

Pink Politics

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a person's face, partially obscured by a sign that reads "KEEP GIRLS OUT". The image is grainy and has a stark, almost graphic quality. The person's features are partially visible in the shadows, and the sign is held up in front of their mouth and nose.

A Research Project About Girls

by Dr. Lucretia Levy

Pink Politics:
A Research Project About Girls

Leanne M. Levy

A Thesis
In
The Department
Of
Art Education

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ABSTRACT

Pink Politics:
A Research Project About Girls

Leanne Levy, Ph.D.
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Messages embedded within media are powerful ideological forces influencing ways girls perceive and negotiate the world and their selves, setting standards, expectations, ideals and norms. From a neo-Gramscian perspective, popular culture is a site of negotiation for a girl's meaning making and construction of self. Over the course of this dissertation, seven teenage girls between the ages of 12 and 14 years offer a glimpse into their private lives as they reflect upon their relationships with popular culture. Through photo-ethnography, and video documented focus group and photo elicitation interviews, the girls discuss issues, personal attributes, and meaningful experiences, and demonstrate how they construct a sense of self amongst the hegemonic forces of peers, family, and societal values mediated by the media and popular culture. As I continue to witness the cultural, social and political girl "come together" through the site of popular culture, the more I realize this site's value as a gateway for meaningful, critical, and transformative media-based art education with an emphasis on self-actualization and social action. Using popular culture to engage girls in critical, reflective and reflexive dialogue provided me with a working framework to understand how each constructed her sense of self amongst others. I have discovered that much like a collage, constructed and juxtaposed piece by piece, everything a girl values becomes, in essence, layers in her self-portrait, and a mirror to her self. There are educational and research implications pointing towards reframing my research methodology for the classroom, adding a fourth step, art-based video documentary

production, and inviting girls to consider and transform what limits their potential through meaningful media production.

DEDICATION

To the awesome girls and their trusting family members who made this research possible. Thank you Kristina, Lauren, Liv, Paige, Kristen, Jayme, and Myka for sharing your meaningful experiences and perspectives concerning what it means to be a girl at this time of your lives. By seeing through your eyes and listening to your voices, I do not hesitate to say that you will inspire anyone, young and older, to take a closer look at one's own sense of self, and how one comes to be. Thank you for allowing us all a glimpse into your personal lives, and for the opportunity to transform what limits my own potential.

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To my grandfather, you always wanted to be a doctor, now through me you are.

To my grandmothers, thank you for believing in my abilities. I should be as fortunate to walk in your footsteps.

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1

Layered



— 2010 —

1 Layered

Layered like a collage, my past and present cultural consumption and production practices illustrate my values and sense of self. I have discovered that at every age, I interweave meaningful narratives when discussing my favorite products and experiences of them. How I use and attribute meaning to my toys, clothing, music, books, magazines, movies, TV programming, and celebrity role models is, in part, a mirror to my self for what I value during particular moments of my life, and an image I perform for others. It is a collective voice of femininity concerning my connection to and construction of femaleness. In coming to understand my own relationship with popular culture, I continue to discover how I construct myself and am constructed by the discourses I consume and produce around my favorite texts and practices.

As a 1970s child, my femaleness was partly shaped by the toys I played with and the tremendous pleasure I gained from exploring my creative potential through them. With *Lite Brite*™ I experimented with color and composition, *Silly Putty*™ and *Archie*™ comic books were my main tools for print making, and *Easy Bake Oven*™ and *Lego*™ facilitated my sculptural know-how.

I can recall favorite bonding moments where popular culture was central to these experiences. My brother and I ate *Swanson's*™ TV dinners while watching *Happy Days* and *Laverne & Shirley*. My father and I assembled puzzles and glued them down on empty record album covers. With my mother I baked *Pillsbury*™ raspberry turnovers and went shopping for toys and clothing. My grandfather and I developed a stamp collection and often played together with my *Fisher Price*™ toys. With my grandmother I built sprawling castles out of playing cards and knit clothing for my dolls. My girlfriends and I traded *Holly Hobbie*™ greeting cards and collected *Smurfs*™. And with

the boys on my block I made sock puppets inspired by *Mister Rogers*, and every autumn when the leaves fell we constructed human size bird nests and pretended we were *Big Bird*™ from *Sesame Street*™.

As a 1980s teenage girl, I continued to rely on my relationships with popular culture as another best friend. Cher and Gloria Steinem were my role models for their unconventional leadership and *girlpower* attitude. A “Rebel without a cause” was I term my mother often called me and so it was no surprise when I adorned my bedroom walls with a shrine of laminated posters dedicated to James Dean. TV shows like *Bewitched* nurtured my imagination with one twitch of the nose. Drooling over Leigh Garrett, Shaun Cassidy and Andy Gibb in *Tiger Beat*™ magazine were favorite bonding moments with best girlfriends. And, when agonizing over heartbreaks, “Like a one winged dove,” (Fleetwood Mac) music instilled in me the message, “Don’t give up” (Peter Gabriel & Kate Bush).

As an adult, my relationships with popular culture continue to shape my sense of self and understanding of others. As a collage of narrated voices, comic strips, newspaper clippings, artifacts and musical lyrics are foundational to my art based audio-visual productions. Favorite movies, *Harold & Maude* (1971), and musicians, Bono, take me “One step closer” to uncovering my meaning in life. And when in the classroom, popular culture is my teaching tool.

From a neo-Gramscian perspective, popular culture is a site of negotiation for the consumption and production of knowledge (Gramsci, 1971; Hall, 1996; 1997; Storey, 1998; McRobbie, [1991] 1997; 2004; Harris, 2004ab). Messages embedded within media are powerful ideological forces influencing ways we perceive and negotiate the world and ourselves, setting standards, expectations, ideals and norms.

Contemporary research findings concerning adolescent girls has linked media's influences on the development of self-esteem and accuse media of setting unrealistic and often unhealthy standards of physical appearance (Bosacki, Innerd & Towson, 1997). Teen magazines have been associated with girls' pressures concerning their physical attractiveness to boys, "In an intriguing merger of advertising and editorial content each ad also features a quote from a different boy about the dress... 'Keep it short and I won't be able to keep my eyes off her'" (Mazarella, 1999, p. 108). And, sexually based media content (Pipher, 1994), the declining age of puberty, and the lack of adult women as *protective umbrellas* (Brumberg, 1998) have been related to female depression, suicide, eating disorders, drug abuse and unwanted pregnancies.

As a backlash to patriarchal propaganda, women's relationships with popular culture have also been celebrated for its reactionary impact that led to the women's liberation movement. Susan Douglas (1994) states,

Unlike popular culture featuring boys, the major impact of kitsch for girls was... reactionary not subversive...girls like me who gorged ourselves on all these pop culture pastries, evolved from cheerleaders, experts at the Bristol stomp, and *Seventeen* magazine junkies to women impatient with our continued second-class status, committed to equality and change, and determined to hold our own in a man's world. (p. 6 & 7)

As an implication of second wave feminist politics (the 1960s women's liberation movement), popular culture of the early 1990s brought with it a new cultural representation of females and a new discourse of personal choice, that of *Girlpower* (Hopkins, 1999; Driscoll, 1999; 2002; Harris, 1999b; 2001; 2004ab; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Fritzsche, 2004; Griffin, 2004). In short, from its cultural inception to its

consumer application, the girlpower ideology of the 21st century connotes a girl's power to control her identity by inventing and reinventing her feminine self (Hopkins, 1999), largely manifested through her sexuality and physical appearance (McRobbie, 2004; Harris, 2004b).

In an increasingly image-based world where information and female representation are largely mediated by the media, and a girl's citizenship is defined by her purchasing power (Harris, 2004b), visual communication becomes a significant language for girls to learn, and popular culture, an effective lens to deconstruct cultural identity construction. My role as an art educator is to adapt my teaching strategies and pedagogical content to best prepare my female students for their changing world.

The following scholars lay the foundation for this study. John Dewey ([1938] 1997) believed education was about reflecting, asking questions, and engaging with experience to enlarge experience. Vincent Lanier (1980) believed the central purpose of an art education was to achieve aesthetic literacy among youth and embraced the social context of youth's visual culture. Laura Chapman (1978) taught children how visual qualities present in all art forms including media are used to express social values. June Mcfee and Rogena Degge (1977) viewed visual arts as cultural communication and believed children should learn the role visuality plays in the everyday life of people. Paul Duncum (1999) states that, "the study of everyday imagery is important because it is at the level of the everyday that most learning takes place" (p.299). Kerry Freedman (2003) emphasizes the hegemonic influence of the educational process and mass mediated images on shaping personal and social identity. Kevin Tavin (2003) advocates that, "art educators have an urgent and necessary responsibility to help students develop critical, reflexive, and meaningful approaches to interpreting, critiquing, and producing images, objects and artifacts from visual culture" (p. 47).

Similarly, David Darts (2004) stresses that educators “have a pedagogical responsibility to move students beyond uncritical and superficial aesthetic understandings that fail to recognize the ideological struggles embedded within the everyday visual experience” (p. 323).

Over the course of this dissertation, seven teenage girls between the ages of 12 and 14 years offer a glimpse into their private lives as they reflect upon their relationships with popular culture. Through focus groups, photos taken and photo elicitation interviews, the girls discuss meaningful issues, perspectives and experiences, and demonstrate how they construct self amongst the hegemonic forces of peers, family, and societal values mediated by the media and popular culture.

The map of the following chapters is as followed. In chapter two, *In The Footsteps*, I address foundational literature on the various definitions and theories of popular culture, audience reception research studies, and the social conditions that positioned girls as ideal citizens of the twenty-first century. In chapter three, *S.E.L.V.E.S.* (Seeing through girls’ Eyes, Listening to girls’ VoicES), I present the research methodology and the various interdisciplinary methods I used to elicit the girls’ perspectives regarding their relationships with popular culture and their lived experience. In chapter four, *Lights, Camera...Gossip!* I present the girls’ discourses that emerged from their focus group interviews. In chapter five, *A Wardrobe Of Voices*, I present and analyze the girls’ private interviews organized within seven doors (sub-chapters), one dedicated to each girl. Behind each door is her personal narrative accompanied by her series of photographs used to elicit her critical reflections. In chapter six, *Mirror To Her Self*, I introduce my meta-analysis *Sense of Self* and explain the girls’ uses and meaning making practices as a direct implication of what she values

when constructing her self. At the conclusion of this chapter, I address the art education and future research implications of this project.

In The Foot Steps



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2 In the Footsteps

This research project is anchored by the work of several cultural and feminist cultural studies scholars to whom I refer over the course of this chapter. I introduce various definitions and theories of ideology and popular culture (Marx, [1859] 1963; Brecht, 1978; Williams, 1983; Hall, 1996; 1997; Althusser, 1998; Storey, 1998; 2003), and ground my research in the neo-Gramscian theory of popular culture, originating from the work of Antonio Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971; Storey, 1998; 2003; Strinati, 1995). I discuss what it means to consume and produce popular culture introducing Stuart Hall's (1973; 1980) televisual model, Dorothy Hobson's (1982) research on women's soap opera viewing practices, Jackie Stacey's (1994) research on women's star consumption, and Joke Hermes' (1995) research on meaning making from reading magazines. Last, I summarize the social conditions that have positioned girls as ideal citizens of the 21st Century and discuss the ideology of Girlpower as a site of resistance and incorporation (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Eisenhauer, 2004; Fritzsche, 2004; Griffin, 2004; Harris, 2004ab; McRobbie, [1991] 1997; 2001; 2004; Taft, 2004; Hopkins, 1999).

Definitions and Theories

2.01 Definitions of Popular and Culture

An obvious starting point in any attempt to define popular culture is to first look at some of the definitions of *popular* and of *culture*. The term popular is not complicated to define but nevertheless according to first generation scholar of the Birmingham Center Raymond Williams (1983), there are four meanings; "well liked by

many”; “inferior kinds of work”; “work deliberately set out to win favor of the people”; and, “culture made by the people for the people” (p. 87).

According to Williams (1983) there are three broad definitions of culture.

Williams’ first definition, the least referred to within cultural studies, understands culture as “a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development” (p. 90).

Williams’ second and third definitions of culture, explains culture as “a particular way of life” as well as “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity” (p. 90) that shapes particular outlooks and modes of behavior. Synonymous terms are *lived cultures* and *cultural practices*.

Similar to William’s second and third definitions of culture are cultural studies scholars John Storey (2003) and Stuart Hall’s (1997) definitions of culture. Storey (2003) defines culture as “how we live nature (including our own biology); it is the shared meanings we make and encounter in our everyday lives” (p. 3). Hall (1997) defines culture as shared meanings “between members of a society or group [who] interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings...in ways, which will be understood by each other” (p. 2).

According to Williams, Storey and Hall, signifying practices and texts are understood as sites for the production of meaning, and are regarded as the primary function of culture. Frow and Morris (1996) define *texts* as commodities, objects and events that are used within signifying practices, and Hall (1982; 1996) introduces the term *articulation*, to express and to connect, to explain how a text is not inherent with meaning but is rather a site of struggle for the articulation of meaning. Hall explains how a text is always dependant on its context for the expression and joining together of meaning. All three cultural studies scholars define culture as a process by which we make meaning from our use of texts we encounter in our daily lives. From this

perspective, television, film, music and shopping are all regarded as sites for the production of culture. William's second and third definitions along with Storey and Hall's are most commonly used when referring to the terrain of popular culture.

The female research participants' definitions of popular culture as *meaningful shared lived experience* support Williams' definition of *popular* as well liked by many, and Storey and Hall's definition of *culture* as shared meanings through similar ways of life.

2.02 Definitions of Ideology

Although it is within the discipline of British cultural studies where the study of popular culture has its academic roots, it is within a political discourse where we come to learn of popular culture's economic role in society (McGuigan, 1992). Stuart Hall (1996) defines *discourse* as "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about- i.e. a way of representing- a particular kind of knowledge about a topic" (p. 201). Before moving on to discuss the various definition of popular culture, I begin by introducing five definitions of *ideology*, all inherently political, and having to do with the way we understand and perceive popular culture's role in our lives. Although all five definitions are similar in principle, all having to do with power relations and the economy, each definition has been developed with a slightly different focus.

The first definition of ideology, the one most commonly used and referred to within mainstream society, regards ideology as a systematic body of ideas represented and expressed by a particular group of people. To use only this definition does not explain the overall function and impact of ideology on society.

The second definition understands ideology in terms of power relations, originally associated with Marxist and feminist theories (Storey, 1998; Strinati, 1995), which looks at class and gender, where wealth and patriarchy rule the masses. From a Marxist perspective, ideology is understood as a certain masking and distortion of reality to provide a false consciousness. Commonly associated with a capitalist ideology, distortions are seen as a way for the powerful to maintain social order over the masses. In this sense, ideology operates to conceal the domination of the powerful over the subordinate classes, where neither groups see themselves as the dominator or the oppressed. It is argued in the tradition of classical Marxism (Marx, [1859] 1963) that,

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society - the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which there correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determine their being, but on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (p. 67-68)

According to Marx the ideological forces of cultural production that form the base of economic systems have direct effects on the production of culture irrespective of an individual's will and consciousness. Culture and consciousness are constructed through the structures imposed by the ruling class onto the people rather than an individual's agency in the creation of one's culture. Although Marx believed in the

transformation of society whereby power dynamics would eventually shift from the ruling class to the people, he saw this a result of the structures, which would necessitate this change rather than an individual's consciousness and agency in this process.

The third definition of ideology, closely related to Marxism, looks at the way ideological forms such as cultural texts (Brecht, 1978) like the theatre, television, music, film and magazines present particular ways of seeing the world. Ideology in this sense is seen as an implied natural way of life. According to Bertolt Brecht, cultural texts are said to take sides by presenting an image of the world that effects the way we as audiences interpret and perceive our world.

The fourth definition of ideology developed by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, (Althusser, 1998; Storey, 1998; Strinati, 1995) is similar to Brecht's interpretation of ideology. It looks at material practices as ideological ones that bind us to social order like seaside vacations and Christmas holidays created to fuel economic conditions of capitalism, and to preserve inequalities of wealth, status and power. According to Althusser (1998), "all ideology has the function of constructing concrete individuals as subjects" (p. 161), and it is the routine of material practices, like going shopping and watching television that subject people to patterns of thought and modes of behavior.

The fifth definition of ideology is put forth by semiologist Roland Barthes (1967; 1973) as operating at the level of connotations associated with hidden layers of meaning such as in media's programming and advertisements. Barthes explains ideology as a myth put in place for hegemonic struggle to fix, restrict and reproduce connotations. Barthes argues, as does Hall (1997), that meanings are not fixed within

myths, signs or texts such as objects, practices or people but rather are constructed, contextual, cultural and polysemic, open to multiple meanings.

I employ Althusser, Barthes and Brecht's interpretation of ideology as ideological forces that operate through texts, at the level of connotations made to appear natural and universal, when in fact they are constructed to serve the reproduction of a capitalist system. With respect to girlpower as the dominant ideology of late modernity, girls are understood as both constructing themselves and are constructed by the ideological forces of popular culture's texts and practices.

2.03 Summary of Varying Theories of Popular Culture

The political implications of ideology held in all of the above-mentioned definitions form the bases for several existing theories of popular culture. Social theory and cultural studies' history with popular culture is a history of the way in which these two terms, popular and culture, have been joined by theorists within particular historical and social contexts, giving rise to different views regarding popular culture's role as an ideological force (Storey, 1998). Rooted in ideological forces, popular culture is a profound political concept and is a site where the construction of everyday life can be examined (Turner, 1996). The purpose of investigating how people use the site of popular culture is beneficial on two levels, first, to understand the practices that govern social beings, and second, to examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and the interests its construction serves.

I begin by first highlighting in brief some theories of popular culture to contextualize the different ways that ideology has been applied to the field of popular culture. The fundamental differences between the theories of popular culture existing

today are the ways in which culture is seen as either a divisive or inclusive role between the classes of people. Largely influenced by Mathew Arnold's (1882) interpretation of culture as "the best that has been thought and said in the world," most of the theories of popular culture are rooted in Arnold's elitist idea that culture is divisible into high, low and folk art in the way that society is divisible into classes.

In line with Arnold's view is French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) argument that culture, synonymous with class and taste, functions as an ideological force to maintain class distinctions by assuring cultural distinctions. For Bourdieu, the consumption of culture, "fulfill[s] a social function of legitimating social differences" (p. 5). As long as people strive to elevate their class level through their cultural capital, this ensures a division of classes and a working capitalist economy.

Although Arnold and Bourdieu's outlook of culture dominated the second half of the nineteenth and mid twentieth century, by late 1970s, centrality of class would be disrupted and replaced by feminists' insistence on the importance of gender (Bryson, 2003; Storey, 2003). From an Althusian perspective, many Second Wave feminists during this period saw popular culture texts specifically as key sites that functioned as ideological forces to propagate patriarchal views of women as domesticated irrational beings, subordinate to and dependant on men for their class status and overall sense of security (Bryson, 2003). The study of popular culture became the focus of many feminists dedicated to fight the patriarchal power bloc in the name of gender equality. Much of today's understanding of women's consumer citizenship is largely due to the Second wave feminists' successful initiatives towards the undoing of patriarchy, later discussed in this chapter (Harris, 2004a; McRobbie, 2004; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004).

By the 1940s and 1950s, a new theory of popular culture emerged, that of the mass culture paradigm (Storey, 1998). Successful industrialization, urbanization and technological advances in mass communication namely film, radio and television (Weaver, 2005), resulted in what was viewed as the Americanization of culture, "The destruction of local, non-American cultures and the globalization of American culture as the only form of culture" (p. 10). What is typically under threat in this paradigm is the pre-conceived notion of the loss of traditional values and traditional ways of life as a direct result of the homogenizing influence of American culture. Within this paradigm, popular culture is defined as mass culture and is regarded as mass production for mass non-discriminating consumption, "[Culture] is consumed with brain-numbed and brain-numbing passivity" (Storey, 1998, p. 11). John Fiske (1989) and Simon Frith (1983) critique the argument by pointing out that if it were true that people consumed in non-discriminating brain-numbing ways, then all products would succeed in the market place.

Structuralism (Storey, 1998; Hall, 1997; Saussure, 1974) provides another theory of popular culture, associated with the mass culture paradigm. A Structuralist perspective has little regard for human agency and perceives popular culture's influence as top down. Structuralists understand popular culture as an ideological machine that reproduces the dominant ideology where audiences are inclined to specific reading positions, leaving little room for individual textual contradictions. Structuralism introduces the idea of human reality as a social construction, constructing and constructed to think and behave in specific ways. Both the self and the unconscious are understood as cultural constructs. The critique of structuralism made by post-structuralism is an opening up of a more critical space where individuals have agency in their interpretations.

Stuart Hall's *Encoding and Decoding Televisual Communication Model* (1973; 1980) addresses a post-structural approach to reading cultural texts as dominant, negotiated or oppositional due to one's multidimensional capacity to interpret texts outside of operating within what Hall refers to as the dominant code. Hall's model is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Now that I have noted two opposing and antagonistic views of popular culture, one which is regarded as structure imposed from above, and the other as agency arising from below, I introduce another theory of popular culture which unites these two opposing ones to form a democratic theory grounded in the ideology of a political self, one that is capable of addressing individual consciousness and transformation despite the structures put in place to construct humans as subjects (Boggs, 2002).

2.04 Neo-Gramscian Theory of Popular Culture

The theory of popular culture, in which I ground this research, is termed *neo-Gramscian Hegemony* and is rooted in the works of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) (Gramsci, 1971). Introduced into British cultural studies during the 1970s, Gramsci's work on *hegemony*, *compromised equilibrium*, and *organic intellectuals*, and his use of words like *consciousness*, *culture*, *politics* and *social change* brings about a democratic rethinking of the politics of popular culture (Storey, 2003; Hall, 1996).

Gramsci's modest roots from rural Sardinia and his close contact with working class life and politics make him a unique socio-political-cultural figure, differentiating him from other bourgeoisie Marxists. A recurring theme in Gramsci's writings is his democratization of Marxist theory by merging it with praxis, defined as informed practice. Gramsci's personal and political life was guided by his belief in the study of

history, philosophy, and culture coupled with political action to understand the inner workings of revolutionary action Boggs (2002) writes

What Gramsci had in mind, especially before the collapse of the Biennio Rosso workers' rebellion in 1920, was an organic process of social transformation that could prefigure the new communist society by gradually extending the domain of egalitarian, non-bureaucratic social authority and social relations into a mature socialist economic and political system. (p. 60)

Gramsci's political activity and theoretical writings responded to Marxism's assumption that the oppressed would rise up to overthrow their capitalist oppressors and form a new economic society based on equality. Inspired by his early involvement with the factory council movement, Gramsci was motivated to understand the conditions, which could precursor a democratic shift towards socialism. His attention to "organizational forms, political tactics and strategy, leadership styles, role of theory, and view of the state" (p. 58) form the basis for his main concepts of ideological hegemony and organic intellectuals, two theories that have profoundly affected the entire field of cultural studies.

From 1921 to 1926, Gramsci immersed himself in the struggle against fascism by organizing and heading the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which later resulted in his own imprisonment by Mussolini's regime (Gramsci, 1971). As a result of the failure of the working class movement, the rise of fascist states, and his imprisonment, Gramsci's intellect and passion for democracy continued to flourish into a series of writings entitled the *Prison Notebooks* (translated in 1971), which today are recognized as one of the great contributions to Western Marxism. Anchored in a democratic outlook, the language of Gramsci's *Notebooks* presents an alternative view to authoritarian politics.

In his writings, Gramsci emphasizes the roles of ideology, culture, consciousness, and the political self, as fundamental to a transition towards socialism,

To transform the external world, the general system of relations, is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself... For this reason one can say that man is essentially “political” since it is through the activity of transforming and consciously directing other men that man realized his “humanity” and “human nature. (p. 360)

Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is understood as,

The granting of concessions to subordinate groups which do not pose a threat to the overall framework of domination... hegemony is not only ethical-political, it must also be economic...based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity. (Ransome, 1992, p.161)

Gramsci understood these concessions between the dominant bourgeoisie capitalists and the subordinate masses as manifested through popular consensus. Through moral, intellectual and cultural leadership, the dominant groups assure their power by incorporating the protests of the masses while ultimately preserving social order and the dominant ideology (Gramsci, 1971; Ransome, 1992). This is what Gramsci termed a *hegemonic compromised equilibrium*. Gramsci saw this relationship as a dynamic one with the potentiality of the masses to overthrow the elite. Gramsci’s emphasis on human agency in the construction of a democratic socialist society differs from that of Marx who emphasized structure as the determining force.

With advanced capitalism, Gramsci's work took on added meaning where "education, mass media, popular culture, and the legal system constituted pervasive ideological forces in support of the status quo" (Boggs, 2002, p. 62). Gramsci's theory of hegemony became a significant contribution to the field of popular culture because he takes two opposing views, that which views popular culture as structure imposed by the capitalist industries with the intention of ideological manipulation for profit, and that which views popular culture as agency spontaneously emerging from the people, and joins them together to describe a hegemonic compromised equilibrium whereby through a process of intellectual and moral leadership, dominant groups win the consent of society's subordinate groups (Gramsci, 1971; Storey, 1998; 2003).

According to Storey (1998), a neo-Gramscian hegemonic compromised equilibrium theory can be employed to analyze, explain and explore many conflicts within and across popular culture, "involving race, gender, region, generation, sexual preference etc- all are at different moments engaged in forms of cultural struggle against homogenizing forces of incorporation of the official dominant culture" (p. 14).

Feminist cultural studies scholar Angela McRobbie (1998) argues for a neo-Gramscian hegemony theory that recognizes the balance between human agency and social and economic structure,

At its best [neo-Gramscian hegemony theory] insists that there is dialectic between the processes of production and the activities of consumption. The consumer always confronts a text or practice in its material existence as a result of determinate conditions of production. But in the same way, the text or practice is confronted by a consumer who in effect *produces in use* the range of possible meanings- these cannot just be read off from the materiality of the text or practice, or the means or relations of its production. (p. 226)

I apply a neo-Gramscian hegemony lens to understand girls' relationships with popular culture as a compromised equilibrium –a negotiated relationship.

Consumption and Production: Use and Meaning Making

2.05 Culture As Shared Meanings

Cultural meanings are formed and communicated through language, “To understand culture is to explore how meaning is produced symbolically through the signifying practices of languages” (Barker, 2000, p. 66). This research is grounded in the constructionist view (Saussure, 1974; Barthes, 1967; 1973; Hall, 1973; 1980; 1997) of language and representation, which recognizes that meanings are open to multiple interpretations rather than fixed. Meanings emerge through a complex process of interpretation involving negotiations of all sorts, and are dependant on the language codes adopted by a particular culture and person doing the interpreting.

Stuart Hall posits that meanings are expressed through what we consume, how we use things, give them value, and incorporate them into the practices of our daily life, and it is through language that meanings are produced and circulated.

We give things meaning by how we represent them- the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them---which need to be meaningfully interpreted by others. (Hall, 1997, p. 3)

In order to communicate a concept for something we need language, a system of representation that consists of signs organized into various relationships. However, signs can only convey meaning if we have codes that translate concepts into language (Hall, 1997). Although there are dominant codes that we as social beings ascribe to in order to communicate and share meaning within and across cultures, within every culture there also exists other language codes made up of shared ways of communicating emotions, attachments, concepts and ideas.

2.06 Hall's Televisual Model: Encoding and Decoding as an Interpretive Framework

Stuart Hall developed his model of televisual communication, *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse* (Hall, 1973; 1980) to analyze the circulation of meaning in television discourses. Hall's model recognizes three moments where meanings circulate: Meaning is first circulated when media professionals decide which *raw* social events they will select and encode into meaningful television discourse. At this point in time, dominant ideologies are at play.

[Media production] is framed throughout by meanings and ideas; knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills, professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions about the audience and so on frame the constitution of the programme through this production structure. (Hall, 1980, p. 129)

The second level of the circulation of meaning occurs when the raw social event is actually transformed into the televisual discourse. At this point, the message

becomes polysemic, open to multiple interpretations, despite the dominant codes of language.

Since the visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, it cannot, of course, be the referent or concept it signifies...Reality exists outside language, but it is constantly mediated by and through language; and what we come to know and say has to be produced in and through discourse. Discursive 'knowledge' is the product not of the transparent representation of the 'real' in language but of the articulation of language on real relations and conditions. Thus there is no intelligible discourse without the operations of a code. (p. 131)

The third moment where meaning is circulated occurs when the audience decodes the message, which despite dominant ideologies, a new set of ideologies becomes present and effects interpretation. If the message is to become meaningful to the audience it needs to be decoded, that is consumed and appropriated. Once the meaning is articulated in practice and acted upon it then becomes another raw social event available to be encoded into another discourse. Hall explains this as a cycle created through the circulation of discourse, whereby production becomes consumption to become production again. Culture is foundational to this circuit as meanings begin in the social realm and ends, to begin once again, in the social.

Fundamental to this cycle of the circulation of meaning is to understand that media professionals cannot guarantee that audiences will decode the meanings intended by the producers, which is the area that most interests Hall, "More often broadcasters are concerned that the audience has failed to take the meaning as they-

the broadcasters- intended. What they really mean to say is that viewers are not operating within the 'dominant' or 'preferred' code" (Hall, 1980, p. 135).

Hall established three positions of decoding. The first is termed the *dominant-hegemonic* position where the viewer decodes the televisual program in the way that producers intend. When this occurs, it is said that the viewer is *operating inside the dominant code*. The second decoding position is termed the *negotiated code* or position, which Hall states is how most people decode,

Decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements; it acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make the grand significations, while at a more restricted situational level, it makes its own ground rules- it operates with exception to the rule. (p. 137)

The third position is termed the *oppositional code* where viewers decode with an alternative frame of reference despite their recognition of the dominant code.

David Morley (1980) was the first to test Hall's encoding/decoding model by employing it in his own research on people's reading positions of the BBC's television news program entitled *Nationwide*. Morley selected 29 groups of people, representing different social class positions, based on his assumption of their ability to reproduce different reading positions ranging from dominant readings to oppositional. When middle-class bankers and working-class apprentices both produced dominant readings, Morley concluded that decoding was determined by both social class position and others discourses at work such as ideology and shared socio-cultural practices, which shape how we think about and view the world. Confirming Hall's

model, Morley's work indicates that readings are always an interaction between the discourses of the text and the discourses of the reader.

I incorporate Hall's three reading positions into my analysis framework to understand how the female research participants are negotiating meaning from popular culture's texts and practices.

2.07 Foundational Feminist Audience Reception Research Studies

During the 1970s a divide occurred in cultural studies having to do with the way texts and lived cultures were dealt with in research (Storey, 2003). Up until this time, the production of meaning from cultural texts was understood as solely dependant on the producers' intentions. Cultural texts were analyzed from a structuralist perspective (Saussure, 1974), where textual analysis was the primary research method to locate the production and reproduction of the dominant ideology of patriarchy and consumer capitalism (Storey, 2003). Feminist researchers, Laura Mulvey (1975) and Angela McRobbie (1991; 2000) are renowned for their textual analysis work on film and women's magazines, which investigated ways that cultural texts construct feminine subjectivities in support a dominant patriarchal power bloc.

With the introduction of post-structuralism in cultural studies, the opening up of a critical space, and television's increasing popularity, Hall's televisual model as an interpretive framework became pivotal to audience reception research (Storey, 2003). A number of feminist researchers, namely, Dorothy Hobson (1982), Jackie Stacey (1994) and Joke Hermes (1995), looked at audience reception of television soap operas (Hobson, 1982), Hollywood films (Stacey, 1994), and women's magazines

(Hermes, 1995) to theorize interpretation and meaning making as a fluid and complex process. Grounded in a Gramscian philosophy, the following three research studies on audience reception (Hobson, 1982; 1989; 1990; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995) demonstrate popular culture as a site of struggle where in order to make sense of one's own life, women actively engage in an ongoing process of negotiation, weaving one's own narratives with that of popular fiction's. Hobson, Stacey and Hermes inform my research and I incorporate aspects of each of their findings into this study's analysis framework to understand the girls' meaning making as constructing mirrors to the self.

Dorothy Hobson's (1982) *Crossroads: The Drama of a Soap Opera* is a recount inspired by a section of her doctoral research on White middle class women's television viewing practices, which has led to specific assumptions concerning the productive work of female audiences. Hobson's research methods involved the use of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing to understand the ways that women consumed and produced meaning from the British soap opera *Crossroads*. After watching the British soap opera with individual women, she conducted a series of unstructured interviews she termed as *relaxed talk* to reveal "the important contribution which viewers make to any television programme, which they watch" (p. 12). Hobson's observation of women who watch soap operas while engaged in other domestic activities has led her to the assumption that one's level of concentration while viewing television differentiates one woman's meaning making from another, "To watch a programme at meal time with the mother of young children is an entirely different experience from watching with a seventy-two-year-old widow whose day is largely structured around television programmes" (p. 111).

On a train journey back from London, Hobson overheard some women speak about their children and grandchildren in relation to another soap opera, and remarked how women repeatedly interweave narratives from soap operas into their conversations about family members. This experience led Hobson to the assumption that meaning making is not a one-time occurrence when engaged in a program but rather is an ongoing process where different contexts bring about new significances.

This train ride experience led Hobson to her second study, *Women Audiences and the Workplace* (1990), where she investigates the extent that women integrate television talk into their working day. Building on women's domestic television viewing practices, this research confirmed to Hobson that women use their own lives to make sense of soap operas as well as the reverse, women use soap operas to deal with the social issues in their own lives, "[Soap operas] are precisely a way of understanding and coping with problems which are recognized as 'shared' by other women both in the programme and in 'real life'" (1982, p. 131). Hobson states that the programme's narrative solutions are irrelevant but rather how the women "work with the text and add their own experiences and opinions to the stories in the programme" (p. 135) is what signifies the relevance of soap opera viewing.

Hobson's research outlines three main findings. The first highlights that women use their own experiences to measure and judge the events happening in the television program. The second is the recognition that women use television as a general discourse to speak about their own lives. Television discourse (TV talk) allows for women to share with one another the social issues that are relevant in their own lives as women. The third finding relates to the interweaving of one's own narrative with the narrative of the television program to assist in resolving one's own personal issues (1982; 1990). Hobson's feminist research on female audience reception, use and

meaning makes significant contributions to the development of ethnographic work in cultural studies, despite her non-academic career as a media consultant which followed after this research (Brunsdon, 2000).

Similar to Hobson, Stacey's research on *Stargazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994) focuses on female spectators' memories of Hollywood stars in 1940s and 1950s Britain. Her work has two objectives. The first is to contribute to an emerging body of feminist research on Hollywood stars, and the second is to analyze the relationship between females and their favorite stars to gain an understanding of women's reading positions and feminine identities inspired by these relationships.

Stacey's (1994; 1995) feminist analysis of cinema spectatorship began with an historical study of female cinema spectators from archived reports on cinema-going in Britain between 1939 and 1945, and letters concerning film stars written to movie magazine *Picturegoer* between the periods of 1940 and 1955. It is through her review of the letters that Stacey sought out a more qualitative approach to her research. After reading the women's letters to *Picturegoer*, Stacey realized their limitations as most were structured and edited around the magazine's specific intentions. She then made a call for female research participants by sending her own letter to four leading British magazines with a readership of women over the age of fifty. The letter stated,

Were you a keen cinema-goer in the 1940s and 1950s? Who was your favorite film star and for what reason? I am doing research at Birmingham University into cinema audiences during this period and would like to hear from any readers who were fans of Hollywood stars such as Bette Davis, Katherine Hepburn...or any other favorites. Please write to me care of this magazine for a more detailed

questionnaire, or simply write to me about the stars you liked or disliked. (1994, p. 243)

Two of the four magazines agreed to publish her letter and out of 350 respondents, 238 White British women of working-class background, mostly over the age of 60, completed her questionnaire. Stacey's questionnaire consisted of a combination of multiple-choice questions concerning movie-going practices, and open-ended questions on star consumption such as, "I want to find out which film stars you liked in particular, and what you liked about them...Hollywood stars...are the main focus of my research" (p. 246).

Stacey's research generated three discourses concerning women's uses and meaning making of Hollywood's glamorous female celebrities and the movie going experience. The first discourse is of *escapism* where Stacey borrows Richard Dyer's (1981) *entertainment's utopian sensibility* to explain the relationship between peoples' daily social problems, where solutions get played out through popular entertainment texts. The women's recollections of British life during the 1940s and 1950s spoke of food, fuel and clothing shortages as stark contrasts to the luxurious environment of the cinema, "associated as it was with luxury and glamour, in contrast to British drabness at this time, Hollywood was remembered as offering an escape to a materially better world" (p. 97).

The second discourse, *identification*, Stacey explains the role of celebrities as generators of fantasies involving power, control and self-confidence. Her respondents described the fantasy of identifying with their favorite star as offering the possibility of something better, "Similarity between self and star is combined with the memory of a pleasure in a more successful femininity: 'more charm and ability'"(p. 126).

Stacey locates the third discourse, *consumption* within a Gramscian perspective “in which consumption is a site of negotiated meanings, of resistance and of appropriation as well as subjection and exploitation” (p. 187). The women’s fascination with American femininity and the consumer products associated with that ideal came about during a time when British femininity was regarded as restrictive. In almost all of the respondents’ accounts of favorite Hollywood stars, the women remembered copying their idols’ in relation to their clothing, shoes and hairstyles, which “meant frequent conflicts or power struggles with authority figures such as parents” (p. 204). The women used Hollywood stars and the cultural commodities to transform their self-image, which was regarded as “rebellion against the codes of respectable femininity in Britain” (p. 204).

Jackie Stacey (1994: 1995) was interested in locating the female spectator of Hollywood films as an agent of meaning making rather than a *cultural dupe* (Adorno, 1950) to the dominant ideology of consumer capitalism and the *male gaze* (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey’s use of the term male gaze refers to how women are positioned through the patriarchal power bloc as the object of male desire and a signifier of the threat of castration. Contrary to Mulvey’s view, Stacey’s work challenges the notion of women as passive consumers of the male gaze and instead focuses her attention on women’s agency as active consumers and producers of popular culture. Stacey’s research makes a valuable contribution to feminist research on audience reception insofar that the women not only demonstrate their reposition as active negotiators between Hollywood cinema’s dominant meanings and Britain’s restrictive norms but that most of their interpretations are in fact oppositional to the dominant ideology of British women’s culture.

Joke Hermes' *Reading Women's Magazines* (1995) is an ethnographic account of, "how women's magazines become meaningful for readers in the context of their everyday lives" (p. 176). Hermes' research is divided into three stages, the first being experimental involving various research forms and pilot interviews. The second stage presents the bulk of Hermes' data collection methods consisting of eighty interviews with women and men coupled with participant observation. The third stage demonstrates Hermes' analytical framework and analysis.

Stage One was initially disappointing for Hermes as most of her participants' responses did not consider their reading practices as having any meaningful significance. This discovery prompted Hermes to recognize the "fallacy of meaningfulness" (p. 16), which she explained was the wider notion adopted by media and cultural studies at that time, whereby meaning making was regarded as a practice solely dependant on producers as encoders of meaning rather than audiences as decoders of meanings. The assumption that people interpret the same meanings, which are intentionally encoded by producers of popular culture, led Hermes to argue for a critical perspective, "To understand and theorize everyday media use a more sophisticated view of meaning production is required than one that does not recognize different levels of psychological investment or emotional commitment and reflection" (p. 16).

