Girl-becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood

through Visual Art, Theatre, and Digital Communications

by

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ABSTRACT

Using arts-informed ethnographic approaches, theatrical techniques and a feminist/performance studies lens, this study analyzes the construction of US girlhood from the perspective of girls ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen by examining their original artistic creations and performances. Placing the artifacts of girl-created culture and the girls' representations, which I view as a performative practice, at the heart of my study, I connect girlhood studies to Butler's gender performance theories and to the larger field of performance studies. Rather than strictly analyzing these original works myself, I involve the girl participants as co-theorists in the analysis of the resulting artistic creations as a performance of girlhood.

Through our theory building sessions, we aim to discover a nuanced understanding of girlhood and how gender identity can be performed by adolescent girls, as well as how artistic and theatrical practices can serve to assist youth in exploring complex issues. The adolescent female participants serve as active writers and performers of girlhood and through their writing and performances demonstrate their understanding of what it means to be a girl in contemporary US society. In viewing the girls as theorists, I demonstrate their capabilities while honoring their experiences and knowledge, an approach I believe should be more often employed in academia and in everyday life.

Specifically, my study's central research question asks: *how do US girls consume mass media representations of girlhood and reproduce or subvert these representations? In what ways do girls perform their understandings of their own identities and what it means to be a girl in contemporary US society through their*

creations of original art and literature, live theatrical pieces, and digital cultural practices? These works include theatrical performances, creative writing, self-portrait sculptures, and blogs/journals. Additionally, I conduct and analyze both solo and group interviews. I assert the importance of creative space and theatrical/artistic practices as tools with which girls can examine and challenge girlhood and gender discourses.

DEDICATION

For my grandmother, Barbara Beckley Malone (9/10/21-2/26/14), an amazingly strong, stern, woman instrumental in the making of the woman I have become and will become. She supported me in everything I did, and served as an exemplary model of generosity with a no-nonsense, you-can-keep-your-bullshit, demeanor. From combing the lice out of my elementary school aged head to the many letters she sent me filled with newspaper clippings to the many, many lunch outings which made me and my sisters feel special, she showed me in so many ways how much she cared. Not one for dramatic, overt displays of emotion I nevertheless always felt her love and support and still do. I wish she could see me complete my dissertation and walk across the stage to graduate.

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INTRODUCTION

"Women hold up half the sky."
- Mao Zedong

This dissertation examines the construction of US girlhood from the perspective of girls. I analyze original works created by girls in order to discover new theories of contemporary girlhood. As a feminist, female educator in a US American public high school, I watched my students conform to the expectations of school, friends, family, and society in varying ways and degrees. One of the most difficult daily struggles I witnessed involved my students' efforts to perform "acceptable" gender roles. As they grew into young adults, both my female and male students dealt with the complexity of becoming men and women. Watching my students explore and experiment with the "right" ways to express their masculinity and femininity under the watchful eyes of their peers, parents, and teachers made me question what it means to be a girl or a boy, a woman or a man, and how we come to learn these meanings. During my graduate studies I often found my research focusing on learned gender roles. Much of my research has revolved around what happens as young girls transition into adolescence, what ideas and messages about gender are transmitted, and how social concepts of femininity are relayed. As I have evolved as a scholar, my interests have centered on the intersections of girlhood, girl culture and performance.

Since the emergence of girlhood studies in the early 1990s as a discrete and separate field of study, many researchers have focused on the artifacts of girl culture in order to understand how society constructs girlhood (Brumberg, 1997; Driscoll, 2002; Mitchell, 2008). The majority of these artifacts under scrutiny by researchers can best be

described as material goods marketed toward girls such as dolls, magazines, music, and clothing items. The field of girlhood studies, as well as other fields like sociology, psychology, and cultural studies that examine gender's connection to culture, have often focused on US adolescent girls as consumers of girlhood culture rather than positioning girls as creators of their own subcultures (Lamb and Brown, 2006; Mitchell and Reid-Walsh, 2008; Piper, 1994; Gilligan and Brown, 1992). These examinations have often focused on the idea that girls, particularly adolescent girls, are in constant danger of being manipulated and damaged, both physically and psychologically, by society and media representations of femininity and girlhood.

In recent years researchers shifted their focus to the girls themselves for a clearer understanding of girlhood (Bloustien, 2003; Driver, 2007; Duits 2008; Currie, 2009). Rather than focusing purely on girl culture created for girls, scholars are now examining culture created *by* girls themselves. In doing so, girls move from passive consumer to a position of agency. Girl-created culture is now valued as integral to understanding girlhood. Former assumptions of girls' passivity are replaced with the possibility that girls are active participants in the construction of girlhood (Kearney, 2006, 2011; Driscoll, 2002). My study seeks to continue this trend to better determine the role girls play in their own identity construction. Specifically, my study's central research question asks: *how do US girls consume mass media representations of girlhood and reproduce or subvert these representations? In what ways do girls perform their understandings of their own identities and what it means to be a girl in contemporary US society through their creations of original art and literature, live theatrical pieces, and digital cultural practices?*

My study positions the adolescent female participants as active interpreters and theorists of girlhood. US girls consume representations of girlhood presented in a variety of mass media forms: newspapers, magazines, movies, television, and the internet. Simply discussing the participants' understanding of girlhood then seems inadequate to capture the depth and complexity of my subject and its presentational forms. The expansion of media and communication methods in recent years makes necessary the utilization of a variety of tactics in my study, and so, my examination of contemporary girlhood uses three different arts-informed approaches with which to address my study's central question. Each of these approaches explores girls' responses to mass media representations of girlhood. The first approach, performance ethnography, involves a theatre class using various theatrical practices as a starting point for the devising of participants' own theatrical creations. The second approach uses visual ethnography to examine a collection of visual art created by female participants responding to the questions: What is a girl? What does it mean to be a girl? Using netnography, my third and final approach, I look at web-based digital creations by the girl participants. Through their performances, artistic creations and writing they demonstrate their understandings of what it means to be a US girl. With their help, my study seeks to answer several additional sub-questions:

- How do girls "perform" girlhood?
- How do dramatic writing and theatre serve as a site of identity exploration for adolescent female youth?
- How do girls theorize girlhood through original theatrical creations?
- What are the various ways girls conceive of girlhood?

- What can we learn from girls' theories on girlhood?
- How do girls navigate mass media representations of girlhood?
- In what ways do girls accept/reject mass media depictions of girlhood?
- Where do girls locate their agency? How do they utilize agency?

Using arts-informed ethnographic approaches, theatrical techniques and a feminist/performance studies lens, I evaluate participants' original creative writing and theatrical performances. Rather than analyze these original works myself, I involve the participants in the analysis of the resulting original creations as a performance of girlhood. Additionally, I conduct and analyze both one-on-one and group interviews. In examining participants' various responses, I aim to discover a nuanced understanding of girlhood and how gender identity can be performed by adolescent girls, as well as how artistic and theatrical practices can serve to assist youth explore complex issues.

Key Terms and Background:

My study is situated in the midst of several discourses including girlhood studies, feminism(s), performance and cultural studies, as well as new media studies. I highlight several important terms, relevant themes and arguments that inform my topic.

Girlhood Studies and Defining Girlhood:

Girlhood Studies, as a field separate from childhood or feminist studies, only recently came into being in the early 1990s. In their articles on the development of girls' studies both Catherine Driscoll and Mary Celeste Kearney, prominent scholars of girlhood studies, note the marginalization of the study of girls in a variety of fields including childhood studies, sociology, and feminist studies (2008, 2009). Driscoll begins her outline of girls' studies at the turn of the century, while Kearney begins her

investigation in the early 1960s. Driscoll defines girl as: "an assemblage of social and cultural issues and questions rather than a field of physical facts, however much the girls empirical materiality is crucial to that assemblage" and notes that "the first things to notice about such an assemblage are where and how it appears" (14). I wish to point out and recognize that the construction of girlhood began long before the birth of girlhood as an independent field of study, and that the understanding of girl has altered with each passing generation. So, as Driscoll astutely points out the concept of girl goes far beyond simply an age range and physical sex. For the purpose of my study when I use the term girl, I will refer to Driscoll's definition – girl as a societal assemblage. Girl can be understood as a socially constructed concept bound by cultural beliefs and geographic locations rather than an identity formed through individual lived experiences. The term girlhood will refer to the experience or state of being a girl. In determining the participants of my study I have chosen to narrow my definition to people of a certain age, 11-18, and of a certain sex, female. Beyond those two criteria I did my best to create a participant group as diverse as possible with regards to ethnicity, body, age, class, language of origin, and those sub-cultures created by girls themselves; however, the composition of the study participants was limited by several factors I discuss further in the limitations section of this chapter. I continually asked how girls are "assembled" by society, themselves, the field of girlhood studies, and my study.

Clearly defining what being a girl means cannot be described as a simple task, and in fact many different understandings of what it means to "be" a girl exist. In their two-volume encyclopedia *Girl Culture,* Claudia A. Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid Walsh state:

> The terms included in the encyclopedia about "girl culture" or "girls' culture" at first sight seem self-evident, in no need of definition or elaboration. Upon a closer look, however, each entry seems less clear. To begin thinking about what a girl is we initially have to think about issues of age and a number of questions need to be posed. How old is a girl? How has the age range defining girlhood changed over time in Western culture? What implications do earlier ideas of girls and girlhood have on our view? What delimits girlhood? Is it age or the preclusion of sexuality? (xxiv)

Mitchell and Reid Walsh go on to suggest several ways to gain understanding about girlhood: a historical approach, a categorical approach, and a thematic approach. The editors examine briefly all three approaches, first summarizing a short historical background of girlhood, and then noting some of the categories (material culture, media, space, girls' bodies) and themes (ephemerality, agency, devaluing girls' culture, lost girlhood) found in girlhood studies. While the editors inform the reader of the variety of approaches to studying girlhood, the entries in the encyclopedias revolve heavily around the consumer culture and marketability of girlhood. The encyclopedia assembles girl as a consumer of culture rather than a producer, however the decision of the editors to focus on girls' culture is significant and purposeful. The editors explain their choice:

> One problem that we have discovered in our own research is that, too often, girl culture is dismissed as not being very important; somehow, the academic integrity accorded to other areas of study is often absent in the context of girlhood. As a consequence, even basic facts are sometimes

> difficult to obtain. The lack of academic rigor in relation to girlhood and popular culture makes the challenge of doing research in the fields both frustrating and oddly fascinating. (xvi)

Following the editors' lead and furthering the discourse, many scholars now focus on culture created by girls with the belief that these cultural artifacts may lead to a different understanding of girlhood. My study combines these two approaches by examining girlhood culture aimed at girls through girls' original art, literature and theatrical creations. While I am specifically interested in how girls respond to mass media and define girlhood through their own cultural creations, the creations will also demonstrate influences beyond the media. Family life, geography, class, education, religion are all factors in how girls come to understand girlhood. The participants in my study have very different upbringings but, as young women currently living in the United States and attending the same school, I assert that one thing they have in common is exposure to many of the same mass media sources, which serves as a sort of shared language. Given this shared influence, I wish to note several prominent girlhood themes discussed by a variety of scholarly fields over recent years.

Many theorists and scholars such as Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan have focused on the effects society has on girls' psyches (especially at the time of puberty and adolescence). Girls are seen as perpetually in danger from the various ills of society (most often the media), and unable to navigate their way through the world without the intervention of parents, teachers, social workers, and psychologists. Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* encapsulates the construction of girlhood as a site of great peril. Published in 1994, Pipher's book became a number one *New York*

Times bestseller and spurned many parents to worry about their adolescent daughters. Pipher, a psychotherapist, recounts her interactions with her adolescent female clients and presents a tragic picture of adolescent girls: "something dramatic happens to girls in early adolescence. Just as planes and ships disappear mysteriously into the Bermuda Triangle, so do the selves of girls go down in droves. They crash and burn in a social and developmental Bermuda Triangle" (19). Pipher goes on to present case studies of her clients, which illustrate the danger that all girls face in adolescence. She compares adolescent girls to saplings in a hurricane, and her book to a hurricane warning, "a message to the culture that something important is happening. This [book] is a National Weather Service bulletin from the storm center" (28). Pipher then advocates for an intervention by society in order to rescue adolescent girls.

This theme of "Girls in Danger" has continued throughout scholarship surrounding girlhood, although I note a change in focus, tone and approach. For example, over a decade after Piper makes her warning, Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown broadcast their own message to society that girls are still at risk. According to their book, *Packaging Girlhood: Rescuing Our Daughters from Marketers' Schemes,* advertising agencies and consumer culture threaten and endanger girls. Like Pipher, Lamb and Brown do some of their own advocating in their book; however, they shy away from calling for a psychological intervention. Instead they urge parents to become more media savvy, and to teach much needed skills to their daughters:

> This book isn't about self-esteem. We don't buy into the view that low self-esteem is the biggest problem for girls today. Girls get plenty of self-esteem whenever they can fit themselves into an image that marketers

> have created, and that's the way they're enticed to seek out confidence. Some have said that marketers create impossible ideals that girls cannot live up to; we think marketers are more clever than that . . . Marketers know that girls do feel better when they shop, buy the newest lip gloss, and conform to current fashion trends . . . In the end, it's the market and its media. (3)

Lamb and Brown indicate that girls don't need to be saved as much as they need to be educated. The difference in interventions lies in the varying diagnosis of the problem: are girls in danger because of the damaged, not-fully-developed female adolescent psyche or because the female adolescent lacks of a certain skill set? Once taught how to navigate and recognize advertising techniques, Lamb and Brown see girls as capable social agents instead of as incomplete beings unprepared or unable to navigate the world on their own.

Lyn Mikel Brown writes again of girls in danger in her book, *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls*. This time Brown places the focus on girlfighting or the mean girls' phenomenon. Brown's investigation begins by looking at the proliferation of reports on mean and nasty girls. Her book is a response to these reports and "an attempt to provide some reality to those descriptions" (3). Brown suggests:

> Girls desperately need the support of their friends to remain emotionally, psychologically, and physically whole in a world that takes them less seriously, values their looks and their bodies above all else, and still requires that they please boys and men to succeed. But in a sexist climate, it is also simply easier and safer and ultimately more profitable for girls to take out their fears and anxieties and anger on other girls rather than on

> boys or on a culture that denigrates, idealizes, or eroticizes qualities associated with femininity. (5-6)

In other words, Brown suggests that the causes of girls fighting or mean-girl syndrome are more complex than current media portrayal seems to suggest. Rather than looking for something inherent in girls causing such behavior, she turns the focus on the media and on society and their depiction of girls and women. Girls have taken in these messages about what it means to be a girl and, according to Brown, are

> acting just as people in subordinate or less powerful positions are supposed to act with each other. They are becoming card-carrying members of a sexist ideology that stereotypes and judges girls and women and denigrates qualities associated with femininity. If this is the way the public world sees girls, who wants to be one, or at least who wants to be that kind of girl? Better to become an "independent," intelligent "mature" individual who separates herself from other girls to be with a guy or who decontaminate herself from all that girlyness, to aspire to be one of the guys. (173)

Society's depiction and representation of girls results in girls who do not want to be girls. Society assembles "girl" as less than or other, unworthy of respect, power, and status.

The theme "Girl Power" attempts to counter the "Girls in Danger" conceptualization of girlhood by advocating that girls can do anything that they want. This seems like a powerful way to conceive of girlhood; however, what happens when girls fail at achieving what they want? Many scholars find this concept problematic and suggest that the possibility of girl power disappeared with its commodification, as

illustrated by marketing and media creations like the Spice Girls. Sociologist Anita Harris explores the issues of girl power in her book *future girl: Young women in the 21st century*. Harris focuses on why young women have become the focus of attention in society, especially the marketplace and mass media. She attempts to determine why the idea of girl power, a girl who could do anything, developed. Harris suggests changes in economic and work conditions combined with feminism and changing social attitudes have resulted in the idea that

> individuals are expected to be flexible, adaptable, resilient and ultimately responsible for their own ability to manage their life successfully . . . there are, however, many young women not living in ways that match the image of success . . . however the consequences of the sexual and economic exploitation of these young women are not confronted . . . Instead, their circumstances are labeled failure, and this is attributed to poor choices, insufficient effort, irresponsible families, bad neighborhoods, and lazy communities. (8-9)

Harris views the girl power discourse and the "future girl" or "can-do girl" as a way of regulating girls and women. Girl power's celebration of adolescent females also constructs them and instructs them to perform girlhood in a specific way, one that reifies hegemonic ideology. A normative girlhood has often been presented within the field of girls' studies; this normative girlhood is white, heterosexual, middle-class, and US American. Both of these themes, girls in danger and girl power, tend to limit girls by constructing girlhood as oversimplified – black and white if you will, rather than a multitude of greys. Either girls are in danger or they are free to do anything. Girlhood is

scary or liberating, painful or promising. These two prominent themes should not be seen as the extent of girlhood as girlhood scholars have challenged these themes and the idea of a normative girlhood. Jessica Laureltree Willis' concept of hybrid-girlhood attempts to move beyond the binary created by "girls in danger" and "girl power" by emphasizing "the multiple configurations of girlhood" (112). Willis sees hybrid-girlhood as influenced by more than just society's understandings of gender; as living in an in-between place, a balancing act between societal beliefs about girls and girls' own ideas about who they are or will become as girls (115).

