize) Interpret and explain: How/why are things as they are? (theorize)
Act:	Plan (report) Implement Evaluate. (p. 16)

For Sagor (2005) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), however, the routines of action research are seen as a spiral set of activities: plan, act, observe, reflect. This is because the participants will work through the various research activities while also constantly “reviewing (looking again), reflecting (reanalyzing), and re-acting (to modify their actions)” throughout the weeks (p. 45). It can be concluded that action research is not necessarily linear or orderly because it is part of a continual process that evolves over time and can change orientations according to circumstance. Nevertheless, it strives to have an internal coherence within the researcher’s particular inquiry and context. Says Noffke (1995), “many action researchers have noted that there are no ‘ends’ to the cycles, only points at which researchers share, deliberate, and move on, hoping that others will gain new ideas from what they have recounted” (p. 8). As such, action research can be viewed as an exploratory methodology (O’Hanlon, 2003) because the ‘findings’ are offered as the best narrative possible of the situation under investigation (Noffke, 1995). What makes action research particular is that throughout the cycle of observation-reflection-theory-action-reflection, etc., unique research settings are created through what is often called an *emergent research design*. Once inside the *gestalt* of the research, the reader is in an informed position to assess credibility.

This study: critical/feminist educational action research.

I situate this study within the conceptual context of the critical/feminist paradigm of educational action research as advanced by Hatch (2002). From this perspective, the material world is perceived as “made up of historically situated structures that have a real impact on the life chances of individuals” (Hatch, 2002, p. 16). For women these

structures involve stereotypical definitions of womanhood that are inculcated as natural and normal. Gender-defining structures are often invisible but nevertheless result in differences in status and privilege according to one's gender (Frost, 2001). Knowledge is one of these structures and it is perceived as politically motivated (Hatch, 2002).

This research therefore investigates the role of feminist ideas, feminist art and art-making in influencing girls and their body image. One of the goals is to generate knowledge through a critical/feminist lens based on data derived from girl's firsthand description of their body image and their art. Alternative narratives will be used in the aim of transforming the participant's lives and thereby enact social change. The nature of 'transformative' teaching in the form of issues-based art education will also be explored. Hence, critical/feminist values are inherent to the research process and will influence the nature of the investigation as well as the outcome. The research method can therefore be named critical/feminist educational action research.

Research Design

Although the research can be seen as emergent due to the ever changing nature of teaching and action research itself, the research design follows a plan that will be explained in this section. Design elements that structured the action are: timing of the research, the site and the context, steps toward action, the research participants and the unit plan.

Design Elements

The research design includes the values of social justice and fidelity to persons, as cited by Zeichner and Gore (1995), which underlie the research process on girls' body image. Hence, the interlocking values and educational goals within the research design is intended to correspond to the dual aim of improving teaching from an issues-based perspective while also attending to the experiences of girls during the research. To achieve these goals, I constructed a spiral research design modeled on Lewin's (1946) 'look-think-act' routine, combined with Sagor's (2005) and Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical models. I chose the following framework: theory-reflection-planning-action-observation-reflection. As my research interests developed originally from theory and prior research, I came to the research context with an understanding of some of the issues that concern girls. This knowledge helped me build my research plan and research questions in a way that would allow me to test my ideas. Reflection and planning were integral to the action of teaching, from which I could further observe and reflect.

I therefore aimed to set up a situation to observe the culture and knowledge of girls firsthand, to discover how and in what ways these girls were different or similar to the findings in the research literature, and to propose purposeful actions, such as discussion, movement and art-making. Therefore, the design elements for my study involved attention to timing, evaluation of site and context, steps toward action, participants, and the overall unit plan. These elements constituted important data and will be described in more detail below.

Timing

The first design strategy concerns the timing of the body image art workshops in the last quarter of the school year. I knew that graduation was looming in the distance and that it would be an important emotional moment in the lives of the girls. I believed that the reality of changing schools would be more palpable and that I would gain pertinent and timely information in this way. Timing was also an important factor in developing lesson plans for the research and there were therefore two stages involved in the preparation. In the first stage, the plan was to expose the girls to differing ideas, art images and media images of girls and women. This would give them the opportunity to get acquainted with feminist ideas and images, and in turn respond to these in light of their experiences as girls. In the second stage of the research, the girls would be encouraged to go further in their reflections by exploring notions of femininity and body image through structured projects in drawing, painting, collage and sculpture.

Research site and context.

My research site was a small public alternative school from the French school board of Montreal with a student body of one hundred and fifty. I chose this site because I was very familiar with the school and I knew a great deal about the formal and informal school practices. Two of my children attended the school and it seemed like a good choice because as an 'insider,' I had easy access. The school chosen as a research site adhered to a project-based, child-centered pedagogy similar to the current reform of education proposed by the Quebec Ministry of Education. As such, all school subjects were learned through projects chosen by the child. A distinctive feature is that classes are

multi-aged. The mixture of ages is intended to allow children to socialize in ways that are closer to real life, as opposed to the rigid age segregation typical of regular schools. It is believed that this format allows the children to evolve and mature at different levels according to their own pace.

Parents of the school are required by contract to participate in the classroom on a regular basis, particularly during “project periods,” evaluation times, and “Parent-Wednesdays” where parents *teach* workshops while the teachers are in meetings. Participation in committees during the evening is also required to manage matters such as admissions, pedagogy, financial issues, the school paper, etc. There are also special events, festivals and parties to be organized. In this context, parents are viewed as educational partners with the teachers and children in the co-creation of the child’s learning experience. My research project on girls’ body image in art was perceived by the children, the teachers, the administrators and the parents as yet another creative venture of an active parent in the school.

Steps toward action.

The first step in the research process involved preparing an information package to present my project to the school principal and later to the parents (see Appendix 2). I strived to make the workshops sound interesting while engaging the issue of body image. This meant careful wording of the text. I made a separate flyer for the girls with a drawing of a young girl dancing, hair flying in the air. Once approved, the school principal then referred me to the after school daycare director who gave me permission to use one of the classrooms for the workshops. I then met with the daycare staff to get their

help to recruit the girls, to explain the project and to answer any questions. I learned from them that my body image workshops implied a reduced quota of students in their groups without a reduction in salary! All of the school staff seemed favorable to my project. At first, they distributed my information literature to sixth grade girls only. Since there were too few registrations, I opened up the group to include fifth grade girls as well. One problem was that the daycare staff often forgot to circulate the information. Due to these difficulties, my first workshop was delayed by three weeks. The loss of control over recruiting the participants made this a frustrating first step.

Research participants.

The participants in the body image art workshops reflected a student body virtually devoid of cultural or ethnic diversity. It came as no surprise to me, then, that the girls who registered in the workshops were predominantly privileged, white middle class and francophone from Quebec. Seven girls had originally registered in the workshops, however only four showed up on the first day. One girl joined the group in the second week, so in total there were five girls who participated in the research. Three girls were in 6th grade and two were in 5th grade. All had experience in art, with the exception of one, who defined herself as a beginner. All the girls knew each other well and had at different times been in the same class. At the time of the research, one of the 5th graders was in the same class as two of the 6th graders. The other 6th grader and the other 5th grader were both alone in separate classes. All the participants *voluntarily* registered in the body image workshops. They were very excited about their participation and eventually requested seventeen workshops instead of ten!

The unit plan.

Once it was established that there would be enough participants in the body image art workshops, I began working out the nuts and bolts of the unit plan in relation to my goals. I wondered about the most appropriate art projects or themes for any given workshop. I worked on a thoughtful response based on the body image literature and my knowledge of teaching art to girls aged ten, eleven and twelve years old. First, I planned a structure to each class to include discussion of ideas, movement and art as alternative ways to think about the body. Each lesson looked like this:

1-Discussion: half hour

Introduction of a theme, questions, exchange of ideas
Art appreciation.

2-Movement: half hour

Dancing, stretching, boundaries, games

3-Art-making: one hour

Painting, drawing, sculpture, etc.

Unit plan.

I prepared a unit plan for ten, two hour lessons, beginning on Monday April 13th and ending on June 17th 2004, from 3:30 to 5:30 PM (see Appendix 3). In the early weeks, I planned for *general* discussions which would progressively become more *personal* over time, and finally include notions of girls' *collective* experiences. The purpose of this format was to allow the girls to feel more comfortable with the discussions and to allow them to gradually make connections between their experiences: from general, to personal to collective. The art appreciation mirrored themes from the discussion, as well as provided new ideas or concepts, in addition to visual inspiration. I chose women artists as role models. The art projects themselves were viewed as a means

to integrate the discussions, the art appreciation and the movement in a non-verbal form. All the workshops were conducted in French.

Research Procedures

In this section, I will explain the procedures that were used in the research: fieldwork strategies and the researcher role, the nature of anticipated findings, the data collection strategies, the data analysis procedures, as well as the credibility and ethical considerations. The purpose is to illustrate how the research was organized around strategies that influenced the research findings while also “acknowledging--and trying to minimize--the inevitable lapses, blind spots or errors” (Schram, 2003, p. 12).

Choice of fieldwork and researcher role.

Fieldwork served my research aims because it provided me with direct access to the lived experiences of contemporary Québécois girls and gave me information about recent concerns, both personal and collective, in girls’ perceptions of their bodies. Fieldwork provided me with the opportunity to test my political knowledge and activist goals in real life and I believe, as a result, that my findings are more powerful (Schram, 2003). Doing fieldwork in a small alternative school with a select group of participants gave me access to girls in their familiar school environment, while offering them privileged treatment (snacks, art, interesting discussion, art making, etc.) when normally they would have attended after school daycare. For the girls, being in a small group *without the boys* felt special to them, whereas for me, as a researcher, I was able to “monitor the ongoing actual events in time, space and circumstance as well as the

changes in tone, mood or energy” that the girls exhibited in relation to the different activities (Schram, 2003, p. 23). Thus fieldwork was an appropriate choice to enable my research to direct attention to the broader conceptual significance of my study related to girls’ experiences and teaching art.

As a fieldworker doing action research, I often sensed that there was a need to balance directive and non-directive approaches (Schram, 2003). Although I was structuring the discussions with questions (such as: “Describe beauty?”) and lesson plans around themes (“how do you feel about your body?”), I often simply noted whatever happened. Many times, the girls spontaneously brought their concerns for discussion whereas other times I made my personal and research preferences known. All throughout the research, I was fully aware of the inevitable play of subjectivity due to researcher presence (Schram, 2003). I carefully considered the impact of my implications with the girls, as well as the consequences of my role from the parent’s point of view.

The nature of the context had already colored the research relationship insofar as the girls and their parents were fully accustomed to parents in the school, even after school. As mentioned above, my role was perceived foremost as an engaged parent and a teacher conducting research only secondly. As a parent, I was an ‘insider.’ However, in such as small school, I was also a newcomer since my children had only been enrolled for seven months and I often felt like an ‘outsider.’ Without going into further descriptive detail, it can be said that my dual position of insider/outsider had positive and negative influences on the girls in terms of discipline, and on the parents and daycare staff in terms of (not) respecting my teaching time. These feelings of insider/outsider demonstrate how

the researcher role affects the dynamics during the process and outcomes of research (Schram, 2003).

Nature of anticipated findings.

Since this research project is based on the feminist paradigm of educational action research, it is clear that the findings will reflect a critical/feminist analysis the body image art workshops. The *a priori* feminist situation (the body image workshops) aimed to make gender the focus of oppressive social structures, and art-making the means to challenge and change the effects of those structures on individual girls. The results of the feminist action research will necessarily be framed within a feminist interpretation.

At the beginning of the research process, I had expectations concerning the outcome of my findings based on my previous research with girls and my contact with feminist literature. For example, I knew that the last quarter of the school year would be an important time in the lives of the girls. The girls in 6th grade would be very close to graduating from elementary school, at the cusp of their preadolescent experiences and on the verge of entering the worlds of puberty, adolescence and high school. I assumed, for example, that participants would be anticipating changes in bodies, worlds and identities and that they would discuss these topics with interest. I also expected generate data about what girls knew about cultural stereotypes, how they knew it, how they evaluated what they knew, how they translated their knowledge or feelings into their lives, into their art, and finally how they described their experiences within the body image workshops.

Furthermore, since the girls had *voluntarily* chosen to participate in a body image art workshop after school, I expected that they would have some prior knowledge or

interest in girl's/women's issues, to be knowledgeable about popular culture images of women's beauty, and possibly express discontent with their bodies. I anticipated that contact with feminism and feminist ideas might stir resistances but also lead to consciousness-raising and perhaps to a deeper understanding of their power as girls and women. I imagined that contact with issues-based art education would have a positive influence on their body image. All of these elements, although interwoven into the story of the research, demonstrate how the transformative dimensions of the action research, the issues-based approach to art education and the topic of body image come together as the point of departure and the final destination of the research findings.

According to Hatch (2002), the overall intent, within the critical/feminist paradigm is to “provide a framework that builds in analytic integrity so that findings are grounded in data while acknowledging the political nature of the real world and the research act” (p. 191). For this study then, the entire research process was one of gathering data in the field while generating data through analysis and interpretation, from a feminist point of view. My active efforts to teach and to do research on body image and issues-based art education with a critical/feminist action research methodology will be an integral aspect of the findings.

Data collection strategies and methods: fieldnotes, reflective journal, artwork and documents.

I collected data during the fifteen two hour art workshops given at the school between April and June 2004.²¹ To record the information during the research process, I used fieldnotes, a reflective journal, student artwork and documents.

I chose to use fieldnotes as my central data collection tool because I believed that it would be best to obtain thick description and large amounts of data while working with a small group of 11-12 year old girls. I hoped to create a particular atmosphere in a relatively intimate setting, where girls could discuss their private relationship to the topic of body image. I felt that more intrusive data collection methods, such as audio or video-taping would render less satisfactory results by making the girls feel more self-conscious. In the fieldnotes, I wrote down everything the girls said verbatim (or as close to verbatim as possible), as well as their non-verbal body language, their formal and informal discussion, their interpersonal interaction, the sequence of events, as well as my own feelings and reactions in the setting, when possible. I noted any changes in plans or directions that spontaneously occurred in the development of the workshops. I also took note of how the girls dressed and the objects, images or music they brought to the workshops. I kept a record of observations related to the presentation of ideas, direct and indirect teaching, tone of voice, feedback, subject matter, etc. I carefully observed the on-task/off task behavior, such as talking, not paying attention, wandering around, interrupting the teacher, bothering others, etc. (Hopkins, 2002). At times, note-taking interfered in my teaching, but it got easier with time and practice. Other times, the girls were distracted by my notes since they seemed to emphasize words or events. In sum, the

²¹ Originally, ten workshops were planned. Then the girls requested two workshops per week. In total, there were supposed to be seventeen workshops but two were cancelled for different reasons (see Appendix 2).

use of fieldnotes allowed me to keep track, as best as possible, of what the girls did at any given time during the workshops and to capture their actions as data on paper.

My own experience, including observations and feelings, was also used as data and written down in a reflective journal. While conducting my research, I constantly engaged and monitored my subjectivity to use my feelings and emotional responses as authentic points of departure, or cues, for inquiry into why I perceived and interpreted matters in any given way. Making sense of myself helped me understand how I influenced the research *in situ* and in the later stages of analysis. My subjectivity became a tool to better understand the context and alternately, to see how I myself may have been an obstacle at times to seeing or interpreting events adequately. The self-reflexive practice was used to the best of my abilities to achieve an account that was accurate as possible, while also taking in the notion that qualitative research, like all research, is necessarily imperfect. To this end, I wrote down my stream-of-consciousness raw reactions in the reflective journal, as well as reflections on the reflective practice itself. This led to deeper insights into some of my unconscious motivations and behavior. The reflective journal allowed a heightened awareness that influenced decision-making for future action.

Although data was collected primarily by fieldnotes and a reflective journal, photographs of student artwork were also significant. Originally, I expected the girls to create one artwork per lesson, which would have probably amounted to eight or nine pieces in the end. Due to various circumstances that I will explain later on, the girls only finished five art projects in total. The artwork, in conjunction with what the girls said about it, is significant as data. Another source of data came from what Dana and Yendol-

Silva (2003) call the classroom 'paper trail' which includes student work, correspondence to and from parents, written lesson plans, etc.

The lesson plans proved to be a very significant source of data. They demonstrated how the reflective journal in combination with the fieldnotes generated changes in the lesson plans, which evolved from week to week according to the participants' needs and demands. Although I had an original unit plan, details of individual lesson plans were decided upon on a weekly basis, according to new discoveries. During the ten weeks, I reviewed my data in an on-going fashion to redirect interventions by the means of the lesson plans. Concretely, I reread my notes after each workshop to formulate new or related questions on girls' body image, to ask for clarifications, to negotiate meanings with participants, and to find ways of addressing issues of resistance with sensitivity in accordance with the girl's developmental level and prior knowledge. I attempted to align my research to what evolved from the context, while also having an openly feminist position in relation to emerging body image issues.

Data analysis procedures.

At a later stage in the research process, after the end of the action research, I worked on a system to make sense of what I learned. Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003) call the analysis process "qualitative storytelling" that goes through the four steps of "description, sense making, interpretation and implication drawing" (p. 93) to build a "metaphorical jigsaw puzzle" (p. 9). Therefore the first step in the analysis process was to read and re-read the fieldnotes to sort the data by themes and categories: key events, people, issues, emotions, etc. By creating topics, marking entries related to topics,

looking for patterns, categories, relationships with topic areas, I recorded main ideas in entries on a summary sheet. Finally, I selected data excerpts to support my generalizations.²² This model of data analysis procedure was inspired by Hatch's (2002) table for developing generalizations by:

- 1-Reading the data for a sense of the whole
 - 2-Identifying important recurrent themes
 - 3-Identifying ideological issues seen in the context under investigation
 - 4-Marking places in the data where ideological concerns are evident
 - 5-Writing generalizations that connect ideological concerns to the data
 - 6-Writing a summary and identifying excerpts that support the generalizations.
- (p. 27)

What is particular about the critical/feminist approach to action research is how a political analysis is both prior to, and developed from the data analysis procedures. By writing summaries based on generalizations which are described, interpreted and understood within a feminist lens, a relationship can be drawn between the participants' experiences and the oppressive condition in which girls and women live. This is what Van Maanen (1988) calls a 'critical tale.' In this case, the critical tale is constructed from data excerpts to shed light on how the particular circumstances of the 5th and 6th grade girls reflect the unequal nature of the broader social world which has an oppressive impact on their body image and their lives in general.

Credibility and ethical considerations.

I believe that the trustworthiness and credibility of my study rests within my efforts to render thick description of the research context, to make my goals and underlying feminist ideology explicit and to be as transparent as possible concerning my

²² I translated the citations from the original French into English.

political analysis and conclusions. Although looking for meaning through a feminist lens, I aimed to uncover any number of possible truths or meanings manifested in the experiences or words of the participants. I built assertions that approximated reality as best as possible while acknowledging the interpretive aspects of qualitative research. My sustained presence in the context sensitized me to subtle understanding of how “meanings emerged through talk and action and how the participants’ perspectives may [have been] altered over the weeks” (Schram, 2003, p. 34). Although I began with a my own subjective biases and research interests which included a clear feminist goal of empowering girls, the ethical considerations of this study meant paying particular attention not to make my research into a self-fulfilling prophecy “by remaining open to competing explanations” of participant’s words, ideas, artwork, or behavior (Schram, 2003, p. 27).

Ethically speaking, one of the foremost considerations of my action research was related to ways of presenting my feminist perspective without implying to the participants that my answers or points of view were the ‘right’ ones. I did not expect nor demand that the girls adopt my beliefs. However, I aimed to widen their perspectives on women, beauty ideals, femininity, selfhood, etc. How could I introduce difficult topics while avoiding imposing my ideas? How could I judge whether a personal opinion of mine (that exposed my ‘true’ self) or any other feminist knowledge would be acceptable to parents or too radical for the girls? How I could remain true to myself while considering ways of dressing, modeling behavior, or negotiating relationships in the body image workshops?

Although I did not always have the answers to these questions, the method of revising my field notes helped me to assess appropriate behavior. At all times, I tried to

be as natural, honest yet cautious with the girls without formulating my ideas as *the* truth. And despite my efforts to remain constantly aware of ethical issues, at times I did make mistakes that influenced the research. Similarly, I aimed to be as democratic and inclusive as possible, by avoiding the temptation to “validate students who seem[ed] politically sympathetic to my ideas” (Schram, 2003, p. 36).

Finally, I felt torn about the idea of making private information into public knowledge through my research. In the small school where I was working, I was frequently disarmed by the gossip and personal information that circulated among parents. When the girls confided in me about issues they presumably did not share with their parents, I was concerned about potentially betraying their trust through the publication of the dissertation. To ensure anonymity, I chose to identify the participants by pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants. In this way, parents who might be interested in reading the research can learn in general terms about what the girls said, thought and did, without easily identifying specific girls. I also chose not to identify the school or the neighborhood. I feel that this will “help balance access and trust with the obligation to attend responsibly to public revelation” (Schram, 2003, p. 42).

Finally, I was aware of the ethical dimension involved in pursuing a doctoral degree, a situation that created unequal partnerships in the research. To be more equitable and not to exploit the participants while generating data, I provided free art lessons, free art materials, and weekly snacks, over and above whatever merit lies in the actual body image workshops themselves.

Summary

This chapter was devoted to discussing the method of action research. An overview of the method was given to understand educational action research, as well as critical and feminist contributions. Next, the applications of action research were explained. Design elements were described: timing, research site and context, steps toward action, the participants and the unit plan. The third section focused on research procedures such as fieldwork strategies, researcher role, nature of anticipated findings, data collection strategies, data analysis procedures, credibility and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4

Description of Body Image Art Workshops

This section is devoted to describing the action research as it happened chronologically. I give details about each of the fifteen body image art workshops, including what the participants did and said, as well as my own plans, thoughts and actions. I have divided it into four sections that distinguish particular moments in the research. Part 1 describes the early workshops and sets the scene. Part 2 describes how the notion of personal boundaries took on particular importance and influenced the workshops. Part 3 describes how the workshops moved into a more positive direction. Finally Part 4 brings the workshops to their conclusion.

Part 1: This Vexes Us

Workshop 1: Tuesday, April 13th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

On Tuesday, April 13th of 2004, I arrived at the school early equipped with a large roll of paper and a box of paints. The daycare director told me that I would be teaching in the Kindergarten classroom. “You will not be able to go up until after the children have left,” he said. When the after-school chaos broke loose with children running in all directions, two girls came rushing down the stairs to greet me. My eldest son turned a corner without looking up. As the girls and I marched up to our room, I realized another girl had been watching from the distance, silently ‘checking me out.’ When we arrived to the classroom, the Kindergarten teacher--who was my younger son’s teacher—was still there. She asked me about the workshops. When she left, I scurried around trying to set

up my materials while the girls wandered around awkwardly. My son, whose after-school daycare group was in an adjacent room joined by a side door, suddenly burst into the room. “Mommy! Mommy! What are you doing?” After a few kisses, I argued with him to get back to his group. The girls were silent during this time and I felt flustered about this offbeat beginning. My plan for the first lesson was the following:

1-Discussion:

Theme: What is body image? Personal introductions

Art appreciation: Images of body tracing projects

2-Movement:

General stretching and dancing

3-Art-making:

Tracing the body on large sheets of paper, working in pairs

When all four girls had finally arrived,²³ we sat down at a round table to start. Before I could present myself, I was bombarded with questions like: “Can we bring our own music?” and “What are we going to do today?” Suddenly, like a bottle under pressure, the girls exploded into a rather agitated, long and detailed evaluation of all the boys in the school! I learned that “the boys always insisted on having *their* music, as if girls’ music was not as good.” Working in teams with boys was impossible “because they are babies always trying to have everything *their* way. It’s like a war.” Although I was taken aback by this outburst of *data*, I decided to ‘go with the flow’ because I was amused and curious.

The girls continued to evaluate the boys in the school. They agreed that only one boy was really mature. “Why?” I asked. One replied, “He works on projects with girls and has good friends that are girls.” This was apparently rare for a boy. Then, with some reflection, they decided that three other boys might qualify as “mature” because they

²³ Seven girls had originally registered in the workshops. One girl joined the group in the second week, so in total there were five girls who participated in the research.

were “careful of others--especially girls and were not sports crazy.” Six other boys were “mature/immature” because they only sometimes made stupid jokes about girls. The rest of the boys were all “immature” because they swore, listened to “sexist music” and liked “sexist videos on Musique Plus.”²⁴ I asked them what a mature girl was like and they answered curtly, “Someone with personality.”

At first I was puzzled by the way the girls took hold of the discussion to lead it themselves. Was this a challenge to my authority from the outset? I decided to relax and see what would happen (this was research after all). As the girls spoke, I took notes. They were very curious about this practice. When I explained that I would be noting their words and behavior for research purposes “to learn as much as possible about girls,” they suddenly felt important. One girl sat up straighter. I could feel how proud this made them feel! When the girls finally took a breath, after finishing the vegetable chips I had brought in for them, I presented myself. They mocked my name ‘Heather’ which is difficult to pronounce in French. At first I ignored this childish banter but finally I had to demand respect. I continued by describing my action research project, how the workshops would be set up and what kind of art they would be doing. Then, I learned their names, what grade they were in and how old they were.

To briefly describe the girls, I will give them pseudonyms. Arianna was eleven years old (almost twelve), and in sixth grade. She was very thin and small. It was she who had remained in the distance to evaluate me. In the group, she was outspoken and dynamic with a forceful personality. She liked to have things her own way. In private, she was more serious, reserved and shy. Her gaze was penetrating. She wore fashionable clothes such as low cut jeans and tight shirts. She liked to dance with ‘sexy’ moves

²⁴ Musique Plus is a cable network channel on Canadian television specializing in music videos.

(swinging hips and shoulders, flying hair). Nina, who was absent on the first day, was exactly the same size and age as Arianna. Both girls were apparently in the same 'gang' of girlfriends even though Nina was in the other sixth grade class along with Isabelle. Nina was a nervous person who fidgeted a great deal and was often loudly provocative and outspoken. She was an entertainer of sorts for her peers. Nina was very fashion conscious and often wore very tight clothing. Isabelle, twelve years old, was also in sixth grade but not in the same class as Arianna. She was tall and round²⁵ for her age but not particularly fashion conscious, beside the large 'loop' earrings she often wore. She came to class clad in sweatpants and sweaters with a zipper. She was joyful and laughed loudly.

Two girls, Joannie and Natasha, were in fifth grade. Joannie was eleven years old, tallish and somewhat well-developed for her age. She was 'strong boned' without being exactly round and had acne. She had a serious attitude, sometimes reserved (as opposed to being outspoken like Arianna or Nina) and although her style included hippie fashion jeans and shirts, she did not try to be 'sexy.' In the group, she was quiet but when called upon for her opinion she could talk a lot. Finally Natasha, ten years old (going on eleven) was of medium height, round in shape and was in the same class as Nina and Isabelle. She seemed anti-fashion since she dressed in her own inventive way (funny hats, scarves, etc.) It could be said that she was an original thinker with a strong personality but proved to be slightly more naive than the other girls.

All the girls knew each other and had been, at one time or another, in the same class over the years. From observation, it appeared that two of the fifth graders and one of

²⁵ It is extraordinarily difficult to find words to describe body sizes without negative cultural overtones referring to ideal sizes. 'Round' and 'strong boned' are used as descriptive terms in this context, yet devoid of judgement.

the sixth graders had outward physical signs of puberty maturation. The participants mentioned that they voluntarily registered in the body image art workshops, and consequently “felt very lucky.”

When asked about their experience with art, all had taken private lessons in community art centers and art schools since there was no art specialist in the school. Two identified themselves as “advanced” and two as “intermediate/advanced.” Nina did not have experience in art. I learned that three girls had family members who were actively involved in art: a father, an aunt and an uncle.

The first workshop continued with excited responses to my question: “What is body image?” The girls told me that that was what “boys were into” because they wanted “girls to dress up like Barbies” or to “look like Pamela Anderson.” Natasha wondered out loud, “Why are all the women on television or in magazines like dolls, why aren’t they sturdy?” “Girls who are not pretty get rejected by the boys,” said Isabelle. Arianna mentioned that a friend of hers (that the others knew) was “super thin but felt fat.” Melissa said, “Girls feel they *have* to be beautiful, like to get married or have a boyfriend.” They discussed this idea at length, thinking about their mothers and fathers before concluding that “a married man does not feel that he has to look good.” A married woman does.

This idea about looking good led the girls to describe their clothing. They mentioned that they all *hated* to wear skirts because boys tried to lift them and because panty hose were “too itchy.” If possible they avoided skirts and dresses even at Christmas. Girls’ clothes were also terribly inadequate because the sizes were too small. “They take it for granted that girls are almost anorexic,” said Isabelle. “I always have to

take the biggest sizes, not my age.” “What’s horrible,” added Joannie, “Is that clothes for girls do not fit me and sometimes (making a face) I have to take *women’s* clothes!” “Maybe they don’t have enough fabric to make girls’ clothes the real sizes?” asked Natasha, innocently. “No!” Arianna exclaimed in a tone that sounded like ‘no stupid,’ “If that were true then why do they make boys’ clothes so baggy?” Natasha replied, “Oh yeah right, but they could be more thoughtful.” “It vexes us, you know,” Isabelle added. I wanted to ask them who the ‘they’ was. I wanted to see how they understood this problem about clothes being made so small. But as I thought about my question, the girls were already racing on to the next issue.

They turned to me suddenly, “What do *you* think beauty is?” Taken by surprise, I awoke from the world of fieldnotes and observation, only to realize that I was somewhat disconnected. Spontaneously, I answered, “For me beauty is about self-confidence, feeling strong, feeling good inside, looking like whatever, being happy and it shows.” Had I been prepared, I might have answered more elaborately that beauty is about knowing who you are or what you want. Instead, I told them a story about how the boys in high school always fell in love with my friend who was not outwardly pretty but had amazing self-confidence and a great personality. “I was prettier than she was, but much more shy. At the time, it seemed so unfair that some really nice boys asked *her* out. Being beautiful is much more than just ‘looking good,’” I said. The girls listened attentively.

At this juncture, and after more than an hour and a half of discussion, I was relieved to move on to some movement exercises. The girls reacted with apprehension...they still had things to say! I insisted three times to get them in a circle. Once achieved, I chose to simply have them stretch and breathe. The physical activity

was meant as a transition, a way to wind down from the discussion and to prepare for the (non-verbal) art-making. The girls seemed embarrassed.

Unfortunately, only half an hour was left for the girls to pair up to trace each other bodies on a six foot piece of paper. I showed an example of a body tracing that I made of myself in different positions. They giggled and acted quite silly during the tracing with marker...between the legs, under the arms, etc. Two girls had time to get out the paint, at which point my son burst into the room again, this time crying because he “wanted to do art too.” While I consoled him (yet angry and exasperated at the same time), the girls ran out into the hallway and started spraying each other with water while washing their brushes. I raised my voice because 5:30 PM had rolled around. Some of the parents were waiting outside the door, two looked relaxed while one father seemed irritated. Arianna’s mother came in to see the artwork and to congratulate me on my research project. After the girls had left, I rushed to clean up to get out of the school with my own children before 6:00 PM (or I would have to pay a daycare penalty). In a panic, I did not know where to store the large paintings. The daycare staff offered to store them while they dried.

Later, in my journal, I remarked on the relatively relaxed and informal atmosphere. The girls were not shy and made lots of eye contact with me. In some ways, they were controlling the situation by going on for a long time and ignoring some of my questions. They barely let me talk. Everyone seemed to have a pressing need to share their thoughts. The verbal atmosphere was chaotic...everyone talking at once. I eventually made them raise their finger. I wondered about the girls’ strong desire to speak

and be heard. Why were they so buoyant yet reluctant to do more than just talk? Why were they embarrassed with the movement?

Although the verbal data was crucial to my study, I decided that the other elements of art appreciation, movement and especially art-making were essential to the issues-based inquiry. Next workshop, I would make more efforts to guide and curb the discussion. Also, the incessant talking had me working very hard for taking notes, which diminished my presence and spontaneity somewhat. As a result of these reflections, I resolved to be clear about limits, including cleaning up and finishing on time. Finally, I decided to meet with my younger son's daycare educator to be sure that he would stay in his room. In the evening, I had a talk with my son to make him promise not to interrupt the research.

Workshop 2: Tuesday, April 20th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

My lesson plan for the second workshop was transformed to allow the girls time to continue tracing their bodies and painting. The lesson plan was as follows:

1-Discussion:

General: Reactions to last week

Confidence and respect with each other and me (my name)

Cleaning up and discipline

Theme: Body image, What is beauty?

Art appreciation: Cindy Sherman, Joan Semmel, Alice Neel, Geneviève Cadieux

2-Movement: Gesture circle

3-Art-making: Body tracings, painting

In the second workshop, a new participant arrived with the same excited verbosity that the others had demonstrated in the previous week. This time however, I purposefully began the workshop with guidelines for appropriate behavior: being respectful of others,

accepting to dialogue, listening to instructions and cleaning up to finish on time. The girls listened attentively and agreed. Then without delay, while eating their little ‘Madeleine’ cakes, they dove into a discussion triggered by my questions, but in the same long-winded, urgent manner as the week before. When asked “What is beauty?” Natasha said, “Beauty is a nice girl who is intelligent, can say what she thinks and finds herself beautiful.” “She does not preoccupy herself with her appearance,” said Isabelle. Arianna jumped up from her seat to imitate a woman in high heel shoes, saying “Not like ‘Oh, I broke my nail!’ Boys always say that girls are like that.” I asked them if they were like *that*, to which they answered, “Not us.” Isabelle blurted out, “In American films the women are always blond with blue eyes...and they think they are better than everyone else with their *décolletés*.” This prompted the older girls to describe some ‘mean’ girls that had left the school last year to go on to high school.²⁶ One of these girls was “full of make-up and was a mean bully” (in French: “maquillée au boutte et elle écoeurait”). She had a nose piercing and “big loop” earrings. Even though she had an intimidating ‘gang,’ the boys apparently thought she was beautiful. “Most boys just look on the surface,” Arianna added.

I noticed that some of the girls did most of the talking, so I decided to call on the more silent girls. To the question: “What is beauty for you?” Joannie said, “A beautiful girl is intelligent, careful of others, funny.” Natasha added, “*Everyone* is beautiful, all girls, except the ones who go for surgery because they are less natural afterwards.” I said that not only movie stars but also powerful business women and many other ‘everyday’

²⁶ In Quebec, elementary school (or primary school) starts with Kindergarten at age 5 and then continues from 1st grade to 6th grade. Children aged 12 move on to high school which is often referred to as secondary school. High school or secondary school is comprised of 5 years. After this, students often go to CEGEP, a two year pre-university or technical program before entering university for three or four years, according to the different specialties.

women undergo plastic surgery because they dislike aspects of their 'looks.' "Like Micheline Charest, for example," I explained. "She was the president of the Cinar Corporation who died this week under anesthesia while undergoing cosmetic surgery. Do you know who she was?"

Only Arianna had heard of Micheline Charest's death while the others did not know who she was. I explained that she was the producer of many of the children's cartoons they watched on the cable network channel *Teletoon*. "That woman had everything she wanted: power, money, fame..." I added. "It's hard to believe that she didn't like her looks...and now...she's dead." The girls seemed surprised and fell silent. Isabelle mumbled, "Michael Jackson looked better before surgery." At this point, I chose not to take a stance against cosmetic surgery but to leave the girls to ponder the notion of some people disliking their bodies to the point of cutting it up, in the name of self-improvement and yet risking death.

After a moment, I broke the silence by finally asking them if *they* were beautiful. Their answer was: "Beautiful/not beautiful" ("belle/pas belle"). "All girls think they are not beautiful," said Nina. When asked if they were fashion conscious or *à la mode*? They hesitated to answer. I continued, "Do you try to be beautiful through clothing?" "Well I dress for boys a bit but really for myself," said Nina. Natasha replied, "I'm okay (in French "correct"), I dress the way I want but I don't like to be criticized for that." Joannie said, "I feel judged by others about the way I dress." Isabelle added, "I want to dress for comfort, not for what the boys like--the Hollywood style." "Yes but what if someone thinks that you're ugly?" Arianna asked Isabelle. "Well then, I'll change my style." I

interjected, "Should you listen to your friends or to the boys?" They all agreed "your friends." No one thought about listening to 'yourself.'