Stage Two, the actual research, required Hermes to seek out many more additional participants and to alter her interview questions replacing them with a more informal and conversational approach. She discovered that to be listened to and respected is of greater importance to her research participants and the integrity of the research, than to have them answer specific questions. At times Hermes used *television*

talk, referring to popular television programming and celebrities, to help motivate and instigate the direction of conversation.

In Stage Three, Hermes introduces her analysis and the *interpretive repertoire* framework she borrowed from social psychologists Johnathan Potter and Margaret Wetherall (1987). Potter and Wetherall define interpretive repertoire as “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (p. 149). Hermes used the recurrent themes from her interviews to design what she terms as *repertoires*, “Repertoires are the cultural resources that speakers fall back on and refer to. Which repertoires are used depends on the cultural capital of an individual reader” (p. 8). Following a constructivist approach to language, Hermes’ work is premised on the notion that meanings are not inherently fixed within texts but rather “the various repertoires readers use make texts meaningful” (p.40).

Hermes’ four repertoires are explained as followed. The first, *easily put down* refers to the ways in which people accommodate magazines into their daily life routines. The second, *relaxation* refers to peoples’ solitude habits. The third, *practical knowledge* refers to the practical tips people gain from reading magazines, which can also be used to fantasize about an “ideal self...a person in control” (p. 39). The fourth, *emotional learning and connected knowing*, refers to the ways in which a person can learn about oneself through the stories and images one reads about others.

All three women’s research on audience reception, Hobson, Stacey and Hermes, indicate that women are actively negotiating their relationships with popular culture texts thus demonstrating that as consumers of popular culture, they too are producers of meaning actively incorporating certain aspects that resonate with them while resisting or simply negating others. Although the foci of these three women’s works are not on discovering to what extent the research participants were aware of

popular culture texts as ideological forces, the women's uses and meaning making value does justify their relationships as self-defining and empowering.

Girls As Ideal Citizens of the 21st Century

Since the early 1990s young womanhood has become central to the debates of Western society concerning girls as the symbol for cultural and economic change, "Popular culture, public policy, academic inquiry, and the private sector are now interested in young women in ways that are quite unprecedented" (Harris, 2004a, p. 13). Harris uses the term *young womanhood* interchangeably with *girlhood* to discuss the cultural phenomenon, which positions young women as ideal future citizens.

Central to the debates of the contemporary socio-political conditions of girls, are the discourse of *girlpower*, and the implications of second wave feminist politics on the cultural phenomenon of girlpower. In *Future Girl* (2004a) and *All About the Girl* (2004b), Anita Harris with other feminist scholars namely, Angela McRobbie (1991; 1997; 2001; 2004), Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2004), Christine Griffin (1993; 2001; 2004), and Bettina Fritzsche (2004), whose works I refer to in this review of the literature, each contribute accounts which help to inform the reader of how girlpower evolved into the dominant ideology of late modernity, which recognizes the cultural representation of girls as a "sexy, brash, and individualized expression of ambition, power and success neatly captured...in the image of Britney Spears" (Harris, 2004a, p. 17).

Girlpower, which I will use interchangeably with *Can-Do-Girls* -a term borrowed from the title of a U.K. sponsored Body Shop research report on girls-, positions girls as sassy, independent, self-inventing, ambitious, goal-oriented, successful and

empowered (Harris, 2004a; Hopkins, 1999). Girlpower has been associated with girls developing individualized personal qualities and expressions of strength through athleticism (witnessed in the 1999 Women's World Cup soccer tournament), consumer citizenship, career ambition, physical appearance, sexuality, and social and political activism (Taft, 2004). Although often critiqued for its racialized discourse on the constitution of girlhood (Griffin, 2004), girlpower is marketed as an all-inclusive ideology to represent girls of all races and nationalities as potential can-do-girls.

The flip side of the girlpower discourse is that of *girls-at-risk*, also heavily marketed in today's consumer society. Although traditionally associated with particular minority groups, namely African American and Indigenous girls (Griffin, 1993; Carrington, 1993), the girls-at-risk discourse today is far more inclusive, and positions girls of all cultural, economic and class-based backgrounds as at-risk for delinquent, nihilist and antisocial behavior. At-risk girls are said to "lack a sense of power or opportunity, [engage in] inappropriate consumption behaviors... of drugs or alcohol.... [And] are also more likely to become pregnant at a young age" (Harris, 2004a, p. 14). Harris states that young women today are primarily constructed and many construct themselves through these discourses.

In both of these images, young women's fortunes are linked to the particular historical circumstances of their generation. That is, in both cases it is the feature of current times that render young womanhood a site of either new possibilities or problems that fill young women with confidence and optimism, or, conversely, leave them alienated and self-destructive. (p. 14)

Before I delve into the phenomenon of girlpower, and how it became the dominant ideology of late modernity (Harris, 2004ab), there are a series of historical

moments I will first highlight, which have given rise to the current state of girlhood. Globalization, a changing youth labor market, and successful second wave feminist initiatives are pivotal moments that explain the repositioning of girls, over boys, as ideal future citizens.

In modern times, with the successful emergence of industrial capitalism, youth were of great interest in terms of their economical and cultural currencies. Male youth, specifically, were the economic symbols that would secure the successful operation of a capitalist society. Their labor has always been used and relied upon to maintain class relations. For middle class youth, modern education was designed to reproduce the dominant economic ideology, that of capitalism, by ascertaining the reproduction of the ideal modern citizen, people who can take authority and climb their way up in a systematic order. Those who climbed the corporate ladder became managers, CEOs and owners of their own companies eventually creating a competing market force, while those who could not afford an education, largely working class youth, were positioned as factory workers in large manufacturing plants.

During modern times, young women were invested in differently than boys, although still largely class related. Girls were used as cultural symbols in several ways. For a middle-class White girl, the construction of young femininity and her transition to normative adult womanhood (Aapola, 1997; Harris, 1999a; 2004a) was centered on “growing up ‘right’...in order for particular forms of gender relations to be maintained” (Harris, 2004a, p. 15). Women as a gender were raised to get married, ascertain their social class status through their husbands, and carry out domestic activities while the male ensured the family structure’s economic stability (Hobson, 1982). Whereas within the girls-at-risk discourse, girls of minority groups traditionally associated with African American and Indigenous girls were constructed as problems for society, as a result of

their association with high sexual activity and young motherhood (Griffin, 1993; Carrington, 1993).

Marking the transition from modern times to late modernity is the emergence of deindustrialization. Technological advancements, globalization of markets and production, and successful feminist initiatives brought about a changing economy, changing gender roles and a new dominant ideology, "Young women... have replaced youth as a metaphor for social change...[and] are now recognized as one of the stakes upon which the future depends (McRobbie, 1991; 2000, p. 200-201).

Alongside this changing economy, the decentralization of power from state to individual was another factor, which positioned girls at the forefront of social change. The collapse of a full-time youth job market combined with a rollback of state welfare, influenced youth to stay in school longer and to train for flexible employment and business opportunities. In short, the reform of *girl* educational and employment policies, the successful publicly and privately funded workforce campaigns like *Take Our Daughter to Work Day*, and girls' success rates as students and employers, led to the creation of a new kind of girl, the Can-Do-Girl (Harris, 2004a). Referring to McRobbie's (2001) *new meritocracy*, opportunity based on ability, Harris states,

With the stripping away of gender-based barriers to participation in education and the labor market and the development of a more open, meritocratic system, young women are perceived to have risen quickly to the top in terms of educational attainment, aspirations, and job prospects. The signs of their success are glamorous careers and luxurious consumer lifestyles, financial independence, and high standards of physical beauty and grooming. (Harris, 2004, p. 18)

2.08 Girlpower: A Site of Resistance and Incorporation

The 1990s also marked the time when popular feminism found its way into different forms of media, both underground and mainstream. Regarding the cultural representation of females throughout popular culture, the early 1990s brought with it a new discourse of personal choice, that of Girlpower (Harris, 1999b; 2001; 2004a; 2004b; Griffin, 2004; Frieztche, 2004; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Driscoll, 1999; 2002; Hopkins, 1999), which was first initiated by the social, political and cultural ideology of the underground *Grrrlpower* movement, that of *Riot Grrrl*.

Founded in 1991, Grrrlpower's Riot Grrrl (grrr communicating anger), and its association with alternative music scenes, began as an underground feminist movement advocating for the improvement of girls' lives (Harris, 1999b; 2001). Borrowing from punk culture's DIY (do-it-yourself) philosophy, Riot Grrrls' discourse of personal choice emphasizes a focus on the self, the power of the individual as a political agent, and her responsibility to social change. The motto was, "You have to change yourself in order to change the world" (Hanna, Riot Grrrl Manifesto, 1991). Music, zines, posters, poetry and the body are used as communication tools to resist traditionally narrow ways of viewing feminine identities. Public displays of nudity during concert performances by female punk bands like the *Bikini Kill*, and self-adornment rituals through use of clothing, makeup, piercing, tattoos, are used as tools of resistance to celebrate alternative femininities. Sexual, cultural and political diversity are encouraged within this movement.

Influenced by the Riot Grrrl ideology and standing on a similar platform, that of the liberalization of personal choice, the production of the all-female *Spice Girls* band represents femininity in a different image while still using the voice of music (Frieztche,

2004). The five outspoken Spice Girls represent a powerful image of girls who dress how they want, say what they want and have what they want. The Spice Girls were the first mainstream all-girl musical group to endorse playfulness within female friendships as holding greater value over intimate relationships with boys (Harris, 2004a). The Spice Girls phenomenon represents girlpower as the celebration of “an all female world of fun, sassiness, and dressing up to please the self” (Griffin, 2004, p. 33).

In short, the girlpower ideology, from its cultural inception to its consumer application, characterizes girls as “independent, successful and self-inventing” (Harris, 2004a, p. 14), and connotes a girl’s power to control her own identity by inventing and reinventing her feminine self/selves (Hopkins, 1999). It encourages a girl to take back her individual rights as a desiring sexual female and to celebrate femininity as an individual choice, the way she defines it for herself. As a social, cultural and political ideology, both grrrlpower and girlpower initiatives support women and girls as reclaiming and having agency over their subjective and objective selves. Irony in re-appropriation of makeup, clothing, and body adornment, is a way for a girl to experiment with and strengthen her identity while also turning upside down the patriarchal implication of the male gaze by implying a newfound ownership over her femininity (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004).

Feminist writers Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2004) give credit to the second wave feminist movement from the 1960s and 1970s who fought for women not to be lured by feminine trappings, and as a result, “did a very good job of ensuring that females of all ages could be valued in society for more than our sexual appeal” (p. 61). Referring to themselves as *girlies*, Baumgardner and Richards discuss girlie girlpower as women who celebrate their feminine selves by embracing “the tabooed symbols of women’s feminine enculturations- Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines,

[and] high heels” (p. 60). From this perspective, female desires are not broken nor are they a result of being duped by patriarchy’s male gaze but rather, Baumgardner and Richards explain girlies as women or girls who celebrate their decorated selves without all the loaded issues attached to feminine objects and lifestyles, “What we love of girls was good and because of feminism, we know how to make girls stuff work for us” (p. 60).

Baumgardner and Richards regard second wave feminist initiatives as laying the necessary groundwork for contemporary young girls to feel an empowerment of self that previous generations of women were not as privy to. Declaring their own celebration for how females use and make meaning of their “pink-packaged femininity” (p. 61), Baumgardner and Richards emphasize that embracing and wearing pink things can be a confident gesture, one which is in fact resistant of the previous ideology held by the patriarchal power bloc and fought by second wave feminists, the association of pink with the feminine fragile victim, “Young women are emphasizing our real personal lives in contrast to what some feminist foremothers anticipated their lives would- or should- be: that the way to equality was to reject Barbie and all forms of pink-packaged femininity” (p. 61).

Logically, advertisers benefited “from this new glamour-worker mode of feminine subjectivity, bound up... with products, accessories, self-presentation, and lifestyle” (Harris, 2004a, p. 19). Central to their marketing strategies was their capitalization on the fiery generational debate concerning young women's relationship to feminism and the feminist critique of the sexualization of girls (McRobbie, 2004). Baumgardner and Richards (2004) introduce the term *hegemommy* to refer to the internal hegemonic struggle within feminist initiatives concerning feminism and femininity.

McRobbie ([1991] 1997) was one of the first feminist cultural scholars to identify these changes in women and girls' magazines and refers to them as new sexualities as "images and text, which break discursively with the conventions of feminine behavior by representing girls as crudely lustful, desiring young women" (p. 196). In *Notes on Post-Feminism and Popular Culture* (2004), McRobbie highlights the 1990s as marking the shift in the ways that women began to be culturally represented within various forms of popular texts. She discusses the 1990s in relation to the introduction of "self-consciously sexist ads" (p. 8), which featured well-known successful female supermodels in sexually alluring poses. A *Wonderbra* billboard ad throughout the main streets of Britain, of supermodel Eva Herzigova staring down at her cleavage, and a TV commercial ad of supermodel Claudia Schiffer undressing in front the camera, were the first of many advertisements to receive controversial public attention largely related to the feminist critique.

McRobbie posits that media's cultural representation of career ambitious women who desire sex but still want a husband is also characteristic of post-feminism (contemporary girlhood). She argues that such forms of women's representation are the direct results of successful feminist initiatives centered on the female's ownership of both her objective and subjective selves,

From *Bridget Jones* to the girls in *Sex and the City*...and those found in girls' and women's magazines...They are confident enough to declare their anxieties about possible failure in regard to finding a husband; they avoid any aggressive or overtly traditional men; and they brazenly enjoy their sexuality, without fear of the sexual double standard. (p. 12)

McRobbie explains this phenomenon as the undoing of feminism, but that this undoing could not have occurred without the successful initiatives accomplished by second wave feminists. She suggests that post-feminism be explored through what she terms as a *double entanglement*, "That is, the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life...with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship" (p. 4). Operating from a neo-Gramscian perspective, McRobbie's double entanglement refers to popular culture as sites of struggle where girls actively negotiate between the competing values of feminist liberalization and, the neo-conservative values of the Bush campaign. Witnesses "to a hyperculture of commercial sexuality" (p. 9), McRobbie's double entanglement recognizes how contemporary young female viewers operate within a Gramscian perspective, always aware of the irony, appreciate the oppositional readings embedded within advertisements, and ultimately, "get the joke." McRobbie states,

Young women have license now to be badly behaved...while at the same time they also re-inhabit tradition... by rediscovering with delight, rituals and customs which feminism has dispensed... lavish white weddings, and the adoption of the male surname on marriage. But what marks out all of these cultural practices is the boldness of the activity, and the strong sense of female consent and participation, the idea that these are all personal choices. This would suggest that young women have learned some lessons from feminism...sexual openness and the entitlement to female pleasure. (p. 9)

Towards the turn of the millennium, younger girls, the tweenies phenomenon, ages 8 to 14 years, began to appear in more ads while simultaneously gaining purchasing power within the family dynamic (Harris; 2004b). Derived from the newfound

power implied in the girl, girlpower today signifies that girls can have or buy anything they want. Young girls' awareness of their newfound consumer citizenship through media's repetitive messages has been adopted into the dominant ideology of the twenty-first century.

In this chapter I have only touched upon some of the aspects of the Girlpower discourse, however it is much more varied to include a range of academic inquiry into this phenomenon (Taft, 2004). In brief, girlpower has also been critiqued as a discourse that excludes girls' political selves. Moreover, it has been attacked for "having nothing to do with changing power relationships" (p. 71), for "dismissing the need for feminist action" (p. 72), for "having achieved gender equality, without ever noting the way that this is tied to racial, sexual and class politics" (p. 72), and for "presenting a world with no need for social change" (p. 73), thus discouraging girls from engaging in challenges, which seek to find solutions to these inequalities.

Despite these competing and antagonistic discourses, I conclude this review of the literature by stating that by putting a face on popular culture and accompanying it with personal life stories of media's favorite female celebrities like Jane Fonda, Madonna, Oprah Winfrey, Angelina Jolie, Alicia Keys, Christina Aguilera, or Mary Kate Olsen is one way to recognize that we as the people position these celebrities as organic intellectuals, to represent and communicate aspects of our own public and private selves. Similarly, as Hobson (1982) remarks in her own research on British women's relationships with soap operas, Stacey (1994) in her research on British women's relationships with Hollywood film stars, and Hermes (1995) in her research of women's meaningful connections with magazine content, relating to our favorite celebrities by interweaving our own personal issues with theirs permits us to experience an emotional connection, which in turn can result in a sense of power that we are not

alone in our daily life challenges. Understanding our own patterns of incorporation and resistance of the dominant ideology propagated through the ideological forces of popular culture texts provides a lens from which to view and understand our own diverse living practices as compromised equilibriums.

This review of the literature provides a rationale for the following four chapters, the methodology, the focus group interview data, the photo elicitation interview data and the meta-analysis.

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3 S.E.L.V.E.S. Seeing Through Girls' Eyes Listening To Girls' Voices

The Research Framework

In the following pages I discuss the interpretive research framework that I designed and implemented to access the diversified voices of seven young girls between the ages of 12 and 14 years. I have chosen the word 'voices' because I want to "remind us of the individuality that lies beneath the surface" that at times pushes us as researchers and teachers "to work to 'sameness' rather than to respond to difference" (Rudduck, 1993, p. 8).

I designed my qualitative interpretive research methodology to answer the following three questions:

- How do girls, ages 12 to 14 years, define popular culture?
- How do girls interpret, negotiate, use and make meaning from popular culture?
- What is discovered about girls through their relationships with popular culture?

The objectives of this research were two-fold: First, to understand how the girls used, interpreted, negotiated and made meaning from their relationships with popular culture. Second, to use these findings to design a pedagogical model to use popular culture for art education praxis.

As "art education draws on several other fields and involves research questions relating to several social science disciplines" (Freedman, 2004a, p. 187), I comprised an interdisciplinary interpretive research framework to understand girls' meaning making practices and construction of self. I borrowed qualitative and interpretive research methods from Marketing Studies (Morgan, 2002; 1996), Cultural Studies (Collier &

Collier, 1986), Feminist Cultural Studies (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995), and Art Education Studies (Freedman, 2004a).

Since the female research participants were minors, I designed a research model that sought “approaches that are less invasive or intrusive and more collaborative from the very beginning” (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 31). I used the focus group interview to collectively elicit the girls’ reflective, critical and dialogical inquiry (Morgan, 2002; 1996; Friere, 1970). I borrowed from feminist audience reception research studies my style of questioning to elicit the girls’ interpretations of Hollywood driven media (Hobson, 1980; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995). I encouraged a photo-ethnography assignment to assist the girls to frame their lived experiences and establish a visual inventory of them (Pini, 2001; Harper, 2000; Collier & Collier, 1986). And, I incorporated the private photo elicitation interview for the girls’ to elicit their personal narratives through their use of photographs (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2000, 1998).

3.01 The Data Collection Methods



The Focus Group Interview (FGI)

I began with the focus group interview to assist the girls’ understanding of their involvement throughout the research process. Associated with the field of marketing

since the 1950s, the focus group interview has been used as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1996, p. 130). Since the 1980s, the social sciences adopted the focus group interview as a reliable scholarly research method (Morgan, 2002). Embraced for its flexibility researchers take either a structured approach, using pre-determined questions for interviewing, or a semi-structured one, developing questions as topics arise. The role of the researcher in the focus group interview is to act as moderator facilitating ongoing dialogue between the participants while keeping discussions on topic.

The Photo-Ethnography Assignment (PEA)

I borrow from visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986) the research method entitled photo-ethnography. In the context of research, photos are used to communicate ideas between the researcher and the participant through the images they photograph and the stories they tell about them. For researchers interested in understanding particular cultures, photos are documentations and representations of culture -people’s consumption and production practices.

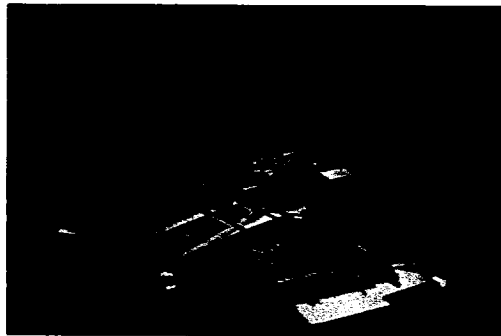
Photographs in the research process are also effective ways to balance power relations between the researcher and his or her participants, which enable them to form collaborative bonds in communicating ways of knowing and being.

Giving over the means of representation to research subjects themselves...[is] a way of somehow "empowering"... young women; enabling them to frame their own lives, tell their own stories, represent their own situation, [and] offer their own understandings...of femininity. (Pini, 2001, paragraph 5 & 6)

As a researcher who is also an art educator, I enjoyed utilizing a visual production method to facilitate the girls' voices and to see through their eyes how they framed their lives.

In this research, the photos have three uses (Harper, 2000). First, the photos are used to assist the girls in articulating intimate dimensions of their social world, depicting relationships with them selves and others. Second, the photos are visual inventories of texts and practices significant in their lives. Third, the narratives inspired by their photos represent their use and meaning making of popular culture.

The Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI)

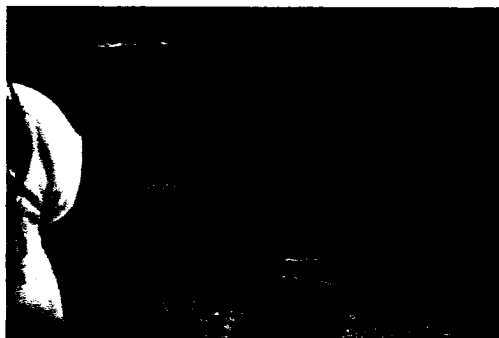


I chose the photo elicitation interview method, also developed within the tradition of visual anthropology, to integrate the girls' photographs into the interviewing process. I believed this would facilitate their personal narratives and communication of ideas (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2000, 1998; Ibanez, 2004). This method inspired the girls to create their own narratives by piecing together their memories, interpretations and perspectives. I prompted them with questions like "Why did you take this photo?" and "Why is this important to you?" to clarify how they used, interpreted, negotiated and made meaning from their engagements with popular culture.

Using a semi-structured interview process such as this method was also effective in that it helped us to structure the girls' narratives. Although there are advantages to structured interviews, in this case where the participants were female minors, I was concerned that a structured interview may have been perceived as hierarchical and could possibly further place the power into my hands. It was important that the girls associated their knowledge and their production of it as power in and of itself, "Power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977, p. 27). By the girls recognizing their power in their knowledge, this would also assist to ensure the reliability and validity of the data.

Last, to facilitate my analysis as all encompassing, I incorporated the video camera into the interviews to record their being and discourses. Reviewing the video footage as data helped me to see each girl as an individual and not simply an opinion.

3.02 Combining Interviewing Techniques



Combining research methods is an effective means for uncovering social phenomena related to adolescence,

One clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretation of their lives...It is important that we find out how they are interpreting the messages they receive through books, television, movies, and magazines. (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p.181)

Combining image based inquiry with several interviewing methods to elicit seven young teenage girls' perspectives allowed me to gain insight into particular areas of their lives. All three methods -the introductory focus group interview, photo-ethnography, and the photo elicitation interview- exposed me to an array of information, and assisted me "to obtain more valid responses...[which] strengthen the analysis of [the] interview data" (p. 188.) Group interviews exposed me to information influenced by the group dynamics, and, the private interviews facilitated the girls' individual perspectives, which at times were overlooked within the group dynamic.

Gergen et al. (1999) state that a key element in eliciting diversified perspectives is from researchers forming collaborative and individual bonds with their participants. Combining interviewing techniques allowed me to accomplish this. As the moderator of the focus group interview -and passionate about the topic- I frequently interjected and probed the girls to further explain themselves in relation to various topics. Within their private interviews where they used their photos to elicit various issues, I took on a similar role. At times, I probed them to clarify their perspectives and asked them to further explain themselves. Often, I found myself engaged in conversation and agreeing with them on various topics. Their verbal and visual discourses inspired by and represented in their photos serve as the bulk of this research data.

3.03 Ethical Concerns: Conducting Research With Female

Minors

There are several ethical concerns when conducting research with teenage girls, and more specifically when it involves their relationships with popular culture. The following points, which I build upon, must be taken into consideration:

- Relationship between the female researcher and the female youthful participant
- Gaining entry into youths' lives
- Validity of youths' voices
- Compromising the social status of the person when she herself becomes the researcher

Oakley (1994) states that ethical concerns related to the adult researcher when engaged with children as participants or co-researchers, should be no different than when researchers work with adults. According to her,

The consensus that emerges from studies exploring children's perspectives is that the major issues of the researcher-researched relationship are essentially the same with children as they are with adults. These issues include the need to be aware of and respect the imbalanced power relations of the researcher vis-à-vis the researched, the importance of distinguishing "private" from "public" accounts, and the need to handle controversial topics with sensitivity. (p. 26)

Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2002), however, caution that there are several constraints when engaging children as "co-participants, co-researchers, or as experts

in their own right...in research related to popular culture" (p. 25). They state that social and ethical concerns range from; the female researcher accrediting the role as "the savior;" gaining access to children's culture; compromising the social status of the child when asking her to comment on what's cool; the validity of the child's voice; and the political implications when conducting research on popular culture.

They cite McRobbie (1991) who addresses the role of the female researcher perceived by her female participants as the "savior." She states,

Sociology does not prepare us for the humility of powerless women, for their often totally deferential attitude toward the researcher. "Why are *you* interested in *me*...?" Or else the surprise on the part of girls that any adult could be really interested in what *they* had to say... Almost all feminist researchers have reported this sense of flattery on the part of women subjects, as though so rarely in their lives have they ever been singled out for attention by anybody. (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 30 on McRobbie, 1991, p. 77)

Mitchell & Reid-Walsh are also concerned with the ethical issues related to "gaining entry" into the private lives of children. They highlight specific procedures in place such as ethical committees and the Board of Ethics that require that researchers to submit in written format their planned procedures taken to minimize risks and danger regarding their youthful participants.

They also cite Buckingham (1993) who suggests that it is important that researchers make children aware that they are not there to "trash their interests" and to their parents or adult gatekeepers -people who are "looked to for guidance when decisions about whether or not to support an effort is made" (Seidman, 1998, p. 38)- that we are not there to corrupt or pollute their children.

They also raise concerns related to the validity of children's voices and sentimentalizing them. Children's voices are either accorded a greater value of truth because they are children or they are revered as cultural dupes. Fiske (1987), however, posits that people's meaning making practices have somewhat transcended this argument that children are cultural dupes in that they have taken into consideration that every person, despite their age, makes his or her own meaning from their consumption and production of popular culture, "despite the power of ideology to reproduce itself in its subjects, despite the hegemonic force of the dominant classes, the people still manage to make their own meanings and to construct their own culture within, and often against that which the industry provides for them" (p. 286).

Last, as "access to material goods –including popular culture artifacts- is often a reason or an excuse for children to exclude one another from a social group" (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2002, p. 32), there are the social concerns related to bullying and peer rejection when researchers seek children as co-researchers or participants and ask them –often in the company of their peers- to comment on what is popular and cool.

Being the first time that I conducted research with minors, I wanted to take special precautions to minimize the risks and dangers involved with conducting my research with teenage girls. One way that I did was that I designed the research to occur within a manageable time frame, four months. This allowed us enough time to uncover how the girls used, negotiated and made meaning from popular culture but protected us from engaging too deeply in researching and potentially uncovering sensitive topics. This also helped me to avoid becoming the "savior" in their eyes since I wasn't "saving" them from anything. Although I did take further precautions by conducting the second stage of interviews in private-inspired by the girls personal photographs-, this did not prevent a couple of the girls from overhearing their peer's

responses and making fun of her to me behind her back. Despite this one incident, however, all went smoothly, the girls had fun, and I obtained all necessary answers pertaining to my research questions.

3.04 Reciprocity

Reciprocity is an ethical consideration regarding research with human beings. Reciprocity is important because it demonstrates that researchers recognize the contributions of their participants in building knowledge. Reciprocity can come in the form of exchanged goods, services and/or information. I designed my data collection methods to provide the girls with several vehicles, namely photography and video to discuss intimate and relevant issues with an interested adult such as myself. In exchange for their time and emotional investment, I provided them each with a free set of photographs and an edited version of her interview on DVD.

Eder and Fingerson (2002) state that reciprocity is also a means for researchers to balance power relations between themselves and their youthful participants. One way to empower the participants, they suggest, is by using their contributions to enrich and improve their lives. Since I made it clear to the girls that the purpose of their insights was to directly implicate their narratives into designing an art education classroom curriculum they were aware that their contributions would be used to enrich the lives of others, which inadvertently enriched theirs.

3.05 Research Participants

For the recruitment of my research participants, I relied on my relationships with friends and a former preservice student to introduce me to two girls, Kristina, age 13,

and Paige, age 12. These girls, my first research participants, became my gatekeepers and were asked to select their best girlfriends to participate with her in the research.

The research unfolded through a group of seven girls between the ages of 12 and 14 years old.



Kristina selected her two English speaking girl friends, Lauren, age 14, and Liv, age 13. These girls lived in city suburbs and were of White middle class background. Both Kristina and Liv turned 14 during the research. Their friendships were formed when Liv entered the picture two years prior to this encounter. All three girls attended the same private girls' school and were required to wear a school uniform. All three had an older brother living at home with them. Regarding their parents' professions, Kristina and Liv's family members were in the fashion business while Lauren made no mention of her parents' professions.



Paige selected her three English speaking girl friends, Jayme, age 13, Kristen, age 13, and Myka, age 12. These girls lived in rural settings and were of White middle class background. Except for Paige who lived in a rural town, the other three girls each lived on a farm. The girls' friendships were formed many years prior to this research, and all attended the same public co-ed school, with no required school uniform. All had older sisters, some lived at home and some didn't. Except for Paige, the other three

girls each had a younger brother who lived at home with them. Regarding their parents' professions, though largely not discussed, each in some way was implicated in the farming business.

Kristina's mother Stella and Paige's older sister Robyn opted to become the adult gatekeepers and assisted me to gain parental consent for the girls to participate in the research. Both women took the responsibility, which I greatly appreciated, and became the liaisons between their group of girls and myself. This required them to pick up the signed consent forms (Appendix A, p. 278), reinforce scheduled interview dates, and make group transportation arrangements to designated interview locations.

3.06 Interview Locations



Friends' Loft



Paige's Backyard



Liv's Bedroom Den

I took careful consideration to the selection of interview locations to; level power relations between the girls and myself the researcher; ease transportation to and from locations; minimize noise pollution and ensure lighting effectiveness; and establish physical comfort and usability of space. Using a video camera as a research tool required that I take special consideration and preparation regarding some of these factors.

This research was conducted in three locations. For *group one's* focus group interview, I selected my friend's loft located in an industrial part of Montreal where many

artists and media production companies reside. The girls selected Liv's home and her bedroom to conduct their three photo elicitation interviews. Paige selected her home and her backyard for *group two's* focus group interview and the four photo elicitation interviews that followed two and a half weeks later. The parents were home during both groups of girls' photo elicitation interviews, and during group two's focus group interview, their technical support regarding the setup and respect for the girls' privacies were most appreciated.

Research Procedures and Timeline

Within this section, I present a four-month timeline of my research and explain the various procedures, which I embarked upon during this time.

3.07 Introduction To Group One: May 2004, The First Phone Call

The research began in the middle of May 2004, with the first telephone call that I made to Kristina, her mother, and Paige's older sister Robyn to establish the girls' involvement in the research. During the first phone call, I explained to them the nature of the research. They were told of the photographic experience and the motivation behind it. After this phone conversation, I emailed them both a written explanation concerning the research timeline and procedures and included the research participation consent form. In the consent form, the purpose and procedures of the research were clearly explained. All the while I did not define popular culture and instead I referred to the research as understanding what was important in teenage girls' lives.

Over the next couple of weeks, Kristina called me to confirm the participation of her two of her best friends, Liv and Lauren, and together we scheduled our first meeting, the focus group interview, to take place the middle of June. I called Robyn and she agreed for Paige. I asked Robyn if Paige had selected friends to participate with her, and at that time she was unable to confirm this information.

After the girls received the consent forms via email, I communicated with Kristina's mother, Stella, and she agreed to explain the research to the girls' family members. She organized to have the consent forms signed and agreed to transport the girls to and from their interview location.

3.08 Group One/Part One: June 2004, The Focus Group Meeting

From the first phone calls made in May to the focus group interview was approximately one month. I made a map with the directions to the location of my friend's loft and emailed it to both Kristina and Robyn.

I met Stella for the first time when she dropped off Kristina, Liv and Lauren for their interview. I assured her of the girls' safety and requested that she returned in three hours to pick them up. Paige was chaperoned by her older sister Robyn, and to my surprise and disappointment, she arrived without any girl friends. Although she was briefed to bring along at least one other friend, she didn't. Due to the greater distance Paige traveled for this meeting, I invited Robyn to remain in the room during their focus group interview. There were a total of four female research participants, myself, one female research assistant who operated the video camera, and one adult guardian, Robyn.

Early on in the focus group interview it was evident that Paige was not comfortable within the group dynamic. Once the first part of the interview was complete we took a break for a few minutes and I approached Paige and Robyn with an idea. As Paige, Robyn and I observed the playful dynamics between Kristina, Liv and Lauren, the three of us agreed to create a second the group of girls, consisting of Paige's three best girl friends.

3.09 Group One/Part Two: Same Day, Introduction To PEA

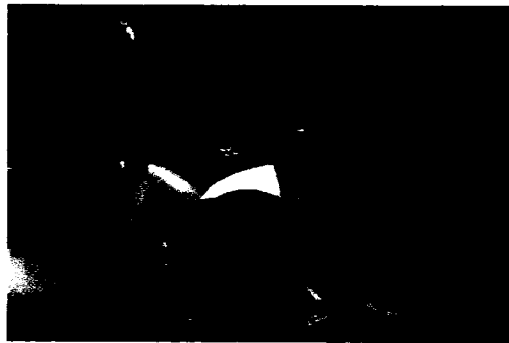


After a short break I resumed with only the three girls as Paige observed from the sidelines. I introduced Kristina, Lauren and Liv to the photo ethnography assignment and provided them each with a written handout that I designed to help them to consider what to photograph (See Appendix B p. 280 for the Handout). I explained the nature of the photos as the basis for their private photo elicitation interviews. We discussed key sites for photo taking experiences to assist them to document what they each considered relevant in their lives.

I gave the girls each a disposable camera to record approximately 27 images each. They were instructed to take photos of meaningful objects, places and people, in relation to their personal views. To conclude this meeting, I asked the girls to clarify with me any questions or concerns.

The girls agreed that two weeks for their photo taking assignment would be sufficient. Once I spoke with them to confirm they had completed the assignment, I picked up their cameras and submitted them for development. I ordered two sets of prints, one for me, and one for each girl. It took approximately one week for the development of the film. I held on to their photos until their next round of interviews. I scheduled the photo-elicitation interviews to occur all in one day, and, within the one week that I received their photos.

3.10 Group One/Part Three: July 2004, PEI



Kristina's PEI

Three weeks later their three photo elicitation interviews took place in Liv's bedroom den. I conducted all three photo-elicitation interviews, using the same introduction and conclusion with each girl. At the beginning of their interviews, I introduced them to their photos, I asked them what they thought of the focus group experience, and how they defined popular culture for their photo taking experience. Each private interview lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Once all three interviews were complete I regrouped them to discuss their final insights regarding their experiences and insights in the research. Since the girls were exhausted and all talked out, this interview did not last long and was somewhat difficult

to encourage and maintain. In this meeting the girls shared with me their love for the video camera, and confirmed with me their enjoyment of the research process.

3.11 Group Two/Part One: August 2004, FGI

During the time that I worked with the first group of girls, I remained in contact with Paige to solidify her involvement as the gatekeeper for group two, made up of her best girlfriends. She confirmed that three of them agreed to participate in the research. Together we scheduled the beginning of August for our first focus group interview with them. Like Stella, Robyn agreed to explain the research to the girls' parents and organized the signing of the consent forms.

We all met at Paige's home and selected her backyard to conduct the interview. Since Paige's father was home, he offered to help us with the technical setup involved with the outdoor electrical outlets, and when needed, he gave us the necessary privacy. Using the same introduction as I did with group one, this focus group interview took on a similar format.

3.12 Group Two/Part Two: Same Day, Introduction To PEA



After facilitating the one-hour focus group interview, the girls took a 15-minute break. We then regrouped to discuss the photo ethnography assignment. Similar to my explanation with group one, I explained the nature of the assignment, gave them the same written handout as I did with group one, and explained the purpose of their photos for their photo elicitation interviews. As the summer was coming to an end and the school year was about to begin two and a half weeks later -in early September- the girls agreed to complete their photo taking assignment in a week and half. Due to these time constraints, Robyn offered to have the photos developed for me and agreed to keep them from the girls until their photo elicitation interviews. I reimbursed her for the cost of the photo development.

3.13 Group Two/Part Three: August 2004, PEI



Jayne's PEI

Within two weeks from the focus group interview, we reconvened again at Paige's home. Once again, several of her family members were present, and like before, our privacy was not compromised. The girls' four interviews took place in Paige's backyard and each lasted approximately 45 minutes. As they rotated their turns the others spent time in Paige's bedroom or roamed around the neighborhood. Once the interviews were complete we all regrouped one last time and again, this was hard to

encourage and maintain as the girls were exhausted and eager to get ready for a party they were attending that evening. During this time, however, the girls invited me to Paige's bedroom to thank me and together they placed a plastic Leigh over my head signifying and articulating that I was now "one of them."

Treatment of The Data

Within this section, I explain how I treat the data in the following two chapters *Lights, Camera...Gossip!* and, *A Wardrobe Of Voices*. Although I conducted the research with two groups of best girl friends, in the case of this project, I treat them as one group made up of seven girls. However, to distinguish their focus group conversations in the writing, together we established two separate names for them. Focus group one became known as the *City Girls* and focus group two became known as the *Country Girls*. These names were chosen in reference to where the girls each lived; three lived in city suburbs, one in a rural town, and three in country farm settings. Although in the following two chapters some of the girls at times identified themselves in relation to their country lifestyle, city life versus country life is beyond the scope of this research and will not be addressed in this project.

3.14 The Data Chapters

In chapter four entitled *Lights, Camera... Gossip!* I address the girls' discourses and where I intercepted to probe them further. I present the data from the focus group interviews according to the similar themes that arose within both groups' interview.

In chapter five entitled *A Wardrobe of Voices* I divide the seven girls' narratives into seven sub-chapters entitled Door #1 through Door #7. Each "door" is dedicated to each girl's personal narrative accompanied by her selection of photographs.

3.15 Coding The Data: Verbal And Visual Discourse

The bulk of the data consists of verbal and visual discourses that emerged from the focus group interviews, the private photo elicitation interviews and the photos themselves. According to Rosalind Gill (1996) discourse is used to "refer to all forms of talk and texts" (p. 141).