The interdisciplinary journal *Girlhood Studies*, first published in 2008, can be seen as a prominent example, even a physical manifestation, of the movement for scholars to explore the multiplicities of girlhood. In the summer 2010 issue, the Journal explores girlhood experiences across the world. In her introduction to the issue Fiona Leach notes the diverse articles share

> certain striking features. Most noticeable is the position of girls on the margins of community and society, as peripheral to decision-making, as simultaneously ignored and exploited. At the same time, the evidence on which the articles draw firmly repudiates the notion of girls as victims. Within the narrow spaces accorded them, girls can and do exercise agency and resist the constraints and silences that society tries to impose on them. (5-6)

It is clear that the daily lives of girls across the world may differ drastically depending on geographic location, governments, class, wealth, ethnicity, and a variety of other factors. While Currie et al. noted that it may be easier for specific types of girls (she refers

specifically to US white middle-class girls) to perform alternative versions of girlhood, many scholars continue to note that transgressions are possible even within confined boundaries (2009). Also important to note, this specific collection of essays on girlhood emphasizes listening to girls' voice their experiences and their understandings of girlhood. By listening to and valuing girls' voices, these articles demonstrate the vast capability of girls to deal with incredibly harsh and difficult circumstances. In placing my participants' voices and creations as the central focus of my study, I move past a normative, singular girlhood and find many versions, many girlhoods. The girl participants and theorists illuminate the diverse experiences of US girls through their performances, creations, and interviews revealing the complexity of US girlhood.

Performing Girlhood

My study asks how girls perform their understanding of their identities and of girlhood through their various creations. The idea of performing an identity or performing girlhood emerges from performance studies, but before I discuss my study's connection to performance studies I wish to clarify my understanding of identity. I use identity as the process of perceiving oneself in relation to others. Identity is fluid and over a lifetime one person may change multiple times (Sherry). Particularly important to my study is the theory that we perform our identities through embodied practices. I highlight Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and how I apply it to girlhood after my brief discussion of performance studies.

Scholars Joseph Roach and Diana Taylor, two prominent voices in performance studies, both discuss the connection between performance, memory and knowledge. I wish to highlight the important idea Roach and Taylor discuss: "by taking performance

seriously as a system of learning, storing and transmitting knowledge, performance studies allows us to expand what we understand by 'knowledge'" (Taylor 16). In designing my research study, I attempt to go beyond traditional written knowledge by looking at the way girls perform girlhood through daily practices (dress, speech, interviews, interactions with peers), through theatrical performances (workshops, activities, performances), and through their non-written artistic creations. In doing so, I hope to accumulate an intersectional understanding of girlhood. This depth of understanding may come from viewing girlhood as knowledge learned and shared through embodied practices – in other words, examining the way girlhood is learned through mimicry of bodily acts and then taught again through bodily acts, or perhaps retaught in a new way. When Roach cites Homi K. Bhabha: "mimicry is at once resemblance and menace," he connects Bhabha's ideas to his own theory on performance which I link to my view of girlhood. As Roach explains: "performances propose possible candidates for succession. They raise the possibility of the replacement of the authors" (6). By viewing girlhood as performance, I can learn from the girl performers who have learned by watching others perform girlhood. Closely related and just as useful to my study are feminist scholar Judith Butler's writings on gender performativity.

The oft-quoted assertion by philosopher Simone de Beauvoir: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one," has served as starting point for much of contemporary feminist theory (*The Second Sex* 283). Feminist theorist Judith Butler has furthered this idea of gender as a social construction in her writings on gender and performativity. For Butler:

> to be female is . . . a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have to become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman," to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal ~~project~~ [emphasis Butler] strategy. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" 903)

In other words, as a strategy of survival, gender is performed through acts of the body with the knowledge that incorrectly performing or doing the body means to suffer punitive consequences. Butler's concept of gender performativity begins with the idea that gender is a social construction operating through a system of binaries. Gender and biological sex therefore do not go hand in hand. Rather than gender as something inherently tied to biological sex, gender can be seen instead as a learned act, as performative. Butler states:

> As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. (*Gender Trouble* 191)

We learn how to act out or perform our gender in socially acceptable ways. As girlhood is inextricably linked to the female gender, Butler's concept of gender performativity can be applied to girlhood, which can then be understood through performative acts. Many girlhood scholars explore the idea of gender as something learned, practiced, or played.

In '*Girl Power': Girls Reinventing Girlhood* Currie, et al. interviewed girls between the ages of 12 and 16 on the meaning of girl power and how they understood what it means to be a girl in today's world. Seventy-one girls' perspectives were analyzed and the author proposed that girls are active in the process of shaping their identities. Girls shape their identities by trying out different ways of being girls in various social settings. According to the authors, "girls are 'doing' girlhood." The girls interviewed are classified as populars, skaters, or online girls. Each group in their own way is playing with the idea of girlhood and what it means to be a girl. The authors conclude:

> that whether or not transgressive expressions of self can be claimed as feminist politics is more complicated than we might have expected. While dissent is perhaps a basic political emotion, in itself transgression does not contribute to sustained social change that 'frees' girls from patriarchal investments in girlhood. (190).

The authors find multiple ways of "doing girlhood" that attempt to transgress the heteronormative construction of girlhood.

Gerry Bloustien's *Girl Making: A Cross-Cultural Ethnography on the Process of Growing Up Female* follows the trend of going straight to girls themselves for how they understand girl power, girlhood and what it means to be a girl. Bloustien gives the girls in her study video cameras and asks them to record their experiences on tape. Currie et al. coined the term 'doing girlhood' to describe the work that girls do in shaping their identities, and Bloustien creates the term "girl-making" to describe what she understands her ten girls are doing. She explains:

> They were all desperately engaged in a delicate balancing act of discovering who they were -- within a limited range of possibilities. I use the word limited advisedly for . . . these teenagers knew instinctively, as most of us do, that their world was symbolically constrained. Every move, every expression of taste, every thought was an articulation of the social and cultural mores in which their lives were embedded, and in which they themselves had huge emotional investments. (2)

Bloustien's study covers several countries including the US, Australia, and Britain; however, she argues that despite differences of location, status, and culture, "self-making is a universal delicate process that tests possibilities while simultaneously heeding the material and symbolic boundaries that circumscribe the whole of our social and cultural life" (269-70).

The idea of 'doing girlhood' or 'girl making' brings up the question of agency for girls. Can girls actively perform their own version of girlhood? If so, how much of that performance is contained within specific boundaries and limitations placed on girls? Both gender and age are seen as factors limiting girls, or at the very least placing them in the category of "other" or subordinate. What are the options for girls to assemble themselves, and how much does society and the discourses surrounding girls, even the very study of girlhood itself, construct girls? To correlate these ideas with Butler's, I return again to Butler's concept of gender performativity:

> Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized

> repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (*Gender Trouble* 191)

Girlhood then cannot be assumed a stable, fixed state of being. Just as gender is produced, girlhood is produced through bodily acts. "Doing girlhood," etc. can be understood as the playing of various girl characters or versions of femininity – in other words performing girlhood. This performance of girlhood (or girlhoods) is exactly what I explore in my study.

Communities of Girlhood: Digital and Live

In bringing together groups of adolescent girls and asking them to perform their understanding of girlhood through artistic creations, specifically theatrical creations, two scholars' work will prove useful. Theatre practitioners and researchers Helen Nicholson and Kathleen Gallagher both explore the power of, or "gift" of as Nicholson asserts, theatre/drama to create spaces of community where difficult subjects might be explored openly (2005, 2000). Nicholson looks at how theatre, specifically what she terms applied drama, is "primarily concerned with developing new possibilities for everyday living" (4). Her assertion that drama serves as a mode of identity exploration applies directly to my study. She explains:

> Drama is a good way for people to extend their horizons of experience, recognizing how their own identities have been shaped and formulated and, by playing new roles and inhabiting different subject positions, finding different points of identification with others. (25)

Gallagher's work examines the ways drama serves as a mode of power acquisition specifically within the school site. She asserts she has observed

> the many ways in which girls' work in educational drama can create opportunities for them to interrupt the limited and limiting discourses and possibilities assigned to them in schools. Drama asks them to mediate reality by working with metaphor, analogy, and symbolism, and, most significantly it asks girls to speak their own understandings of the world. (2000, 6)

While the location of my work with the girl participants of my study, much like Gallagher's, resides within a school setting, I believe their artistic work expands beyond our educational setting, allowing them to explore discourses of girlhood outside of school. Girls, after all, face these "limited and limiting discourses and possibilities" at home, work, church and other public spaces. The creation of a safe communal space where a community might develop within the structured school site requires the development of a "creative space" (Nicholson, 129). Nicholson explains:

> Creative spaces are those in which people feel safe enough to take risks and allow themselves and others to experience vulnerability. It is creative moments of transition that enable participants to move out of restricted spaces – literally or symbolically – and beyond identities that are fixed and codified by particular spatial practices into new forms of social identification. (129)

The question then becomes how can our space, our place of communal creation, be formed to allow what Gallagher calls "the distinctive educative force of theatre – its

dialectics" to work, "invit[ing] us to take up points of intersection *and* confrontation, so that our dramatic explorations do not simply calcify cultural and ethnic boundaries" (11-12). Careful considerations, which I discuss more fully in Chapter Two, must be taken to develop these creative spaces. Elizabeth Ellsworth's examination of space as integral to learning and the development of knowledge proves valuable in the development of creative space.

In *Places of Learning*, Elizabeth Ellsworth looks to theorists, designers, and practitioners that search for new spaces of experience. Many of the sites Ellsworth explores as places of learning involve a mind/body/place melding, a sensory experience involving the body, mind and geographic place. What I find significant about Ellsworth's concept is the idea of experience, or doing, as vital to understanding the self as "a becoming, an emergence, and as continually in the making . . . [which] moves us beyond a contemporary politics of difference based in semiotics and linguistics toward an experimental 'pragmatics of becoming' based on making and doing" (4). In these learning spaces, the learning self acquires new interpretive strategies and new understandings about self and the world. I use Ellsworth's idea as a way of viewing my study and the adolescent female participants' experiences as learning spaces. Spaces created by interactions in art classrooms, drama workshop sessions, and online social platforms are possible places of learning that are explored for their potential for creative transformation. Ellsworth explains Winnicott's concept of transitional space which correlates with her idea of places of learning:

> Winnicott's transitional space is what makes possible the difficult transition from a state of habitual compliance with the outside world, with

> its expectations, traditions, structures, and knowledges, to a state of creatively putting those expectations, traditions, and structures to new uses . . . in order to learn things and in ways not given in advance, Winnicott believed, we need opportunities and capacities that allow us to be interrelated and separate. (30)

I argue that my study accomplishes just that by forming a community of female adolescents residing in a transitional space apart, or at least distanced from, expectations of the outside world, which through shared experiences incorporating both mind and body put their understandings of girlhood to new uses.

Research Design

Data/ Procedures

My study uses three approaches to investigate how girls come to understand girlhood: performance ethnography, visual ethnography, and netnography. I have designed my research to occur in three concurrent projects of investigation with a different central ethnographic method or approach for each project. I titled these projects based on the roles the participants take in each: Visual Artist, Theatre Performer, and Cyber Writer. While I could pre-determine specific representations of girlhood for the participants to respond to in each project, I decided it would be much more valuable to allow the participants to pull from their prior meaningful girlhood representations and interactions as well as their established beliefs about girlhood.

My field work began in August 2012 at an all-girls high school with a theatre class of twenty-three girls. Fifteen of these students agreed to participate in the study. Over

the course of the fall semester each female student simultaneously participated in three long-term projects.

Theatre Performer Project

In a high school theatre class of twenty-three students, I facilitated an exploration of girlhood through theatrical practices including Image Theatre, Newspaper Theatre, Creative Drama, Improvisation, and other Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. The class culminated in a staged reading of the Girl Theatre Performers' devised script based on their daily theatrical work in class. A theory building meeting was conducted after the performance in which the girls analyzed their creation process and script with regards to what they revealed about girlhood.

Visual Artist Project

In the same class, girls also created a photography-based Self-Portrait Sculpture or 3-D Self-Portrait. Girl Visual Artists chose a structure of their choosing (box, book, folder, any 3-D item with an "inside" and an "outside"). The inside of the self-portrait represented the "real" version of themselves – the self rarely shared. The outside of the self- portrait represented the public version of themselves – how they present themselves to the world, or how they feel the world sees them. At the end of the semester their artistic creations were shared in a "gallery" showing.

Cyber Writer Project

Over the course of the semester the female participants kept ongoing blogs/journals. The Girl Cyber Writers had full control over the content and design of their blog/journals, but were asked to at least write one entry per week. Entry prompts were suggested by me and by the girl participants. Girls were also asked to share their

other cyber creations like Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and Tumblr blogs. Girls also participated in solo interviews.

Coding and Initial Findings

The majority of my field work ended at the end of the fall semester, December 2012. I began to sift through the data collected during my field work, including field notes, videos, photographs, solo interviews, the play script, girls' blogs/journals, girls' web creations (Tumblr, Facebook, etc.), and self-portraits. During the analysis of this data I relied heavily on Johnny Saldaña's *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. I completed two cycles of data coding. As Saldaña explains: "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (3). In my first cycle of coding, all written artifacts and videos used In Vivo Coding: coding using the language of research participants and emerging from the data. I chose this specific coding method as I wished to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (74). I next completed a second round of coding focusing on "themeing the data" (139). As my dissertation focuses on the concept of girlhood, I examined the data specifically attempting to identify what girlhood is "about and/or what it means" (139). In this round I looked for the participants to define girl, telling me what it means: girl is _____, being a girl means _____. After the final focus group and during the transcription and coding process, I continued to work with a small group of five of the original fifteen participants as my central girl-theorists. We met three times during spring 2013 in theory building sessions where we analyzed video documentation of the girls' work and artistic creations from the semester. I served as facilitator asking the girls to examine the data for

underlying themes and messages about girlhood. Several prominent themes began to develop in these rounds of data analysis, coding, and theory building.

When examining the girls' consumption of mass media representations of girlhood and their own production of girl-culture, it became clear that they are aware of the manipulative methods of media. Their awareness of these methods does not mean the girls are able to escape or subvert the stereotypical representations of girls. In some cases the girls seem happy to find a category/label to reside under. Whatever category of girl they may use, I believe their awareness that these categories are socially created and then performed by girls is significant. Three prominent ideas came to the forefront of my research findings:

- Separate place apart: Status as "other" makes their single-sex school a place of safety and temporary escape, and rehearsal. The theatre classroom extends this separate place to a space for rehearsal and experimentation of girlhood.
- Girl as "other": Girl participants recognize they belong to a secondary class or hold a position of "other" when compared to their male peers, and that this status continues into adulthood.
- Humor as rebellion: Much of the theatrical work created by the Girl Theatre Performers utilized humor, specifically satire, to illuminate disparity experienced by girls or to expose supposed fixed gender beliefs as performed, social creations.

Organization of the Study

Rather than organizing the chapters by each of the three projects, I have chosen to use prominent themes as an organizational method instead. I begin first by examining

location, then research participant, and finally the participants' various creations. While my original intention was that each project (which resulted in my primary data sets) would have equal weight and significance in the study, I believe it important to note several things. The course that served as the central (and in fact only) site of recruitment for research participants was a Theatre course. The blog/journal/cyber creations and self-portraits were artistic creations made by each individual girl participant. The majority of class time was spent building the class ensemble, developing theatrical vocabulary, and devising the theatrical project. While I intended to give equal time and consideration to all of the data groups, as I wished to explore girlhood through a variety of methods, in the end some data sets took prominence over others for mixed reasons. I present the data in order of the weight I believe I gave them during my analysis.

Drama (Class) Work

Drama work consisted of two subsets of data collected from the girls' work over the semester. The first group consisted of live and recorded performances of the theatrical work conducted by the girls. I tried as much as possible to privilege this data as it was my original intention to focus on girlhood as performed, rather than relying heavily on the written word. I assert that the performing arts, specifically the moments of performance, serve as a mode of communication as valuable as the written word. I examined videos of daily theatre games, improvisations, presentations of written solo and group work, rehearsals, and the final sharing of the devised play. The second group resulted from the first group. This subset included the written record of the work the girls devised. Scenes that began as improvisation eventually found their way into script form and then the girls revised and perfected them. This also includes records of their

solo work (monologues, poems, etc.). Additionally, the notes taken during The Girls Summit, letters and other communication to me from the girls, and research materials brought in by the girls, complete this second subset of data.

Solo Interviews

I provided a digital recorder and a set of fourteen interview questions[1] to each girl. I asked the girls to review the questions, take some time to contemplate their responses, and then record their answers to the questions at their own pace[2]. Thirteen out of the fifteen girls returned the recorders to me. Their solo interview responses varied in length from ten minutes to sixty-plus minutes, with most falling around the thirty minute mark. Originally I intended to listen to their responses and provide each girl with a follow-up set of interview questions; unfortunately we ran out of time at the end of the semester. The interviews still provided a wealth of material about the girls' understanding and perceptions of girlhood. While we had many class discussions that covered a lot of questions about what it means to be a girl in today's society, the interviews provided a safe method for self-expression without the constrictions of time limits or the presence of an adult[3]. The interviews also demonstrated the multiplicity of girlhood as each solo interview revealed "different 'voices' threaded through narratives" rather than one singular voice (Sorsoli and Tolman 495). Gender Studies scholars Lynn

[1] Interview handout with directions and questions is included in appendix.
[2] Much in the manner of Dana Edell's "slow motion interview" presented in her 2010 dissertation.
[3] Here I was inspired by Gerry Bloustien's *Girl Making* where she provided her research participants a video camera, time, and space to record their experiences.