The girls told me that the boys constantly made comments about their clothes such as "I don't like the way you are dressed" or "Those pants are ugly." This made them feel self-conscious. When questioned, the girls said that they did not make comments about the boys' clothes. "Why not?" I inquired. "There's nothing to say," Nina replied. They also said that boys regularly hit the girls at school but the girls did not hit the boys. "Why not?" I inquired. "Girls just aren't like that," Arianna answered. Sometimes the boys would embarrass the girls by making them feel inadequate.

Nina told us a story about a boy who went up to her gang of girlfriends and asked, "Who of you has the smallest breasts?" "That kind of thing really makes me feel ashamed because I am not yet formed, I always have to say 'me,'" Nina replied. Right then, I started to feel angry. Although I had been acting as an interested researcher who was simply amazed with what I was learning, now I felt frustrated. I told the girls that this behavior about commenting on appearance or bodies was called "harassment." Instead of feeling obliged in some way to respond to questions about breast size, instead of feeling humiliated, girls could react. They could get mad and make the boy feel out of line by saying "Who do you think you are?" or "We will not tolerate intimidation." I told them to get the help of an adult at these moments. The girls eyed me carefully as my cheeks and ears turned red. "No one has the right to invade your privacy," I said.

This seemed like an appropriate moment to get up from the table to do a 'gesture circle.' This was a 'Dance/Movement therapy' exercise where each person made a physical gesture to express "How I feel right now." One girl was supposed to start and

the others would repeat the movement. The girls felt “weird” and they acted self-conscious. They giggled and mocked each other.

After this, I left the room to retrieve the large paintings from the daycare staff, only to discover that the paintings had been folded over a few times! Looking at my watch, I realized that there was only a half hour left for art-making. I felt annoyed and upset. The girls set up their materials and got to work on the paintings. During the art-making, they were quiet and concentrated. They mixed their paints and used my varnish all the while resisting any stylistic or technical suggestions from me. Nina, however, had no prior experience in art and needed much encouragement and guidance. While she worked, she made derogatory comments about her painting. The others talked lightly, hummed and generally appeared to be enjoying themselves. At the end of the workshop, they had come to a common decision. “Could we have *two* body image art workshops a week?” they asked. Thrilled, I said I would inquire with the school and the parents to see if it would be possible.

At the end of the workshop, just like the week before, the girls turned crazy and fooled around so much during the cleaning up time that the workshop ran late. One father laughed when he saw his daughter soaked from head to toe. Affectionately he said, “She’s been getting wet after art ever since Kindergarten.” Another father looked exasperated when he saw his daughter’s pants full of paint. Still another father was cold, never making eye contact or talking to me at all. Like the week before, Arianna’s mother came in to talk. She was a psychologist who felt that the body image art workshops were extraordinary and that her daughter was extremely fortunate. I told the parents that the

girls requested two workshops a week. They all seemed favorable. As the girls ran off in different directions, Nina came running back to see me, “You’re cool!” she said.

As I reflected on the workshop in my journal, I noted that the new girl, Nina, changed the group dynamic. There was less consensus (or constant agreement) but more group energy. Is there an in-group or clique developing here? I wondered. Although all the girls got along well in the first week, this week it felt as if Nina and Arianna were becoming a subgroup. Although Natasha and Joannie worked as a pair for tracing the body, now it seemed that Natasha was an outsider. “Why don’t we become friends again and hang out like in the old days?” Natasha had asked Joannie. “No, I don’t think so,” was Joannie’s reply, although in a pleasant tone.

Nina was a volatile element in the group dynamic. Instead of becoming more stable, I sensed that group cohesion might be harder to achieve since Nina was often jumpy and quarrelsome. From time to time she contradicted what I said, yet it was she who found me ‘cool.’ At the same time Nina was extremely ‘touchy-feely,’ as she constantly played with my hair and touched my earrings during the discussion. How did I really feel about this? In some ways I liked the contact and in other ways I felt distracted and invaded. Finally, I noted that Nina lacked confidence in art-making and needed so much extra attention, which made me less available for the others. What messages was she sending me by being so close, needy and resistant all at the same time? Were all of Nina’s actions all geared at getting attention in one way or another?

In my notes, I remarked that all the girls forcefully demanded the right to talk with the exception of Joannie who was more reserved. Sometimes they would turn to me with a burning question like “What is this problem about?” or “What should we do about

this issue?" But when I would try to answer, they were not necessarily interested. They would turn 'on' for themselves and 'off' for me. Did they simply want to see if I was paying attention? Sometimes I would try to coin a word for them...as if they were on the verge of understanding but lacked the vocabulary.... "injustice," "harassment," "double-standard." This 'on/off' mode was also evident in the art-making, as they resisted my assistance or suggestions. It was as if they reached for me when they needed me—but not too much--as a way to assert their independence. In response to these reflections, I decided to introduce the notion of boundaries using ropes to illustrate "your personal space." Finally, in my journal I noted how much work the workshops had been so far and how tired I felt by the end. I was frustrated that so little time was directed toward art-making, which was, from my perspective, the most important part of the workshops. Nonetheless, I was elated by the girls' desire for more workshops and the parents' encouraging attitude.

Workshop 3: Monday, April 26th, in the 6th grade classroom.

Since the girls had still not finished the tracing project, and I had not yet introduced any artists, I planned to meet these objectives. The third workshop was on a Monday since the parents and the school agreed to two workshops a week. The workshops alternated locations: on Mondays they would be in a 6th grade classroom and on Tuesdays, they remained in the Kindergarten classroom. That meant that Arianna was already in the 6th grade room---her classroom---when the rest of us arrived on Mondays. This room was bigger than the Kindergarten class but there was no sink. The lesson plan looked like this:

1-Discussion

General: Reactions to last week, how do you like the workshops so far?

Do you feel silly during the movement exercises?

Cleaning up still not acceptable and discipline

Theme: What is the self? Who am I?

Art appreciation: Louise Bourgeois, Alice Neel, Emily Carr

2-Movement: Boundaries with ropes

3-Art-making: Demo of pastel work over painting and use of varnish

Finishing the painting

When I arrived, the girls helped me move the tables around to make a nice place for discussion and snacks and another area for placing artwork and paint. I informally began the workshop with “How are you today?” The girls were tired and had had “a bad day.” Arianna had broken her front tooth. When I asked her about it, she said, “I prefer not to talk about it,” but then said that a boy fell on her, she was full of bruises and worst of all “he didn’t even apologize!”

Natasha had a bad day because her teacher yelled at her. “She yells at me all the time and sometimes she hurts my feelings by treating me like a baby. She always ignores people, she’s unfriendly (in French “elle est bête”), she’s intolerant, gets mad (“elle pogne les nerfs”), and then she yells, ‘This is not working’ really loud and this frustrates me.” Nina who was in Natasha’s class chimed in, “Well she ignores *me* because I’m obnoxious!” Natasha continued, “What I really hate is that she’s not fair because when we raise our hands to talk, she chooses the children with their arms down.” “You said it makes you feel frustrated?” I asked, as she was almost in tears. “Yes, it’s as if she is up and I am down. The teacher makes me feel crazy, intimidated, humiliated, scared, sad, angry. I often felt like crying but have to hold it in. Sometimes I feel like punching her! When she talks, I just close my ears to ‘off’ and pretend to listen. That way, I can’t feel anything.” I listened with empathy. Internally, I thought, “I hope none of *my* kids ever get

that teacher.” “But then once,” Natasha continued, “I had the courage to tell her how I felt and she tried to be more careful afterward.” To this I responded, “Wow, you can say things and it has a real impact. That is good to remember.” Natasha brightened up with this remark. Isabelle and Arianna changed the subject by saying that they were their teachers’ pets.

Joannie who was usually more reserved with her opinions broke out of her silence with great emotion. She too felt that boys and girls were not treated fairly in school. She explained that girls were *usually* the teachers’ pets. In her class however, (which was also my eldest son’s class...), the teacher liked the boys better than the girls even if they “never behaved well.” The teacher apparently always chose boys first for all activities and always talked to the boys while ignoring the girls. Girls were also punished for behavior that went unpunished for the boys. “I really don’t like her, none of the girls do,” Joannie concluded. This made me wonder about my son’s class. “This is terrible,” I thought.

This outburst of emotion concerning the teachers flowed naturally into an unleashed description of the unfairness in girls’ lives, particularly in their relationships with their mothers. Some mothers were perceived as “controlling,” others were “neglectful.” Mothers generally ranged from invasive, unfair, tired, infuriating and enmeshed within an overall view that they could also be nice, caring, loving, understanding and friendly. The girls admitted that sometimes their mothers found them difficult, too.

Nina said she had a single-mother who gave her “too many responsibilities” because she had to buy and wash her own clothes. She had to get up all by herself to go

to school because her mother worked early in the morning. Candidly, she said, "I told her 'it's rare that you take care of me.' At first she got very mad. But now she tries to be more careful and things are better." As with Natasha earlier, I responded, "You see, when you speak up and make your voice heard, people listen and it makes a difference." The girls seemed to lighten up, which was a relief since the emotional atmosphere had been quite heavy. During this time, the girls had finished a big bag of chips. I told them I aimed to bring in "healthful snacks" since I was a mother too and I was thinking about their health. "Oh Heather, we *need* some junk food, especially on Mondays. Mondays are so hard and we need to be comforted." I said I would think about it. Isabelle added, "Come sit with us next time while we eat our snack. We get lonely without you."

Although I had planned to discuss the theme "Who am I?" I decided that the girls' general expression of anger and frustration was amply sufficient for the day. An hour had passed and I was anxious to get on to another activity. Natasha said, "Heather, what should we do about all these problems with our teachers and our mothers?" I answered, "Good question! You can speak up as best you can. You can also retreat into a personal place for safety and comfort. There is no perfect solution to problems but you can have a boundary, which is a personal space all your own. Your boundary helps you figure out what you really need so that sometimes you say 'yes' and sometimes you say 'no.'" I explained to them that a boundary was like a circle all around the body which delimited a private place without anyone else. Not even Mommy or Papa!

Originally, I had planned to introduce a boundary exercise with actual ropes. Instead, I chose to move on directly to the art-making. Before they started, I did a demonstration of applying dry pastel over the paint and using acrylic varnishes. While

they worked, they subtly bothered Natasha by being squeamish about not wanting to sit next to her and telling her to move over, etc. When Arianna said to Natasha, “I don’t like you,” I reprimanded them, “When you put others down, you diminish yourself.” “Think about that,” I said.

One father came in fifteen minutes early to pick up his daughter because he had an appointment. Isabelle paid no attention and continued painting, saying “Yeah, yeah, I’m almost done...I’m almost finished,” while continuing her work. I was embarrassed by this and told her not to make her father wait. She did not obey either of us and the father was irritated. Who was the authority in this case? Who was at fault? I wondered. When Isabelle finally left, all the other girls rushed to finish early. “We’re done for today,” they said. As in the previous weeks, cleaning up was a hassle and it was difficult to get the girls to wipe the paint off the floor. After class, I rushed around the school with my kids. Three of the girls saw me in my other role as a harried mother, losing my patience over a missing shoe and lunch box!

In my journal, I wrote that I felt excited, almost exhilarated. I called my contact with the girls “a positive experience.” I hoped that my impatience with my own kids had not altered this feeling...The girls seemed so alive, they blushed as they spoke. It was as if they really took advantage of the workshops to discuss their concerns and share their emotions. I felt proud that the girls could ‘open up’ to trust me. However, at the same time, Natasha expressed her feelings strongly and was also ostracized for this. I did not feel that I adequately helped her explore her problems with her teacher. At the same time, I knew that it was not possible to do so in the classroom context. At home, my son told me that “*everyone* in the school hated Natasha and her sister.” This made me sad since I

could not understand the dynamics of her exclusion. Did Natasha feel like a victim? Was anything going on that I could not see?

In my notes, I reflected on the anger and frustration that the girls expressed. I wondered about authority issues and how the action research was giving me writing duties that felt like extra work while also making me feel less natural. Were the girls talking so much *because* I was taking notes? Were they resisting my authority because I seemed *busy*? Was my busy-ness arousing their anger? I decided that the next workshop would be almost entirely devoted to art. I would show them artists and then they would finish the paintings...finally!

Workshop 4: Tuesday, April 27th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

The next day, the girls seemed really pleased to see me and they expressed their glee about having two workshops per week (they had power!) As I walked in, Nina said to the others, "Look at her long brown skirt," and to me, "I *like* it, I mean it's not my style or anything but it looks good on you!" I was not sure if I was being mocked or not. I ignored this bizarre greeting and began the workshop as always by offering a snack: carrots and humus dip. As usual the girls ate as if starving to death. They commented again on their need for junk food on Mondays and thanked me for the snacks in general. "But could you bring juice?" I replied that they could bring in their own drink. My lesson plan for the day was simple and focused solely on finishing the artwork:

1-Art appreciation: Tamara De Lempicka, Mimi Parent, Georgia O'Keeffe

2-Art-making: Finishing the painting

I began the workshop by showing the girls various artwork by Tamara De Lempicka, Mimi Parent, and Georgia O’Keeffe. I introduced art concepts such figurative and abstract art, painterly style, brushstroke techniques and composition. This time they listened with interest. Sometimes they commented on the subject matter. In this role, the girls seemed to respect me as knowledgeable as an artist and art teacher. Whereas in the realm of girls and women studies everything seemed *personal* and *relative*, in the realm of art, they accepted me as the expert. I suggested they get right down to work. “No movement?” said Arianna. “But we *need* it to relax.” Suddenly Nina suggested we all sit in a circle to massage the person in front of us. She naturally wanted to massage me. For five minutes, everyone was quiet and enjoyed the group massage. Then we turned around and started over (because Nina desperately wanted to be massaged by me!).

Soon thereafter, the girls got to work on their paintings and painted for the whole period with utmost concentration (see Figures 4-8). Everyone had time to finish, except for Natasha who had to leave early. Again, Nina seemed to ‘stick’ to me during the art-making, still needing guidance and technical advice. She repeatedly told me how much she liked me. Knowing that the others could hear, I tried to be as kind as possible while telling her individually, “I like you a lot but I feel uncomfortable being touched all the time. Sometimes, it’s too much for me,” I said. Although I did not mind sharing some information about myself, some of her questions were too personal (like if I kept my house clean, if I liked her teacher, if I lived near her house, or why I had sweat spots under my arms, etc.) Gently yet firmly, I told her not to make comments about my clothes. “It’s a boundary thing, you know,” I said. She said, “Okay,” but I could not tell how she was

reacting. I knew that I was modeling my behavior for all the girls by making boundary theory into practice.

During clean-up I struggled, as in all the other workshops, with the crazy end-of-day girl energy. It seemed hopeless and I started to think that the girls were too tired at 5:20 PM. I decided to end the workshops earlier in the future. Two girls said that their parents were mad that the workshops ended so late. But this did not motivate them to clean up any faster and only increased my level of stress. By now, most parents waited outside due to the nice weather or downstairs inside the school door. Although I no longer had to deal with the parents directly, this made it even harder for me to get rid of the girls as they hung around forever, while I rushed about. I often felt like yelling at them.

In my journal, I reflected on how well I managed my own boundaries by expressing my personal limits with Nina—within the earshot of the other girls. I worried however about how she might react in future workshops. Nina had been my helper throughout today's workshop, helping to set up paints and materials and always sitting next to me. Was Nina really a neglected child? Or rebellious? I noted the words that I coined for the girls during that lesson: "humiliating" and "abuse of power." Were the teachers really that bad or was that only one side to the story? In relation to art, I was relieved that the paintings had been finished. Finally we could move on to something else! I decided to keep the workshops focused on art, as this had proved to be the most successful approach to date.

Later in the week, I met with daycare director to find a solution to the discipline problem that made the workshops end late. He said, "I will send someone to escort the

girls down their respective daycare groups at 5:30 PM.” This made me feel much better as I felt more supported and less entirely responsible for the girls’ lack of cooperation²⁷. On the way out of his office, a daycare educator asked me, “So how’s the research going?” Surprised, I struggled to discuss the research appropriately while safekeeping confidentiality. I learned from the educator that Nina had “quite a strong personality” and was considered “difficult” because she often used swear words. “She is quite ‘rock and roll,’” she said (a Quebecois expression meaning ‘trouble-maker’). This information came into contrast with the Natasha that I knew, the one who desperately tried to please me. But I was not terribly surprised either.

Part 2: We Need Our Bubbles

Workshop 5: Monday, May 3rd. In the 6th grade classroom.

My plan for the fifth workshop was as follows:

1-Discussion:

 General: Reactions to last week

 Cleaning up

 Discipline

 Theme: positive and negative images of women in magazines

2-Movement: Boundaries with ropes

3-Art-making: Collages of positive and negative images of women

The girls walked into the room with a nervous, erratic energy. Instantly, I knew that it would be a difficult to work in this atmosphere. Arianna appeared with a brand new ‘look’: her hair was a bright fluorescent pink! When I exclaimed “Wow!” she said “I don’t want to talk about it because it’s my private business!” Right from the start, Nina

²⁷ It was a good plan. Some weeks later the director admitted that it was impractical since the daycare educators could not really leave their groups.

was grating my nerves. She loudly made jokes about sex and (what I call) “pipi-caca” talk. “Guess what? I’m pregnant!” she said, followed by “I need to piss.” I must have turned livid because she said, “No, just kidding.” Then she made a joke about breasts. “Who wants a boyfriend or are you lesbians?” Then she asked, “Can I leave the room? I’ve really got to do a caca. Just kidding.” I took a deep breath and assertively asked her to quiet down. To this she responded, “You do not hit a girl who does not want to make love...but touch me, I want to.” The other girls laughed at this berserk spectacle. Arianna said, “You’re an anarchist!” I was simply astounded.

To break the zany mood, I set out the chocolate chip cookies at once. It was Monday after all, but I knew the sugar was not a good choice. As they ate, I explained that the art project for the day and its two parts. The first part would be to look at magazine images of women to determine what was ‘positive’ and ‘negative.’ The second part would be cut and paste onto large sheets of cardboard. I explained that there was no time allotted for discussion and I immediately introduced the boundary exercise. Each girl received a rope and had instructions to find a place on the floor to trace a circle around herself. The exercise was meant to experiment with personal space and to discover what felt best for each girl. During my explanations, Isabelle said, “It feels like I’m in my very own bubble” (in French the expression “être dans sa bulle” conveys the idea of an interior personal space, dreamy and intimate). The girls were enormously pleased with this idea and used the ‘bubble’ metaphor for the rest of the workshops.

The first exercise was to make a very big boundary. Arianna felt “invaded by so much space.” Nina was also uncomfortable and left the rope open at the back, thus not closing the circle. Joannie felt “great” and even lay down with arms and legs

outstretched. Isabelle said, “Finally I have enough space.” Natasha was bothered by a knot in the rope, but also liked having “more space.”

Then I instructed the girls to make the circle so small that it touched their bodies. None of them liked this constricted feeling of lacking personal space. “I feel cornered,” said Isabelle. Arianna said it made her “feel like crying.” Natasha felt “stressed.” Quickly I told them to find “just the right size” for their personal space. For Natasha, Joannie and Isabelle (the bigger girls), it was interesting that their boundaries were on the bigger side. For Arianna, the right size was a foot around her on all sides. “I feel more snug and secure like this, I feel safe. I don’t feel like crying anymore.” Nina had a hard time finding the right size. At first she kneeled into a small ball and kept the rope touching her body, rocking back and forth. Then she opened the circle somewhat. “I think it should be like this,” she said. Her personal space was rather small.

Although I had not planned for a long reaction to the exercise, the girls apparently needed to digest their feelings. “For me, my bubble feels like a cloud, it’s so soft,” said Isabelle. “Mine feels so feminine, it makes me feel like caressing myself,” said Arianna. Natasha said that she felt so happy that she wanted to “jump rope” with her bubble. Nina wanted to experiment. First she came into my boundary. I told her that I felt invaded. But Adrianna said, “Come over into my bubble, it will be fun.” Then Nina wanted us to join all the ropes together to make a huge collective boundary. Once accomplished, the other girls said they preferred their individual bubbles.

After that, Arianna expressed some of her many frustrations about her mother. “She never listens to me, she decides everything...” This went on for what felt like a long time. It seemed as if having a boundary—a space for self—elicited a desire to discuss

boundary issues. The other girls also described their boundary difficulties with their families, especially in relation brothers and sisters not respecting their space. Joannie said, “I don’t want my brother coming into my room or taking my stuff.” Natasha added, “My bubble is not respected when my parents don’t keep their promises.” Arianna concluded, “Children don’t know how to get adults to respect them.”

Although the boundary exercises were significant, I felt disappointed when I realized there was only a half hour left. I told the girls to cut up the magazines. I had bought current issues of magazines especially for girls like *Elle Girl*, *Clin d’Oeil Fille*, *Full Fille*. Nina was flabbergasted, “I can’t believe it! We can’t cut out of *this months’* magazines! You should have told me. I have tons of old ones at home. This cost you *money*.” I reminded her that they all were supposed to have brought in magazines²⁸ and that for me it was okay to cut up fashion images. Nina made a face, “Well, okay...if you say so!” She continued to mumble, “I can’t believe it” to the others.

Although the activity was to sort, evaluate and cut out images, the girls seemed immersed in the fashion. I kept hearing, “This is nice” and “Oh, I like this one.” Many times, I had to remind them to get back to the art project or to ask that they stop rubbing perfume on themselves (taken from the samples in the magazines). It seemed difficult for them to concentrate. Nina was disturbing the others by arguing about their choices of ‘negative’ images. “That can’t be ‘negative,’ you don’t know what negative is.” “Fashion is good,” Nina insisted, “Look at her, she looks great...this can’t be negative.” Many times, I asked her to leave the others alone to develop their own ideas. The girls did not really listen to me and remained in clusters. Toward the end of the workshop, my partner

²⁸ I had asked the girls to bring in of positive and negative images of girls and women from their magazines. They did not.

burst in the room with my younger second son and my two year old daughter. My daughter was rambunctious, wildly running around the room, knocking images off the tables. I was furious and raised my voice. The girls thought the whole thing was funny. By the time the workshop ended, I was exhausted. At least there was not much cleaning up to do.

In my journal, I reflected on Nina's curious combination of sex with pipi/caca talk. Was this related to the girls' age level, caught between childhood and puberty? Was sexuality somehow bound up in Nina's mind with defecation? I noted that I found the boundary exercise incredibly rich because it gave the girls an important tool for learning to respect their needs and be respected. However, I also felt exasperated that the workshops always focused on talk. Cutting up magazines was a chaotic exercise and I realized that the girls were often tired as early 5:00 PM. I wondered about Nina's reaction...had I breached holy ground by implying that there was something negative to be found in fashion images? Had she lost respect for me because she found me weird? This made me realize that on some level I wanted to be liked, to be cool, and that sometimes I myself did not always want to be different from everyone else. This was the girl in me. As an adult and a feminist, I could tolerate holding an opposing point of view. But what would this mean for teaching and discipline?

In this lesson, I noted for the first time how the girls' were dressed. Why did I not notice this before? Was this prompted by the fashion magazines for girls? Joannie, Nina and Arianna were apparently fashion conscious. Joannie was wearing fashion jeans and a seventies style baggy shirt with long sleeves. Both Nina and Arianna had low cut bellbottom jeans which somewhat exposed their stomachs. Arianna was wearing a tight

pink shirt with three hearts on it and a pink bead necklace. Her bright clothes matched her long flamboyant pink hair. Nina had a white spaghetti strapped t-shirt with a zip-up vest with a hood. Natasha and Isabelle were wearing sweat pants. Natasha and Nina had big-loop earrings. All had running shoes. I was wearing a long wrap around tie-die skirt, a sleeveless t-shirt, leather sandals and big round earrings. My style was closer to 'grungy-artist-anything-goes type' spiced with interesting colors and patterns.

During the week, I spotted Arianna in the schoolyard thanks to her bright hair. I waved a special 'hello.' This meeting made me even more conscious of my behavior and dress when I entered the school (because sometimes I looked like a baggy eyed rumped mother of three children when I brought my kids to school early in the morning). It also made me realize that sometimes the girls must see me when I don't see them.

Workshop 6: Tuesday, May 4th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

1-Discussion:

General: Letting others evaluate the images without interfering

Art appreciation: Barbara Kruger, Sue Coe, Eleanor Austin

2-Movement: Dancing, stretching and boundaries.

3-Art-making: Positive and negative images of women

I began the workshop with the idea that I would skip the discussion and movement exercises. I hoped to finish the positive and negative collages. When all were seated, I noticed that Natasha was absent. They ate their Russian poppy seed cake, while I showed them artworks by Barbara Kruger, Sue Coe and Eleanor Austin. I was careful to discuss the subject matter of the art while avoiding influencing their evaluations of positive and negative images (for now). I discussed stylistic strategies and the incorporation of text into the artwork. Kruger's work had little impact on the girls

because of the language barrier. The slogan '*Your gaze hits the side of my face*' and '*We have orders not to move*' seemed to lose its power in translation. I told them to start right away. "What?" said Arianna, "We *need* to do our bubbles, we have been waiting all week...*please*..." The others chimed in "please, Heather!" "Okay," I answered, but I don't want to go on talking for the whole workshop. There are so many interesting art projects that you will not be able to do because all you do is talk, talk, talk. I want you to do more art." "Yes, okay, we won't talk, we promise...thank you, Heather, you are so nice."

I handed each girl a rope and they made their boundaries. Arianna was the first to start, "I am mad because all my friends have copied me by dying their hair too...it's not fair." She wanted to be original. I asked if she liked her new hair. She answered that she received lots of attention for it. People apparently turned around to see her. "Do you like the attention?" I asked. "Yes and no," she shared. "I like feeling different but sometimes I want my privacy. And I don't like people to make comments."

Nina said, "I saw this really scary horror movie that gave me the shivers. It was about a nightmare where a man was hiding, watching and all you could see was his two eyes in the dark. Now I feel spooked out at night." Isabelle continued, "Me too, I really feel scared at night around 10:00 or 11:00 PM and I don't want my parents to go out or leave me alone." "Do they do that?" I inquired. "Sometimes, and when they do, I'm afraid to move around in the house. I stay in my room. If I look into a mirror or see a shadow, it scares me to death. There are no curtains in our house and I always feel watched." "What are you afraid of?" I asked. They answered: "Sexual predators, crazy mentally ill men who attack women, men with knives or guns, vicious perverts, maniacs

like Guy Cloutier.”²⁹ Isabelle said, “Little girls are sometimes kidnapped. I was almost ‘caught’ in the Côte-des-Neiges neighborhood.” Joannie said that sometimes an old man might say, ‘Come quick, something happened to your mother’... “But luckily my parents warned me about that.” Isabelle told us about a television show (that I also saw) where children were filmed, as the naively followed a stranger to help him ‘find his dog.’ There was talk about being “attacked in the metro” (subway) and about “making a mistake... and going with the wrong parents.” “This makes me scared of growing up,” said Isabelle.

During this time, I noticed that Arianna and Nina were silent. Nina said, “Me, too. I’m afraid of pedophiles or someone stalking me, always at the same time of the day.” Suddenly, she got very serious. “Promise me that I can trust you and that you will not tell anyone *a word* of what I will tell you. I have never told anyone this before.” She made us all cross our hearts. I wondered what this was all about. Her voice was somber, “I want to tell you that I was ‘messed with’ down here (pointing to her pelvis area). When I was in daycare, the babysitter’s older son always put his hands in my pants. I did not like it. When I told my mother, she didn’t do anything about it.” “Did you keep going to that daycare?” I asked. “Yes, finally after a long time, my mother told the babysitter what had happened. I went back once after that. At the table, the boy said, ‘Who has pink panties here?’ and I was embarrassed because it was me. Please don’t tell anyone.”

I was in shock about this revelation. I froze while wondering what action to take. Suddenly, Isabelle pushed Joannie, who then complained loudly. I was forced to intervene. This broke the solemn mood and caused a distraction. Now the girls were all

²⁹ Guy Cloutier was a famous impresario who, at the time of the action research, was accused of raping and sexually abusing a child under his supervision. In 2004, Cloutier pleaded guilty and went to jail. Nathalie Simard, the well-loved Quebecois singer was later revealed as the victim. There was considerable media attention and popular shock surrounding this event.

talking at once while interrupting each other. Arianna yelled, “Everybody shut up.” I was not able to say anything more than, “Thank you, Nina, for sharing that with us, I’m sorry that happened to you.” And to the others, “It’s always important to tell an adult when something happens to you or if you are scared. You always need to trust yourself if something does not feel right. If no one believes you, you need to tell someone else, maybe your teacher. You have the right to be protected and you are not alone.” I asked if anyone had taken self-defense courses. None had, so I strongly recommended it. “It will make you feel so much stronger. You’ll learn to fight back.”

Arianna who was unusually quiet broke in, “I’m really *really* scared.” I said, “Okay then, everybody, it’s time to get up. Here are some tricks to do when you get scared. First you try to remember your boundary. Ask your parents to buy you a rope. Then you raise your vitality level like this” and I began stomping my feet. “It’s really important to feel your legs, all that power in your legs. Feel how strong you are!” They all stomped and jumped around. “At home, you can punch your bed too, and I mean *punch!*” Then everyone got silly and we played a game of tug-of-war with the rope. I encouraged them to grunt and growl. Then we sat back down into our boundaries. Everyone said they felt more relaxed, except Arianna who was still very scared. “Would you like to come closer to me?” I asked. She said no. She did however accept Nina and Isabelle into her bubble. They all hugged.

As revealing as it was, the whole emotional episode took most of the class time. At least the girls were able to glue their images onto the cardboard. Although I had many colours, three girls chose pink, and one girl chose red. The workshop finished on time. On the way out, Nina wanted a kiss and I gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder. Arianna

ran out of the room so fast—and without the usual eye-contact--that I did not get to say good-bye. Her mother forced her back in the room for a “decent” good-bye and thank you. But before I could say anything to the mother about how scared Arianna had been, she was gone.

In my journal, I noted the “heavy subject matter.” I was surprised and saddened that young girls were scared of being attacked just like grown women. A great deal of anger had been expressed about violence against women and girls, particularly sexual violence. Although I did not feel prepared for giving concrete advice for dealing with fears of pedophiles and maniacs (something I had not quite resolved myself), I recognized that I did my best under the circumstances. I thought that the physical exercises demonstrated that girls are not completely powerless or without strength. I nevertheless felt somewhat confused about my role.

I noted that Nina’s confession of sexual abuse was greatly disturbing to the other girls. Because they ‘acted out’ their feelings by creating a distraction, I felt frustrated that I was unable to respond appropriately. In the evening after the workshop, I felt increasingly upset, as if Nina’s disclosure was my fault...as if I somehow brought it on and then was not empathic enough or able to bring adequate closure. I didn’t do my job, I thought. I regretted not giving her a kiss at the end of the workshop. I resolved to give Nina my support during the next workshop (which was a whole week away!).

That same evening, I also thought about calling Arianna’s mother to tell her about her daughter’s fear. I struggled with the ethical dimensions around sharing confidential information but felt that since I could not help Arianna from the distance, her mother (the psychologist) would know what to do. I wondered what to say if Arianna answered the

phone. Luckily, the mother answered and I told her about what happened during the workshop, the fear and the disclosure of abuse. I did not tell her who confided the story but the mother thought she knew. She thought it best not to tell Arianna that I called, so as not to break the trust or “prevent Arianna from sharing other thoughts in the future.” She thanked me for playing such an important role with the girls and promised to ensure Arianna’s well-being.

Although I felt that calling Arianna’s mother was the right thing to do, I was still upset about the question of abuse. I felt protective of *my* girls. What would I do if there were any more confessions? How would I deal with the parents? The whole topic was very upsetting and that night, I could not sleep.

Workshop 7: Monday, May 10th. In the 6th grade classroom.

Because I was discouraged that so little art was being produced, in addition to the burden of secrets, I decided to skip the discussion. I really wanted to finish the collages. I questioned my motives about avoiding closeness, but I seriously projected to diminish all discussion...no matter what came up. The emotional content was draining me. In this workshop, the girls were only to discuss what was positive or negative in the images of women, found in the magazines. The lesson plan was:

- 1-Movement: Dancing silently
- 2-Art-making: Positive and negative images

When the girls sat down, I gave them their snack. They talked lightly. Arianna kept popping up from her seat to go dance in the corner, swaying her hips and throwing her hair about. Obviously she had learned the feminine ‘moves’ from stars and hit singers

on TV. Every time she would get up, someone else would too, and I had to ask them all to sit down several times. I felt irritated and impatient to get on with the workshop.

The girls took the entire workshop to finish cutting and gluing images on the cardboard. While they identified which images were positive or negative, they went into little groups to discuss. “This is positive because... and this is negative because....” I wanted them to save their discussion for the next class. They ignored me and kept talking among themselves. I felt left out, and this too was draining. I noted however that there was no bullying, no excessive hugging and no fooling around (beside the fact that I was basically ignored). “Maybe the girls are absorbing last week’s workshop,” I thought. When all were about to leave, I said to Nina with emotion, “I wanted to tell you last week that you were very brave to share what you did. I want you to know that it was not your fault. It never should have happened.” Nina looked touched.

In the hallway, Joannie’s mother wanted to talk to me in private. She asked her daughter to wait further away and told me that she was concerned with my notion of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ images of women. She told me that it could be very damaging to a girls’ self-concept. “What is she referring to?” I wondered, as she spoke. When I got a chance, I reassured the mother that I was not imposing any ideas on the girls, but rather listening to what they were saying, and helping them make connections between what they believed and the choices they made. I meant to challenge stereotypes by looking at media and art images of women. I told her that my goal was to empower, to help girls feel good.

Finally, I understood that Joannie’s mother was concerned because her daughter felt “self-conscious because she was bigger than the other girls in her class” and wore a

bra. She was also embarrassed about her acne. I told her that Joannie had not mentioned these things in the workshops and I would let her bring it up herself, if she chose to. Otherwise, I would be discreet. As she walked away, she said, “You should talk to a social worker at my work and read on the topic of body image.” This comment made me feel diminished as I wondered what the mother was implying...about the validity of art education or about me?

Workshop 8: Tuesday, May 11th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

In the effort to finally get the collage projects finished, I had a simple lesson plan:

- 1-Movement: Breathing and stretching to the music, dancing
- 2-Art-making: Discussing the collages

To begin the eighth workshop, I told the girls that there would only be time for describing the posters and that next week we would start a new art project. Isabelle said, “I like to discuss, but really, I can’t wait to do more art.” “Yeah,” said Joannie. “Didn’t you promise we would do print-making and sculpture?” “That was my plan,” I responded. “But believe me, as interesting as everything is, I never expected you to talk so much.” “Well, why didn’t you tell us to stop?” said Arianna sarcastically. “I thought it was important to let you express yourselves,” I answered. “Yeah, but now *we’re* the ones who won’t get to do the art,” Isabelle said in a frustrated tone that sounded like ‘it’s not fair.’ “Let’s finish this once and for all, so we can get on with other things as fast as possible. Even arguing about it takes up our time,” I urged.

Like the week before, Arianna kept getting up to dance her ‘rock star’ moves, as we talked. This time she was on a little wooden stage that the Kindergarten teacher had made for the end-of-year performance. Isabelle impatiently exclaimed, “Arianna, be more

serious and listen to Heather. You're wasting all our time!" After the snack, we stretched, breathed and danced to the music for ten minutes.

After the warm-up, the girls placed their posters on the wall (see Figures 10-15). To my surprise, I discovered that some girls had cut the women's bodies off and had only conserved the heads! Some girls had also invented a third category 'medium' in between 'positive' and 'negative.' I realized that I had paid little attention to what the girls had done in the previous workshop. Instead I had focused almost exclusively on interactions. Was my inattention caused by the stress I felt, related to the disclosure of abuse?

I asked each girl to explain her poster. Although they seemed terribly bored with this project, this is what they said to explain how they categorized their images.

Isabelle's positive images of women.