To code the girls' verbal discourses that emerged from the focus group interviews, I transcribed their conversations and highlighted various themes discussed within both focus groups. I made a column for each and color-coded the various themes that emerged. Once I recognized similarities between their conversations I shaped the chapter to address their topics of interest (Please see chapter 4 p. 102 for Chart #1, the color coding system).

My coding process for the girls' photo elicitation interviews occurred in two stages. Stage one involved transcribing each girl's interview to isolate specific topics. I then looked at their photos to recognize and compare recurring themes amongst them. Once I recognized similarities, I returned to each girl's personal narrative to discover differences amongst each of them, which emerged through the issues she individually addressed.

For stage two I designed an interpretive repertoire framework based on the audience reception research of Hall, Hobson, Stacey and Hermes. I borrowed many of their repertoires, "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and

evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (Potter & Wetherall, 1987, p. 149) to code the girls’ verbal and visual discourses represented in their narratives and photos (Please see the next section for my definitions of the coding system).

Within the body of chapter five where I address each girl’s narrative, I present my interpretive analysis alongside and at the conclusion of each girl’s sub-chapter. In the appendix of that chapter entitled *Behind The Scenes*, I provide a comprehensive analysis based on the coding system I used in my interpretive repertoire framework along with each girl’s interpretive analysis framework completed with my coding of her verbal and visual discourses.

In chapter six, *Mirror To Her Self*, I address *Sense of Self* as the meta-narrative, inspired by my interpretive repertoire framework, and I provide another comprehensive analysis regarding how each girl used verbal and visual language inspired by popular culture to construct her account of her personal and social world.

Definitions: Interpretive Repertoire Framework

3.16 Popular Culture As Meaningful Lived Experience

The girls' defined popular culture as meaningful lived experience through favorite and popular texts used and practices engaged in (William, 1999; Hall, 1997; Storey, 1996).

Meaningful Texts

I identified five recurring texts in their photos, which I coded as *Physical Environments (PE)*, *Media (M)*, *Fashion (F)*, *People (PP)* and *Pets (PT)*, and *Health (H1)* (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are defined as follows:

- Physical Environments: meaningful spaces.
- Media: meaningful commodities related to digital, audio, and print.
- Fashion: meaningful commodities related to personal style and self-adornment.
- People and Pets: meaningful people, pets, and farm animals.
- Health: meaningful environments and commodities related to health.

Meaningful Practices

I identified four recurring practices in their photos and coded them as *Personal Adornment (PA)*, *Communication (C)*, *Health (H2)* and *Citizenship (CD)* (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are defined as follows:

- Personal Adornment: meaningful activities related to physical appearance and personal style.

- Communication: meaningful activities related to communicating with the self and others.
- Health: meaningful activities related to healthy and unhealthy lifestyles.
- Citizenship: meaningful activities related to the betterment of humanity.

3.17 Meaningful Uses of Texts and Practices

I borrowed from Stacey, *Identification (ID)* and from Hermes, *Practical Knowledge (PK)* to code the girls' photos (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are defined as follows:

- Practical Knowledge: meaningful information learned and used to teach others.
- Identification: texts used and practices engaged in to describe aspects of the self

3.18 Meaningful Meanings From Texts and Practices

Inspired by Hobson, Stacey and Hermes, I identified one meta-narrative, *Sense of Self*, deconstructed into four interdependent elements, Image, Wellbeing, Knowledge, and Citizenship. These four elements explain how the girls made meaning of their use of popular culture to construct sense of self. The first three elements are coded as *Image (SSI)*, *Wellbeing (SSW)*, and *Ambition to Learn and/or to Teach ((AL/AT))*. I coded their photos to further understand with which group they identified, connected and negotiated with, and developed five terms in relation to their *Shared Community* with others; *Girls (SCG)*, *Peers (SCP)*, *Boys (SCB)*, *Family (SCF)* and

Humanity (SCH). The fourth element, citizenship, is coded as her shared community with humanity (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are each defined as follows:

- Ambition to Learn/Teach: motivated to seek out information to learn from and to teach others with.
- Sense of Self as Wellbeing: to experience inner wellbeing related to self worth and outer appearance.
- Sense of Self as Image: self defined by physical appearance.
- Shared Community of Girls: emotional connection to other females
- Shared Community of Peers: emotional connection to mixed gender peers.
- Shared Community of Boys: emotional connection to boys.
- Shared Community of Family: emotional connection to family.
- Shared Community of Humanity: emotional connection to humanity and how she envisions her role in connection to her larger community.

3.19 Negotiating Texts and Practices

I applied Hall's three reading positions, *Dominant hegemonic (D)*, *Negotiated (N)*, and *Oppositional (O)* according to the dominant cultures operating at the moment of each girl's interpretations of her photos (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are defined as followed:

- Dominant readings: refer to a person operating within the preferred code of the dominant operating culture.
- Negotiated readings: refer to a person negotiating the dominant operating culture.

- Oppositional readings: refer to a person opposing the dominant operating culture.

The four dominant cultures with which the girls negotiated were coded as *Girl Culture (GC)*, *Peer Culture (PC)*, *Family Culture (FC)* and *Media Culture (CC)*. I code a fifth category as *Other (O)* to refer to additional cultures that were also operating but not often enough such as *Youth Culture*, *City Culture*, *School Culture* and *Country Culture* (Chart 1; Tables 1-7). They are defined as followed:

- Girl Culture: female-related lived experience.
- Peer Culture: peer related lived experience.
- Family Culture: family related lived experience.
- Media Culture: consumer related lived experience.

3.20 Girlpower As Can-Do-Girls

In relation to the literature that states that girls construct themselves and are constructed by the girlpower ideology (Harris, 2004), I fix girlpower as the dominant ideology to understand to what extent these girls are operating within the preferred code of girlpower as can-do-girls that are *Ambitious (AM)*, *Self-Inventive (SI)*, *Consumer Powered (CP)*, *Athletic (A)*, *Emotionally Healthy/Spiritual (EH)*, *Socially Conscious (SA)*, and prefer *All Female Friendships (AFF)* to boys (Chart 1; Tables 1-7).

Lights, Camera...Gossip!



PERSONA

4 Lights, Camera...Gossip!

The following chapter addresses the issues that emerged within the focus group interviews of the *city girls* and the *country girls*.

My research was conducted in three parts, the first involved a focus group interview, which functioned as an introductory meeting where I introduced the girls to the research topic and they discussed every day life instigated by their popular shared practices. In this interview, which resembled a critical reflective conversation, meaningful topics were addressed that later served a purpose for the second and third stages of the research, the photo ethnography assignment and their private photo elicitation interviews.

My intention to begin with the focus group interview was to introduce the topic, research format, and vibe I wished to establish throughout the course of this project. I wanted the girls to know that this was about them and their perspectives, and, that they should feel free to express themselves openly in a friendly and safe environment. The objective of this focus group interview was to heighten the girls' awareness concerning the issues that concerned them most by facilitating meaningful dialogue whereby the girls could begin to reflect on and critically discuss important issues in their lives.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, although I had initially intended to have one large group of girls, consisting of approximately eight members in total, this did not occur and a second group was established with Paige and her three best girlfriends. Nevertheless, both groups of girls and their friendships are considered and researched as one group of girls consisting of seven members.

To recap, the first focus group interview with the city girls took place at my friend's loft located in an industrial part of Montreal where many artists and media

production companies reside. The second focus group interview with the country girls took place one month later in the backyard of Paige's home. In the city girls' focus group interview there were a total of four girls who participated in the research, one researcher –myself- one female assistant to operate the video cameras, and one adult guardian, Paige's sister. In the country girls' focus group interview four girls participated, myself, and the same female assistant who operated the video cameras.

Participants Of The Focus Group Interviews

4.01 Dress Code for City Girls' FGI



Over the following pages, I provide a dress code description of each girl to demonstrate how she performed her individual and social identity through self-adornment.

In the city girls' interview, all four girls had a similar image in their personal dress code, fashionable yet casual and simple. Demonstrating individuality, each differentiated herself from the next in her choice of color scheme, hairstyle and accessories. Each wore low-wasted pants and none of them had on tops that revealed their bellies. Although I present stills from the video footage, the following paragraphs are descriptions of what each of the girls wore to this first interview, including myself.

Paige, age 12, the youngest of the girls, had shoulder length thick blond hair tied back in a tight bun. She had blue eyes, no makeup on, a red no-logo partially zipped hooded sweatshirt, a white no-logo t-shirt and low-wasted fitted faded blue jeans rolled up to her calf. She wore no jewelry, no purse, and red flipflop sandals.

Liv, 13 at that time but turned 14 a few days later, was the tallest of the girls and had long blond hair that was pulled up in a high pony on top of her head with a hairdresser pink clip to pull her long bangs away from her face. She had black-rimmed glasses on, braces, and wore pink lipgloss. She had on low-wasted fitted blue jeans rolled up to her calf, a pale yellow partially zipped hooded sweatshirt, and an aqua fitted t-shirt that had a faded medium sized unreadable logo across her chest. For jewelry she had on a tiny gold cross that hung on a thin chocker chain around her neck, and a bracelet and watch on her right arm. For shoes she wore black flip flops, and carried a small yellow pencil-case size shaped purse with a short gold and yellow chain strap.

Lauren, age 14, had long dark brown wavy hair loosely pulled back in a low pony and long wispy bangs parted to the side of her face. She had pale skin, red freckles, and blue eyes. She wore some black eyeliner on the inside of her eyes, bronze-pink lipgloss, black nailpolish on her finger nails, several gold thin rings on her various fingers, and a silver heart charm on a silver choker chain around her neck. For her clothing, she had on three-quarter length black army-influenced chinos, a white t-shirt that read *Juicy* in black across her chest, and a partially zipped black, red and white hooded sweatshirt. On the left side of the breast of the sweatshirt was a logo that read *Ecko Red*, and red, white and black thick-banded stripes on the wrists, sides, and collar of the sweatshirt. She wore red flip flops for shoes and a medium sized oval

shaped black purse adorned with colorful butterfly prints, a silver buckle and a black medium length strap.

Kristina, age 13, and the tiniest of the girls, had long wavy dark brown hair that fell like a lion's mane around her face and half-way down her back. She had long wisped bangs that hung over her brown eyes and used a tiny blue hairdresser clip to keep part of her hair up and off of her face. She had braces and pink-red lipgloss on her lips. For her clothing, she wore low-wasted blue jeans, a black partially zipped hooded sweatshirt with a white unreadable small logo on her left breast, and a black t-shirt with a white-rimmed collar and a white thin zigzag design across her chest. She had on black *Nike* running shoes with a white swoosh, no jewelry and carried a red shopping bag style and size purse that read "Boys Are Smelly."

I came dressed as I usually did, very casual in three-quarter length green army pants, a pale pink tie dyed long sleeved t-shirt adorned in the center with a big bright blue Chinese-influenced symbol that read 'Happiness,' and blond shoulder length hair tied low in two short pig tails.

4.02 Dress Code for Country Girls' FGI



In the country girls' interview, all four girls also had a similar image in their personal dress code, which was completely summery and outdoorsy. Only Paige differentiated herself from the others in her choice of color scheme and hairstyle, she wore pink where the others wore blue and white. The following paragraphs are descriptions of what each of the girls wore to this first interview, including myself.

Paige, age 12, the youngest of her group of girls, and one of the most physically developed of her friends, again, had her hair pulled back from her face in a tight bun. She wore a pink spaghetti strapped tank top and pink flowered surfer shorts. She had no makeup, nailpolish, and jewelry, and wore no shoes.

Myka, age 12, was tall, lanky and not yet physically developed, had long thin medium blond hair that hung halfway down her back, and long bangs parted to the side. She had on a white lasagna strap tank top and blue flowered surfer shorts, and wore no shoes. She wore braces, no makeup and no nailpolish.

Kristen, age 13, was average height for her group and not yet physically developed, had shoulder-length medium blond hair and bangs that hid her forehead. She had on a pale blue and white striped lasagna strapped tanktop and white short shorts. She had braces, wore no makeup, and no nailpolish. She had on a watch and red elastic on her right arm and a hospital bracelet on her left arm. She also wore no shoes.

Jayme, age 13, one of the most physically developed of the girls, had long blond hair that hung halfway down her back. She wore a white t-shirt with a dark blue *Jacob Junior* logo and jean shorts. She had on a several yellow rubber bracelets on her right wrist and a pale blue think banded watch on her left wrist. She wore no makeup, no nailpolish and no shoes.

Again, I came casually dressed wearing the same army green three-quarter length pants but this time since I knew the interview would take place outdoors I wore a pink bandana strapless triangle top. I wore my hair in two low braids.

Interview Format

4.03 City Girls

In the city girls' focus group interview we all sat in a triangular format. I sat on a wooden chair in the middle of the four girls, and in pairs, two girls each sat on either side of me. Lauren and Kristina sat on a white couch, Liv and Paige sat on the on a blue treasure chest. In the middle of us was a large wooden square coffee table where I laid out a couple of teen magazines, a book of artistic photographs of women and their disposable cameras. I offered the girls some *Snapple*™ yellow lemonade, which they drank during the break.

4.04 Country Girls

In the country girls' focus group interview, which took place in Paige's backyard we all sat on the grass in a semi-circle format. All four girls sat next to one another and I sat at the end of this crest. I placed the table microphone in the middle of us on the grass. Since it was a beautiful hot summer day and with the sun blaring down on us, Paige's mother also prepared lemonade juice, and this time it was pink. This became a very nostalgic moment for me as the color and taste of the lemonade reminded me of my own childhood days growing up in a close-knit country suburb.

4.05 My Introduction

On the advice of my thesis committee, who knew my vibrant personality and ease to elicit stories from others, I did not prepare any structured questions to ask the girls or paper to read from. Instead I listened carefully to what the girls were saying and used their conversations to facilitate topics. In both settings, I explained to the girls not to look at the camera but to look at each other and myself instead. When the cameras were rolling I began by asking each girl to state her name, age and the school she attended. After they introduced themselves, I set the tone immediately and explained the intention of this research.

I began my introduction with the city girls by tying the term popular culture to teenage girls' popular lived experiences, I said, "I found that...it would be really interesting to have research done by young girls like you girls to basically fill me in on the role of popular culture in your lives, and so I'm here to learn from you girls...to find out what you do outside of school...."

I began with a similar introduction with the country girls, "...The whole time that we are spending talking is to define through your eyes you're going to tell me what you think popular culture is... I am looking at your experience as girls and what you go through on a daily basis and that's what we are going to be talking about, [is] your life."

I provide the transcripts of how the girls defined popular culture.

4.06 City Girls Definitions

Leanne: ...when you heard that I was doing research on popular culture and teenage girls what came to mind?

Kristina: Things that most teenage girls like to do on their spare time. Just stuff that a lot of people do.

Lauren: Music and movies and stuff, and stuff that you do on a Friday night and a Saturday night like sleepovers and all those girly stuff put together.

Liv: I really don't know what to think, I guess it's like what they're saying but further into it, like kinda what the root of it all like, what triggers all of that, I don't know how to explain it.

Leanne: Have you heard or seen that word outside of me bringing it to you?

Liv: Popular yes, but not them together.

Leanne: Paige, what do you think of popular culture?

Paige: I think its pretty much the same what they said.

4.07 Country Girls Definitions

Leanne: ... Have any of you actually heard of the word popular culture? Ever?

Jayne: No.

Paige: Well, I heard of them separate though.

Jayne: Yeah.

Leanne: If we separate it 'popular' and 'culture' what would popular mean to you?

Paige: Things that a lot of people do, things that are common.

Jayne: Yeah, like what they like.

Leanne: And 'culture' what does that word mean to you? What do you think of when you hear the word culture?

Jayne: Different kind of families and different kind of colors.

Paige: Different lifestyles.

Kristen: Kinda where you came from.

Jayne: Different families.

Leanne: Excellent, excellent. So culture means so many different things so when you put those words together popular culture, what would think maybe that would mean?

Jayne: The cultures that are really popular (giggle) that everybody either follows or shadows.

Leanne: Exactly, absolutely, fabulous, so stuff that are popular, lifestyles that are popular.

What is Popular Culture?

Although I avoided giving them any scripted or unscripted definition of this term and throughout our one-hour interviews I did not instigate topics unless first brought up by them, I do want to highlight how I helped the girls to contextualize the term popular culture simply by introducing the theme of this project as wanting to know what was important in their lives as teenage girls. Since I tied the term *popular culture* to the girls' lived experiences, the value this definition had in the context of this research was that I established that they would, could and should talk about the popular things that girls did in their daily lives. I used this term to elicit their conversations concerning what was meaningful to them at that time of their lives.

Once specific topics were addressed and when I felt it was necessary to clarify what they were saying, I instigated and probed them to further explain their perspectives. Because this term was initially associated by both the city girls and the country girls to various forms of Hollywood driven media and fashion, the girls discussed similar topics and issues in relation to their value systems.

List of Topics Addressed

- Entertainment through & relatability to magazines, TV, movies, music videos & the Internet
- Celebrity influence on fashion, body image & dreams/goals
- Communicating with friends through online chatting, listening/singing/dancing to music (pop & country)
- Popstars are (not) role models
- Popstars' Influence through music videos
- School Dress Code
- All girl friendships
- Personal style & self-expression through clothing, hair & makeup
- Shopping for brand names & bargains
- Work & money
- Media versus reality
- Drugs & smoking cigarettes
- Boys, peer pressure & dating
- Boyfriends versus boys as friends
- Body image

4.08 Girls' Friendships & Media

Friendship between girls was the first topic the girls addressed through conversations they had when speaking about their favorite movies and TV shows. In the case of the city girls, Liv, Lauren and Kristina related their own friendship to their favorite movie *Mean Girls*. They identified with certain circumstances the girls faced in the movie and saw their own character traits in those of the leading characters, "It relates to a lot of things that teenage girls go through" said Lauren, "You see all of their characters and everyone's flaws or like their strong points, and you could relate to it a lot." Kristina agreed, "They have a bit of what we have." Liv explained, "Kristina is like Gretchen she's like the girl who can't stand people being mad at her, or she'll like always want to help someone and that's how she is, its not the bad qualities that Gretchen has but the good qualities."

As the girls continued to describe the movie and their interest in it, I was able to witness how the experience of both watching and interpreting this movie was in itself a meaningful experience for them. I was interested to know why the movie was called *Mean Girls* and what relevance this title had to them and so I asked, "How did you feel about the movie being called *Mean Girls*, was it about girls being mean?" Lauren explained,

It was about girls saying something to your face and meaning something different behind your back. Like it's about betraying friends and how sometimes people aren't what they appear to be. So I don't think it was about being mean but about finding out who you really are, and seeing who your true friends are.

Paige gave her opinion, "It's a really good movie, and as they said it, it explains a lot of things that people go through." So I asked, "Is that typical of teenage girls to be mean?" And all responded with laughter, "Yes." Kristina further explained, "Yes, they just say things and sometimes they don't know what comes out of their mouths." I continued to probe them, "What were they mean about?" Liv responded, "Guys a lot, they would say something to you and say something different to them." Kristina cut in, "like betraying," then Lauren said, "Like say if you like a guy and you told your best friend that you liked him and your best friend went up to him at a party and she like..." Kristina took over, "started making out with him" and Liv concluded, "or something like that you know."

Through this conversation it was evident that these girls enjoyed their friendships together. Although the movie *Mean Girls* displayed mean behavior between girl friends, these girls interpreted the film as demonstrating the difference between healthy and unhealthy friendships, and chose to focus on the qualities that make for healthy friendships.

I was curious to know what brought the three of them together as friends and what kept them together and so I asked, "Do you find there is a reason why you girls are all friends like that you have something in common?" Liv responded, "We all laugh about everything that's one of the things that brings us all together, we laugh at the littlest things." Lauren continued,

And we all have a lot of the same opinions on stuff, and I think that maybe our personalities aren't the same but you just know your friends will always be there for you, you know? Like if I'm really insecure about my body maybe Liv really likes her body a lot, so she can help me get over that insecurity and all that stuff so even if we're not the same our differences can help each other.

Based on Liv's comment, she enjoyed friendship for its playful aspect and according to Lauren she relied on her girl friends to nurture her self-esteem. The movie was significant to these girls as it was reminiscent of their own life experiences and what they were going through as young teenage girls just entering high school.

Although not as articulate and critically aware as the city girls, the country girls shared a similar story regarding their relationship with their favorite TV shows *Friends*. The girls explained their enjoyment of the show, "It's funny" they all said, and laughed at some of the characters' personality traits, "Joey and Phoebe, they're just so funny" Jayme giggled, "They're kinda like dumb" continued Kristen. They thought Phoebe's TV personality resembled that of Kristen's, "They always make fun of me because I'm lost in the conversation a lot, " said Kristen. Paige continued, "like if we talk then she'll be like..." and Jayme finished Paige's statement mimicking Kristen, "What, what, what are you saying?" Kristen giggled, "I don't know, she's kinda funny, she's dopey kinda."

Although the girls admitted to having little in common with the storylines, the city living experience (the show takes place in New York City) and the ages of the show's characters, they nonetheless related to aspects of the leading characters and overall they enjoyed the kind of humor exhibited in the sitcom. Although they were less articulate than their city counterparts, which I attributed to being younger in age and having had less experience in discussing media's role in the classroom, whereas the city girls admitted to discussing such topics in school, the show *Friends*, like *Mean Girls* signified and reinforced to them a shared value of friendship.

4.09 Celebrities as Role Models

Celebrities as role models were largely discussed amongst all the girls. The girls spoke of them in relation to their relatability and influence in their personal lives. They spoke of having celebrity role models close in age to identify and negotiate with as they shared similarities in personal style, attitude, and goals. They explained their admiration for them as inspirations to believe in themselves.

Lauren spoke of pop stars close in age as role models that help her to negotiate her insecurities related to her physical appearance, she said,

I use to be very self conscious about my freckles and now all these new actresses like Lindsay Lohan coming out with freckles just makes me feel more secure of myself. When I got the magazine ad saying freckles is the new thing, and they made freckle pencils and everything, all that kind of stuff just made me feel good.

Liv identified with Paris Hilton and admired her for her sense of style and personality, she said, "I love Paris Hilton clothes. Its not preppy but its not rock n' roll... I dress like Paris Hilton but tone it down a notch... I find she's entertaining...her personality and her style...but a bit too skinny...and she always has so much fun..." She also related her friendships with girls to that of Paris and Nicole Ritchie's exemplified in their Reality TV *The Simple Life*, she said,

I saw in the *Simple Life* this week, they'll just like go up to random people and ask them for money. I'm like so shocked that she is able to do that and not be shy about it, and they laugh about it, I love that...that's one of the things that brings us all together, we laugh at the littlest things.

Paige referred to Lindsey Lohan, Hilary Duff, Ashley Simpson and Avril Lavigne as role models that provide girls with options regarding diversified images, she said,

It drives a lot of how people dress...people look up to some people...[and] try and dress like them. Avril has the punk look and I find it's really good to have the two mixes. There's like Lindsey Lohan and Hillary Duff versus Ashley Simpson and Avril Lavigne. It's two different styles so you don't always have to be pressured into wearing something that you don't want to.

Paige also admired them as teenage singers who made their dreams come true. Paige's dream to become a singer herself was further encouraged by seeing that if they did it then so can she, she said, "Hillary Duff, Lindsay Lohan and Avril Lavigne, I think its really cool that they're teenagers and they can sing, that's why I keep singing if enough people hear me, I don't know...."

4.10 Image: Personal Style & Representation

Image in the form of personal style and self-representation was an important topic addressed by the girls. Although the city girls were restricted to a school uniform throughout the school year and the country girls were not, clothing remained their most significant form of expression and representation articulated through this interview.

For the city girls, their families who worked in the clothing business largely influenced their personal styles, Liv stated, "My parents are in the fashion business so its always been a part of my life because I have them knowing so they kind of influence

me I guess and that's what I want to be when I'm older." For Lauren, personal style was about being hip and socially recognized for one's style, she said,

What I love about Kristina and her family is that they all have such different styles....I think it's a really big part of Kristina's style is that she gets a lot of that from her sister...we all have trademarks that everyone recognizes like Kristina is always different and Liv is always girly and bright and I'm just different every time, I'm all over the place (giggle).

The girls also expressed a strong desire to dress according to their moods.

Lauren stated,

I think for me it reflects on how I'm feeling that day. Like if I feel like going out and just shopping I'll wear a simple dress or like a cute skirt and a shirt, or if I'm going to hang out friends I'll wear jeans or pants, one day I'll paint my nails pink and the other day, black, it's weird, whatever I'm feeling like.

Kristina agreed with Lauren, "Pretty much the same thing, let's say I feel like looking all pretty one day and I'll wear a skirt, something nice, girly, or the next day I just wanna hang out, I'll wear sweatpants. It depends on how I feel." Liv also agreed, "It's exactly like them," and so did Paige, "I'll wear black one day or the next I will wear pink, it changes."

Paige admitted to taking a long time getting dressed in the morning in order to make sure she felt good in her appearance, "It does take me a long time to get ready in the morning, like with my sister she can get ready in 15-20 minutes and it takes me much longer because I find I have to find what I feel like and what looks good on me that day."

Liv felt she didn't have that problem since she was required to wear a school uniform, which helped her to get ready quicker, she said, "It's so much easier for us because we have a uniform." Kristina however agreed with Paige, as this was not the case for her in the summer, she said, "Lately in the summer I've been noticing its taking so much longer, you want to be a bit different, you want to find something different to wear and how you wear it, you want it to be different, well that's me personally."

When the topic of clothing and personal style was addressed with the country girls Kristen was the first to respond, she said, "I dress comfy, whatever I feel like wearing that day, I don't like anything that's like itchy or hot." Instead of the girls each taking this opportunity to discuss their personal style, Paige and Jayme both jumped on Kristen to further describe her style, Paige said, "You don't try to dress up like you wear nice clothes but it's not like," then Jayme giggled and cut in, "you dress the weather you don't dress past that. Some people when it's hot they'll be in jeans but Kristen will always be in shorts." Kristen piped in to defend herself and explained further, "I wear what I am comfortable in, like if its too hot I will just wear shorts, I don't care really, but not ugly shorts I will have my good shorts... they're not all hand-me-downs but I have two older sisters so I get a lot of their clothes some of them I like but some of them, they're too used."

Once I saw this dynamic, this instigated me to further question them on how they decided to wear what they wore and who where they dressing for and so I asked, "Do we girls care about our looks or the way we dress based on our friends, or does media impose that pressure?" Paige responded, "I say mostly my friends, and Kristen agreed, "Yeah, it's probably because you don't want people to see you, like..." and Paige cut her off to continue her sentence, "...In the wrong light, like indicate you the first time you meet someone," Kristen agreed, "Yeah."

I asked the girls a few times and in different ways about media's influence on their sense of fashion, "Do you feel pressure from looking at fashion ads? Does that play a role in any of your lives? And, do sexually explicit ads offend you?" For the most part they answered 'Um...' or 'No' to each of these questions. Paige however was the only one who stated that she was aware of sexually explicit imagery in the ads "it is all around us" but nevertheless this did not influence her to dress provocatively. Kristen however commented on the fact that no one she knew dressed that way and therefore she felt her environment played a large role in how someone dressed and what they were influenced and not influenced by. She stated, "I just think, 'why would you want to wear that?' To me I don't know why anybody would be like that but that's just me ... I don't really see very many people like that. I don't find it around where I live. There's not a lot of people like that."

Although some of the city girls admired certain youthful celebrities' personal styles they realized their human components and were not blinded by them, Lauren said, "I love them and I really idealize them because I love music and I can't live without music" but she was not influenced to wear provocative clothing like them. Instead she recognized their risqué clothing attire as costumes related to their stage performances, she said,

When you see them when paparazzi take pictures of them they're wearing their sweatpants and t-shirts but when they're on stage and when they are performing they're wearing their costumes. It's like that for anything you see so it's not like they're always going out in these bras and hot pants, like when they go out shopping they just wear whatever they want with a hat and their hair not done but when they're on stage it's a different story...

However, when it came to girls younger than she, Lauren felt that these music videos might not be good examples since she believed they were too young to understand. She said, "I think that other people who don't realize it's just a stage act they take it too personally and seriously. So for younger girls who don't know that it's not a good example for them...." Nevertheless, Lauren had no problem with the way certain celebrities dressed and therefore was supportive of their choices, "I don't have anything against it, if she wants to do that and she's comfortable with her body then let her do it."

Like Lauren, Liv accepted what was relatable to her and dismissed what didn't impact on her sense of self. Although she related to Paris Hilton she was not offended by her sexual scandal or the way she (sometimes) dressed provocatively. Instead she admired her for being herself despite others who criticized her, she said, "...With the whole [sex] scandal with Paris, I still really respect her...I won't be offended if she wears something too short because I know it's her own personal style and no one else needs to like it but I wouldn't go out wearing the little tiny things she wears."

Kristina also admired Paris's courage to be different despite what others said, "She doesn't care what other people think." Nevertheless like Liv and Lauren she was not influenced to copy their celebrity images, "I'm not gonna be attracted to it like 'Oh my gosh Britney Spears is wearing that so I have to do that!' Never because I wouldn't go out wearing that but I wouldn't be offended."

Since Liv and Kristina's parents were in the fashion business I asked the city girls how their parents felt about certain provocative fashion styles, "How do your parents feel about the low-waisted jeans and belly button t-shirts?" Liv responded that although her father wasn't pleased according to her he had no choice,

My dad's not like crazy about it but he doesn't stop me, it's not his favorite thing. We went to a sweet 16 a few weeks ago, and I wore a dress that was kinda cut down a bit, and so the next day he told me 'What were you wearing last night?' I said, 'Mom got it for me,' he said 'Oh my gosh!' He won't stop me because he knows it's in style because both my parents are in the fashion business but he's not fond of it.

Kristina's mom didn't like these styles and although Kristina had no intention of dressing to be provocative, she preferred the comfort of wearing low waisted jeans to those that were high waisted,

My mom, she doesn't like it when I wear low jeans, she'll tell me pull them up or pull down your top, but they're made like that and I can't wear them higher, it's uncomfortable! It's not that I try and be in, it's just how I have to wear them. I don't wear tops over my belly button but if I have skin showing it's okay, it doesn't matter if it's showing.

Lauren said there was a time and place for everything and felt it was important to dress accordingly,

I realize and even my mom tells me there is a time and place for everything so say if I'm going to the movies with my friends. She'll let me wear jeans and a t-shirt, as long as it's not showing. I'm not wearing Britney Spears style with the bra hanging out and everything. It's different when I'm going to see family where and I'm wearing more like pants, a shirt and a sweater over it to be respectable to the people around you.

Paige's mother also trusted her choice of clothing, "Well my parents don't really interfere with what I wear most of the time because I don't usually wear shirts above my belly button, and pants, I don't know, it depends."

Since I noticed the *Juicy* logo written across Lauren's chest, I asked the girls how they felt about brand name clothing. Although some admitted to being influenced by them, most prioritized price and fit. Lauren said, "I really like it but sometimes I don't have the money to buy that stuff.... But if I go into a random store and could buy shorts for 10 or 15 dollars, if it looks good on me I'll buy it, it doesn't have to be brand name to look good on you."

Paige said she dressed however she felt and was not inclined to spend much money on clothing, "I dress in whatever I feel like. Both my older sisters are into the style, especially the one whose not here, she'll go in and buy like \$100 dollar pants, whatever, like I don't do that, it's not my style." Liv preferred to buy fake name brand articles to the real ones, "I wouldn't buy a real *Louis Vuitton* because I may wreck it or get bored of it so I buy a fake and am proud of it." Kristina was price conscious, "I wouldn't go off and buy something without looking at the price."

With the country girls, Kristen addressed this topic and expressed herself as price conscious, "*Jacob Junior*, I like that store...there's a lot of good sales, I don't like to buy anything too expensive, I am kinda cheap."

It was only logical for me to ask all the girls how they got their money and so I did. In terms of the city girls, Lauren baby-sat, Kristina cleaned her dad's house, and Liv worked in her parent's office. For them, money was a big issue in terms of gaining independence and "allowance isn't always enough" said Lauren. Although work was important for the country girls; Paige babysat almost daily, Jayme worked on the farm, Kristen tutored her neighbor three times a week, and Myka packaged for her friends'

company, none of the girls made any mention as to what extent they paid for things versus their parents.

4.11 Issues Learned From Celebrities

Issues such as eating disorders and suicide were discussed in relation to conversation about certain youthful celebrities. In the country girls' conversation about music videos Paige, Jayme and Kristen entered into a discussion about Britney Spears, marriage and suicide. Kristen didn't admire or relate to her and was critical of some of the choices she made, "I don't like her at all, stuff that she does isn't really right. She got married for 50 some odd hours and then they got it annulled...I find some of her songs are ok but I don't really look up to her and don't relate to her at all." Jayme responded, "I think she's really pretty and has a nice voice but sometimes she carries it too far." Paige intervened to describe her music video about suicide, "Her music videos are a little scary but it's not always her fault, it's the producers, " Kristen agreed, "Yeah." Paige continued, "In *Everytime*, they made her committing suicide but no one would air it so they had to change it so she cuts her head and...has blood on her hands, and then she goes underwater and drowns, its kind of freaky", and Myka agreed, "It's disturbing."

This was a moment where I further probed them to find out how they received this disturbing information, "How does that make you feel when you see another girl like that in the media showing more disturbing imagery, how does that effect you?" Paige responded, " Every time I hear the song I think of that." For Kristen the song was ruined, "Before I saw the video, I thought it was an okay song but then the video was just kind of messed it up."

In a discussion about the Olsen twins, the city girls engaged in a conversation about anorexia and bulimia. Kristina admired them but was shocked that one of the sisters was anorexic, she said, "Mary Kate Olson use to be my idol when I was younger, her and Ashley, I cant believe she's anorexic. It's so sad when you're anorexic or bulimic because you can't get out of it." Although Liv recognized this as a problem that faced other girls she was thankful for her group of girl friends and credited them for keeping each other healthy and secure, "None of our friends are because I guess we all have each other to depend on and make ourselves feel secure, but a lot of, not a lot, a few other girls in my grade and school suffer from it."

This was another moment where I further probed the girls with questions and I asked them, "What age does it start at?" Lauren was the first to respond and highlighted high school as the pivotal moment where she became familiar with issues related to body image and her own feelings of self-worth, she said,

Late 13, early 14, in that whole beginning of Secondary One...I think it gets worse as it goes along. You're opened up into this world when you come to high school where you discover all these magazines, ads, shopping and everything, say you try on a skirt and it looks amazing on your friends and then it doesn't look good on you, then you think, oh my gosh I have to lose weight, you get into always questioning yourself.

The country girls also spoke of child star Mary Kate Olsen's (alleged) anorexia problem, which they read about in magazines. Although this issue was not apparent within their social circle, but was with the city girls, they were nonetheless very much aware of the pressures Hollywood celebrities faced with respect to their body weight. Paige started the conversation, "Mary Kate is anorexic I don't know if its her fault like if

she started doing it but..." Myka continued, "or if it's just because of all the other people..." Kristen explained in greater detail, "Sometimes it can be the person's fault but sometimes it's not. Like Mary Kate I don't know why she went anorexic but maybe it was pressure because she's on TV a lot and in magazines...like sometimes people tell them to lose weight." Paige gave another example, "On movies they have to keep on special diets like for *Cat Woman*, she had to keep on a special diet," and Jayme added, "Like she had to fit into her outfit."

I was curious where they got this information and so I asked them, "How did you know that?" All responded, "Magazines!" Myka continued with another example, "You know *Grease* the movie? She had to lose weight, she couldn't eat anything except for carrots," Paige knew about that story and added, "They had to sew her pants on" and Jayme further explained, "She tried to get it on but it wouldn't fit so they had to take it a part and sew it on her."

4.12 Body Image, Boys & Boyfriends

Body image, boys and boyfriends were the themes of the next conversation. Since the city girls had already gotten their period they were beginning to recognize and were somewhat self-conscious of how their bodies were changing. Liv and Kristina felt they had love handles that were not yet balanced on either side, Liv said, "Kristina and I are lopsided, this love handle is bigger than this one!"

After Liv's comment on her lopsided love handles I asked the girls how they dealt with their bodies changing and whether dieting was an option, "Do you follow diets or how do you combat that whole thing?" Liv was the first to respond, "My parents are on the *South Beach*TM diet so I guess it kind of rubs off on me, my house

has a lot of stairs, so running up and down the stairs is kind of my exercise. But Kristina and I, Kristina you explain it..." Kristina took over,

Not to be on a diet but not eat so much junk. Watch what you eat, if you don't have to live off all the junk food because it's not something you need to live off of, just eat more of the more healthy stuff. You don't have to not eat at all or make yourself throw up to be skinny you can do other things.

Lauren had something else to add, which she felt was missing from this conversation. She brought up the topic of media's influence on boys' impressions of the ideal body type for girls. In Lauren's statement, boys' opinions were not always perceived of as nurturing and healthy. Instead, she accused them of supporting media's stereotypes of the ideal thin body type therefore reinforcing a girl's negative self-image. She discussed advertisements as a basis for the peer pressure she felt from boys and commented on the power of ads to influence them in their expectations of the ideal girl. Lauren felt that because of media they had a set image on how girls should look, which made her feel pressured to have that image in order to be accepted. She said,

I find that a lot of the thing is not the fact the stuff the media puts in my head but the stuff the media puts in to guys' heads, so you're always wondering what if that guy thinks I'm fat, you think that boys have a set image of how girls should look, like big boobs and big butts, and skinny, you want to have that image because you want to look good for boys and stuff like that. It's not that I want to look like a model but that I want to be accepted by everyone, you know?

Although Liv cared what boys thought of her she wasn't prepared to change who she was for them, "...Like what guys think, I am self-conscious but it's not to the

extent where I'll do anything for them to be liked, like her (Lauren). I find they have to accept you for who you are." Kristina agreed with Liv and also said she wouldn't change who she was for a boy to like her "You're not gonna change completely who you are just for guys to like you."

According to the city girls, it wasn't necessary to have a boyfriend although many girls their age did, "It's not like a thing to do but a lot of people do" said Liv. Lauren elaborated, "When I was in Secondary One I was like 'Oh my gosh the thought of having a boyfriend!' At a younger age you want a boyfriend...just to say you have a boyfriend and now you start to hang out more with guys and you see that..." Kristina finished Lauren's thought, "they're just close friends."

They felt that at their age boys were becoming more like friends and that was a good thing they each enjoyed. Liv expressed her desire to hang out more with boys than with girls, "I like hanging out with them so much more..." and the others agreed. Liv felt some girls were more held back and restricted whereas boys were more daring and fun to be around, "It's so different hanging out with guys than girls because guys will do anything, they're so daring and everything and a lot of girls they're really held back and restricted."

Looking older and men's attraction to them was another topic they addressed. Liv was surprised by the attention she received from older guys at a *Grand Prix* racing car event she attended, "It's so different now...it's kind of scary...old men are looking at you. I was at the Grand Prix and 40 year old men came up to us wanting to have a drink with them...20 year old guys came over to us and ask us to go clubbing with them!"

This was another moment where I probed the girls to further understand how this male attention affected them, "How do you feel about that? Do you feel too young

for all of that?" All responded, "Yes!" Lauren however understood how they could be mistaken for being older since media and fashion, she felt, also contributed to young girls looking older. Lauren said,

It's weird because you feel young, if someone older comes up to you and says 'Hi,' and they're older, your like 'Okay I'm only 13 or 14' then you look at the way you dress and you can see why they didn't think you were that age, and then with all the media, the makeup and the clothes coming into factor, you can see why people don't think you are your age. People are always telling me I look a lot older than I am.