Sorsoli and Deborah L. Tolman[4], who both specialize in adolescent sexuality and gender development, explain that people

> pass regularly from one 'state of mind' to another many times in a day, often without realizing it, and particularly in response to difficult relational experiences. Multiple, even contradictory, perspectives on any given experience (which can be "voiced" in concert in narratives) are not only acceptable but are to be anticipated." (497)

The shifts from one "state of mind" to another as well as the "multiple and contradictory perspectives" found in each girl's interview exposed a particularly significant aspect of contemporary girlhood which I discuss in Chapter Five and Six.

Self-Portrait Sculptures

As I have previously mentioned, this visual art project asked the girls to use a variety of artistic expressions to create a 3-D sculpture self-portrait. The outside of the sculptures were supposed to demonstrate how the girls portray themselves to the outside world, or how they feel the outside world views them. The inside of the sculptures were to reveal the "real" girl inside. The girls could share the part of themselves they did not share with the world, the unexpected, and the unknown. The choices of sculpture base, content shared, and the methods of presentation presented illuminating commentary on girlhood and identity construction.

[4] In their article, "Hearing Voices: Listening for Multiplicity and Movement in Interview Data," Sorsoli and Tolman build on the interview analysis techniques that are part of The Listening Guide a qualitative method developed by Brown and Gilligan in their psychological work with women and girls in the 1990s. The Guide was developed specifically to approach and understand the "marginalized and understudied experiences" of women and girls who are often "not included in research purported to be about 'people'" (498).

Daily Performances of Girlhood

This set of data involved recorded observations, pictures, and video recordings of the girls in class while not performing. I took notes on fashion choices, peer interactions and negotiations, conversations with peers, and student/facilitator exchanges whenever possible. I found the relaxed moments that occurred between the girls during creation time and down time particularly powerful and informative in this data set.

Cyber Writing

A lack of access to the internet and computers, along with other unexpected issues, created limitations that hindered the ability for the girls to express themselves through digital, cyber creations. The school, equipped with wireless internet, provided a set of computers in each classroom. Each Friday I had planned that the girls would add to their blogs, as well as use the internet for research purposes. Knowing that not all the girls had a computer and internet access at home, we spent a class period setting up their blogs. This proved difficult as the school's web security blocked many blog sites. Once I dealt with the security issues we discovered the class computers used Internet Explorer rather than Chrome, preventing blog creation on many blog sites. Once all the girls finally had blogs created, new issues arose including girls' lack of tech experience, wireless outages, computer issues, forgotten passwords, and loss of Friday class time due to special school events. Eventually after about a month of struggling, I purchased composition notebooks for those girls who wished to keep their "blog" the old-fashioned way. Girls who preferred to keep their blogs online continued their work. Out of the fifteen girls, only four of them chose to stick with their blogs.

One of the solo interview questions asked the girls how they use the internet to express themselves. Four of the girls stated outright that they did not use the internet as a method of creative self-expression. Only three expressed that they found the internet a vital method of self-expression. The remaining girls fell somewhere in between, with a lot of them discussing using the internet as a primary site of knowledge exploration rather than a place of creation, creativity, and self-expression. I gathered significant information from Ruby, Melissa, and Brooklyn (pseudonyms) as they relied heavily on various internet websites for self-expression; however, insight about the rest of the girls remained spotty and sporadic with this method. Due to these circumstances this data set remained incomplete, and netnography ended up an inconsistent way to analyze the girls' understanding of girlhood.

In organizing my dissertation I chose to discuss the Theatre Performer Project primarily in *Chapter Four: A Diary of Girlhood*, the Visual Artist Project mainly in *Chapter Three: Girl Introduced* and *Chapter Five: Girl Theorist*, and the Cyber Writer Project sprinkled between Chapters Three and Five.

Chapter Two: A Room of Our Own

This chapter introduces the all-girls school as a site of research and experimentation. I explore the idea of a transitional space, or "learning space," created by our theatre classroom which allowed our art-making and subsequent theorizing.

Chapter Three: Girl Introduced

This chapter introduces the research participants, their backgrounds, and the journey they experienced. The girls come alive on the page through their own words, *I am* poems, and thick description of their daily and theatrical performances. The Visual

Artist Project and Cyber Writer Project creations also help to develop a complete picture of each girl. The complexity of girlhood as represented by the girl participants becomes evident in these girl portraits.

Chapter Four: A Diary of Girlhood

This chapter shares the process of devising an original theatrical piece about girlhood with the girl research participants. I explore and analyze the script the girls created based on their theatre work in class. Emerging themes begin to develop.

Chapter Five: Girl Theorists

This chapter presents the theory building process with the girl-theorists. I introduce and explain the development of the girls' central theory of girlhood as well as my own formulations. I provide a blended presentation of our theories of contemporary girlhood.

Chapter Six: Girl Becomings

This concluding chapter considers recent trends surrounding "the year of the girl" and synthesizes major findings while examining what was not addressed in our work. I review our work and findings to determine what was left out, unexamined, and the resulting questions that follow. I then ask what might come next in my research.

Conclusion

Limitations

In no way do I wish to suggest that my study speaks for all girls across the US. I believe this to be one of the larger limitations of my study. The US population is incredibly diverse in many different ways including ethnicity, socio-economic status, family structures, geographic location, origin, and education level. While it was my hope

that the participant composition of my study would be as diverse in all of these aspects as possible, many factors go into creating a participant group including my own geographic location, access to certain groups, and gaining parental permission. The student body available at the school site where my study took place served as the first narrowing of possible research participants. This population was further limited by the twenty-three students placed in my theatre class by the school administration. Finally it was these students (and their parents/guardians) who became the final arbiters of the make-up of participants as they volunteered to participate (with parent/guardian permission) beyond the theatre class in my research study[5]. In the face of this limitation, my study does not seek to make any large universal declarations about girlhood. Instead, I emphasize the importance and significance of what can be learned about girlhood from girls through artistic and theatrical expressions by utilizing a hybrid interdisciplinary research methodology.

My original intention to integrate digital media along with web-based modes of communication into my study was hampered by several issues. While it may seem technology has become integrated in nearly every part of our lives, access to technology requires above all the funds to purchase and maintain it. The school my participants attended is a Title I public school where eighty percent of the students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. In many cases access to technology like computers, smart phones, and internet access was not available in the homes of the participants. This limited the time these students had access to technology to keep a blog or communicate via web-

[5] I discuss this entire process in Chapter Two

based modes to school hours. Use of class laptops in school focused on academic classes. As I mentioned before, this reduced both the amount of data I collected in this project and in several cases the participants kept their blog in a hard-copy bound journal form that they turned into me once a week. In addition to access to technology for digital creations being limited by monetary issues, as my participants were minors, parental/guardian permission or lack of permission meant several participants were not allowed to use the various web-based technologies as forms of artistic/individual expression.

The minor status of my participants brings with it additional issues with regards to the study as a whole, but specifically with regards to the use of digital platforms. I do not wish to violate my participants' privacy or identity and this relatively new form of media is fraught with unknown issues. I had to navigate this carefully being sure to gain permission from parents/guardians and school administration.

Significance

Various fields of study including sociology, cultural studies, media studies, and girlhood studies now value girl-created culture as integral to understanding girlhood. My study continues this trend to better determine the role girls play in their own construction. Not only do I examine artifacts of girl-created culture recognizing their importance and placing them at the heart of my study, I also look at girls' representations as a performative practice. In doing so, I connect girlhood studies to Butler's gender performance theories and to the field of performance studies. Additionally, I assert the importance of creative space and theatrical/artistic practices as tools with which girls can examine and challenge girlhood and gender discourses,

building on the work of other theatrical facilitator-researchers (Gallagher, 2000; Marin, 2005; Wong, 2008; Edell, 2010). The adolescent female participants serve as active writers and performers of girlhood and, through their writing and performances, demonstrate their understanding of what it means to be a girl. More than that, my study positions the adolescent female participants as active interpreters and theorists of girlhood. In viewing the girls as theorists I demonstrate their capabilities while honoring their experiences and knowledge, which is something I believe should happen more both in academia and in everyday life.

CHAPTER 2

A ROOM OF OUR OWN

"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write . . ."
- Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

The Facts

The Girls' Institute for Future Leaders[6], located in the heart of a large metropolitan area in a southwestern state in the United States, opened its doors in 2010 as a single-sex public charter school. The second non-boarding, all-girls school in the state, the Institute serves as the first and only all-girls public school in the state. The school year I conducted my field research (2012-2013), one hundred and seven girls attended the school. Seventy percent of the school identifies as Hispanic/Latino[7], with eighty percent of the school's population qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The girls wear a uniform of a purple short-sleeved polo shirt with the school logo embroidered on it, and either a purple pleated plaid skirt or solid black or gray pants/shorts[8]. A small school with seven full-time teachers, three administrators, a handful of support staff, and two administrative assistants, the school is housed and run by a large non-profit

[6] Location and name of the school, as well as the names of all administrators, teachers and students have been changed for confidentiality

[7] The full demographic breakdown: Asian or Pacific Islander (1.8%), Black or African American (8.4%), Hispanic (70%), American Indian (2.8%), White, Not Hispanic (16.8%). 7% of the school were identified as qualifying for special education.

[8] Additional uniform requirements include: Sweaters/sweatshirts may be solid black, white, or gray (no patterns) or the school logo sweaters/sweatshirts. Pants should not have any patterns, artwork or holes. No sweatpants, blue denim or cargo-style pants. No spandex, basketball, or sweat shorts. Shorts must reach the knee or longer. Heels on footwear can be no higher than two inches and boots must be solid colors. Jewelry/hair/makeup requirements include: Only stud or small hoop earrings. Single, appropriate necklaces or bracelets are allowed. No facial piercings. Tattoos must be covered. Headwear is not permitted except for religious reasons.

organization in the state which serves at-risk[9] girls through a variety of programs including a therapeutic group home, transitional living, and a home for pregnant and parenting girls. While the non-profit sponsors and oversees the charter school, the Girls' Institute for Future Leaders is treated as a separate entity and its students are not clients of the non-profit.[10] The school, tuition free, opens its doors to anyone in the larger metropolitan area and has no enrollment requirements except a desire to attend the school. The school describes itself as "a special place where young women will be empowered to find their voices as leaders in their own lives, in their communities, and in the world," and lays out further goals in its mission statement: "to provide young women an opportunity to achieve high school and college academic success simultaneously while nurturing self-confidence and developing leadership skills in an academically rigorous environment."[11]

The Neighborhood

The school sits on the southeastern border of the Granada[12] neighborhood, one of just over a dozen neighborhoods that make up this large metropolitan city. The neighborhood measures approximately twenty square miles with a population of about 160,000 people. The median income hovers at $40,000/year with 45% of the population without a high school degree. Just under half of this population self-identifies as Caucasian, with around 35% Latino; African-American follows as the next largest racial

[9] As described on their website, the girls they serve are in need of assistance to deal with issues of abuse, neglect, teen pregnancy, teen parenting, and behavioral and/or mental health issues.
[10] This of course does not mean that the students at the Institute are issue free, just that they are not clients of the non-profit while attending the school.
[11] In order to protect the anonymity of research participants, I have chosen not to cite the school's website.
[12] Name has been changed

group, then American Indian followed by Asian, then those who identify as two or more races.

The Granada neighborhood cuts through a large, population dense, diverse part of the city forming an arrow like shape on the map with the spine of the arrow following one of the largest freeways in the state. While social, financial, and other population demographics can help develop a picture of the school and its surrounding neighborhood, this area (like many in the city) defies simple categorizations and descriptions. The school sits on the border of this neighborhood, and another neighborhood can be accessed by simply crossing the busy city street that travels north/south. The Mountain View[13] neighborhood contains some of the city's largest resort/hotels, upscale shopping, and expensive housing. Here the median income climbs approximately $15,000/year, the Caucasian population increases about 12%, while the population density drops 4,000 people per square mile. The school sits at the intersection of these two neighborhoods increasing the diversity of its students and neighborhood residents with regards to their socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic background, and ability to access commercial and cultural businesses/organizations. The fluidity of movement between and across neighborhoods, means one can experience the full spectrum of experiences and environments offered by the city with a short car, bus, or light rail ride from the school. While the surrounding neighborhoods hold a vast array of possibilities, whether or not the students and residents experience these opportunities can often be determined by income, education, and mobility levels.

[13] Name has been changed

At the large and busy intersection nearest the school, on the northwest corner a one-story small stucco covered strip mall houses a nail shop, a sub sandwich restaurant, a Japanese fast food eatery, as well as a check cashing business and a wireless devices store. A McDonalds sits just next to the strip mall. A large expansive parking lot behind these leads to an unused larger and older strip mall now long shuttered, a familiar site at many corners in this city and the surrounding suburbs. Opposite this on the northeast corner sits an independent mattress store in a non-descript familiar beige square one-story building. On the south side of this intersection, some of the city's history and cultural identity can be felt: both corners contain auto body shops housed in cinderblock one-story buildings with large signs in bright colors. On the southeast corner, a red and white striped building advertises antiques, and next door the auto body shop with the bright red awning assures prospective customers they will "get it done fast" on its tall yellow sign. Across the busy five-lane city street, on the southwest corner another auto body and repair shop, painted in a bold blue and white, lists its services in large black lettering on its white wall. Just next door a flooring store catches the public's eye with its bright chartreuse and orange stripes. Right behind the flooring store, a small family run Mexican food restaurant serves traditional fare from its window. Between the sidewalks and the buildings on this corner the ground is not landscaped and occasionally a weed peeks through the dirt.

It is a vivid and diverse intersection representative of many in the city. Older buildings still habited by family businesses that have resided there for decades mix with failed shopping centers replaced by newer strip malls with carefully manicured corners of beige gravel, beige stucco walls, and desert plants. At each corner people wait at bus

stops to travel to work, school, and home as large billboard advertisements tower over them. Power lines and streetlights fight for the sky with palm trees and street signs. Cars of all makes, models, and ages travel up and down these city streets, some of the busiest in the city. Travel zips and slows, ebbs and flows, with its frustrated drivers stuck at lights or behind the buses as the waiting crowds climb off and on and continue their journeys in various directions and down the smaller side streets. Traveling down the center of the street heading east to west a gleaming, silver light rail train winds itself through this neighborhood to the city's downtown and across multiple cities in each direction until it ends in a heap of expansion construction at each end.

Houses surround the Institute, located on a side street one block away from the large intersection described above. Mostly built in the 1950s, these small single family homes in the Granada neighborhood create an eclectic picture composed of cinderblocks, stucco, brick or wood. Painted white, grey, sage green, brown, beige, cream, yellow, and even rust-red, most are one story with large front yards composed of mostly dirt. Large palm, Palo Verde, and olive trees decorate the yards along with desert bushes of all sizes. Most houses up and down these streets lack any formal landscaping (or have lost signs of previous landscaping intent), instead neatly maintained dirt lots have a tree here or there; sometimes the trees stand straight and proud in the center of the yard planted within the last few years evidenced by planter's stakes and supporting twine. Other times, the trees as old as the house tower over the yard still showing signs of strength, while others lean and meander across the yards, their branches marked by years of children climbing and swinging. The weight of their years lays heavy on these trees, with their thick trunks straining to hold the branches aloft. The landscape seems a sea of

brown, beige and muted greens with the occasional bloom of bright yellow, orange, violet, and white flowers from Mexican Birds of Paradise, Oleanders, Bougainvillea, Baja Ruellias, and Green Feathery Sennas. Sometimes a field of orange Cape Marigolds covers an entire yard or empty lot. The bushes appear haphazardly at corners of yards or beside the houses, one single bright jewel in a desert of brown, or as remnants of a border hedge now depleted by the lack of water and hot sun. Cars line the sidewalk-less streets, and fill the carports or dirt driveways. City trash cans and recycling bins in army green and robin's egg blue can be found in a neat line beside each house. Occasionally an empty lot, a newly built single family home, or recently constructed apartment building disrupt the flow of the neighborhood sticking out like sore thumbs acting as reminders of "progress" creeping in on history.

Across the busy street the school backs onto, in the Mountain View neighborhood residents hold on to their history tightly. The neighborhood began with wood frame and cinderblock bungalows built in the 1920s, followed by other houses built in sixteen different architectural styles through the 1950s. In 1996 residents obtained a historic district designation. Lush green lawns bordered by white picket fences or neatly cut hedges frame the well-kept small houses. Occasionally a weed free desert landscaped residence will appear with its beige gravel lawn complete with a cactus or two to break up the wave of green lawns. Tidy yards and neatly trimmed trees and plants line the streets. Cars are kept mostly in carports with only a few parked on the street.