Pure, wet, washed, soft, looks like she's feeling good (in French: "l'air bien"), looks like she's nice, soft, looks glad, happiness, shows expression, takes pride in her looks ("coquette"), is happy that she's pretty.

Isabelle's negative images of women.

I don't like the way she looks at me, she looks like a snob, her tongue is in the back of her mouth, her eyebrows are up—gives a funny look, licentious/depraved/vicious (in French: "vieux").

Isabelle's medium images of women.

Too perfect, eccentric, playful, she wants to skip school because she's a rebel, she has sunglasses but not a disgusting smile, too much silicone---that's the outside because on the inside she still wants to take care of others.

Joannie's positive images of women.

Reminds me of someone, is smiling, likes herself/her body (in French: "Bien dans sa peau," literal translation: feels good in her skin).

Joannie's negative images of women.

Aggressive, mean. You can read the emotions: she looks disappointed.

Arianna's positive images of women.

Looks happy, exudes something joyful and not just for the photo, experiences pleasure, looks pleased, has a nice smile, is pretty but could have better hair. The Ashley twins look happy to be together, look like nice people. They do exercise and take care of others and themselves.

Arianna's negative images of women.

Not natural, too much gel in her hair. This girl almost never wears make-up but did so for the photo, even though she didn't want to. This one looks disappointed. This one looks awful, aggressive, not natural, does not take advantage of her childhood or adolescence.

Nina's positive images of women.

Happy, relaxed, comfortable. Smiles at her boyfriend ("Who is naked?" asked Isabelle).

Looks like she feels good. Natural, in a cocoon.

Nina's negative images of women.

Fake smile. I felt like scratching off the smile. She is not sure of her idea, about what she got herself into. This one says: 'Let go of me and get out of my bubble/boundary.' Scared because she saw someone. Just mouths, mouths, mouths. Is serious, petrified, scared in her bed. Not happy because she saw her ex-boyfriend.

Natasha's positive images of women.

Looks like she won a million dollars, she is natural, she is interested in something...maybe a photo or a vase. She is cool.

Natasha's in-between images of women.

Natural but not too natural. It shows that she has contact lenses. She is wearing a bikini.

She has a sunburn.

Natasha's negative images of women.

Osée, she dares to wear bras and bathing suits in front of everyone. Licentious/depraved/vicious (in French: "vicieux"), on her knees, sex (makes a gesture that seems to imply coitus and says "clink-a-clink"). She looks awful, too much make-up, is too pale, looks like a Barbie.

Moving away from her poster, Natasha said, “What these images have in common is that they are erotic. They have to attract someone, guys. You pass in front of a mirror because guys like that.” I said, “I noticed that some of you seemed to describe sex as negative. Is it bad to be sexual?” Natasha continued, “Well the women in the pictures are too excited. They’re spilling out from a Playboy magazine. The message is ‘if you are like this, you will have a boyfriend.’” “Yeah,” said Arianna, “It’s eroticism for your boyfriend. It’s stupid (in French: “C’est con”). And what I noticed is that girls’ clothing always highlights the breasts and butts.” Arianna looked down at her clothes. She noticed that there were two hearts on her t-shirt, each at breast-level. On the back of her sweat pants, buttock-level, one could read BAD GIRL. “If they want to go to a porno site on Internet, it’s their business,” Isabelle added.

I was glad that there was some critical discussion coming from the girls themselves because I did not find their evaluation of images very apparent. From my point of view, I did not see any visual difference between what they qualified as positive or negative. When they were all done talking, I said, “Let’s look at my positive and negative images.” Practically all my images from the magazines were in the ‘negative’ category. I had purposefully made a poster with publicity images that zoomed in on body parts. I pointed out how women bodies were segmented into parts: lips, eyes, breasts, etc. I said that I did not like it that the eroticized images were virtually the only images available of women. “Where are the girls or women we see in everyday life?” I asked. “Where are the older women, or the working women, or the rounder women or the women of colour? Where is the variety that is part of life?” “Some of you have used the word ‘vicious’” I continued. “First of all, it is good to remember that the women who

pose for the photographer are paid to take a pose, to play a role, but they are not necessarily themselves 'licentious.' You are right about your perceptions of eroticism too. In our culture, women are practically only represented as sexual in images. For me, it is not real sexuality that is vicious. I see sexuality (ideally) as a mutual exchange between two loving, consenting people. It's erotic, safe and equal. It's not vicious. What is vicious is equating women with sex all the time or sex that is unequal."

"The real question is 'can we have any other images please'? Do sexualized women have to be used to sell radios on the side of the bus? These images are everywhere on posters, magazines, TV, etc. Women are always sexy, with a certain 'look' in their eyes that implies that they are sexually available. Boys say they like these images, right? (The girls nodded.) Are women really this way...just always asking for sex? I don't think so. Women have lots of other things to do in life too...sex is just one thing. But we are set up to look at women in this certain way. And to make things worse, women themselves want to look sexy and beautiful in this certain way, and what happens when they can't do it? They feel imperfect and diminished."

I knew that I was talking a lot but for once the girls were listening. "The images create a false desire to look like models and then we feel bad," I continued. "Did you know that movie stars like Nicole Kidman, who look so beautiful, don't look like that in real life? They wake up in the morning like you and me, with pillow marks on their face, pimples or bags under their eyes?" The girls looked at me in humorous disbelief. Do you realize that these pictures have been altered with computers to create perfection? Even the beautiful women don't look perfect. The photos are fakes, they don't represent real-life! They can be nice to look at. After all, the photographers and designers who created

those slick images all went to art school or university for three to four years. It's all just a big set up." Isabelle's face lit up. "Really?" she said. "I thought they were just regular photos..."

Looking right at me, Nina said, "I don't know what's wrong with you. These images are great! The women look so good. We *need* the magazines to know what to wear and how to be *à la mode*. These magazines are *so cool*." I responded calmly, "It's okay. Nina. You're allowed to like them. You can have a different opinion." I took a moment to calm down. Arianna said she sometimes read magazines like *Cool* to learn tricks about how to fix her hair. "The problem with the magazines is that if we don't like how we look, then we compare ourselves," said Isabelle. At that moment, I noticed that Natasha had covered her face with her hands. "What's the matter?" I asked. "I will never be perfect," she exclaimed. I put my arm on her shoulder. Tears began streaming down her face, "I'm sad...I think it's because of these pictures we cut out of the magazines..." She cried for a moment.

As I tried to console Natasha, the other girls did not seem to pay attention. Nina and Arianna were massaging each other in a corner and talking. Isabelle was drawing on the blackboard. "My grandmother bought me a new bathing suit that was too small. I did not want to try it on. My parents got mad and made me try it on. I couldn't even fit in it. When I looked in the mirror, I was sticking out on all sides. I looked awful." She cried more and I felt bad too. I had always hated my body in bathing suits. "What can we do to feel beautiful, just the way we are?" she asked me. Right then, I felt dumbfounded. "Avoid the magazines," said Isabelle, who I did not think was paying attention. "That way, we can say to ourselves that we're not that bad!" Then Isabelle sat down with

Natasha and I, “I want to lose weight to fit into my bathing suit too. Maybe I will go on a diet to lose some pounds. I need to do sit-ups to lose weight because I ate some chocolate.” She hugged a pillow on her stomach and smiled self-consciously. It was time to go. On the way out, Nina said, “I still don’t see what your problem is.”

In my journal, I reflected on the lack of group cohesion and how hard it was to rally everyone’s attention. They all seemed so distracted and the subject felt so volatile. I noted that I talked more in this lesson than ever before...Did I talk too much? Did I try to indoctrinate them? Did I impose my ideas after all? Did I support Natasha enough? My heart felt heavy. I knew that I had done my best in a less-than-ideal classroom atmosphere. What about Nina? She apparently liked the magazines and yet also was so often insecure...what there a connection here? She was also very intolerant of others’ opinions during the sorting and pasting stage of the negative and positive images. Was she getting rude with me? The class atmosphere was not improved by Arianna and Nina having bonded. Since Nina was obviously prone to backbiting, would Arianna become that way too? I hoped to improve the group dynamic in subsequent workshops.

To my discouragement, I learned that in the following week, three of the girls would be absent because they were going on a three day class fieldtrip. Only Joannie and Arianna would be present. Yet again I had to reorganize my lesson plan. I still did not feel that progress was being made in art-making or that I was achieving my research goals in a way that felt satisfying *artwise*.

Part 3: A Time for Flight

Workshop 9: Monday, May 17th. In the 6th grade classroom.

1-Discussion:

Art appreciation: Frida Khalo

2-Movement: Dancing

3-Art-making: Self-portraits with aquarelle colored pencils and ink.

I knew that only two girls would show up for the ninth workshop: Joannie and Arianna. The others were on the fieldtrip. While the two girls munched on their celery, they discussed the group dynamic. “I really like this group of girls,” Arianna told me. “Yes, it’s really fun to come here,” said Joannie. “Plus we’re so lucky compared to the other kids, we get snacks *and* art.” Right away, I noticed that Joannie was talkative and less shy than usual. She was lively and exuberant, profiting the undivided attention I could give her. Arianna, on the other hand, seemed timid. Without peer support, it was as if it was harder for her to relate one-on-one.

It was a pleasant change not to have constant chatter, or endless discussions fueled by strong emotions. There was no fuss in getting straight down to work. I got out my book on Frida Khalo. We discussed the artist’s life, her great accident³⁰ and her strained relationship with Diego Rivera. I don’t know what my purpose was in telling the girls that Rivera had been an unfaithful husband but they reacted strongly to this. “A husband should take care of his wife,” said Joannie. “How could he do such a thing?” Since I did not want to get into that topic, I tried to be as brief as possible. “Why did she choose him in the first place?” Arianna pursued. I ended the discussion by recommending that they go see the movie entitled ‘Frida.’ As a result of the discussion however, the girls

³⁰ I did not give details about the terrible accident nor did I explain where or how Khalo was hurt.

seemed to 'read' autobiographical, marital and related psychological issues into all the paintings, instead of responding more directly to the art. "She's angry at herself because of the accident so she makes herself uglier in her portraits," Arianna said. I regretted this approach to art appreciation, as I chose Khalo to look at self-portraits, painting style and the use of objects to create a background atmosphere.

The first few images portrayed Khalo with monkeys, with leafy plants and always with some menacing object around her neck. "I don't like her eyebrows," Joannie exclaimed. "She looks mad." "I heard of a story about a girl who committed suicide, she hanged herself," said Arianna. "Do you know why?" I asked. "I don't know, I think she was too fed up" (in French: "Trop écoeurée" which also implies 'sick to her stomach'). When looking at *The Broken Column*, Joannie said with a gasp, "This painting gives me a shock." When looking at *The Two Fridas*, she exclaimed, "It's so macabre." She was very disturbed as she pointed to the long vein that was attached to the exposed hearts on the two Fridas. "I really don't like the blood."

Quickly, we got up to do some stretching and movement. Then, the girls sat down to work on their portraits. They were very receptive to portrait techniques. I introduced some exercises with compressed charcoal. They worked with quiet concentration. Arianna did not like getting her hands dirty. Both girls were seriously involved in observing their noses, eyes and mouths in the little mirrors I brought in (see Figures 18-19).

In my journal, I noted that the lesson was "calm." It was intriguing that in terms of art-making, it was the most successful so far. Was this due to that fact that Joannie and Arianna were not friends from the same in-group? Were they simply different types of

girls? Or did it have to do with their age? Joannie was in a 3rd-4th-5th grade class, as opposed to a 4th-5th-6th grade class. They talked more to me (especially Joannie) and less among themselves. Consequently, there was very little discussion. As class companions, they worked well together. I was happy to get input from Joannie and to see how she seemed to flourish with more personal contact.

Workshop 10: Tuesday, May 18th. In the Kindergarten classroom.

My plan for the tenth workshop resembled the one for the ninth:

1-Discussion: What's in a portrait

Art appreciation: Käthe Kollwitz, Marie-Louise Vigée-Lebrun,
Lilias Torrance Newton

2-Movement: Dancing

3-Art-making: Self-portraits

I arrived ten minutes late for this workshop. As I was climbing the stairs, I met Joannie who said, "I'm so glad to see you, I worried that you might not come." This confirmed my feeling that Joannie liked the workshops, even if she had been relatively silent in the earlier weeks. That morning, I had been in Joannie's class (my son's class) to teach a 'Parent-Wednesdays' class with another parent. There had been an outburst among the girls because Helen, who dressed like a rebel and was known to have epileptic seizures, was rejected from the two 'girls' tables. "We don't want her with us," said the girls from the first table. "Neither do *we*," said the girls from the second table, "There's no room for her." Joannie was well seated among her friends at one of the girls' tables. The other parent and I felt broken-hearted. How could this happen we wondered? "Put her with the boys," one girl said, to which the rejected Helen nodded 'no.' I felt angry, "This makes me very mad and frustrated. How would *you* feel if this happened to you? It

is unacceptable. Helen is going to sit here or else I'm going to get your teacher right now and there will be consequences." Although I was irritated that class time was being lost to insignificant quibbles, it was the end of the story for me. Unfortunately, the other mother who had been silent so far got upset and went into a long moralizing monologue about how bad the kids were, how mean...and so on.

Later that very same morning, there was a sudden outburst in the classroom when an eleven year old boy violently stood up screaming and swearing "Your mother is a prostitute! You fucking asshole!" Then he threw a piece of clay right into another boy's eye. The other boy shrieked and cried, also swearing "*Tabarnaque!*" jumped up and the two boys started punching and kicking each other. Other boys rushed to the scene to split them up. Once separated, I took charge of the first boy while the other mother brought two other boys into the hallway. We struggled to figure out what happened and who had started, and so on. The boy I was with was crying and shaking, while muttering "He laughed at me and said that my father shot himself in the head and that's why I don't have a father!" The rest of the class was silent. To my relief, the teacher came to handle the situation so I could get on with my art lesson. The boys were separated. No apologies.

Since Joannie had participated in the morning's event, I thought it was a good idea to address what had happened in the workshop. Joannie responded by giving me many details about how bad Helen really was. "She can be so selfish," she said. She gave me many examples to show that Helen 'deserved' to be rejected. "No one likes her," she maintained. In the morning, I had felt it important to express my frustration and to act (which resulted in forcing the girls to accept Helen). In the context of the research, I felt that it was delicate not to make Joannie feel guilty or entirely responsible yet not to leave

the issue completely in silence either. I said, "I did not like what happened and I did not know what to do but I felt that the other mother went on for too long." Joannie did not say anything. Then she slightly diverted the topic by saying, "The boys and girls are very divided in the class, we can't work together." I said that the boys' fight had exhausted me. Joannie did not reply. I asked Arianna if there were boys and girls tables in her class too. She said, "Yes, all the girls sit together. They're not *real* friends but it's okay. I don't agree with everything they do. I have some friends that are boys but only in the other class."

This led Joannie to change the subject entirely. She told me about a letter she had sent to a boy named Carl in her class, asking him to 'go out with her' (which means to become boyfriend-girlfriend). During recess, Carl had sent his friends to respond that "no, Carl was not ready for a relationship." Joannie was disappointed but not crushed, and she still liked Carl. She thought that he secretly did like her but was too embarrassed in front of his friends. I was quite amused. Noticing my interest, she told me, "Your son might be in love with Anna, did you know that?" Now I was even more amused. Not only did I not know, but my son had me convinced of his sincere hatred of girls. (When I asked him later, he blushed. "I really *do* hate her, believe me," he said.)

We got up from the table to dance to the music of Sarah Mc Laughlin and Shakira that Joannie had brought in. Again the girls were cooperative and positive. There was no self-consciousness. They sat down without any fooling around or distractions. Joannie said, "I'm really disturbed by Frida. I had a hard time sleeping last night. I kept imagining her accident and her paintings full of blood." I did not know what to say

because Frida's life was indeed tragic and her artwork, disturbing. "My goal was to give you visual inspiration," I added.

I gave each girl a mirror and asked them to plan their artwork. How did they want to represent themselves? "I want to be beautiful," said Arianna. I helped them structure their drawings on paper, plan the background and think about the dry and wet medium. I instructed them to "look 90% in the mirror and only 10% on the paper." As the day before, they responded with enthusiasm and concentration. Before starting, Arianna said, "I'll have to be careful because I am less pretty on one side of my face." From time to time, she mumbled little comments like, "I look like I have wrinkles" or "I've got a big forehead, I don't like that."

I gave both girls a good deal of individual direction but Joannie, in particular wanted my guidance every step of the way. As a result, she produced a very wonderful self-portrait that held great resemblance. This was clearly a great leap in her drawing skills. "I am so proud," she said. "I can't believe I drew this! I can't wait to show my dad! This is the best drawing I have ever made! Thank you, Heather." I said, "All the credit goes to you, you are the one who made it, I only helped you." As I saw her applying a thick coat of paint onto the paper, I warned her repeatedly to be careful. She did not listen. When her drawing was completely covered over in beige paint, she exclaimed, "It's ruined!" I hesitated while I resisted the temptation to say 'I told you so.' There was a tense moment. When I sat down quietly beside Joannie, she burst into tears. She sobbed loudly, "It's the best drawing I ever made in my life" and "I'll never be able to do it again." I tried to reassure her that if she had done it once, she could do it again but my words were pointless. Her frustration was at its height. She had spent the entire hour

working with the utmost attention. I wondered how to react, and then I put my arm around her shoulder. “It’s okay, I’ll help you make another one.”

Unfortunately, there was only fifteen minutes left to the workshop. I helped Joannie as much as I could. When I told the girls that there were only five minutes left, Joannie cried some more. “It’s not fair,” she said. Arianna had also produced a fine self-portrait, for which I praised her. She said, “Girls often find their drawings ugly. Or sometimes, even when they know it’s nice, they say it’s ugly so that they get some extra admiration.” When Joannie’s father came into the room, we explained the situation. I offered to lend Joannie my aquarelle pencils so she could continue her drawing at home. When the girls left, they commented on the workshop. “This is the best project so far,” Arianna exclaimed. “The others really missed something great!”

In my journal, I wondered if I had acted appropriately with Joannie. My first impulse had been to put my arm around her right away, but then I hesitated because I did not want to invade her space. Is touching okay? I wondered. I too had felt so proud of her first self-portrait and although I believed she could eventually make another one, I knew that part of her success came from my undivided assistance. Originally, I expected that drawing the self-portrait might lead to greater self-appraisal due to the development of artistic ‘seeing’...in other words really looking at the body (eyelashes, lips, etc.) to enjoy its individual uniqueness. I found Arianna’s negative comments to contradict this idea. Could it be that the dollar store mirrors, which were round and pink with sparkles, led Arianna to look for faults in her face and complexion, rather than focusing on how amazing the body is—as it is, which was what I expected? Did those feminine pink mirrors remind her of the application of make-up? Although her portrait turned out well,

she seemed constantly dissatisfied with her looks. I also noted in my journal that the girls acted greatly impressed with my demonstration of technique. Was I a role model for them as a competent artist?

No workshops

There was no workshop on Monday May 24th because it was a national holiday, Victoria Day/ Fête de Dollard and there was no school. The next day, Tuesday, May 25th, I was sick with a bad cold and cancelled the workshop. I called the school and talked to a daycare educator who assured me that she would transmit the message to the girls. Before hanging up, I emphasized, "It's really important not to leave the girls waiting." "No, of course not," said the educator.

Workshop 11: Monday, May 31st. In the 6th grade classroom.

When I arrived in the classroom, Joannie said, "Where were you last week?" Surprised, I replied, "Didn't the educator give you the message that I was sick?" "No!" said Isabelle. I learned that my telephone message had not been transmitted and the girls waited for over twenty minutes, in vain. When they inquired at the after school daycare, everyone was confused. No one in the day care staff thought to call me at home either. I felt very angry and misled when I learned this. I told the girls that I was terribly sorry and that I would not just disappear without notice. I said, "It makes me very mad that this happened because you guys are important to me." "Well, then, why don't you take off your shirt and walk around in your bra?" said Nina. "I don't know what your joke is

about Nina, but I can understand that you might have felt let down by my not showing up last week.” She half smiled.

As they ate their snack, the girls told me about their four days and three nights at the camp. They played lots of outdoor games, slept in little cabins with their friends, made fires, went on excursions in the forest, went on boat rides, etc. They had a wonderful time. I asked the other girls, the ones who had stayed with me, “How did it feel when the others were away?” They answered that at first the class “seemed empty” but it turned out to be the “best workshop so far.”

Arianna seemed relieved to have the others return. She told the group that she had been “stressed out for the entire month.” “I am stressed by the end-of-year exams,³¹” Arianna said. “Plus, I’m in a sports tournament, I have two concerts to give with my band because I want to be a singer *and* my brother and I are moving in with my mother’s boyfriend and his daughter.” “You’ve got a lot going on,” I responded. As if to change the subject, Isabelle said: “Will you celebrate our birthdays with something special?” I asked if anyone’s birthday was coming up but there was no clear response. I let it go.

The lesson plan for that workshop included two movement exercises geared at creating greater group cohesion after the period of absence and separation. It looked like this:

- 1-Movement: playing with sheet, holding a big piece of material together (bonding),
going under the sheet (trust and relaxation)
- 2-Art appreciation: Janson’s *Art History*, feminist art: Nancy Spero, Kiki Smith, etc.
Discussion: Women and girls, individual and collective realities,
craft/high art
- 3-Art-making: Preparatory drawings for painting on fabric

³¹ There are no grades in the alternative school. At the end of 6th grade however, like all other Quebecois children, a government exam must be passed to go onto high school.

I decided to start the workshop with a game. It consisted of having the group hold a large piece of translucent fabric together. As expected, it was not as simple as it seemed to let the fabric move fluidly unless there was a minimum of group cooperation. I asked each girl to take turns making ripples in the fabric. Some girls, particularly Arianna and Nina were trying to keep control and the fabric would not move. I argued with them about “letting go,” “working together as a team,” and “having fun.” But I was arguing...and getting mad.

Faced with these power struggles, I came up with the idea that one girl would lie down on the floor in her boundary while the others would lift the fabric up and down in the air. The girl on the floor was instructed to relax and listen to the music, to abandon her stress. The others were to remain calm and to concentrate on making the experience as pleasurable as possible for the person lying down. “Send the girl your positive energy,” I said, rather esoterically. As we created big waves with the fabric, to the sound of Loreena Mc Kennit’s music, a big air bubble was formed that slowly descended into a relaxing caress.

The first girl to go under the sheet was Natasha. Although I resisted at first, Arianna insisted on telling a story that would be “very relaxing for Natasha.” For many minutes, in a low tone, she told a story about a caterpillar that snuggles into a cocoon to prepare for “The Great Transformation.” We naturally expected a beautiful butterfly to emerge. Abruptly, the butterfly was squashed! I felt furious. “What kind of story is that?” I exclaimed. “What’s the matter with you? You’ve shown a big lack of respect.” I kneeled down to Natasha who was curled into a little ball, “Are you okay? I feel really bad about Arianna’s story.” Natasha responded with a self-conscious laugh. I felt

frustrated about how Natasha had been treated all along....Why did Arianna want to ruin my wonderful experiment with the sheet? Now I felt like punishing her, and yet I thought, what about the research? My anger made it difficult for me to figure out what to do. I decided that Natasha would have another turn *in silence*, as I fumed and tried to regain control of my emotions.

As I calmed down, each girl had five minutes under the sheet. The experience looked immensely pleasurable. We waved the sheet slowly up and down. The other girls however had difficulty remaining calm while lifting the fabric. They giggled a good deal. Nina was very annoying as she constantly made jokes. After repeating many times to stay calm, I got mad again and raised my voice. "Try to be empathic of the others...or should we just stop right now?" All the girls subsequently calmed down somewhat, but furtively eyed each other and me, from time to time. Although I had kept strict time, Arianna felt that she did not get a fair amount of time under the fabric.

Then we sat back down at the table. I asked the girls how they liked being under the fabric. Arianna was the first to talk. "It was amazing, it felt like a cloud," she said. "It was as if I was mixing up dreams with real life...not really sure...it was like a cloud going up and down. It was like a Greek temple, a veil, a hide-out, a cocoon. (!) It was like the circus and very relaxing. I felt like a goddess." Isabelle said that she too felt "like a goddess" and that "it was a loving atmosphere" that she knew I was trying to give them. "I'm sorry I giggled so much, I don't know what got into me." Joannie, who was now more confident to talk in the class said, "To me, it felt like drops of blue, like a cloud. I felt like I was on a swing in my bathing suit. I felt so good that I was thinking about all the good things that are happening in my life."

When I asked Natasha how she had felt under the sheet, at first she only had positive things to say. “For me too it felt like a soft, silky cloud, it was beautiful because you could see the light right through the sheet. I felt so calm. The waves gave the effect of a light storm.” The word storm triggered my question, “How did you feel about that caterpillar story?” “I was very disappointed,” Natasha replied. Her eyes were sad. “I thought that I was going to fly off as a butterfly...so when I was squished, I felt tricked and this stressed me.” “I’m really sorry that happened,” I said, glaring at Joannie. “I’m glad that you got a chance to enjoy your time under the sheet anyway. I hope we can do the exercise again in another workshop.” When I turned to Nina to ask about her experience under the sheet, she said she did not like it. “I felt like a ghost. I did not dare to move or breathe” and “I was so scared, I did not even ask you if I could go to the bathroom.” She said she felt “like running out of the room” because it reminded her of “falling out of bed.” The other girls laughed. It was hard for me to tell if Nina was serious or not. I said to everyone, “You should tell me when something bothers you. I don’t want you participating in anything that makes you feel uncomfortable or scares you. Let me know what’s going on so I can help you.”

I proceeded to show the girls some images taken from Janson’s (1986) *Art History*. I showed them traditional representations of the female nude: Titian, Caravaggio, Manet, Gauguin. The girls were shocked, both at the nudity and the passivity of the women. They found them “fat” and could not believe that ideals of beauty evolved over time. Then I showed them feminist art, which equally shocked and disturbed them. They did not like the “wrinkles, the fat stomachs, the plain faces,” etc. It was as if they had no point of reference to make sense of the images. I tried to explain the context of the

art world and how many feminist artists worked for social justice through art to make people see the female body in new ways. “Many of the very issues we have discussed in these workshops are *in* art and addressed by some artists: body image, violence against women, male-female relationships, etc.” I said. After their initial reaction, I let them digest these images silently. Then they went to their places to create a preparatory drawing for painting on the fabric.

In my journal, I expressed my exasperation with what I perceived as Arianna’s bullying and the general difficulty of respecting others. I found this aspect of the workshops exhausting and infuriating. Should I have forced Arianna to apologize? Should I have punished her, and how? Should she have skipped *her* turn under the sheet? Was empowerment also about setting limits? Did she feel she did not get enough time under the sheet because she knew I was angry at her? How come the girls acted so badly and yet enjoyed the sheet exercise so much?

I also noted that the 5th and 6th grade girls reacted to the traditional and feminist imagery in ways that were strikingly similar to the reactions of the 13 year olds in my pilot project. They all had reacted with shock. It was as if their eyes were only accustomed to media’s idealized depictions of women. Even though they expressed disagreement with the messages inherent in the images, they still struggled with ‘other’ images. The ‘newness’ could only be interpreted as ‘negative.’ No wonder they struggled to negotiate ‘real life’ bodies, I mused.

Workshop 12: Tuesday, June 1st. In the Kindergarten classroom.

1-Discussion:

Theme: Women and girls, individual and collective realities
(ripping the big fabric into individual pieces)

Art appreciation: various, craft/high art, Faith Ringgold, Myriam Shapiro

2-Movement: Holding a big piece of material together (bonding), going under it, ripping it up into smaller pieces, everyone dances with their piece.

3-Art-making: Painting on fabric

While the girls arrived, I cut up and ripped the large piece of fabric into six smaller pieces. Isabelle, who had been on the fieldtrip the week we made portraits, surprised me with a self-portrait she had made at home. “I want you to put this in your research,” she said (see Figure 20). The other girls asked me if they could eat their snack in their bubble. I said okay. I noticed that Nina was absent.

As I set up the materials, the girls talked about eating dog food by mistake...and little pieces of ‘caca.’ I said, “It is known that sometimes poor people resort to eating dog food, so the companies have been forced to improve their recipes.” They then discussed how homeless people sometimes lived in danger on the streets at night. As in week ten, the boundaries seemed to trigger notions of safety and fear. Since Natasha was absent the week the other girls talked about being scared at night, I decided to let them talk about it but not for too long. I had enough data on that topic I thought, plus by now I was weary of discussion.

Natasha said, “I’m afraid to take my shower, I’m afraid Freddy’s³² claws, I feel observed. I’m afraid to be cornered in somewhere or left alone. I’m afraid of spirits.” She continued, “My bed is far from the light switch in my room. I’m always afraid that someone might try to catch my leg from under my bed.” Isabelle added, “I feel watched.

³² Freddy was the main protagonist in a well-known horror film of the same name.

I'm scared of noises, like when the wall cracks. Movies scare me too." Natasha added, "I saw a movie where cannibals suddenly attacked the victims. Now I'm scared to death (in French: "J'ai une peur bleue") of my closet." "I think it would be a good idea to call your parents when you get that scared," I said. To which she answered, "No, I'm too scared to even call them or to get up. I'm afraid of the silence...everyone asleep, darkness that is lifeless, no help if anything happens." Isabelle said, "I dreamt my mother was dead and I called my dad, and he just laughed." Arianna added somberly, "I'm afraid of dying, of being closed in somewhere or trapped in a sarcophagus." As in other workshops, the atmosphere was chaotic, the girls were not listening to each other, while also fighting to talk. Arianna was standing up, while everyone else is sitting on the floor, to dominate the discussion. I felt tired and impatient. "Okay girls, let's get down to work." "But we want to talk about our fears," Isabelle said. "I know, but we really need to move on," I replied. Although I felt that the girls did have a strong need to discuss their fears, I believed that the girls needed self-defense courses (which I was not qualified to give). Also I felt pressed for time and wanted the girls to do more art.

I got up to hand each girl a piece of material. I instructed them to play with it, to throw it up in the air, to wrap it around their bodies and to dance with it to the sound of music. Arianna mimicked sexy dancers with her hips. She wrapped the cloth around her body to make a tight sexy dress. The others played with the buoyancy of little girls, jumping up and down and all around. After ten minutes, they sat down in their boundaries and I read them the story of the Ugly Little Duckling.

The girls listened to the story very attentively, and at the signal got up to imitate the duck. As the ugly duckling, they waddled along clumsily. Like little girls, they

laughed and giggled with pleasure. Then they enacted the dejected and lonely duckling, whose feet get frozen in the winter lake. The duckling then feels the summer sun warming her back. She eventually recognizes herself in the reflection in the pond (with use of mirrors) and flies to meet the other swans (using of the fabric as wings). I would explain the idea and say, “Now you find a movement to express it.” Much emphasis was placed on the emotions of the inner transformation from duckling to swan: the worthlessness, the surprise of recognition, the great pride of self-discovery, and the final take-off into flight and freedom as the swan. When they enacted the swan, I said, “Being beautiful is about connecting with your swan self.”

After this very successful activity, I showed the girls some pictures of my own performance of the ugly duckling/swan story that I presented in a Creative Arts Therapies at Concordia University. The girls reacted with awe: “Cool! Really cool!” and “I can’t believe you actually did that in front of *people!*”

Then, the girls sat down on the floor to work on their paintings, using colored ink on the fabric (see Figures 27-30). Their paintings were inspired by their preparatory drawings done the day before. For more than an hour, the girls worked in silence and with great deliberation. I was very excited and I decided to paint on my fabric too (see Figure 26). The girls were impressed with my painting and again made many comments about how “cool” it was, what “a great artist” I was, how fast I worked, etc. This flattered my ego. I told them that my skills came from practice and experience. As the girls worked, I noticed that ink was bleeding through the fabric onto the underlying the newspaper, thereby creating prints. To my eye, some of these prints were even more evocative than the paintings themselves. I said, “You’re doing print-making at the same

time.” The girls were surprised that I wanted to keep the prints, which seemed like garbage to them. At the end, everyone cleaned up rapidly and there were no unpleasant surprises. “It’s too bad Nina missed a really great workshop,” Arianna said.

In my journal I noted that although the workshop got off to a false start with the chaotic talking, the movement exercises were amazing since the girls fully participated in imitating the duckling. It was noteworthy that this lesson was based on my own artistic work with the duckling/swan theme, both through painting with ink on paper and in a performance. It was as if the girls really got involved when I was particularly inspired. I naturally became the leader when the artwork or the art ideas were most meaningful to my own artistic life...

I also noted how proud I felt about the creative dimension of the last workshops with the sheet. I had invented an art project with multi-levels: playing, breathing, dancing and ripping and painting. I was thrilled that the girls “really got into it.” Furthermore, I felt that the workshops were evolving in a positive and exciting direction...beyond words. The metaphor of the swan flying away gave the workshops a symbolic direction that felt more engaging, dreamy and mythical. I was also relieved that so much had been accomplished in only two lessons. Without Nina, the atmosphere was greatly improved. Maybe Arianna did not have to ‘prove’ anything if Nina was absent? I was pleased that Isabelle, who was absent on the day of the workshop, had made a special effort to make self-portrait. It was intriguing that she was concerned with the research. I guessed that it was always in the back of the girls’ minds somewhere. After all, I was still taking notes. They knew they were playing an important role in my project, that is, the project of the Ph.D.

Part 4: A Time for Endings

Workshop 13: Monday, June 7th. In the 6th grade classroom.

1-Discussion:

Theme: Different images of women, sizes, color, age, women in action and female experience

Art appreciation: Betty LaDuke, Niki de Saint Phalles, prehistoric goddess images

2-Movement: playing, kneading, punching the clay

3-Art-making: Clay figures

When the girls arrived for the workshop, they worried out loud about Nina. “Last week, she had a doctor’s appointment,” Arianna said. “Yeah, and today she said she had *another* appointment,” Isabelle coyly added. “That’s okay girls,” I replied. “I don’t know if she really has appointments or not. Maybe she doesn’t want to come anymore. She has a right, you know. And I’m not mad about it. I think it’s too bad but maybe there’s something she doesn’t like and that’s okay.” The girls were silent as they ate their snack.

As they sat, I asked them what it felt like to finish elementary school. Isabelle said, “I’m going to miss my friends.” Arianna said, “Me too, but I’m happy to be leaving the little ones behind.” “Who are the little ones?” I inquired. “All the annoying kids in the younger grades,” she told me. “But you know, *you* will be the youngsters in high school,” I added with a smile. “Yeah, but it will be different because *everyone* is big in high school,” she quipped. I asked which school they would be going to and if they knew anyone there. “I only know two boys who will be going to my new school,” Arianna replied. “Well, I’m sad about it,” said Isabelle. “I’m sad because I like my school here, even if I’m also happy to be going off to high school. I’m kind of scared about everything.” “Yeah,” said Arianna. “I’ve warned my mother to stop kissing me in front of my friends. I like kisses but when I’m with my friends, I’m in my bubble.”

I began the art appreciation by explaining the difference between high art and low art that distinguished some forms of art as superior and others as inferior. “This has resulted in many forms of art-making, some traditionally done by women, like artwork with textiles or clay, to be considered less good as painting, for example. Sometimes it was simply women’s choice of subject matter that was not considered important enough. Remember Mary Cassatt and her subject matter?” I asked. “Women and babies,” said Joannie, “What could be more important than that?” “War scenes have a big place in art history...oh and naked women,” I added ironically. “I’m joking,” I continued. “The point I want to make is that women can make art to express their ideas and experiences as women...and that is as valuable as whatever else is out there. Women artists should be in museums just as much as men.” “They aren’t?” Arianna asked. “No,” I replied.

Then I opened up my book on Betty La Duke. I wanted to show the girls more images of a variety of women (black, white, older, younger, active, etc.). They responded positively to LaDuke’s strong use of color. “But I don’t like that bottom part,” Natasha said while pointing to a painting of a birthing mother *Africa: Oshun Rainbow*. “I think this part could be cut out.” Natasha would have cut out the lower stomach and vagina! I showed them images of clay prehistoric Goddesses with large protruding stomachs and breasts. We discussed fertility rites as cultural practices in history. “I like seeing a strong woman for once,” said Natasha. “Well you can believe that you gotta be strong to birthe!” I said with humor. “I always tell my partner, lifting heavy boxes is just fine but pushing out babies is the biggest strength in the world.” The girls looked at me sideways. I opened up another one of my favorite books on Nikki de St-Phalle with her humorous ‘Nana’ series of large colorful women. “I love her work,” I said.