Kristina didn't like being gawked at by older men. She felt it was disrespectful of them to stare at her, she said,

A few weeks ago my dad took me out to lunch and I just felt like wearing a skirt, so I'm wearing this skirt and there's these disgusting bikers like 50 year olds, and they're staring at me, and my dad was always looking back and he got pissed off, he's like 'It's disgusting!' It's also about respecting people it's not nice if you're always staring at them.

The country girls had issues regarding the peer pressures they experienced to date certain boys. Paige said, "There's a lot of pressure for some things...some girls get pressured about guys." There was a fear that if a girl said 'No' to dating a certain boy then all the other ones in that group would not like her. Myka stated, "They say 'Go out with him, go out with him,' even if you don't want to...like even your friends [pressure you] and if you say 'No' then all the guys don't like you and if you say 'Yes,' then you are stuck with him!" Jayme agreed and elaborated, "You know like if the guy

asks you out or something and then you say 'No' the guy's friends will all surround you and bug you about it." The situation also arose where Myka liked a particular boy but did not want to go out with him because she didn't like his friends.

The girls were quite articulate about liking healthy boys. They didn't like boys who smoked cigarettes or did drugs, Paige said, "I definitely wouldn't be into someone who was like smoking or doing drugs." Although they liked boys who were into sports they sometimes felt they were too into their sports, which took time away from being with them, Jayme and Paige together said, "They are all into sports...like every recess the gym is open they all go down and play basketball but they have to have time for us!"

Another critique was that when they did get together with the boys sometimes the boy would have nothing to say exclaimed Myka, "And then when you finally get together with them they are like 'Ah huh, okay...'like they don't say anything!" Jayme agreed, "When they are with their friends they will say a whole bunch of different stuff but when they are with other people they say nothing."

I asked if they dated boys and Paige said not during the school year but in the summer they did. She was the only one of her friends to have a boyfriend and she also expressed that, "Some of them play games and it gets so annoying!" Kristen was the only one to express no desire to have a boyfriend. "I really don't have an interest," she said.

4.13 Conclusion

The one important value the topic of popular culture had in the context of this research -whether the girls or I introduced it as celebrity driven media, fashion and

music-, was that through entertaining topics, the girls engaged in meaningful conversations concerning relevant issues in their lives. In hindsight, I am not sure to what extent had I instigated certain topics would this have effected the girls overall ability to be engage critically, reflectively and reflexively concerning their relationships with popular culture. However, one thing I do know is that by not instigating topics I was assured that the issues brought up were reflective of the girls' lives and not my own.

To recap, issues discussed by the girls largely related to friendship, media, celebrities, image, family and boys. Movies, TV and magazines were relatable, entertaining and a way for the girls to inform themselves and bond with each other. Media was also the main source of the city girls' most significant pressure: body image. Aware of media's mixed messages, they constantly negotiated having an image and attitude deemed ideal with maintaining a healthy lifestyle and sense of self. Entering high school was identified as the pivotal moment where such pressures intensified, and in the case of all the girls, all-female friendships, according to them, were supportive, nurturing and the most effective means to combat pressures related to body image, boys, smoking, and drugs. Parents were also identified as influencing their children's body awareness as they too followed the media to inform themselves on the latest diets and exercise trends.

The girls' role models were largely Hollywood celebrities, musicians, and older sisters, admired for attitude, image, and goals achieved. The city girls, however, were less offended by celebrities' behaviors able to pick and choose from qualities they respected whereas the country girls tended to dismiss a celebrity more readily if they didn't agree on a particular behavior or scandal.

Clothing and personal style were their foremost means for self-expression. None of the girls chose to dress provocatively or wear much makeup. Popstars, magazines, peers and family were most influential when it came personal style, and, although name brands were important for some, price played a factor for all. To earn money, each worked in some capacity while also getting an allowance but all admitted to never having enough.

None of the girls smoked cigarettes or did drugs although they each knew someone their age that did. For the city girls, boys were regarded as friends, and none of them had boyfriends, and for the country girls, boys were seen as potential boyfriends but only Paige had one. Peer pressure to date certain boys existed with the country girls, whereas peer pressure to have the right image for boys, existed with the city girls.

Despite media's engaging role, friends and family were still the most important and influential people in their lives because having someone to talk to who will support, appreciate, and nurture you was a priority for all of the girls.

In conclusion, what was of utmost importance throughout these focus group interviews was that these girls understood that this was their time to discuss in their words, the things they regarded as most important in their lives. Using friendship as catalyst for conversation, the focus group interview was an effective first research method to engage the girls in dialogical practice and collective meaning making.

In the following chapter, *A Wardrobe Of Girls' Voices*, I address each girl's personal narrative inspired by her set of photographs, and analyze to what extent popular culture was a site for her meaning making practice and construction of self.

Chart 1. Thematic Color Coding of FGI Discourses

Popular Culture @ 13 & 14: City Girls' Perspectives

- *1) The movies (relate to movies)
- *2) TV (relate to reality tv shows)
- 2) Girl friendships (aware of its importance and role in their lives)**
- 3) Media & Body Image (puberty)
- *4) Pop Stars influence fashion (yes, and they follow)
- *5) Popstars as role models (yes)
- *6) Music (all kinds except country)
- *7) Magazines (quizzes, fashion, pop star news)
- *8) Internet (chatting on msn & download music)
- *9)
- *10) Working for money
- 11) Girls' bedrooms (girl bonding, privacy, sense of comfort & security, design space)
- *12) Makeup/physical appearance (more imp./puberty, boys)
- *13) Personal Style (more influenced by media), aware of looking girly /sexuality
- 14) Body Image & Boys (older issue/puberty)**
- 15) Looking Older & Boys (older issue/puberty)**
- *16) Boyfriends
- *17) Popstars & music videos
- *18) school uniform
- *19) media vs. reality (very relatable)
- *20) to what extent does media influence our appearance? for them, alot

Popular Culture @ 12 & 13: Country Girls' Perspectives.

- *1) Magazines (embarrassing moments, not aware of sexuality in ads, not influenced by models and fashion statements)
- *2) TV(funny, not analytical or reflective)
- *3) Internet: chatting & download music
- *4) Music (pop & country)
- *5) Popstars as role models
- *6) Popstars & music videos (the story in the video infl. How they feel about the song)
- MTV (only paige has MTV)
- *7) popstars influence fashion (yes, but they aren't except for paige)
- *8) dresscode at school
- *9) personal style
- *10)
- *11) work & money
- *12) the movies
- *13) media vs. reality (not very relatable)
- 14) drugs & smoking**
- 15) peer pressure & dating**
- *16) boys & boyfriends (only paige has a boyfriend)
- *17) physical appearance / makeup (paige more into makeup and boys)
- *18) to what extent does media influence our appearance?for them, not much

Wardrobe Of Voices



**Photo
Elicitation**

City Girls: Photo-Elicitation Interview Set-Up



When I arrived at the front door of Liv's home, Liv, Lauren and Kristina led me and Ariel, my video camera assistant, upstairs to her two-part bedroom where in one of the enclosed rooms we collectively set up a private, colorful and cozy space for each girl to discuss her meaningful photos with me. This architecturally designed room made for an ideal private setting for the girls' interviews. It was a white angular space with colorful floor pillows and a fabulous red brick chimney wall that penetrated the center of the room. Having access to the television in the room we hooked up the video camera for the girls to view and feel comfortable with their onscreen appearance.

The setup took approximately one-hour to complete, which also helped establish a greater comfort level amongst us all. The girls noticed that I had an extra video camera as a spare and asked me if they could use it to film a behind-the-scenes video of what they did while waiting for their turns to be interviewed with me. I said, "Yes" and was excited by the fact that they wanted to further engage themselves to articulate their personal perspectives. I do not however share their video footage in this research project.

The format went as follows. Each took turns sharing their photos with me while the other two waited behind the scenes video recording each other. Although in some cases the girls were able to overhear each other's private interview, for the most part, there was privacy and respect for their time invested in sharing their ideas with me.

KRISTINA

Door #1: Everyday Life Stuff



interview

5.01 Behind Door #1...



"The best...makeup, being a girl, acting crazy, the clothes...the bad...peer pressure."

Kristina, age 13, was the first of the seven girls that I interviewed. She was petite with braces and sported a large plastic yellow flower in her long wavy brown hair. She entered the room and sat down on the pillows. I sat directly in front of her on the carpeted floor and arranged her photos in no particular order. As she saw them for the first time a big smile came over her face.

Comfortably, I began by asking her to recount her impressions of our focus group meeting. I said, "When you left our meeting last time, what did you think we talked about?" Kristina responded, "I thought it was really good, the conversation just went on and it was really natural and it was about real stuff that happens to us everyday, I found it interesting." I asked what popular culture meant to her and how she defined the term for her photo taking experience, she replied,

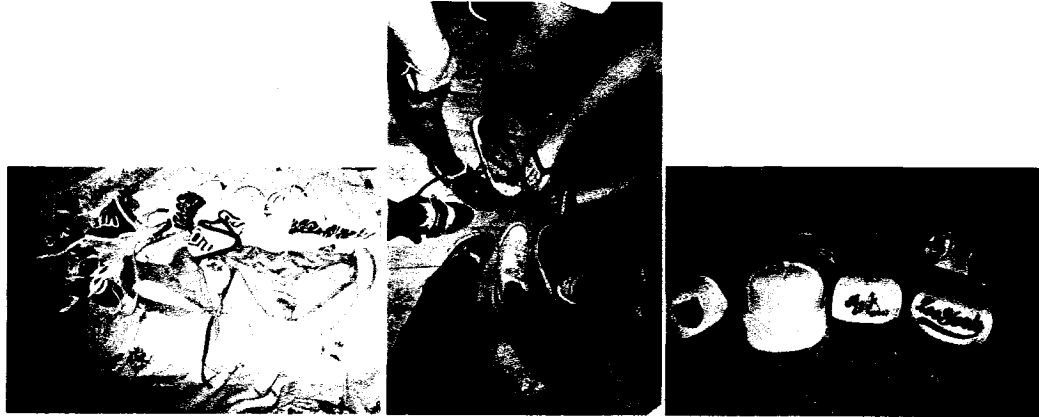
Popular culture is everyday life stuff, the things that happen around us that are popular, in the outside world that teenagers go for, do and buy. I thought of what popular culture was and what I found it was then when I would see something that was popular culture I would take it. I didn't really plan it out I just took pictures. At first when I took my pictures they weren't as good but later on I understood more.



Kristina photographed her favorite lived experience to recount the relevant issues in her life and what she perceived as well liked amongst teenage girls. A stylish image, friendship, family, respect, peer pressure, body image, and addiction were the topics she largely addressed.

Kristina's 23 photos document her girlfriends, t-shirts, trucker cap collection, purses, shoes, girl friends' manicured nails, makeup, perfume, hair products, music CDs, a *Louis Vuitton* encased cell phone, computers at camp, a grocery store parking lot, a graffiti wall, a tattoo and piercing parlor, a movie theatre sign and parking lot, girls posed in a mock-up ad, and a cigarette package. Kristina's favorite practices were spending time with girl friends, shopping for shoes, logo t-shirts, bathing suits, purses and trucker caps, reading fashion, health tips and gossip in magazines, online surfing and *MSN* chatting, experimenting and adorning herself with makeup, perfume and temporary tattoos, styling her hair, giving herself manicures and pedicures, listening to music, and going to the movies. Her favorite people were her girlfriends and family members. Her favorite environments were her bedroom, summer camp, shopping stores and movie theatres.

Image



"I am girlie when it comes to clothing and to everything pretty much"

Investing in beauty was a priority for Kristina. She loved to wear name brand clothing and participate in self-adornment practices to help construct her *girlie* image. She said,

I am girlie when it comes to clothing and to everything pretty much, I love purses.... Name brand clothing, *Roxy*, *Ecko*, *Abercrombie*, *Logik*, I get what I like.... I love buying bathing suits... I love shoes I could shop for shoes for so long... My trucker cap collection, they are very in. I collect them and wear one for every day of the year....



"It's the mood I feel I smell it and I feel pretty"

She talked about wearing makeup and perfume to look and feel pretty, "I wear makeup...if I feel like going out or I feel ugly.... Perfume, it smells so good... It's the

mood I feel I smell it and I feel pretty. Let's just say if I am all in pink, I will wear a flowery smell."

Kristina mentioned her girlfriends in relation to her self-adornment practices, she said,

...we use to wear a lot of makeup because that's when we started wearing it.

But now we just wear a bit, we don't need to wear all that makeup....

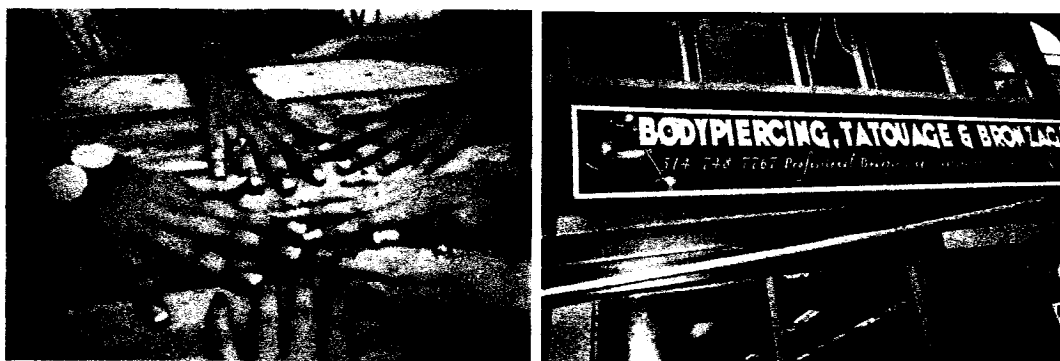
Perfume...we just all wear it and spray it on us. You smell our school we are all wearing perfume walking around.



"I go through hair products very quickly"

Hair was very important to Kristina evident by her daily consumption of a variety of hair products. She also commented on hairstyling as a popular practice among girls,

Hair blowdryer, straightener and curler, things we use for our hair often. I put a lot of hair products in my hair, for curl, extra hold, mousse, gel, I go through hair products very quickly especially in the summer... During the year I straighten my hair often practically every day it takes a really longtime because its thick and long...it will take me 45 minutes if it's curly to straighten it or an hour but now in the summer I don't straighten it because it gets curly easy, the humidity makes it wavy and ugly... I like it straight a lot, I prefer it.



"I like to try different things"

Kristina was self-inventive and liked to try different things. She expressed an interest in body adornment as another form of self-expression and commented on the popularity of manicures, tattoos and piercing amongst girls her age. She said,

Nailpolish, fake nails, a lot of girls put these...I had black and pink stripes, I like to try different things. I give myself pedicures.... Body piercing and tattoos are very common with girls now. Belly button rings, nose rings. I like a nose ring [but] my belly button is too small for a belly button ring.

Unable to make up her mind on what to adorn her body with, she chose instead to get temporary tattoos, she said, "I love tattoos but I can't make up my mind for a design so I get henna tattoos on my lower back, hip bone or shoulder blade...."

Parental Influence

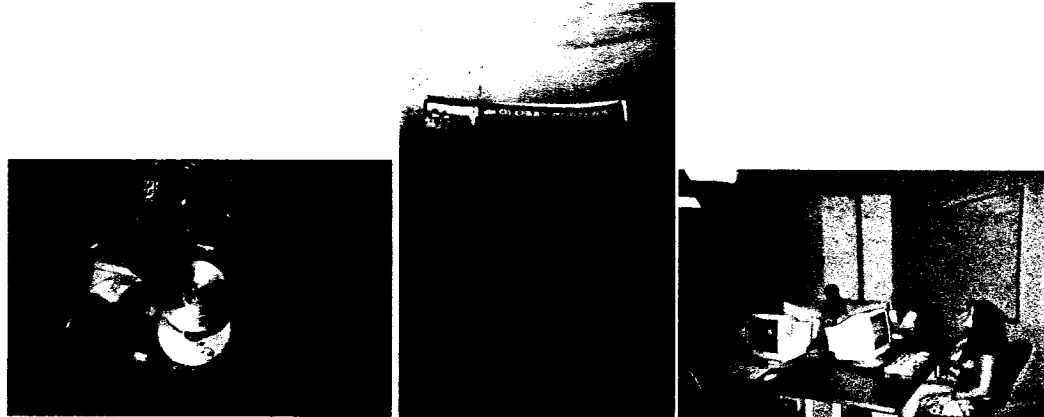


"I have to earn it"

Although consumer powered, Kristina also exemplified her ability to reasonably negotiate with parents concerning her purchases,

I have a fake *Louis Vuitton*, at my age getting a real one isn't necessary. If my parents offered me a real one I would accept it but I would never ask for it... Cellphones...I have to earn it in school, my parents think I should get one, my mom just wants me to work for it before, but my dad doesn't want me to be on it all of the time because they know that is what is gonna happen.

Media As Entertainment & Information



"It depends how I feel, I am very open"

Kristina used and valued a variety of music, magazines and the Internet for entertainment, self-expression and information,

I like pop, hiphop, popular music, it depends how I feel, I am very open to music... I really like reading magazines seeing what's happening out there. Celebrities, what's in and what's not. Let's say Mary Kate being anorexic and what's happening with her because she's in rehab now...the stuff that's in the news that you wanna hear about... Computers...[I] go to see what's new like pictures of models. I search *Google*TM when I hear of stuff on TV and want to know more.

She enjoyed being informed on issues that interested her and demonstrated a critical mind when negotiating media's messages, she said, "Since Mary Kate is anorexic I notice more photos of Ashley, I think the media does this intentionally because parents don't want kids looking up to someone sick."

Pressure & Addiction



"Friends they are so important and part of everyday life"

At this age, Kristina preferred all female friends to boys expressing her appreciation for her girl friends and the importance she placed on communicating with them, "Friends they are so important and part of everyday life. You can tell them everything and talk to them, they help you out and are there for you...I have guy friends also but I am closest with girls."



"We thought we'd be going through...peer pressure...but...we haven't"

Regarding eating disorders and addiction to drugs and smoking cigarettes, Kristina relied on her girlfriends and family members to help nurture her positive self-esteem and remain resistant against outside pressures. She demonstrated agency by

negotiating healthy choices for her self despite knowing people around her engaged in these unhealthy practices. She said,

My group of friends its good, we thought we'd be going through a lot of peer pressure this year but its been really good we haven't gone through smoking and stuff or your body the way you look like that happens often like oh my gosh people go 'I'm so fat' or 'My boobs are so small.' Like I'm really really small but it doesn't bother me. If I were to have big parts on my body I would be really unproportional. So I don't mind now because no one really cares about it, everyone thinks that all they care about but its not true... we all consult each other and tell each other, we support each other... A lot of people do it [smoke weed] that we know...but we want to stay away from it because it's not a good thing to do. Like you try it whatever but then you're like 'Oh I forget how it was' and then you're gonna want to do it over and over and that's how it becomes a habit to do. My sister's boyfriend says 'don't start smoking,' like I won't, I'm not against people who do because a lot of people do, but I just don't want to get myself into doing it.



"Can I have that picture instead?"

Kristina discussed her father's addiction to smoking cigarettes and his inability to quit. She referred to the ineffectiveness of the ads present on these packages and the easy access to purchasing cigarettes. This was the only moment in the entire research where Kristina expressed herself in a disappointed and defeated tone, which I attributed to her close relationship with her father. She said,

My dad's pack of cigarettes, they even put the picture on it. My dad goes, well, let's say there's a picture of the brain or the lungs or someone lying in the hospital, my dad will say 'Can I have that picture instead?' Even though it's terrible, like a picture of a pregnant lady but he's like 'I'm not a woman right now' so he always asks for the least worst picture for him...they are trying to let you know that it is killing you but you can't stop, like for my dad it's really hard, it's true what he says that cigarettes are really hard to stop. Let's say you are lying in bed and you can't sleep, there is a dep (short for *depanneur*, which means a corner convenient store) everywhere, everywhere they sell cigarettes whereas drugs you can't just randomly go and get.

Respect



"People should help out"

In a rather angry tone, Kristina addressed her observation of peoples' disrespect towards one another and their respective properties. She said,

...In the parking lot outside of a grocery store, we found carriages everywhere... people should help out even if they don't work there...just pushing the carriages on the other side so cars don't go banging into them... Graffiti is everywhere on the streets and buildings. Why go on other people's property to express your feelings... It's disrespectful.

At the end of her interview, I asked Kristina if she had learned anything new about herself through her investigation of her relationships with popular culture, and she responded, "I found it interesting because I thought about all the things that I like to do and I paid attention to things that happen in my everyday life... The best thing[s] [are]...to wear makeup, being a girl, acting crazy, the clothes, and the bad stuff...peer pressure."

Conclusion: What is discovered about Kristina through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Kristina used all that she photographed to help express herself as both an independent and social person. Inspired by her lived experience, Kristina's story unfolded through her photographs of clothing, hair products, accessories, shoes, nail polish, magazines, music, a cigarette package, and friends posed in the style of an ad. Her interpretations of them highlight issues related to self-image, communication, knowledge, health, wellbeing and citizenship.

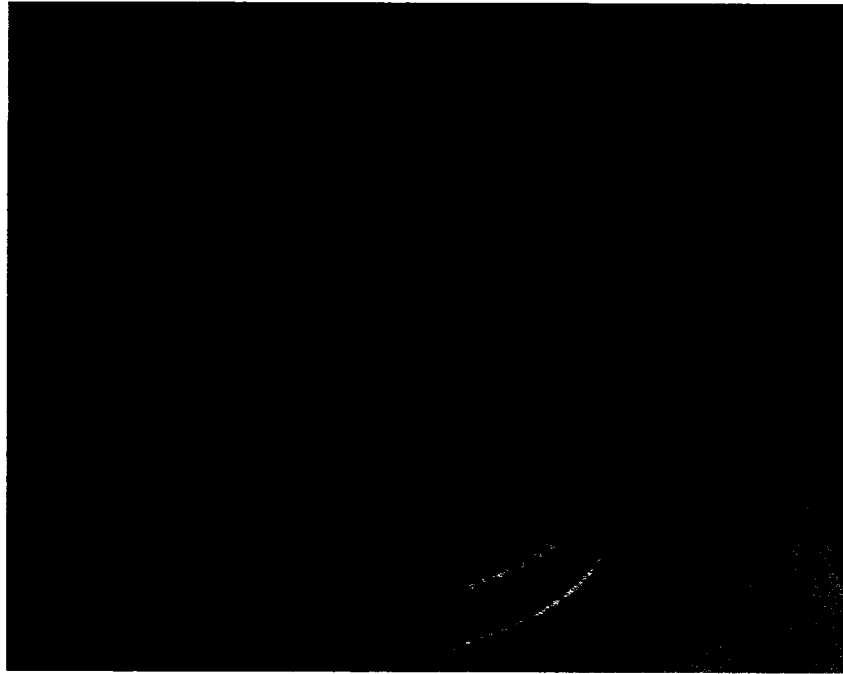
Kristina used self-adornment practices to experiment with her image, represent herself to others, and communicate with her girl friends. She used magazines and the Internet to inform herself on issues of interest and demonstrated her ability to negotiate media's messages. Aware of pressures, she used friends and family to negotiate and resist engaging in eating disorders, smoking cigarettes and doing drugs. Her most critical insights came when speaking about choice regarding body image and addiction. Although aware of people's unhealthy choices, she resisted the pressures and demonstrated an ability to learn from others' mistakes.

Echoing Neo-Gramscian theory (Storey, 1998), popular culture was a site for Kristina's meaning making practices and construction of self. Her struggle to maintain healthy self-esteem was most apparent by the way she negotiated her self amongst the voices of media, her female peers and family members to help her to construct and maintain a healthy sense of self. She enjoyed her *pink packaged femininity* (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004) and consumer power and was also critical of her choices. Amongst her peers, with respect to her fashion sense and family credibility, she was identified as an organic intellectual -a leader- (Gramsci, 1971). Kristina's self-

inventiveness, adoration for self-adornment, consumer power and all female friendships demonstrates her operating within the preferred code of the girlpower ideology (Harris, 2001; 2004ab; Table 8; Table 1).

LAUREN

Door #2: All About The Media



interview

5.02 Behind Door #2...



"I am trying to look deeper into everything...to get more in touch with myself."

Lauren, age 14 and the eldest of all the girls in the research, was the second girl that I interviewed. Long wavy brown hair, beautiful blue eyes and a bubbly personality, Lauren bounced into the room and was eager to get started. Sitting and clutching the lime green pillow to hide her partially exposed belly, Lauren watched with excitement as I randomly laid out her photos directly in front of her. Following a similar format as I did with Kristina, I began by asking her how she defined popular culture for her photo taking experience, "When we left last time and we discussed what pop culture was, what were you thinking?" Lauren responded,

Popular culture is everything you see all around you, what people wear and how they follow others...I thought of stuff that I see everyday, you'll see people in TMR (Town of Mount Royal) wearing mini skirts, you'll go to the West Island and they'll be wearing mini skirts, popular culture is the same thing everywhere, in the United States, in Canada, its all the same thing.



Lauren photographed her popular lived experience to recount the relevant issues in her life and what she perceived as well liked amongst teenage girls. A stylish image, friendship, family, a sense of community, media influence, spirituality and respect for the environment were the topics she largely addressed.

Lauren's 16 photos document her girlfriends, their stylish clothing, hairstyling equipment and hairstyles, belly piercing and tattoos, a *Von Dutch* baseball hat, a tanning and nail salon, her cat in a bag, girlfriends posed in a mock up ad, senior citizens in a community center, and her friend in front of her church.

Some of Lauren's favorite practices were people watching, hairstyling, reading magazines, online surfing, *MSN* chatting, giving and getting manicures, deconstructing ads, going to church, and community service. Her favorite environments were summer camp, her bedroom, the church and her community center. Her favorite people were girl friends, her mother, senior citizens, and celebrities.

A Stylish Image



"The whole big thing now is..."

Lauren took photos of her friend's belly ring, a fake tattoo and a spa salon to explain girls' investments in negotiating and constructing their image. In a confident tone she began the interview reporting back on girls' popular self-adornment practices and her involvement in them. She said,

That's a big thing now piercing and tattoos, a lot of people wanting to get pierced, people wanting to get real tattoos like butterflies or flowers...I find that a lot of girls are all about going for spa days and getting their nails done, I like getting my nails done it kinda makes you feel more special and you wanna show them off. It's nice because it's all relaxing and when you get them done it feels more special.



"A lot of people [are] getting their hair done"

Like Kristina, hair was an important factor for Lauren. She used these images to articulate the importance of hair in one's physical appearance. She said,

A lot of people [are] getting their hair done, they straighten, straightening is a big thing now or curling, you know the curling iron and stuff, people doing their hair basically. The whole big thing now is bangs, before it was having long hair, now it's cutting your hair.... You can have a pretty face but if your hair is messed up it will take away from that pretty face, you know, so I find hair makes a really big difference... I love big hairdos...[and] hair dying and streaking your hair is a really big thing now....

To emphasize her hairstyling know-how she pointed at the picture of the three girls and said, "I actually cut her bangs the night before, and I cut her bangs too."

Negotiating Peer, Media & Parental Influence



"I always hoped that I could...have everyone follow me but...I am not that...person"

Lauren identified herself as a girl who highly respected her girlfriends for their fashion sense and looked up to them for guidance regarding her personal style, "Say I'll see my friend wearing this skirt, I liked it so much I went out and bought a skirt just like this...." According to her, a good fashion sense is regarded as having the ultimate power something she identified as lacking within her peer group. She said,

I always hoped that I could go out and sport a new fashion and have everyone follow me but I guess I am not that kind of person that people looked to for the latest fashion. I guess its different for Liv, I can see her doing all that kind of fashion kind of trend thing and I know I'd probably really like it, but it's because her parents are in the fashion business and I know that she knows what's coming up next, for me I just look at a fashion magazine. I wanna be the kind of person that is not the one looking in the fashion magazine and deciding what to wear, I want to be the person who decides what's going to be in the fashion magazine, I want to be that kind of person but I'm not.



"Younger kids and older kids...they're wearing the exact same clothes"

Lauren photographed a *Von Dutch* baseball hat to share her awareness of children dressing like teenagers, and, was critical of the pressure they faced at such young ages. She said,

... Everyone bought *Von Dutch* when it first came out and now I see 5, 6 and 7 year olds are walking around at camp and they have *Von Dutch* t-shirts, *Von Dutch* hats, its ridiculous. Lots more little kids are starting to wear *Juicy Couture* that's what's surprising being around younger kids and older kids at the same time, they're wearing the exact same clothes. It's bad to see. When I was little I'd go to like *Le Chateau* and that would be like 'Oh my gosh *Le Chateau*,' or 'Oh My Gosh, *La Senza Girl*' and now the kids are like, 'Oh my gosh, my *Juicy Couture*, my *Tiffany*,' you'll see 8 year olds doing that and it's ridiculous just enjoy being a kid while you're a kid, don't worry about all that pressure.



"Just because Britney Spears had them she bought them"

Lauren highlighted celebrity influence on her girlfriend's purchases. She said,

This is Stephania wearing a *Tiffany* necklace, a *Tiffany* bracelet, a *Rolex* watch, and a *Juicy* tracksuit. Brand names aren't important but I guess [at] this age people now think they are. My friend Stephania, she spends so much money, she saw Britney Spears wearing in her concert these Adidas pink high tops and she went out and bought them they were like \$500 or \$600 dollars! Just because Britney Spears had them she bought them. I mean of course they were nice she wouldn't have bought them if they were ugly but because she saw them on her she decided that's what she wanted...

Despite Lauren's critical insights regarding media's influence on Stephania's purchases she perceived her as having the ultimate agency -consumer power-, she said, "She spent over \$6000 in one store so they don't even charge her tax anymore!" Unable to afford expensive name brand products herself she referred to her mother's advice to negotiate her girlfriends' privileges,

My mom waited 45 years to get a *Louis Vuitton* purse so when she got it, it was finally special. That's why she doesn't want to get me all this expensive stuff now, there's gonna be so much more time for it. If I get everything now I'm not gonna appreciate anything afterwards...I think it's smart and if my friends get it I can always borrow it from them.

Nevertheless, Lauren admired celebrities' power to influence society and used them to articulate her own desire for the power to lead others,

In my next life I want to be a celebrity...I like Britney Spears and Madonna...I want to see what it would be like to live like that, because you have all the power, so much power, I am more the follower I'm not the leader and I want to

be the person with the power. If I were famous people would see what I was wearing and say 'Oh my gosh I want that because she is wearing it' I do that, like 'Oh my gosh Britney Spears is wearing that!'



"Ever since Paris Hilton did it"

Although she clearly admired celebrities for their power she was not always supportive of the trends they inspired,

This is my cat and she's in a bag, I find it's a really big thing now, people wanting their pets in bags and people wanting to buy Chihuahuas just so they can stick them into a fake *Louis Vuitton* bag and carry it around for show. That's not what having an animal is all about! People just want it for show ever since Paris Hilton did it.



“‘Drink Pepsi’ or ‘Drink Coke...’ Not like ‘Try Pepsi or Coke’”

Critical of media's agenda, Lauren stated her awareness of media's strategies to get people to consume their products,

I took a picture of people drinking *Pepsi*, there are so many commercials and ads that say ‘Drink *Pepsi*’ or ‘Drink *Coke*...’ Not like ‘Try *Pepsi* or *Coke*’...they are telling you what to do, they are trying too much to get it into your head. Ads use sex to sell...I discussed it with my friends a couple of days ago on websites, looking at subliminal messages, and there are a lot of them out there.

Negotiating Spirituality & Citizenship



“It's a time to get in touch with yourself”

Lauren also identified herself as spiritual and socially conscious, and, was in search for deeper meaning. She photographed her church to discuss religion as a time-out to reflect on every day life pressures and believed this was necessary for the spiritual wellbeing of all people. She said, "Religion...I think it's very important. It's a time to get in touch with your self. You're so busy doing everything else all week that it's 45 minutes of being selfless."

She talked about the significance of youth and religion and was aware of their lack of presence in church,

I just like to see everyone pay more attention to their religions...When I look around I see all the older people but there are no youth in the church...no one wants to wake up at 9am to go to church... My friends, I don't think they go to church or synagogue all that often but I think it would just be better if people got in touch with their religion....

Lauren also viewed going to church as a family bonding practice and credited her mother for instigating this value, "I'll go to church on Sundays and my mom wants to keep us going to church, so our family goes to church on Sundays...I think it's very important."



"We are giving to other people who don't have that much"

Lastly, Lauren identified herself as civic. She photographed her community center to articulate her awareness of youth's lack of interest in taking care of an aging population and their lack of concern for the natural environment. She said,

Old people playing games in the rec[reational] room...I think that people should realize that... we are very fortunate. If the youth think of community service as a chore they should be more happy to do it because we are giving to other people who don't have that much... Our environment, like if they keep on littering our planet isn't gonna stay like this forever. The cars and the gas are gonna hurt the earth sooner or later. It isn't gonna to be as nice as it is now.

At the end of Lauren's interview I asked her whether she had learned anything new about herself as a result of participating in this project. This is the conversation that went on between us.

Lauren: I realize that every image has several meanings. It can be read in different ways. Like the one of the cat in the bag, in one way, you can think 'Oh my gosh, it's so cute!' and in another way it can be read as animal cruelty! I am

trying to look deeper into everything and I am interested in taking up yoga, I think it will help me just to get more in touch with myself, and being aware.

Leanne: So what do you think now about popular culture?

Lauren: Popular culture is the same everywhere in different neighborhoods, countries in the US and in Canada. It does differentiate in age groups although *Juicy Couture* is on kids and teenagers. It's bad to see though, little kids like 8-year olds into fashion. I think it's a big pressure for kids to have to think about that at their age. They should just enjoy being a kid and not to worry about all that pressure.

Leanne: Do you still feel like a kid?

Lauren: I behave like a kid sometimes and like a grown up depending on the situation and place I am in. People tell me that I act all mature and stuff but I don't want to grow up too fast and leave my childhood behind.

Leanne: How would you define your style?

Lauren: A little bit preppy, I follow styles. I have dreams to be something that I am not. I want to be famous but it's much easier said than done like I could send in a tape or something. I don't know, I'll take it one day at a time and see how everything goes.

Conclusion: What is discovered about Lauren through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Lauren regarded all that she photographed as commentaries on girl culture while also making sense of her self. Inspired by her lived experience, her photos document fashion statements, girlfriends, media, and civic duty. Through her photographs she highlighted issues related to media influence, self-image, communication, spirituality, wellbeing and citizenship.

There was a contradictory voice when she reported back on her photos as she fluctuated through varying degrees of confidence and spoke from conflicted points of view. In one instance she spoke from a point of authority by taking on a reporter's role reporting back on what she observed as popular practices amongst girls her age. In a self-doubting voice, she was concerned about her image and her social standing within her peer group. This was consistent throughout Lauren's interview. Amongst peers her age she perceived herself as lacking power and when speaking with me about popular girls' practices she spoke with authority.

Lauren used her physical appearance for peer acceptance and her comment on children dressing like adults was another means to express the pressure to fit in. In this interview she used celebrities to critique her girlfriends' name brand shopping privileges. By positioning her observations within the context of media as the instigator, Lauren safely discussed their shopping practices supporting and validating their lifestyles but with a hint of criticism. What I found most interesting was how she negotiated her admiration for her peers' consumer power and stylish images with a desire to be more spiritual herself. She was clearly torn. After repeated conversations regarding her stress level to fit in, I was not surprised when she expressed her desire

for spiritual wellbeing in search for deeper meaning. Lauren talked about the importance of nurturing family relations and her mother's influence on her values and Christian faith. I found this to be an interesting balance for Lauren as she continuously demonstrated her navigation of the hegemonic voices of peers, media and family. This clearly illustrates her struggle for meaning in her construction of self.

Echoing neo-Gramscian theory, popular culture was a site of struggle for Lauren's meaning making practices and construction of self. She used popular culture to explain her negotiation of the hegemonic forces of boys, girls, media, and family in constructing her layered self. Her adoration for fashion and close friendship with girls demonstrates Lauren operating within the preferred code of girlpower but her insecurities regarding her image and lack of power within her peer group echoes the at-risk discourse concerning low self-esteem. Her strength however, through my own witness, was her ability to communicate these insecurities with ease. Despite Lauren's low self-esteem concerning her body image, she showed no signs of eating disorders and did not partake in cigarette smoking or drug, alcohol and sexual consumption (Table 8; Table 2).

LIV

Door #3: What Influences People



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5.03 Behind Door #3...

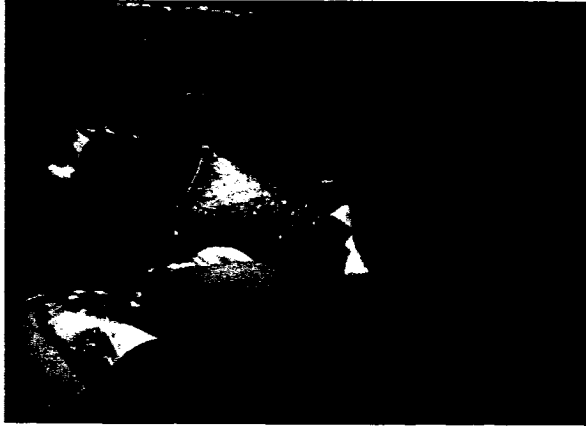


"I don't want to get myself into doing drugs and...become a crack addict mom"

Liv, who turned 14 a few days after we first met during the focus group interview, was the third girl that I interviewed. Long blond hair, the tallest of the girls and sporting black-rimmed glasses, Liv presented herself as confidant and mature. She sat down on the pillows and placed the pink rounded one on top of her lap. As she observed me lay out her photos, she expressed her love for taking them and overall interest in the research. She said,

I found it so cool what we're doing, I don't find its like work or anything, taking the pictures. I didn't just take like anything, I wanted to take nice ones, I actually thought about it because in school work I could be good at doing what I do but I don't really try for this I actually tried.

I began by asking Liv how she defined popular culture for her photo taking experience, I said, "When you left and you knew it was a project on pop culture, how did you define it to yourself?" Liv responded, "For me it meant what influences people, because the biggest influence is the media. Basically it's all that people think about, and all that people read about, and all that people watch TV about, it's all popular culture, that's how I define it."



Like friends Kristina and Lauren, Liv photographed her popular lived experience to recount the relevant issues in her life and what she perceived as well liked amongst teenage girls and in some of the cases the rest of society. Media influence, a stylish image, attitude, friends' copying each other's style, sexuality and addiction related to cigarettes and marijuana were the topics she largely addressed.

Liv's 23 photos document a *Brat*[™] doll, a clothing store, purses, a weight scale, books, cigarettes and coffee, diet products, artificial sugar packaging, a *Krispy Kream*[™] coffee cup, a pink garbage can, her parents' showroom for junior girls' clothing, *Adidas* track pants, an *I Love NY* T-shirt, A *BMW* steering wheel, a poster of teen popstar Hillary Duff, name brand purses and keychain, a makeup bag, a sticker, her clothing closet, a television set, Chinese slippers, her magazine collection, and a necklace of a cross.