The School

Just a short walk one street away from the large intersection on the southwest corner, steps away from the small Mexican restaurant's window and across from the auto

body repair shop, five newer one story buildings and one two story building painted in the colors of the desert – sand, grey, reddish brown and sage green surround a small parking lot. The campus houses the large non-profit social services organization mentioned earlier which oversees the Girls' Institute for Future Leaders. The campus is small and resembles a generic business complex with well-kept landscaping and a small parking lot in between the buildings with covered parking. All that is seen of the campus from the parking lot are the front office entrances of a one story building and the two story building, with a gated area next to the two story building. The school resides on the second floor. Upon entering the building, a waiting room greets you with indoor plants and a large seating area. A lovely young woman with long brown hair and a professional smile asks visitors to sign the guest log and take a visitor badge. She then instructs the visitor where to go, or calls the requested employee to greet the visitor.

A staircase leads to the Institute's doors on the second floor. Past the large wooden double doors, two large light grey and cream desks sit in front of three offices that belong to the principal, dean of curriculum, and dean of students. At the first front desk closest to the entrance sits a smiling, short, dark-haired, toffee-skinned woman named Rosa. A parent volunteer, she coordinates the parent association and often is the first to greet students, parents, and visitors as they enter. At the next desk sits a heavy-set woman with a short blonde bob and an often serious expression: Beverly, the school's secretary/office manager. Teachers, students, and administrators often line up beside her desk with questions or requests. To the left a white hallway lined with six classrooms and a small teacher lounge curves with a turn to the right that ends at a door leading to a staircase to the campus cafeteria. To the right a series of grey cubicle offices house a

space for the large copy machine, and work space for several support staff including the special education coordinator. Just past the cubicles, one more classroom completes the small school. On the walls of the school, make-shift bulletin boards brightly display student work, posters offering after school clubs, pictures of students of the month, and framed pictures of school events including panoramic portraits of the entire school and each of its inaugural classes.

The Principal and an Offer

I first climbed the staircase to the Institute in late July, just before the start of the new school year. After signing in at reception downstairs and receiving directions to the school, I pinned my visitor's badge onto my black shirt, climbed the stairs and walked through the double doors making my way to Beverly's desk. I explained I was here to meet with the principal, Ms. Masterson. Sitting nervously at a chair, I waited for Beverly to announce my arrival. This meeting had happened very quickly, and I did not feel as prepared as I wanted. The day before a colleague of mine from Arizona State University's Theatre for Youth graduate program emailed me. The year before, she developed an afterschool program exploring female characters in children's literature using theatre with six of the Institute's students. She had graduated and moved out of state, so when Ms. Masterson contacted her about continuing the program, knowing I was looking for a site to complete my dissertation research, she put me in contact with the principal. I responded the same day thinking I would have to wait several days or weeks to set up a proposal meeting. Instead I received an email from the principal asking to schedule a meeting for the very next day.

After only waiting for a minute or two, the third office door opened and Ms. Masterson nearly flew out of the office toward me. A tall, fit woman in her fifties, Ms. Masterson exuded an air of urgent energy. Dressed in an A-line shin length black skirt and white blouse cinched with a large oversize black belt that she accessorized with several pieces of silver jewelry, she crossed toward me, a mass of curly shoulder length reddish-brown hair bouncing with each step, before I even had the chance to stand up from my chair. With a mild accent, which she would later identify as Irish, she greeted me with a warm hello and ushered me into her office. I stepped into a small corner office with a desk covered from edge to edge with papers, files, and books and took a seat at a medium size round table with four chairs. Two large windows looking down onto the campus took up two of the walls, while a bookshelf filled with books, framed pictures, and various knick knacks filled the third wall; finally a large white smart board occupied the fourth. Ms. Masterson introduced Ms. Lerner, the dean of curriculum, who was already sitting at the table. Ms. Lerner, a small woman perhaps in her late thirties with a short brown bob dressed in neatly pressed light blue knee length collared dress with a matching belt, greeted me with a smile and a handshake. “So tell us about your project,” Ms. Masterson said as she sat down at the table.

Just under an hour later, I had completed explaining my dissertation proposal and had committed to teaching a semester long theatre class at the Institute. After hearing my proposal, Ms. Masterson excitedly offered her school as a site for my research study. She presented me two options: I could complete the project as an afterschool program or I could teach a theatre course over the semester recruiting participants from the course. After briefly contemplating my options I chose the latter as

it would hopefully reduce participant dropout and infrequent attendance which can often happen in an afterschool program.

The details of the offer and how my research would be conducted on the campus were quickly decided upon as well. I turned down the Institute's offer of payment for teaching the class, as it somehow felt wrong to profit from conducting my research. Instead I asked that they put money aside to allow me to take the class on a field trip or two to see local theatre productions. All the students placed in the class were to be given the option of Theatre as an elective with no student forced to take the class. I asked that the class be capped at twenty if possible to allow for easier ensemble building. Finally, I requested that the class be free of letter grades, and instead use pass/fail. While I had originally intended to recruit participants for an afterschool program, I would now be recruiting from my theatre class. I intended to develop a course curriculum for the semester that included the specific activities of my dissertation proposal and would teach the basics of ensemble building, improvisation, and acting/devising. I planned on informing the class about my research at the beginning of the semester, explaining what a dissertation was and what my goals were. Once the class had begun to develop as an ensemble and I had begun to build trust with the students, I would ask for volunteers to participate as research subjects. I will only discuss the research volunteers and analyze their participation, performance, and work in my study.

The Class

The new school year began in just over a week, and I quickly went to work adapting my dissertation plans to a semester long high school theatre course. The school's classes followed a block schedule, with periods 1, 3, and 5 meeting Mondays and

Wednesdays, and 2, 4, 6, and 7 meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays. These class periods lasted 99 minutes, with two additional classes on Mondays, a 55 minute Advisory class and a 43 minute Academic Support class. Every Wednesday school was released 90 minutes earlier for teacher planning. On Fridays periods 1-7 met for 49 minutes. My theatre class was scheduled for 6th period. Since I was teaching a college course that met during the scheduled time on Fridays, Ms. Masterson arranged for Friday class to be supervised by a staff member. On Tuesdays and Thursdays I would lead the theatre class, and on Fridays the students would be able to use the class computers to create and update their blogs for the class, as well as conduct research when required.

My class would take place in one of the English teacher's classrooms who had a prep period during sixth period. Ms. Fitch, a second year Teach for America fellow, welcomed me into her classroom graciously. In her early twenties with a dark brown pixie haircut, minimal make-up, and a crisp tailored fashion sense, Ms. Fitch would prove very helpful to me as I negotiated my way into the school for the semester. Our nicely sized square shaped shared classroom suited an English teacher well. Two small alcoves provided space for a teacher's desk and a series of bookshelves filled top to bottom with books, as well as a sink with cupboards for storage. Five large round tables filled the classroom and provided an ideal situation for group work and conversations. As a theatre teacher, however, I found the classroom slightly limiting as the round tables did not allow for any significant movement around the tables. It became our class ritual to turn the tables on their sides and roll them into the alcoves and against the walls, carving out as much open space for our work together as possible. As school began Ms. Fitch and the administration informed me that it would take time for the final

enrollment of each class to settle. This process took approximately three weeks, as students enrolled after the start of school and the school made last minute additions to elective offerings to balance class sizes with student graduation requirements and personal preferences.

A Room of Our Own

While the theatre class would count for credit toward graduation and take place in a traditional school classroom, I wanted and needed to create a distance between the familiar school/classroom and the space where we would work for the semester. When the students entered sixth period and moved the tables out of sight and mind, the comfortable position of student behind the desk disappeared replaced instead by an open space, both literal and figurative, where they could express themselves and their ideas with their whole beings:

> Somewhere that offers a fresh perspective on experience that would allow us to undo some of the damage left in the wake of binary thinking and use new understandings of experience to create concepts and pedagogies capable of making more of the experience of the learning self. (Ellsworth 3)

As a theatre educator with several years of experience teaching at the high school and college levels, I desired to lead the students away from traditional expectations of learning which often position the student as a passive receptacle to be filled with knowledge by the all-knowing superior teacher. I have seen firsthand how this approach can impede critical thinking and self-expression. This limits learning experiences to rote memorization with clear, concise right and wrong answers. Nicholson explains:

> Transforming highly regulated spaces into creative performance and workshop spaces is not just an interesting artistic challenge. It involves reconstructing how space is conceived, temporarily overlaying its codes with alternative spatial practices . . . related to drama this requires practitioners to understand how discourses of power and authority are constructed and reproduced in space, and therefore, how they can be rewritten for the duration of drama and beyond. (128-129)

The purpose of my study is not to impose my knowledge and experience of girlhood onto or into the girl participants, but rather to engage them to share their experiences so we can learn and understand contemporary girlhood together. Educational scholar Elizabeth Ellsworth explores the ways "anomalous places of learning" might help us to "think of pedagogy not in relation to knowledge as a thing made but to knowledge in the making" (1). Ellsworth's idea of a constant continuous process of learning that never stops intrigued me in its application to the type of environment I wished to create. While Ellsworth explores places outside of the school classroom, I questioned whether or not changing the environmental structure of the classroom, replacing the expected activities inside the classroom, and attempting to equalize the power between teacher and student would create the kind of transitional space needed. Ellsworth asserts:

> Transitional space does not appear spontaneously or simply because we will it to, but it does exist always and everywhere as potential. Whether it is in fact actualized . . . depends, in part, on how an environment holds stabilizing dynamics such as habit, foundations, and already-achieved

> "knowledge" with *flexibility*. A flexible, responsive holding environment meets the self-in-transition with curiosity and playfulness. (32-33)

While physically transforming the classroom into this "flexible" space by simply moving tables and chairs became the first step each day to spark ourselves-in-transition, the full construction of a Room of Our Own required other elastic components. Together we needed to compose our own style of co-learning, while I worked to develop an ever-adaptable curriculum outline that would provide sufficient experiences for the creation of new knowledges of girlhood.

Our roles

First and foremost, I wanted the girls to feel like we were co-learners in our exploration of girlhood through our theatre class. Given the complex power dynamics between teacher and student, accomplishing the shared status of co-learner would be a difficult and constant process. I began by establishing some small changes to the traditional classroom. First, I asked that the girls call me by my first name. Removing the formal title of Ms. Minarsich served both to place the girls on equal footing with me, and at the same time subtly work to distance our room/space from the school. While we could not physically leave the school (except on field trips), we could depart it virtually through small shifts. Second, the specter of letter grades and the accompanying power they bestow on the teacher was diminished by switching to a pass/fail structure. True, the power to pass or fail a student still placed me in a position of elevated power, but the change did help to establish that I would not be the arbiter of self-expression, doling out As or Bs for their creativity, acting, or participation. I put it simply, if they tried and participated they would pass the class. Taking risks in a theatre class can be difficult

enough, without the added stress of grade anxiety. Next I explained that my expectations of their behavior and language would probably be more relaxed than in their other classes. For instance, when writing (especially in their blogs/journals) I asked that they expressed themselves in their preferred style – in other words, they would not have to stick to academic language and expectations and could feel free to use slang or the abbreviated online vernacular. I may have to come to them for translation, but I wouldn't fail them for incorrect grammar or spelling. I explained that while our overarching conversation for the semester would revolve around girlhood, the subjects we explored would come from them and that meant we would look at controversial, at times uncomfortable topics. We would decide together what to explore and no one had to participate if she were uncomfortable with a specific topic. Finally, while I would facilitate our work together, where we ended up in the end would be a group decision. We would decide how to culminate and present our work at the end of the semester. We would all conduct research on agreed upon topics, bring ideas and stories to each other, and move forward based on class consensus.

Once the enrollment of the class stabilized to twenty-three girls, we worked to establish the guidelines of our learning journey as co-learners. During one session we developed four guidelines we could return to in order to remind us of where we wanted to go and how to get there. I asked them to come prepared with two or three requests they would make of their fellow co-learners, with the idea that they would be performing in front of each other and sharing personal creative projects. I presented three of my own ideas for possible guidelines, then in small groups they shared their ideas and narrowed their ideas to three; finally each group sent a representative to the whiteboard and wrote

their ideas down. Together we examined our ideas and grouped similar guidelines together. After much discussion and revising the following guidelines became our class compass:

1. Nurture each other with support and encouragement
2. Provide positive feedback and suggestions
3. No inappropriate laughter
4. Take risks and act like no one is watching

I asked that they consider adding two things I felt were very important to these four guidelines. To number one I suggested that they add the word yourself, so that they would not forget about taking care of themselves during this process: Nurture *yourself* and each other with support and encouragement. I explained that they had to advocate for themselves during class by speaking up when necessary, taking a break when they needed it, and remembering to not judge themselves too harshly. We were learning together. To number four, I presented the addition of a question they could ask themselves during our activities together: Do I need to step up or step back?[14] In other words frequently check in with yourself by asking if you are taking risks and participating whenever possible. If you aren't, step up. If you are, ask yourself if you need to step back and encourage someone else to participate. These additions were discussed and agreed upon. The girls then asked that I be open to hearing from them on an individual basis should they need to discuss any concerns or personal issues they did not

[14] This was adapted from my collaboration with my PhD co-hort, Enza Giannone, during our work together developing our own curriculum for a course titled Theatre for Social Change we both taught after taking a facilitator workshop together on Theatre of the Oppressed. She used the term Step up, step back in her syllabus. I appropriated it from her with many thanks.

want to bring up in front of the whole class. I assured them I would try my utmost to be available, understanding, and approachable; I hoped they would come to me for anything, large or small, or just to chat.

This request for understanding from the girls reinforced for me the complex nature of my role in this project. Not only was I the assigned teacher of the class (despite my desire to reinvent the notion of that role), I was also actively conducting a research project and hoping that many of them would agree to participate. The balance between those two roles was constantly in flux during the semester. I wanted to establish a relationship of co-learner with the students, but still needed to provide structure and safety for students. Should problems arise I would be the one to lead the negotiations and preserve the sanctity of Our Room. Not only did I have to navigate power dynamics between myself and the students from the position as instructor, I also had to come to terms with other, often unquestioned, privileges that would provide me with power advantages over the girls and at the same time distance me from them.

My class consisted of twenty-three girls ranging in age from fourteen to seventeen; seventeen self-identified as Latina, two as Asian-American, two as Caucasian, and one as African-American. While I grew up in a lower middle-class family and might share a similar socio-economic background as many of my students, there were many differences between us. I grew up in suburban neighborhoods and attended predominately Caucasian public schools, unlike my students who were living near the downtown center of a large city and attending an all-girls charter school. Now in my mid-thirties, I would describe myself as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, single, feminist theatre educator and artist. I had experienced a very specific girlhood growing

up in the eighties and nineties that was vastly different than what the girls I was now working with experience. I had spent the last four years studying theatre, performance theory, feminism(s), and gender studies while creating theatre and focusing on girlhood studies. During my studies I had developed specific ideas about girlhood. The question now was how do I negotiate my own privilege, position of power, background, and baggage while remaining committed to my role as a co-learner?

In her article, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering," Ellsworth describes facing similar issues while teaching a course called "Media and Anti-Racist Pedagogies." She questions the discourse created around critical pedagogy asserting that it has resulted in harmful myths, and critiques the now familiar terms of "empowerment," "student voice," "dialogue," "and critical reflection." While the exact purposes and goals of my project do not match exactly with the course Ellsworth taught, we both experienced similar epiphanies during our respective semesters. Early in the semester I showed the girls a video of a trailer created to advertise the "One Billion Rising" anti-violence against women campaign created by Eve Ensler, author of *The Vagina Monologues*. I explained to the girls that the topic of violence against girls and women was an example of what we could focus on in the class, depending on their interests. In preparing for a theatre game we would play in class the same week, I had created a list of terms and phrases familiar to girlhood. They included things like "girls can't throw," "training bras," "sit like a lady," and others. These seemed universal to me as I wrote them on small slips of paper so the girls could pull them out of a bowl and create frozen images depicting the term. After watching the girls create these images in small groups and then try to guess what the term was, I felt like their work had been off somehow. It did not seem to engage them in

any significant way; no illuminating discussion followed the exploration of the images. As I reflected on the week's progress it soon dawned on me that by bringing in the video clip and the predetermined terms, I was limiting the co-learning possible in our class. I was leading the conversation toward my own understanding of girlhood. Ellsworth explains the difficulties raised when the teacher carries the responsibility to "bring subjugated knowledges to light" when "no teacher is free of these learned and internalized oppressions" (307-308). She realized she did not know racism better than her students, and I realized I did not understand contemporary girlhood better than my students (308).

I quickly came to understand I would have to shift my own thinking so my class could move in the direction of student-led learning. I had to let go of the idea that I was an expert on girlhood; I had sought out a research site where I could explore girlhood *with* girls and develop a nuanced understanding of today's girlhood directly from the girls and their creative work. From then on the ideas/terms/topics explored in class would come from the girls. As much as I wanted to equalize the position between myself and the students, if I continued choosing topics I deemed connected to girlhood or a girl's experience I would deny the actual experiences of the girls in my class and perpetuate the unequal power dynamics between teacher and student so deeply entrenched in an educational environment. In creating my dissertation proposal I had chosen the questions I wished to focus on, now I needed to learn to listen to the girls and leave my preconceived notions behind.