Suddenly Natasha turned to me, “You have three kids don’t you?” “Yes.” “Did it hurt?” “You bet it hurt,” I said. “But I was very strong. Even though I got very scared and did not think that I could go through with it, I persevered, and I pushed those babies out with all my strength. Now I am really proud of myself that I had my babies at home with a midwife.” “Wow” gasped Natasha and Joannie as they all fell silent. I continued, “You know, I was not planning to talk about childbirth, but it is related to reproduction and bodily transformations... You, girls, will be turning into women and your bodies will be changing. You will have your first menstruation...often called menarche. It might have happened or will be happening very soon...maybe you can find a way to celebrate.” “Oh, not *us*,” said Isabelle. “We’re too young.”

The girls looked awkward and no one moved...not a breath was to be heard. Then Isabelle let out a barely inaudible nervous giggle, “Does it bother you that we don’t have our menstruation yet?” “I just want you to know that this is a positive thing and that you will become part of the community of women,” I answered. I completely ignored their apparent lack of reaction.

Not wanting to push the girls any farther, I got out the clay. I gave each girl a piece and instructed them to knead it, roll it, punch it, etc. As the girls worked their clay, their vitality shot way up. Now they were laughing hysterically. I moved around to give them technical advice. Isabelle sprayed Joannie saying, “Here you go, you Goddess of nature!” They talked joyfully and exuberantly as they built their figures, their eyes alighted. Interestingly, they all made women figures, although I had only given the general directive to “make a figure” (see Figures 21-25). Natasha said, “I’m having trouble making the legs on this woman. That proves that thin legs are a nuisance because

toothpick women (in French: “Les maigrichonnes”) are not strong enough.” I laughed out loud. “I can’t make a strong woman,” said Joannie. “Keep trying, with practice you’ll succeed,” Isabelle said joyously.

I enjoyed this gleeful atmosphere and also worked on a Goddess figure. I could feel Arianna’s gaze as she carefully observed me, while working on a figure similar to mine. The workshop ended without any difficulties. Since Arianna was in her regular daytime classroom, she got out rags and Windex for everyone to help wash the tables. I was impressed with their cleaning perfection, Arianna especially (this was new!). Just before leaving, I asked the girls if they wanted to have a Vernissage in the last workshop and invite their parents to see their artwork. They frowned. “No, we want to keep the workshops private and celebrate only with you, Heather.”

In my journal, I remarked how concerned the girls were about Nina. Or were they covering up for her? Why might Nina have dropped out? I wondered. Did anything happen that I failed to notice the week before? I searched my mind. I knew she had not appreciated my ideas about media images of women...but was that it? Why did she define ‘negative’ images of women as “looking scared?” Was Nina really scared after the sheet game...like a ghost? I recalled that she had been very agitated in the previous weeks. I worried that the workshops had triggered her fears...and her memory of sexual abuse.

I noted that in this lesson, I talked more about my personal life...I was excited but was this good? Certainly I was influencing the research. Would the parents be upset with

my unconventional view about birthing at home with the help of a midwife?³³ As a girl and young woman, I had always heard women describe childbirth in the most horrific ways including gory details that scared me enormously. I wanted to convey the experience as something powerful and empowering. Was this a good approach? What effect did this have on the lesson? It seemed to make childbirth a central component of women's strength. Although I believed this could be true, it was not necessarily so and certainly not the only means to women's power.

In this case, the topic evolved from the choice of artists I chose, but I did not purposefully choose (nor would have chosen) childbirth as an appropriate topic to present to young girls. Would the positive portrayal of strength through motherhood be perceived as encouraging teenage pregnancy? At least, the topic of childbirth had led to the spontaneous discussion of menstruation. The girls silence around this topic was intense. Their subsequent wild laughter was equally full of meaning. Were they in some way relieved about my carefree approach to one of the most significant (and perhaps scary) events in their immediate lives? Was speaking the taboo a liberating experience for them? Clearly, their art reflected the idea of 'strong' women, (some standing and one giving birth) which was facilitated by the medium of clay.

Tuesday, June 8th : Workshop is cancelled by a daycare educator.

As I entered the school, the daycare educator for the 4th-5th-6th grade class, Kelly, greeted me at the door. "I hope you don't mind but I have canceled your workshop for today," she said. "I can't let the girls come because Isabelle, Natasha and Joannie are part

³³ Birthing at home was illegal at the time of this workshop. In 2005, midwifery was legalized in Quebec and women can now, in all legality, choose to give birth in their homes, in addition to birthing houses or hospitals.

of the end-of-year daycare show. I forgot about your body image activity and today is the 'General' (the first full repetition before the opening). I'm really sorry. Now I need your cooperation because Isabelle is putting up a big fight. She says that your workshop is the most important thing in her life! She says she cannot and will not miss it under any circumstances! She went upstairs to your room and says that she will not come down to practice her role in our theatre piece. Natasha and Joannie have already joined me. Please try to convince her, Isabelle is just being difficult and resistant, pre-adolescent style."

I was taken aback by the news that my workshop "had been cancelled" without prior notice. After all, I always made a last minute dash to the store to buy a snack on my way to the school and I carried plenty of materials. That day, I had a box of paints, some sand in little plastic trays and a big bag full of books. My arms were aching. What made things worse was that there were only three lessons left. Did I have enough data? I wondered. I felt flushed with anger. Although this was not the first time I felt betrayed by the daycare educators, I did not feel that I had any choice in the matter. My research had been made possible by the daycare staff in the first place, who courteously allowed me to work in their rooms. Resigned, I agreed to go talk to Isabelle.

As I went up the stairs to my classroom, Nina came charging down. She looked up unexpectedly, and then was embarrassed. "I can't come today because I have an appointment." "That's okay," I said. "It's up to you. I'm not mad. Take care of yourself and good luck." When I got to my classroom, Isabelle began pleading with me to stay. "It's *just* a stupid play. It's nothing important. Working on a doctorate, now *that's* something important! Don't you think?" "I understand how you feel, Isabelle," I said. "I'm disappointed too. I hoped to paint the clay today. But listen, the other girls are

already down there and you signed up for the play.” “I hate Kelly,” Isabelle screamed. “She always has to have her own way. She’s so bossy. I’m big enough to decide, she’s treating me like a baby. My decision is not being respected. I really *need* the body image workshops.” I learned that Isabelle and Kelly had an argument, which ended when Kelly said, “If that’s the way you want to be, then beat it!” (in French: “Vas-t-en”).

Although I selfishly agreed with Isabelle that a doctorate was more important than a ‘stupid’ play, I did not say this to Isabelle. Isabelle said, “It’s not fair, all your stuff is here, your snack, they didn’t respect you.” I tried to make the point that I owed it to the daycare to cooperate. Naturally, I was tempted to let Isabelle to stay but, after all, the Joannie and Natasha were already gone, Arianna was at band practice and Nina had apparently dropped out of the group. I knew that my long discussion with Isabelle was making the ‘General’ start late. I repressed my feelings for revenge. At that moment, Joannie popped into the room, “I’m so sorry Heather, I just found out that the ‘General’ was today. I’m not happy *at all* and it’s really stressing me out. I don’t want to miss anything.” “Don’t worry girls, you won’t miss anything,” I lied. “I’m really glad to know how much these workshops mean to you.” Finally, the daycare educator came to get Isabelle who begrudgingly left with Joannie, still mumbling “it’s not fair” down the hall.

This was my lesson plan for the workshop on June 8th.

1-Discussion:

Theme: Different images of women, sizes, color, age

Art appreciation: Indian art, African, Mexican, etc.

2-Movement: Sandplay (playing with figurines in small sandboxes)

3-Art-making: Painting and decorating the clay figurines

In my journal, I noted that the day's events allowed me to discover that the girls believed that the workshops were meaningful to them. All my struggles with discipline had stood in the way of realizing this. Now I felt that my efforts had been worth it after all. As we approached the end of the school year, I noticed that the girls had less and less to discuss, but that their silence felt charged with emotion. I decided to introduce a drawing exercise for the final art project that would focus on expressing emotions. I wondered if my intuition would materialize onto paper.

Workshop 14: Monday, June 14th. In the 6th grade classroom.

1-Discussion:

Theme: End of workshops, end of school, endings in general, the yin and yang

Art appreciation: Helen Frankenthaler, Elizabeth Murray, Marcelle Ferron

2-Movement: Gesture circle and boundaries (silently)

3-Art-making: Emotions in oil pastel

The class began in the same way as it had the week before. The girls worried out loud about Nina. "I wonder if she will be coming back?" Isabelle mused out loud. I could sense a feeling of loss. "I don't really think so. My feeling is that she has dropped out," I said. "But what if she wants to come back?" "We'll see. But I think she has missed too many workshops." I wanted to create some closure about the 'Nina situation.' I continued, "Yes, now that I think about it, she cannot come back anymore, even if she wants to. She has missed too many lessons." "Oh" said the girls and the question was resolved.

I asked them if they were excited because school was almost over. "I couldn't care less," (in French, "Je m'en fous" which is closer to 'I don't give a shit'). Arianna said. "I'm not excited *at all*," Isabelle said as she jumped up from the table. "I'm really

disappointed that the clay will not be painted,” she said, changing the subject. Joannie said she was sad that the workshops would be over tomorrow. “Please, please, please, could you do more workshops for us next year?” “I would like to,” I answered. “But next year I will be teaching in university and I need to finish my research. Next year, I will be becoming a Doctor of Philosophy!” I said with glee. I tried to cheer them up by reminding them the last workshop would be a little party. No one smiled.

I gave each girl a handout on the Yin and the Yang. On the first page, there was a column on the left for the yin/feminine and a column on the right for the yang/masculine. On the second page, there were columns for the right and left sides of the brain and their corresponding cognitive styles, taken from Betty Edwards (1999), *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*. My purpose was to show the girls how ideas—or ways of being---were often categorized, labeled and stereotyped (leading to gender discrimination). When looking at the sign of yin-yang, the interlocking forms with the dot of the opposing color struck me as a good illustration of how the differing aspects supposedly belonged to both genders and to both brains. “No one is exactly just feminine or just masculine,” I said. “Things are not opposites, they flow together.” They were incredibly astonished that the *black* form in the yin-yang drawing was the feminine. They thought that the white colour should be the feminine.

Natasha did not like the handout, “But why is the feminine ‘negative?’” “Good question,” I said. “I feel insulted,” she continued. “Things should never be opposite. Girls and boys are both negative. There should not be any categories. Everyone is really everything...it’s all mixed up. This philosophy is not real.” “I know what you’re talking about, Natasha,” I said. “I think you are reacting to stereotyping. As if women were only

one thing and men only another. That's my point. Just like we all have two brains that function differently, yet together. I think we all have different sides to ourselves like emotions and reason, clarity and confusion, strength and weakness, hot and cold, and so on. I think it's true that too much negativity is associated with the feminine. As if there was always some kind of immutable truth about gender, based in biology. So many ideas of masculine and feminine come from the culture." "The truth is," Arianna added, "When you look at reality, girls are not equal. Things are not really fair." "I still don't like this sign," Natasha said. "Why don't you try to make another one then, one that is closer to how you see it," I proposed. It was harder than she thought, but Natasha came up with a drawing (see Figure 39).

Just for fun and instead of the gesture circle and boundaries, I spontaneously invented a funny movement exercise. I said, "Let's play. Everyone, walk around the room like a boy." They swung their legs and moved their arms. "Boys are so funny in their loose clothes," Joannie said. "And it feels like they move their bodies so much." Then I asked them to imitate a macho man like Arnold Swartzenegger. "The macho man's muscles feel like a big rock," said Arianna. "He's so inflexible." I asked, "Do you know that song 'Macho macho man' by the Village people?" They did not, so I imitated it. The girls giggled a lot while imitating their father's strides.

Then I asked for super-femininity, "How about Pamela Anderson?" (since they had mentioned her in the first workshops). Again they laughed, bobbing around in imaginary high heel shoes, long hair flying in the wind and big wobbly breasts. Natasha said, "My body feels all tight when I imitate the feminine. The clothes are so tight that I feel tension in my butt." Imitating their mothers proved to be difficult. "This is too hard,"

Joannie said. “Okay, do yourself,” I said. Arianna and Isabelle were astonished, “You know what? I think I walk *just* like my mother!” We all laughed.

The girls then sat down to do some abstract drawings with oil pastel. At first, they were to find ways of expressing emotions through line and colour. They folded their paper into eight squares and drew the following emotions from left to right. In the top squares there was joy, sadness, anger, love. In the bottom squares there was power, feminine, fear, masculine (the girls did not all follow this order) (see Figures 31-34). When they had finished this warm-up, they chose their favorite emotion drawing to enlarge (see Figures 35-38).

In my journal, I noted that I forgot to ask the girls about their 6th grade graduation party (in French: “La fête des finissants”). I was suspicious that they did not tell me about it. I knew for a fact that Arianna and Isabelle had gone to this party and that it was considered to be a ‘really big deal.’ Another instance of significant silence, I thought. I reflected on Natasha’s anger about the Yin-Yang handout and noticed that none of the girls brought it home. I thought that the imitation of stereotypes was more fun and perhaps more significant to them, than reading words that described feminine and negative in rather absolutist terms. I was not really sure if the emotion drawings were successful in unleashing real emotions into images. Nonetheless, the girls obviously enjoyed the process.

Workshop 15: LAST WORKSHOP.

The last class was on Tuesday, June 16th. Normally, the workshop would have been in the Kindergarten room but I received special permission to end my workshops in

the 6th grade classroom. I thought this was more appropriate, symbolically speaking and also because the room was more spacious for the vernissage. As the girls came in, I told them that we would set up the artwork first and then have the party afterward. They were to look through the piles and then find a place in the classroom to hang their art. Joannie started to panic, "I can't find my self-portrait, it's not there!" I helped her to look but we did not find it. "I must have left it at home," I said. "Don't worry. I can give it to you later or even next year, at the worst." "I hope you find it. I really want you to put it in your thesis!" She was almost in tears.

When all the artwork was placed on the wall, the girls asked for the ropes to make their boundaries "one last time." I said, "Don't forget, you always have an invisible boundary. The rope is for you to get used to the idea." For the first time, they remained silent in their bubbles. Natasha said, "You know, I am really happy (in French "contente" implying happy and contented.). I think it's worth it to be proud of ourselves for our work in these workshops." "Well, I'm really proud of you too and I really want to thank you for participating in the research. It's really meant a lot to me," I added. Arianna had difficulty containing her emotions. She chose to express her discomfort by appearing unusually impatient, "What time is it?" and "When can we leave?" I asked her to be patient. I explained, "This workshop is our good-bye, for those of you who will be going off to high school. I want to wish you success, new friends, and good teachers. For the others, well, it will be good-bye until next year. I'm sure I'll see you in the hallways." "Heather, have you reconsidered giving us workshops next year too?" Joannie asked.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Isabelle. “Maybe I can come back from high school especially to come to these workshops.” I said that I was touched.³⁴

Then I said, “I have a surprise for you.” On a table in the corner, I placed a red tablecloth. On paper plates, I set out cheese, strawberries, carrots, two kinds of chips, brownies, doughnuts, some chocolate and two little juices each. “Wow! Thank you Heather,” they said, as they lunged toward the table.

While the girls ate, I asked them which art projects they had enjoyed the most. Arianna said, “The painting and the fabric.” Joannie answered, “I really loved the self-portrait and the emotion drawing.” For Natasha and Isabelle, it was also the emotion drawing, the fabric painting and the sculpture project. All agreed that the collage of negative and positive images was the least interesting. So they had like the emotion drawings after all! I was astounded at how much and how fast they ate the food. “We’re not toothpick girls,” said Natasha with her mouth full. “You know what’s funny?” asked Isabelle. “You have *exactly* the same watch as my mother.” “Me too,” said Joannie. “Exactly the same one as *my* mother too. It’s weird.” Arianna and Natasha insisted the same thing. “Come on girls,” I laughed. “That can’t be possible...*exactly* the same?” Everyone except Arianna believed it was the same watch. “I think my mother’s one is just a *little* bit different, but not much.” I assumed that this was a cute and girlish way to express their feeling that I was like a ‘mother-like’ figure for them.

I wanted to end the workshop by looking at all the artwork produced and by giving each girl the opportunity to explain her artwork to the others. The girls however pleaded with me to do the ‘sheet’ exercise again. I agreed. But first I took pictures of

³⁴ It would be interesting to return to the girls in four or five years to discover how they perceived the workshops in retrospect and if they had any influence on their body image.

their artwork. While I was busy, the girls started yelling and running around (it must have been the sugar). Three of them said they felt sick to their stomachs because they ate too much. “Thanks so much for the food. It was great. But now I feel really sick,” Isabelle said.

After the photos, everyone held the sheet, as each girl went under to relax (there was no butterfly story this time). They insisted that I get a turn too “to see what it feels like.” Indeed it was very soothing. Everyone got a chance to go under but as Natasha finished her turn, two parents arrived early to pick up their daughters, so Arianna and Isabelle immediately rushed out of the room. Then Joannie dashed out too. I felt sorry for Natasha. I let her relax under the sheet and told her to take her time. I gave her a friendly pat on the back, “You deserve to have a full turn, even if the others have left.” Then Natasha dreamily got up and disappeared. Alone, I felt vaguely disappointed. I got one whirlwind ‘thank you’ and no ‘good-byes.’

In my journal, I thought about my watch. Did the girls really believe that I had the same watch as their mothers? Did they not find it strange that all the mothers had the same watch too? I knew this was very unlikely. Positive transference, I presumed. I noted that the workshops did not end as I might have expected. Did I expect a greater level of attachment or more profuse thanks? I knew that this reflected my own difficulty with good-bye’s and the sadness it often made me feel. Maybe it was I who wanted to be reassured and loved? Maybe running out of the room was the only way that the girls knew how to deal with separations, without crying. To conclude my notes, I felt that the last class—with its art, its food and its giant floating sheet--resembled a ritual of passage. Maybe something important had happened after all...even if nothing went according to

my plan. Should I really be surprised that the workshops ended in the same way they began? That is, they were creative, full of action and full of data but they never followed the outline.

One week later.

On the last day of school, June 22nd, the whole school was assembled in the gymnasium for the final countdown. I was there with my kids. We counted “10...9....8...” When we got to ‘1,’ girls of different ages burst into each others arms in tears. In the chaos, I caught sight of the girls from my workshops. Arianna’s face was flushed with tears and she was sobbing hard. Isabelle was wrapped in another friends’ arms, face buried. Nina was crying too. I hesitated and wondered if I should approach them...they seemed so devastated. The girls ignored me. Then I remembered what they said about not wanting to be kissed by mothers in front of their friends. I figured that it was okay for them to cry. But in the end, I had mixed-feelings.

Summary

Workshops 1-4: This vexes us.

The first four workshops were an introduction into the girls’ world in general and to their anger about the unfairness in their lives. It was Isabelle who said “this vexes us” when referring to an elusive ‘somebody out there’ who does not care about girls’ needs and makes clothes sizes too small. I used the expression as a title because it coined the overall feeling of anger about an unfair world, expressed in the early weeks of the workshops. Not only did the girls talk with urgency, they also experienced a very high

level of emotion about their most immediate problems: boys, body image, sexism, sexual harassment, issues of justice with teachers and mothers.

Workshop four stood out as the first *extra* workshop that the girls requested. They seemed ecstatic that people (me, parents, educators) had accepted their demand to have *two* body image workshops per week, instead of one. The girls' feeling of importance was highlighted by the girls' participation in doctoral research. They expressed personal pride about having their words and actions considered valuable for academic investigation.

Workshops 5-8: We need our bubbles.

The first workshops laid the basis for grounding the girls' real life problems in relation to the topic of body image. The second four workshops deepened the discussions to important personal matters. I introduced the concept of boundaries as "a personal space without Mommy or Papa" with the help of a rope to make a shape in space. The girls responded strongly to this idea and decided to call boundaries 'bubbles.'³⁵

One day, when I decided to skip the boundary exercise, Isabelle insisted, "We *need* to do our bubbles, we have been waiting." It seemed that the idea of bubbles was a strong metaphor for the girls during these weeks, and that is why I chose 'we need our bubbles' as an evocative title. Feelings of safety within the boundaries led to the acknowledgment of a lack of safety for women, apparent in the discussion of violence against women and sexual abuse in workshop six. General feelings of shock ensued which led to a period of chaos and lack of group cohesion. The group dynamic hit an all-

³⁵ The French expression 'being in your bubble' ("être dans sa bulle") conveys a dreamy sense of a personal space without being 'spaced out'.

time low in workshop eight during the exercise devoted to finding positive and negative images of women. The idea of sexualized images and stereotypes about women were angrily discussed by the girls and resulted in Natasha's tears, related to her negative body image.

Workshops 9-12: A time for flight.

The third series of four workshops marked a definitive change in the classroom atmosphere. Three girls were away on a field trip and only two girls participated in workshop ten. This allowed for a shift in dynamics where the quiet girl, Joannie, became more talkative, and the talkative girl, Arianna, became more reserved. Then a week passed without any workshops because of a national holiday and I was sick. On the eleventh workshop, everyone was reunited and a positive experience emerged with the sheet exercise. The title "a time for flight" refers both to time away from the workshops and to a metaphorical lift-off into art-making, which also marked the beginning of a change in the group dynamic. In workshop twelve, Nina dropped out which further improved the girls' attitude and made room for even greater participation in the movement and art exercises.

Workshops 13-15: A time for endings.

The last three workshops continued in the same positive vein as the previous two but can be viewed in terms of winding down toward the end. Workshop thirteen marked the beginning of sadness and fear of the unknown which are mentioned in relation to starting high school. The title 'a time for endings' evoked the idea that the last workshops

were imbued with finalities. Paradoxically, the girls' showed a high level of energy and pizzazz inspired by prehistoric goddesses and the idea of fertility rituals. Less talking was done while more time was devoted to art appreciation, movement and art-making. Problems were approached more playfully as the girls used their bodies to enact male and female stereotypes, for example. Difficult behavior was resolved and the girls became more helpful in cleaning up and leaving on time, more than ever before. In the last workshop there was a vernissage. There was food and artwork was placed on the walls. The girls experimented one last time with their boundaries and the swan/sheet exercise. They were silent before running off.

CHAPTER 5

Interpretation and Analysis of Findings

I will now interpret and analyze the findings of the action research which is organized into three major parts: girls' body image, voice as feminist education and teaching issues. The first two parts investigate themes related to body image and gender roles that emerged from the data. The third part examines the teaching and research contexts. I have chosen to present the findings in this order due to the emergent research design and the way the research was conceptualized as an on-going process that included the analysis. Although some of the themes from different parts of the analysis are interrelated, each will be viewed within one category. Data excerpts are selected and interpreted to support my analysis, which is framed within a feminist interpretation. I will discuss how the findings in general, and the themes in particular, are related to prior research, as described in the literature review in Chapter Two. I will return to my research questions specifically in the Conclusion, Chapter Six.

Voice-centered research.

This research was conceptualized as critical feminist action research using an integrative pedagogy that involved movement and art. Within each workshop, my goal was to create a safe environment for the girls to practice using their voices. This was conceived as a feminist strategy for breaking with stereotypes, and to foster resistance to oppression. I believed, like Ward and Benjamin (2004), that a safe environment would allow the girls to practice their voices in a secluded place 'just for girls.' Like Bentley

(1999), I encouraged them to practice “a variety of ways to use tone, pitch, and volume,” (p. 220). First, I communicated this idea through the detailed information packets describing the doctoral research (see Appendix 2). I also told the girls that their words were listened to, written down and considered important as intellectual knowledge. In turn, it seemed that the girls saw ‘voice’ as the principal function of the workshops.

As planned, the girls used the body image workshops as a place to discuss gender discrimination. By emphasizing discussion, the participants transformed the body image workshops away from the original focus on art. Instead, the workshops became focused on what Broude and Garrard (1994) call ‘consciousness raising groups.’ As a result, the early workshops were mostly invested in the feminist strategy of ‘naming’ oppression (Harris, 2004). Later, in the second half of the workshops, the girls participated in the second feminist strategy of ‘celebration of the feminine-identified’ (Davis, 1997). Overall, the body image workshops allowed the highly charged topic of body image to surface. Since the discussions were generally non-directive, it was the girls themselves who intuited a connection between girls’ body image and gender injustice, within the context of feminist research.

During the action it was difficult to contain the girls’ pressing need to talk within an arts-based research project. I therefore adopted a voice-centered research method inspired by Brown and Gilligan’s (1992). In the Laurel/Harvard research project, Brown and Gilligan said: “We would use the questions as openings. We would follow the associative logic of the girls’ psyches, we would move where the girls led us” (p. 19). Like them, I allowed the girls to take the lead in the discussions and structured my workshops to respond to their concerns.

Providing great latitude for the girls' self-direction within the body image workshops was a struggle in terms of discipline yet permitted greater fluidity within the emergent research design. This approach was also concomitant with the goals of critical action research and feminist pedagogy. It meant however, that I was constantly readjusting myself and required to leave out aspects of my lesson plan, such as art appreciation and art-making. This open-ended model had its strengths and weaknesses which will be discussed in this analysis. In essence it allowed the research to develop loosely around actual and expressed learning needs of the participants. For this reason, I have accorded a prominent place to the verbal dimension of the workshops within the analysis. As such feminist themes and voice are a central component of the analysis, while art-making is secondary.

I will return to the topics of voice and art-making. For now, I would like to address the idea that voice is relational, connected to being heard or not. I therefore decided, for the purposes of the interpretation and analysis, to take what the girls said at face value. That is, I did not try to judge if their words represented all the truth or if there was another side of the story. Instead, I took the position that what the girls said could be trusted and analyzed within the context of feminist literature.

Girls and their Body Image

Part one of this chapter analyzes and interprets the themes that emerged from the participants' discussion, relative to the topic of body image. Four categories can be identified as centrally related to the girls' feelings about their body image: boys, beauty, media images and violence against women. In a spontaneous way, it was the girls

themselves who connected the topic of body image to an overall condition of gender oppression, as reflected in these topics. Some of these themes are open-ended as they reveal concerns and fears about growing up female in a sexist culture and yet are connected to the girls' personal feelings about their bodies. I have chosen to present the findings in chronological order as they surfaced in the body image workshops, to analyze how the participants conceptualized body image and its related problems.

Body Image is a Boy Thing

Boys are immature.

The girls' associative logic had them begin the workshops with the issue of boys' general devaluation of the female gender. When asked to define what body image was, they said that "body image was what boys were into." It is significant that the girls chose to discuss this problem within the first few minutes of the workshop. The way boys treated girls in school affected their feelings about their body image and this was not related to romantic interest. The girls emphasized that boy-girl relationships in everyday school life were like "a war" because boys found girls' things "not as good" and that boys tenaciously insisted on "having their way" which they always defined as "better." Also, the girls reported that the boys regularly ridiculed girls through imitation, for example, jumping up and saying "I broke my nail," insinuating girls' vainness or concern with triviality. This can be related to Frost's (2001) findings that girls are portrayed as "psychologically unstable beings locked in enfeebled and unreliable bodies" (p. 7). In daily school circumstances, the girls were very frustrated with the boys and felt that their negative behavior toward them was very "immature."

In these examples, the girls described the boys as the central problem in their lives at school. This was due to an overall atmosphere where girls felt devalued by the boys. Ridicule was used by the boys to reinforce the idea that boys' ways, music, attitudes were superior. This was in turn used as a justification for the boys' stubborn attitudes and insistence on imposing their own way. The boys' inflexibility demonstrates a lack of ability or desire to negotiate with the girl-identified or feminine-identified and can be analyzed in terms of what Bouchard and St-Amand (1997) and the Quebec Council on Higher Education (1999) call boys' "abnegation of the feminine" (p. 53). Also, the girls' descriptions of boys attitudes confirms numerous studies on boys such as Frost's (2001), Kimmel's (2005), and Kindlon and Thompson's (2000). It relates to what Bouchard and St-Amand (1997) found in their educational research in Quebec, that boys are rigidly attached to gender stereotypes, more so than girls. The boys' refusal to negotiate or cooperate with girls reflects the cultural assumption that boys and men are naturally dominant and superior and that girls and women are somehow inferior. These ideas, played out in the girls' daily lives, not only served to reproduce and reinforce gender inequality, as Arnot (2002) argues, but they also stood as a significant sources of everyday frustrations for the girls.

The girls' preoccupation with the way the boys treated them revealed that they were trying to understand the reality of gender imbalance at an early age. Not only did they reflect on the 'boy problem' but they came to the conclusion that the issue was developmental, not political. Thus, the eleven and twelve year old girls in the research associated the devaluation of the feminine to immaturity. In this sense, girls' 'warlike' difficulties with boys were perceived as temporary within a progressive view that boys

will eventually grow up and become more mature in time. This seemed logical to the girls since not all boys were equally immature. Becoming “mature” involved “caring for girls,” respecting their opinion or “being friends” with girls. The girls claimed that only one boy in the whole school was mature!

It is noteworthy that teachers, parents or other adults are conspicuously absent in the girls’ description of the boys’ devaluation. Left to their own reflection, the girls assumed that boys would improve with time. This was reinforced by teachers and parents who encouraged girls to “give in to the babies” in the name of greater emotional maturity. By giving in to ‘babies,’ girls are not adequately prepared to resist domination. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that boys become more caring of girls, simply because they grow up. On the contrary, Kimmel (2005) and Kindlon and Thompson (2000) argue compellingly that boys and men develop few empathic qualities in their socialization to masculinity. In fact, male emotional inflexibility is shown to crystallize over time as boys become even more rigid in their gender associations (Kindlon & Thompson, 2000; Deak, 2002). As the Quebec Council on the Status of Women (2002) demonstrated, only a few years after primary school, girls are faced with physical intimidation and psychological violence where boys “treated them as inferior beings,” “controlled their relationships and activities,” and used “intimidation to make girls follow their orders” (p. 67).³⁶ It can be seen from the girls’ words that boys’ psychological intimidation has less to do with maturity than with the political reality of male dominance.

In this light, boys stood out as the biggest ‘problem’ in girls’ daily school lives. The girls saw their choices negatively in terms of power struggles that involved fighting for one’s rights by making ‘war,’ avoiding the boys or simply giving in. From a feminist

³⁶ For statistics on boy-girl adolescent relationships see the end of Appendix 1.

perspective, devaluation of the feminine can be seen as the root issue in girls' body images struggles under patriarchy (Davis, 1997; Toupin, 1997). In the early weeks of the workshops, the girls did not appear to have a larger political position from which to build resistance against daily devaluation.

Sexist boys, sexist images.

The girls said that most boys made “stupid jokes about girls,” listened to “sexist music” and liked “sexist videos.” What seems inferred by these comments is that girls recognized that much of the media and popular culture images are sexist and that these images and ideas are somehow aimed at boys. Sexist was defined by the girls as dressing up “like Pamela Anderson”³⁷ or “like Barbies.” Boys not only viewed popular culture and liked it but they also participated in it by pressuring girls to emulate these models. This suggests that the girls recognized a power imbalance related to images and representation.

From this perspective, body image appeared to the girls as another ‘boy thing’ that boys insisted on “to have their own way.” The girls said that the boys were greatly influenced by appearance and beauty and gave positive reinforcement to girls who wore make-up and tight clothes (like the mean sixth grade girl, leader of a gang, for example). If the girls did not comply in being pretty, they said they were “rejected by the boys” or picked on. That explains why “girls feel they have to be beautiful, like to get married or have a boyfriend.” In these instances, the girls saw boys as complicit with sexist and stereotypical images of women.

³⁷ Pamela Anderson is a Hollywood actress known for her voluptuous bosom and erotic posters in string bikini.

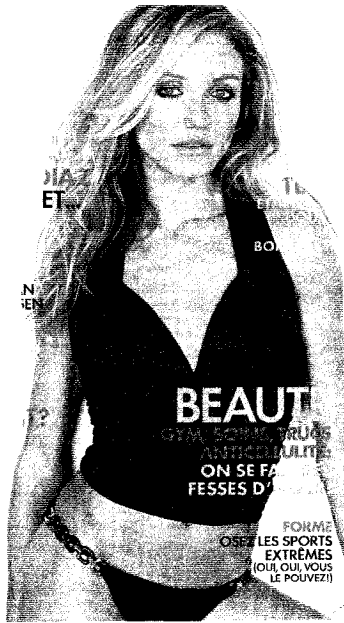


Figure 2. Image taken from a fashion magazine for girls, 2004.

It seemed that young boys appropriated images and made the male gaze explicit through harassing comments. Although the girls expressed disagreement and resentment about the boy's attitudes, they also felt pressured to be accepted and liked. As Bentley (1999) argues, girls feel that their "value is measured by physical attention" (p. 211). As such the boys' participation in the gaze can be analyzed according to Foucault's (1980) argument that power locates individuals as male and female from birth, while constructing gender definitions, meanings and identities. Power is seen to operate *through* and *in* individuals in daily life (Hall, 1997). As a result, the boys perpetuated sexism in the classroom in an active way that affected the girls' sense of their growing bodies.

Fashion and harassment.

When asked “Do you try to be beautiful through clothes?” the girls answered by explaining how they felt about their style of dress. Natasha said, “I’m medium” (in French: “je suis correcte” which resonates as “I’m average”). “I dress the way I want but I don’t like to be criticized for that.” Isabelle explained, “I want to dress for comfort, not for what the boys like—the Hollywood style.” Again the girls connected clothing to boys’ reactions and desires, which in turn came from the media. They described the difficulty in ‘being yourself’ by dressing “the way I want” or wearing comfortable clothing that was not fashionable without external criticism.

Interestingly, Joannie did wear fashion clothes. Like the other girls, she felt “judged by others about the way I dress.” It became clear that no matter how they dressed, the girls received negative comments, regardless of their style, as Levine and Smolak’s (2002) also found. When I asked who made the disparaging comments, the girls maintained that it was the boys who made comments like “I don’t like the way you are dressed” or “those pants are ugly.” These examples demonstrate how harassment is normalized as a public performance in schools (Stein, 2005) and is mostly perpetrated by boys (Levine & Smolak, 2002). The girls also reported that harassing remarks made them feel “self-conscious” and “criticized,” they felt worried about how to dress in the morning. This can be linked to Larkin and Rice’s (2005) research that reveals how harassment contributes to negative body image because of heightened self-consciousness. Feeling worried about one’s appearance also relates to Stein’s (2005) argument that harassment reminds girls, on an everyday basis, that their bodies are subjected to the male

gaze. These examples demonstrate how harassment makes the female body the focus of inequitable gender relations (Larkin & Rice, 2005).

Arianna's bright pink hair gave some insight into girls' struggles with the public dimension of women's bodies in relation to the gaze. Although Arianna wanted to be noticed, she simultaneously felt uncomfortable with the attention she received. She said, "I like feeling different but sometimes I want my privacy. And I don't like people to make comments." This refers to the struggle to maintain privacy when feeling exposed by the gaze. Clothing, style and fashion stood out as means for receiving attention. However, no matter how they dressed, these eleven and twelve year olds knew that taunting was possible, if not probable. The fragility in seeking a personal space as 'one's own' is revealed by how easily Isabelle contradicted herself when Arianna asked, "What if someone thinks you're ugly?" Without hesitation, Isabelle replied, "Well then, I'll change my style." This example gives credence to Basow and Rubin's (1999) conclusions that girls rather suddenly move out of a place of relative freedom to 'be who they are' to being perceived as objects of the gaze, as enacted by the boys. Little room is left for self-determination which, according to Frost (2001), contributes to girls' low self-esteem and depression.

In addition to comments about clothing, the girls said that the boys also lifted skirts. As a result, the girls avoided wearing skirts and dresses and again felt "worried" and "self-conscious." Joannie's mother told me that her daughter feared having her bra snapped. Nina described a situation where a boy made harassing comments to a group of girls about their breast size. When discussing this, the girls in the workshops agreed that harassment about physical development made them feel "ashamed," "inadequate" and

“embarrassed.” This supports Levine and Smolak’s (2002) findings that harassment heightens girls’ sensitivity toward their body image by making them feel vulnerable and exposed. It is also related to Larkin and Rice’s (2005) research that showed how the sexual harassment of girls begins in primary school and not just in high school.