Liv's favorite practices were shopping for clothing and makeup, hanging out with her cousins and girl friends, listening to music, watching music videos, TV and movies, reading teen girl magazines, and hanging out at her parents' workplace. Her favorite environments were her bedroom, her cousin's home, the car and her parent's office. Her favorite people were her girl friends, family members, their co-workers, and celebrities Hilary Duff, Paris Hilton, the Olsen twins and Jessica and Ashley Simpson.

Media Influence On Image



"All girls strive to be a Barbie"

In a confident and serious tone Liv began her interview with a photograph of a *Brat*™ doll to comment on particular ways that media influenced young girls, she said, "This is a picture of a *Barbie*™ because I think that all girls that's what they mainly strive is to be a Barbie." She discussed Barbie's new hair color and its influence on others to dye their hair brown, "The new hair color now is brown...now everyone is dying their hair brown, Lauren dyed her hair brown and Ashley Simpson dyed her hair brown now all the Barbies have brown hair...I think that shows a lot!"

Similar to Lauren, Liv was aware of children dressing older and critiqued celebrities' influence on their fashion sense,

My cousins and I were watching *Spice World* this weekend and my little cousin was like 'Oh I like her dress and her shoes.' They're wearing shoes honestly six inches above the ground and dresses up to here and she's like seven years old. She always asks 'Mommy can I buy this?' And she's like 'No,' I mean it's a shirt up to here and a skirt up to here...she believes everything she sees on TV.

Unlike her younger cousin, Liv felt she negotiated healthier choices regarding her selection of celebrity role models, she said,

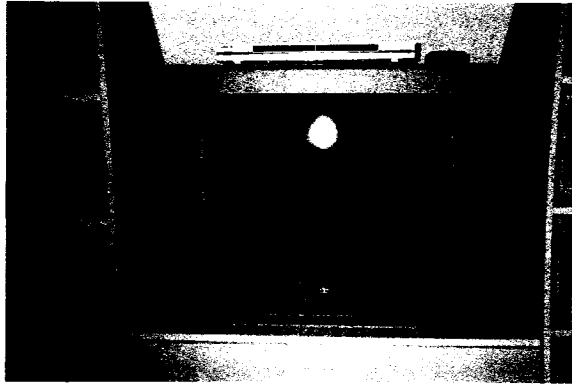
Full House was my favorite show but that was a good show for kids because it was a family show. I think Ashley and Jessica Simpson are great role models, I mean, they can sell just as many records as Britney Spears, but wearing the clothes that they do and I think that's a good thing.



"Not afraid of what people think"

Liv negotiated her own adoration for and similarities to certain celebrities she looked up to, and, used them in ways that mirrored her self and her friendships with others,

I like Hillary Duff. She's not afraid of what people think of her that's why I like her...For Halloween I am dressing up like Paris Hilton with my cousin who is like Nicole Ritchie because that's how we act. I act exactly like Paris Hilton and she acts exactly like Nicole Ritchie, she's always the loud mouth.

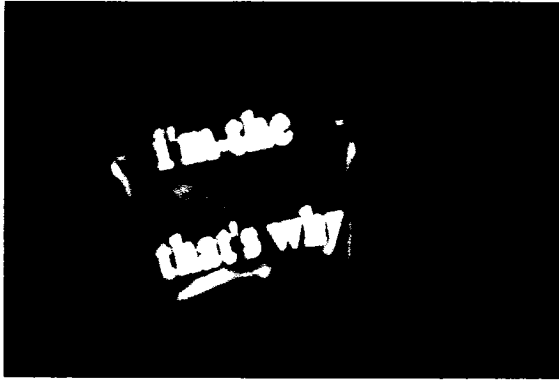


"She's a hypocrite"

Although she admired certain celebrities, Liv was critical of Avril Lavigne, she said,

I hate Avril. I find she's a big hypocrite like she's going around saying 'I'm not gonna do that, like what kinda girl do you think I am, you think I am gonna have sex with you? I don't think so!' and then she goes and does a video in her underwear?! Oh gosh, I use to really like her when she had her songs like *Complicated* and *Skater Girl*, but now I despise her...just the fact that she wants to be different and then she goes and does a lot of the same things as other people do. I find she's...a hypocrite...

What I found most interesting was the way Liv identified herself as making healthy choices with respect to her choice of celebrity role models in comparison to how she viewed her younger cousin's choices. Similar to Lauren's observation of young children overly concerned with their name brand image, she too was critical of young girls and their fashion sense.



"Yeah, get me that, why? Because I am like Jessica Simpson!"

Liv commented on the "Princess" attitude as popular behavior she termed "Popular Culture," she said, "I find it's very pop culture, 'Yeah, get me that, why? Because I am like Jessica Simpson!'" Through this photograph of a sticker, she also articulated her awareness of media's agenda to manipulate information,

I was watching four movies this weekend and one of them was the *Princess Diaries* and it showed how media blows things out of proportions. She [the princess] was set up to go like change and they [the media reporters] showed her in no clothes with a towel...and then the guy kissed her in front of the camera and [the headlines read] 'Oh yeah the wild night she had!'

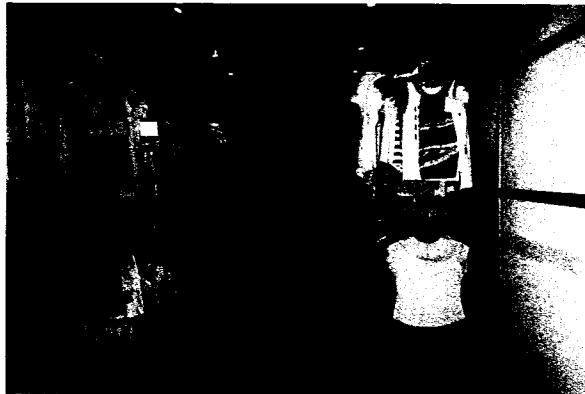
Friends Copying Each Other



"I don't want to be like everyone else"

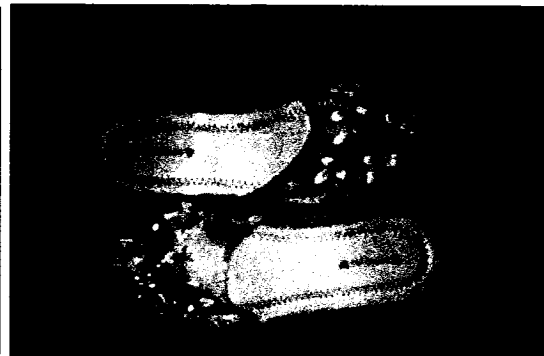
Liv saw herself as a visionary with respect to fashion trends and fumed when people copied her style. She said,

This is a picture of one of my closets... It just shows brands, and stuff. Everyone has the Kangaroo shoes...I bought them before they were popular but then everyone started buying them then everyone started wearing them now I don't wear them anymore...I don't want to be like everyone else...I hate when people copy me! You can ask Lauren or Kristina, I can't stand it. Lauren bought the same skirt as me and I wouldn't talk to her for a week, I was so pissed off! I hate when people copy me, People say 'Oh yeah you should take it as a compliment,' Oh my-gosh, I can't stand when people copy me!



"My parents' showroom, things here are in the underground stores"

Although she despised people copying her fashion sense, it was important to Liv that others saw her as an organic intellectual with respect to her style. To further establish her credibility, she referenced her parents' clothing business, "This is a picture of my parents' work it's part of the little girls' showroom. [These are] all the samples they go out and buy, what they look for. A lot of the things in here are already in the underground stores...."



"Everyone has them"

Liv commented on girl friends influencing each other in terms of copying one another's fashion styles. She said,

Here is a picture of two purses, this one's Kristina's purse and this is her cousin's purse, it shows how people buy the same things. I don't know if she

bought it just because it was a name brand but just people will buy things because everyone else has them... The Chinese slippers, everyone has them not just the preppy girls. The Italian girls, the hiphop girls, they all interpreted it to their style. I use to wear them but now everyone's wearing them...

Media Influence On Health

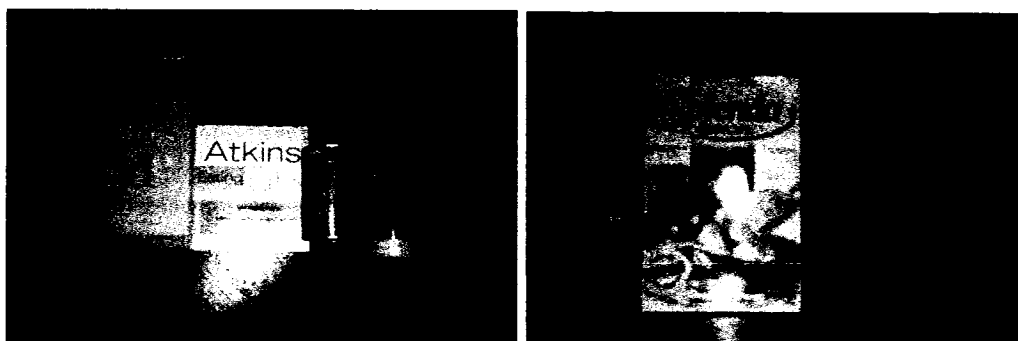


"I can relate to a lot of things in there"

For the second half of her interview, Liv shifted tones and talked about media's role on issues related to health. She photographed her collection of teen girl magazines to comment on their relatability, entertainment and informative value. She said,

This is a picture of my Magazines I have kept them for so long. I find magazines are a really really big influence...like '10 Ways to Get Clear Skin,' I'm like 'Oh shit I gotta go and read that!' I don't know I just find they are a really big influence. I won't buy a magazine that says *In Shape*, I'll buy a magazine that looks appealing like my favorite magazines are *Seventeen*, *Cosmo Girl*, and

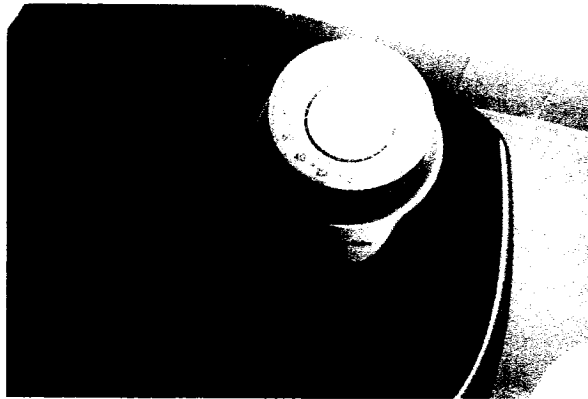
Teen People...it's for teenage girls I find. I like those magazines because I can relate to a lot of things in there. It's fun to quiz your friends on it, like we always quiz our friends on them like '15 Ways to Get Your Man Satisfied!'(giggle).



"People don't care what they are eating as long as it makes them lose weight"

Liv commented on society's fascination with image and artificiality and photographed her father's diet food supplements, and a *BMW* car steering wheel to illustrate this point. She said,

Curves™, *Atkins™*, muscle drink, and everything to stimulate your muscles. I took these pictures at my dad's office, and these my dad had. That's a big fad ...Everyone...is on *Atkins™* and the *South Beach™* diet.... *Splenda™* is a supplement for sugar on all the diets to show how people don't care what they are eating as long as it makes them lose weight. In the movie *Mean Girls* this girl she had *Caltine™* bars and she thought it would make her lose weight. She kept eating them but then they made her gain weight!



"A lot of girls are really really into their weight"

Liv spoke about pressures at her age related to body image, sexuality, smoking cigarettes and doing drugs. She photographed a scale to comment on her awareness of teenage girls' susceptibility to eating disorders. She said,

This is a picture of a scale to show that a lot of girls are really really into their weight and they have to be like 100 pounds and 6 ft tall because they want to be so skinny, and they'll do anything to get there...there are some girls at our school that are really really skinny and it's not nice skinny, a lot of us think they have eating disorders because they always have bags under their eyes because you know when you throw up your eye bulges out so that's how you get bags, their knuckles are cut out. We learned about all those things in school.

She observed that eating disorders manifested themselves closer to Prom time, "So many girls especially going into grade 11...I guess it's the year before prom that a lot of girls have eating disorders." Like Lauren, she exclaimed how she only learned about these things once she entered high school, "I only learned about all this, this year. You learn so much in high school it's weird because they're like the best years of your life but also like the worst years because you have so many pressures."

Despite her awareness of pressures related to body image, Liv demonstrated her agency by negotiating a healthy body weight for herself, "I'm lucky because I'm tall so my fat evens out...I wouldn't want to be like fat, but I wouldn't want to be like skinny skinny."

After she admitted that in high school she was opened up into the world of adolescence, Liv shifted towards talking about teen sexuality and her negotiation of friends who participated in these practices. She said,

I always knew about kissing at our age but I never knew about people having sex at our age that a lot of people do. One of my friends had sex with her boyfriend after 5 days because she wanted. Its not because the guy pressures. The girls that I know having sex at our age its because they want it...A lot of girls our age are having oral sex but I am talking about the real thing.

I asked her whether her friend practiced safe sex and Liv replied, "One of the girls that I know who is having sex she had sex without a condom after her period. She didn't think she was gonna get pregnant because I don't think you can or whatever but this guy he wasn't the cleanest guy ever." She continued to explain, "And then she had sex with another guy she was like 'Yeah, when you have sex you're gonna realize that you have to keep having it, you'll do it with anyone!' So I don't talk to this girl anymore because she scares me." I asked why she thought this girl behaved this way and Liv responded, "This girl, she gets bored really fast, she had done everything."

What struck me most about Liv's recount of her female friend's sexual relations was how misinformed young educated girls continue to be on the risks of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Although Liv demonstrated knowledge of bulimic behavior, of which she said she learned in school, when it came to sexuality she was

less informed. I asked myself and made a mental note of this, "Is the topic of sexuality treated differently within the school curriculum than eating disorders?"



"They're like *Sex And The City* for our age"

We continued our discussion of girls' sexual attitudes and I asked if she felt media played a role in influencing girls to be sexual, she said, "Yeah, you know the shows like *Sex And The City*, it kind of encourages. The *OC* even, she wanted to have sex with him but he didn't want to. These books..." she reached over to grab her next photo, "*Gossip Girls*, there amazing but they are like *Sex and the City* for our age, they're such good books and I really think they influence people...."

I asked if this influenced her to be sexual and she responded,

I'm like Jessica Simpson, I find it a really big deal. I think it's easier said than done [being a virgin]. I'm really really surprised she did it (was a virgin until married) because she's all like 'Nick come upstairs.' I don't think a lot of people our age in this day will [save their virginity].

Although Liv discussed media's ability to encourage girls to have sex she demonstrated her own agency by negotiating her lack of participation in sexual practices.



"Cigarettes and coffee...are so bad for you"

Liv negotiated her potential involvement in smoking cigarettes but resisted for fear of becoming a hypocrite herself, she said,

Cigarettes and coffee...the biggest things that stunt your growth and are so bad for you... All my friends smoke and I discourage them so much, I'm always like 'Oh that's so disgusting!' ...My mom is a social smoker so there is a chance [that I may smoke] but I don't want to be a hypocrite and start smoking because then people will be like 'Oh yeah but you always say don't smoke' so I don't think I will.

This was the only time in her interview when Liv admitted a vulnerability with respect to partaking in unhealthy behavior despite having knowledge of it's negative consequence. Nevertheless, she harshly denied an interest in smoking marijuana and referenced friends with drug-related problems, she said,

I will never try weed, I think drugs shouldn't be a part of your life it just screws people up. I know people who were addicted to drugs and I saw how it ruined their lives. My friend's mom was a crack addict and I saw how it ruined her life. There's a lot of peer pressure at our age, my friends say 'I'm gonna get you to try weed' and I'm like 'No way.' My friend, he's an ex-drug dealer who is 15 now, he changed his ways. He had his connections so he didn't have trouble getting out of that scene.

Using this knowledge to her benefit she consciously negotiated the peer pressure with her desire to lead a healthy life, "I don't want to get myself into doing drugs and then when I grow up become a crack addict mom."

At the end of her interview, I asked Liv if she had anything more to say and whether she had gained any insight from engaging in this project, and she responded,

It gave me the insight that people will really really do things just to like show people. People are all show, they'll go out like 'Oh yeah I bought a new *Louis Vuitton* purse' like one of my guy friends he went out and bought a new *Jacob & Co.* watch you can tell it's fake but he brags about it to everyone because he wants to be known as the little rich kid. I am not like that. I hate when people brag 'Oh yeah like I have all this *Louis Vuitton* at home,' Like I don't really care!

Conclusion: What is discovered about Liv through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Echoing Neo-Gramscian theory, popular culture was a site of struggle for Liv's meaning making practices and construction of self. Liv spoke of her involvement in self-adornment and media related practices to share ways that she negotiated healthy choices amongst the hegemonic forces of media, family and peers. She spent an equal amount of time discussing her fashionable image as she did her knowledge of people engaged in eating disorders, sexual relations, smoking cigarettes and doing drugs.

Liv negotiated her image while maintaining a healthy respect for her body and she chose not to participate in smoking cigarettes or eating disorder practices. She expressed a disinterest in using drugs and engaging in sexual activity despite having friends that were ex-drug dealers, users and sexually active. She admired celebrities for their personality, attitude and image but was not influenced by their unhealthy behavior and lifestyle. Despite partially blaming media for girls' sexual behaviors, Liv also credited them for their relatability, informative and entertainment value.

Liv discussed her favorite pop stars as being positive role models but accused the Spice Girls and the Brat™ doll of propagating promiscuous images to children. Like Lauren, she positioned herself as more knowledgeable and responsible than the younger generation of girls and regarded herself a figure of authority.

What struck me most however was that although Liv discussed her own media influenced behavior she was largely not critical of herself. Furthermore, she did not appear to be conflicted between her subjective and objective self, rather saw herself as a cohesive whole.

Country Girls: Photo-Elicitation Interview Set-Up



When I arrived at Paige's home, Robyn led Ariel and myself to her backyard where we set up for the girls' private interviews. Since all the girls hadn't yet arrived Paige and Robyn helped me setup. At this point, we discussed the options for various interview locations. At the same time, Robyn offered to place each of the girls' photos into their respective photo albums that came with each set of photographs. The girls had not yet seen their photos and it was Robyn that dictated the order of them in their albums.

Paige and I decided to set up her interview on this colorful blanket her mother offered us. Although the other three girls had not yet arrived, we began her interview nonetheless. Three quarters way through her interview, the other three girls arrived and went up to Paige's bedroom to give us our privacy.

Kristen decided she would go next and together we selected the swimming pool for her interview. Then Jayme went, then Myka. As each set up changed, Robyn and her father helped us with the technical setup and equipment, for example, where to find the electrical outlets, the use of extension cords, and the testing of the microphone for sound.

Since the city girls had the opportunity to film a behind the scenes video, I mentioned this to the country girls and asked if they wanted to experiment with the video camera and do the same. They said, "Yes" and the format went as followed. Over the course of five hours, the four girls each took turns sharing their photos with me in

private while the other three had a second camera to film a behind the scenes video. In their cases, the girls were not able to overhear each other's private interviews as they wandered around their neighborhood to film their video and kept returning every 45 minutes to check in.

Again, since the behind the scenes video was not initially part of this research project, I have not coded the data and have decided not to include it in this project.

PAIGE

Door #4: What Influences Me



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5.04 Behind Door #4...



"Standing up and doing things like a 30-hour hunger strike is important to me"

Paige, age 12, the youngest of the girls, and the unofficial leader of her group, was the first country girl that I interviewed and the fourth interview in terms of the research. Paige had medium length blond hair, which she had professionally straightened for this occasion. Together we reviewed her photos on a colorful blanket laid out on the grass. I asked how she felt regarding her participation in this research and she responded, "I find it's a really good experience and I really like it. It feels good to have people interested in what I think, getting your perspective." I then asked her how she defined popular culture for her photo taking experiences and she said,

Things that are popular that influences you, magazines, TV shows, movies... What influences me, what's important to me...at first I was trying to think of things that influence me and that are important to me like the TV and the computer, after the first couple of pictures I knew more what I wanted to take.



Like the others, she photographed her popular lived experience to recount aspects about herself and the relevant issues in her life but unlike them she didn't recount what she thought was well liked by other girls, only that which interested her. During this interview Paige largely discussed issues related to independence, self-expression, integrity, ambition, communication, health, knowledge and citizenship.

Paige's 24 photos document her girl friends, a car, posters and signage on her bedroom wall, dance movies and music videos, the Canadian flag, a memory scrapbook, her soccer jersey and medals, her sister and sister's best girlfriend, singing microphones, clothes in her closet, the telephone, magazines, and the refrigerator.

Paige's favorite practices were singing, dancing, playing sports, sporting events, fundraisers, and communication with friends and family. Her favorite environments were her home, school, the soccer field, friends' house parties and other sports environments.

Independent, Self-Expressive & Proud



"I don't care what you think"

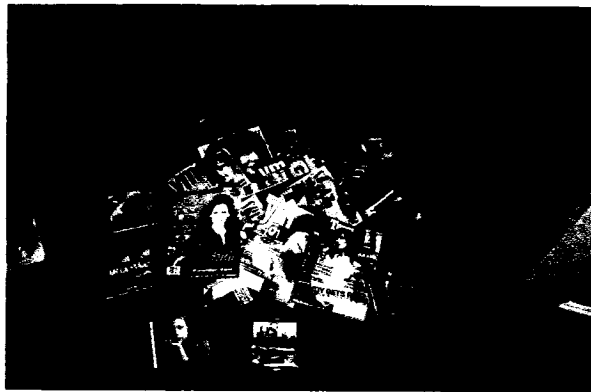
Paige had an independent mind and was not easily influenced by the opinions of others, "When I like something, I don't care what you think...if I like it, leave it alone, it's what I like." To exemplify this, she recounted a story that involved shopping for her Elementary school graduation dress, she said,

When I went shopping for my graduation dress...some of the other people wanted me to try on other dresses and I said 'No, this is what I like, I don't care if I look good in the other ones, I want this one cuz this is the one I am comfortable in!'... I don't like when others choose my clothes for me...unless I ask someone what looks better.

She was self-inventive when it came to her appearances and enjoyed investing time in constructing a unique image,

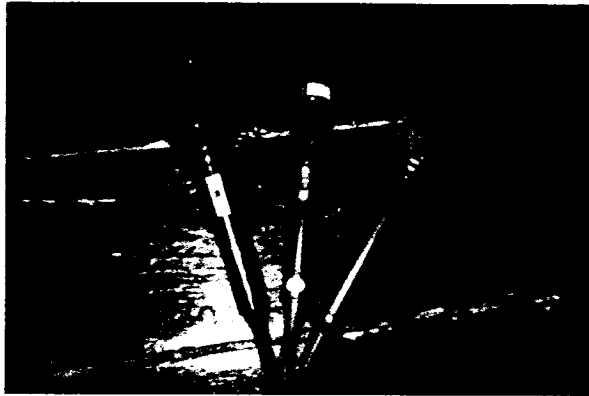
I find I am different than everyone. The way I am, my clothes, I like standing out..." she said. She explained that she took a long time getting ready in the mornings because she wanted to feel good in how she represented herself, "It take[s] me a long time to get ready in the morning...to find what I feel like and what looks good on me that day...I want to make sure I am comfortable how I am dressing.

As long as Paige respected her school's dress code rules, her mother was supportive of the way she dressed, "My mom isn't in to how I am dressing she doesn't bother me. Usually I wear clothes I am allowed to wear at school. If my stomach shows, my mom won't say anything it depends on the school dress codes. Mom's comfortable it's more about school rules."



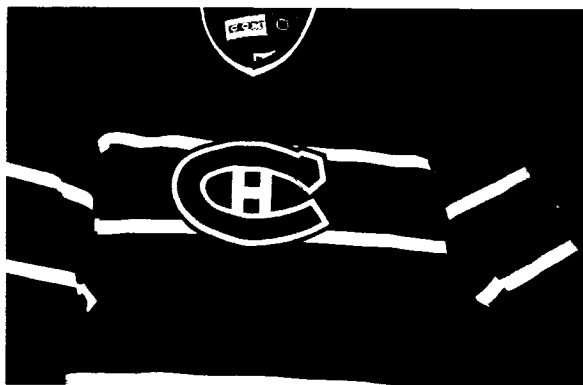
"It keeps me involved and up to date"

She enjoyed reading magazines and used them to get ideas and keep informed on the latest fashion trends, "I love reading magazines it's probably my favorite thing to read. It keeps me involved and up to date and I know what's happening, how people are dressing. Like if I see something I like I'll be like 'Oh that's cool'...."



"If they can do it so can I"

Paige enjoyed expressing herself through singing and had dreams to become a professional singer, "I got singing awards too. I love to sing...I have a little karaoke machine. I sing a lot [of]...pop stuff... country...[basically] songs that have meaning. Hillary Duff and Avril Lavigne are my role models, they are two teenagers that made it, and if they can do it so can I."



"I'm really proud"

She was proud and admitted not being easily influenced by the opinions of others,

I'm really proud to be things. When I like something, I don't care what you think.

A lot of my guy friends they like the Toronto Maple Leafs, and I said, 'No, I like

the Montreal Canadians,' and a lot of them were like. 'No, don't like them,' and I say, 'If I like it, leave it alone, it's what I like'...



"I'm Proud to be a Canadian"

Paige liked to keep informed on global issues and had done so since she was a child, "I like to keep involved so that's how I know what's happening." She was well versed on politics and current events. She said that at nine years old she "paid attention to 9/11...it was all over the radio and all channels on dish satellite." I was impressed and a bit surprised to encounter a 12-year old girl speak with such conviction regarding her patriotism, and interest in Canadian politics. "I'm proud to be a Canadian," she stated, "I think that's really important...to be proud of things." She commented on the possibility for the separation of Quebec from Canada, and was against this, "I don't think Quebec should separate...Quebec will be a really poor province if we separate." She then spoke of the war in Iraq and referenced a conversation she had with a friend about Americans,

One of my friends, he takes it too far. He doesn't like Americans but I told him that a lot of my cousins are American and he's gotten a lot better. He used to be anti-American because of Bush and the war in Iraq. I [also] don't agree on some of the decisions they make and they make it for the whole country.

Healthy Ambition



"These are some of my soccer medals"

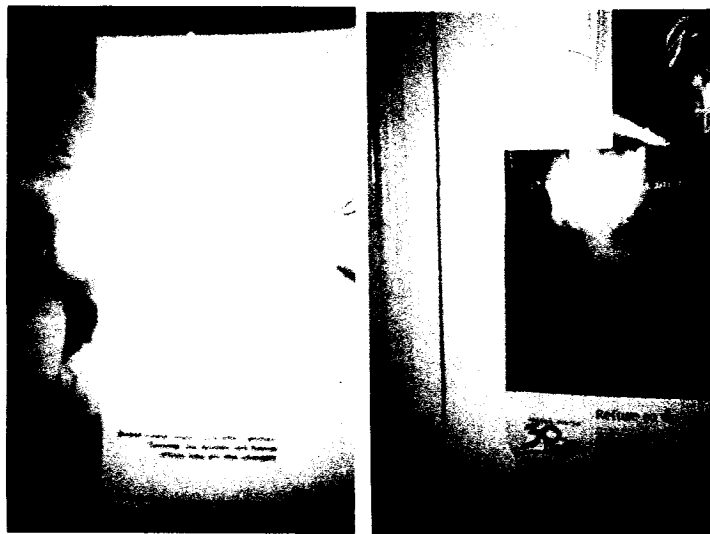
She practiced a healthy lifestyle and was ambitious with her sports, "Soccer is a very important thing in my life I've been playing it since I was 5...these are some of my soccer medals it's really cool...."



"Respect what it says"

Paige photographed a “No Smoking” and a “No Littering” hung on her bedroom wall to explain the importance of respect, she explained,

I use to be asthmatic so nobody could smoke around me and I thought that was good. Respect what it says, if it says something, don't do it, follow the rules! Around our school everyone just drops papers in the hallway. My boyfriend's mom is one of the janitors and that's what stopped me, I am not gonna let my friends do that because look whose cleaning up after you.

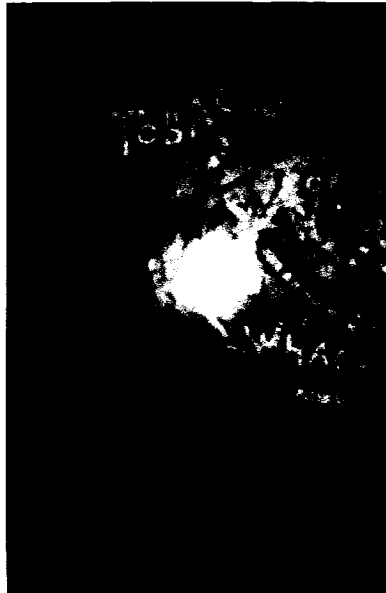


“I am a really big supporter”

She was an advocate for health issues and had first hand experience with those who have suffered from illness, she said, “One of my sister's friend's mom died of breast cancer, and one of my friends, she had cancer and she lost all her hair. She had to go to treatment.” As a young activist she enjoyed participating in fundraising events, and, felt strongly about particular causes. She said,

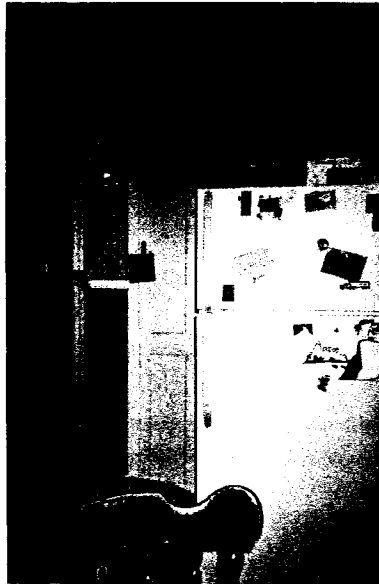
‘Erase Breast Cancer’ and ‘Refuse To Do Nothing, 27,000 children will die today and what will you do?’ I am a really big supporter I like to stay involved. Whenever they have runs and walks for breast cancer I really want to participate

in them because I think it's a really good thing to do, it helps a lot of people...For the 30-hour famine...our school...had a hunger strike and we slept at school, it was really fun.



"I told her to stop and gave her all these reasons"

Paige observed the pressures to smoke drugs and cigarettes but chose not to participate in these unhealthy practices, "Some people are influenced by drugs and I think it's not something I am influenced by." Instead she tried to help and educate others to stop smoking, "My friend she use to smoke she just turned 13, I told her to stop and gave her all these reasons like I told her she's only 13 and there's no point in doing it...."



"I haven't been eating as much"

Paige was aware of eating disorders and although she didn't think she had body image issues, her friends were concerned with her decrease in appetite. She commented,

Eating is big thing, people try to loose weight and watch their diet. I definitely ate a lot but lately I haven't been eating as much. All my friends think it's really weird. I am just not hungry. I told them I only eat when I'm hungry. At a party some of the guys thought I was going anorexic because I didn't eat cake!

She observed that experimenting with drinking alcohol was popular amongst her friends but according to her, this was all normal in comparison to her parents' alcohol consumption when they were her age, she said, "Alcohol is a big thing at our age. Not getting drunk just trying it...my friends tried beer. I don't find beer is bad. Some are getting drunk at my age but it's not really a problem. My parents...they use to bring alcohol to school, they were worse than us!"

Communication



"My mom calls me a social butterfly"

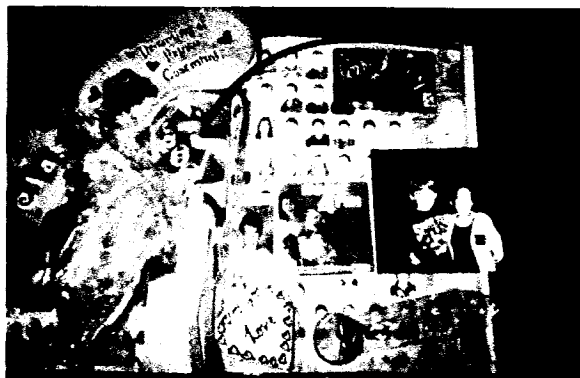
She adored her friends and appreciated communicating with them, "My friends, they give me a lot of support, I can tell them everything. I am not shy to tell them things." Her mother called her a social butterfly, "My mom calls me a social butterfly [that] I talk to anyone and everyone." Transportation facilitated her being able to see her friends, which is why she started saving up for a scooter, "I'm saving up because I am not 14, I'm 12 right now but I'm turning 13, and I am saving up for a scooter so I can go and see my friends."



"She doesn't know how to dance so I always watch those [films and music videos]"

She watched dance movies and music videos to teach others new dance moves, "One of my friends, she says she doesn't know how to dance so I always watch those [films and music videos]. At the dance, I always dance with her...."

She was also respectful of her parents and explained how some of her dance moves were not appropriate in front of them, "It's completely different how I dance at school and how I dance in front of my parents. I think it's about respect. They [my parents] wouldn't like me dancing like that...."



"Dreams, don't let anyone convince you against [them]"

Paige was the only girl in the research to have a boyfriend, and was especially appreciative of his nurturing, encouragement and supportive qualities. She said,

These are all my memories with my boyfriend, we started in March and broke up in June, and then went back out in June 2 weeks later he's 13... He's really interested in how I feel, always asking how I am doing, like he is a really good friend. I have a lot of really good friends who are guys, my group of girlfriends we always hangout with the guys, and he's more of my best friend then the rest of them are. This is the first time, when I find out he liked me, we went to a

hotel... and I bought that, and it says 'Dreaming of Prince Charming.' I was in this drama club play and I was a princess, he said it suits me, and he said this to all my friends he called me a princess so he's my prince... This is woodworking class I made a heart...Josh stayed to help me when my box fell... I go to watch all his hockey games. The thirty-hour famine was our first kiss during the hunger strike at school!

I noticed the pink condom in her photo and asked if people her age were having sexual relations. She responded,

This group of guys are not having sex at this age, it's funny cuz it's pink [the condom]. We had sex ed. in elementary, that's where he got it from the nurse who gave them out to the boys in the class. You can get condoms at [school] if you ask the nurse. One of my friends got it as a joke. My group of friends, they're not having sex...[and] no one I know is having oral sex....

She referred to an image of a soccer poster to further illustrate her appreciation for his support,

'Keep Your Eye On The Goal!' I think it's a really good lesson... If you have dreams, don't let anyone convince you against that, that's what Josh says. I've had goals, I really wanted to be a singer when I was little and I still want to be but some people say I am not that good but I don't listen to them. I sang to Josh one time and he said I was amazing and don't listen to them....



"A really important message"

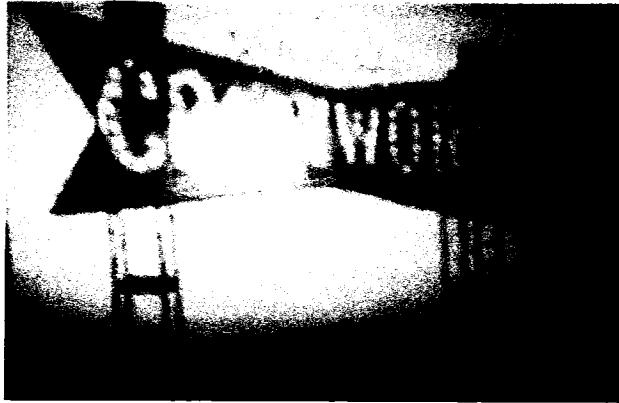
Although I did not ask her directly if she was engaging in sexual relations with her boyfriend, I was impressed by Paige's interest to articulate a critical perspective regarding female sexuality and representation. She showed me a photograph of her favorite magazine advertisement hung on her bedroom wall that read, "*Be Sexy, That Doesn't Mean You Have To Have Sex, Almost One Million Teenage Girls Will Become Pregnant This Year*." That's a really important message," she exclaimed and continued to explain, "There's pressure around our age...people...are [sexual and dress sexy]... It doesn't mean you can't be sexy or you can't dress how you want, it just means don't have sex." She thought this ad was a positive influence on young girls and agreed with its message, "They're trying to say you can be sexy without having to do it, I think it's a good influence."



"They help me"

Paige also enjoyed having older female role models such as her sister and sister's best girlfriends. She loved to get advice from them when it came to clothing and issues regarding her boyfriend,

My sister Meghan and her friend Kim, they are a really good influence and I look up to them... She helps me figure it out how I want to dress... They help me with things...I can talk to them... Krista...she went out with my boyfriend's cousin, so she knows they are so much alike. We are always talking about them like how they are both really jealous if you talk to another guy. She helps me when I get into fights with Josh and tells me what to say and how to act. I fit in all her clothes, she's 18, she's another sister.



"My life gets really hectic"

Paige exemplified a healthy life filled with friends and a range of activities, which helped her to express her self in many ways. She was ambitious on so many levels. She had an eventful social life, she was extremely athletic, involved in team sports, she had dreams to become a singer, and was an activist at heart. But sometimes she found her busy lifestyle overwhelming. She said,

Welcome to *Crazyworld* because a lot of my friends say I am crazy. It's just my life! Sometimes it gets really hectic and I get stressed. Sometimes school or if I am not getting along well with my friends. I am [also] really involved, like I play soccer and I go and watch a lot of basketball games...a lot of my friends play basketball...so this [sign] is something that describes me.

At the end of her interview I asked Paige to recap on the issues she discussed and whether she had learned anything new about herself through studying her relationships with popular culture. She proudly responded,

This is my popular culture, what influences me and what's important to me. My friends, clothes, fashion, communication, relationships, social, [and] having good social skills are very important... I realized what's important to me, standing up and doing things like a 30-hour hunger strike is important to me. My

relationships with pop culture are a positive thing in my life. I am not influenced by anything bad from my point of view. Some people it can have a negative impact but in general it doesn't for me.

Conclusion: What is discovered about Paige through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

During this interview Paige, for the most part, demonstrated awareness, critical insight, and reflexivity concerning her relationships with media and others. The majority of Paige's photos document a healthy sense of inner wellbeing inspired by her both her independent mind and her connection to others. Paige's story unfolded through her photographs of media texts and communication practices to discuss issues related to image, integrity, ambition, health, love, wellbeing and citizenship.

Paige used clothing to express her self as independent and self-inventive. She used magazines ads and signage to inform herself and others on issues of interest. She used celebrities to visualize possibilities for her future. She used movies, music and dance to bond with peers. She used a refrigerator to comment on her awareness of eating disorders and teenage alcohol consumption, she used signage and posters to express her healthy lifestyle, and she used Canadian artifacts to express her integrity.

Paige's interpretations of her photos indicate her keen insight concerning media's role in shaping her sense of self as someone who is compassionate towards others, and recognizes her larger role within society. She spoke with a sense of inner wellbeing, someone who was socially conscious, willful, respectful, and civic. Although she did not feel victimized by others, and perceived her boyfriend as supportive and nurturing, her reliance on his validation of her singing talents rather than being sure of

herself, and an awareness of his jealousy when speaking with other boys may be a warning sign of a possible abusive relationship. Nevertheless, she enjoyed her interpretation of media's messages, appreciated media's involvement in raising social consciousness, and claimed she was empowered by her relationships.