Wanting to create a Room of Our Own, a safe space for exploration and expression, and actually succeeding at it are two very different things. Ellsworth

discusses her realization that the classroom she had created and assumed was a safe place for all her students to speak equally and freely with equal power in influencing class decisions was not and could not be until the myth of rational classroom dialogue was acknowledged and new "classroom practices that confronted the power dynamics inside and outside of [the] classroom" were developed (315). Again, while the circumstances of Ellsworth's class and those of my own were not exactly alike, enough similarities existed to make me question what else I could do to challenge the myths perpetuated by critical pedagogy – a pedagogy that I had come to believe in firmly during my years of using theatre to explore social issues, but now had come to question as my own experiences, and those of my students, challenged its doctrine. While this was an ongoing struggle, which I will discuss in later chapters, I settled on the following guidelines for myself as a researcher and co-learner/facilitator:

- Acknowledge I do not understand girlhood any better than the girls in the class
- Create a flexible curriculum with project outlines that allow the students to control the topics of exploration
- Listen, listen, listen, and then listen some more
- Continually ask students to tell me, through a variety of methods, what they see, hear, feel, and think – through writing, blogs/journals, improvisation, image theatre, drawings, photography, and music.

Our Curriculum

Ellsworth examines several examples of sites of learning (outside the traditional classroom) like multimedia projections onto urban buildings, interactive museum

exhibits, and community created performance art at public events that provide the "learning self" the opportunity to experience a body/brain/mind meld with the site of learning resulting in experience or learning in the making (4-5). She explains: "in this mind/brain/body meld with objects, spaces, and times, the self is understood as a becoming, an emergence, and as continually in the making" (4). I believe the making and creating of art, specifically theatre, creates the opportunity for the body/brain/mind meld and development of the perpetually becoming self as it requires a full engagement of learning bodies and minds as they move through and create the playing space. Theatre, and other performing arts, absorb the learning self in the act of making and doing. The space created in our classroom becomes a transitional space because of the action of creation performed in the space. The act of playing with and through concepts, ideas, and terms rather than relying heavily on language transforms our classroom into A Room of Our Own, but this does not and did not happen overnight. It required great work from everyone, and demanded a flexible outline of learning activities for the semester that "set the concept of pedagogy itself in motion into interdisciplinary spaces" (7).

The curriculum I developed for the semester after my meeting with the principal, Ms. Masterson, was based on my dissertation proposal and contained three different projects. After my self-reflection and the development of my own guidelines, the curriculum unit became a skeletal outline of movements and project ideas that continually evolved as we progressed through the semester together. The semester ended up broken into three distinct movements – ensemble creation, idea building, and performance development. I will briefly highlight some of the important moments and

activities from each and then discuss the three projects that developed throughout the semester (in much different forms than my original proposal).

During the months of August and September, we spent the majority of our time building an ensemble and transforming our space into A Room of Our Own. At the very beginning of the semester I asked the girls to write me a letter responding to my introduction to the class, which included a brief overview of my dissertation research project. I asked them to tell me anything they wished and to feel free to ask me any questions. Shortly after my epiphany, the class held what we called, "A Girls' Summit.[15]" In small groups, the girls brainstormed and recorded their responses to questions/prompts based on my research questions. Their responses helped provide a starting point for our work together, as well as a wealth of topics and ideas for future exploration. The last prompt asked the groups to list any experiences and topics important to the girls that were not covered in the other prompts; these didn't have to be tied to being girls or girl-centered experiences. The girls also started blogs and each Friday they would post an entry in response to a question posed by the class or on a topic of their own choosing.[16] Also during this period of ensemble creation, the girls composed *I Am* poems that they presented for the class, which later became an important part of performance development and ultimately an act in the play they developed.[17]

[15] An outline and directions for this activity are included in the Appendix.
[16] As discussed in Chapter one, technology issues and lack of access to computers with internet resulted in many of the girls turning to a hard copy journal format. Friday schedules were often altered due to special school events, field trips, assemblies, and guest speakers, so often girls did not have the opportunity to complete blogs/journals at school. It was not my intention for the blog/journals to become homework, so blog topics often spanned more than one week depending on schedule changes or other issues.
[17] The poems are shared in Chapter Three and examined further in Chapter Four

The girls spent the majority of the time during these first two months playing theatre games and exercises focusing on trust development drawn heavily from Augusto Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. These games required the girls to get up on their feet and to engage their bodies as well as each other in the act of playing and doing. We soon expanded on these trust-based games and added improvisational games which helped the girls think quickly on their feet. We continued these games and exercises throughout the semester, but in late September we transitioned our focus to image theatre. Image Theatre, part of Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, uses still images to express ideas, feelings, or events. Its creation came from Boal's international work which involved working with groups of people who often did not share a language. The multiple meanings attached to words necessitated the creation of a technique that would provide a new mode of communication. Boal explains, "of course images don't replace words but they cannot be translated into words either – they are a language unto themselves. They connote words just as words may connote images – they can be complementary" (174). Boal eventually devised a system where movement and even words were added to the static images. This "dynamized" the images. He asserts:

> the whole method of Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly the series of the Image Theatre, is based on the multiple mirror of the gaze of others – a number of people looking at the same image, and offering their feelings, what is evoked for them, what their imaginations throw up around that image. (174-5)

To further illustrate Image Theatre, I will briefly describe one afternoon of Image Theatre work. After The Girls' Summit, I had the girls share the synonyms for girl their

groups had come up with. The girls formed small groups and each group was assigned a word. Each group struck still images of their word while the other groups offered their understandings of the images. Together we explored images of a gold-digger, a drama queen, a princess, a Barbie Doll, and a bitch. The images were "dynamized" by first asking the observers to share what they imagined were the inner monologues of each frozen image. The frozen characters were then asked to come alive briefly and share their inner monologues with the class. The groups shared their word with the class, at which point we returned to each groups' series of frozen images and attempted to change the images (if necessary due to the oppressive nature of the image) to create a positive, "ideal" (non-oppressive) image of a girl[18]. A rich and interesting discussion ensued with each attempt to turn these images to their ideal.

In October we began to move toward idea building. During this period we built on the skills we learned through theatre games and Image Theatre while adding to our storytelling methods. Girls brought in newspaper articles, poems, and music that inspired them, spoke to them, and/or upset them. Using these as inspiration, in small groups the girls would create short improvisational scenes in response. Gallagher asserts:

> Working in role – that is, improvising the story together rather than learning the lines of a script, or process drama – is concerned with forging a production aesthetic during the process and, equally importantly, teaches students about the social constructs that shape their lives while

[18] Boal further built on the dynamization of still images in the development of a technique he called Rainbow of Desire he explained in his book, *The Rainbow of Desire: The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy.*

> allowing them to shift perspectives and seek truth in opposites – to alter action, slow down processes, and create meaning collectively. (2000, 27-8)

Sometimes these scenes retold the content straightforwardly, other times the scenes challenged or made fun of the subject matter; some were movement based sans dialogue, and still other scenes diverted widely from the original material. Girls brought in objects that held special meaning to them and told the story of the object. Using these object stories as a jumping off point, the girls wrote short monologues. They then presented these monologues to the class in a Readers Theatre style[19]. I feel it is important to note that our focus was on using theatre to explore ideas and tell stories, rather than a traditional focus on the production and rehearsal of a play. This meant acting techniques were not explored. Simply put, the girls were asked to take the risk of sharing their ideas in front of each other by presenting their improvisational scenes and written work for the class. Given the limited time, memorization and character development remained on the back burner.

In November we moved to our last phase, performance development. I asked the girls to review the activities, creations, and scenes developed in class. Together as a class we needed to decide what we wanted to develop further and where we wanted to go with our work. We developed a list of our major theatrical creations. Our work up until this point consisted of storytelling through image theatre, monologues, improvisational-based scenes, solo and group poems. In small groups the girls reflected on each of these

[19] Non-memorized, with scripts in hand and very little (if any) blocking.

categories and then shared their preferences with the whole class. The majority of the girls found performing solo poems or monologues intimidating. The girls reached the consensus that they preferred performing in small ensemble groups. After much discussion we decided to focus on the group poems and several selected scenes. In their improvisational groups, the girls reviewed several of their more developed scenes choosing the one they wished to continue to work on and present to an audience. The girls spent the rest of the semester working toward developing a play script together.[20] Beginning in November, the girls were given Fridays to complete their self-portrait visual art projects,[21] which had been assigned at the beginning of the semester. I provided art materials and a disposable camera for each girl. I then developed the film for the class. The girls shared their artwork the last day of class.

In October, I finally felt we had developed enough of a relationship as an ensemble that I was ready to recruit research participants. I presented the opportunity for the girls in class. I explained that if they chose to participate I would analyze their class work and performances, as well as their self-portraits and blogs/journals. I would also ask them to participate in a focus group at the end of the semester and a solo interview. If they wished they could join me next semester for a couple of follow-up meetings where we would analyze their work and creations together. No one was required to participate in the study, and they could choose to stop participating at any

[20] This process and the script is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

[21] Each girl was asked to create a self-portrait sculpture or 3-D self-portrait. Directions to the project are included in the appendices. The girls could use any structure they wished that had an inside and an outside – a box or folder for example. The inside of the structure was to represent the "real" girl not shown to the outside world, and the outside of the structure was to represent how each girl presented themselves to the world (or how the world perceived them).

time. I passed out a participant consent form and a parental consent form. In the end fifteen out of the twenty-three girls in the class chose to volunteer as research participants in my study. In the next chapter I present each girl participant relying primarily on the girls' own words, artistic creations, and thick description of their daily and theatrical performances.

CHAPTER 3

GIRL INTRODUCED

"A woman is not born a woman, but rather becomes one."
- Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

The Girls

The fifteen girls who graciously agreed to volunteer to take part in my research study can best be described as a diverse group of girls with personalities that ranged from incredibly shy to ornery, from vivacious to laid-back. The participant group consisted of nine Latina girls, two Asian-American girls, two Caucasian girls, one African-American girl, and one Native American girl. While the group did not shy away from discussions of romantic attraction, declarations of sexual orientation never occurred[22]. Instead these conversations often reinforced an assumed, accepted heteronormativity in their references to romantic attachments occurring between couples of the opposite sex. Their ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds were sometimes self-expressed, and other times kept a mystery. Other issues impacting identity – class, immigration status, family make-up, body image, religious beliefs, visible or non-visible disabilities, and many others – were sometimes brought to light through class discussions, performances, interviews, and other creations. What each girl

[22] At no time during the semester did a girl link her identity to a specific sexual orientation directly. Most of the time sexual preference was revealed through discussions about boy crushes. None of the girls discussed attraction to the same sex. I did not witness any derogatory conversation about same-sex preferences, but the times homosexuality was mentioned it was often connected to difficulties faced by the LGBTQ community or an underlying fear of being thought of as a lesbian due to fashion choices or actions that were viewed as un-lady like.

chose to share with me remained her decision, and therefore each girl controlled, or at least had a part in, the development of her image.

Attempting to bring the girls to life on the page has proven a frustrating experience, as it can feel I reduce them to one-dimensional caricatures of girlhood in my descriptions. Fully capturing each girl's complexity and varied experiences, just the slice of their lives shared with me in class during one semester, felt impossible at times. What follows is a portrait of each girl taken in a specific place and moment in time, during our semester together and in the space we created together. I rely as much as possible on the girls to paint their own pictures. I have used video of class sessions and performances, as well as solo interviews to create these composites. Additionally I pull from the girls' work in class – letters to me, object storytelling, monologues, and their self-portrait visual art projects – to flesh out, as much as possible, these fascinating, complex, three-dimensional creatures. Each girl participant completed a fill-in-the-blank poem called, *I am*. I use this poem with most theatre arts residencies I have conducted in the last few years as a way of getting to know each participant on a deeper level, and as a way to explore the theatrical nature of poetry with a group. Each portrait begins with the girl's original poetry as a way to bring the forefront their self-expressions as artists and as girls.

Example:

I AM POEM

I am_____ (two special characteristics you have)

I wonder_____ (something you are actually curious about)

I hear_____ (an imaginary sound)

I see_____ (an imaginary sight)

I want_____ (an actual desire)

I am_____ (the first line of the poem repeated)

I pretend_____ (something you actually pretend to do)

I feel_____ (a feeling about something imaginary)

I touch_____ (an imaginary touch)

I worry_____ (something that actually worries you)

I cry_____ (something that makes you sad)

I am_____ (the first line of the poem repeated)

I understand_____ (something you know to be true)

I say_____ (something you believe in)

I dream_____ (something you actually dream about)

I try_____ (something you make an effort about)

I hope_____ (something you actually hope for)

I am_____ (the first line of the poem repeated)

Introductions

Rosalinda[23]

I am unique, my own person

I wonder what tomorrow will be like

I hear success calling my name

I see my future ahead of me

[23] All of the participant names have been changed for confidentiality

I want acceptance

I am unique, my own person

I pretend I can sing

I touch the stars with my imagination

I worry about big change

I cry for my mother

I am unique, my own person

I understand not everything will be in my favor

I say equality will come one day

I dream about meeting my idols

I try my hardest with school work

I am unique, my own person

Rosalinda (see fig. 1), a Latina sophomore, walks to the front of the classroom with gentle, slow steps. As she sits down in the chair, she smoothes down the back of her purple plaid uniform skirt with one hand to assure that it tucks properly underneath her as she sits. Her shoulders curl inward towards her center making her smaller as she adjusts her clothing to assure her modesty. She pushes one of the tendrils she has pulled from her sparkly silver headband to frame her face behind her ear. Her long brown hair is dyed with blonde highlights; in addition to the headband she has styled half of it up in a ponytail with the remaining hair falling straight down then pushed forward finally resting just past her shoulders. In her other hand she holds her poem. The paper shakes

slightly as she gives the class a soft half smile I have come to expect from her. Her head tilts toward the ground and she looks up just from behind her mascaraed lashes meeting our gazes hesitantly. She begins to read her poem in a quiet voice just barely heard above the shuffling of the other girls in their seats. I urge her to project her voice so we can hear her beautiful poem. Her lovely round face with expertly applied make-up raises up to more directly address the class; as her shoulders straighten, her voice increases in volume and her confidence seems to build by the time she reaches the second verse.

She finishes her poem and quickly rises from her chair hurrying back to her seat while zipping her grey hoodie higher up. Her ever-present dark solid color hoodie presents a dramatic contrast to her other non-required uniform accessories. In addition to her sparkly silver headband, silver ballet slippers adorn her feet and small silver hoops glisten at her ears. She tucks her hands back into the sleeves of her hoodie as she sits breathing a sigh of relief that her turn is over.

Figure 1. Rosalinda.

In her introductory letter to me at the beginning of the semester Rosalinda expressed an openness to my project and being in a play for the class, but she warned me, “I would be willing to play

any part in a play, but I am extremely shy at first. Any kind of acting is something that I stay away from." Over the course of the semester Rosalinda's shyness, which was one of the more extreme cases in the class, faded. By the end of the semester she was an outspoken participant in the class, calling fellow students out for lack of positivity and not following the class guidelines. Despite informing me she stays away from any kind of acting, she volunteered to take on extra roles when her shyer classmates expressed hesitancy to participate in our class sharing of their play.

In her solo interview Rosalinda labeled herself as a mix or hybrid of a girlie-girl and a tomboy, "I think I can be kinda both sometimes. Like I like to wear makeup and I love shoes and sparkles and all that, but I also love to play video games and 'cause I grew up with brothers so I kinda act boyish sometimes." This admission surprised me as I would not have thought of her as a tomboy; the entire semester I do not remember her wearing a pair of pants or talking about video games or sports. She always displayed a carefully polished outward presentation. Her self-portrait project affirmed her attention to detail in presentation; a folder beautifully crafted with 3-D scrapbook decorations and foam letters in a pastel color palette opened to reveal details about her family, friends, and passions with each page decorated and structured with detail and thought. Rosalinda explains, "I – I love to get crafty and – on projects and reports and stuff. I really love getting creative and putting a lot of work into – putting a lot of effort into my work.

Melissa

I am a hero, an artist, a shield to protect all people

I wonder about the strangest things

I hear the screams of every silent person

I see worlds beyond my own

I am a hero, an artist, a shield to protect all people

I pretend that I am human

I feel like I'm an alien

I touch the freedom of my imagination

I worry that people hurt because of me

I cry when I think about the people who have died

I am a hero, an artist, a shield to protect all people

I understand that I am different

I say that it's ok to be

I dream that someday everyone will be happy

I try to save everyone

I hope that I am strong enough

I am a hero, an artist, a shield to protect all people

Melissa (see fig. 2), a Caucasian sophomore, bounds toward the front of the room, one of the first girls to volunteer to share her poem with the class. Her gait includes a constant bounce; her energy exudes from each step-bounce-step-bounce. Her long, stick-straight, light brown hair which reaches almost to her hips, swings back and forth with her bounce. She rarely styles it, sometimes letting it hang straight from her side part, other times containing it with a single long braid; today she has pulled half of it

back with a rubber band but several long pieces have escaped which she pushes back behind her ears. She eschews the chair at the front of the room, choosing to stand. Her shoulders thrown back, chest out, feet spaced out and confidently grounded almost in an athletic stance as if ready to take off in a sprint if need be, she smiles to the class. Her large smile with full teeth fills her round unadorned face and spreads to her bright eyes. She begins her poem in a large voice that fills the room; she stops and pauses for dramatic effect, her tone changing and dropping in volume in places to express a shift in emotion.