Perhaps the criticism the girls received about their clothes and their bodies explains why they were confused and uncomfortable when asked directly if they were fashionable (“à la mode”). This seemed puzzling and embarrassing to them. From their words, it appeared that they felt cornered to choose between dressing “for boys”—the very ones who devalued them-- or “for themselves” at the risk of further being devalued. These examples show that the girls received negative comments regardless of their style or actual body size. As Larkin and Rice (2005) also found, body image dissatisfaction is shown here to be more strongly related to harassment from boys *in real life* than to ideals of thinness per se or distorted self-perceptions. This is highlighted by the girls’ very understanding of the concept of body image as a ‘boy thing.’

When questioned about boys’ clothing, the girls said that “there’s nothing to say” and that they did not make comments about boys’ dress. This reveals a gender imbalance in the looking paradigm.³⁸ That is, boys appeared to look at girls and ‘have something to say’ and according to the girls, their comments were mostly negative. In the workshops, the girls noticed and discussed the idea that boys’ clothes were baggy and loose, whereas girls’ clothes were tight, skimpy and uncomfortable. While it can be presumed that girls look at boys, they apparently do not have a cultural language or sense of entitlement to make comments to boys, particularly negative ones. Stein (2005) makes a link between

³⁸ I will discuss the issue of an unequal looking paradigm further on in this section.

entitlement to harass and sexual domination. For the girls, then, the 'problem' of body image was associated with harassment and image...a boy's thing.

Girls' clothes are binding.

The girls linked body image to boys' reactions to clothing. However, the girls also reported that clothes for girls were inadequate because the sizes were too small. Small sizes were a source of frustration and dissatisfaction. "They take it for granted that girls are almost anorexic," said Isabelle. The girls expressed the idea that someone 'out there' was deciding things without taking girls' real needs into consideration. The fact that "they" could be "more thoughtful" but were not, made them angry. "It vexes us, you know," Isabelle said. The girls were emphatic that girls' clothes felt binding. This idea might be seen in terms of standard sizes defined according to girls' ages. The issue was that that they did not feel 'normal' if they could not wear the 'right size.' Not being normal or right for one's age may exacerbate body dissatisfaction, considering fears about criticism from boys, especially if girls are 'rounder' than average. This idea is related to Griffin's (2004) argument that girls who are rounder, taller, shorter or in any way different than idealized girlhood feel marginalized and silenced. Thus, the girls felt caught between dissatisfaction about their body size within a conflicted desire to be beautiful.

The idea that girls' clothes are too tight can also be understood in terms of fashion styles for girls being metaphorically binding. A tour of the girls' department in Walmart and Zellers, for example, reveals an array of low cut jeans and high cut t-shirts, in many bright colors like pink, turquoise and purple with sparkles. Girls must choose their

clothing in the stores that, according to Harris (2004), their mothers for the most part decide on. If they struggle to fit into the clothes made to show off their bodies and skin or if they do not wish to dress 'sexy,' some girls feel inadequate or 'not normal.' Yet, it did not seem that the girls had many other options.

Arianna, who wore low cut jeans and tight short shirts, was distraught to realize that the words BAD GIRL on her clothes highlighted her breasts and buttocks. Zooming in on those areas made her feel self-conscious and trapped inside clothing that sexualized her body in a way that she did not want. Although the words 'bad girl' made English references to Girl Power beauty, this connotation was lost in the French translation. However, it points to commercialized Girl Power ideology, as described by Taft (2004), Griffin (2004) and Harris (2004), that sexualizes girls by reinforcing the idea of 'power in glamour and image.' If a girl dresses up, she is a star. If she does not (or cannot or will not), she is a 'nobody.' In sum, the girls' expressed a contradictory position regarding clothing. On the one hand, they believed that clothing held the potential to give girls an acceptable public image, and on the other, to make them feel inadequate or inappropriately sexualized. Either way, it positioned the girls' gaze fretfully outward for approval.

Beauty and Body Image

The second category related to girls' body image focuses on girls' experiences in relation to cultural standards of beauty. Although they resented the boys' body-based harassment or the imposition of a sexualized gaze, the girls still strongly identified with notions of femininity and beauty. Still, they challenged ideals of women by emphasizing

a desire for “being natural” or “being yourself.” When questioned more closely about beauty, however, the girls’ positions were more nebulous as their attachments to feminine beauty were more obvious. Through the analysis of media images, stereotypical beliefs about women surfaced. As such the girls struggled with the stereotypes that make beauty into a core aspect of girls’ nature and identity.

Beauty is a nice girl.

When asked “What is beauty?” Natasha answered that “beauty is a nice girl who is intelligent, can say what she thinks and finds herself beautiful.” Joannie said that “a beautiful girl is intelligent, careful of others, funny.” Both girls answered this question by defining *beauty as a girl* who is nice which, like Striegel-Moore (1999) argues, reinforces the notion of beauty and niceness as core features of femininity. Beauty was also related to caring for others by being careful, which is also about being nice and not too imposing. All of these ideas combined to indicate how powerfully the beauty myth intersected with the stereotype of femininity, as Striegel-Moore and Fanko’s (2002) and Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) research have also shown.

It is noteworthy that the girls identified intelligence as part of women’s beauty. This might be perceived in terms of a positive feminist influence (women are intelligent) or in opposition to the ‘dumb blond’ stereotype that the girls referred to sometimes (women overly invested in beauty are not too smart). Also, the girls said that a beautiful girl can “say what she thinks” which resembles the idea expressed by Nina that “a mature girl” has “personality.” Although having personality can mean many things, it is easy to imagine that a girl with personality is not stereotypically passive or silent. Instead, she

might be “funny,” “say what she thinks” or be sassy. This is reminiscent of how Taft (2004) described Girl Power beauty which juxtaposes attractiveness (pleasing and nice) with a sassy personality (intelligent).

Tautological beauty?

Natasha specified that part of being beautiful was that a girl “finds herself beautiful.” Finding oneself beautiful is not a tautology for a beautiful girl because as Nina said, “all girls think they are not beautiful.” Here the girls show their awareness of what (Rodin et. al, 1985) coined as normalized body image discontent. Arianna reported that some girls feel “fat” when they are “super thin,” many think they are “ugly” when they are really beautiful and want to change. This idea echoes Levine and Smolak’s (2002) research findings on girls’ self-critical attitudes toward their bodies. Therefore, the girl who “finds herself beautiful” or “who does not concern herself with beauty” can be interpreted in two ways.

The first interpretation to the idea that ‘some girls need not concern themselves with beauty’ is that some girls are *naturally* perfect. In Girl Power, for example, some girls are presented as gorgeous: they know it and flaunt it! They do not have to worry about being beautiful. This naturalistic argument is further supported by the girls’ impression that photographs of women in the media represented ‘reality.’³⁹ That is why Isabelle was astounded to discover that fashion photographs were contrived and not just realistic photography of beautiful girls. She thought *those* girls and women in magazines or T.V. were just lucky to have been born beautiful which explains why they are “happy that they are pretty.” She was surprised to learn that the images were concocted

³⁹ A more detailed analysis of the girls’ interpretation of images will be explored later in this section.

artificially in art studios. Isabelle's impressions demonstrate that media images of women not only instill ideals of women but also reinforce the idea that ideal women exist 'out there.' This makes sense since Yamamiya et. al's (2005) research showed that 94% of media images portrayed women who were thinner than average. In other words, idealized images concretized the belief in the existence of ideal women.



Figure 3. Image taken from a fashion magazine for girls, 2004.

The idea of being “happy” to be “pretty” implies that the lucky women chosen for photos are *born* more perfect than others. It follows that they will be happier and more successful in life. This relates to Mazzerella and Pecora's (1999) and Yamimiya et al's (2005) research that links media representations to women's and girls' beliefs that beauty will lead to happiness. Inversely, it implies that women who are not born into beauty are less worthy of attention (love, happiness, money) as they are somehow inferior, as Bentley (1999) and Griffin (2004) have argued. This idea was also revealed in the report from the Quebec Council on the Status of Women (2002) that showed that young girls

believe that being thin and beautiful is an essential condition for social and professional success.

The second interpretation to the idea that some girls or women are unconcerned with beauty points to the girls' understanding of real life beauty, that is, being natural without make-up or without fashion clothes. That is why Natasha said that "everyone is beautiful, all girls." In this sense, being natural means accepting oneself (the natural body) and refuting artificial standards of beauty. This understanding clarifies the girls' seemingly contradictory idea that people who have cosmetic surgery are less beautiful afterward because they are less natural. By cutting up the real body, the natural body is lost, bygone to pressures of 'selling out' to cultural standards "for the boys." This position demonstrates that although the girls felt negatively influenced by images, they did not uncritically accept them, as Basow and Rubin's (1999) research on girls also showed. Yet, it also points to knowledge that many contemporary women, and a rising number of teenage girls, resort to cosmetic surgery to become beautiful (Larkin & Rice, 2005). Thus, the girls seemed caught between two versions of female beauty, both centered in 'nature,' although one closer to the classical body and the other, the grotesque as described by Wolff (2003). In both cases, the female body remained a source of comparison with images, frustration and resistance.

It was interesting that during the four weeks that the girls discussed the connection between boys and beauty, they also worked on large scale body image self-portraits. In their art, the girls represented themselves in ways that suggested a break away from idealized images (see Figures 4-8).



Figure 4. Arianna's body image painting.



Figure 5. Nina's body image painting.



Figure 6. Joannie's body image painting.



Figure 7. Isabelle's body image painting.



Figure 8. Natasha's body image painting.

Personal impressions of beauty.

When asked directly if *they* were beautiful, the girls' answers were vague: "beautiful/not beautiful," as in 'yes and no.' They preferred to avoid the question directly. Later on in the workshops, Natasha asked, "What can we do to feel beautiful, just the way we are?" This implied feeling 'not beautiful' but also the desire for greater self-acceptance. Direct self-criticism was more evident in later workshops when Arianna made comments like, "I'll have to be careful because I am less pretty on one side of my face," "I look like I have wrinkles" and "I've got a big forehead, I don't like that." Here her negative perception is obvious. Another example of admitting to negative body image was when Natasha cried after discussing media images of beautiful women. "I'll never be

perfect,” she said as she told a story about how her parents forced her to try on a bikini that made her look fat. “I was hanging out all over the place,” she sobbed. “I looked awful.” This implies that the girls were well versed in the narrow cultural standards of beauty, as Yamamiya et al (2005) has also demonstrated. Arianna’s self-criticism and Natasha’s discouragement are examples of what Striegel-Moore and Fanko (2002) found in their research, that is, that young girls as young as eleven years old girl engage in body monitoring, anxiety about appearance and anti-fat attitudes.

Beauty and fat.

Natasha believed that her tears were ‘caused’ by her imperfect female body, as Frost (2001) argues many girls do. In response, Isabelle said: “The problem with the magazines is that if we don’t like how we look, then we compare ourselves.” This relates to Levine and Smolak’s (2002) findings that girls engage in negative comparisons with images, but also that the comparisons are direct. Isabelle decided that the best thing to do was to “avoid the magazines...that way, we can say to ourselves that we’re not *that* bad!” She then explained that she wanted to lose weight to fit into her bathing suit too, by going on a diet and doing exercise “because she ate some chocolate.” This demonstrates that on the one hand, feeling “fat” or “bad” is associated with images through a process of comparison (Striegel-Moore & Fanko, 2002). The idea of being ‘seen’ in public in a bathing suit—and not being thin-- resulted in shame and tears. Natasha’s distress gives evidence for Levine and Smolak’s (2002) argument that the cultural obsession with fat makes girls unhappy with their growing bodies.



Figure 9. How to firm up your butt, Elle Girl, 2004.

These findings are similar to those of Yamamiya et. al's (2005) laboratory research where a five minute exposure to 'thin-and-beautiful' media images resulted in a 'state' of negative body image for two hours. The fact that Natasha's and Isabelle's body image dissatisfaction came out into the open after eight hours of workshops devoted to evaluating positive and negative media images is significant. Natasha said she felt bad "because of the images." Her tears and feelings of low self-worth were evoked through comparisons with idealized images. This gives credence to Striegel-Moore and Fanko's (2002) argument that images "adversely affect [girls'] psychological well-being and the quality of life" (p. 183). From the girls' emotions during the body image workshops, it was evident that idealized representations of images influenced their self-esteem through

a process of negative comparison that was reinforced through the boy's negative comments.

Isabelle suggested some solutions to bathing suit problems. These included increasing body control through dieting by 'watching what you eat.' Striegel-Moore and Fanko (2002) argue that young girls are made to feel responsible for (bad) fat while disregarding the importance of fat in pubertal development. Isabelle's emphasis on needing to do exercise to lose weight can be linked to Yamamiya et al (2005) who argue that the media tells girls they *can* and *should* be thin. Both Natasha's and Isabelle's expression of body dissatisfaction poignantly supported Levine and Smolak's (2002) findings that fat was a source of great distress for girls ages eleven to fifteen years old. Isabelle, whose body type was 'rounder' than average, came up with the solution of dieting. This confirms Larkin and Rice's (2005) findings that early maturers start dieting sooner. It can also be linked to the Quebec statistics that show that 57% of girls want to lose weight (Lavalée, 2002) and 30% reported being "highly distressed" about their bodies (Quebec Council on the Status of Women, 2002). It is not surprising that it was the 'rounder' girls, who, among the participants, were the most angry with media images of women.

From a feminist point of view, Isabelle's suggestion to avoid thin-and-beautiful images of women demonstrates that young girls are looking for ways to resist the oppressive images and messages—to build their self-esteem to feel "not that bad." It shows that the girls reflected on the problem of 'what to do about images.' This also points to a lack of resources for critically engaging with images and the importance of building more resistance in girls by finding other ways of valuing the female body.

Beauty as difficult knowledge.

Nina and Arianna were less preoccupied with “fat” because they were so thin, perhaps too thin, as Nina’s story about inadequate (undeveloped) breasts seemed to imply. Did these girls feel less womanly? Perhaps this explains why they were less angry at media images of women than were Natasha and Isabelle (Joannie had remained relatively neutral). At the same time, I noticed Nina’s sexy clothes and Arianna’s sexy dancing on different occasions. As such, both girls seemed invested in what Basow and Rubin (1999) have termed ‘gender intensification,’ a defense mechanism to help manage the stresses of puberty by looking rather rigidly to traditional, no-risk gender models.

Although Arianna said she learned how to fix her hair from girl magazines, it was Nina, who had an older teenage sister, who loved fashion. Nina had repeatedly said that magazine images were “positive, glamorous, cool” and that “fashion was good.” From her style and her comments, it seems likely that she was invested in Girl Power ideas about girls being strong and sexy. Nina was disturbed by my directive to cut up “this month’s magazines,” which may have conveyed a lack of respect for fashion. Nina’s angry attitude can be interpreted as an example of what Cohen-Evron (2005) called ‘difficult knowledge.’ As such, Nina was confronted with a moral conflict when the other girls got upset about the images of thin-and-beautiful models. It was not easy for her to deal with the idea that Natasha’s tears and Isabelle’s self-consciousness were related to the magazine images she adored. It may be that Nina felt threatened because if fashion was ‘bad’ then gender roles were less clear and uncharted mental territory became apparent. Perhaps she felt the stress that Striegel-Moore and Cachelin (1999) describe when girls disidentify with femininity and beauty, at the risk of being labeled as

unfeminine and unattractive, and therefore becoming unpopular or stigmatized in their peer group. It is possible that Nina felt great insecurity outside of traditional gender norms.

Media Images

The girls often referred to images from the media as structuring boys' responses that resulted in harassment. Their own ideas about feminine beauty also came largely from media sources and prevalent stereotypes that define women's essence as inherently beautiful. However, the discussion of media images led to an important discovery about the ways the girls viewed images.

What is a woman?

In the workshops devoted to evaluating positive and negative images of women, the girls used specific criteria to characterize some women as 'good' hence positive and others as 'bad' hence negative (see Figures 10-15). Images defined as "positive" involved women looking "pure, washed, soft, nice, glad, happy, pretty, joyful, relaxed, comfortable, natural and cool." The girls said that these women were positive because they "experience pleasure," "do exercise," "take care of others" and look like "a million dollars." The women had nothing to worry about because they were "happy that they are pretty." In sum, they were perfect. While some of these criteria were constructed within the images themselves (beautiful smiling women), the girls' overall explanations help to understand the unrealistic ideal of femininity toward which young girls aspire.



Figure 10. Joannie's positive images of women found in girls' magazines.



Figure 11. Isabelle's positive images of women found in girls' magazines



Figure 12. Arianna's images of women found in girls' and sports magazines. Negative (bottom-left). Positive (top-right).

Negative women.

The images that the girls chose to describe the "negative" category showed women who:

Looked like a snob, had a [sexualized] gaze, were licentious/depraved/vicious, aggressive, mean, looked disappointed, were not natural, had too much gel in their hair, looked awful, have a fake smile, too much make-up, are too pale and look like a Barbie. (fieldnotes)

In these examples, women are 'negative' if they are not perfectly beautiful or look perfectly happy in a feminine way. Looking tired, "too pale" or generally "awful" was not acceptable. The girls felt that being "aggressive" or "mean" was clearly bad for women. Being imperfect in any way, either by being tired or disappointed was considered negative, as was being explicitly sexual. Since these images were taken from fashion magazines, I could not differentiate the images between the categories of negative and

positive. I felt that the girls' interpretations came entirely from their normative understandings of acceptable female 'looks.'



Figure 13. Natasha's images of women found in girls' magazines



Figure 14. Nina's images of women found in girls' magazines. Negative (bottom-left), middle (top-center), positive (top-right).

The woman in-between.

Struggling with beauty was most evident in the girls' comments related to evaluating a middle category that they had invented (I did not request it). The girls described the in-between category as an interesting mix of stereotypes. Isabelle for example described the women in her 'medium' category as: "too perfect, eccentric, playful, rebels, wore sunglasses, and too much silicone." That was on "the outside," she claimed "because on the inside she still wants to take care of others." Therefore, in some ways the model was superficially focused on her appearance (hence beautiful), yet she had a personality because she was playful and a rebel (thus active) but took care of others (was feminine). Being feminine was still good. The 'in-between' category suggests that the girls were familiar with and invested in Girl Power beauty, as described by Taft (2004).



Figure 15. Isabelle's images of women found in girls' magazines. Negative (left). Medium-In Between (right).

Literal viewing paradigm.

It must be said that the categorization of women in positive and negative was part of an exercise determined by me. However, the girls' responses were coherent with stereotypical definitions of womanhood that focus on a beautiful appearance and feminine niceness. What came as a surprise was how the girls transposed themselves into the role of the models and then projected thoughts onto them. For example, Arianna said: "This girl almost never wears make-up but did so for the photo, even though she didn't want to." She felt that the model did not "take advantage of her childhood or adolescence" because she was too involved with beauty. Nina found that one model was "not sure of her idea, about what she got herself into." She thought the model said: "Let go of me and get out of my bubble!" and that all the models in her poster were "scared, petrified, not happy." These comments showed how the girls were reading meaning into images, as if they reflected real life situations.

Not only did the girls engage in what could be called a literal reading of images, they also revealed how sensitive they were to what was implied about their gender, particularly in relation to sexual innuendoes. When discussing boys who liked sexist images of women, for example, Pamela Anderson---and her voluptuous *décolletés* was often mentioned as an example of what boys wanted girls to look like. At these moments, the girls were responding to the sexualized content of media images. However, it was the models themselves who were personally held responsible for a "disgusting smile" or a "vicious-licentious-sexualized look in the eyes." Isabelle said that fashion models "think they are better than everyone else." Natasha felt that models were perhaps overly or provocatively sexual because they dared "to wear bras and bathing suits in front of

everyone.” Pointing to one image taken from a gardening magazine (!), Natasha said that it was very negative because “the woman is sex” (see Figure 16). She explained by pointing to the model’s sexualized posture, “wearing too much make-up” and skimpy sexy clothes.



Figure 16. Image found in a gardening magazine.

By looking carefully at facial expressions and bodily poses, the girls were reading the sexual connotations correctly, especially in terms of what Mulvey (1975/84) defined as a structured way of viewing women as ‘woman/body/sex.’ When the girls said that the women were “too excited” and “spilling out of a Playboy magazine,” they linked media images with pornography (glazed look in the eyes, legs parted, arched back, bosom forward, etc) as described by Levy (2005). Isabelle added: “If they want to go to a porno site on Internet, it’s their business,” implying that the women who posed for girls’ fashion

magazines should go *back* where they belong, that is to pornography, rather than in regular advertisements for girls!

The correlation between media images and pornography is revealing of the girls' attitudes toward women. On the one hand, they projected what they perceived as negatively oversexed onto the women who posed for the images. It did not occur to Natasha, for example, that men "were sex" because men did not often appear in the images...only the beguiling temptresses. In the girls' eyes, as Matthews (1991) and Bordo (1993) argue, responsibility for the sexualized pose was displaced from the artistic director, photographer or magazine editor onto the sexual nature of the model. Thus, in the context where female sexuality is visible and male sexuality invisible (Parker and Pollock, 1981), all the girls saw was the woman...the negative lascivious one with which to disconnect. On the other hand, the girls made distinctions about what was for girls (magazines for girls) and not for girls (pornography). It shows an 'us' versus 'them' and 'good' versus 'bad' position which justifies the devaluation of some women through a judgment on sexual mores that has echoes of the sexual double standard. The girls did not have enough of an understanding of the larger cultural context to move beyond the suggestion that female gender was blameworthy for "being sex."

The virgin/whore dichotomy.

The girls' choice of words and ideas to describe women in media images reveal that they were struggling with stereotypes of good and bad women. Nice and intelligent girls (like them one might suppose) were pitted against dumb blonds with blue eyes...sellouts for boys who are too sexual (like Pamela Anderson). One type of woman was

perceived as good because she is “nice,” “pure,” “happy” because she “takes care of others” and thus deserves respect. The other type of woman is bad because she is “mean” and “aggressive.” This type is a ‘bitch’ who “felt better than everyone else” and a ‘slut’ because she’s “too excited” and “spilling out of a Playboy magazine.” This woman should go away and leave girls alone.

By dividing women into opposite camps of virgin/slut, female sexual maturity is laid in conflicting discourses of good/bad sexual behavior. As Aapola et. al (2005) argue, girls are bombarded with contradictory messages that involve incitements to be sexy within the (heterosexist) obligation of choosing between being “a good girl or a bad girl” by “wanting sex or love, [but] not both” (p. 151). Although the girls did not explicitly discuss what good sexuality was, it can be presumed (due to their age level) that they were familiar with sexuality laid in reproductive language, which parents usually present in positive terms (like how mommy and daddy made a baby). Although the girls referred to ‘slut-like’ women and made references to their place in pornography, it was not apparent that the girls had discussed issues of active female sexuality with their parents. This can be related to Bouchard and Boily’s (2005) and Levy’s (2005) arguments that today’s girls are exposed to pornographic types of images and yet, as Robert (2005) asserts, parents do not discuss sexual matters or sexual feelings sufficiently with their adolescents. Instead, the girls in the research seemed educated by the media with its pornographic gaze and, paradoxically, its sexual double standard condemning women’s active sexuality.

The girls were caught contradictory narratives about proper female sexual behavior. On the one hand, the media’s stereotypes about women’s narcissistic

exhibitionism (or desire for the gaze), as described by Bordo (1993), served to justify and inculcate a desire in girls to be sexy and cool at all costs. Here the media can be seen as participating in the illusion that girls are inherently *look* oriented. On the other hand, the media constructs a category of hypersexualized women through images, traditionally labeled as 'sluts.' It is proposed that girls imitate the style of the images but not go too far with their sexuality. Girls are called to be sexual in body image but not in action, which implies restraint. It is noteworthy that some of the girls cut off the bodies but not the faces in their posters of positive and negative women (see Figures 13-15). This placed the focus on the facial features while eliminating the problem of sexual poses or sexualized clothing. One interpretation is that this strategy allowed them to avoid the topic of sexuality altogether. As Robert (2005) points out, avoidance of sexual knowledge increases girls' vulnerability while posing a challenge to eventually negotiating sexual activity in positive terms.

However, Milnes (2004) argues that Girl Power has promoted a contemporary twist in the 'good/bad' sexual division. Today, girls are encouraged to be sexually active by rejecting passivity and restraint, which is feminine-identified. Instead they are pressured to identify with masculine-identified promiscuous sexual behavior. To be beautiful, feminine, nice and *cool* girls also need to be sexually active. Yet, as Milnes (2004) has demonstrated, despite precocious sexual activity girls are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and are still stigmatized as 'sluts.' It can be presumed that the girls in the body image workshops were too young for considering sex. However, from Arianna's and Nina's sexy clothing, sexy body movements and an overall Girl Power stance, they

confirmed Milnes (2004) argument that today's young girls believe that being modern and liberated involves acting and looking sexual.

Images are eroticism for boys.

The problem of media images was rationalized by the girls in terms of how *those* sex-crazed women influenced boys and clothing-makers who in turn pressured young girls. As a result, the girls grappled with the notion that images made them feel inappropriately exposed to the gaze in real life. They responded by disconnecting from the bad, dumb, blond, sexpot women out there. In the process, the girls become divided, between women and within themselves. This can be seen in terms of Brown and Gilligan's (1992) theory that girls' adolescent crises stem from a disconnection between women which disturbs a positive identity construction as a woman. If "beauty is a nice girl" and "the negative woman is sex" not much room is left for positive female sexuality.

It might be wondered however, why the girls were so adamant about the defining sexualized images as negative. One interpretation might be that since the girls made relevant connections between media images and boys' attitudes toward them, what seemed negative and "disgusting" was the imposition of sexuality as a personal invasion of boundaries. The fact that the girls were undergoing puberty may have made this imposition seem even greater. It follows that if only *those* women could go back where they belonged, then maybe boys would leave girls alone with their body image.

In any case, the girls struggled to articulate the idea that the sexualized images of women were 'for boys.' They described feeling pressured to be sexualized even though they were also uncomfortable with it.

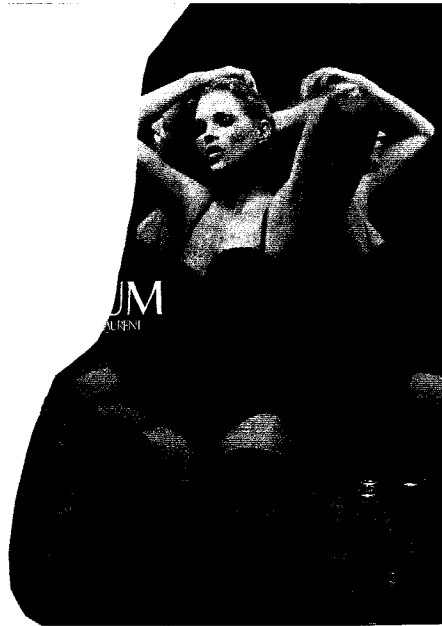


Figure 17. Image taken from a fashion magazine for girls, 2004.

They sensed that there was a connection between the *images*, expectations of their *behavior* and real life *relationships* with boys, involving positions of dominance. To make that idea clear, Natasha said, “You pass in front of a mirror because guys like that.” Arianna said: “The images are eroticism for your boyfriend.” These comments seem to imply that images are for boys (a male gaze for boys) but also that sexuality involves giving in to boyfriends. At the same time, an unidentified ‘they’ was sending the “message” through images that “if you are like this, you will have a boyfriend.” Thus, images played a role in making girls feel caught between two types of women. From the girls’ words, however, they demonstrated how hard they worked to construct a positive feminine *identity* nevertheless. Media images stood out as major source for defining the positive woman while placing girls in a limiting bind with little room for agency (in terms of looks or sexual behavior). In all of these ways, the media images could be seen

as reinforcing gender roles, partaking of what Hall (1997) called the “symbolic violence meant to reinforce patriarchal hegemony” (p. 259).

Uncritical gaze.

By condemning the women in the images (as ‘sluts’), the girls demonstrated their lack of a critical position toward the society from which the images emanated. They remained unaware of the image-making industry and how it structured their ambivalence toward women. They had no knowledge that the photographers had *studied* photography in university (or art school) and had *learned* the male gaze, as a certain way of framing and presenting images. In addition, the girls did not show sophistication with cultural overlay which allowed for the interpretation of images. Through a severe judgment about sexual behavior based in stereotypes, the girls contradicted Gledhill’s (1997) and Sherlock’s (1992) ideas that viewers of images can transform the text “at the level of reception” (p. 71). Instead, the girls’ uncritical position was closer to Mulvey’s (1975/84) notion of an implied viewer constrained within a passive female spectatorship. In other words, the girls reenacted the male gaze, traditionally structured to look erotically at women’s bodies, while also making judgments about the women, based on stereotypes. Other women were viewed only in terms of the male gaze, a gaze that structured power relations and appropriate behavior. In this sense, the girls were looking at other women---unknowingly---according to traditional viewing paradigms seen in art history, as Desjardins (1989) has argued, deriving from and contributing to the unequal social positioning of men and women.

Negative 'other' images.

Although the girls were frustrated with images of idealized women and caught between sexiness and sexuality, they were nevertheless perplexed by other 'realistic' images and photography from feminist art. When viewing a large variety of other body types, ages, color of skin and so on, they were uncomfortable. It was very difficult for the girls to see alternate feminist images as positive because they were so foreign. To their credit, however, they reacted positively to paintings and sculptures of large "sturdy" women like those of Nikki de Saint-Phalles and prehistoric Goddesses. "I like seeing a strong woman for once," Natasha exclaimed. Generally, however, paintings and photographs of fat, wrinkles, or non-ideal bodies were shocking to the girls and "very negative." Therefore, although they had the words to describe the unfairness of ideals of perfect femininity, they were most accustomed to media images and were perhaps unwilling to embrace the 'real,' the 'natural' or the 'grotesque.' Stylized paintings or abstract art like those of La Duke's were more appealing to the girls' imaginations than was photography that more closely approximated life. As a result, the girls could not easily appropriate new visions of femininity as advanced by feminist art theorists such as Lippard (1993), Nochlin (1982) or feminist art educators like Congdon (1996), Wyrick (1996), Zimmerman (1990) and many others. Instead, the girls continued to struggle with beauty head-on. This is what Betterton (2003) calls "the gap between feminist art history and its potential audiences" (p. 11) caused by being "cut off from any interpretative context" (p. 14). Indeed, the girls were frustrated by images of idealized women yet those were the images with which they were the most familiar. Confronting new images was dauntingly negative.

Violence against Women

The girls' discussions followed a logical sequence in the workshops that moved from boys' general devaluation of girls, to harassment about clothing, to sexualized images that reflected a social expectation that girls would participate in a boys' eroticism. The girls felt stuck within limited choices. Although, I presume that the girls' logic was unconscious, it was coherent that their discussion moved from images to other invasions of boundaries such as violence or rape. Therefore, the fourth category to emerge from the data involved the girls' feelings of powerlessness regarding violence against women. They discussed how their fear of sexual assault made them afraid of growing up. Living in fear can be indirectly associated to body image as it represents the oppressive feeling of being victimized as a female.

The topic of violence against women emerged as an important, highly charged topic in the sixth workshop, one week after having introduced the notion of boundaries using a rope. Secure in their boundaries, affectionately labeled 'bubbles,' the girls discussed how horror movies triggered their fears of being attacked in real life. While horror movies are often sexist in content, both eroticizing danger and making women the principal victims of attack, the girls' fears were related to being watched by a man in real life. The girls reported that their fears were fed by newspapers stories of rapists and pedophiles. Isabelle said, "I really feel scared at night around 10:00 or 11:00 PM and I don't want my parents to go out or leave me alone....I'm afraid to move around in the house. I stay in my room...I always feel watched." Natasha felt "observed" and "afraid to be cornered in somewhere or left alone." She continued, "I feel watched. I'm scared of

noises...I'm afraid of silence...darkness that is lifeless, no help if anything happens” and “I'm scared to death of my closet.”

Being afraid of the dark, a normal event in early childhood, was now related to sexual threat. The girls said they most feared “sexual predators, crazy mentally ill men who attack women, men with knives or guns, vicious perverts, maniacs and pedophiles.” They knew that “little girls were sometimes kidnapped,” tricked to follow strangers or “attacked in the metro.” Nina was afraid of being stalked “always at the same time of the day.” These examples demonstrate that young girls are aware of danger for girls and women, particularly sexual dangers, rape and murder. They know that the attackers are men. This relates both to real danger, imagined danger and to a generalized fear of violence in everyday life. According to Statistics Canada (2003) and the Quebec Report on Sexual Assault (2001), a strong proportion of women live in fear of attack and real women and girls are victims of sexual assault. The girls' descriptions of attackers as “maniacs” relates to what the Quebec Report on Sexual Assault (2001) identified as a displacement of fears onto strangers when the majority of assaults happen in domestic settings.

A violent imagination.

The girls said they worried about being “watched” and “observed” and as a result limited their movement in their houses at night. This points to the idea that the (adult) male gaze is sexually threatening and dangerous. Girls do not want to be left alone because they feel powerless. Yet it is one thing to be scared at night at 11:00 PM and

another when it gets dark at 4:30 PM in winter! In any case, the girls could not imagine their self-defense. Even in their imaginations, the attacker was powerful and dominating.

The girls' fear of violence was fed by major media headlines of brutal sex crimes on young girls, like the tabloid stories of Quebec pedophiles Guy Cloutier or Luc X during the year of 2003. These stories demonstrated the way the media sensationalizes sexual violence by giving lurid details that heighten the climate of fear. They also reinforce the idea of women as victims and downplay more common forms of violence like harassment (Stein, 2005). Rarely are stories of escape from violence or women's courageous acts of defiance documented. This is unfortunate since it is a well-known fact, taught in self-defense courses for women, that fighting back is more likely to lead to escape from rape. According to Clarke (2005), behavior traditionally encouraged in women, such as negotiation, cooperation or taking passive attitude (i.e. being nice), does not help in fighting against rape.

The girls' feelings of fear were also aggravated by the fact that parents "warned" them to "be careful" of strangers. As a result, they worried excessively about potential abusers *out there* and not any manipulative "perverts" that might show up in their daily lives. By discussing their fears, the girls demonstrated how vulnerable and unprotected they felt "if the parents go out." It is hard to know if the parents had warned the girls about the most frequent sexual abusers in girls' lives: fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers as described by the Statistics Canada (2004) or the Quebec Report on Sexual Assault (2001). However, if the girls knew about this, they found this unspeakable.

In any case, the girls associated the problem of violence against women with being "scared of growing up." Feeling vulnerable to violence, they limited their choices

and actions. This can be interpreted in light of De Bold et al (1999) findings that “maturation makes many girls feel vulnerable to sexual violence, abuse or rape” and that “girl’s psychosexual development is typically experienced as a physical, psychological, or social danger” (p. 228). By equating fears of gender violence with growing up, the girls described their development as a threat to their identities.

Sexual abuse.

The topic of violence against women and living in fear led Nina to share her experience of molestation by an older boy. Her story revealed her mother’s struggle to believe her and to act in her daughter’s defense. Nina made us promise “not to tell anyone a word” because she had “never told anyone this before.” She said “Promise me that I can trust you.” In this sense, she was including us in the process of moving a voiceless experience, a taboo, out into the open. The topic of violence against women, concretized by Nina’s story, revealed another important dimension to girls’ complex relationships with their body image. As Fallon and Ackard (2005) have found, sexual abuse, rape and violence in general have serious consequences on girls’ self-esteem and feelings toward the female body. Not only does this affect body image but good functioning in general and sexual functioning in particular (Wiederman, 2002). The girls were not mistaken in making parallels between body image and women’s condition under patriarchy. The male gaze is seen to move beyond images to be enacted on girls’ bodies through harassment and clothing, suggestions for sexual behavior and self-regulation, and fear of violence if not violence itself. As a result, the girls experienced the world as unsafe where the childhood ‘bogy man’ turns into a real man. All of these elements

together combine to create a powerful block to seeing womanhood and the female body in positive terms.