What struck me most about Paige was the amount of media texts she photographed to identify her social conscious citizenry. Being the youngest of the girls in the research, I was surprised to discover that when asked to document her popular culture, most spoke of Paige's sense of community and compassion towards others.

Echoing Neo-Gramscian theory, popular culture was a site for Paige's meaning making practices and construction of self. Sharing her interests through stories elicited by magazine ads, signage and artifacts allowed her to demonstrate ways that she negotiated her self amongst the hegemonic forces of peers, media, family, and her larger community. Paige negotiated a productive lifestyle while maintaining a healthy respect for her body and mind. She embodied the girlpower ideology as someone who was self-inventive, ambitious, athletic, social, and socially conscious towards others.

KRISTEN

Door #5: Family And Friends



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5.06 Behind Door #5...



"How fortunate I am"

Kristen, age 13, was the second country girl that I interviewed and the fifth in terms of the research. She had light brown hair, braces, and was the eldest of her group. As the afternoon approached and the sun was burning bright, we chose the setting of the swimming pool to review her photos. I began with a similar structure as I did with the others and asked her recap her definition of popular culture for her photo taking experience. She said,

I had a lot of fun and I learned a lot, popular culture before I had no idea what it was, like I kinda thought but I wasn't sure at all...Mostly the media is popular culture for a lot of people but for me it's family and friends...that's probably the most important things to me. ...I took my photos based on if I like it or if it was important to me.



Kristen photographed her popular lived experiences to express that which she valued as most representative of her. A neat appearance, health, privilege, democracy, education, country life, family, friends and animals were the topics she largely addressed.

Kristen's 24 photos document teen magazines, clothing, a shopping bag, the computer, a Canadian flag, a radio, a *Finding Nemo*™ balloon, a DVD collection of the TV series *Friends*, girl friends, family members, a stuffed animal cat her grandma made for her, a soccer field, a bike, a swimming pool, a car, her home, her appendix scar and hospital bracelet with a *Minnie and Mickey*™ sticker she placed on it, a no smoking sign, her school year book, her favorite reading books, a puppy, a kitten, and the piano.

Kristen's favorite practices were playing soccer, biking, swimming, listening to country music, playing piano, online chatting, watching TV, family gatherings, bargain shopping, school, her education, participating in charitable events, and reading books. Her favorite environments were her home, school, the soccer field, and friends' houses. Her favorite people were her family members, girl friends and animals.

Image



"I don't want to go out and look really bad"

Kristen articulated the importance of having a neat appearance. She enjoyed clothing for comfort and practicality but was not interested in self-adornment beyond that,

These are my clothes I think it's just more my style. I dress for comfort and how I feel that day. I find you can tell a lot about a person from their style...I wear whatever I like my style is pretty much comfy. I don't want to go out and look really bad. I think that's kinda the way I am I don't like to be messy...[but] it's mostly for me....



"I'm kind of cheap"

She wasn't concerned with having an expensive branded image instead she enjoyed shopping for bargains, "This is a Jacob Junior bag...I like that store, there's a lot of good sales. I don't like to buy things that are too expensive I'm kind of cheap. I really like that store because it has good prices so I go to that store as much as I can."

Health



"I don't want to end up really sloppy"

Kristen valued a healthy lifestyle, enjoyed keeping in shape and appreciated the social aspect of sports, "This is...soccer...my favorite sport... I find it's really important to keep in shape...and the social part like getting to see your friends...my bike...I love to swim... We have a treadmill and I'll admit I don't use it very much, but I don't want to end up really sloppy or anything...."



"Polluting your lungs"

She photographed signage on a wall to illustrate her disgust for smoking cigarettes, "This one is really important to me, neither of my parents smoke and they never have, but when other people do it really bothers me because I find it's polluting

your lungs. There are a lot of things I've heard and I don't like it at all...I would never smoke."



"You don't really realize how poor the system is until it hits you"

Kristen appreciated her health especially when she didn't have it, "I really missed [soccer] this summer when I couldn't play because of my appendix." She photographed her scar and hospital bracelet to critique the health care treatment she received during an emergency eruption of her appendix.

That's my scar and hospital bracelet...we were really disappointed by the whole thing...we were in the emergency room and we had to wait 5 hours before we got seen and I was really in pain...the medical system isn't very good there was only one doctor on call that night and I think someone was dying too so that didn't help at all. It's not the doctors or anything, the doctor was good and everything was okay it's just the wait... My parents say you don't really realize how poor the system is until it hits you.

I noticed she was still wearing her hospital bracelet adorned with a *Mini Mouse*TM sticker so I asked her why she still had on her bracelet. She responded, "I like my *Mini and Mickey* sticker I put on the hospital bracelet. I will take the bracelet off

when I get tired of it...It represents that I was in the hospital... That night all I wanted was to be home in my bed."

Canadian Privilege: Country Life & Education



"I am really glad that I live there it's where I am growing up"

Kristen identified herself as a country girl and greatly appreciated her country lifestyle and family heritage, she said,

That's my house, I am really glad that I live there. I like my house a lot it's where I am growing up. That's the view from my house. I really like it in the country...town...[is] a lot different... I live on a farm with cows it's a dairy farm. It's my mom and dad and my uncle's farm. It use to be my grandparents, my dad grew up here too in the same house.

She explained in brief her family farming business, "They milk the cows...[and] there's corn fields too...they make it for cans like the *Green Giant*™" and so I asked her if she had any plans to enter this business of which she laughed and said, "They have to be home for 4:30 to do [these] chores, so I don't think that I want to that when I grow up!"



"It symbolizes things"

She loved to listen to country music and being a country girl, she related to their lyrics, "Country music, you can hear the words and it symbolizes things and they have meanings to the songs. I'm not saying that other kinds of music don't but just for me I am growing up in the country and I've always liked that kind of music."

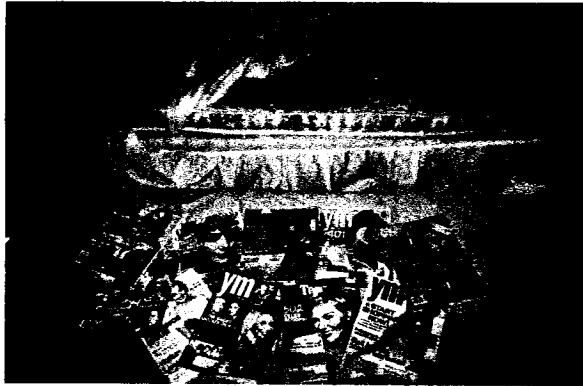


"How lucky I am, for sure"

Kristen was proud to be a Canadian citizen. She was aware of her privilege to receive a democratic education and was sensitive to those who suffered social injustices. She said,

The Canadian flag, that's really important to me, my country. If you ask anyone they will say that I am really proud to be a Canadian... I am glad that I live here. A lot of people in the world aren't as fortunate and don't get to eat as much like people in Pakistan... These...three books...I chose to read them because I find they symbolize a lot because it talks about a girl in Afghanistan and about the way she lives. Her dad got beat up by the Taliban soldiers for being a teacher.

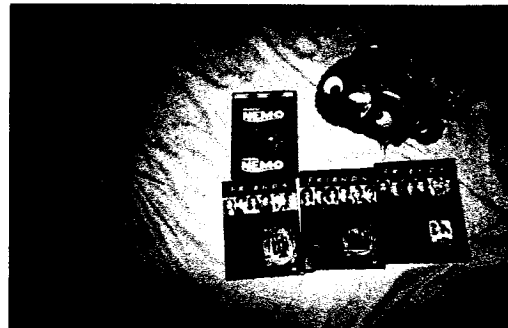
She had to pretend she is a boy to go outside by herself and work to get money for her parents...It reminds me of how lucky I am, forsure... School is a big thing in our lives at this age...you learn, it's really important. A lot of people don't get to go to school because they are girls and I am really glad that I can get an education.



"Fundraiser for school"

Although she rarely purchased or read teen magazines she enjoyed supporting social causes and for this reason she and her sister subscribed to YM magazine, "That's a bunch of magazines, I don't normally buy them...[but] the fundraiser for school was selling magazine subscriptions, and my sister and I we got this one."

Communication



"They are always there for me"

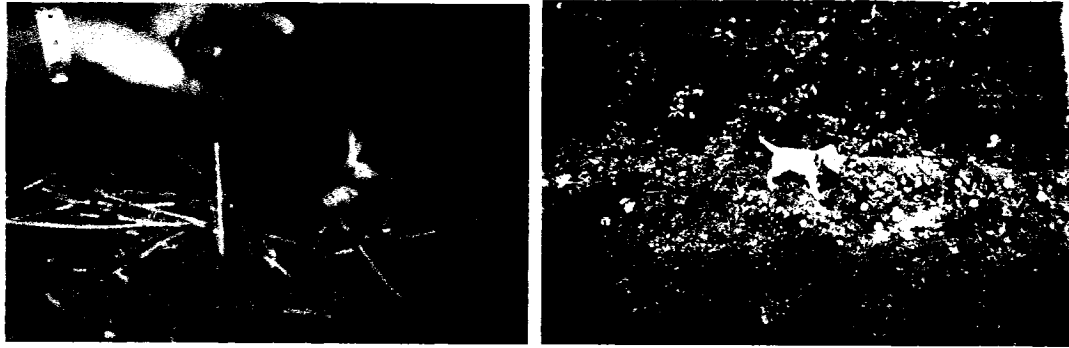
She appreciated her friends and enjoyed communicating with them, “My friends, probably the most important to me, they are always there for me. I have a lot of...friends...you can talk to them about almost anything and they are always there for you.”



“I am close with them”

Kristen valued a sense of family and credited them as most influential in her life. Even when out of town or living far away she found ways to document their meaning in her life. She said,

My family is getting smaller and smaller. Emily, my sister, she was working the day so I took her photo and my other sister Lauren she is in Switzerland. I am getting closer with her now that she is away. My dad isn't normally photogenic but I like this photo! My parents are really important to me I am close with them. Emily and I have a big age difference, we fight a lot but my sisters are still important to me. This stuffed animal cat, my grandma made it for me. It has a music box inside. My grandparents live far away, two hours away so I couldn't take a picture of them. This symbolizes my grandma.



"I love pets but I don't have any"

Since Kristen's dog died, she immensely desired having a pet. She photographed a kitten and a dog she wished her parents would allow. Unfortunately, at that time they had refused, she said,

This is a kitten in the hayloft of our house...I love pets but I don't have any in my house, I wish I did. I use to have a dog, he was really old, 15 and he was there my whole life. My mom says if we get a puppy there's a lot of hair, she doesn't want to have to clean up after them. She doesn't think I would take care of it. This is the puppy I wanted. My friend's dog had ten puppies they are so cute. I really wanted this one but my mom didn't want one. Pets are really important, something to love, always there for you. I am gonna let my kids have any pet they want!

At the end of Kristen's interview, like the others, I asked if she had learned anything new about her self as a result of her engagement in this research project. I was impressed with her critical response. She said,

I did learn, I had to really think what's important to me these are the most important to me. Friends, family, my home, I hope it stays in the family, how fortunate I am, my country. TV shows are more for entertainment but they don't influence me. I don't relate to TV shows, but magazines are different. Also, we

have to drive a lot farther, shopping we can't go everyday or week. We have to plan it because it's more easy for girls to go shopping who live in town [so] pop culture probably influences them more...the visual surroundings are different in the country than the city, there are no billboards, but there are commercials on TV that can influence you. Sometimes I want to buy stuff I see on TV but I don't really get to buy it.

Conclusion: What is discovered about Kristen through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Kristen's story unfolded through her photographs of clothing, her scar, signage, sporting activities, the radio, a Canadian flag, family, and her home to share aspects of her self as conservative, healthy, family oriented, socially conscious and aware of her privilege. She used clothing to express the importance of having a neat appearance, signage to reference her health, magazines to speak of her participation in social causes, movies and television to bond with peers, the radio and Canadian flag to express her country identity and the relatability of country music, and books to identify her democratic voice and interest in social justice.

Kristen's interpretations of her photos indicate reflexivity concerning her privilege and self-esteem. Not overly interested in Hollywood driven media, I was not surprised to discover her high level of self-contentment gained from other areas than simply her physical appearances. When asked to document her favorite popular culture, most spoke of Kristen's sense of family, her appreciation for an education, and her country life existence.

Echoing Neo-Gramscian theory, popular culture was a site for Kristen's meaning making practices and construction of self. Kristen's negotiated relationship with popular culture demonstrates that although she resisted to some extent celebrity driven fashion, music and media, she nevertheless used media texts that resonated with her values. Her commitment to learning from teen girl books related to gender issues in third world countries, her choice to purchase teen girl magazines to support a social cause, and, her embracement of country music, is indicative of Kristen's agency within this negotiated relationship. Kristen was operating within the preferred code of girlpower as educated, athletic, socially conscious, and social with her girlfriends, and maintained a healthy respect for her body and mind.

JAYME

Door #6: What I Enjoy



interview

5.07 Behind Door #6...



"I like having dreams"

Jayme, age 13, was the third country girl that I interviewed and the sixth in terms of the research. She had long blond hair and a mischievous playful look about her. Together we chose to set up her interview on the grass next to a garden sculpture of *Garfield*[™] the cartoon cat. She loved this character, which is why we chose this location. Although Jayme was one of the more articulate girls during the focus group interview, during her private interview she was more reserved.

I began with the same format as I did with the others, and asked her to recount her definition of popular culture for her photo taking experience. She said,

For me, what I enjoy, what I see, what's close to me, I guess that's what pop culture is. The magazines, how people say stuff in them... It was cool, different... Mostly I was thinking about the pictures, what I was gonna take. I organized some stuff like my pictures of my shoes and stuff.



Like her friends, she photographed her popular lived experience to recount aspects of her self and the relevant issues in her life. Self-invention, entertainment, communication, sportsmanship and family were the topics she largely addressed.

Jayme's 21 photos document her horses, dogs, cats, camper, magazines, clothes, shoes, makeup, perfume, jewelry, TV, the phone, the computer, sporting equipment, her soccer team, and the trampoline.

Jayme's favorite practices were playing sports, reading magazines, watching TV, Internet surfing and online chatting, shopping, experimenting with makeup, karaoke singing, riding horses, playing with her dog and cat, going camping with friends and family, playing on the trampoline, sharing clothes and music with her sisters, and bonding with girl friends through playing sports. Her favorite environments were her home, the soccer field, other sports-related environments, the campground, and the computer/TV room. Her favorite people were her family members and pets, girl friends, and soccer team members.

Self-Inventive



"The best part of my life"

Jayme enjoyed her clothing and regarded herself as self-inventive, "My clothes...they are the best part of my life, you can express yourself, if you're in a sporty mood, or a dress up mood. I dress more for me and not for others." She loved to accessorize herself with jewelry and scented lotion, "I like earrings, I have hoops, stars,

dangling ones, there are nice to wear, when I am all dressed up and have no earrings on I feel naked. I feel I look better with earrings on.” Although she enjoyed experimenting with makeup for entertainment purposes, on a regular basis, she didn’t wear much, “I don’t wear that much makeup, when I am bored, I will go to my room and put on thick eyeliner, black, or really light, do all different shades.” Like Kristina, she enjoyed perfume, “I like to smell good...I like my shirts smelling really fruity.”

Although Jayme wasn’t motivated to buy name brand clothing, she nevertheless enjoyed shopping especially for shoes, “I like shoes, I have a lot of them, flip flops, running shoes, normal wear shoes, cleats. I like the look of shoes. Every time I go shopping I look at shoes...I don’t care about the name brands the look and feel is how I buy them....”

Entertainment & Communication



"I get ideas"

Jayme subscribed to teen magazines because she enjoyed reading them for its entertainment and informative value, “They’re fun to read, they’re better than reading a chapter book I find, they’re more interesting, there are different subjects, they’re not all the same thing.” Although she enjoyed reading about fashion tips and celebrity gossip she stated that they did not influence her purchasing choices, “Sometimes I get ideas from magazines. I enjoy seeing different pictures of outfits and stuff [but] I don’t always

believe the stories [although] I enjoy reading them. ... I am not influenced. I buy my own clothes. [For example] I don't buy the short short skirts."

She enjoyed reading about regular people in her favorite section entitled *Total Embarrassing Moments*, "those are so funny to read what people do, and how they do them, its funny. In *J14* or *YM* magazine they are my favorite parts to read."

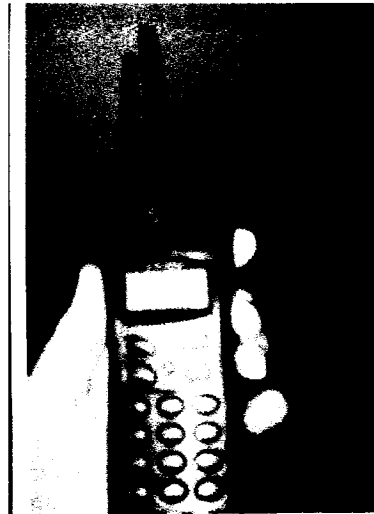


"Like 24/7"

Jayne was very busy between reading magazines, watching television, surfing the Internet and writing emails,

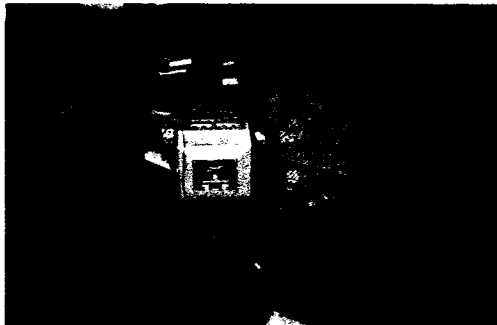
I watch TV a lot, when I am on the computer...*Friends* is my favorite TV show...

Not usually am I influenced by [the TV commercials]. I usually surf the net when commercials are on... I go on the Internet like 24/7... I talk to my friends on MSN, I check my emails and writes emails. Sometimes I go on to the YM website and read the stories like *Most Embarrassing Moments*, stuff like that....



"They give me advice"

Jayne valued her communication with girl friends, "That's the four of us they are my best friends. They give me advice and help me through hard times, and when I have decisions to make.... I like talking on the phone...to my friends and tell them what happened...."



"I do crazy stuff when I sing"

Music was important to Jayme for self-expression, relatability and bonding with her sisters. She said,

That's the karaoke machine I like to sing...I do crazy stuff when I sing. It makes me feel hyper. I dance too (giggle). I sing with Stacey, we sing country songs... I

love listening to music. My sisters and I we all share the same CDs, we have a big thing it's like this high, it's all full of CDs.

Like Kristen, she also related to the lyrics of country music, There's one [song] that I find really sad, it's a country song. It's [about] a guy...[who]...comes home and sees his wife sleeping with someone else. Then he puts a bullet to his head and she puts a bullet to her head and they bury each other by the Willow trees, it's really sad.

Health & Communication

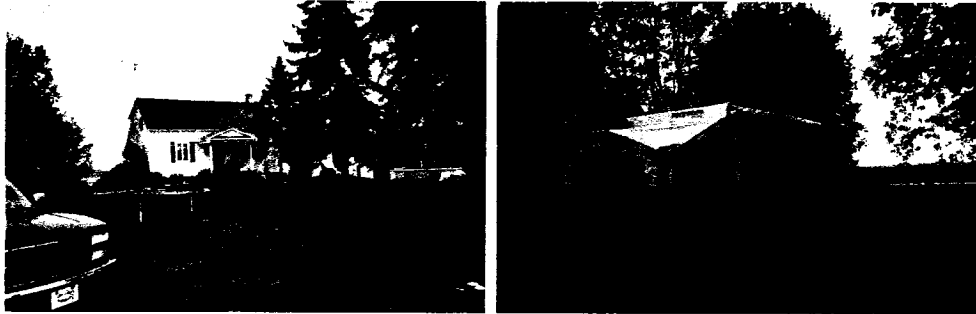


"We have a lot of sportsmanship"

Jayne's favorite practices involved sports of all kinds, "Those are all the sports that I do, swimming, rollerblading, hockey, basketball, soccer, running... baseball... I like playing sports," and used them to release her emotions, "If no one listens to me I will go outside and shoot hoops, or wip the tennis ball...."

She enjoyed teams sports for their girl bonding value and making new friends, Soccer, our team, we are very into it, we have a lot of sportsmanship. Same with hockey, one day we did our hair in braids, next we wear our hair down. It's great girl bonding... We played against a Kahnawake team and they're just starting and not that good so we always cheer them and help them out.... That's

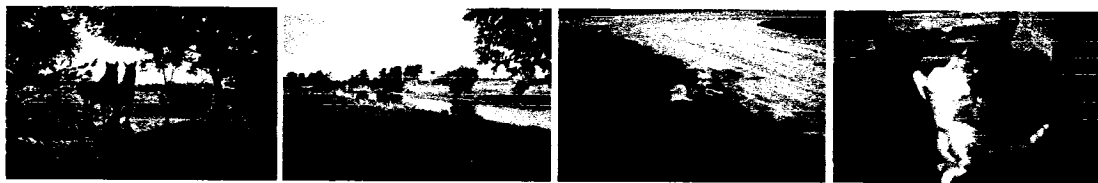
sportsmanship and the way each team bonds. We had three players from Chateaugay come on to our team and now are all good friends and we always talk to each other its fun!



"It symbolizes love"

Holiday time and summer vacations were favorite bonding moments with her family. She said,

That's my house...it's where everything happens and started...at Christmas time we give presents and at birthdays... It symbolizes love, family and friends. ... We go camping every year with family, mom and dad and my brother. It used to be with my older sisters Stacey and Shelley but they don't come anymore, they're working. We went out West in that camper. I enjoy that because you can just relax and do nothing pretty much and have fun.



"I always play with [them]"

Jayne loved and valued her animals. She took care of them and enjoyed time spent with them,

These are my horses Sunshine and Cookie. She's old but we ride her, we have a saddle for her. I love horses I've been around them since I was little. I feed them and give them carrots I spoil them (giggle). They are apart of my life, part of my routine... My dog Sadie I always play with her, I kick the ball around with her and she'll run around. Animals are important to me they are another best friend... Charlie always sleeps in my room and on my bed... I always play with him. Sometimes I talk to him.

At the end of her interview, I asked Jayme if she had learned anything new about herself through her engagement in this research. She was the only girl to respond that she had not, she said, "Not really but my feelings kinda got stronger for my sports and stuff." And so I asked her to recap on what was important to her, and she responded, "Family, friends, sports, animals, [and] having dreams, I like dreams," she emphasized.

Conclusion: What is discovered about Jayme through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Jayme's story unfolded through her photographs of clothing articles, magazines, a karaoke machine, the TV, the computer and her pets to share aspects of her self as self-inventive, consumer powered, athletic, team spirited, family oriented and compassionate towards animals. The majority of her photos document a healthy lifestyle and inner wellbeing largely inspired by her athleticism and desire to remain connected to her family and friends. Her pets and family members were of great importance to her as she spent a significant amount of time with them.

Jayne used clothing to express her self as independent and self-inventive. She used magazines, TV and the Internet for entertainment purposes. She used movies, music and dance to bond with her sisters and peers. She used the camper, her home and her pets to express bonding moments she cherished with family.

She identified herself as athletic and enjoyed self-adornment practices like experimenting with clothing, makeup, scented lotions, and wearing jewelry. Although she spoke a great deal of her participation in sports she made no mention of body issues related to her self or others. Although her photos demonstrate Jayme as consumer powered she expressed herself as rarely influenced by fashion trends propagated by celebrity driven media. She did not feel influenced by celebrities although she enjoyed reading about them for their informative and entertainment value.

Jayne was unable to discuss her negotiation of her relationships with popular culture with me although she intuitively did negotiate them. Although her interpretations of her photos did not indicate a keen insight concerning media's role in shaping her sense of self or her larger role in society –citizenship–, she did speak with a sense of inner wellbeing, someone who was content, enjoyed life and cared about others. She did not feel victimized or demonstrate any form of victimization by others. She enjoyed her interpretation of media's messages and appreciated media mainly for its entertainment value.

What struck me most about Jayme was the amount of times she photographed and discussed athletics without mention of body image. Being the most developed of the girls in the research, I was surprised to discover no mention of her awareness regarding societal pressures to be thin. When asked to document her favorite popular culture, most spoke of Jayme's sense of playfulness and her close connection to others.

Since there was little evidence of her critical engagement with media in this interview, it was difficult to assess to what extent popular culture was a site of struggle for Jayme's meaning making practices and construction of self. Although she shared her interests through stories elicited by magazines, music, clothing and self-adornment texts, it was difficult to make out how she negotiated her self amongst the hegemony of others. Nevertheless, Jayme did negotiate a healthy and productive lifestyle and did not appear to be negatively impacted by media's messages.

MYKA

Door #7: My Life



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5.07 Behind Door #7...



"Most of the things in my life are really nice to have"

Myka, age 12, the second youngest of the girls was the last person I interviewed for the research. Tall, slim with long blond hair and braces, Myka was perhaps the shyest of the girls and least familiar with her definition of popular culture and its relationship to the photography assignment. On a wooden scaffold we set up her interview to review her album of photos. I began with the question, "Tell me about your experience?" She responded, "I thought it was really fun and a good experience, I didn't really know what we were gonna do." So I asked her, "What did you come away thinking that pop culture meant to you?" She responded, "It means your dislikes and your likes, basically everything in *your* life, is *your* popular culture. At first I was like what should I take a picture of then I read the paper and my mom helped me to think of what to take a picture of."



Admitting to being confused about the term popular culture and what it meant to her and the photography assignment, nevertheless, like her friends, she photographed

her popular lived experience to recount aspects of her self and the relevant issues in her life. Communication with and nurture of and from friends, family, animals, and self were the topics she largely addressed.

Myka's 23 photos document her home, her two farms, the tree house, horses, dogs, cats, the sky, girl friends, family members, sporting equipment, the computer, her bedroom, and posters of favorite male celebrities on her bedroom wall.

Myka's favorite practices were spending time with friends and taking care of her pets and farm animals, skiing and canoeing with family, playing soccer, swimming, thinking about boys, going to the movies with her family, playing video games on the computer, online chatting, alone time, listening to music, watching the clouds and hanging out in her bedroom and tree house. Her favorite environments were her bedroom, tree house, the barn, the soccer field, the ski hill, the campground, and the computer room. Her favorite people were her family members and pets, girl friends, boys and male celebrities.

Communication



"We can talk to eachother"

Like all the other girls, Myka valued her friends and communication with them, We're friends and we can talk to each other and we are really close. You need to talk to people and to be yourself around people and not only around your family. And in school you need people... She's my oldest friend I've known her since I was a baby I can tell her everything...she means a lot to me.



"I talk to friends, listen to music and play games"

The computer was also a form of entertainment for Myka, to chat with friends, listen to music and to play computer games, "After school and homework, I go on to talk to friends and listen to music. Sometimes I play games on the Internet, we have a whole bunch of games like *Harry Potter*TM and car racing...."



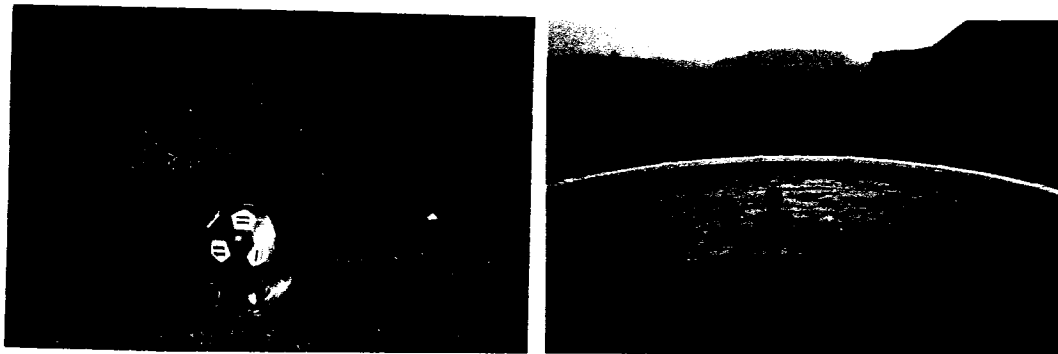
"I like boys"

Paige and Myka were the only two girls to discuss boys in a personal manner.

Myka desired to have a boyfriend as another person to communicate with. She said,

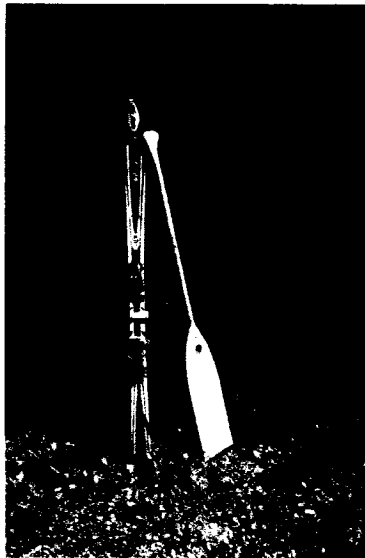
I like boys... In grade 7 going out with a boy is holding hands and kissing. In Grade 8 you can still at school hold hands walk around and talk to each other. I don't need one but I wouldn't mind one [it's] another person to talk to, it's a different conversation with boys, you talk about sports, and with girls you talk about boys, and girl stuff.

Since she had a bunch of posters hung on her bedroom wall, I asked her about her favorite male celebrities, I said, "What about your posters, are these your favorite male celebrities?" Myka responded, "Ashton Kutcher is okay, Josh Harnett I really like him in *Hollywood Homicide*. When I was a little kid, me and my brother use to watch *Star Wars*, so I use to have a crush on Harrison Ford, so I thought it's a perfect movie for me but now he's an old fart."



"A time to see your friends"

Myka loved to participate in sports and appreciated the social aspect of athletics, "I really like playing soccer because it's fun to do and it's a time to see your friends in the summer and you can even play against your friends, it's really fun. I love swimming and am usually in there all day... My best friend is in the pool with me."



"Winter weekend ski trips"

Her family members were also active and together they bonded through winter weekend skiing and summer canoe trips,

Every weekend in the winter we go skiing and do races, downhill slalom usually... I go to *Owls Head Titus*, it's 30 minutes away from home. I go with family and sees friends there, all my friends are there. Sometimes me and my sister just go off cuz we know the hill by heart... I [also] do canoeing a lot with my family we go to Meacham Lake or the Sandbar. It's a half hour canoe ride, we like it there you see a lot of stuff you can swim all the way to the other island at the sandbar. It's a good way to spend time with my family.

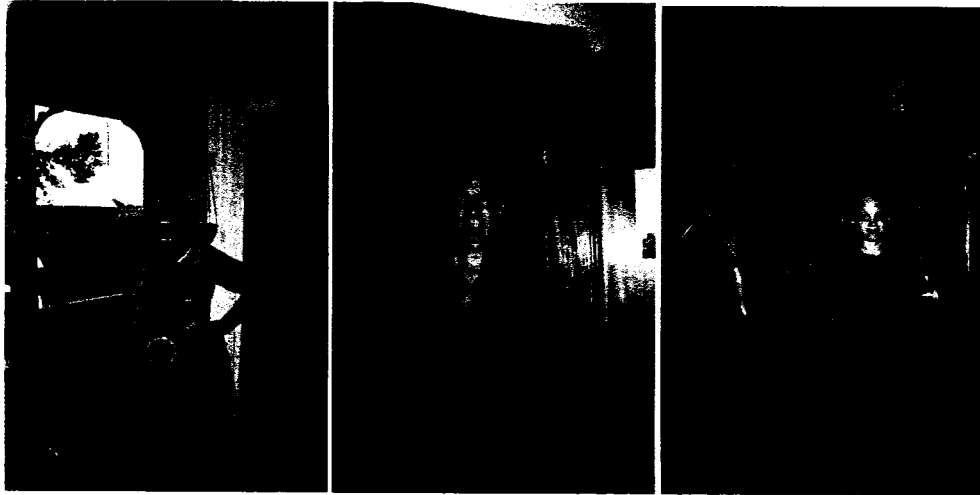


"Horses mean a lot to me"

She loved her horses and enjoyed taking turns riding them with her mother and cousin,

Horses, they mean a lot to me. I ride and I like it because it's something to do with your time. It's fun to do with another person. This summer I rode with my cousin from Holland, she taught me stuff. I usually take turns with my mom. We only have one horse to ride, the other one's hooves are not well from the winter. They will get better though. She's a pony so next year will be my last year to ride it then it will go to my brother.

Nurture



"We...see a chick movie...[and they] see Star Wars"

Myka continued to speak about her family and explained movie going as a family bonding practice, "That's my mom...I can tell a lot and I'm with her almost all the time. Me and my sister and my mom we usually go shopping and go to the movies, see a chick movie." I asked her what kind of movies they went to see and she responded, "Sometimes we'll see our movies like *Princess Diaries*, and sometimes we see my mom's movies like *Something's Gotta Give*. My brother and my father will go see *Star Wars* or something."

Myka spoke about the care she took of her brother when he broke both of his arms "My brother, I care about him. He just broke his two arms falling off a swing. His cast came off two weeks ago. I took care of him. He's 10 yrs. Old." She spoke of her sister who was in Switzerland visiting relatives and reminisced of the times when she was there, "My sister is in Holland visiting relatives. My mom's relatives live there. Next summer I am going...I went three times but I was young. I remember special things like grandmas house and eating all day peanut butter sandwiches...I speak part Dutch with them, and they speak half English with me."



"All the animals can come in the house except for the sheep and the horses"

Myka's pets and farm animals played a large role in her life. She shared what it was like for her to nurture them when they were sick,

My dog, I love him. I didn't know if it was pop culture but I took it. My Other Dog, I cut his hair he's really old, 13. His bones are weak. We crush the pills up and put it in his food. His bones got weak at 11. He runs up and down the driveway and then gets tired and weak. He means a lot to me and he's my friend. These are my three kittens I have two dogs and six cats... All the animals can come in the house except for the sheep and the horses. I spend time with them, and feed them, and take care of them. This is my barn it's where I do all my chores and take care of the animals, when they are sick or when they are having babies. Last time there were two paralyzed ones. Everyday we took them out and after a week they started standing and walking, now they are perfectly fine. Except one has an amputated leg. We are giving that one to a neighbor to breed because it's a different bloodline. Our sheep we breed them every summer, the boys we send off and the girls we keep to make more babies.

I asked her how she felt about sending off the males for slaughter and whether she was a vegetarian and she responded, "I am not against slaughtering sheep, it's the

only meat I eat and chicken. I don't like cow that much cuz it's a different taste. I am not use to the taste."



"It's a big part of my past"

Myka reminisced about her second farm where she use to work and the strawberries she use to pick,

The Vermont farm, we use to sell strawberries. It means a lot to me because it's a big part of my past. I use to help pick them. I use to do the money it was fun! I love strawberries I can eat them for supper. When I pick the strawberries I eat them at the same time!



"[Where] I spend most of my time"

She enjoyed spending time at home, "I took a picture of my house because it's my home and I spend most of my time in it, day and night. I'm comfortable there." She also enjoyed spending time with friends in her bedroom and was in the process of painting a mural with them,

My bedroom, it's my room and I can do whatever I want in there. [For my mural] I wanted a sky so I used sponges, I am gonna continue to put all handprint of my friends on my wall...so I can remember them and they will put their names in permanent marker so I will not forget them. It's my room and I could do whatever I want in there. I don't have to have permission or anything.



"Nobody bothers me there"

Although sociable, she also cherished time alone in her tree house and on her roof where she loved to look at the clouds and the stars while listening to her music,

That's my fort me and my brother made. We covered it with trees and pine. We sleep out there that's why the tarp is on. I can spend time there and nobody bothers me there...it's nice to have that. Nobody comes up to...say 'Go do your chores or clean your room or do the dishes!' I know I have to do that but when I am there they don't bother me. I don't have that much chores its just like put the dishes in the dishwasher or go feed the bunnies... At night I go on my garage roof and look at the stars...it makes me feel relaxed and peaceful...usually at night I have my *Walkman*TM on and listen to music as I look at the stars.

Once the photo elicitation interview was complete and I realized that she made no mention of her physical appearance or photographed any of her clothing, I asked her about the bracelets she was wearing, "Tell me about your bracelets that you are wearing?" Myka described her jewelry as bonding moments between herself and her

sister, "This bracelet my sister gave me. My sister loves black and white, she's gothic, I got her a black and white one for her birthday and she gave me this one now we both have the same bracelet." She continued to explain the rest of the jewelry she was wearing,

I like rings to play with and making macramé bracelets. It's stuff I like to do while I am in the car, something to do instead of just sitting in the car. I like pink a lot and I saw that pink and white look good together and you need three colors, so that's how I made it.

I then asked her about her eye makeup and once again, she explained makeup as a bonding moment with her sister,

I wear makeup just on my eyes. I am not a total freak where I need makeup all the time. Everybody has makeup but I am not influenced. With eyeliner I find I look really different, my eyes look darker. My sister loves taking me and doing everything with my hair and face. One day she did just eyeliner and I thought it looked really nice... My sister is 14.

As my final question to Myka, I asked if this experience had taught her anything new about herself of which she responded, "Now I know that most of the things in my life are really nice to have and [this research] gives me a reason to come and spend time with my friends."

Conclusion: What is discovered about Myka through her relationships with favorite texts and practices?

Although Myka's photos did not reflect the typical media driven popular culture like the other girls' photos, she was expressive and reflective concerning her relationships with others. She photographed texts and practices representative of who she was to share aspects of her self as caring, sociable, athletic, team spirited, family oriented and compassionate towards animals.

Myka's story unfolded through her photographs of her family, friends, pets, horses, her barn, the farm, her home, bedroom, her tree house and posters of favorite male celebrities to discuss issues related to her sense of belonging and connection to others. The majority of her photos document a concern for her inner wellbeing largely inspired by her desire to be both needed and at times left alone. Her pets and family members were of great importance as she spent a significant amount of time with them.

Myka used music to relax herself. She used the computer and the Internet for entertainment and communication purposes. She used movies to bond with her mother and sister. She used photographs of her family, pets, home, farm, and barn to express cherished bonding moments with them.

She identified herself as athletic and although she didn't photograph self-adornment practices, she enjoyed participating in them with her sister. Like Jayme, although she spoke several times of her participation in sports she made no mention of body issues related to her self or others. She was the only girl in the research not to photograph her clothing and magazines. Other than her posters of male celebrities on her bedroom wall, she did not speak about celebrity driven media nor felt influenced by it.

Although she photographed a significant amount of her lived experience her elicitations were largely not critical. She made no mention of peer pressure related to body image, cigarette smoking, drugs, or sexuality but was interested in having a boyfriend for communication reasons.

Her interpretations of her photos did not indicate an insight into media's role in shaping self and society, which may demonstrate media's little role in her life. She spoke with a heightened sense of awareness concerning her need for quiet time away from others and her responsibilities.

What struck me most about Myka was the lack of self-adornment texts in her photographs, and issues related to peer pressure. Like Jayme, she discussed her athletics without ever making mention of body image in relation to herself or others. When asked to document her favorite popular culture, most spoke of Myka's close connection to others.

Since there was little evidence of her critical engagement with media and others, it was difficult to assess to what extent popular culture was a site for Myka's meaning making and construction of self. Nevertheless, Myka did negotiate a healthy and productive lifestyle and did not appear to be negatively impacted by media's messages, if at all aware.