Figure 2. Melissa.

Melissa rocks back and forth ever so slightly on the heels of her simple black lace-up athletic shoes. She holds her poem with a tight, calm grip with her right hand. At one point during her reading, her left hand raises to her silver necklace and rubs the small pendant for just a moment before returning to her side. She finishes her poem in a clear, confident tone with well-articulated enunciation. She laughs and gives the class a mock bow before skipping back to her seat in the audience. As she takes her seat she grabs her dark grey hoodie from the seat of her chair and quickly throws her arms into the sleeves. She does not bother to zip it up, and

instead rubs her hands along the legs of her pants; the grey denim whirs under her palms for a moment before she stops to focus on the next poem reader.

In her interview, Melissa discussed not meeting society's expectations of what a girl is supposed to be, "for a girl not acting like a girl – and I've got some firsthand experience at this, let's face it. When you're a tomboy or when you're – I don't know – some other way girls aren't supposed to act, you get kind of socially ostracized." Melissa expressed she now revels in not fitting in, wearing a label of rebel or outsider proudly, and even feeding off of it: "I really don't feel pressure to be a certain way because I'm a girl. I feel more of a desire to be more of who I am and less of what they think I should be."

The previous semester Melissa participated in an afterschool theatre project that examined female protagonists in children's and young adult literature, and expressed her excitement to be part of the theatre class. She repeatedly volunteered for our theatre games and improvisations, and had no problem voicing her opinion or making suggestions. Despite her outward manifestations and expressions of confidence, several times during discussions Melissa voiced feelings of loneliness, sometimes joking she had no friends. Despite a seeming closeness with Ruby, Natalia, Soledad, Valentina, Leila and Mindy who often chose to be in small groups with Melissa, at times she did clash with her classmates. Melissa's situation closely resembled the circumstances of Olive, a character she created for her written monologue. Olive speaks to her stuffed bear and tells him about her first day at school: "You know that yesterday was my first day of high school right? I mean it was my first day and already no one seems to like me . . . I'm too

smart to hang out with the popular girls, too loud for the computer geeks and for sure not pretty enough for most guys. Not even the teachers seem to like me . . .".

I must admit, as a teacher and theatre artist, that Melissa delighted me with her wit and insight. Her self-portrait visual art project consisted of four small paper boxes connected together to create one large structure. On the outside of each box Melissa pasted pictures that depicted things the world knew about her – her interests including video games, the bass guitar, and amine. Words like "loud," "tomboy," "geek," and others served to announce the labels placed on Melissa by the people she encountered. Upon opening each of the four boxes the viewer learned a different aspect of Melissa's self. One box contained her fears, for example, a second box shared her confidence and pride in herself, another her secret ambitions, still another her feelings of deep loneliness.

Ruby

I am confident and brave

I wonder why people are afraid to speak up

I hear that tree that falls when no one is around

I see the buildings shouting for me

I want to make a change

I am confident and brave

I pretend to laugh when nothing is funny

I feel challenged against my fears

I touch the glass that isn't supposed to be touched

I worry that it won't turn out right

I cry over the dumbest things

I am confident and brave

I understand that things won't always go my way

I say that I'm right even when I'm not

I dream in black and white

I try to give 110%...ALWAYS

I hope that people will change, even if I can't do it myself

I am confident and brave

Ruby (see fig. 3), a Native American sophomore, crosses quickly from the back of the classroom to the front with long strides. She wears calf-high black suede fur-lined Ugg boots, black denim pants, and the required school purple polo, topped with a black hoodie with white lining. Around her neck hangs a rosary of brown beads with a crucifix at the end. She takes another look at her poem, and purses her lips in concentration until they disappear. She exhales, raises her head, and tosses her long black hair, which she sometimes wears straight and sometimes curls, out of her face. She brushes back her long bangs once more before presenting her poem. Her clear voice soon replaces her initial hesitance, and the room fills with her presence. One of the tallest girls in the class, her broad shoulders straighten from their former slumped position and she takes the familiar stance I have become used to: weight shifted to one side, one leg out just in front

of the other, a slight tilt of the head, and a hand resting on one hip. When she reaches the last stanza of the poem, her posture straightens to match the capitalized letters and her whole body rises and leans forward in emphasis: “I try to give 110%...ALWAYS/I hope that people will change, even if I can’t do it myself/I am confident and brave.”

Like Melissa, Ruby participated in the afterschool theatre project last semester and she proved to be a fearless leader in our class through her example of volunteering and kind encouragement for her peers. Her leadership extended outside of our room into the wider school; she belonged to most of the afterschool clubs available including InventTeam, Debate Team, the Basketball and Softball teams, and Student Council. A born politician, Ruby often became a voice of reason in the class, especially in small group work. She ably listened to each side and suggested compromises that almost always pleased both sides. During object storytelling Ruby shared a volleyball trophy with the class and told the story of how she came to earn it and what she learned, “Working in a team is vital. No matter what, you have to face the hard stuff. Hopefully together.” This philosophy permeated much of her work in

Figure 3. Ruby.

class; an athlete and avid sports fan, she wrote a monologue from the perspective of football coach Bill Belichick in the Patriots' locker room, "Exactly like I said last week in Seattle, stay focused when the world around you is falling apart . . . And I'm gunna say don't be afraid to make mistakes. It's part of the game and it's part of life."

A natural performer and public speaker, Ruby expressed that she did not consider herself a visual artist and that she struggled with the self-portrait project. Instead she felt called toward music and writing as a form of self-expression. She admitted though that most people did not know this about her: "when people hear my name, they think of, oh, that's the girl that likes sports." She then contemplated that perhaps ultimately the sports field served as her place of artistic expression and self-expression: "when I'm pitching, people can always tell my mood . . . it may sound kind of weird, but it's true." Ruby admitted to me when she handed in her self-portrait project it was incomplete, and she had felt a lot of pressure to create something beautiful with lots of details on the outside like many of the other girls in class were doing. Ruby chose a circular box with a removable top as her sculpture base. On the edge of the box she had glued a line of alternating small blue and red fuzzy pompoms (to match the colors of the New England Patriots). All around the outside of the box, she posted stickers and pictures of her favorite players and teams, along with their team logos and pictures of baseballs and gloves. Additionally, she added words written in bold, script and colors like "jock," "tomboy," "Softball," "Ace," and "Hey batta." In the end she left the inside of her sculpture empty when she ran out of time. Despite expressing that one of her favorite things about being a girl was "being able to prove that we can do something, and we can make a change," she was not immune to the pressure to perform in a certain way as a

girl. “It all goes back to, like I said about, you know, the media . . . it gives you criteria, this certain box that you have to fit in or you’re not normal, you’re not pretty or you’re not smart enough. So yeah, sometimes I wonder if my butt is too big. Or if I am fitting in with my girl friends.”

Natalia

I am insane and beautiful

I wonder what the burning edges of stars feel like

I hear the sky falling

I see the colors of the wind

I want people to see more than my skin

I am insane and beautiful

I pretend I’m more interesting than I am

I feel the silk touch of my imaginary friend

I touch the synchronized heartbeat of our drums

I worry that I am already too far gone

I cry when I realize I am not enough

I am insane and beautiful

I understand that it is hurts to be beautiful

I say that family is everything

I dream that my words will be seen

I try to do more than expected

I hope my life will be forever

I am insane and beautiful

Natalia (see fig. 4), a Latina sophomore, walks to the front of the room taking large steps, her arms swinging front to back. She stops and pivots on her low-top black and gray plaid Converse shoes to face the class. Her long brown hair with bold dark red chunks whips around with her body. She stills herself, clasps her poem with both hands, and exhales. Her brown eyes scan the room meeting the eyes of her audience. She holds her mouth and jaw tightly before beginning her poem. I have come to expect this very serious expression from her, brows furrowed and posture upright. When she begins to perform her poem her stance and face relax morphing into expressions that correspond with the phrases of her poem. Her lovely voice carries through the room lifting and lilting over her words. In my many years of teaching theatre and directing youth, Natalia stands out as one of the most natural performers I have encountered. She takes constant risks, making bold decisions about characters altering her voice and body to create some of the class's more memorable characters.

While she most often wears the pleated purple plaid uniform skirt, today she wears black denim pants along with the uniform polo. She accessorizes with several silver rings and necklace with small pendant, along with a black leather bracelet on her right wrist. When she reaches the first line of her last stanza, her voice drops to a whisper, "I understand that it hurts to be beautiful/I say that family is everything/I dream my words will be seen." Her eyes, lined thick with brown eyeliner well slightly with tears. I examine her face carefully. Her pleasing symmetrical features – straight nose, full lips, large brown eyes and high cheekbones – mark her as classically beautiful.

Figure 4. Natalia.

A small amount of acne mars her skin, but fails to mask her attractiveness. I contemplate the lines of her poem and wonder what sparked the display of emotion. Being a talented actress, she could be acting; however, her later actions in class demonstrate her openness as well as her ability to express her own vulnerability without shame.

For the object storytelling activity, Natalia brings in a coin given to her by her mother. She explains to the class that she and her mom do not get along, in fact they fight pretty much all of the time. Natalia finds her mom overly strict, forbidding her from sleepovers and many other activities with friends. According to Natalia, her mother feels her performance in school matters the most and doesn't understand her passions for non-academic subjects like acting and writing. The coin, holding it in her hand, helps to remind her that she and her mom (who has a matching coin), despite their differences, are stuck together.

She considers herself an artist explaining in her interview, "I am a vocal and written artist, I – the words I say, when they come out of my mouth with the passion behind them, it's – it's a force like no other." In her letter to me at the beginning of the semester, Natalia asked that our theatre work "revolve around the pressures put on

girls." She expounds on the pressures she feels as a girl again in her interview reporting she feels pressure to be a certain way because she is a girl all the time from her family:

> "I – I literally live separate lives. I'm one person when I'm sitting here with my mom. I'm another person at school . . . And it's – I don't know, I kind of push myself into these situations where I have to change who I am to make myself sound right . . . to make them believe that I am - I don't know, like a good girl."

Natalia's self-portrait sculpture consists of a small rectangular box she wrapped in white paper. She left the outside unadorned except for a black and white photo of herself pasted to the top of the box's lid. The picture is slightly out of focus and in it Natalia looks off to the side with that familiar serious expression. Natalia covered the inside of the box with black construction paper and placed several small items inside, including the coin from her mother. The stark difference between the crisp, clean white outside and the dark inside with its strange trinkets reminds me of the reoccurring line in Natalia's *I am* poem: "I am insane and beautiful." Natalia wrote her monologue in poetic form and explained the motivation of the monologue's speaker was a response to anyone who thinks she can't do anything by herself. I find her lines speak to the Natalia I came to know, especially her determination and seriousness: "I don't need your help/I don't need your 2nd pair of hands/I don't need your extra pair of hands/No matter how girly, weak or naïve I look/I don't need your help/I can do it by myself."

Soledad and Valentina

Soledad

I am intelligent and curious

I wonder how hypocrisy can be contagious

I hear screaming hearts

I see the fast pace in which people live

I want to retrace my steps

I am intelligent and curious

I pretend to be strong

I feel the compassion of those like me

I touch the twisted knots of my heart

I worry that my heart will go missing

I cry when disagreeing turns to fighting

I am intelligent and curious

I understand that imperfect is beautiful

I say never sacrifice who you are just because someone has a problem with it

I dream about a happy ending

I try to stay positive

I hope

I am intelligent and curious

Valentina

I am funny, curious

I wonder about true love

I hear hahahahahaha!!!!

I see people laughing

I want my closet filled with Adidas

I am funny, curious

I pretend to feel okay

I feel lonely

I touch keyboards

I worry about finding love

I cry when I have problems in my life

I am funny, curious

I understand you cannot have everything you desire

I say “Si se puede!”

I dream about my true love and me

I try to act alright

I hope I will find my love soon

I am funny, curious

Soledad and Valentina (see fig. 5), Latina sophomores, seemed forever attached at the hip. It took me quite a while to distinguish one from the other. The other girls in the class, as well as the school, referred to them as the twins. I present them together as I find I could not think of one without the other; they are inextricably linked in my mind. I also find their close relationship important to who they are, or I should say, how they performed themselves. To be honest, I am not sure whether they were drawn together as friends because they shared similar interests and personalities, or if their “twin-ness”

developed over time as they each took on parts of the other. While not actually twins or even cousins, Soledad and Valentina shared very similar physical attributes. Approximately the same height and weight, their body types and facial features matched closely. Each wore her dark brown hair to her shoulders. They often wore their hair pulled up into buns or pony tails. They always seemed to match in their uniform choice; when one wore pants so did the other. Most often they chose to wear the pleated skirt paired with black tights. They differed in their accessory choices, however. Soledad often wore a scarf of muted browns, reds and purples draped around her neck along with knee high brown leather boots. Valentina's go-to choices included a black Nike hoodie with white racing strips down the sleeves and black converse with white stripes. Both girls wore matching rectangular black framed glasses daily.

While they shared many physical attributes which made it hard to tell them apart, as I grew to know them it became clear that their personalities varied. Valentina acted as the spokesperson for the pair; Soledad provided the laughter for Valentina's constant funny comments (or the appropriate eye roll when Valentina's humor fell flat). Neither of them ever hesitated to perform when called upon. Soledad always seemed one step behind Valentina as they walked the halls or rose

Figure 5. Valentina (left) and Soledad (right) watching their peers perform.

from their seats together to perform for the class. This interaction became the inspiration for their exaggerated characters in their scene they created titled “First Day of School.” Valentina’s character, a girl bully who just won’t stop talking, repeatedly cuts off Soledad’s character but Soledad’s character continues follow her around.

Both girls brought in jewelry given to them by family members for their object storytelling activity. Soledad’s watch and necklace were purchased during a family vacation, and she recounted when her father left the family the watch stopped working only to start again when her parents reconciled. Valentina’s Tia gave her the necklace she shared with the class: a silver chain with a V pendant. She recalled how important it became to her when her aunt passed away; now she never took it off. When it came to their solo interview responses their roles reversed and Soledad became the talker giving long embellished answers, while Valentina gave short clipped replies straight to the point. Both replied that having a “vagina” (Valentina) and “female parts” (Soledad) was the answer to the question “What does it mean to be a girl,” and each claimed that friendship and shopping were the fun parts of being a girl. Valentina and Soledad used shoeboxes as the base for their self-portrait sculptures. Each girl covered the shoebox with pictures of things and people they liked: basketball, Skrillex, and shoes for Valentina; piano, fashion designers, and shoes for Soledad. On the inside of their sculptures they pasted pictures of loved ones and friends, along with candid snapshots of themselves and each other.

Mindy and Leila

Mindy

I am passionate and curious

I wonder about the deep blue ocean

I hear crashing waves

I see long shiny fish tails

I want to be a marine biologist

I am passionate and curious

I pretend to smile

I feel scared and sad

I touch needle like surfaces

I worry that I might be alone

I cry when I have difficult obligations

I am passionate and curious

I understand that everybody goes through pain

I say life is meant to be learned from

I dream I can reach beyond the clouds

I try my all when it comes to what I want

I hope I will find my true happiness

I am passionate and curious

Leila

I am sensitive and I dream big

I wonder if there will ever be peace on earth

I hear the whispering winds

I see the full moon above the ocean

I want to be a marine biologist

I am sensitive and I dream big

I pretend to be part of the Korean pop group

I feel at peace and calm

I touch sand and fossils

I worry if my dreams will ever come true

I cry when I can't get something done right

I am sensitive and I dream big

I understand the way to my dreams

I say listen to your heart

I dream in succeeding my dreams and travel

I try to be myself and meet my expectations

I hope to never lose my friend

I am sensitive and I dream big

Leila (see fig. 6) and Mindy (see fig. 7), Asian-American sophomores, sit huddled together trying to make themselves invisible so I will not call on them to share their poems with the class. Leila and Mindy share a friendship similar to Valentina and Soledad, although they do not physically match each other enough to be called identical twins. They do, however, share many of the same interests and passions, which may have brought them together. When developing our ensemble I often had to urge, even force,

them to pair up with other people or to join different groups. They brought each other comfort, and were most often found with their heads together in quiet, deep conversation about K-pop groups (Korean pop music), Korean soap operas, or anime. Sometimes they reminded me of twins who develop their own language.

As I called on them one at a time, each girl left the comfort of her seat next to the other to cross to the front of the room to present her poem. Both walked across the room with their heads hung down as they shuffled slowly, pausing to look back at their friend. When finally reaching the chair at the front each took a seat fiddling in their own individual ways. Leila alternated between twisting her hair, picking at her pleated skirt, and tapping her right foot. Mindy wrapped her feet around the chair legs after tucking and securing her skirt as she sat. Back and forth her feet went around the chair legs, almost seeking something to anchor her to the chair. Both girls covered their legs with black tights; their feet were encased in black converse, while their thin frames were overwhelmed by their oversized sweaters worn over their polo shirts. Long bangs that reached their eyebrows, just above their

Figure 6. Leila.

glasses, framed their lovely heart shaped faces. Pony tails worn high up on their heads dangled down their backs and swayed or bounced with each bout of fidgeting.