Summary

This section was devoted to exploring the way the girls in the research viewed their body image. The girls' words were used to understand how complex the topic of body image was and to build a picture of how girls felt about their bodies. The analysis revealed that the boys in school stood out as the most immediate 'oppressors' in girls' environments, using harassment as a form of domination. The girls felt that there was a connection between boys, ways of looking and expectations of girls' behavior. The media played an important role in shaping on girls' feelings about women in general and their body image in particular. On the one hand, clothing and media images of women were perceived as imposing frustrating standards of thinness on girls. The media was held responsible for giving boys standards for looking at girls, who in turn harass girls for never being perfect or beautiful enough. On the other hand, the girls struggled with standards of beauty while both resisting and embracing stereotypes of femininity that make beauty (and thinness) part of the definition of a positive woman.

Although the research findings confirmed other feminist studies on girls' body image in relation to images, it was a surprise to discover that the girls did not have sophisticated means for interpreting images as cultural constructs, as some feminist theorists have suggested. Instead, the girls viewed images uncritically within sexual stereotypes, as seen through the male gaze. The result was that the girls 'read' images in terms of the models' responsibility for their sexualized gazes and poses. Women were

categorized as ‘good/pure’ or ‘bad/sexual,’ forcing girls to disassociate from the ‘bad/sexual’ women, thus creating an inner division that displaced the idea of positive sexuality. Finally, the girls situated the sexualized gaze on women’s bodies in the context of violence against women. As a result, they felt powerlessness and defenseless, and “scared to grow up.”

In all of these ways, it can be concluded from the research that the media plays a major role in the reproduction of femininities. Girls and boys learn through images what womanhood is and should be. Within a patriarchal society that locates boys in a dominant position, boys believe themselves superior to girls and learn to use harassment as a form of entitlement to women’s bodies. Girls, already located disadvantageously, struggle to be recognized as “themselves” while also aspiring to be feminine and likable. In this way, gendered behaviors are shown to begin in elementary school. For the girls, the media limits their choices of models of femininity while constructing impossible standards that lead to ‘normative body discontent.’ Art education was shown to hold potential as tool for body image enhancement by offering the girls the opportunity to create semi-representational artwork on the theme of body image (see Figures 4-8). However, the research participants did not have enough art knowledge to see other (non-media) feminist images as positive. Nevertheless, the girls used the body image art workshops to voice their frustrations about sexist bias and to use art to resist devaluation and loss of self-esteem.

Voice as Feminist Education

Part two of this chapter analyzes the concept of voice as a feminist strategy within the body image art workshops. Brown and Gilligan (1992) originally conceptualized voice as a key element, often missing, in girls' development and women's psychology. They argued that the inability to use voice contributes to making women passive about their oppression. Developing voice is seen as a catalyst for political resistance that builds into psychological resistance to oppression. For Brown and Gilligan, strong agency for self is necessary to build self-esteem in a world that sanctions femininity while devaluing the feminine-associated at the same time.

This is significant because even though the body image workshops were intended to focus on *art-making*, they served the ultimate purpose of giving the girls permission to practice their voices to name their oppression. Two important categories stood out in the research as significant in relation to voice: being nice and significant silence. First, the girls defined 'niceness' as a characteristic of girlhood. They also expressed personal frustration with this ideal that placed them in a bind. Second, the body image workshops served as a catalyst for what was *not* said, and demonstrated places where the girls did not have voice. In both cases, the concept of voice is used to understand how feminist education can help girls develop better self-esteem and positive body image.

Girls are Nice

Niceness.

The idea that 'girls are nice' was a recurring theme in the research. At times the girls were frustrated with this issue and at other times they uncritically accepted it. When asked to define beauty for example, they answered: "Beauty is a *nice* girl." Beauty and niceness combined to characterize girlhood. The cultural injunction for girls to be nice is invoked as a stereotypical feature of girls' *nature*. From this perspective, it makes sense that the girls described women who were nice as "good" and women who were 'not nice' as "bad." They said that being nice also involved "taking care of others" which is related to cooperation, sharing and negotiation (or giving in to boys so that they can grow up), feminine-identified traits. These examples can be seen in light of Brown and Gilligan's (1992) argument that the idealized and romanticized understandings of what a girl is, what she does and what relationships are like inhibit the development of a strong voice.

Sanctioned to be nice.

The girls described 'being nice' as an essential characteristic of beauty and femininity. Their expectation was that niceness would give them privileges. Analysis of the data demonstrated however that niceness was an oppressive trap. This was most evident when the girls talked about their women teachers,⁴⁰ about whom they regularly expressed highly charged emotions of frustration. Their anger was often related the expectation that girls would be "nice to others" in school. This could be seen, for example, the day Joannie said that her teacher preferred the boys in her class. She was

⁴⁰ All of the girls' teachers in school were women.

emphatic that this was “not normal” because it was “usually” the girls who were the teacher’s “pets.” Arianna and Isabelle confirmed the idea that girls were “supposed to be the teachers’ pets.” Even worse was the fact that the boys “never behaved well.” Joannie said that although the girls were “always” obedient, her teacher chose the boys *first* for all activities and talked to the boys while ignoring the girls. This confirms the research done by Bouchard et al (2003) and the Quebec Council for Superior Education (1999) indicating that teachers tend to favor boys and that girls “seem to fade into the décor” (p. 51).

Joannie expressed strong emotions about her teacher. The idea of wanting to be the teachers “pet” reveals a longing to have a privileged relationship. This can be interpreted in light of Brown and Gilligan’s (1992) and Basow and Rubin’s (1999) research that showed that girls were highly receptive to closeness with their teachers. It also points to the girls’ logical expectation that they will receive special treatment when they are nice and behave well. However, Joannie said that the girls were “always good” whereas boys were “never good.” This might be interpreted in terms of how boys do not feel they have to be good or nice in school, as the Quebec Council for Superior Education (1999) showed. It also implies that girls make great efforts to be “always good” while possibly redoubling efforts when they feel ignored.

From Joannie’s perspective, the teacher treated the girls unfairly in comparison to the boys. She described how the boys were not always held accountable for their ‘bad’ behavior and were more easily dismissed from being nice. Another example of this was when Arianna came to the workshops with a broken front tooth. She told us that a boy fell on her. Although she believed that the accident was unintentional because the boy

was playing roughly with his friends, she was most infuriated that “he didn’t even apologize.” What angered her most was the boy’s lack of empathy and the fact that there were no consequences or expectations from the adults that he be nice or show kindness, afterward. She did not feel that the adults had defended her rights and she did not know what to do about it or if it mattered. Later, in front of the mirror, it mattered...

The idea that girls feel invisible or that their concerns are not adequately taken into consideration correlates with similar findings in educational research (Quebec Council for Higher Education, 1999). Yet feeling ignored or invisible made the girls terribly angry. It seems logical that good conduct will be rewarded in school, whereas bad behavior will be punished. These rules are based on merit. Favoritism (being a pet or getting rewards) is unfair and illogical when based on gender and not behavior. When it was obvious to Joannie that boys need not be good to be liked by her teacher, and that the rules were not straightforward, she noticed the unfair treatment and felt resentful. In these instances, the girls showed great sensitivity to fairplay, equality and respect. This finding can be linked to Stein (2005) who found that inequitable circumstances lead girls to withdraw their belief that school is a fair environment.

Since the reward system based on gender remains hidden, it may be that the girls try even harder to be good and nice. It requires great self-control to suppress daily frustrations, to remain pleasing or to avoid conflicts. The desire to be nice leads to a vicious circle where niceness sanctions silence and silence sanctions invisibility. Brown and Gilligan (1992) refer to this conundrum as a “tyranny of niceness” that “orchestrates behavior” by keeping girls from “saying too much or speaking too loudly” (p. 52). Lacking support and resources, it was even more difficult for Arianna or Joannie to speak

up about their frustrations. Instead, they seethed in silence, while taking things personally.

Girls' bad behavior.

Joannie implied that the girls in her class made great efforts to be nice in class “all the time.” She said that girls got punished for behavior the boys got away with. The idea that bad behavior is unacceptable for girls or that the consequences are greater for them was demonstrated by Natasha on the “bad day” when she got into a fight with her teacher. Natasha was livid when she explained that she was “incapable of being good.” She believed that her bad behavior resulted in her teacher disliking her. Natasha said, “[The teacher] yells at me all the time,” “treats me like a baby,” “is unfriendly,” “intolerant,” “gets mad,” “is unfair” and “ignores people.” Natasha’s “feelings were hurt” and she “felt like crying.” Her teacher made her feel “crazy, intimidated, humiliated, scared, sad and angry.” Natasha felt so furious at her teacher she said she “felt like punching her.” This finding points to what Luttrell (1997) calls an ‘emotional curriculum’ that is an inherent part of the process of teaching and learning. She says: “Unspoken and unresolved *emotions* (a taboo subject among most educators) and the ethical and political dimensions of relationships make a difference in the learning process” (p. 120). Although I never found out what had caused the conflict, Natasha believed that her ‘badness’ had resulted in a loss of relationship with her teacher, a fear many girls share and that encourages ‘niceness,’ according to Brown and Gilligan (1992).

It appeared to the girls that teachers were sometimes wielding of negative authority due to differential standards of behavior for the two genders. When a girl steps

out of the acceptable range of feminine behavior, she became vulnerable to stigmatization or rejection, as Bentley (1999) argues. This was evident, for example, when Nina's daycare educator warned me that Nina was "difficult" because she "often used swear words" and was "irreverent to authority." As such, she was characterized as a trouble maker. Having "a strong personality," although promoted in boys, can be a liability for girls because it does not correspond to the social definition of feminine niceness.

Anger swallowed.

When the girls got too angry, their teachers and educators did not always have the energy or the time to understand their problems. They were expected to swallow their anger and cooperate with authority. This was obvious, for example, when Isabelle argued with Kelly, her daycare educator, about practicing her role in the theatre piece (which meant that she had to miss the body image art workshop). Although Kelly had made a mistake (because she had forgotten about my workshops), and the situation was unfair (Isabelle did not want to go), Isabelle felt forced against her will. This made her enraged. She screamed, "I hate Kelly. She always has to have her own way. She's so bossy. I'm big enough to decide, she's treating me like a baby. My decision is not being respected."

This example demonstrates typical 'tween' dilemmas described by Deak (2002): being caught between opposing desires and expectations of 'big' and 'little.' However, Isabelle felt that her voice was not heard and her needs were overlooked in the name of the greater good...the theatre piece. As Isabelle angrily attempted to express her point of view, the educator expected her reasonable about the situation (nice). When a power struggle ensued, Kelly did not have the time or the resources to deal with what she

perceived as ‘out of control’ stubborn behavior. Consequently, Isabelle was to swallow her anger to ‘get on with the show.’

Passive-aggressive niceness.

The examples above are related to the social expectation that girls will be nice, whether they want to or not. Although the girls did not challenge the underlying stereotype, they described the feelings of frustration and loss of power that resulted from both niceness and ‘not niceness.’ Joannie’s response to her teacher’s privileging boys was: “I really don’t like [my teacher], none of the girls do.” This comment reveals that the girls had talked about the teacher’s behavior among themselves and came to a disempowering conclusion: the teacher liked the boys better. It also reveals a passive-aggressive stance of ‘telling secrets’ and ‘whispering,’ as documented by Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Deak (2002).

Natasha responded to conflict with her teacher in a similar way. Although, she felt so furious that she “felt like punching her [teacher],” she did not express this to her teacher directly. Instead, she “closed her ears off” while pretending to listen. “That way I can’t feel anything,” she said. However, in both Natasha’s and Joannie’s examples, the intensity of the girls’ anger demonstrates that bad feelings were festering underground, as described by Brown and Gilligan (1992). Natasha’s suppression of anger also points to how relational aggression is the only outlet available to girls within stereotypical expectations. As Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) and Brown and Gilligan (1992) have argued, girls’ direct aggression is considered so unacceptable that it involves great consequences for girls, ranging from punishment, stigmatization to the loss of

relationship. Whatever their fear, the girls resorted to relational aggression by talking about teachers behind their backs, in the body image workshops.

It was therefore positive that Joannie, who was often reserved in the workshops, overcame her fear of consequences and used her voice to discuss her anger about the differential treatment of girls and boys in school. The body image workshops allowed Natasha to express her aggression about punching her teacher in words instead of acting out with bad behavior. She knew that there was no threat to her identity as a girl. And Isabelle vented her frustrations about Kelly and then was able to participate in the play she had signed up for. It can be concluded from these examples that the use of voice as a feminist strategy allowed the girls more freedom to 'be themselves,' to be outspoken about injustice and to shed somewhat the façade of feminine niceness.

Forced to be nice.

It is clear from the examples above that feminine niceness is something girls work hard to develop, it is not *natural*. Rather than being part of girls' nature, it is a form of social control that appears as self-control, as Brown and Gilligan (1992) contend. Overcoming the obligation to be nice *to all people* and *at all times* is a way for girls to strengthen their voice, and to improve girls' development and women's psychology (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

At different times during the workshops, I observed or learned about situations where the girls were forced to be nice. Arianna's mother, for example, forced her to come back to give me "a decent good-bye" even though she was in a state of shock, the day that Nina talked about sexual abuse. Natasha's parents forced her to try on a bathing suit

against her will (that she knew was too small) to please her grandmother. Yet, the most poignant example of all was when I (unknowingly) forced the girls to be nice in Joannie's regular class.

On that day, I was teaching an art lesson for a 'Parent-Wednesday' in my son's class.⁴¹ Suddenly, there was a commotion among the girls. A girl named Helen was rejected from the 'girls' table.' I reacted strongly by insisting that she be reintroduced by threat of punishment. I was irritated that class time was being lost and wanted to get on with my art lesson. The mother who was teaching the 'Parent-Wednesday' with me sermoned the girls about their mean behavior.

Fifteen minutes later, a fight broke out among the boys. One boy screamed "Your mother is a prostitute! You fucking asshole!" while hurling a piece of clay into another boy's eye. The other boy shrieked and cried, jumped up swearing "*Tabarnaque!*"⁴² and the two boys punched and kicked each other. Other boys jumped in. The mother and I struggled to figure out what was going on, who had started it, while the crying and yelling continued. The rest of the class was silent. The episode ended when the regular teacher came in and the boys were separated.

This example demonstrates firstly how the girls' relational aggression resulted in moral blaming about 'bad behavior.' Regardless of their problem, they were rapidly forced to let Helen sit with them. The girls did not stand up to us or insist on voicing their opinion. On the other hand, we did not attempt to understand the underlying dynamics. Personally, I wanted to move on to my art lesson and did not even question my behavior. After school, in the body image workshops, Joannie and I talked about the incident.

⁴¹ This was not part of the research but part of my parental participation in the alternative school. My son and Joannie were in the same class.

⁴² The English equivalent is something like "fucking shit."

Joannie told me that Helen was “bad” and that “no one likes her.” Suddenly, I remembered that Helen had an ‘attitude’ problem with adults and was somewhat anti-social. The conversation with Joannie made me realize that I had not made any efforts to understand the girls’ motives that morning. I had simply discredited their anger by not considering the problem real. The relational aggression appeared unjustified and was meanness ‘for no reason.’ Through analysis, it seems that I had unknowingly absorbed what Harris (2004), Ward and Benjamin (2004) and Chesney-Lind and Irwin (2004) have called the ‘mean girl literature.’ As Maher and Ward (2002) argue, inequality between the genders can be seen as largely reproduced by unconscious assumptions like these.

Boys’ relational aggression.

In contrast, I reacted to the boys’ problem entirely differently. Due to the urgency of the situation, the boys’ loud screaming and swearing coupled with a violent attack forced the adults into action. Clearly the harassment and personal insults were relational aggression (not just ‘a girl thing’) and the boys were victims of each others’ physical aggression. What was different was how the boys and the girls—and the teachers---reacted to the relational aggression. The girls tried to get help from the teachers, who in turn squelched their conflict. The boys literally took the problem into their own hands while defending themselves in a spirit of moral outrage. The adults reacted by trying to understand the situation (who did and said what) and then by separating the boys (two boys went into the hallway). Within a feeling of emergency and a desire to bring back peace, no blame was placed on the boys for wasting half an hour of class time and they were not reprimanded for their swearing (because the boys continued to complain even

after the conflict was supposedly over). Although 'meanness' was involved in the relational aggression, the intensity of the boys' reactions was assumed to be provoked and therefore justified, by the regular teacher. Mutual fighting and insults were viewed as somehow equal and thus, no other punishments were needed. Like in the example when a boy fell on Arianna and broke her tooth, no apologies were demanded. Furthermore, the regular teacher did not apparently expect the boys to 'shut up and be nice' about it afterward. That is why they were separated.

Stuffed back into the body.

The girls' problem was not considered 'real' or significant and were therefore rapidly squelched. Not only did their problems remain unresolved and forced underground but the girls were blamed as a group for their 'meanness.' The girls' behavior seemed unacceptable, unjustified, irrelevant, and unworthy of class time. Even though they were sufficiently angry about something that seemed important to them (resulting in Helen's exclusion from their table), they were required to back down in the face of conflict and authority or face punishment. Brown and Gilligan (1992) argue that this is what girls are taught to do. Probably, their anger moved from Helen onto us, the teachers, since they were unusually *silent* after the problem was 'solved.' They kept right on working when the boys had 'their' problem.

It must be said that as a parent-teacher, I was not in a position to deal with physical aggression with authority, not being the regular teacher nor knowing the children well. Therefore, it was the regular classroom teacher who made the ultimate decisions. It remains clear, however, that the boys' problems took up a lot of room. This

upholds findings from the report from the Quebec Council of Higher Education (1997) that boys feel that it is their right to take up space. The boys resorted to both relational *and* physical aggression, whereas the girls only used relational aggression. The boys' acted out their anger which rallied a significant amount of energy from teachers and other children. In sum, the boys' aggression was more damaging to the group and the teachers than was the girls' aggression. However, the girls received more blame.

Later on in the body image workshop with Joannie, I awkwardly tried to talk about the girls' and boys' incidents. She responded with silence. Either Joannie only unconsciously understood the gender dynamics at play or she did not feel that she could address the injustice directly with me. This was a time when she did not use (or was not able to use) her voice.

The fact that Joannie was silent about what had happened in class earlier that day, led me to reflect further on my behavior. Only through analysis did I realize that I had treated the genders differently and unfairly during the 'Parent-Wednesday.' Joannie did not seize the opportunity make me aware of how the girls had reacted to my intervention. However, in the body image workshops that day there were only two girls present because the other girls were on a fieldtrip. I was able to give Joannie my undivided attention. Perhaps she felt torn between the desire for greater closeness and the possibility of using her voice. This is a process Brown and Gilligan (1992) referred to as "sacrificing relationship in the name of relationships" (p. 232). In other words, Joannie was being nice to me by remaining silent (not confronting me) even though I had repeated the very same unequal behavior toward boys and girls that she had decried in a previous workshop about her regular teacher. Yet at the same time, I sensed that something was missing, that

Joannie was not her usual self with me. When she struggled with her self portrait—painting over a painstaking drawing done under my guidance—Joannie cried (see Figure 18). Perhaps her tears reflected the tension between being true to oneself or being nice in relationships, in addition to feeling frustrated about “ruining” her portrait.



Figure 18. Joannie’s self-portrait.

This example demonstrates how complex dynamics happen in silence within classrooms and that solutions for improvement are not straightforward. It also demonstrates that feminist knowledge involves attention to teaching practice and skills while remaining aware of the ways oppression constructs the conditions of girls and boys behavior. Berge and Ve (2000) affirm that gender equity is a balancing act that must take into consideration how all educational actors, feminist teachers included, are imbued with power regimes and inadvertently deconstruct the equity desired. Otherwise, as Arnot (2002) suggests, schools become important sites for the reproduction of gendered identities.

It is interesting that after the discussions related to the issue of girls' niceness, both Arianna and Isabelle made self-portraits where they represented themselves as feminine and nice, with soft flowing lines and flowers (see Figures 19-20).



Figure 19. Arianna's self-portrait with pink hair.



Figure 20. Isabelle's self-portrait done at home.

Mothers

Although the girls expressed powerful anger about their teachers, they described their mothers in a more well-rounded way. The exercises with the boundaries put the girls in closer contact with 'having a personal space' (or not) which brought the topic of

mothers to the forefront. After the third workshop, mothers became a frequent topic in the girls' discussion. As such, they stood out as major figures in girls' daily preoccupations as adults who "do not always keep their promises" and sometimes give "too many responsibilities." At times, mothers were described as controlling, neglectful, invasive, unfair, tired, infuriating and enmeshed. At other times, they were seen as nice, caring, loving, understanding and friendly. On some occasions, the girls admitted that sometimes their mothers found them difficult, too. In general, however, the girls characterized their mothers as "caring."

The girls' intense scrutiny of their mothers appeared as a way to reflect out loud on the mother-daughter relationship, from many different angles. It seemed that the girls had an overall realistic perspective on their mothers and not an idealized one. Although they found their mothers at times maddening, they did not expect them to always be nice. Mothers were not viewed as unfeminine if they expressed discontent, got angry or if they looked tired. This is significant as it marks a shift away from the stereotypical definitions of positive and negative women according to 'good' and 'bad' traits, as seen in the exercises with media images. This differs from Brown and Gilligan's (1992) argument that young girls romanticize all relationships and therefore strive to 'be nice' at all costs, even with their mothers. It may be that within the affective relationship with mothers, involving a long-term bond, girls could see beyond gendered stereotypes, through the image of their imperfect mother. This, as a result, perhaps allowed the girls a private space to *not* be perfect or nice, which was not possible at school or in other public settings. This is what hooks (2003) calls "a margin" within a system of domination from where to find agency (p. 94) and, Bettis and Adams (2005) "a space of liminality" (p. 10).

The idea that mothers offer girls a place for agency within relationships relates to Debold et al's (1999) findings that girls view their mothers as important sources of support. Deak (2002), Bouchard and St-Amant (1997) and the Quebec Council of Higher Education (1999) have demonstrated that mothers, across all social classes, instruct their daughters about issues of safety, sexist bias and incite their daughters to resist stereotypes and issues of inequality. Basow and Rubin (1999) argue that it is mothers who teach their daughters to recognize their own agency through direct or indirect role modeling.

The girls' gaze on their mothers reveals the central importance of mothers in the lives and happiness of girls as positive examples of womanhood. The girls showed themselves attentive to gender inequalities in their mother's lives by noticing, for example, that mothers tried hard to be beautiful and to look good, but not fathers. It is noteworthy that in one movement exercise the girls were pleased to discover that they walked "just like their mothers." It was understood from their discussion that daughters could talk to their mothers about their problems. Nina felt safe enough to tell her mother "it's rare that you take care of me" to which her mother at first reacted with anger but then was "more careful" and "things [got] better." This gives credence to DeBold's (1999) idea that girls work for individuation through connection rather than through separation and "hunger for an us" (p. 193).

From another angle, Arianna invoked the idea that mothering in public would no longer be 'cool' in high school when she said, "I've warned my mother to stop kissing me in front of my friends. I like kisses but when I'm with my friends, I'm in my bubble." Although this might suggest a defensive adolescent façade, it also implies that preteens like their mother's affection but are struggling to develop their autonomy from parents.

As such, although they felt supported by their mothers, the girls kept some things “private” from them...like what transpired in the body image art workshops, for example. (I learned this from the mothers). In all of these examples, it appeared that the girls were working on issues of dependence and autonomy, and feminine identity construction with a focus on their mother.

My contact with the girls’ mothers reinforced the idea that the mothers and daughters had a working relationship. Arianna’s and Joannie’s mothers made a special point of discussing the body image art workshops with me. Both mothers showed a great deal of concern for their daughters. They talked at length about the workshops, about the girls and about the subject of body image. Arianna’s mother felt that the girls were incredibly privileged to have a body image workshop—that all girls need it. Joannie’s mother worried that I might insinuate media beauty as positive which might make her daughter feel bad. Both mothers gave me important information about their daughters that helped me better interact with the girls. I learned about Arianna’s suspicion about a friend’s abuse and Joannie’s struggles with her body image (because she felt more mature than the other girls, feared having her bra snapped and disliked her acne). In both cases, the mothers filled in the gaps where the girls did not have voice. This relates to what Deak (2002) identified as women’s “advanced relationship skills, empathy, and other tools of emotional literacy [brought] to the task of parenting” (p. 173). It also relates to mothers’ playing an active role in ensuring physical and psychological safety against stereotypes and issues of inequality. In short, the mothers expressed concern for their daughters and thereby confirmed their daughter’s portrayal of them as “caring.”

Othermothering: when bad is good.

It was intriguing that the girls did not apparently feel that they had to be stereotypically nice with me in the workshops. This resulted in teaching problems and behavioral issues that I will discuss in the next section on teaching. It may be that my ambiguous role as parent-teacher (and not quite either), in an alternative school and after-school setting, led the girls to feel free to be disobedient. Although ‘bad behavior’ was a problem, the idea that the girls did not feel pressured to be nice can also be interpreted in positive terms as a parallel between the girls’ attitudes toward their mothers and my own investment in what Debold et al. (1999) defined as “othermothering” (p. 194). This idea can be supported by the girls’ endearing insistence that I had “exactly the same watch” as their mother! One result of this kind of (unconscious) comparison may have been that the girls did not feel they had to be good to be liked or to give up their voices to be appreciated in the body images workshops.

One of the stated goals (and luxuries) of the body image art workshops was the opportunity to create a privileged environment for girls that made room for feminist othermothering. Not only did I aim to help the girls survive sexist bias but I also concentrated on making the outcome as rewarding as possible, over and above the multilayered aspects of the project. The most immediate form of othermothering was the provision of healthy snacks at the start of every workshop. I saw this as a way of marking the end of the school day and making the girls more available for learning. In response, the girls showed their understanding of motherly attention by expressing a counter-desire for junk food, “Oh, Heather, we *need* some junk food, especially on Mondays. Mondays are so hard and we need to be comforted.” When I agreed, the girls came back with more

requests, “Could you bring juice?” Isabelle asked. These examples show that the girls were acknowledging the caring dimension of teaching, but that they were also testing my limits.

Othermothering was evident in the layout of the workshops. Oftentimes, if the girls would request a change in my lesson plan and I would struggle to make room for their needs. I carefully (but rapidly) evaluated the situation and adapted my lesson to the girls, if it seemed appropriate. This happened, for example, in workshop four when the girls wanted to do movement “to relax” when I had chosen to skip it. In this case I agreed because the girls had previously acted so embarrassed with the movement in the workshops. In workshop six, I accepted the girls’ proposition to do an exercise with boundaries which resulted in a grave discussion about violence against women and sexual abuse. When I first agreed, the girls exclaimed, “Thank you, Heather, you are so nice.” (They stroked my desire to be perceived as nice, in a feminine way.) However, in workshop twelve, I refused to let the discussion about the nocturnal fears drag on and insisted we get on with the art-making. They conceded. This demonstrated the pull and take of the negotiations between the girls and me throughout the weeks, involving flexibility and limits.

It may be that the fact of offering the body image art workshops in the first place may have situated me as an othermother from the outset in the girls’ minds. Both for their timing and the topic, the workshops placed me in a position to attend to the crucible events in the girls’ lives, in a direct yet friendly way and to act as a bridge between the generations. As a result, when emotions became very strong, othermothering was demonstrated when I placed my arm around a girl because I sensed oncoming tears. The

girls were receptive to this kind of gesture which I attribute to their high level of comfort and feelings of safety.

In truth, I was able to othermother because there were only five girls in the workshops and because of the loose nature of my pedagogy and critical action research. This important fact influenced the outcome of the research. It was only during the analysis of the data that I realized that my interaction with the girls in the body image workshops was very different from my behavior in my son's class. Within the institutional format, I was focused on teaching my art lesson and I had a goal to achieve. In the research context, I was voice-oriented and open-ended, since that is what the girls chose. Admittedly, the goals of critical action research within a philosophy of fidelity to persons and an ethic of care, in addition to a feminist pedagogy, allowed me 'take in' whatever emerged from the context. Even though I had an agenda and lesson plans, I had enough latitude to 'go with the flow.' I knew that whatever transpired in the workshops would be sufficient as data, even if the girls talked a lot and produced little artwork. Furthermore, there were no exams or material that had to be covered. Had I been required to follow a curriculum, I may have been even less patient with the girls' irritating behavior like swearing, not listening, jumping about, talking all at once or throwing paint. It is easy for me to imagine myself as more prone to "yelling," like the girls' teachers.

Teaching in institutions.

Perhaps, the girls were more angry with their teachers than their mothers because the demands of school life make teachers more invested in girls being good to get their job done. In the difficult circumstances in schools, it can be imagined that when *the girls*

get bad too (meaning all the children—boys and girls), teachers have a really bad day! This finding relates to Maher and Ward's (2002) idea that "sexist assumptions and practices, enforced by gender differences and gender expectations, shape the ways we think about school, our teachers, and our children in schools" (p. 111). The fact that the girl's devoted a considerable amount of time talking about their teachers can be interpreted in light of the expectation that their teachers—women—would be nice. The girls confirmed Luttrell's (1997) notion that schools depend on "structural, but hidden reliance on *ideal*, not real, women" (p.116). Teachers are expected to be pedagogically appropriate and generally nice *at all times*. The fact that they are not, arouses anger. At the same time, the girls' discussion gave evidence of a need for the teachers to learn more about creating equity in the classroom.

Naturally not nice.

The question of girls' niceness in school stood in opposition to their behavior in the body image art workshop. Although, the girls appeared generally happy in the workshops, they were not, however, nice. They were 'mouthy,' loudly emotional and erratic. They did not sit or listen to me—or to each other--very well. It was difficult to introduce the art lessons or to look at artwork. Even so, it would be unfair to say that the girls were not nice because they were not completely obedient. Also, given the strong social current that propels girls to niceness, it is hard to know the extent to which they felt compelled to be nice with me. Indeed, they were frequently warm and friendly. It did not appear to me that they made special efforts to be nice or to have nice behavior most of the time. In feminist terms, they were *naturally not nice*.

One interpretation to the fact that the girls were not nice may be that girls in alternative schools are, to some extent, less constrained by niceness. Children in these settings rarely sit at their desks and, as such, have much more latitude for running around in the hallways and classrooms. Parents frequently participate in the classroom, and from my own experience in the 'Parent-Wednesdays,' both boys and girls profit from the lesser authority to get rowdy. My son told me that when parents came into the classroom "even the girls were bad." This comment reflects the idea that usually the boys are bad and the girls are good. It may be that in the body image workshops, my status of lesser authority permitted the girls to be out of control. I, like the other women teachers, would have preferred nice behavior because the constant negotiation was extra work. I often felt that few of my objectives got accomplished while the girls' energy and emotions were boundless and tiresome. Paradoxically, had I failed to make room for their voices in the research by enforcing niceness, I would have also missed out on important data.

Significant Silence

So far, I examined how the girls used their voices to intuit gaps in their knowledge, to understand a problem, or express how they felt about issues or people. They used their voices to work through their difficulties 'out loud' within the context of the body image art workshops. In this way, the girls practiced the power of their voices to understand and find solutions to the problems in their lives. In this section, I will analyze the places where the girls had no voice. Since the girls talked incessantly, it is conspicuous that they did not mention their relationships with fathers or the crucible events of their lives, such as sexuality and menstruation and graduating from elementary

school. These major omissions are reflective of a breach in the girls' experiences that have a significant impact on growing up female. I call this *significant silence* because these moments of silence reveal places where feminist education can play an important role in recovering and attending to voice.

Fathers.

The girls in the workshops talked 'non stop' about their lives. As described earlier, mothers were brought up frequently in the discussions. Fathers appeared as a major omission and were barely acknowledged at all. This was even more striking since three fathers regularly picked up their daughters after the workshops, twice a week. Therefore, although fathers were a strong physical presence, the girls only made two quick references to their 'dads' during the entire fifteen workshops. One example was when Joannie was so proud of her self-portrait that she said, "I can't wait to show my dad!" Another example was when the girls had hilarious fun walking like their fathers during a movement exercise. These examples give evidence that the fathers were present in the girls' lives and that they did feel affectionate toward them. However, the girls did not describe, complain or analyze their fathers. In comparison to mothers, fathers went virtually unmentioned.

It is noteworthy that none of the fathers came to talk to me about the workshops, as Joannie's and Arianna's mothers did. Not only did the father *not discuss* any of their daughters' concerns, they did not make small conversation either. They simply came into the room to pick up their daughters. Oftentimes, they would omit saying 'hello' or 'goodbye.' (Apparently they did not feel obliged to "a decent" good-bye like Arianna's

mother had expected of her). Perhaps the fathers were simply leaving the emotional caretaking of children to the women teachers and mothers as Deak (2002), Kindlon and Thompson (2000), De Bold et al (1999), the Quebec Council on Higher Education (1999) and Bouchard et al (2003) argue. This would be an example of fathers' unengagement with what Arnot (2002) calls 'domestic pedagogic work' related to puberty and sexuality-related education. Although they may have been interested in their daughters' participation in the body image art workshops, (and were apparently not against it) they did not communicate their interest. It is from this angle that I perceived what Deak (2002) identified as distance in the father-daughter relationship.

At the same time, I saw the girls interacting warmly with their dads when they left the workshops. Fathers and daughters greeted each other with smiles and put their arms around each other as they left the room. Clearly, the fathers were an important presence in the girls' lives. The fact that the girls barely acknowledged this crucial relationship reveals a significant gap...a place where girls and their fathers do not find voice. It is plausible that fathers seemed distant because of the charged emotions related to female body changes, as argued by Deak (2002). Maybe the fathers felt that their daughter's puberty was none of their business or that they were suddenly somehow out of place. It may be that the girls experienced a feeling of loss in their relationships with their fathers or estrangement, as Debold et al's (1999) research showed. As a result they turned toward their mothers to negotiate the great changes in their lives.

However, it is striking—and saddening---that the only men mentioned by the girls in the workshops were the maniacs, perverts and lurking pedophiles. This may suggest that the girls experienced confusion about the male gender in general...fathers are good,

boys are annoying and other men could be bad. Perhaps the girls were silent about their fathers as they tried to situate men on the continuum between fatherly love and sexualized danger? In any case, the fathers' absence of communication with me, in combination with the girls' lack of acknowledgment of their fathers within an inquiry about body image, invites a comparison to Kimmel's (2005) and Kindlon and Thompson's (2000) research on men. Their work links men's socialization in the stereotype of masculinity with a difficulty in practicing emotional literacy and connectedness. Perhaps, this reveals the fathers' ambivalence about female sexuality, something that the girls would be in a difficult position to comprehend or discuss.

Crucible events.

Originally, I expected to generate data about what girls knew about cultural stereotypes, how they knew it, how they evaluated what they knew, how they translated their knowledge or feelings into their lives, into their art, and finally how they described their experiences within the body image workshops. I scheduled my research to coincide with the last quarter of the school year because I knew that it would be an important time in the lives of the girls. The girls in 6th grade would be very close to graduating from elementary school, at the cusp of their preadolescent experiences and on the verge of entering the worlds of puberty, adolescence and high school. I assumed that the participants would be anticipating changes in bodies, worlds and identities and that *they would discuss these topics* with interest! I was therefore surprised at the girls' reluctance and general inability to voice the most challenging changes of their lives. The areas that

Deak (2002) defines as crucible events, such as sexuality, menstruation and changing schools, were conspicuously absent in an atmosphere of intense emotional exchange.

Sexuality.

The topic of sexuality recurred frequently in the girls' discussion but in a rather bizarre way. Nina, for example, was particularly odd with her jokes that combined sex and 'pipi-caca' talk. She said, "Guess what? I'm pregnant," followed by "I need to piss." "You do not hit a girl who wants to make love...but touch me, I want to." In this sense, sexuality was more of a provocative spectacle than a topic in its own right. It was not discussed in an open and frank manner. However, the fact that it was brought up in the context of the workshops demonstrates that eleven and twelve year old girls do talk about sex, as well as "sexism," "eroticism for your boyfriend," "pornography on the Internet", "Playboy magazines," "prostitutes," "pedophiles" and "sexual abuse." This is similar to Deak's (2002) findings that "sexual activity is part of the social conversation as early as the tween years" (p. 85).