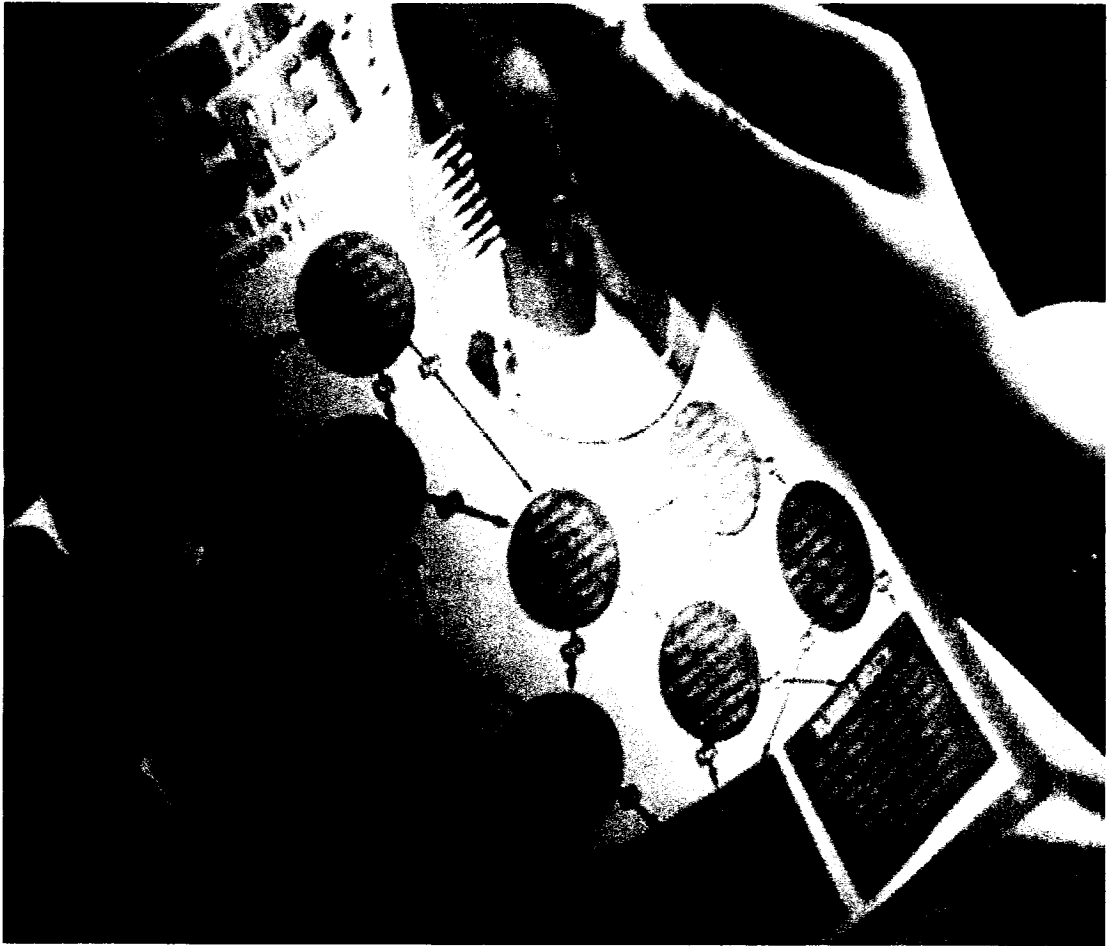


Chart 2. Girls' Definition of Popular Culture

Definition of Popular Culture:	Kristina-age 13	Lauren-age 14	Liv-age 14	Paige-age 12	Kristen-age 13	Jayme-age 13	Myka-age 12
The City girls defined <i>popular culture</i> in their focus group interview whereas (FGI) the country girls defined each term separately to arise at a full definition. Together they defined <i>popular</i> as "Things that are common that a lot of people do, and <i>culture</i> as "Different kinds of lifestyles, families & colors." Pop culture was finally defined as "cultures that are really popular that people follow."	(FGI) Things that most teenage girls like to do on their spare time. Stuff that a lot of people do... Everything that happens around you that a lot of people do. (PEI) Popular culture is everyday life stuff, the things that happen around us that are popular, in the outside world that teenagers go for, do and buy. The best thing about pop culture is to wear makeup, being a girl, acting crazy, the clothes, the bad stuff, I don't know, peer pressure.	(FGI) Music and movies and stuff, stuff you do on a Friday and Saturday night, stuff that girls do together... It's all about the media, how people are influenced by it, how people should think, and feel, and look. (PEI) Pop culture is everything you see all around you, what people wear and how they follow others... I thought of stuff that I see everyday, you'll see people in TMR wearing mini skirts, you'll go to the West island and they'll be wearing mini skirts, popular culture is the same thing everywhere, in the United States, in Canada, it's all the same thing.	(FGI) Further into it, the root of it all, what triggers what girls want to do... It's all about the media, friends and family. All three influence your decisions. It's all about what your surroundings are. (PEI) What influences people, because the biggest influence is the media. Basically it's all that people think about and all that people read about, and all that people watch TV about, it's all popular culture, that's how I define it.	Made reference to media related texts and practices. (PEI) Things that are popular, that influences you, magazines, TV shows, movies... What influences me, what's important to me... Standing up and doing things like 30-hour famines and breast cancer... My friends, clothes, fashion ads, communication, relationships, social, having good social skills is very important.	Did not know what the term meant in the focus group interview. (PEI) Mostly the media is popular culture for a lot of people but for me it's family and friends.	Did not know what the term meant in the focus group interview. (PEI) What I enjoy, what I see, what's close to me, I guess that's what pop culture is. The magazines, how people say stuff in them... Family, sports, animals [and] having dreams.	Did not know what the term meant in the focus group interview. (PEI) It means your dislikes and your likes basically everything in your life is your popular culture.

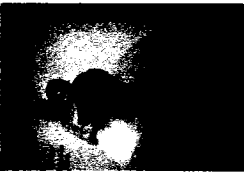
Chart 3. Sample of Interpretive Coding Framework: Liv



A picture of cigarettes and coffee because they are the biggest things that stunt your growth, they are so bad for you like the
 I guess that's not so bad but smoking is really really bad for you...I really don't want to...all my friends smoke and I discourage them...my mom is a social smoker... I don't think drugs should be apart of your life.



A lot of the things in here are already in the underground stores.... I like different styles... I can go wear Space Fb and then the next day wear Diesel...I use to be really into hip hop and thug scene last year but I grew out of that... Kristina is more funky, Lauren will wear whatever, for me its more girly.



I really really like this movie, I like Hillary Duff...She's not afraid of what people think of her that's why I like her... My cousins and I we went out for a dinner...and we had the Hillary Duff cd in the car and we opened up all the windows and we were blaring Hillary Duff CD, it was so funny and all the teenage guys were looking at us.

Use:	7. ID/ PK	T: HI/ M	P: H2	8. ID/ PK	T: FI/ PE	P: PA	9. ID/ PK	T: MI/ PP	P: C
Meaning:	SSW/SCPI/SCFI/AT			SS/SSG/SCFI/AT			SSW/SCG/SCBI/AL/AT		
D.O.C.:	PC/FC/CC			GC/FC/CC			GC/CC/PC/FC		
Reading:	N			N			N		
CD as/AT as:	EH/AM			SI/AM			EH/AM/SI		
Use:	10. ID/ PK	T: FI/ MI/ PP	P: PA/ C	11. ID/ PK	T: FI/ PE	P: PA/ C	12. ID/ PK	T: HI/ MI/ F	P: H2/ PA
Meaning:	SSW/SSI/SCG/AL/AT			SS/SSW/SCFI/AT			SSW/SSI/SCG/AL/AT		
D.O.C.:	GC/CC			FC/CC/CC			GC/CC		
Reading:	N			N			N		
CD as/AT as:	SI/AM			CP/ EH/ SI/ AM			EH/ SI/ AM		



I don't know if she bought it just because it was a brand name but just people will buy things because everyone else has them. I hate when people copy me... Lauren bought the same skirt as me and I wouldn't talk to her for a week.



Here's a picture of a BMW, just goes to show how people take pride in their cars... How people won't buy a shit box, they'll go and buy a BMW if they had to waste all their money to do that...my parents already told me



and they'll do anything to get there... I'm lucky because I'm tall so my fat evens out... I don't like to go on diets I just like to cut back on junk food... I wouldn't want to be fat but I wouldn't want to be like skinny skinny because there are some girls at our school that are really skinny and it is not nice. A lot of us think they have eating disorders.

Chart 4. Interpretive Analysis Framework

	Kristina-age13	Lauren-age14	Liv-age14	Paige-age12	Kristen-age13	Jayne-age13	Myka-age12
Signifying Texts:	F-16	F-12	F-18	M-17	M-12	M-7	H1-9
Signifying Practices:	PA-17	PA-11	PA-17	C-23	C-18	C-17	C-20
Dominant Use:	ID-23	ID-16	PK-22	ID-24	ID-24	ID-21	ID-23
Dominant Meaning:	SSI-17	SCG-14/AT-14	AT-21	SSW-23	SSW-21	SSW-21	SSW-22
Dominant Operating Culture:	SC-23/SS-28	SC-18/SS-15	SS-27/SC-26	SC-34/SS-29	SS-26/SC-24	SS-27/SC-19	SS-23/SC-25
	CC-22	CC-16/GC-16	CC-23	GC-18	GC-14	GC-17	GC-18
Dominant Reading:	N-15	N-9	N-21	N-21	N-21	N-12	N-14
Dominant aspect of Girlpower:	SI-16	AM-14	AM-22	EH-18	EH-14	EH-15	EH-18
# photos:	23	16	23	24	24	21	23
Distribution of Uses	ID-23/PK-16	ID-16/PK-14	PK-22/ID-21	ID-24/PK-14	ID-24/PK-9	ID-21/PK-5	ID-23/PK-2
Distribution of Meanings:	SSI-16 AT-14/AL-11 SCG-13 SSW-12 SCF-5 SCP-3/SCF-2	SCG-14 AT-14/AL-11 SSW-8 SSI-7 SCH-2/SCF-2	AT-21/AL-15 SCG-14/SSW-14 SSI-13 SCF-5 SCH-4 SCP-2/SCB-1=3	SSW-24 SCP-5/SCB-8=13 SCG-10 AT-10/AL-11 SCF-6/SCH-5 SSI-5	SSW-21 SCF-10 AT-8/AL-7 SCG-7 SSI-5 SCH-4/SCP-3	SSW-21 SCF-7 SCG-6 SSI-6 SCP-4/SCH-2 AT-4/AL-4	SSW-22 SCF-13 SCG-8 SCP-3/SCB-1=4 AT-1/AL-1 SSI-1/SCH-0
Distribution of Operating Cultures:	CC-22 GC-19 FC-5 PC-4 O-City-1	CC-16 GC-15 FC-4 O-Youth-2 PC-1	CC-23 GC-22 FC-5 PC-2/O-Religion-2	GC-20 PC-16/CC-16 FC-8	GC-16 CC-14 FC-10 O-7: Country-3 /School-2/Can-2*/PC-2	GC-17 CC-12 FC-6 PC-4 O-Country-2	GC-17 FC-15 CC-8 PC-5 O-Country-4
Distribution Readings:	N-15/D-8	N-9/D-6/O-1	N-21/D-1/O-1	N-21/D-3	N-20/D-4	N-12/D-9	N-14/D-9
Distribution of Can-do & At-risk:	SI-17 AM-16 EH-12 CP-7 AFT-6/SA-0	AM-14 EH-8/AFT-8 SI-3/SA-3 CT-2 AT-1/SE	AM-22 SI-13 EH-10 CP-6 AFT-1/SA-0	EH-18 AM-16 SA-6 AFT-4/SL-4 A-2/CP-0	EH-14 AM-9 SA-6 AFT-3/A-3 SI-2/CP-1	EH-15 AM-8 A-7 SI-5 AFT-4/CT-4/SA-0	EH-18 AM-2 AFT-5 A-4 SI-1/CP-1/SA-0
Distribution of Signifying Texts:	F-16 M-10 PE-9 PP-8/III-2	F-12 PP-10/PT-1 PE-5 III-4/NI-1	M-16 PP-7 III-6/PE-6	M-17 III-8 F-6 PP-4	M-12 III-6 PE-5 F-4/PP-4/PT-2	M-7 H1-6 F-5/PE-5 PT-3/PP-3	H1-9 PE-8 PP-6/PT-4/M-4 F-2
Distribution Signifying Practices:	PA-17 C-13	C-12 PA-11	PA-17 C-10	C-23 H2-8 CD-6/PA-4	C-19 H2-6 PA-5/CD-1	C-17 PA-6/H2-6 CD-0	C-20 H2-9 PA-1/CD-0

5.08 What is discovered about Kristina?

Kristina, age 13, the youngest of her group, took 23 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to explain aspects of her self. Kristina referred to her self as autonomous in her practices 28 times during her photo elicitation interview, and 23 times to her self as connected with others (Chart 4).

With respect to texts used by Kristina, 16 relate to fashion, 10 to media, 9 to physical environments, 8 to people, and 2 to health. Regarding her practices, 17 of her photos relate to personal adornment and 13 to communication. To a lesser extent, 2 to civic duties, and 2 to health issues of smoking and body image. During the focus group interview Kristina shared with me her knowledge of and interest in fashion having come from a family that works in that business (FG, City Video). Kristina discussed her future educational and career plans regarding a career in fashion, which may help to explain her level of her attention to fashion and physical appearance.

Fourteen of Kristina's photos relate to her ambition to teach me about girls' relationships with popular culture, and, almost an equal number demonstrate her shared connection to girls.

Kristina enjoyed personal adornment, what she termed as *girlie* practices, and embraced Baumgardner and Richard's (2004) concept of *pink packaged femininity*, enjoying the feminine aspects of being female without feeling victimized. Kristina largely defined her sense of self through her image, indicated by the 17 photos coded as self-invention through her personal style. Kristina also demonstrated a good sense of wellbeing regarding her values and emotional health indicated by the 12 photos coded as wellbeing. Although she was well informed on brand names and asserted herself through her fashion, Kristina also negotiated her shared community of family and appreciated their input regarding her cultural consumption.

Despite her attention to image and fashion Kristina was not influenced by the peer pressure to be thin or to have large breasts. Kristina demonstrated a concern and respect for others indicated in two of her photos, one of a graffiti mural, and a second of a grocery store parking lot.

Fifteen of Kristina's photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, and, 8 represent her operating within the preferred codes of girl and media culture. Although media culture was Kristina's dominant culture with which she negotiated indicated by the 22

photos coded as such, she largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, the media, girls, and family. Although she embraced practices related to her physical appearance, regarding her body image, she remained un-influenced by others.

Kristina's attention to appearance, her adoration for girl friends, and her dream to pursue a career in fashion is indicative of her operating within the preferred code of girlpower as self-inventive, ambitious, emotionally healthy, consumer powered, and preferring all female friendships. Although Kristina was aware of girls' fascination with body image, peers' interest in drugs, and, her father's consumption of cigarettes, she chose not to partake in these practices demonstrating her agency in her construction of self.

5.09 What is discovered about Lauren?

Lauren, age 14, the eldest of her group, took 16 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to explain aspects of her self. During her photo elicitation interview, Lauren referred 18 times to her self as connected with others, and, 15 times to her self as autonomous (Chart 4).

Lauren largely defined herself through her communication and fashion practices with girl friends indicated by 14 photos coded as her shared community of girls, 12 as fashion texts, 10 as people texts, and 12 as communication practices. Out of the 12 fashion texts, 8 relate to her girlfriends' fashion sense and her shared connection to them through practices related to clothing, body adornment and consumerism.

Although Lauren made repeated references to celebrities as icons for fashion statements during the focus group interview, in her photo elicitation interview she largely relied on girl friends regarding her own sense of style. During the focus group interview, Lauren shared with me early on, her insecurities regarding people's opinions of her. Lauren identified high school as the moment when peer pressure regarding physical appearance was emphasized. Despite the value she placed on fashion and physical appearance, Lauren balanced this anxiety by crediting girlfriends and her mother for keeping her healthy.

Fourteen of Lauren's photos demonstrate her ambition to teach me about girls' relationships with fashion and personal adornment practices, and this phenomenon with the younger generation of girls. Lauren tried to balance this attention to image with a sense of spiritual wellbeing. With respect to brand names, she relied on her shared community of family and the values her mother instilled in her.

Concerning Lauren's spiritual wellbeing, she took 2 photos of physical environments to articulate her shared connection to community members, and compassion for humanity. Through an image of a senior citizen recreational home in her neighborhood, Lauren advocated for youth's involvement in community service and environmental issues.

Lauren felt similar with respect to youth's involvement in spirituality and religion and used a photo of a church to make this point. Nine of her 16 photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, 6 represent her operating within the preferred codes of girl and

media cultures, and one represents her operating in opposition to them with reference to fashion statements made through carrying pets in bags.

Although consumer culture was Lauren's dominant culture with which she negotiated indicated by the 16 photos coded as such, she largely negotiated between three dominant hegemonic forces media, girls, and family.

Although most of her practices with girlfriends were related to personal adornment, her agency was her ability to negotiate her involvement, assisted by her close relationship with her mother, and the values she instilled in Lauren. Her consciousness regarding her involvement in practices is what made her capable of agency in her construction of self, and, ultimately, of personal change if she so chooses.

Lauren's participation in self-adornment practices, her appreciation for friends' consumer power, and her social consciousness regarding spirituality, community service, and environmental awareness is indicative of her operating within the preferred code of girlpower as ambitious, emotionally healthy, preferring all female friendships, and, a socially conscious. Her articulation regarding her lack of power with respect to her self-invention echoes the at-risk discourse concerning low self-esteem but her strength was her ability to communicate this insecurity with ease. Although, at times, Lauren spoke of her insecurity regarding body image, she showed no signs of engaging in eating disorders, did not partake in cigarette, drug or alcohol consumption, and was not sexually active.

5.10 What is discovered about Liv?

Liv turned 14 during the research, and, took 23 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices. Twenty-two are coded as practical knowledge, and 21 as identification to share with me aspects of her self and to teach me about media's influence on society. During her photo elicitation interview, Liv referred to her self as autonomous 27 times, and 26 times to her self as connected with others (Chart 4).

Liv largely defined herself through her ambition to teach and to learn, and used fashion and media texts for this purpose. She largely defined her sense of self as image through practices involving personal adornment related to personal style. Aware of her influential role in fashion, Liv articulated her disdain for others that copy her. She prided her sense of fashion on herself, and her shared community of family.

Although Liv did not go to church, she was interested in religion as another means with which she identified. Twenty-one of her photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, one of them represent her operating within the preferred codes of consumer and girl cultures, and one indicates her operating in opposition to them.

Although media culture was Liv's dominant culture with which she negotiated indicated by the 23 photos coded as such, she largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, the media, girls, and family.

Although most of her practices were related to personal adornment and consumerism, her awareness of its influence on her and her observation of its influence on others is indicative of her capacity for critical thinking, and her agency in her construction of self. Liv's initial definition of popular culture during the focus group interview, "It's all about the media, friends and family. All three influence your decisions" (Chart 2, Liv), represented early on, her awareness of the hegemonic forces with which she negotiated.

Liv's confidence to articulate her observations, and her celebration regarding her own self-invention is demonstrative of her operating within the preferred code of girlpower as ambitious, self-inventive, emotionally healthy, and consumer powered. Aware of girls' fascination with body image, their engagements in sexual activity, and their consumption of cigarettes and drugs, Liv did not partake in any of these practices.

5.11 What is discovered about Paige?

Paige, age 12, the youngest of her group, took 24 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to explain aspects of her self. Paige referred to her self as connected with others 34 times during her photo elicitation interview, and 29 times to her self as autonomous (Chart 4).

With respect to texts used by Paige, 17 relate to media, 8 to health, 6 to fashion, and 4 to people. With respect to her practices, 23 of her photos relate to communication, 8 to health issues of smoking, alcohol, breast cancer, sexuality, hunger, the environment, and the body, 5 to civic duties, and 4 to physical appearance.

Paige took all 24 of her photos to explain aspects of her identification, largely defined by her sense of wellbeing regarding the betterment of others. Out of all the girls and being the youngest, Paige placed the most attention on social activism through her civic duties regarding the environment, humanity and the betterment of society. Paige used media texts the most to articulate her voice concerning the relevant issues in her life. Female image, sexuality and pregnancy were discussed through her use of magazine advertisements, health issues related to smoking were explained through signage and a poster, her participation in breast cancer runs and hunger strikes were advocated through posters, and, her concern for the environment and respect for others were expressed through signage.

Paige also defined herself through her shared community of girls. Out of all the girls, Paige was the only one to have a boy friend. She referred to him and his emotional support several times throughout her photo elicitation interview. Paige photographed a sign entitled *Crazyworld*, the telephone, and a car to communicate aspects of her social life with her shared community of peers. Although Paige did not place a large attention on personal adornment practices regarding a sense of self as image she articulated her sense of self-invention as a means to assert her independent thinking.

Twenty-one of her photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, three of them represent her operating within the preferred code of girl, peer and media cultures, and none represent her operating in opposition to them. Placing the most attention on peer culture of all the girls, Paige largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, girls, the media, and peers.

Most of her practices relate to communication with others through media and media health related texts. Paige's compromised perspective is most notably exercised through her repeated use of teen girl magazine posters and signage to raise consciousness regarding social issues and her participation in them. Paige negotiated her use of these media texts choosing between the many advertisements and selecting the ones that most resonated with her.

Paige's interaction with popular culture as a means to communicate demonstrates her operating within the preferred code of girlpower as emotionally healthy, ambitious, socially conscious, self-inventive, and athletic. Although Paige was aware of alcohol consumption and eating disorders articulated through an image of a refrigerator, she did not engage in eating disorder practices or drug consumption related to cigarettes, alcohol or marijuana.

5.12 What is discovered about Kristen?

Kristen, age 13, the eldest of her group, took 24 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to explain aspects of her self. Kristen referred to her self as autonomous 26 times during her photo elicitation interview, and 24 times to her self as connected with others (Chart 4).

With respect to texts used by Kristen, 12 of the photos relate to media, 6 to health, 5 to physical environments, 4 to fashion, 4 to people, and 2 to pets. Regarding her practices, 19 relate to communication, 6 to health issues of smoking, exercise, body image, and the Canadian health care system, 5 to physical appearance, and one to civic duties. Out of her group of girlfriends, she was the one to articulate a stronger sense of country identity (FGI, Country Video) through her use of media, pets, and physical environment texts.

Although Kristen articulated a lack of interest in media texts, "Mostly the media is popular culture...but for me it's family and friends," (Chart 2, Kristen), she used them as her dominant form to communicate aspects of her sense of self as wellbeing. Although Kristen didn't place a high importance on brand names, she did on the relevance of image and shape. Twenty of her photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, 4 of them represent her operating within the preferred code of family and country cultures, and none represent her operating in opposition to them. Although girl culture was Kristen's dominant culture with which she negotiated, she largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, girls, the media, and family.

Although she resisted to some extent mainstream fashion, music, and media, she nevertheless selected media texts that resonated with her values. Her commitment to learning from teen girl books related to gender issues in third world countries, her choice to purchase teen girl magazines to support a social cause, and her embracement of country music, is indicative of Kristen's agency in her construction of self. Kristen's embrace of a healthy and active lifestyle filled with sports, girl friends and family is representative of her operating within the preferred code of girlpower as emotionally healthy, ambitious, socially conscious, athletic, preferring all female friendships, and self-inventive. Although she repeated several times the importance of image and exercise, Kristen did not engage in eating disorder practices or drug related consumption.

5.13 What is discovered about Jayme?

Jayme, age 13, took 21 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to share aspects of her self. Jayme referred to her self as autonomous 27 times during her photo elicitation interview, and 19 times to her self as connected with others (Chart 4).

With respect to texts used by Jayme, 12 of her photos relate to media, 6 to health, 5 to fashion, 5 to physical environments, 3 to people, and 3 to pets. Regarding her practices, 17 relate to communication, 6 to health, all sports related but never any mention of body image or exercise, 6 to personal adornment, and none to civic duties.

Jayme largely defined her sense of self as wellbeing through practices related to media and fashion texts like magazines, music, clothing, makeup, jewelry, the television, and the computer. Jayme also defined herself through her involvement in sports, more so valued for the shared community of girls than for physical activity. Jayme valued her shared community of family including her parents, siblings, and pets.

Twelve of her photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, 9 of them represent her operating within the preferred code of girl, family, peer, and media cultures, and none represent her operating in opposition to them. Although girl culture was Jayme's dominant culture with which she negotiated, she largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, girls, the media, and family.

Although she embraced mainstream media and fashion related texts and practices, she was not influenced to buy name brand articles. Prioritizing comfort over brands, and fitness over thinness indicates Jayme's agency in her construction of self.

Her commitment to girl bonding through sports, she termed as sportsmanship demonstrates that Jayme is operating within the preferred code of girlpower as emotionally healthy, ambitious, athletic, self-inventive, preferring all female friendships, and consumer powered.

5.14 What is discovered about Myka?

Myka, age 12, took 23 photos in total of meaningful texts and practices, all coded as identification, to share aspects of her self. Myka referred to her self as connected with others 25 times during her photo elicitation interview, and 23 times to her self as autonomous (Chart 4).

With respect to texts used by Myka, 9 of her photos relate to health, 8 to physical environments, 6 to people, 4 to pets, 2 to media, and one to fashion unrelated to clothing. Regarding her practices, 20 relate to communication, 9 to health (4 that are sports related, 3 that are 'alone-time' related, and 2 that are food related but never any mention of body image), one to appearance, and none to civic duties.

Myka largely defined herself through her involvement with family members, using texts of people and pets to express her sense of wellbeing. Myka expressed several times throughout her interview a desire and appreciation for her own space. After family members, Myka enjoyed her shared community of girls, and boys. Although Myka made the least reference of all the girls to media and fashion related texts, she did express some engagement in autonomous and collective practices. Like the rest of her group of girl friends, Myka embraced a healthy and active lifestyle filled with sports, friendships, and family but different from them, was her lack of awareness of her use of mainstream popular culture texts and practices in her daily living practices. Although Myka's self-adornment practices like wearing makeup, jewelry, clothing and hairstyling were not evident in her photos they were brought to consciousness at the end of her interview.

Fourteen of her 23 photos demonstrate her negotiation skills, 9 represent her operating within the preferred code of girl, family, and media cultures, and none represent her operating in opposition to them. Although girl culture was Myka's dominant culture with which she negotiated indicated by the 17 photos coded as such, Myka largely negotiated between three hegemonic forces, girls, family, and the media.

Although most of her practices and use of texts related to health and physical environments, her autonomous and collective communication practices did involve media related texts. Despite Myka's lack of awareness of the role that popular culture plays in her life, Myka is still operating within the preferred code of girlpower in relation to her emotional health, all female friendships, and athleticism.



Meta-Analysis

6 Mirror To Her Self

Over the course of this chapter, I present the girls' definitions of popular culture (Williams, 1983; Hall, 1997; Storey, 2003), I explain their interpretive framework used to negotiate choice, I address how each constructed *Sense of Self* through the value she placed on image, wellbeing, knowledge and citizenship (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995; Greene, 2003; Harris, 2004ab; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004), and I conclude with future educational and research implications regarding a pedagogical call to use popular culture and art based media production in all-female learning environments as a gateway for emotional development, conflict resolution and social action.

How Do Girls Define Popular Culture?

6.01 Meaningful Shared Lived Experience

Discussions amongst the girls during their focus group interviews largely centered on Hollywood driven media and fashion, and initiated reflective and critical dialogue concerning daily aspects of their lives. This experience prepared each girl to take photos of what she considered meaningful popular culture. In her private interview she used her photographs to articulate her individual perspective concerning aspects of herself as an autonomous and collective being.

The girls interpreted *Popular* as *meaningful* and "well liked by many" (Williams, 1983), and *culture* as lived experience often shared with others (Hall, 1997; Storey, 2003). Popular culture was therefore defined as *meaningful shared lived experience* made up of texts used and practices engaged in. Meaningful texts illustrated in their

photos depict *People and Pets* (PP), *Media* (M), *Self-Adornment* (SA) and *Physical Environments* (PE) and meaningful practices depict *Personal Adornment* (PA), *Communication* (CM), *Health* (H) and *Citizenship* (CD). I present their texts and practices in the following two charts. Each girl's photographs articulate what she valued.

Chart 5. Girls' Meaningful Texts

People & Pets	Media	Self-Adornment	Physical Environments
Celebrities	TV	Clothing	Home
Pop Stars	Magazines	Makeup	Bedroom
Pets	Internet	Hairstyle equipment	Bathroom
Family	Computer	Hairstyling Products	Backyard
Friends	Radio	Hair Dye	Back Alley
Boyfriends	CD Player	Nail Polish	Shopping Mall
Senior Citizens	Karaoke Machine	Trucker Caps	Clothing Stores
	Reality TV Shows	Jewelry	Parking Lot
	Animated Cartoons	Perfume	Retail Stores
	TV Sitcoms	Lotion	Restaurants
	Music Videos	Tattoos & Hennas	Coffee Houses
	Books	Piercing	Movie Theatres
	Magazine	Shoes	Spas
	quizzes/Ads	Hand bags	Tanning Salons
	Editorials	Keychains	Hair/Nail Salons
	CelebrityGossip/News	Wallets	Tattoo/Piercing
	Fashion/Beauty Tips		Parlors
	Posters/Pinups/Ads		Camp/Camping
	Signage		Grounds
	Flag		Sporting Events
	Sticker		/Fields/Parks
	Brat Doll		Hospitals
	Balloon		Bus
	Video games		Metro/Subway
	Music CDs		Car
	Movies		
	Movies on DVD/VHS		

Chart 6. Girls' Meaningful Practices

Self-Adornment	Communication	Health	Civic
Shopping/Trying on Clothing	TV	Horseback Riding	Fundraising Events
Makeup Application	Movies	Playing Sports	Community Service
Hairstyling	Dancing	Exercising	Environmental-Awareness
Manicures	Singing	Dieting	
Hennas/Tattoos	House Parties		
Piercing	Listening Music		
Wearing Jewelry	Online Chatting		
Perfume/Lotion	Online Surfing		
	Downloading Music		
	Computer Gaming		
	Reading Magazines		
	Snacking		
	Gossiping		
	Concerts		
	Sporting Events		
	Baby Sitting		
	Farm Chores		
	Reading Books		
	Magazine Quizzes		
	Hanging Posters		
	Sticking Stickers		

How Do Girls Interpret and Negotiate Popular Culture?

6.02 Relatability and Influential Forces

Meanings are produced through interpretation. Interpretive frameworks are the mental structures that guide us in making decisions, especially in situations in which we have limited knowledge. Negotiating relatability is the interpretive framework that guided each girl's choice making. How she constructed herself was based on her ability to relate to and negotiate relationships with events, people, places and objects, actual and imagined. For these girls, they largely negotiated choice amongst the hegemonic forces of girls, family, boys and societal values mediated by and reinforced through various forms of media.

How Do Girls Use Popular Culture?

6.03 A Mirror, An Image, A Voice

In part, popular culture is used as a *Mirror* to communicate aspects of her self to self. It is used as an *Image* in how she wants to represent herself to and be seen by others. And, it is used as a *Voice*, her shared connection to and construction of femaleness (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995). The various texts and practices presented in this section are each a cultural site where she negotiates to construct her sense of self.

How Do Girls Make Meaning From Popular Culture?

6.04 Sense of Self As Image, Relationships, Knowledge and

Citizenship

Each girl, at varying degrees, demonstrated how she constructed herself and was constructed by the discourses inspired by popular culture (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995; McRobbie, 2004; Harris, 2004ab). Gillian Rose (2001) defines discourse as “a particular knowledge about the world which shapes how the world is understood and how things are done in it” (p. 136). She states that discourse produces subjects and sense of self is arrived at “through the operation of discourse” (p. 136-7). Sheila Greene (2003) states that the self is comprised of a woman’s “multifaceted relationship to her world and her own experience” that is both conscious and unconscious (p. 99). A sense of self is accomplished through a person locating herself in time through merging her objective and subjective self. The objective self is what is actual and fixed in time and place, and the subjective self is her internal imagined world. Greene states that both are “fundamental elements of each person’s experience of being in the world” (p. 99). Similarities and differences between the girls further demonstrate how the objective and the subjective self work in tandem to interpret experience and define sense of self. As a side note, the difference between the self and identity is that the self is able to participate in events that are transient without necessarily defining the self’s identity whereas identity is seen as that which is enduring about the self. My analysis only addresses how each girl constructs a sense of self and identity construction is beyond the scope of this project.

Stuart Hall (1997) states that,

Meaning is produced whenever we express ourselves in, make use of, consume

or appropriate cultural 'things'; that is, when we incorporate them in different ways into the everyday rituals and practices of daily life and in this way we give them value or significance. Or when we weave narratives, stories- and fantasies- around them. (p. 3 & 4)

Each girl made meaning from popular culture based on how she used texts and practices according to what she valued to construct her sense of self. I have discovered that a girl values her *Image, Relationships, Knowledge* and *Citizenship*. I have defined each as follows:

- Image is defined as personal style.
- Relationships are defined as her communication with others.
- Knowledge is defined as information she learns and teaches others.
- Citizenship is defined as how she sees her role within community-society.

The following analysis is based on how each girl constructed her sense of self according to what she valued to nurture her image and relationships with others, access knowledge, and articulate her citizenship. All four factors generate her sense of inner wellbeing.

6.05 A Girl Values Personal Style For Pleasure and Power

As a mirror to her self and an image to others, each girl valued and used her image and self-adornment texts and practices to nurture her wellbeing and to identify and communicate aspects of her self to self and others (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995). Personal style was most significant in terms of self-representation, it

said something about who she was, what she felt and what group she belonged to. The girls valued their image for reasons related to pleasure and, in some cases, power. Through self-adornment she tried on attitudes, philosophies and images to see what fit comfortably (Harris, 2004; McRobbie, 2004; Baumgardner & Richards, 2004).

The following transcripts are quotes expressed by the girls in relation to the value they placed on their inner wellbeing derived from self-adornment.

Kristina: If I feel like looking all pretty one day I'll wear a skirt, something nice, girly, or the next day I just want to hang out, I'll wear sweatpants, depending on how I feel... I straighten my hair often practically every day... I like it straight a lot, I prefer it... I hardly wear makeup...if I feel like going out and I feel ugly (laugh)... I have an eyelash curler so I don't need to wear mascara. I curl them one day and they will last a few days... Different colored nailpolish...black and pink stripes. I like to try different things. I give myself pedicures... I get henna tattoos on my lower back, hipbone or shoulder blade... Perfume...I smell it and I feel pretty...if I'm all in pink I'll wear a flowery smell... I am girly when it comes to clothing and to everything pretty much. I love purses...shoes...bathing suits... My trucker cap collection... I...wear one for every day of the year.

Lauren: I think for me it reflects on how I'm feeling that day. Like if I feel like going out and just shopping I'll wear a simple dress or like a cute skirt and a shirt, but if I'm going to hang out friends I'll just wear jeans or pants...one day I'll paint my nails pink and the other day, black...whatever I'm feeling... Makeup... depends on the day, like if I want to go out and wear a dress, then I'll do more

girlie...or simple makeup... If I'm going out, I'll go more all out like with the hair and everything. It comes together.

Liv: I would never be the type of person to go out and wear black because I'm more giddy and happy, they could never see me wearing black, I wear more like pink and like colors and stuff... I like different styles I don't want to be defined as one look... I don't wear a lot of makeup...all I wear is like eyeliner and mascara, I don't go crazy but I just love having it.

Paige: Depends how I feel... I want to make sure I am comfortable how I am dressing... I find I am different than everyone, the way I am, my clothes, I like standing out... I won't see anyone the way I look when I wake up in the morning (laugh)...my hair gets really big, so I have to wet it every morning... I am the worst out of all our friends.... I like to be matching [my] bracelets and eye makeup...[with] my shirt.

Kristen: I dress for comfort and how I feel that day...you can tell a lot about a person through their style...my style is pretty much comfy... I don't want to go out and look really bad...I don't like to be messy... I just leave my hair down all the time. I will brush it and take a shower in the morning, but I don't wear makeup...I care but I don't go overboard, I won't go all out.

Jayne: My clothes... I always wear clothes they are the best part of my life. You can express yourself, if you're in a sporty mood or a dress up mood...I dress more for me and not for others... I like earrings, I have hoops, stars, dangling

ones, they are nice to wear. When I am all dressed up and have no earrings on I feel naked. I feel I look better with earrings on... I don't wear that much makeup. When I am bored, I will go to my room and put on thick eyeliner, black, or really light, I'll do all different shades... I like...fruity stuff and hand cream, I like my shirts smelling really fruity... I like shoes, I have a lot of them...everytime I go shopping I look at shoes....

Myka: I wear makeup just on my eyes. I am not a total freak where I need makeup all the time. With eyeliner I find I look really different, my eyes look darker....

Lauren and Liv used self-adornment as a power statement in relation to how they wanted others to perceive them. Social acceptance and leadership status within their peer group was achieved through their personal style.

Lauren said she dressed to fit in, "I'm more self conscious about how I look, so if I walk into a room and say I decide to wear a skirt to a party...and no one else is wearing a skirt, I'll be really shy the whole night, I'm just like that." Liv said she dressed to be different, "I'm kinda like up on the fashion before everyone else is, I was wearing short skirts before everyone else was and I was wearing color before everyone else was, now the new colors are like yellow, orange and green and I like had no idea I just liked the colors...."

Lauren admired Liv for having this power amongst their peers, she said, "A person like Liv...could start a new fashion...trend...when people see it on me ...they're...like 'What are doing you look like a fool!' ... It's different for Liv...because her parents are in the fashion business...she knows what's coming up next." Liv poked fun

at Lauren that she did not have this power, she said, “Like the *Von Dutch* clothes and everything...it’s been around for along time...I heard Lauren she’s like ‘Ah, about three months,’ that’s when Kristina and I started laughing because it’s been...like two years ago!?”

6.06 A Girl Values Her Relationships With Others

The girls engaged in several forms of relationships with others for various reasons. Relationships with celebrities as role models helped them to represent what they valued and how they perceived themselves. Relationships with girl friends, family, and for some, boys, were significant forms of communication for social bonding, nurturing self-esteem and the wellbeing of others. Relationships with various forms of media were significant forms of information where the girls informed themselves on issues of interest and negotiated propaganda to construct knowledge. Relationships with community members were significant ways for the girls to demonstrate awareness of their citizenship in relation to the concern and respect for the wellbeing of others.

Celebrities

For some of the girls, celebrities were mirrors and a collective voice of femininity. Some used celebrities autonomously and collectively, and, assigned them organic intellectual status, for identification and representation (Gramsci, 1970; Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995; Storey, 1998). They chose particular people to represent their values and for guidance regarding self-representation –in terms of outer image and inner wellbeing. Some felt connected to a shared community of other females with whom they felt similar. Reminiscent of Stacey’s (1994) research on female

star consumption as a form of identification, escapism and consumption, Hobson's (1982) research on women making sense of their lives through watching soap operas, and Hermes (1995) research on women reading magazines for practical knowledge, Hollywood celebrities were agents for meaning making and the girls were active negotiators of them. The girls interweaved their own narratives with those of their role models to identify aspects of themselves, their friendships with others, to articulate their values and dreams, and to facilitate and mirror a sense of self.