Leila clasped her poem in both hands and began to read so softly the girls in the audience strained to hear her words. I had come to expect this soft-spoken tone from her, and I urged her to start again and project this time. She looked up and nodded at me. She was clearly used to my request now. She began again and spoke clearly, her volume rising as she began to relax a little. Her shoulders remained curved inward as she leaned toward the audience. When she finished she collapsed in on herself, her head in her lap, and then sprung up from the chair bounding back toward Mindy. While I often had to remind Leila to project when performing or speak up during class discussions, her writing in class screamed from the page. In her monologue her character, Momo, faced her bully relieving herself of all her pent up frustrations and anger: "You tell me I'm stupid when I know I'm not. You tell me I'm ugly when I know I'm not. I'm being myself and you call me weird. You hurt and criticize to hide your fears!" She began the semester very timid and afraid of being in front of the class, but by the end of the semester she often volunteered and took the lead role in her group's scene titled, "The Light Rail."

Mindy's clear voice filled the room as she read her poem. Her feet eventually stopped hugging the chair legs by her second stanza, and her eyes began to rise from the paper to meet the audience's gaze. She finished her poem and a smile spread across her face as she fanned herself with her poem. She skipped back to her chair next to Leila and sat in a heap letting her limbs and head hang from the edges of the chair. Leila assured her she had done well. They sighed and giggled. Much like Leila, Mindy began as a hesitant performer, but it did not take long before she found she had a knack for comedic

acting in class improvisations. Her comedic timing shone in “The Light Rail” where she played one of the best friends who teased their friend about her crush. She showed her sentimental side during our object storytelling activity when she shared a wallet her aunt had given Mindy before she moved out of state. She used her story as the inspiration for her monologue about a girl preparing to move away and leave her aunt whom she will miss the most, “she has always been so kind to me and caring. What separates her from all my other relatives is her personality. It’s like a kid’s. It’s probably because of her high energy.”

Figure 7. Mindy.

In her letter to me Mindy shared her frustration that she felt she had to “act like a girl, but not too ladylike that you can’t defend yourself.” In her solo interview Leila echoed Mindy’s frustration but insisted that while “being a girl is hard due to centuries and centuries of stereotyping,” she did not believe in a “specific definition for girls ‘cause if there was, it would be limiting – limiting their abilities and thoughts.” In fact, Mindy and Leila often expressed similar opinions in their solo interviews. Perhaps being the only Asian-American students in the school helped forge their close relationship, or perhaps similar backgrounds and cultures aided in the creation of similar world views. Maybe it resulted from them spending every moment possible together. Whatever the reason, it was hard to differentiate between their self-portrait sculptures. Both were formed from composition notebooks with the outside covers

decorated with pictures of the two of them. Inside pasted on the pages were all of their favorite anime characters, K-pop bands and artists, and Japanese fashion styles (Decora, Lolita, and Mori[24]). Their self-portraits captured their passion for Asian pop culture; they both reinforced this in their solo interviews as each girl connected her artistic self to these subcultures. Leila expressed her love of fashion and make-up design, while Mindy explained, "the kind of artist I consider myself is probably a drawing artist like the ones that are found in Japanese Manga."

Ariana (Ari)

I am crazy yet caring

I wonder how life would be if I was someone else

I hear the birds on the summer breeze

I see Hollywood lights

I want fortune

I am crazy yet caring

I pretend to be famous

I feel desired and wanted

I touch your burning flames

[24] Japanese teen fashion styles change quickly and often originate in the Harajuku fashion district. Many of them include an element of Kawaii (meaning cuteness). Decora fashion includes bright colors and layers of accessories which often include toys. Lolita fashion, which has many sub-types, revolves around Victorian-era clothing but most often with a shorter silhouette (knee length skirts and knee socks). Mori (meaning forest) attempts to replicate a look of a girl living in the forest with soft natural colors, long flowy layers, and handmade items often in lace.

I worry that I'll be alone

I cry my heart out

I am crazy yet caring

I understand that happiness is earned

I say the world is an ugly place

I dream big dreams that may not come true

I try to make everyone happy

I hope everything turns out alright

I am crazy yet caring

Ariana (see fig. 8), a Latina sophomore who preferred to be called Ari, sits on the floor hiding behind a chair. The chair almost completely blocks her small frame. I call out her name again and she sinks deeper toward the floor. She crawls out from underneath the chair at the urging of her friend Yesenia. Her long light brown hair hangs in front of her face as she pulls herself up from the floor and on to the soles of her black lace-up tennis shoes. She pulls a hairband off her wrist and collects her hair into a pony tail. She picks up her poem from the seat of her chair and half skips half bounces to the front of the classroom. As she stops and faces the classroom a smile spreads across her pixie face. Her ears stick out slightly now that her hair has been pulled back tightly and she resembles a fairy dressed in the school's purple polo and gray skinny jeans which only highlight her small size. The smile begins to turn to uncontrollable nervous laughter and she turns her back to the audience in an attempt to recover. After a couple of deep

breaths she turns to face us and reads her poem with a sweet, lilting, bright voice. She completes her poem and returns to her chair, this time sitting on it instead of behind it.

Ari might have begun as one of the shyer, more timid girls in the class but she quickly transformed into a brave risk-taker. She wrote to me at the beginning of the semester and shared with me her desire to perform. Later on her blog she expressed she wanted to overcome her hesitancy in class: "I want to get better in stepping up and not be as shy." She worked hard and overcame her fears. In fact she did not back down from performing one of the more difficult, riskier scenes created in class, even when the class decided we would present the play for the school. In her group's scene titled "The Period Scene," Ari played a young girl who wakes to discover she has had her first period. While all girls share the experience of menstruation, talking about it can be uncomfortable and certainly performing a scene all about it is not easy, especially for a girl who started out hiding behind chairs.

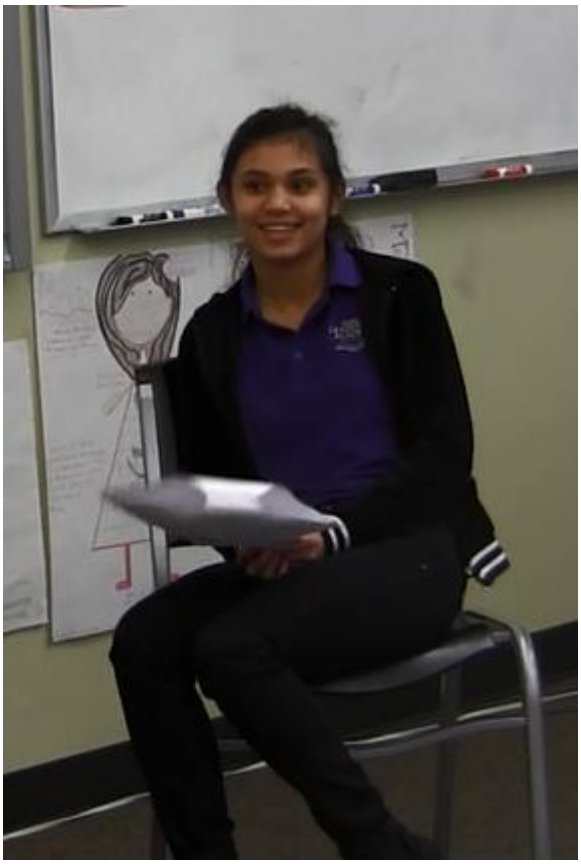

Figure 8. Ari.

Like Iris, Ari chose not to complete her solo interview or self-portrait sculpture. She fell ill at the end of the semester and apologized for not finding time for the solo interview or sculpture explaining that she had to prioritize her academic classes with

difficult final exams. I appreciated her honesty and was glad that she was able to see her role through in the final sharing. I debated including her feeling I may not have had enough data to develop a clear picture of her, but in the end decided that her journey from behind the chair to lead character in her scene demanded inclusion.

Iris

I am curious and insane

I wonder why this world can be so cruel

I hear laughter

I see hatred

I want to know why

I am curious and insane

I pretend I am alright

I feel confused

I touch the cold steering wheel, holding tightly onto

I worry about what's going to happen next

I cry when I worry about losing the ones I love the most

I am curious and insane

I understand that no one can understand

I say that I am doing just fine

I dream that someday all of this will go away

I try my best to hold on

I hope that I'll find my answers soon enough

I am curious and insane

Iris (see fig. 9), a Caucasian sophomore, sits quiet and still slightly apart from the rest of the girls in the audience. Her smile, although beautiful, remains elusive. The quietest girl of the girls who chose to participate in my research project, I rarely heard her volunteer to share her thoughts aloud in class. When I call her name as the last person to share her poem, she nods in recognition and walks to the front of the classroom, head slightly down with her left arm crossed in front of her body, while her left arm hung down with her poem fluttering from her hand. She planted herself at the front of the room feet spread waist width apart. She raised her left arm up, with her right arm still tucked underneath and read her poem in her quiet, halting voice. As she finished reading she brushed her long brown side bangs back from her thin, oval face (to which she expertly applied foundation, powder, and thick black eyeliner every day) and gave the class a half smile as they applauded. She moved back to her seat in the audience, this time with both arms crossed over her chest. As she sat tucking her hands into the sleeves of her oversized black pull-over hoodie she wrapped her arms around her legs, encased in a pair of grey skinny jeans, which she folded into her chest.

Figure 9. Iris.

Despite her quiet nature, Iris never hesitated to participate in improvisations, theatre games, or any other aspect of the class. She never volunteered herself, but as the semester wore on she became bolder in the choices she would make when she was called on to participate. She took on the difficult role of playing the boy Leila's character had a crush on in the scene "The Light Rail." Early in the semester she self-disclosed to me she had extreme hearing loss, but could hear somewhat and could read lips. She preferred for her hearing loss not to be brought to anyone's attention and asked that as much as possible I make sure I face her when speaking and to occasionally check in with her through eye contact to see if she was comprehending everything. Her hearing loss went largely unnoticed for the semester, and she worked to improve her enunciation which was only slightly impaired. After sharing this with me, she kept to herself for the most part for the remainder of the semester, sharing little in class discussions and never really chit-chatting with the other girls during class downtime. While she chose to volunteer to be part of the research study, she was one of two girls not to complete a solo interview or a self-portrait. I considered cutting her out of the study due to lack of information from her, but in the end I felt her silence spoke volumes. Why does such a quiet, reserved girl choose to volunteer for a research study? After volunteering, what prevented her from sharing her responses to the solo interview questions? What was it about the self-portrait project that caused her not to complete it? I have only my observations of her work in class to attempt an answer, but I assert that the process of sharing so much with me and her classmates presented too much of a risk to Iris.

She may not have participated in a solo interview or shared a self-portrait with me, but she did reveal parts of herself in other small ways. For the class's object

storytelling activity, Iris brought in a picture of her little brother explaining that he might be a BIG pain but she loved him very much. During last year, a very hard year for her, he had been there for her in ways she had not imagined. Later when she wrote her monologue, the character told the story of her freshman year of high school when she began to struggle with an eating disorder. “I’ve been struggling with this eating disorder since freshman year began. I didn’t tell anyone but my parents seemed to notice that something wasn’t quite right. I would lash out. I didn’t eat with them.” The female character later entered rehab and described how difficult it was to be away from home. The only thing that helped her through the “hell” of rehab was family visits on Sunday. “They were the people that kept me going into my recovery. Even my little brother . . . just seeing my little brother made my face light up . . . I missed how he used to piss me off.” While Iris never self-disclosed being in recovery for an eating disorder, the connections between her object storytelling and her monologue help to fill in some of the questions her silence raised. After sharing the object stories, the girls were informed that they would be writing monologues. They could use the stories they told or heard as inspiration. They would have to share them with class. Knowing this, many of the girls still chose to write monologues that further expanded on their object stories, often revealing or alluding to very personal experiences. Iris’ choice to share this story represents the strength and risk-taking that occurred often in our room, even from the shyest girl in the class.

Luz

I am nice and funny

I wonder if my crush likes me

I hear hammers hitting doors

I see a bright light

I want to see a special someone

I am nice and funny

I pretend to be happy

I feel a fluffy dog

I touch a pencil

I worry about my family

I cry when I see people bullied

I am nice and funny

I understand that my family is important to me

I say I believe in karma

I dream about zombies

I try doing my best

I hope my crush asks me out

I am nice and funny

Luz (see fig. 10), a Latina sophomore, breaks out into giggles as I call on her to read her poem. Luz wears a permanent smile and often breaks into spontaneous laughter; in fact, I do not think I have ever encountered her with an expression other than a bright smile. The giggles fade as she reaches the front of the room, but the smile remains. My breath catches a little when she reads the line, "I pretend to be happy," and I contemplate how much energy it must take to present that constant happiness. Her outward demeanor matches her rainbow colored tie dye pullover hoodie sweatshirt, which she wears on an almost daily basis despite it not meeting the uniform regulations of the school. Bright and cheery, I have never witnessed her in a disagreement with her group members. She always responded pleasantly to any requests, and participated consistently in the class – sometimes as a volunteer and sometimes called upon. As she sits back in the audience she smoothes down her thick curly dark brown hair which she wears in thick long sausage curls. She either pulls it into a low side ponytail or a voluminous bun worn high on the top of her head. Her bangs sweep down the side of her face from right to left skimming her eyebrows and ending in one of those long sausage curls which bounces when she laughs.

Figure 10. Luz.

Her self-portrait sculpture challenged her seemingly uncomplicated, happy manner I had come to associate with her. She used a manila folder as her base and

covered the outside cover with puzzle pieces and her name. On the inside, using brightly colored construction paper she fashioned pages to create a book. On each page she pasted pictures with captions. Several of the pages expressed her active participation with and passion for softball. Many of the other pages introduced family members and friends, while others showed her growing up from a baby to a small girl to a sophomore. When sharing her object story she pulled her phone from the back pocket of her black denim pants. Out of the pocket of her bright hoodie she revealed headphones. She explained that riding the light rail and then the bus to and from school could often be frightening with strange people attempting to talk to her. Her headphones combined with her phone served as a "safety blanket" dissuading potential harassers. Her monologue was actually written from the perspective of her phone. The phone complained how Luz treated it. It explained she dropped it repeatedly and overused it; it suggested that perhaps Luz had an addition problem, "She took me everywhere, even when she went to the restroom, every day she would have me in her hands. Those thumbs, 'CLICK CLICK CLICK," sounds like addiction, right?" Luz's monologue represents several of the monologues written in class from the perspective of inanimate objects – there were three other phones, a mirror, and a Tapatillo bottle. Unlike the more dramatic and revealing personal stories shared by girls like Iris, these monologues utilized humor while at the same time revealing significant aspects of the daily life of the girls in the class, like love (even addiction) for technology.

Yesenia

I am unique and loud

I wonder what it is like to live in Italy

I hear the ocean calling my name

I see Batman standing in front of me! OMG!

I want a trillion dollars

I am unique and loud

I pretend to be a superhero

I feel happy

I touch my teddy bear

I worry about my family

I cry when I get in trouble

I am unique and loud

I understand most things

I say what's on my mind

I dream about my dreams

I hope to be successful in life

I am unique and loud

Yesenia (see fig. 11), a Latina sophomore, may have described herself as loud in her poem but I knew her as a quiet, polite young lady who often faded into the background when compared to her classmates. Yesenia admitted to me after I questioned her about her poem that in our class she felt herself holding back a lot more than she did in other classes and in her free time. Over the course of the semester she exuded more and more confidence, but always remained on the quiet side. Unlike some

of her classmates who excelled at and reveled in the humor of class improvisations always searching for the funny moments in a girl's life, Yesenia brought the serious side of a girl's life to the attention of the other girls in the class. The girls were given several opportunities to bring in articles, music, and poetry that interested them and that they wanted the class to explore. Yesenia became interested in learning more about sex trafficking after coming across an article about young women brought into the US. These young girls and their families thought they would be working at factory jobs or as maids, but instead found themselves forced into prostitution. Yesenia used the inspiration from these stories to write a monologue she titled, "Because I Love You." In the monologue a young girl named Tiffany explains to her younger sister that she does what she does for her. "I don't do it because I like it. I don't do it because I am forced to. I DO it because I need to. You and my brother and sisters are the most important thing to me. We all know mom can't take care of us." This more serious side of Yesenia seems to contradict the lighter version presented in her poem. On the day she presented her monologue she wore her purple pleated skirt and uniform polo shirt. Her face, with just a touch of mascara and lip gloss, formed a serious expression. She straightened the black zip-up jacket while taking a deep breath. Her toes covered by black high top Reeboks turned inward, right foot meeting left foot at the tops of her

Figure 11. Yesenia in the midst of an improv.

shoes. Knees knocked together as she shifted her weight forward and backward. She read her monologue in a quiet pleading voice. Her left hand fluttered from resting at her hip to twisting her long light brown hair and back again. In contrast, when crossing the room to read her poem she walked with a quiet bounce. She smiled, her right leg placed out to the side, her weight shifted onto her left leg in a relaxed stance. Her self-portrait sculpture captured her many sides well. Yesenia decorated the outside of a manila folder with 3D brightly colored foam letters that spelled out her name. Inside the sculpture, on pages of construction paper that matched the foam letters, Yesenia created a page for her dreams, interests, and fears. For example, on one page she planned out her future trip to Italy, somewhere she wished to travel. On another she talked about her favorite comic book character, Batman. And on still another she expressed her love for her family. She decorated each page carefully with scrapbook stickers and pictures framed in boxes made from construction paper. Glittery markers explained and captioned each page and picture. On several of the last pages, done in more muted shades with minimal decorations, she highlighted her desire to be involved in the campaigns against modern day slavery, forced prostitution, and sex trafficking.