Although it was not my goal to discuss sexuality in the workshops, I realized that the girls struggled to comprehend sexual issues through sexualized images. I knew that they did not receive any sexual education courses at their school. It appeared that much of this information came from media sources like magazines and television. From their talk, I did not get the impression that the girls had discussed sexual matters in depth with their parents. This can be linked to Robert's (2005) findings that children are relatively ignorant about sexuality and to the idea that parents often give the 'sex talks' around age thirteen which is too late (Deak, 2002; Kindlon & Thompson, 2000).

As such, I felt that the girls' jokes revealed a desire to talk about sexual matters to some extent. However, the negative interpretation of sexualized images exposed a significant gap in the girls' discussion: a positive female sexual experience. Although I did not expect to talk about such intimate issues (and did not), this seemed like a non-issue. This omission was even more striking since sexuality was described in so many ways as a 'boy's issue' or a 'boy's eroticism' enacted through clothes, comments and gaze. It may be that the girls were too shy to discuss their attraction to boys. However, this demonstrates that feminist intervention in the area of sexuality is still needed. It also refers to the complex and unresolved feminist debates over the possibility of feminine eroticism within a patriarchal system of representation.

Menarche.

The topic of menarche and menstruation is an example of a crucible event that was only briefly touched upon in the workshops but that caused the girls to react strongly. Menstruation was not part of my lesson plan, yet the topic arose spontaneously from the appreciation of La Duke's abstract and metaphorical painting of a mother giving birth. When Natasha placed her hand over the imaginary vagina and said "I don't like that bottom part." I said, "You will be turning into women and your bodies will be changing. You will have your first menstruation...maybe you can find a way to celebrate." The girls' reacted with silence as they all looked away. Isabelle was braver than the others. She turned the problem on me, by asking, "Does it bother you that we don't have our menstruation yet?" I responded by saying that menstruation was positive and that it was okay to talk about it. "You will become part of the community of women," I said.

The feelings surrounding menstruation were intense and at first the girls were very quiet. It seemed that they responded to the word menstruation with shock and perhaps embarrassment. Whatever they felt, it was unspeakable. This demonstrates that girls are sensitive to cultural stigmatization of menstruation as a shameful event struck by a strong taboo, as Fingerson (2005) argues. Their silence also shows that they were invested in what Fingerson (2005) calls the negotiation of “a private menstrual identity” and a “public menstrual identity” (p. 115). Although, the girls may not have yet undergone the profound changes that menstruation signals, they knew *that I knew* they were near. This can be seen as an important turning point related to “shifting and changing identities” (Fingerson, 2005, p. 115). By mentioning menstruation to the girls, I acknowledged the importance of the event as a landmark in women’s development, described by Deak (2002) as a complete transformation of feminine identity, involving a psychological adjustment. Fingerson (2005) argues that the stigmatization of menstruation as taboo is detrimental to women’s health, self-esteem and relationship to her body. It follows that breaking the taboo within the context of the body image workshops can be interpreted as a positive step toward accepting and enjoying female embodiment. Although it was not apparent (because they were frozen in their fears), the girls no doubt noticed my casual attitude toward the topic and my invitation to celebrate womanhood.

The brief acknowledgement of menstruation was preceded by the appreciation of artworks of large women, birthing women, women of color, working women, women with children, and prehistoric Goddesses with large stomachs and breasts. These images were shown to give the girls other models of what women could look like or be. After the

discussion of menstruation, the workshop moved on to art-making and the girls became joyous and exuberant. They laughed hysterically as they built “strong women” figures in clay (see Figures 21-25). Isabelle sprayed water on Joannie, saying, “Here you go, you Goddess of nature!” In the space of ten minutes, the girls had moved from an unspeakably voiceless state to one of great vitality and joy.

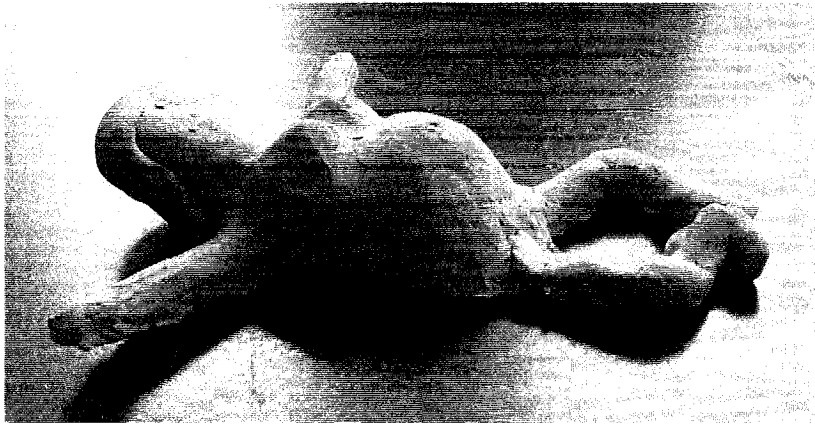


Figure 21. Isabelle’s pregnant mother figure.

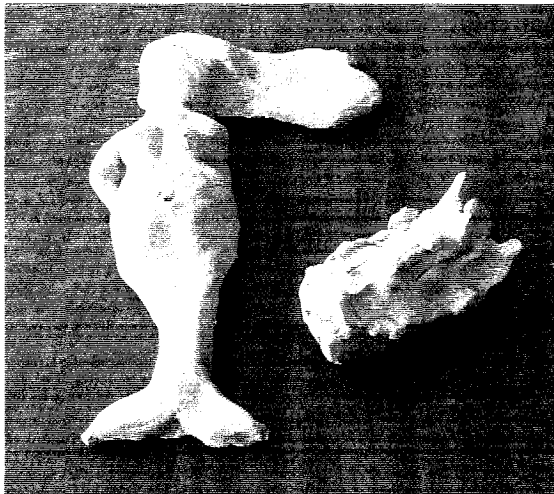


Figure 22. Natasha’s pregnant mermaid.



Figure 23. Natasha's sea creatures.

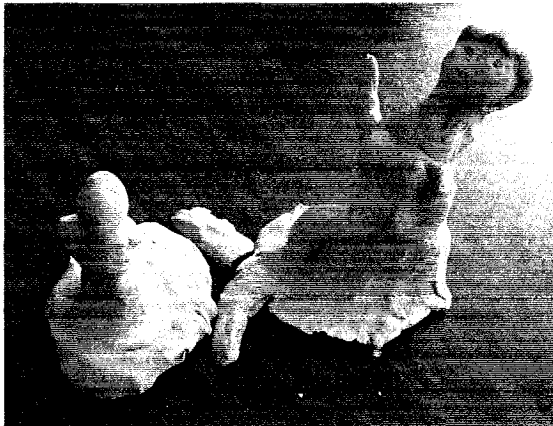


Figure 24. Joannie's Goddesses.



Figure 25. Arianna's Goddess.

It was intriguing that simply mentioning menstruation had such a powerful impact on the girls...with a slight delay. Had they heard the word positive associated with menstruation for the first time? Had I in some way helped dissipate some of the fear and mystery? Had I said more than their parents? In any case, this example points to Deak's (2002) notion that menstruation is a central event in girls' lives which transforms their identity and to their body image in profound ways. The fact that the topic evolved from a discussion of cultural rituals and myths celebrating female fertility corroborates Fingerson's (2006) argument that girls need new cultural traditions to redefine female embodied experiences in positive terms. In sum, the girls responded positively to Fine's (2004) idea that women and girls can come together to 'speak the body' through a "thin reed of biology" (p. xii). This was reflected in their art. The girls made clay women who were large and round, with breasts. Their art showed that the girls were able to imagine women who were not stereotypically thin and that it was acceptable to represent other facets of women's beauty, including the idea of pregnancy (see Figures 21-22).

The end of the school year.

Finishing elementary school was subject covered in a thick blanket of silence. Because the girls expressed such an urgent need to talk in the early workshops, it was at first perplexing that they became more quiet as time went on. In the eleventh workshop, an inkling of endings was insinuated when Arianna said that she was "stressed out for the entire month" because of "the end-of-year exams." I first mentioned the idea of changing schools and moving on to high school in the thirteenth workshop. I asked them what it felt like to finish elementary school. Isabelle quietly said, "I'm sad" and "I'm going to

miss my friends.” Arianna was tougher as she affirmed that she was happy to be leaving “all the annoying little kids in the younger grades” behind. To my suggestion that they would not be the big kids in high school, Arianna retorted “Yeah, but it will be different because *everyone* is big in high school.” In the next workshops, however they were more solemn at the prospect. Arianna said “I couldn’t care less” and Natasha said “I’m not excited *at all*” at the prospect of high school. They did *not* want to talk about it.

The discussion about high school demonstrated how eleven and twelve year old girls are caught in an uncomfortable place. This is what Deak (2002) calls ‘tweens,’ a cross of between childhood and ‘teen.’ On the one hand, there is hope that the simple fact of going to high school might confer ‘big’ status and provide new exciting challenges. On the other hand, high school itself is a big unknown environment without friends. Leaving behind the “annoying little kids” is a relief but leaving behind friends is harder. As the school year came to a close, it was increasingly difficult to talk about these changes. They went from “I’m sad” to “I couldn’t care less,” “I’m happy to be going off to high school” to “I’m not excited *at all*.” Thus the sixth grade girls moved from being very talkative to virtually silent about their lives, within fifteen workshops. This gives evidence of the enormous stress of crucible events, marking the end of the girls’ childhoods as they knew it and involving what Levine and Smolak (2002) call “synchronous stressors” (p. 75).

Conclusion.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) argue that voice is a catalyst for political resistance that builds into psychological resistance to oppression. Strong agency for self is

necessary to build self-esteem in a world that sanctions femininity while devaluing the feminine-associated at the same time. The issue of girls' niceness relates to body image in so far as it represents a vital challenge to girls' optimal development as women.

With this in mind, the girls in the body image art workshops were receptive to the invitation to practice their voices. They used their voices to find words for their experiences and to work through their difficulties 'out loud' under my guidance. Through discussion they actively worked to understand difficult issues and build their self-esteem as growing young women in developing female bodies. Similarly, their significant silence revealed places where feminist education can play an important role in recovering and attending to voice. Art was helpful in this process.

Together, words and silence combined to create a picture where girls worked to understand the truth about the world and to develop a positive female identity in resistance to cultural devaluation of the feminine. In the context of the body image workshops, the girls' needed to express their emotions about an unfair world. They chose to use their voices and did not feel pressured to be nice. Although this made the teaching difficult at times, it can be analyzed as positive in terms of a liberation from the tyranny of niceness. Hence, the issue of voice, as a strategy for feminist education, had an important impact on the outcome of the research.

Summary

This part of the analysis dealt with the concept of voice and the participants' ability to express experiences and feelings in words as a strategy for feminist education. Feminist analysis allowed for reflection on how gender structures behavior in ways that

are disadvantageous for girls. On the one hand, the girls voiced issues of injustice that affected their relationships with their teachers, related to the stereotype of girls being nice. As a result, feminine niceness stood out as a stumbling block in the girls' ability and willingness to use their voices to stand up for themselves to face conflict in school. Although they were frustrated with inequitable treatment, the girls did not challenge the idea that girls and women were inherently nice.

The body image art workshops were useful in discovering gaps in the girls' voices where the topic of body image was a catalyst for what was *not* said, for what the girls could not or would not discuss. This was viewed as *significant silence*. Changes in bodies and crucible events like changing schools and shifting relationships with their fathers represented major omissions in their discussion. What was not addressed offers insights into gaps where girls' self-esteem can be enhanced through feminist intervention and art to find voice.

Teaching Issues

Part three of this chapter analyzes the positive and negatives outcomes of the body image workshops. I look closely at the teaching context to shed light on the effects this project had on me as a teacher and researcher. Three categories are examined: successful teaching interventions, teaching struggles and constitutive reflection on the research.

Successful Teaching Interventions

The following section is devoted to analyzing the teaching interventions and tools that had a positive outcome on the body image workshops. Boundaries, movement and metaphor exercises and feminist media literacy education were successfully incorporated into the educational context as an integrative pedagogy.

Boundaries.

The notion of boundaries was a powerful catalyst for eliciting the girls' feelings about their lives and their relationships. Not only did the boundaries, as defined by Rosenberg (1985), bring issues to consciousness, they also offered as a means for containment. The girls reacted positively to the idea of "a personal space without Mommy and Papa" and affectionately labeled their boundaries "bubbles." The girls demonstrated their understanding of boundaries by describing their difficulties with their siblings who did not respect their space. Joannie said, "I don't want my brother coming into my room or taking my stuff." Natasha added, "My bubble is not respected when my parents don't keep their promises." Arianna said, "Children don't know how to get adults to respect them." These examples show how sensitive the girls were to boundary issues.

Once the girls had made a circle on the floor with a rope to define their boundary, they experimented with their comfort levels. A large boundary, for example, was too big for Arianna who felt "invaded by so much space." Isabelle, on the contrary, finally had "enough space." Small boundaries were suffocating for most who felt constricted by the lack of space. Isabelle felt "cornered," Arianna "like crying" and Natasha was "stressed." When Arianna found just the right size she said, "I feel more snug and secure like this, I

feel safe. I don't feel like crying anymore." These examples demonstrate how the use of the rope delimited a space that gave the girls concrete sensate feelings in the body and also contributed to the safe environment.

At first, the boundaries appeared to give the girls a greater sense of safety and good feelings. Then more loaded topics surfaced which led the girls to recognize the importance of boundaries and to request them more often. When I decided to skip the boundary exercise one day, Isabelle insisted, "We need to do our bubbles, we have been waiting." It is noteworthy that the notion of boundaries permeated Arianna's imagination to be projected into future situations when she said: "I've warned my mother to stop kissing me in front of my friends. I like kisses but when I'm with my friends, I'm in my bubble." In this sense, being "in my bubble" was perceived as 'cool' in front of friends and also an instrument in developing greater autonomy. Therefore the boundaries can be seen as both a metaphorical tool and a physical experience. When the girls expressed their fears of violence against women and when in the last workshop Isabelle said she felt "kind of scared about everything," I reminded them of their boundaries. Since the concept of boundaries took on such great importance in the workshops and were so readily incorporated into the girls' language, it can be presumed that boundaries were a good choice of intervention with girls of this age. This supports Totenbier's (1995) notion that girls with body image dissatisfaction benefit greatly from a better sense of personal boundaries.

Movement and metaphor.

The use of movement was instrumental in the later weeks of the workshops, by moving the girls away from a sole focus on discussion. Examples of movement exercises were: the gesture circle, different speeds of dancing and the sheet game. At first, the girls were terribly embarrassed by the movement and often acted self-conscious. I acted as an unselfconscious role model in this situation. To me, it was important that the girls use their bodies within workshops devoted to body image and images of the body, as inspired by Nikitina (2003) and Totenbier (1995). As time went on, the girls became accustomed to the movement and even requested it. “No movement?” Arianna said. “But we need it to relax.”

What made the movement more successful was the use of metaphor and play. Metaphor became a powerful force for moving beyond talk into an imaginary space of abstract thinking. The very potent workshop with the use of a sheet to create a giant wave was a good example of how movement was incorporated into play in a way that did not feel embarrassing for the girls and yet required large arm gestures. The body was used in non-self-conscious movement because of it was bound up with the image of ‘making a wave’ with the sheet. The movement and metaphor combined to create a positive experience. This can be understood in the girls’ reactions. Arianna, for example, said, “[Being under the sheet] was amazing, it felt like a cloud. It was as if I was mixing up dreams with real life...it was like a cloud going up and down....a veil, a hide-out, cocoon....I felt like a goddess.” Isabelle also felt “like a goddess.” Joannie said, “To me, it felt like drops of blue, like a cloud. It felt so good that I was thinking about all the good things that are happening in my life.” It was intriguing that Joannie added “I felt like I

was on a swing in my bathing suit.” Here she seemed to be expressing the idea that the wave made her feel at ease in her imagination...even in her bathing suit. This was significant since Natasha had cried about her ‘bathing suit problem’ only a few weeks earlier.

In the workshop following the one with the wave, the girls listened attentively to Anderson’s story of the Ugly Little Duckling. Although not explicitly stated, body image was the underlying topic of the workshop. Yet, the girls participated without resistance (and without need for discussion) in enactments of the ugly duckling who transforms into a beautiful swan. This was facilitated by the fabric (used earlier for the wave) that had been cut to give each girl a smaller piece (see Figures 26-30). Dramatic play allowed the girls to project their feelings of ugliness, imperfection or rejection that they had described verbally in the earlier workshops onto the duckling. It allowed them to experiment with an imaginary space of beauty by enacting the swan and leaving behind the gendered associations of the gaze.



Figure 26. Heather’s demonstration piece.



Figure 27. Natasha's dancing fairies.



Figure 28. Isabelle's unicorn.



Figure 29. Joannie's duckling.

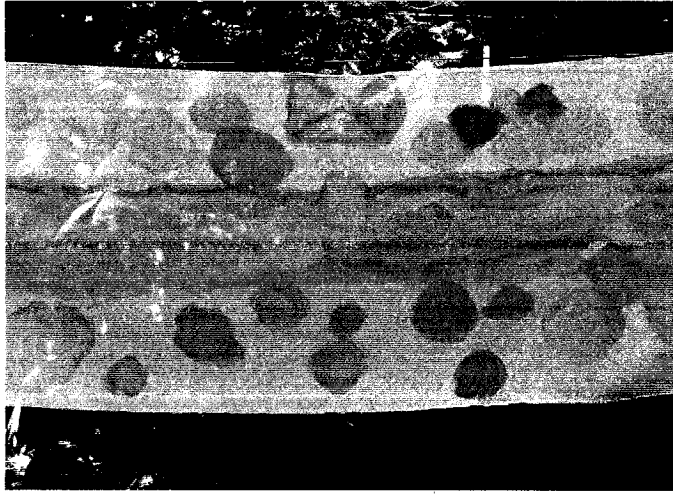


Figure 30. Arianna's flowing river.

Another poignant example of how movement and metaphor combined to offer alternative modes of thinking about body image was apparent when the I asked the girls to imitate gender roles directly. They responded by playfully imitating the macho man, their father, boys, Pamela Anderson, their mother and themselves. During the imitations Joannie said, "Boys are so funny in their loose clothes." She learned that boys "move their bodies so much." Arianna felt that "the macho man's muscles feel like a big rock" and "he's so inflexible." When imitating super-femininity and Pamela Anderson, Natasha said, "My body feels all tight when I imitate the feminine. The clothes are so tight that feel tension in by butt." Arianna and Isabelle were astounded to discover that they walked "just like [their] mother." It is noteworthy in these examples that movement and enactment became creative ways to integrate ideas and concepts about masculinity and femininity. The girls used their bodies to 'think' through movement and to discover what felt best for themselves. They then applied these ideas into their art. This was evident in

the drawing exercises devoted to using line to express abstract ideas such as: joy, sadness, anger, love, power, feminine, fear, masculine (see Figures 31-38).

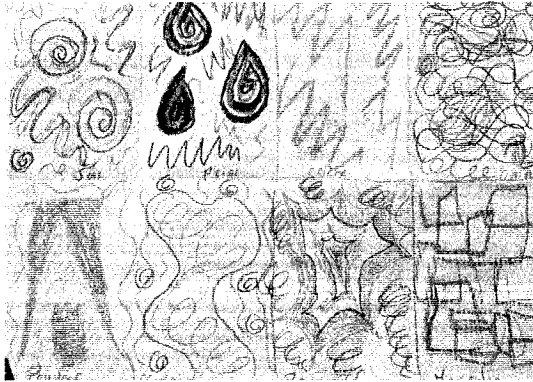


Figure 31. Isabelle's emotion drawings. From left to right: joy, fear, anger, love, power, feminine, fear, masculine.

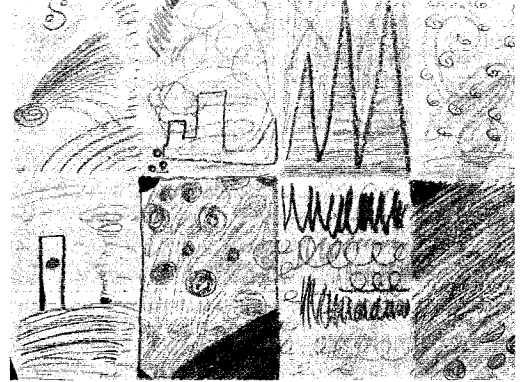


Figure 32. Natasha's emotion drawings. From left to right: joy, fear, anger, love, power, feminine, fear, masculine.

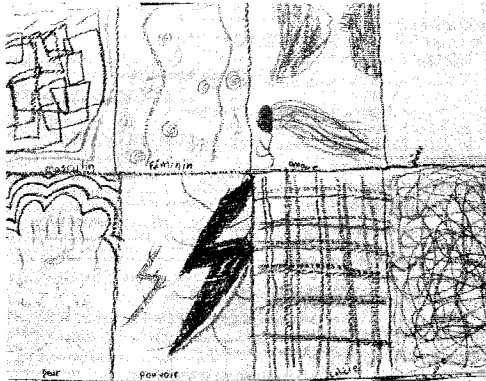


Figure 33. Joannie's emotion drawing. From left to right: masculine, feminine, love, sadness, fear, power, anger, joy

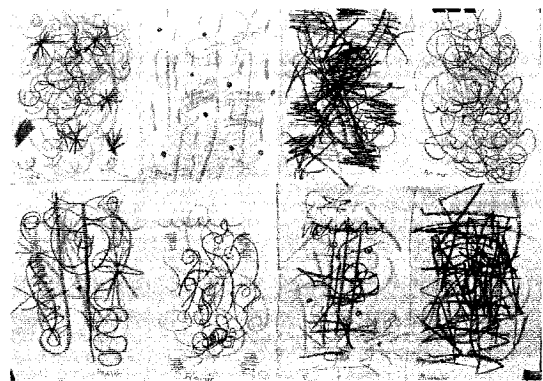


Figure 34. Arianna's emotion drawing. From left to right: joy, fear, anger, love, power, feminine, fear, masculine



Figure 35. Arianna's drawing of joy.



Figure 36. Isabelle's drawing of love.

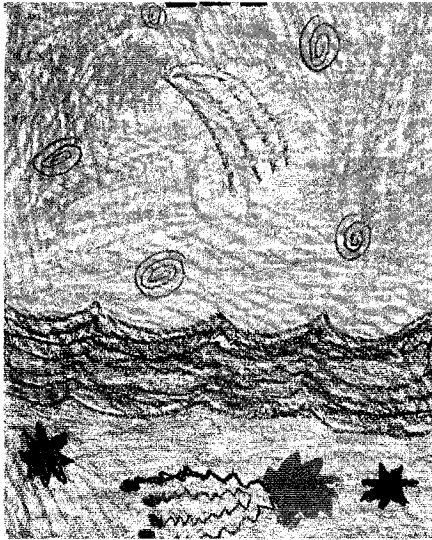


Figure 37. Joannie's drawing of sadness and joy.



Figure 38. Natasha's drawing of masculine and feminine.

In the examples above, the girls used movement as an integrative pedagogy. In other words, movement served the function of catalyzing words and ideas into creative ways. It allowed the body to be used physically, progressing from feelings of embarrassment to enjoyment over the weeks. At the same time, movement provided a bridge to art, as seen in the girls' increased involvement in art-making. Perhaps the girls learned more through movement than through talk...This supposition relates to Yamamiya et al's (2005) research on media literacy education that reveals talk-based

methods like cognitive dissonance are less effective than image-based methods. In sum, it appeared over time, as Totenbier (1995) affirmed, that movement had a positive influence on the girls' during the workshops and may have contributed to constructive feelings about the body.

Media literacy education.

Media literacy education also stood out as a significant teaching tool in the research. It was introduced in the workshops devoted to evaluating positive and negative images of women. Although stemming from feminist analysis of stereotypes, the exercise was closely modeled on the Yamamiya et al's (2005) research approach called 'Artificial Beauty' and Cohen-Evron's (2005) examples of art teachers working with 'difficult knowledge.' My exercises involved allowing the girls to choose, categorize and respond to media images freely. Media literacy education was used to help the girls become aware of the artistic and technical ways that images are manipulated. This gave them the opportunity to reread the 'messages' inherent in the images in more complex ways. This demonstrates the important role issues-based art education can play in demystifying the process of image-making and reducing its power.

In sum, the teaching interventions of boundaries, movement and metaphor and media literacy from a feminist perspective helped the girls understand reality in more abstract ways. These tools contributed to shifting the gender dynamics of niceness by developing a stronger sense of self in space through talk, play and art.

Teaching interventions in chronological order.

The following list clarifies how the teaching interventions in the body image workshops combined with the girls' reactions and needs. Viewed from this perspective, each element can be seen as playing a role in the teaching process as a building block toward a favorable outcome.

Feeling important: being part of a doctoral research project.

Feeling safe.

Having power: extra workshops.

Having space: boundaries.

Naming: expression of problems and fears

Critical learning tools: media literacy education: understanding images

Separation: a time out from the emotional intensity.

Metaphor: non-verbal learning tool. Feeling like a Goddess

Change in group dynamic: Nina drops out.

Metaphor, movement and enactment: swan/sheet Ugly Little Duckling, abstract thinking.

Crucible events: menarche. Positive associations with womanhood.

Crucible events: end of school year

Metaphor, movement and enactment: stereotypes through movement, abstract thinking.

Closure: vernissage. Feelings of pride.

As seen above, the early workshops set the tone by creating a safe environment conducive to sharing problems and discussing issues in a secluded place reserved for

especially for the girls. The concept of boundaries both aided the verbal expression while bringing it to a new dimension of feelings in the body. Feelings of safety and strength were increased while making apparent concrete feelings of insecurity which peaked with the disclosure of abuse and the reactions of shock. Media literacy education played an important role in liberating the girls from erroneous beliefs that images reflect a reality of perfection unattainable for them. The critical exercises on positive and negative images of women were an important learning breakthrough.

This was followed by two weeks of group separation that served as a time out from the strong emotions and the volatile group dynamic. During the first week of separation, three girls were on a fieldtrip which made room for one-on-one teacher-student relationships. This in turn shifted the group dynamics. In the second week, there were no workshops at all which can be seen as a 'dead point' where precious workshop time was lost. When the group was reunited, the Swan/sheet exercise marked an important turning point, as a metaphorical 'lift off' into an atmosphere more conducive to art-making, movement and play. When Nina dropped out four workshops before the end, the group dynamic was profoundly altered. There was less talking and provocation and more pleasure in learning. The girls were no longer embarrassed by movement exercises and had fun imitating the Ugly Little Ducking and the macho man and ultra-feminine stereotypes.

The acknowledgment of crucible events like menarche and the end of primary school were vital in connecting the teaching with the real lives of the students

(particularly since it was harder for them to find their voices to address their fears and concerns). Finally, the clear demarcation of the end of the workshops with a vernissage and a mini version of the entire ten weeks with artwork, boundaries, the Swan/sheet and food created a strong sense of closure which facilitated the 'good bye.' All of these elements combined to offer a positive view that the workshops were more successful than they felt to be at the time.

Type of expression over the ten weeks.

It is insightful to view the fifteen workshops in terms of the way they moved from an emphasis on verbal expression to one with increased artistic expression, over the ten weeks.

1-Verbal expression: boys. Some artistic expression.

2-Verbal expression: boys, beauty, clothes, and teachers

3-Verbal expression. Learning tools: Boundaries.

4-a) Verbal expression fear of violence, sexual violence, sexual abuse.

b) Verbal expression: positive and negative media images

5-a) Verbal expression: positive and negative media images

b) Verbal expression: learning tools: media literacy education. Understanding images.

6-Separation: a) Artistic expression: self-portraits

b) Artistic expression: self-portraits

7-Separation and loss of workshop time (dead point). Two lost workshops a) b)

8-a) Artistic expression: preparatory drawings

b) Artistic expression: painting ink on fabric

Learning tools: movement, metaphor of the Ugly Little Duckling.

9-a) Artistic expression: clay. Learning tools: art appreciation, goddesses.

b) Workshop cancelled by daycare educator

10-a) Artistic expression: drawing with pastels. Learning tools: movement stereotypes.

b) Artistic expression: vernissage. Summary and closure

Shift from verbal to artistic expression.

Careful analysis of the workshops in terms of the different uses of expression, gives evidence that the learning tools of boundaries, movement exercises and metaphor played a crucial role in increasing the level of artistic expression. The dead point, however, can be seen as central, marking a shift in the girls' attitudes and behavior before and after it. Before the dead point, the girls were mostly verbal and less invested in art-making or movement. The introduction of boundaries, although metaphorical, laid the foundation for greater personal disclosure. The girls struggled to identify how they felt about their body image and how the loaded topic was connected to gender injustice. The emotional climate related to problems of violence against women and sexual abuse led to a period of chaos. Then, because of external circumstances, three of the girls missed four workshops and two girls missed two workshops. This had the effect of diffusing the emotional climate and allowing the girls to reinvest in the body image workshops in a positive way upon their return.

The last six workshops became significant for art-making as the girls moved away from being verbal after the dead point. Instead, they participated more freely in the metaphorical and artistic dimensions. They also seemed to be ‘digesting’ the earlier material as they gave evidence in their discussion of having integrated feminist ideas and concepts in a more playful way through imitation, enactment and art. It may be that the girls embraced the non-verbal components of the workshops more gracefully toward the end because of the difficulty in expressing charged emotions about saying ‘good-bye’ to friends to move on to high school. Whatever the reasons, from the perspective of teaching, it was satisfying for me to discover through reflection that the girls did invest in art-making and seemed to profit from the workshops in general.

Teaching Struggles

Although the body image art workshops had successful outcomes, the student’s behavior often made the process of teaching difficult. In this section, I will look at the problems of bad behavior, strong emotions and insufficient time allotted to art-making. These issues stood out as barriers to teaching from an issues-based approach. Although the topics are interrelated in many ways, I will describe their impacts on the teaching context individually.

Bad behavior.

Unruly behavior stood out as the most challenging aspect of the issues-based teaching project. It was one of the most draining aspects of the teaching, in addition to the verbosity and strong emotions that were problematic in most workshops. In every class,

there were frequent struggles when the girls did not listen, jumped up, pestered each other, threw water or paint, refused to clean up, would not leave, talked like crazy, had uncontrolled giggling or did not finish on time. Behavior struggles were especially strong during moments of transition from one activity to another. The girls profited from gaps in the teaching to unleash their boundless energy, be wild, silly and energetic some days and restless, erratic and chaotic on others. The girls often tested my limits and pushed my patience. They were what Deak (2002) refers to as the “terrible T’s: terrific, turbulent, and trying” (p. 70). As a teacher, this made me feel exhausted, which is reminiscent of research on teaching stress by Greenberg (1982), Kottler and Zehm (2000), Dunham (1992) and Soares (2003).

Strong emotions.

Closely related to behavior difficulties were the strong emotions aroused by the topic of body image. The girls came into the workshops with what appeared to be prior pent up frustrations. The moment they set foot in the classroom, they were ready to explode. Not only did the girls show an intense urgency to talk, but their heavy subject matter, related to violence against women or body dissatisfaction, sometimes led to tears. Their emotions influenced their behavior in a variety of other ways as well, ranging from giggling, making jokes, running around or being unkind to each other or crying.

These behaviors did not fit well with class organization or the good functioning of my lesson plans. It was especially difficult for me to teach the material I had prepared when someone was crying. I felt it to be my responsibility to attend to real life issues. At the same time, I often experienced frustration in regards to the lack of time devoted to art.

As a result, I noted that in almost every class, the students' strong emotions, if not the topics of their discussion or their length, aroused my frustration. As Cole and Walker (1989) point out, experiences of stress like these led to feelings of anger, which in turn, affected the group dynamic.

Not enough art.

The short amount of time devoted to art-making was a central source of frustration during the body image workshops. I viewed the lack of art-making as the greatest drawback of the emergent research design. Although I believed in the issues-based feminist project, I often felt that I was sacrificing the most crucial components of my teaching expertise. In the day-to-day reality of teaching, I felt frustrated by the emphasis on talk. Not only did I spend a significant amount of time preparing for art teaching but I often carried art books and art materials to class that went unused. Notwithstanding the positive outcomes of the girls' discussion--including encouraging the girls to use their voices as a feminist strategy--by the end of the research I was disappointed with the small quantity of artwork produced.

In my original unit plan, I had allotted half an hour for discussion, twenty minutes for movement and one hour for art-making. In the actual workshops, the girls prolonged the discussion over an *hour*, oftentimes an hour and a half. I allowed this to happen because the emotional climate was strong and it was difficult to truncate discussions to move on to art-making. This teaching decision resulted in the girl's producing only six pieces of art during (what turned out to be) fifteen workshops. This was considerably less than the ten or eleven artworks I expected. Thus the emphasis on talk took precedence

over art. This finding supports Smith's (2003) argument that issues-based approaches are "inherently talk-oriented" (p.7). Also, the focus on discussion rendered the art-making a passive approach to critical issues, from Cohen-Evron's (2005) perspective. The lack of art was a problem in the body image workshops, and from an art teaching perspective, it was a source of disappointment.

Unfamiliarity with art.

Another difficulty was that the girls were unfamiliar with art appreciation. This was a stumbling block when trying to offer alternative images of women, as all art images seemed very foreign. Efland (2004) contends that:

If a student's horizons are limited to the aesthetically familiar, then growth in understanding should require aesthetic experience with the less familiar, with art that challenges one's tolerance for complexity and ambiguity, with art that tells other stories about people and issues that lie outside the range of everyday familiarity. (p. 245)

Indeed more time was needed for the girls to become more familiar with art, yet this was not possible in the body image art workshops due to the discussions. The unfamiliarity with art made the theories of feminist art and feminist art education, as described in Chapter Two, too complex. The girls' inability to interact meaningfully with art supports Efland's (2004) argument that young people today are already so invested visual culture that more investment with it, within art education, necessarily takes away from learning about artists and art.

In sum, teaching struggles were inherent to the teaching process. The problems of bad behavior, strong emotions in addition to insufficient time allotted to art-making stood out as blocks in the day-to-day context of teaching of about body image. However, in

light of the positive outcomes, the workshops were overall more successful than they appeared at the time.

Constitutive Reflection

This last section deals with constitutive reflection on the research. First, I make tentative conclusions about the success of the workshops based on the girls' expression of appreciation and their favorable predisposition to feminism. Second, I explore the dilemma within issues-based art education involving introducing students to oppression while also containing their reactions.

Girls' appreciation of the workshops.

Tentative conclusions about the success of the workshops can be assessed from the girls' comments throughout the weeks. From the very start, they "felt very lucky" to be in the workshops and seemed happy to attend. They felt so privileged, in fact, that they requested more workshops: two per week instead of only one. I sensed that the girls liked the workshops, but their behavior at times prevented me from knowing this for sure. Confirmation of positive feelings about the workshops came from informal feedback when three of the girls went off on a fieldtrip. Arianna told me, "I really like this group of girls" and Joannie said, "It's really fun to come here." When Isabelle got into a fight with her daycare educator, Isabelle said that the body image workshops were "the most important thing in her life!" She told me that "a doctorate was more important than a stupid play." And Joannie told me that she felt "stressed out" to have missed a workshop. When Isabelle made a self-portrait at home and Joannie worried that I lost her drawing,

both girls expressed the idea that it was really important to them that these drawings be included in the research (see Figures 18 and 20). These examples demonstrate the extent to which participating in doctoral research was significant and that the girls did not take the workshops for granted. Their spontaneous expression of appreciation seemed sincere and presumably not a façade to be nice.

Other confirmations of the girls' appreciation were evident when the girls tried to negotiate future body image workshops, at the end of the school year. Yet, the most significant sign of appreciation came from Natasha, who, in the last workshop said, "You know, I am really happy. I think it's worth it to be proud of ourselves for our work in these workshops." This comment signals a recognition that the workshops were meaningful. The choice of the word 'work' indicates that it was not necessarily easy or straightforward. It was not just play and Natasha was both proud and happy. In the last workshop, the girls insisted that I go under the sheet so I could feel "like a goddess" like them. This was a caring gesture that also gave them power. Their motion eased the last workshop to its natural end, by completing the circle. Thus, the workshops were assessed as meaningful to the participants. This supports Basow and Rubin (1999), Debold et al (1999), Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Larkin and Rice (2005) whose studies showed that feminist education contributes to girls' greater self-esteem and positive self-image.