Amongst her girlfriends, Kristen identified with Phoebe the lead character from TV show *Friends*, "They always make fun of me because I'm lost in the conversation a lot, like [Phoebe] she's kind of funny and she's just dopey."

Liv identified aspects of herself and best girlfriend Lauren with qualities associated to Paris Hilton, Jessica Simpson and Ashley Simpson. She said,

I love Paris Hilton's clothes. It's not preppy but it's not rock n' roll... I dress like Paris Hilton but tone it down a notch...my idols are Paris Hilton and Jessica Simpson...I find them both really different...Paris Hilton is more edgy and Jessica Simpson is more laid back... Ashley's more like me but Jessica is more like Lauren. Ashley...kind of knows what she wants but still acts dumb...and Lauren relies on other people. I love them both and everything, it's [more]...who I think I am...like.

Lauren aspired to be a celebrity like Britney Spears and Madonna to attain the power she felt she lacked within her peer group. She said, "I want to be a celebrity ...like Britney Spears...[and] Madonna... I want to see what it would be like to live like that...you have all the power, so much power. I am more the follower I'm not the leader and I want to be the person with the power." She also admired Avril Lavigne and

considered her an inspiration for her own self-expression. She said, "Avril...she... inspires me to pick up a pen and write songs because she writes all these songs and all her feelings in her songs...she's a big inspiration for me."

Paige identified with Hillary Duff, Lindsay Lohan and Avril Lavigne for their singing abilities and used them as encouragement to pursue her dreams, "I think its really cool that they're teenagers and they can sing, that's why I keep singing if enough people hear me...." She also credited them for providing her with options in her personal style, she said, "Avril has the punk look and I find it's really good to have the two mixes. There's like Lindsay Lohan and Hillary Duff versus Ashley Simpson and Avril Lavigne. It's two different styles so you don't always have to be pressured into wearing something that you don't want to."

Similar to Stacey's (1994) British women of the 1940s, these girls also used celebrities to transform their self-image and generate fantasies involving power and self-confidence. Stacey's women, however, who lived in a time of war and shortage, used Hollywood celebrities to escape, fantasize and rebel against "codes of respectable femininity" (p. 204). My girls who were born in the 1990's and raised with a girlpower ideology mass marketed as non-politicized princess entitlement, used celebrity fashion less as a rebellious outlet and more to validate feminine individuality and conformity to social expectations.

Girlfriends

Amongst girlfriends they felt a sense of belonging. Liv said, "We all laugh about everything that's one of the things that brings us all together." Lauren continued, "We all have a lot of the same opinions on stuff...maybe our personalities aren't the same but...you just know [that] your friends will always be there for you...." Kristina added, "I

know Lauren since kindergarten and we've been close since grade two. Liv, we've been close with since last year." Kristen said, "My friends...[are] the most important to me, they are always there for me... You can talk to them about almost anything and they are always there for you." Myka said, "My friends...we can talk to each other and we are really close. You need...to be yourself around people and not only around your family." Jayme said, "My best friends...give me advice and help me through hard times, decisions to make, and homework." And, Paige said, "My Friends...give me a lot of support, I can tell them everything, I am not shy to tell them things."

Kristina enjoyed collective decision making with her girlfriends regarding makeup and perfume. She said,

At the beginning of the year and around Christmas we use to wear a lot of makeup because that's when we started wearing it. But now we just wear a bit, we don't need to wear all that makeup just some eyeliner or mascara...perfume...we just all wear it and spray it on us. You smell our school we are all wearing perfume walking around... my friends have it so I start wearing it. I like a lot the one's my friends have.

Liv bonded with her girlfriends through answering magazine quizzes, she said, "My favorite magazines are *Seventeen*, *Cosmo Girl*, and *Teen People*...it's for teenage girls I find...it's fun to quiz your friends...like we always quiz our friends...like '15 Ways to Get Your Man Satisfied!'(giggle)."

Jayme enjoyed chatting online and writing emails with her girlfriends, "I talk to my friends on *msn*, I check my emails and writes emails." She also enjoyed hairstyling as an act of sportsmanship, "...our team...with hockey, one day we did our hair in braids, next we wore our hair down. It's great girl bonding and sportsmanship...."

Myka enjoyed online chatting with her girl friends, "After school and homework, I go on [the computer] to talk to friends...." She also enjoyed playing sports and painting a mural with them, "Playing soccer...it's a time to see your friends... and you can even play against your friends, it's really fun.... They are all handprints of my friends on my wall so I can remember them. They put their names in permanent marker so I will not forget them."

The girls also used popular culture to support and nurture each other's self-esteem.

Paige watched dance movies and music videos to teach her girlfriend how to dance. She said, "One of my friends, she says she doesn't know how to dance so I always watch those [films and music videos]. At the dance, I always dance with her...."

Kristina appreciated her girlfriends' support for her body image and to resist drugs. She said,

Oh my gosh people go 'I'm so fat' or 'My boobs are so small.' Like I'm really small but it doesn't bother me...[because] we all consult each other and...support each other... A lot of people...smoke weed that we know...but we want to stay away from it because it's not a good thing to do... I'm not against people who do...but I just don't want to get myself into doing it.

Lauren relied on Liv to boost her self-confidence when going shopping. She said, "[When] I go shopping and try something on [sometimes] it looks good on my friend but not on me...I'm really insecure about my body and Liv who really likes her body, she...help[s] me get over that insecurity."

Liv observed cigarettes and coffee as a popular lifestyle and discouraged friends from smoking. She said, "All my friends smoke and I discourage them so much, I'm always like 'Oh that's so disgusting.'"

Paige used a public service announcement poster ad to teach her friend about the risks of smoking cigarettes. She explained, "'Tobacco is Whacko If You're A Teen'...my friend she use to smoke she just turned 13, I told her stop and gave her all these reasons...."

Together Kristina and Lauren used a magazine makeup ad to help nurture Lauren's self-esteem concerning her freckled complexion. Kristina said, "I have a few posters of *Strut* magazine from *Style Exchange* about freckles and how it's the new thing, it made her [Lauren] happy when she saw it." Lauren responded,

I use to be very self conscious about my freckles and now all these new actresses like Lindsay Lohan coming out with freckles just makes me feel more secure of myself...when she [Kristina] got the poster saying freckles is the new thing, and they made freckle pencils and everything...all that kinda stuff just made me feel good.

Kristen received magazines and a *Finding Nemo* Balloon as "Get Well Soon" gifts from best girlfriends when sick in the hospital. She said, "Magazines, I don't normally buy them...but when I was in the hospital my friends got them for me...my favorite movie, *Finding Nemo*...I got this balloon from Paige when I was in the hospital."

Family

Through, fashion, camping, boy talk, movies, church, and animals, the girls expressed the importance of time spent with family.

Myka enjoyed communicating with her mother. She said, "My mom...she means a lot to me because she's my mom and I can tell a lot and I'm with her almost all the time." Going shopping and to the movies were favorite bonding moments with her mother and sister, she said, "Me and my sister and my mom we usually go shopping and go to the movies, see a chick movie." She also cherished weekend sporting trips with them, "Every weekend in the winter we go skiing... Sometimes me and my sister just go off because we know the hill by heart... I do canoeing a lot with my family...we like it... It's a good way to spend time with my family." She adored taking care of her pets, she said, "My dog, I love him... He means a lot to me and he's my friend...my three kittens...two dogs and six cats...I spend time with them, and feed them, and take care of them."

Kristina bonded with her father through going to the movies and eating junk food. She said, "I go to the movies with my dad... we saw *iRobot*...and we ate queue de castor (pastry) and drank *Pepsi*...." Lauren observed that fashion was another way Kristina bonded with family and especially her sister. She said,

What I love about Kristina and her family is that they all have such different styles like Kristina's sister can't stand having the same thing as everyone. I think a really big part of Kristina's style is that she gets that a lot from her sister, like she'll go to her sister's house, because like she's in her 20s and she'll see all these clothes and she'll pick stuff out from her closet.

Liv bonded with her parents through fashion. She said, "My parents are in the fashion business so its always been a part of my life because I have them knowing so they kind of influence me I guess and that's what I want to be when I'm older...."

Paige bonded with her older sister and best girl friend through clothing and boys. She said,

My sister Meghan and her friend Kim, they are a really good influence and I look up to them. She helps me figure it out how I want to dress... Krista the girl who lives with us she helps me a lot... She helps me when I get into fights with Josh [my boyfriend] and tells me what to say and how to act. I fit in all her clothes, she's 18, she's another sister.

Lauren bonded with her family by going to church with them on Sundays. She said, "I go to church on Sundays...my mom wants to keep us going to church, so our family goes to church on Sundays...I think it's very important."

Kristen associated country living with family bonding. She said,

My parents are really important to me I am close with them...my house...in the country...I am really glad that I live there... it's where I am growing up... I really like it in the country... I live on a farm... It's my mom and dad and my uncle's farm. It use to be my grandparents, my dad grew up here too in the same house....

Jayne bonded with her family through summer camping, and with sisters through music. She said,

We go camping every year with family. Mom and dad, my brother and it used to be with my older sisters Stacey and Shelley but they don't come anymore, they're working... I enjoy that cuz you can just relax and do nothing pretty much and have fun... I sing with Stacey, we sing country songs... My sisters and I we all share the same CDs, we have a big thing it's like this high, it's all full of CDs.

Boys

Friendships and intimate relationships with boys were valued as another form of communication and were used to negotiate sense of self. In some cases boys helped nurture self-esteem and in other cases they created further insecurity amongst the girls.

Paige was the only girl to have a boyfriend and appreciated his nurturing and supportive qualities. She said,

My boyfriend...he's really interested in how I feel, always asking how I am doing, like he is a really good friend. I have a lot of really good friends who are guys, my group of girlfriends we always hangout with the guys, and he's more of my best friend then the rest of them are... I was in this drama club play and I was a princess, he said it suits me, and he said this to all my friends he called me a princess so he's my prince... If you have dreams, don't let anyone convince you against that...that's what Josh says.

Myka expressed a desire to have a boyfriend for communication reasons, she said, "I like boys...I don't need one [a boyfriend] but I wouldn't mind one, another person to talk to. It's a different conversation with boys, you talk about sports, and with the girls you talk about boys, and girl stuff."

Lauren said that at a younger age it was cool to have a boyfriend but now they were simply good friends, she said, "At a younger age you want a boyfriend just to say you have a boyfriend, and now you start to hang out with more guys and you see that they're your friends."

Liv preferred hanging out with boys more than with girls, she said, "I like hanging out with them so much more, its so different hanging out with guys then girls,

because guys they'll do anything they're so daring...and girls are so held back and restricted."

Lauren expressed another side of friendship with boys that made her insecure. She said, "You're always wondering what if that guy thinks I'm fat. You think that boys have a set image of how girls should look, like big boobs and big butts, and skinny. You want to have that image because you want look good for boys..." Liv and Kristina however disagreed with her. Liv said, "I find they have to accept you for who you are," and Kristina said, "You're not gonna change completely who you are just for guys to like you."

Paige, Myka and Jayme expressed the pressure they felt to befriend and date certain boys. Paige said, "Some girls get pressured about guys," Myka continued, "They say 'Go out with him, go out with him,' even if you don't want to...like even your friends [pressure you] and if you say 'No' then all the guys don't like you and if you say 'Yes,' then you are stuck with him!" Jayme agreed and elaborated, "If the guy asks you out or something and then you say no the guy's friends will all surround you and bug you about it."

6.07 A Girl Values Knowledge

Each girl used various forms of media to inform and educate herself about issues of interest. As a mirror to her self, an image to others and a collective voice of femininity, popular culture was used as practical knowledge (Hermes, 1995). She constructed her self and was construct by the knowledge she consumed and produced from movies, magazines, TV, music videos, celebrities, books, signage, and poster advertisements.

Autonomously and collectively the girls interweaved movies, Reality TV, music videos, magazines, books, signage, and poster ads to discuss aspects of themselves, each other, and issues of concern (Hobson, 1982; Stacey, 1994; Hermes, 1995).

From watching movies, Liv informed herself on media's manipulative tactics. She said,

I was watching...the *Princess Diaries*... it showed how media can blow things out of proportions... she was set up to go like change and show her in no clothes with a towel and that was all set up and then the guy kissed her in front of the camera and [and the next day the headline read] 'Oh yeah the wild night she had!'

From reading magazines, Liv informed herself on issues related to fashion and health, and negotiated based on what she wanted to improve on. She said,

From magazines I look at how these girls dress and it gives me ideas...I find magazines are a really really big influence...like '10 Ways to Get Clear Skin,' I'm like 'Oh shit I gotta go and read that!...'I wont buy a magazine that says *In Shape*, I'll buy a magazine that looks appealing like my favorite magazines are *Seventeen*, *Cosmo Girl*, and *Teen People*...it's for teenage girls I find. I like those magazines cuz I can relate to a lot of things in there....

From watching TV shows and reading books, Liv informed herself on issues related to sexuality while negotiate her own. She said,

Gossip Girls, there amazing but they are like *Sex and the City* for our age, they're such good books and I really think they influence people... I'm like Jessica Simpson, I find it (sex) a really big deal. I think it's easier said than done

(being a virgin), I'm really really surprised she did it because she's all like 'Nick come upstairs,' (laugh) I don't think a lot of people our age in this day will do it (save their virginity).

From watching music videos and interviews with popstars, Liv informed herself on hypocritical behavior. She said,

I hate Avril. I find she's a big hypocrite like she's going around saying 'I'm not gonna do that like what kinda girl do you think I am, you think I am gonna have sex with you? I don't think so!' and then she goes and does a video in her underwear?! Oh gosh, I use to really like her...but now I despise her...just the fact that she wants to be different and then she goes and does a lot of the same things as other people do. I find she's...a hypocrite....

From reading magazines, Kristina informed herself on issues related to fashion, celebrity gossip, and health. She said, "I really like to read magazines to see what's out there, the celebrities, what's in and what's not...their fashion tips, Mary Kate being anorexic, what's happening to her because now she's in rehab basically the stuff that's in the news that you want to hear about."

From reading magazines, signage, and poster ads, Paige informed her self on issues related to fashion, female representation, sexuality, health, discipline, social consciousness, and respect. She said,

I love reading magazines its probably my favorite thing to read, it keeps me involved or up to date and I know what's happening, how people are dressing... This [ad]...says 'Be Sexy, That Doesn't Mean You Have To Have Sex, almost 1 million teenage girls will become pregnant this year.' That's a really important

message... There's pressure around our age...it doesn't mean you can't be sexy or you can't dress how you want to, it just means don't have sex...I think it's a good influence... *'Erase Breast Cancer'* and *'Refuse To Do Nothing, 27,000 children will die today and what will you do?'* I am a really big supporter I like to stay involved. Whenever they have runs and walks for breast cancer I really want to participate in them because I think it's a really good thing to do, it helps a lot of people... [This one says] *'Keep your eye on the goal'*...it's a soccer picture. I think it's a really good lesson to keep your eye on your goal. If you have dreams, don't let anyone convince you against that... [This one says] *'Tobacco Is Whacko If You're A Teen.'* A lot of people are influenced by drugs and stuff and I think it's not something I'm influenced by.... [This one says] *'Respect.'* Respect what it says, if it says something, don't do it, follow the rules! Around our school everyone just drops papers in the hallway. My boyfriend's mom is one of the janitors and that's what stopped me, I am not gonna let my friends do that because look whose cleaning up after you."

From reading books, Kristen informed herself on issues related to social injustice. She said,

These three books, *Bread Winner*, *Parvannah's Journey* and *Mud City*...I chose to read them because I find it really symbolizes a lot because it talks about a girl in Afghanistan and about the way she lives, her dad got beat up by the Taliban soldiers for being a teacher...she has to pretend she is a boy to go outside by herself and work to get money for her parents....

From watching the TV sitcom *The Steve Harvey Show*, Jayme informed herself on high school related issues. She said, "It's about a high school...they always have fights and problems and then they deal it out."

From watching the TV animated show *Cyberchase*, Myka learned math. She said, "I love that show, it's about math...the cartoons are so funny."

Watching the movie *Mean Girls*, Liv, Lauren and Kristina collectively informed themselves on teenage girl related issues. Lauren said,

It relates to a lot of things that teenage girls go through. You see all of their characters and everyone's flaws...[and] strong points. You could relate to it a lot... girls saying something to your face and meaning something different behind your back...betraying friends and how sometimes people aren't what they appear to be...finding out who you really are and seeing who your true friends are.

Kristina continued, "They have a bit of what we have," and Liv explained, "Kristina is like Gretchen she's like the girl who can't stand people being mad at her, or she'll like always want to help someone and that's how she is, it's not the bad qualities that Gretchen has but the good qualities."

Reading about celebrity Mary Kate Olsen in magazines, Liv, Lauren and Kristina informed themselves on eating disorders. Kristina said, "Mary Kate Olson use to be my idol when I was younger, her and Ashley. I can't believe she's anorexic. It's so sad when you're anorexic or bulimic because you can't get out of it." Liv responded, "None of our friends are anorexic...we all have each other to depend on and make ourselves feel secure, but a lot of...other girls in my grade and school suffer from it." Feeling more insecure than her friends and susceptible to media's messages, Lauren explained,

"You're opened up into this world when you come to high school where you discover all these magazines, ads, shopping and everything...you think, 'Oh my gosh I have to lose weight,' you get into always questioning yourself."

Reading tabloid news of Britney Spears and watching her music video, Kristen, Jayme and Paige collectively informed themselves on her lack of values and suicide. Kristen said, "I *don't* like her at all, stuff that she does isn't really right. She got married for 50 some odd hours and then they got it annulled...I find some of her songs are okay but I don't really look up to her and don't relate to her at all." Jayme responded, "I think she's really pretty and has a nice voice but sometimes she carries it too far." Paige explained, "Her music videos are a little scary but it's not always her fault, it's the producers. In *Every Time*, they made her committing suicide but no one would air it so they had to change it...its kind of freaky and disturbing...every time I hear the song I think of that." Kristen concluded, "Before I saw the video, I thought it was an okay song but then the video was just kind of I don't know, why anyone would want to do that?"

From magazines, Lauren, Kristina and Liv informed themselves that media presented an image different from reality. Lauren said,

When you see them when paparazzi take pictures of them they're wearing their sweatpants and t-shirts but when they're on stage and when they are performing they're wearing their costumes... I think that other people who don't realize it's just a stage act they take it too personally and seriously...younger girls, who *don't* know that, it's not a good example for them.

Kristina responded, "I'm not gonna be attracted to it like 'Oh my gosh Britney Spears is wearing that!' Do I have to do that? Never, because I wouldn't go out wearing that but I wouldn't be offended but other people might be." Liv rebutted, "I find Jessica

and Ashley Simpson are really talented...they have amazing voices and they don't go out in Britney Spears' clothes and could sell just as many records as them wearing the clothes that they wear and acting they way they do."

6.08 A Girl Values Her Citizenship

Some of the girls demonstrated social conscious citizenry through their concern for their larger community and supported causes they each believed in through education, community service, fundraising, and personal responsibility.

Kristen recognized her citizenry when it came to receiving a democratic education and supporting social causes. She said,

If you ask anyone they will say that I am really proud to be a Canadian... I am glad that I live here. A lot of people in the world aren't as fortunate...a girl in Afghanistan... She had to pretend she was a boy to go outside by herself and work to get money for her parents...It reminds me of how lucky I am... A lot of people don't get to go to school because they are girls and I am really glad that I can get an education... Magazines, I don't normally buy them...[but] the fundraiser for school was selling magazine subscriptions, and my sister and I we got this one.

Paige recognized the importance of her citizenry when it came to littering and supporting fundraising events. She said,

Throw things in the garbage...look whose cleaning up after you... I am a really big supporter I like to stay involved. Whenever they have runs and walks for

breast cancer I really want to participate in them because I think it's a really good thing to do, it helps a lot of people.

Kristina recognized the importance of her citizenry when it came to respecting others and their property. She said,

In the parking lot outside of a grocery store, we found carriages everywhere...people should help out even if they don't work there...just pushing the carriages on the other side so cars don't go banging into them... I was on the bus and graffiti is everywhere on the streets and buildings. Why go on other people's property to express your feelings, write it on a paper or on your own wall, why go outside and do it on someone else's building...it's disrespectful.

Lauren recognized the importance of her citizenry when it came to spirituality, community service and environmental awareness. She said,

Religion...I think it's very important. It's a time to get in touch with your self. You're so busy doing everything else all week that it's 45 minutes of being selfless... I think that people should realize that...we are very fortunate... youth...[and] community service... they should be more happy to do it because we are giving to other people who don't have that much... Our environment, like if they keep on littering our planet isn't gonna stay like this forever. The cars and the gas are gonna hurt the earth sooner or later....

What is Discovered About Girls Through Their Relationships With Popular Culture?

6.09 Conclusion

My research has informed me that popular culture is a site of negotiation for a girl's meaning making and construction of self. Popular culture engaged the girls to critically reflect upon their lives and become reflexive about them selves. As autonomous and collective beings, popular culture functions, in part, as a mirror, an image, and a voice. Adolescence is the time when negotiating healthy choices are essential to becoming an autonomous adult. 'Who am I? What do I value?' are questions at the forefront of all seven of these girls' minds. Through heightened consciousness, regarding how they used and made meaning from favorite texts and practices, the girls isolated what they valued – self-expression, self-love, social acceptance, nurture, kindness, support, family, friendship, animals, community, communication, integrity, independence, spirituality, respect, health, pleasure, sportsmanship, knowledge, education, social justice, and citizenship-, and as a transformative means, they confirmed them.

Kristina at age 13 expressed her pink packaged femininity with pride. She shared her love for self-adornment and felt strongly about maintaining her unique image. She enjoyed reading magazines and surfing the net to keep informed on the latest news but was resistant to media's pressures concerning the ideal body type. She was knowledgeable of eating disorders amongst girls her age, and used friendship and family to support her healthy self-esteem. She was respectful towards others and expected the same in return.

Lauren at age 14 expressed her insecurities with honesty. She shared her love for fashion and her desire to influence style as a reaction to feeling powerless within her peer group. She used self-adornment practices to bond with girlfriends but was knowledgeable concerning the oppressive characteristics of consumerism and the ideal image. She fought hard to negotiate her own values amidst those of her peers and Hollywood driven media by reminding herself of the importance of spirituality, family, and social conscious citizenry.

Liv at age 14 expressed her observations with confidence. She shared her leadership abilities regarding her fashionable image and her disdain for others who copied her style. She used celebrities and Hollywood driven media to build her knowledge of femaleness and the rest of society. She negotiated her own values amidst her family, peers and Hollywood driven media by reminding herself of the importance of maintaining a healthy body and mind.

Paige at age 12 expressed her integrity with ease. She shared her love for using her image to explore her various moods. She regarded clothing as a reliable outlet for her self-expression and used them to represent her independent mind. She gained pleasure from matching her makeup and accessories to her outfits. She was knowledgeable concerning issues related to health and citizenship, and was proud of her athletic accomplishments, social conscious citizenry and political interests.

Kristen at age 13 expressed her privilege and self-contentment with ease. She shared her enjoyment for bargain shopping and used her image to express her **conservative** values. She appreciated her country lifestyle from the music she listened, the physical environment where she lived, and the animals she dreamt of nurturing. She expressed a disinterest in the values of certain popstars represented in Hollywood driven media. She enjoyed sports to bond with girls and appreciated the exercise to

maintain her physical shape. She was proud of her Canadian citizenship, felt privileged for her democratic education, and was knowledgeable of the social injustices suffered by others.

Jayne at age 13 expressed her pink packaged athleticism with adoration. She shared the pleasure she gained from experimenting with her image. She enjoyed informing and entertaining herself through music, watching TV, reading magazines and surfing the Internet but expressed their lack of influence on her overall self-adornment choices. She played sports to bond with girls, looked forward to summer camping trips to bond with family, and exemplified compassion towards animals.

Myka at age 12 expressed her desire for communication with others. She enjoyed communicating with girlfriends, family and pets, and desired to have a boyfriend for the same reason. She played sports as a means to bond with girls and used the computer as a form of entertainment. She appreciated family bonding moments through summer and winter weekend getaways and going to see “chick-flicks” with her mother and sister. She enjoyed her time alone and the environments that privileged this, and shared her love for animals exemplifying kindness towards them.

The girls’ self-representations demonstrate their interpretation of the girlpower ideology as all-inclusive. At their age they actively embodied girlpower as self-inventive, athletic, consumer powered, spiritual, socially conscious, and preferring all female friendships. Amongst the various hegemonic influences enjoyed and resisted, each girl constructed herself as an autonomous and collective *can-do-girl* (Harris, 2004b), able to negotiate choices for the betterment of her wellbeing and appreciative of her fortune. Kristina said, “A lot of people [smoke weed] that we know...but we want to stay away from it.” Liv said, “I don’t want to get myself into doing drugs and...become a crack

addict mom.” Lauren said, “I am trying to look deeper into everything...to get more in touch with myself.” Paige said, “Standing up and doing things like a 30-hour hunger strike is important to me.” Kristen said, “How lucky I am, for sure.” Jayme said, “I like having dreams.” Myka said, “Most of the things in my life are really nice to have.”

Popular culture is an effective lens to investigate the construction of cultural identity. Through popular culture discourse the girls accessed ways of knowing, learning and being, initiated consciousness, were critically reflective and reflexive, nurtured sense of self, and highlighted their transformative potential, “If students are not able to transform their lived experience into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing” (Friere, 1970, p. 19). Most importantly, the girls’ participation in this research is indicative of their interest in sharing their authentic voices for a scholarly and transformative purpose, in this case, the betterment of teenage girls.

7

Pink Politics Transformed



implications

7 Pink Politics Transformed

7.01 Critical Art Education & Research Implications

To create meaningful, critical and transformative pedagogy we have to seriously consider how young people make meaning from popular culture, “Without such an understanding of young people and their lives, I maintain we will always be limited in our analyses, diagnosing the condition of the young in largely unsubstantiated ways, in ways that reinforce our political predilections” (Dimitriadis, 2001, p.120).

In an image-based world, media literacy and visual communication become an increasingly significant language for girls to learn. Freedman states (2003a),

Images shape an individual's self-concept even in the ways they shape the notion of individualism. Individuals appropriate characteristics of visual representations, adopting these representations as a description of himself/herself. From this perspective, people can be manipulated through images.... The educational importance of visual culture is important to understand if we are to teach appropriately in a contemporary democracy. (p. 2-3)

As an educational implication, I address the pedagogical use of popular culture and art based media production as a gateway for self-actualization and social action. The Quebec Educational Reform (2000) states, “In order to address the concerns of all students and to motivate them to become involved in their education, young people's life experiences will become themes for student work, reflection, creation and action” (Quebec Education Program, section 4, paragraph #4).

At this age the girls demonstrate healthy sense of selves able to negotiate various pressures. However, as a female, art educator, researcher, and once a teenager

myself, I was concerned with the hegemonic association of power to image and consumerism, and curious how these girls will continue to negotiate pressures as they journey through their adolescence.

In reaction to the influence of the girlpower ideology on contemporary girlhood Taft (2004) states, “girls are encouraged to identify their girl-positive feelings with a nonpolitical rather than a politicized discourse, and to think about girlhood in these purely cultural ways, rather than as a space for social and political action” (p. 71). There are hints that the girls want to move beyond their cultural understanding of what being a girl means to develop a more political stance. In response to Liv and Kristina’s awareness of media’s manipulation, Lauren’s search for deeper meaning beyond attractiveness and popularity, Paige and Kristen’s interest in social issues, and Jayme and Myka’s interest in animals, there are psychosocial, educational and future research implications to re-frame this methodology for critical media-based art education in all-female learning environments to nurture self-actualization and social action, and, as an ethnographic participatory activist research model where girls become researchers of their own lives.

Although more than ever girls are highly achieving, they still lack adequate resources to nurture emotional development. Cruddas and Haddock (2003) state, “Girls who are struggling silently with painful emotions, depression, bullying, bereavement or eating disorders are often unnoticed” (p. 1). A future research implication for studying and nurturing girlhood identity construction is to invite girls to further investigate their identities through meaningful art-based documentary video production. Robinson (2001) states, “There are many ways in schools of enabling young people to discuss and express their feelings and emotions. Among the most important are the arts” (pp. 36-37). In this research, the girls took the first step by heightening awareness

concerning the meaningful aspects of their lives. The second step would then be to introduce girls to their transformative potential. Heightening critical consciousness by engaging girls to become researchers of their own lives as the subjects for their films can nurture their transformative potential for personal and social action. As classroom praxis and an ethnographic participatory activist research model for the classroom, I would incorporate art-based video production as a fourth step to accompany the focus group interview, the photo ethnography assignment, and the photo elicitation interview. By making meaningful media, girls are invited to:

- Re-frame their own lives
- Re-construct their selves
- Share their stories
- Represent their situations
- Demonstrate their knowledge
- Intervene in their futures
- Make meaning out of the issues that most concern them
- Offer their own understandings of femininity
- Inform others on young people's needs
- Nurture self-esteem
- Potentiate humanization, and
- Encourage informed participation in personal and social action.

As a participatory activist research model, girls as researchers and co-researchers engage in dialogical ways to develop social and emotional awareness skills, explore and resolve conflict, and authenticate the scholarly literature on information about them.

To carry out these educational and research implications, I call for all-female intergenerational art education environments as ideal settings to implement this research and curriculum. In what should be a safe environment free of sexist judgment and stigma, women educators can “commit themselves to providing a new generation of adolescents safe harbor from the painful losses weathered by [them]...” (Ward & Cooper-Benjamin, 2004, p. 18) and offer girls their *protective umbrellas* (Brumberg, 1998) as they collectively explore meaning making, and the hegemonic construction of cultural identity. Child psychologist Michael Roberts (1999) states,

Girls’ struggles...require a collective, rather than an individual, response. This suggests the need for a new concept of health and stress resistance that locates the struggle between the girl and her world, not within the individual girl, and that holds the adults in girls’ environments accountable for providing girls with experiences and opportunities for them to understand, engage with, and potentially transform what limits and harms them. (p. 415)

I concur with Roberts’ statement. The all-female classroom is the ideal environment for developmental group work to support girls’ learning and emotional development. Shaffer and Galinsky (1974), cited by Cruddas and Haddock (2003, pp. 23-24), describe key factors in developmental group work: democracy, learning how to learn, self-knowledge, and social awareness. Developmental group work provides a method for working with young people whereby girls are encouraged to:

- Explore the relationship between individuals and their systemic contexts
- Examine acts that develop good relationships, social, emotional and self-knowledge.
- Develop listening and communication skills

- Develop empathy and concern for others
- Explore and find ways of resolving conflict, and
- Develop the ability to learn how to learn

With new media platforms to democratize and globalize girls' voices (Mitchell & Reid-Walsh, 2004), art educators in all female learning environments are ideal facilitators to encourage group developmental work and self-study as foundational to classroom learning. Art, photography, and video as production tools, and websites, blogging, video podcasting, and the mobile phone as distribution channels, offer girls new opportunities for innovative self-study, expression, participation in global discourses, and building digital communities. Furthermore, educators who implement new media platforms in art education learning environments are connecting informal and formal learning, building their students' career skills, and inspiring them to own their educational experiences with possibilities of nurturing sense of self in the process.

Critical art education, grounded in a liberatory philosophy, emphasizes self-actualization as the ultimate facilitator for freedom and justice. Critical pedagogues (Friere, 1970; Hooks, 1989; Duncum, 2002; Freedman, 2003a; Tavin, 2003 Darts, 2004) recognize the politics of education and its hegemonic influence on identity formation. Freedman states, "Education is a process of identity formation because we change as we learn; our learning changes our subjective selves...." (p. 2). She advocates balancing power relations between the teacher and student where both work in tandem to potentiate humanization. Tavin posits that critical pedagogical practice is "rooted in a democratic ethos that attends to the practices of teaching and learning and focuses on lived experiences with the intention to disrupt, contest, and transform systems of oppression" (p. 198). Duncum (1997) maintains that what "art education needs is a

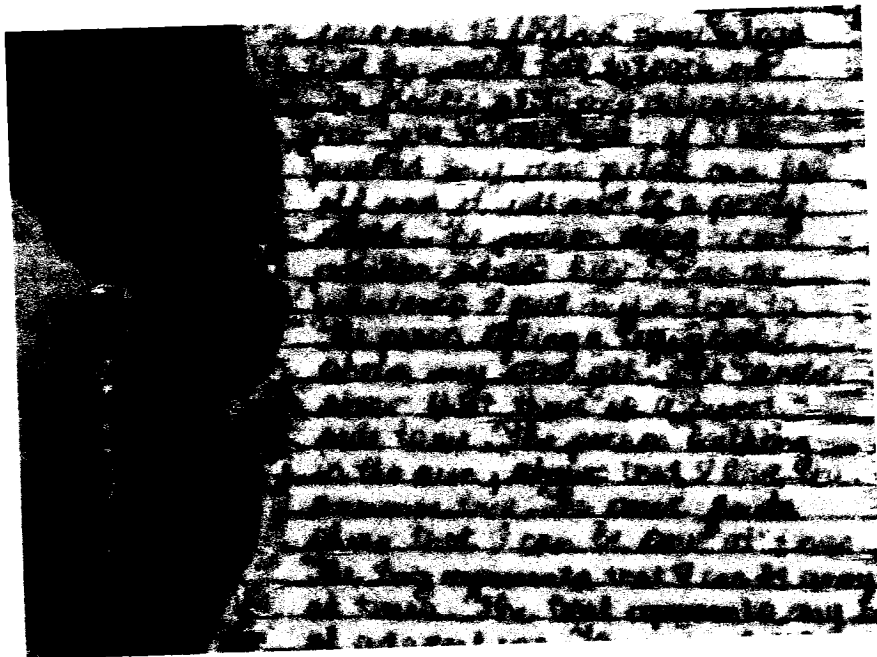
paradigm shift that both acknowledges the hegemony of the mass media and approaches the media with appropriate conceptual tools" (p.71). As critical art educators, we have a role to instruct students in how to decode images and systems to uncover their multiple meanings and ideological functions with the intent "to expose and deconstruct the powerful strategies and aesthetic tactics commonly employed by artists, designers, and other producers of visual texts" (Darts, 2004, p. 325).

In conclusion, as I continue to witness the cultural, social and political girl "come together" through the site of popular culture, the more I realize this site's value as a gateway for meaningful, critical and transformative media-based art education with an emphasis on self-actualization and social action. Using popular culture as a gateway to engage girls in meaningful and critical dialogue provided me with a working framework to understand how each of these girls constructed her sense of self amongst the hegemonic forces of peers, family, and societal values mediated by the media and popular culture. I have discovered that much like a collage, constructed and juxtaposed piece by piece, everything a girl values becomes, in essence, layers in her self-portrait, and a mirror to her self. By reframing my research methodology for girls to produce meaningful media using the language of popular culture, girls are invited to consider and transform what limits their potential.

Inspired, I wish to end this dissertation with a quote I mentioned earlier from Antonio Gramsci (1971) who despite having been jailed for most of his life discovered his power from within, enough to transform an entire society for generations to come. He said, "To transform the external world...is to potentiate oneself and to develop oneself... For this reason one can say that man is essentially "political" since it is through the activity of transforming and consciously directing other men that man realized his "humanity" and "human nature"" (p. 360). His biography inspires my

understanding that to ignite self-actualization and lead social action one must recognize that true agency and hegemony reside from within.

Girls' Meaning Making & Art Education



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Behind The Scenes



Appendices

9 Appendices

Appendix A

(To protect the girls' confidentiality, I do not provide their original signed consent forms, only a sample of what appears in the form.)

Consent Form to Participate in a Research Study: Pink Politics- PopularGirlCulture@Ages12.13.14.ca

This is to state that I agree to participate in a Doctoral program of research conducted by Leanne Levy of the Art Education Department of Concordia University.

I hereby authorize Leanne Levy (hereinafter "The Researcher") to record my name, likeness, image, voice and audio (hereinafter "Performance") on video, tape, or otherwise for use by the Researcher in the connection with the research and production of "Pink Politics."

A. Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is as follows:

To understand and describe how some teenage girls, ages 12, 13 and 14 years, use, make meaning from and interpret popular culture. The Researcher is interested in understanding what teenage girls discover about themselves through their relationships with popular culture.

This research in both written and video form is the basis for the Researcher's Doctoral dissertation, a book, a chapter in a book, academic articles, a video documentary for film festivals, Television, Teacher training, and professional conferences. The Researcher also reserves the right to use this information in other capacities, which are not indicated, but may arise in the future.

B. Procedures

Research participants consist of seven girls between the ages of 12 and 14 years old. The data collection methods involve focus group interviews, photo-ethnography, and private photo-elicitation interviews. The female research participants are each given a throw away camera to photograph and document what she interprets as popular culture that matters to her. All focus group interviews and meetings will be videotaped and audio recorded.

This research takes place in the participants' homes to avoid noise pollution and to create a safe environment for the girls to communicate their ideas. The data consists of teenage girls' views, interpretations, definitions, conversations and short stories concerning the role of popular culture in each of their lives.

This research will begin with a focus group interview. In this meeting we will discuss the girls' definitions and the role of popular culture in their teenage lives. In this meeting, the girls will also be explained how to go about the photo taking project. Each girl will be

given a throw away camera to document what and how she sees and understands popular culture in her life. These photos will form the basis for the one-on-one photo-elicitation interviews with the Researcher where each girl will have the opportunity to discuss, in detail, the significance of each photo.

The Researcher owns copies of each girl's photos and is the sole owner of the unedited video recorded data.

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent (only in written form) and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is:

Non-Confidential (My identity will be revealed in study results)

- I consent to the use of my name, likeness, voice and biographical information about me in connection with the Researcher's activities.
- I acknowledge that the data from this study may be published and therefore made public in written, visual and audio format.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.

Name (Please print) _____

Address, City, Country _____

Phone & Email _____

Signature _____

**Signature of
Parent or Guardian** _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Handout: Photo Ethnography Project

Popular culture @ 12-14: Girls' perspectives

Doctoral Research By Leanne Levy

Concordia University

Art Education Department

XXX.XXX.XXXX cell. XXX-XXXX

email:XXXXXX@XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com

Photo-taking Project- Let the camera be YOUR eyes!

*The objective of this project is for me to see and understand how YOU, a 13-year old girl, views popular culture.

Things to remember & to think about when taking photos:

* What does popular culture mean to you?

(Think back to what we discussed in the meeting)

* What role does pop culture play in your day-to-day life?

Take photos that represent its role in your life

* What are the things from pop culture that you relate to most?

Take a photo...

* What things from pop culture do you love?

Take a photo...

* What things from pop culture do you dislike?

Take a photo...

* What symbolizes pop culture to you?

Take a photo...

* What are some of the things you would like to change about pop culture?

Take a photo...

* What in pop culture do you want to see more of?

Take a photo...

*When taking photos indoors (remember to use the flash!)

*Think of taking photos outdoors

Procedures following photo taking project:

When you have finished the roll of film in the camera, call me and I will pick up the camera to develop the photos. When I receive the developed photos, we will schedule a one-on-one meeting to look at the photos and talk about them together.