Favorable predispositions: girls as feminists?

It might be wondered how come the girls so easily connected the topic of body image to feminist issues of gender equality, especially since the discussions in the workshops were typically non-directive. One possibility is that the information given to

the parents about the doctoral research was communicated to the girls (see Appendix 2), which in turn encouraged a positive predisposition toward feminism. Although the word feminism was not mentioned, the girls often expressed feminist ideas. Either they had prior exposure to feminism from their parents or they had been immersed in the cultural climate created by feminism that has permeated the media to *some* extent, as evident in the popularity of books about girls like Piper's (1994) *Reviving Ophelia*, in the Girl Power movement (however limited) or in women's magazines, as Taft (2004) and Harris (2004) contend. Baumgardner and Richards (2005) argue that young girls are imbued with feminism whether they appropriate the word 'feminist' or not.

Analysis of the data shows that liberal feminist ideas ran through most of the discussions in the workshops. The girls believed, for example, that women deserved the same social status as men (and girls with boys). Anything less than full gender equality--on the same terms--was viewed as discriminatory and unfair. Thus, the girls who participated in the research were already aware and critical of social injustices before entering the workshops. They did not put up resistance to learning more about gender oppression, which indicates that young girls aged eleven and twelve are critical of, and not completely fixed in, stereotypical roles.

The girls entered the workshops with the knowledge that there were injustices 'out there.' At the end of the workshops, it seemed that they understood that injustices were in their lives as well...in their relationships, in school, in their self-perception. The discovery of the pervasiveness of gender injustice was an eye-opener for them. Yet it did not break their spirits. Instead, it confirmed some of their experiences that defied logic (like rewarding boys for bad behavior) and helped them let go unrealistic hopes about the

world. Moments of equity could be seen in some of the comments the girls made during the workshops and a general attitude favorable to unveiling sexism. This was most evident, for example, when Arianna said, “When you look at reality, girls are not equal. Things are really not fair.” This comment implies a prior social belief, or a Girl Power belief as Taft (2004) asserts, that gender equality has been achieved. By looking at ‘reality’ in the context of the body image workshops, however, Arianna realized that girls are not equal and “things are really not fair.” Since she made this remark in the fourteenth workshop, it carries added emphasis as a concluding realization that she had perhaps begun to give up the secret hope that maybe things will get fair ‘out there.’ Her statement, and the way she said it, are indications of greater resistance and determination for equality. In another workshop, Natasha reacted strongly to the Chinese symbol of the Yin-Yang. She was determined to draw a new shape that would make *both* the masculine and the feminine “negative” (see Figure 39). In both these examples, the girls were actively working on letting go of romantic ideals. They struggled to formulate more truthful understandings of reality...beyond stereotypes.

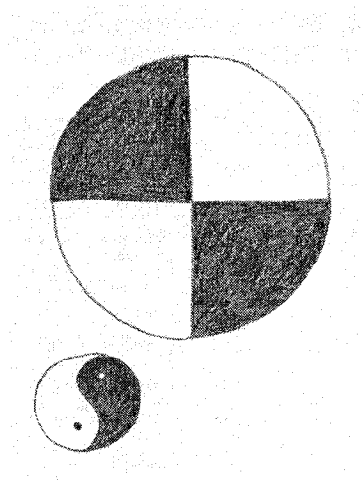


Figure 39. Natasha's equitable Yin-Yang symbol.

It can be argued that the girls, like society in general, need to be educated into feminism in a way that parallels the history of feminist thought. That is, first the girls grapple with the basics of liberal feminism, then gradually expose themselves to more sophisticated feminist arguments about female identity construction (involving intersections of race, class, sexual orientation and more). By learning about the various strains of feminist ideas, such as Marxist, psychoanalytic, ecofeminist, postmodern, and embodiment feminisms, girls open their horizons to an even wider span of intellectual thought (Toupin, 1997; Davis, 1997).

The body image workshops served as an introduction to feminist thought. By sharing their problems of negative body image and conflicts about beauty in the context of an all girls group, the girls seemed to understand that women's oppression was a *collective* experience manifest in their *personal* lives. Recognition of a shared collective reality based on gender, more than any other factor, may have contributed to the girls' greater resistance to oppression.

The central dilemma in the issues-based approach.

What became apparent in the body image workshops was a central dilemma that involved a balancing act between teaching about oppression and containing the participants' reactions to the discovery of their oppression. As such, the topic of body image invited personal soul-searching and reflections on experience, yet the educational context stood in the way of adequately addressing the students' emotional reactions. Nina's disclosure of sexual abuse made apparent these contradictions in the aims of the body image workshops.

Although it can be tentatively assessed that some girls in the body image workshops worked on building resistance to oppression by using their voices, this cannot be assessed in Nina's case. The safe atmosphere led the girls to talk about their fears of pedophiles, maniacs, lurking child abusers and kidnappers. It also triggered Nina's past memories of molestation. It was difficult to help Nina deal with her feelings because the other girls reacted with shock. Although the workshops solicited difficult experiences, the educational context stood in the way of an appropriate response. Since Nina dropped out of the workshops, it is hard to ascertain how she dealt with her experience. It is also impossible to know if the other girls in the workshops kept Nina's "secret" or if she was taunted outside of the workshops.

Nina's story reveals a paradox in the issues-based approach to art education. Although knowledge of oppression is necessary to build resistance, it is not enough in the case of abuse, which is also related to oppression. When and where should teachers draw the line? At the same time, teachers must be careful not to silence the voices they seek to empower, as Garber (2005) argues. Was Nina silenced in the body image workshops?

As a concluding thought, it can be affirmed that the after-school context was for a good choice for the body image workshops. Had the workshops been conducted in Nina's class, for example, she probably would not have discussed the abuse. Instead she might have suffered her memories in silence without the option to withdraw when her feelings became too intense. This research project demonstrated that applying issues-based art education within schools is a difficult task and that oppression is multifaceted.

Summary of Chapter 5.

This chapter analyzed the findings of the action research. It was divided into four major parts. Part one focused on the participants' reactions to the art education workshops in terms of their feelings about their body image. It was argued that although body image dissatisfaction was influenced by media images, it appeared that the girls' most immediate problem involved body-based harassment by boys in school.

Part two analyzed the concept of voice in terms of girls' ability to express themselves. It was discovered that the cultural injunction and stereotype that 'girls are nice' was a major stumbling block that involved self-silencing strategies that did not always confer privileges. Overall, it appeared that the girls perceived the body image workshops as a vehicle for practicing their voices to address issues of gender inequity. However, significant silence related to important life changes also offered insights into gaps where girls' self-esteem could be enhanced through feminist art education to find voice.

Part three focused on teaching from an issues-based approach to art education, inspired by feminist theory and pedagogy. Successful outcomes of the research were analyzed, particularly teaching interventions and tools. Boundaries, metaphor and movement exercises and feminist media literacy education were reviewed to understand the role they played in encouraging the girls to make art on the topic of body image. Teaching struggles such as bad behavior, strong emotions, group dynamics, and insufficient time allotted to art-making were explored to shed light on the difficulties that arose during the body image workshops. The chapter concludes with constitutive reflection on research. First, it examined tentative conclusions about the success of the

workshops based on the girls' expression of appreciation and their favorable predisposition to feminism. Then it explored the dilemma within the issues-based approach of introducing children to issues of oppression while also dealing responsibly with their strong reactions.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

This chapter presents the important conclusions drawn from the analysis in Chapter Five. I begin by answering the research questions. Then, I discuss the implications for action while also making some recommendations for further research in art education. The thesis concludes with my personal insights that involve a more moderate perspective on issues-based art education

Answering the Research Questions

Although Chapter Five presented the major findings related to the literature and offered in-depth interpretation and analysis, I will now more narrowly answer each research question individually.

1-Can art assist adolescent girls in resisting cultural messages that lead to dissatisfaction with their bodies?

To answer this first question it must first be established that the participants of the research did express dissatisfaction with their bodies. The analysis revealed that they interpreted and integrated cultural messages about women which resulted in ambivalent feelings about growing up female. The girls primarily perceived body image as ‘a boy thing’ and dissatisfaction with their bodies was viewed *as the result* of boys’ harassing comments. It appeared as if the boys looked at the girls, who then self-consciously looked at themselves. The girls viewed media images as primarily responsible for shaping boys’ reactions to girls in real life. It was also demonstrated that the girls themselves were

affected by media images of thin-and-beautiful women through a process of negative comparison which led to dissatisfaction and tears. These findings corroborate other feminist studies in art and in psychology demonstrating that representations of women influence girls' in their body image perception in negative ways. Harassment, idealized/sexualized images of women and ingrained notions about girls' and women's nature combined to create powerful blocks to seeing womanhood in positive terms.

Art education was shown to hold potential as tool for resisting negative body image. Media literacy education helped the girls understand that images did not represent reality (or the natural order) but instead were constructed by artists and photographers who had learned the male gaze. New knowledge allowed the girls to reread the 'messages' inherent in the images in more complex ways. This demonstrates the important role art education can play in demystifying the process of image-making and reducing its power. Overall, feminist resistance to cultural messages was primarily the result of the girls using the workshops to defend themselves against devaluation and loss of self-esteem. Art played a role in this process but it was secondary to developing 'voice.'

2-Can art contribute to a positive self image?

Question two interrogates the relationship between art and a positive self image. It was found in the research that the girls had little familiarity with art in general. This was a stumbling block when introducing feminist artists because the research participants did not have enough art knowledge to see other non-media, feminist images as positive. The long emotional discussions interfered with meaningful or sustained art-making that

was planned in the research as a means for personal agency. This demonstrates that Smith (2003) is right in arguing that issues-based teaching is “inherently talk-oriented” (p. 7). Focusing on issues within the body image workshops reduced the total amount of time devoted to art, as Efland (2004) pointed out. This was problematic in the Quebec educational context where the participants had little access to art in their school.

One moment in the study worth considering, when evaluating art’s potential for contributing positively to girls’ body image, was in the workshop devoted to viewing images of women’s varied body shapes, sizes and colors. The girls responded positively to images of prehistoric Goddesses, Saint-Phalle’s sculptures of large women and Betty La Duke’s women of color. In the art-making session, they worked on “sturdy women” in clay. In a subsequent lesson, two of the girls said that they “felt like a goddess,” after a movement exercise that consisted of making a wave with a sheet. Joannie said, “To me, it felt like drops of blue, like a cloud. It felt so good that I was thinking about all the good things that are happening in my life.” It was intriguing that Joannie added “I felt like I was on a swing in my bathing suit.” These examples show how the girls were using art to think about stereotypes and while focusing on pleasurable feelings and not just ‘looks.’ Art contributed to shifting gender dynamics by helping the girls develop a stronger sense of self in space through talk, play and art.

These findings give credence to the idea that art *could have* potential for contributing to girls’ positive body image but needs further verification. Overall, the art education workshops provided alternative modes of thinking about body image and representation of women’s bodies.

3-What effect does issues-based art education have on students, teachers and curriculum planning?

This third question focuses on the effects of issues-based art education as observed in practice in the body image art workshops. To answer concisely, I will describe the varied effects on students, teachers and curriculum planning in separate categories.

The participants' reactions.

It was shown in the research that the girls were affected by issues-based art education in different ways, which included emotional and intellectual effects. It was determined that the participants had prior pent up frustrations relative to their gendered experiences of inequality. As such, they entered the research context with strong emotions and the expectation to use the body image art workshops to express their qualms. They appeared to have a favorable predisposition to feminism. From a feminist perspective, they used their voices to combat self-silencing and denial of gender inequity. The opportunity for an 'all girls' group on body image—especially doctoral research--was *in itself* a catalyst for growth and an empowering event for the girls. Therefore, the first and foremost effect of the body image workshops involved a special place for girls that carried an extra mark of distinction as higher education that elicited pride in girls and women's achievement.

In the day-to-day reality of teaching, the issues-based workshops had a wide range of effects on the girls. These effects were largely emotional as the participants confronted issues of women's oppression. Their reactions were multiple and complex

varying between frustration, anger, fear, sadness, joy, excitement, appreciation and more. Although the workshops were planned and conceived of in light of the feminist topic of body image, it was the girls themselves who brought difficult material for discussion. In this sense, the underlying issue of oppression was not taught in any direct way, but flowed through the participants' discussions of issues that affect women under patriarchy: sexual harassment, gender bias in the classroom, stereotypical expectations of girls, pressures to conform to media images, violence against women, and more. The girls' emotional reactions to learning about oppression often resulted in unruly behavior and 'acting out' in the classroom.

At the same time, there were intellectual effects of the workshops, apparent in the girls' discussions as time wore on. These effects can be attributed to gaining more knowledge about the larger social world, moving the girls from a vague place where they had *personal impressions* of gender injustice to the realization that other girls also shared similar experiences. This helped to consolidate the idea that girls were *collectively* oppressed, although this was manifest in their personal lives. From a feminist perspective, this 'consciousness-raising' included letting go of false ideas about 'reality' *out there* and the perception that gender equality has already been achieved. In this sense, the effects of the body image workshops included the girls' more conscious and realistic stance that 'girls are not equal.' This is viewed as a positive effect in terms of preparing girls to resist oppression by maintaining self-esteem *in here* in a world that devaluates the feminine while inculcating stereotypes of femininity.

The teacher's reaction.

The analysis demonstrated that there were many positive effects of the body image art workshops on the students. This was in part due to a progression within the teaching that moved from an emphasis on verbal expression to one with more art-making. Increased movement and art-making coincided with an indication of the girls' greater feminist consciousness which is linked to resistance to oppression. The teaching nevertheless remained difficult and frustrating throughout. Bad behavior, strong emotions, a volatile group dynamic and insufficient time allotted to art-making stood out as powerful barriers to an enjoyable teaching process.

As the teacher, I felt exhausted which made me worried that I was not achieving my research goals of social justice through feminist education. This was a source of discouragement that would not have been overcome had it not been for subsequent reflection and analysis of the research.

Curriculum planning.

The body image workshops were planned and organized according to a unit plan and to detailed lesson plans. Although the format was relatively loose in accordance with the needs of the qualitative emergent research design, there were goals to be accomplished, information to be learned, artists to be introduced and art-making to be done. The execution of my lesson plans was difficult due to the participants' reactions to the topic of body image. In every workshop, I was forced to relinquish some aspect of my plan, often the art appreciation component and sometimes the art-making.

The issues-based approach to art education had the effect of making it necessary to spend significant amounts of time discussing and dealing with issues of oppression at the expense of other curricular activities. The flexibility of the approach made it pedagogically possible for the girls to attune the teaching and learning to their needs. It is unfortunate that this also meant a reduction of time allotted to art-making and to the evaluation of feminist art, key elements in the research.

4-What tools can the art educator learn to adequately cope with student's emotional reactions to new self-knowledge or notions of oppression, in order to move them toward a positive space of empowerment and change?

This question refers to the original assumption that some educational tools would be useful for assisting a teacher in directing an issues-based art project. It was discovered in the research that some teaching tools were effective in moving the participants toward integrating ideas and concepts that could lead to a positive space of empowerment and change. These are related to using movement and metaphor in the classroom.

Movement.

Movement was instrumental in moving the girls away from a sole focus on discussion in the workshops. The girls were at first quite uncomfortable and embarrassed by movement exercises in the early weeks. As time went on, they participated more readily in dancing, stretching and gesture games. Since the movement was non-verbal, it served to mark the end of the discussion period and to signal the beginning of the art-making period, even though movement itself also took time away from the art component.

Metaphor.

What made the movement more interesting was the use of metaphor. This was apparent when the girls imagined that a sheet was a giant wave, when they imitated a swan or when they enacted stereotypes of the masculine and the feminine. It seemed that the girls integrated important concepts about gender roles by thinking through their bodies. I would recommend using movement and metaphor for teaching from an issues-based approach as an integrative pedagogy.

The concept of tracing boundaries with a rope was introduced into the teaching as a metaphor for personal space. This was meant to encourage the girls to feel their bodies and to give them a personal sense of their power. Although this undeniably led to important data, the boundary exercises stirred profound reactions. At times they encouraged more verbal disclosure of personal events that were difficult to contain in the educational context and diminished time for art-making. The metaphorical dimension of boundaries remains important, central to the issues-based feminist goals of empowerment. I remain however hesitant and cautious about recommending this approach in the educational context, since feelings of safety within boundaries led one of the participants to disclose her experience of sexual molestation.

Implications and Recommendations

To bring this study to a close, I will discuss the implications for action while also making some recommendations for further research in art education. I conclude with my personal insights that involve a more moderate perspective on issues-based art education.

Implications for Action in Art Education

This research project focused on the topic of body image and the implementation of issues-based art education. The findings outlined here suggest implications for art education.

First, it should be considered essential to increase the amount of time allotted to art-making in any issues-based program. Although discussion is a necessary component for teaching issues-based art education, it is vital to maximize students' exposure to art and opportunities for art-making in a world that already trivializes art learning. Second, critical analysis of media and art images of women's bodies is needed in art education, now more than ever. This is especially true in the context where young girls feel pressured to look sexy and to engage in precocious sexual activity. Media images need to be deconstructed in light of the way they reproduce the gendered gaze that influences the way boys see girls which can be translated into sexual harassment in the schools. Third, there is a need for greater teacher-training to address issues of equity between the genders in the classroom and in teacher-student interactions. Fourth, teachers and administrators need to be trained for combating sexual harassment and reporting sexual abuse. In Quebec, the Minister of Education has specific programs already organized for this purpose (see www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/cond-fem/form_pers_scol.htm).

The fifth implication for art education revolves around the idea that issues-based art education should not be taught in teacher-training programs until the practical considerations have been adequately researched. Similarly, it should not be expected that art teachers shoulder the difficulties of issues-based art education in isolation, as Garber (2005) also acknowledges. One solution is that issues-based art education be taught by a

team of teachers, perhaps in combination with psychologists and social workers. The art teacher could then focus on art education for social change and the psychologist could lead a group therapy setting. This would diminish the individual teacher's stress level and help balance the ethical responsibilities related to dealing with the traumas of oppression. At the same time, working with other professionals might reduce personal feelings of frustration which are exacerbated by structural inequities in schools. Finally, the sixth and last implication for action is the need for more alternative forms of art education to create spaces for girls and rituals for celebrating embodied womanhood.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations for further research are suggested. First, it was revealed in the research that boys contributed to oppression by following the cultural current of male dominance. As Kimmel's (2005) work on boys demonstrates, there is a great divide between the lived experiences of boys and girls, men and women in our society. Kimmel compares the responses of a group of high school students to the question 'what are you the most afraid of?' The girls answered that they were afraid of being assaulted, raped and killed. The boys said that they were afraid of being laughed at (Kimmel, 2005). This demonstrates that boys and girls live in completely different embodied realities. Although gender differences like these are structural and related to pre-established power positions, boys can become more conscious of their participation in gender oppression. It is therefore recommended, as Imms (2003) has also suggested, that more research in art education be devoted to *boy's studies* to understand how boys can be educated to promote equity.

It is also recommended that longitudinal studies be devoted to girl studies in art education. It would be fascinating, for example, to follow a group of girls from pre-puberty to young adulthood with a larger sample, as Brown and Gilligan (1992) did with the Laurel/Harvard project. Also, the topic of body image should be narrowed because it is far too vast, similar to doing research on 'what is a girl.' One suggestion is to investigate body image from the angle of fashion or dance while making comparisons and parallels to art. Finally, I also recommend team research between the fields of art education and psychology so as to let art educators focus on their competence of teaching art, while letting the psychologists deal with appropriate interventions for maintaining students' healthy psyches.

Ideas About What Girls Need.

The feminist research on girls' body image triggered reflection on what girls need to survive the cultural bias and dangers of patriarchy. These are:

- 1-Spaces for girls only, special spaces like the body image art workshops
- 2-Feminist education and consciousness-raising skills
- 3-Self-defense courses
- 4-Sexual education, understanding puberty, combating peer pressure
- 5-Rituals for celebrating womanhood
- 6-Othermothers, people who understand and value the gender specific needs of girls
- 7-Role models of women and women's herstory.

Concluding remarks.

I now conclude the thesis with my personal insights that involve a more moderate perspective on issues-based art education. I reaffirm that the research was successful as feminist education and less successful as art education. This appraisal is in both cases based on the participants' difficult behavior aroused by the context and the topic of body image.

On the one hand, the girls' 'bad behavior' was viewed as positive in terms of a representation that girls are not 'naturally' nice. Reflection on the issue of 'girl's niceness' made me realize that as a feminist educator working to promote gender equity, I sometimes subverted my own goals through unexamined teaching practices. I discovered that one unconscious way of negotiating the stresses of teaching is to encourage (and sometimes force) girls to be nice. Therefore, it is viewed as positive that the participants in the research felt safe enough within the body image workshops to resist acting in ways that are stereotypical for girls and profited from the possibility of using their voices.

Paradoxically, the girls' 'not niceness' constituted the greatest difficulty in the teaching process which also prevented art appreciation and art-making. This was compounded by the girls' general unfamiliarity with art and made me realize that as critical as I am of the Canon of Art for its hierarchical, elitist and gender-biased practices, I also think it is regrettable *not* to know about art or aesthetic practices *at all*. I discovered that it is dubious to sacrifice art when the goal is to encourage girls to make *more* art and to potentially become artists. Therefore, the lack of art in the workshops was problematic.

It is for these reasons that I view the outcome of the research as both successful as feminist education and less successful as art education.

Finally, this study helped me to understand that teaching for social justice through the issues-based approach to art education is multilayered and not straightforward. I was reminded of this a few weeks ago during an evening event at my children's school, which was also the research site. At the front of the room, I saw a tall curvaceous teenager with long hair, dressed in tight pink sweat clothes. I realized that it was Natasha. She had come to see her younger sister participate in a school play. As I contemplated this teenager from the distance, I remembered how outraged she had been at the idealized/sexualized images of women. Two years had passed since the day she cried in the body image workshops because 'she would never be perfect.' Now I wondered if she was more confident in her beauty or more pressured to conform.

Teachers involved in the pursuit of feminist social justice can often feel like a salmon swimming upstream. The cultural current is so strong that the effort required to be combative and resistant is not possible at all times. Occasionally, there is some slipping back. Seeing Natasha reminded me of the patience necessary for promoting gender equity because there is no immediate gratification or certainty about the outcome. Change is a slow process whose long-term benefits might not be apparent in the present, if ever. Specialized training and experienced teaching will never be enough to solve the deep problems related to systems of oppression. Facing one's own oppression as a teacher or the oppression of students is enormously complex.

To conclude, I still believe that the goals of issues-based art education are meaningful and necessary. More work needs to be done to discover practical ways of

making it succeed in classrooms to offer teachers more realistic structures of support. I therefore retain a moderate position and believe that individual teachers should willingly choose to embark on projects like this one on girls' body image, in full awareness of the difficulties that lie ahead.



Figure 40. Image taken from a fashion magazine for girls, 2004.

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APPENDIX 1

Statistics Canada (2003)

Canadian Statistics on Violence against Women

Internet source: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/85-224-XIE/85-224-XIE03000.pdf>

- Half of Canadian women (51%) have been victims of at least one act of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16.
- Of all victims of crimes against the person in 2000, females made up the vast majority of victims of sexual assaults (86%), criminal harassment (78%) and kidnapping/hostage-taking or abduction (67%).
- Women are much more likely to be victimized by someone they know than by a stranger. In 2000, 77% of all female victims were victimized by someone they know (37% by a close friend or an acquaintance, 29% by a current or past partner, 11% by other family members - including parents) while 19% were victimized by a stranger.
- In 2000, 27,154 sexual offences were reported in Canada, including 24,049 sexual assaults and 3,105 other types of sexual offence (such as sexual touching, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, incest, sodomy and bestiality). Women made up the vast majority of victims of sexual assault (86%) and other types of sexual offences (78%).

Age and gender of victims

- In 2000, the majority (54%) of female victims of sexual assault were under age 18 (20% were under age 12 and 34% were from 12 to 17 years old).
-
- Of the 15,000 sexual assaults reported by the 122 police services, 61% of victims were aged 17 and under. About four-fifths of these victims were girls, and more than two-thirds of these females were between 11 and 17 years old.
-
- Adult women aged 18 and over accounted for 45% of the female victims. With regard to other type of sexual offences, 43% of female victims were under age 12, 40% were from 12 to 17 years old, and 16% were adults.

Relation to offenders

- In 2000, 40% of female victims of sexual assault were assaulted by a friend or casual acquaintance, 23% by a stranger and 23% by a family member (including a spouse or ex-spouse).

Criminal Harassment (stalking)

- Over three-quarters (77%) of reported victims of criminal harassment in 2000 were women.
- Almost nine in ten (88%) female victims in 2000 were stalked by men.
- While one in five women (21%) were stalked by men who were casual acquaintances, most women were stalked by men with whom they had been in previous intimate relationships, usually an ex-husband or ex-boyfriend (60%). Four percent (4%) of women were stalked by current partners.

Spousal violence

- Of the almost 34,000 victims of spousal violence reported in 2000, women accounted for the majority of victims (85%), a total of 28,633 victims.

Fear of crime

- Women tend to be more fearful of being victims of crime than men. In the *General Social Survey* of 1999, nearly two-thirds (64%) of women reported feeling somewhat or very worried while waiting for or using public transportation alone after dark, more than double the proportion of 29% for men. About 29% of women reported being somewhat or very worried if they were home alone in the evening (compared to 12% of men) and 18% of women felt somewhat or very unsafe when walking alone in their area after dark (compared with 6% of men).

Québec, Conseil du statut de la femme (2002)

Des Nouvelles D'Elles. Document d'information sur les jeunes Québécoises de 15 à 29 ans.

Violence against girls in male-female adolescent couples:

10% of girls reported being victims of physical violence: 7% were pushed, 3% were hit by an object thrown in their direction, 3% were slapped.

Another 10% of girls reported sexual violence: 8% were harassed to have non-consensual sex, 2% were threatened with violence if they refused.

APPENDIX 2

Les filles et l'image du corps :

Cours d'arts plastiques et projet de recherche en art

Information pour les parents

Le cours 'l'image du corps'

Dans le cadre d'un projet de recherche universitaire, j'aimerais inviter les filles de 5^e et 6^e année à participer à un cours d'arts plastiques sur le thème de l'image du corps. La direction de l'école ainsi que le service de garde ont donné le feu vert pour que ce cours puisse avoir lieu dans un local de l'école entre mai 2004 et juin 2004, deux fois par semaine après l'école de 3 :30 à 5 :30.

Les filles seront donc invitées à discuter de leurs expériences de filles dans un contexte intimiste (séparé des garçons) et à créer des œuvres d'art à partir de leurs découvertes. Comment les filles perçoivent-elles leur corps en imaginaire, dans le miroir, et dans les yeux des autres? Comment les filles négocient-elles la différence entre le corps 'idéal' vu dans les médias et leur propre corps unique? Les filles seront encouragées à créer des images d'elles-mêmes qui correspondent à qui elles sont et à qui elles veulent être, dans une atmosphère d'acceptation de soi.

Buts

Entendre les filles et les encourager à s'exprimer librement

Offrir un environnement où les filles pourront réfléchir sur leurs expériences

Exposer les filles à des images variées des femmes et des filles par l'entremise de l'art

Promouvoir l'acceptation de soi en encourageant les filles à s'aimer davantage comme elles sont

Aider les filles à développer leurs techniques d'expression artistique par le dessin, la peinture et le collage.

Faire de l'art sur le sujet des filles, leurs vies et leur relation au corps

J'ai imaginé ces ateliers avec les filles de 5^e et 6^e dans le cadre de la rédaction de ma thèse de doctorat en enseignement des arts à l'université Concordia à Montréal. Le sujet de cette thèse est l'image du corps des filles en art. Le but de la recherche est de découvrir et de documenter si l'art peut contribuer à une perception positive du corps chez les filles et, par le fait même, à une

meilleure acceptation et confiance en soi. J'ai choisi cette école parce j'ai deux garçons en 3^e année et en maternelle (j'ai aussi une fille de 2 ans) et je crois que ce projet constituerait une autre façon de contribuer à la vie de l'école.

J'ai choisi les filles de 5^e et 6^e année parce qu'elles sont à une période critique de leur vie préadolescente qui précède des changements dramatiques au niveau physique, émotionnel et psychologique. N'étant pas encore complètement immergées dans le monde de l'adolescence et de l'école secondaire, les filles de 5^e et 6^e année sont dans une position privilégiée pour examiner les idéaux de la féminité ainsi que leur vision/image d'elles mêmes. En améliorant leurs outils de communication visuelle par le dessin, la peinture et le collage, je crois que des niveaux profonds d'acceptation de soi peuvent être accédés.

Exemple d'un atelier

- 1-Causerie
- 2-Regarder des œuvres d'art, discuter des idées des filles
- 3-Enracinement corporel : exercices, étirements, respirations, mouvement (avec musique)
- 4-Faire des peintures, dessins, et collages reliés au thème de l'image du corps, l'image de soi
- 5-Retour

Quand et à quel endroit?

En accord avec la direction de l'école et le service de garde, le cours 'l'image du corps' pour filles se donnera deux fois par semaine pendant deux heures de 3 :30 à 5 :30 dans un local du SDG les lundis et mardis, entre mai et juin 2004. Les filles pourront manger leur collation pendant la causerie. Elles devront s'habiller confortablement pour pouvoir faire les exercices physiques (donc pas de jeans serrés). Inscrivez- vous rapidement, les places sont limitées.

Prix \$0.00

Le cours est entièrement gratuit. Tous les matériaux d'arts plastiques sont inclus : peinture acrylique, pastels secs et à l'huile, craies aquarelle, charbon, encres, pinceaux, papiers divers, etc. En échange, j'espère recueillir les signatures des parents pour autoriser la publication des données de la recherche (voir 'consentement des parents'). Si votre fille a déjà des matériaux d'art qu'elle aime, elle peut les amener.

Consentement des parents

Puisque le cours 'l'image du corps' fait partie d'un projet de recherche universitaire, il serait souhaitable que les parents signent un formulaire de consentement à la recherche qui permettra la publication des discussions et des photos des œuvres d'art produits durant les cours. Les participantes elles-mêmes ne seront pas photographiées et resteront anonymes. Il est à noter que les participantes pourront se désister en tout temps de la recherche et/ou de sa publication.

Professeur/Chercheur

Heather Michelle Veltman détient une Maîtrise en éducation des arts de l'université Concordia à Montréal. Elle a dix ans d'expérience comme professeur d'art. Son sujet de doctorat porte sur l'image du corps des filles, et elle cherche à développer des méthodes éducatives pour promouvoir une image corporelle plus équilibrée et harmonieuse.

Heather Michelle Veltman a déjà donné deux ateliers sur l'image du corps des femmes et des adolescentes. Les deux ateliers ont connu un grand succès auprès des participantes. Heather est également parent de l'école. Elle a un enfant en 3^e année et un autre en maternelle. Pour de plus amples informations, vous pouvez rejoindre Heather à la maison.

APPENDIX 3

Original Plan for the 10 Workshops

Class 1:

1-Discussion:

Theme: What is body image? Personal introductions

Art appreciation: Cindy Sherman, Joan Semmel

2-Movement:

General stretching and dancing

3-Art-making:

Tracing the body on large sheets of paper, working in pairs

Class 2:

1-Discussion:

Theme: What is beauty?

Art appreciation: Frieda Khalo

2-Movement: Boundaries with ropes

3-Art-making: Drawing, self-portraits with mirror, colored pencil and ink

Class 3:

1-Discussion

Theme: What is the self? Who am I?

Art appreciation: Louise Bourgeois

2-Movement: Gesture circle

3-Art-making: Self-box: cardboard box, collage with felt, natural materials, paint, etc.

Class 4:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Personas, different parts of the self, friends and relationships

Art appreciation: Tamara De Lempicka, By a Lady, etc.

2-Movement: Mime of the little duckling, story-telling, enactment

3-Art-making: Masks in papier mâché

Class 5:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Feeling the body and transitions, boys

Art appreciation: Caiserman-Roth, Betty Goodwin

2-Movement: Dancing, stretching and boundaries.

3-Art-making: Blind drawings, gesture drawings of movement, print-making

Class 6:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Media and art images of women and girls, positive and negative

How do I feel about my body in relation?

Art appreciation: Sue Coe, Barbara Kruger

2-Movement: Stamping feet, arms in the air and breathing

3-Art-making: Collage from magazines

Class 7:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Different images of women, sizes, color, age

Art appreciation: feminist art, Niki de St-Phalles, prehistoric goddess images,
Faith Ringgold

2-Movement: Sandplay (playing with figurines in small sandboxes)

3-Art-making: Clay figurines

Class 8:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Women and girls, individual and collective realities

Art appreciation: Betty La Duke, various, craft/high art

2-Movement: Holding a big piece of material together (bonding)

3-Art-making: Painting on fabric

Class 9:

1-Discussion:

Theme: Women and girls, individual and collective realities

Art appreciation: Sonia Delaunay, Mary Cassatt, etc.

2-Movement: Dancing

3-Art-making: Group painting or mural

Class 10:

1-Discussion:

Theme: End of workshops, end of school, endings in general

Art appreciation: Student work

2-Movement: Dancing and gesture circle

3-Art-making: Vernissage and celebration

APPENDIX 4

CONSENTEMENT POUR PARTICIPER À LA RECHERCHE

Ce formulaire indique que je suis d'accord que ma fille participe dans la recherche de Heather Michelle Veltman qui est une candidate au doctorat dans le Département d'éducation des arts à l'université Concordia, Montréal, Québec.

A. BUT

Je suis au courant que le but de cette recherche est d'enquêter sur l'image du corps des filles de 5^e et 6^e année, telle que perçue par elles-mêmes à travers leurs descriptions et leurs représentations artistiques. La recherche vise à découvrir si l'art peut contribuer à une image positive du corps.

B. PROCEDURES

Les données de la recherche seront recueillies durant un cours d'art donné par Heather Veltman tous les lundis de 3 :30 à 5 :00 PM et les mardis de 3 :30 à 5 :30 PM dans un local du Service de Garde à l'école entre le 15 Avril et le 15 Juin 2004. Nous allons : 1-Regarder des images et des œuvres d'art représentant des filles/femmes 2-Discuter des idées des filles 3-Faire de la relaxation et du mouvement 4-Faire des œuvres d'art en dessin, peinture et collage.

Heather Michelle Veltman prendra des notes durant les ateliers ainsi que des photos des œuvres réalisées par les participantes. Il y aura un questionnaire à remplir à la fin des ateliers.

C. CONDITIONS DE PARTICIPATION

- Je comprends que je suis libre de retirer mon consentement et d'interrompre la participation de mon enfant à n'importe quel moment sans conséquences négatives.
- Je comprends que ma participation dans cette recherche est complètement CONFIDENTIELLE (i.e. que la chercheuse va connaître mon identité et l'identité de mon enfant mais ne le dévoilera pas). Le nom de l'école ne sera pas dévoilé.
- Je comprends que les données de cette recherche vont être utilisées dans le cadre d'un doctorat universitaire (3^e cycle) et pourraient éventuellement être publiées dans des revues académiques.

J'AI ÉTUDIÉ LES INFORMATIONS CI-HAUT AVEC SOIN ET JE COMPRENDS CETTE ENTENTE.

JE DONNE MON CONSENTEMENT POUR PARTICIPER DANS CETTE RECHERCHE, LIBREMENT ET VOLONTAIREMENT.

NOM (lettres moulées s.v.p.) _____

SIGNATURE _____

SIGNATURE D'UN TÉMOIN _____

DATE _____

APPENDIX 5

Summary Protocol Form

Concordia University Departmental Ethics Committees

For Graduate Student Thesis Research with Human Subjects

Name of Applicant: Heather Veltman

Title of Project: Girl's Body Image in Art Education

Signature _____ Date _____

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Lorrie Blair, Dept. Art Education

Signature _____ Date _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY DEC ONLY:

APPROVAL BY THE DEPARTMENTAL ETHICS COMMITTEE

Name of DEC member _____

Signature of DEC Member _____

Date _____

IMPORTANT SPF'S MUST BE TYPED AND SUBMITTED IN TRIPLICATE