Sadie

I am honest and understanding

I wonder what my purpose in life is

I hear the whispers of rumors about me

I see Obama winning the election today

I want my Mom to finally be stress free and happy

I am honest and understanding

I pretend that I don't care

I feel my brain getting smarter

I touch the money I wish I had

I worry about EVERYTHING that's anything

I cry when I have no words to explain myself

I am honest and understanding

I understand that life goes on

I say I am always right

I dream of stability and happiness

I try to please my mother

I hope that I can find and believe in hope again

I am honest and understanding

Sadie (see fig. 12), a junior Latina, sauntered to the front of the room, hips swaying side to side, shoulders thrown back, and her chest held high. The tallest girl in class, Sadie's broad and curvaceous frame overpowered the other girls. She was in a word, imposing. "Do I have to do this?" she asked for the fourth time. "No," I replied, "but it serves as your participation in class today. Ultimately it's up to you. I will not force you." Her erect posture slumped slightly toward the floor as her face crinkled in consternation. She held my gaze for several seconds while she contemplated her decision. Of all the girls in class, Sadie proved to be the hardest to reach and to develop a feeling of mutual trust. Our first interactions could best be described as a series of

challenges by Sadie. She questioned each activity always wanting to know the purpose of it. She never hesitated to inform me if she thought something "sucked" or if she did not understand something. An ensemble building activity that required the girls to walk in unison without speaking in a circle, taking twelve steps in one direction before changing direction, then taking eleven steps, then ten, and so on until they reached one and faced each other in the circle, proved very frustrating for Sadie. The activity asked the girls to move together becoming one unit. After several attempts did not succeed, Sadie voiced her disappointment saying it would never work. I replied they had to concentrate on each other and find a way to sense each other's movements. I suggested using eye contact more. Sadie responded to my challenge by raising her hand to conduct a countdown and the group's turn. I halted the action and urged them to try again with no single leader. This lead to more sighs from Sadie.

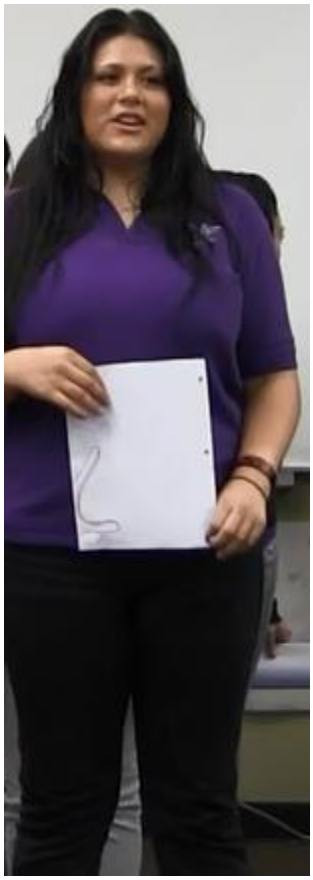

Figure 12. Sadie.

My responses to her were always even-toned and patient. I had encountered students like her before and knew expressing frustration with her criticalness would only serve to increase her challenges. She could be as hard on the other girls as she was on me, and at the beginning of the semester I often required her to join groups away from her friends in the class who seemed to increase her confidence. Her interactions with other girls when separated from her friends helped to develop a strong ensemble. As hard as she could be on others, she was even harder on

herself. “But my poem sucks,” she admitted while at the same time admonishing herself. I held in a desire to envelop her in a giant hug and reminded her, “remember we are not seeking perfection in class; we are just exploring ideas and trying to express them in different ways. It’s up to you.” She rolled her eyes and sighed. With her right arm she swept back her waist length dark brown hair to one side. She held the poem which shook just the tiniest bit and began to read. Her face relaxed and her features softened to reveal lovely brown eyes, clear skin, and deftly applied make-up highlighting her beauty.

Eventually we developed a trust and Sadie grew less challenging in class, instead focusing on the work we did in class. She volunteered more and more, and became more open. At one point mid-semester, we had a private discussion where I asked her to group with some of the shyer girls in the class and encourage them to take risks. We talked about how to approach this responsibility in an understanding, non-threatening manner and Sadie thrived in this role. Several of the girls she partnered with increased their volunteering in class and started speaking up more in class.

Sadie’s honesty, a characteristic she claimed in her poem, came across every day in class. As she grew more comfortable and trusting, her understanding nature became more obvious. She shared with the class about her close, but complicated, relationship with her mother – someone who she expressed deep respect for, and who she wished would receive the recognition and love she deserved for her hard work raising a family on her own. At the same time she admitted feeling deep pressure from her mother to act a certain way, to be pretty, and to achieve in school. In her monologue she created a character with similar issues. The girl in her monologue described struggling with her mom over various things. “My mom is very picky about what time I go to bed. Her excuse

is a working brain needs seven hours of sleep, which I don't believe." Her mother featured prominently in her self-portrait sculpture. Sadie decorated a composition notebook with selfies and words written with plain black marker that described the way the world saw her (loud, sassy, bitch, rude, and stupid). Inside were pictures of events and people in her life. Several of the pages were filled with her mother and she wrote detailed captions of each.

Her self-portrait reflected her preference for writing as her form of self-expression. Like Ruby, she admitted to feeling inadequate about her level of visual artistry: "I was looking at, um, other students' like little projects they had on Friday. And like all these girls had cute little scrapbooking wallpaper on their boxes . . . and I haven't even started . . . I'd rather write something." She filled her self-portrait project with her writing and kept the decoration to a minimum. Her solo interview also demonstrated her inclination toward expressing herself through language. Her interview lasted twice as long as most of the participants' interviews. She opened up and shared a great deal about herself. Her ever-present self-doubt and tendency to be hard on herself appeared several times in her interview, but could not mask her enjoyment in delving into the interview questions and having an opportunity to express herself. At one point she stopped in mid-answer, "Wow, these are questions I don't think about every day. I thought these questions were going to be like, oh, when was your first ride at Disneyland or something. I didn't expect these questions to be like you have to think about them." Repeatedly she apologized for rambling and talking so much. At the end she admitted, "I did not mean to talk your ear off. You probably fell asleep and not listening anymore, but thank you for letting me participate. I had fun answering these questions."

Mira (Mimi)

I am curiously confused

I just simply wonder why

I hear the pain in the music I listen to

I see my future becoming clouded

I want answers and the reasons why

I am curiously confused

I pretend to be myself

I feel . . . way more than I want to or should

I touch the moon because the stars were not far enough

I worry obsessively about everything

I was taught that tears are weak

I am curiously confused

I understand things that I shouldn't

I say that family and friends are important

I dream of drastic changes

I try to improve everyday

I hope to live life

I am curiously confused

Mira (see fig. 13), who chose to go by the nickname Mimi, stood out as the only senior in class. In her class blog she wrote "at first I wasn't happy to be in this class

because I am the only senior in the class, [but] I do like to act and I am not afraid to be myself. So far it's been a good experience." Due to her status as a senior, Mimi was often excused from class to attend informative sessions from visiting speakers, school related events and field trips. Despite her frequent absences, she provided a relaxed style of leadership in class and often swayed girls to her side in discussions with her well-spoken, persuasive arguments. She missed the opportunities to present her poem and monologue for the girls, but never backed away from a performance challenge when in class. She played the first US female president in her group's scene "1st Female President," and when several of the girls in class expressed reservations about sharing the class's play for the school she stepped up and took on several more roles.

Figure 13. Mimi as she presents her poem.

Mimi, a Latina with light skin and dark, almost black shoulder length hair, expressed her belief that "times have changed, we are able to run for president, we are able to vote. We are able to do a lot more things than in the past. And I think that – that has given girls more freedom and more liberty to do what they wish to do. We can follow any career we want." Mimi dreamed of majoring in film and business so that she could change the

entertainment industry. “I want to have a non-perfect girl be the hero, a non-perfect girl be the cover of the best magazine out there. And show girls that we don’t need to be that perfect girl, because we’re all beautiful in our own ways.”

Brooklyn

I am loud and funny

I wonder what people really think of me

I hear hummingbirds hum

I see the sunrise

I want to have everything I have ever wished for

I am loud and funny

I pretend to be a person without a single problem

I feel shivers down my spine

I touch people’s hearts

I worry that I will never see you again

I cry when you yell

I am loud and funny

I understand I’m who I am

I say SEXY CAN I

I dream being the best I can be

I try to get the best grades I can get

I hope my cousin survives

I am loud and funny

In her solo interview, Brooklyn (see fig. 14), an African-American sophomore, stops in the middle of answering the question, "Do you consider yourself an artist? What kind of artist?" She addresses me directly, pleading with me: "Teresa, I'm begging you right now to teach me how to cry on cue." Earlier in class the girls had been discussing

Figure 14. Brooklyn fooling around with the camera during down time.

how difficult it could be to express the right emotions when acting. Some of them expressed a desire to take an acting class after our class finished. They loved what we had created but felt uncomfortable about the thought of sharing it with the school. I tried to reassure them that the decision to share our work with the school would be a group decision, and that no one would be forced to perform. I went on to explain that when devising our work together our focus was on exploring ideas, if we had another semester to work on the play we would begin to focus on character development. I joked about

learning to cry on queue and the girls challenged me to cry in front of them. I took a deep breath and let the tears well up and fall down my cheeks. The class responded with oohs and ahhs. Since that day Brooklyn repeatedly asked for crying lessons. She went on in her interview to share her dream of acting: "I want to be an actress when I get a little older . . . like 20 years from now I could be an Oscar or an Emmy winner." Despite her pleas for crying tips and dreams of a future in the spotlight, Brooklyn chose not to perform when we shared our play with the school. Instead she became our sound designer and organized music for transitions between scenes.

The day the class shared their poems, Brooklyn did participate in sharing. She crossed to the front of the room from her seat at the back of the room. She faced the audience and then let her head hang down. Shaking her head, she said "Oh, no. I can't do this." She began to return to her seat, but the other girls in the class encouraged her, shouting at her that she could do it. She turned back, swinging her arms from side to side while her body dipped up and down as if she was in great distress or pain. "UUUUGgggghhhh!" she let out like a slow leaking balloon. We waited with patience. "Okay, okay, I got this." She threw back her shoulders and raced through her poem as quickly as she could. "And scene," she joked, then bounded back to her seat. The class applauded and she smiled. She rubbed her hands across her face and into her short hair which she had pulled back into a small ponytail sticking up and out like a feather from the top of her head. She rubbed the luminous ebony skin of her cheeks again as if to cool them down, and exclaimed, "Man, that's hard to be up there by yourself." Brooklyn exuded much more confidence when performing in small groups or when improvising in pairs. She was both "loud and funny," as she claimed in her poem. In fact, because of her

wise cracks I often found myself breaking into laughter no matter how hard I tried to maintain a straight face.

Brooklyn did demonstrate her serious side on occasion in our class. Her monologue told the story of a girl named Jazmine contemplating her choices after learning she was pregnant. She discusses the possibility of abortion and adoption, unsure about keeping her baby and being able to care for it. She speaks to her unborn baby: "It's not that I don't love you. It's just that I want you to have a better education and a family that can provide for you better than I can." For her self-portrait sculpture she filled every page of a composition notebook with pictures that told the story of her life from birth to high school. She explained each picture in a detailed caption. She also included pictures of quotes from films[25] that she felt influenced who she had become.

A Picture's Worth a Thousand Words

The descriptive portraits above attempt to bring to life the girls I came to know over the course of a semester together. In the end we shared approximately thirty-one days together in a Room of Our Own. Funneling pages of written work, hours of performance, and countless recorded discussions through my lens as facilitator and researcher in order to create a composite of each girl seems inadequate because the written word limits what I can capture and express about each of the girls. I have attempted as much as possible to privilege the words and work of the girls. When I first began composing the portraits, I had hoped to find a word or phrase used by each girl that might focus on their essence – a sort of selfie with a caption. As I waded deeper into

[25] A few examples of films included: *Sparkle, The Princess and the Frog,* and *The Great Debaters*

the collection of data about each girl, I realized that this would prove to be an elusive project. Each girl revealed a multi-faceted self; peeling back the many, many layers only revealed more layers rather than an easy label. If I worked hard enough, I could probably justify categorizing girls into groups by how they performed girlhood daily, their outward appearances, or the words they used to describe themselves. Perhaps Rosalinda might be marked as a girly tomboy hybrid as she suggested. I might accept Melissa's self-description of alien geek girl. If Sadie, who owned her honesty, was to label herself she might revel in her fierceness and claim the term *bitch* with pride. Again and again what the girls shared and what they created demonstrated the complexity of girlhood, a girlhood that defied simple labels like girly girl and tomboy. In Chapter Five I expand on this and other themes that rose to the surface during my work with the girls. But first, in the next chapter I want to share the text of the play the girls created together and again attempt to paint a picture, this time of the creation process and the multiple performances of the play, from improvisation to writing to rehearsals to the final sharing. Through textual and performance analysis, I hope to bring the script to life while imbuing the play with the personalities and talents of its girl artists.

CHAPTER 4

DIARY OF GIRLHOOD

"We don't want to hurt you, but we need to breathe."
– Poem 5, *Diary of Me: In My Shoes*

Over the course of a semester, the girls examined a great many topics in a variety of theatrical styles. I have already discussed in Chapters Two and Three the ensemble building steps and the process of developing a space of trust where the ensemble could take daily risks exposing their thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences with regards to girlhood. Once we had established the ensemble and this space, we began to answer questions about girlhood using theatre, visual art, and blogs/journals. These questions and topics were most often created by the girls themselves. Written outlines and video documentation of their theatrical storytelling were kept over the course of our devising process. Beginning in November we reviewed what we had created during our time together and focused on those works that spoke to the girls the most. As a class we discussed the possibility of sharing our work with the wider school population. This possibility may have impacted their choices, something I examine in Chapter Five. In small groups the girls selected what works they wished to return to, add to, and revise. These smaller pieces were grouped together and linked through various ways. What resulted was a scripted performance of girlhood in three sections or acts. In this chapter I break down the script by act and discuss the creation process in more detail. In each of the acts I included thick description of the girls' performances in order to bring the performances to life for the reader. I examine the script in two ways: one, through a performance studies lens with a particular focus on the girls' embodied performance of

self, and two, through in depth textual analysis. I highlight important, reoccurring themes surrounding girlhood which develop through the performance and in the script, providing an initial analysis of the script for potential burgeoning theories on girlhood.

For reading purposes, it should be noted that the acts and scene separations are marked. *(Stage directions are placed in parentheses and written in italics.)* ***I placed my description of the girls' performance in italicized bold font.*** The Theatre Performers chose to use their own names in skits rather than create character names and therefore, in order to protect their anonymity, I have replaced the names with either numbers or letters or other substitutions that fit the scene. Also, please be aware that in writing the performance pieces, girl playwrights were allowed to use their specific vernacular. I believe language expresses something very detailed and important about identity. This may occasionally seem like spelling/grammatical errors, but these reflect specific choices made by the playwrights.

Act 1: Introduction

Our first act was actually created at the end of our devising process. Working in small groups, the girls narrowed their focus to one devised scene and one choral poem. We began to look at how to present these pieces; for example, in what order would they be presented and how we would tie the different scenes together with the serious-toned poems. We considered many options. We came to the point where we needed a title for our piece. As often is the case in a democratically controlled ensemble, we ended up with two choices with the girls split down the middle. We compromised and put the two names together – *A Diary of Me: In My Shoes*. The scenes the girls had been revising already incorporated the idea of diaries, and so we spent a day exploring the idea of

shoes through improvisation. In their small groups they were given the task of creating a short scene about shoes. The only requirement was to connect shoes to our exploration of girlhood. What resulted was many "trips" to the shoe store, but during each trip deeper ideas/questions emerged – what did shoes represent, how are shoes and girl stereotypes connected, how do we judge a person by their shoes, and what about the idea of walking in someone else's shoes. We spent the next class deciding in what order to present the shoe shopping excursions, and what we ended up with was the opening, or first act, of our performance piece.

Act I: Shoes, Eight Trips

Girls of various personalities and shoe preferences enter and exit a shoe store while shopping.

Trip One

Character Breakdown

GIRL 1[26]: Mimi

GIRL 2: Ari

GIRL 3: Sadie

(As each part ends and a new group of girls enters the store the original girls will freeze as if shopping for shoes, allowing the new girls to have focus. Three girls walk in and look for shoes in a shoe store.)

1[27]: Come on guys, let's go in here and shop for shoes.

[26] If the character is played by a research participant I have included their names.

[27] Reminder: The Theatre Performers chose to use their own names in skits rather than create character names, and therefore in order to protect their anonymity, I have replaced the names with either numbers or letters or other substitutions that fit the scene. In Act I assigned a number to each Theatre Performer. Some Theatre Performers played multiple characters.

2: Woohoo. Shoe shopping!

(They begin to examine the shoes.)

1: Uh, those are ugly . . . those are uncomfortable…. OMG, I am getting these ones. These are the ones!

(GIRL 1 grabs shoes to her chest and follows GIRL 2 and 3 as they begin to look at shoes.)

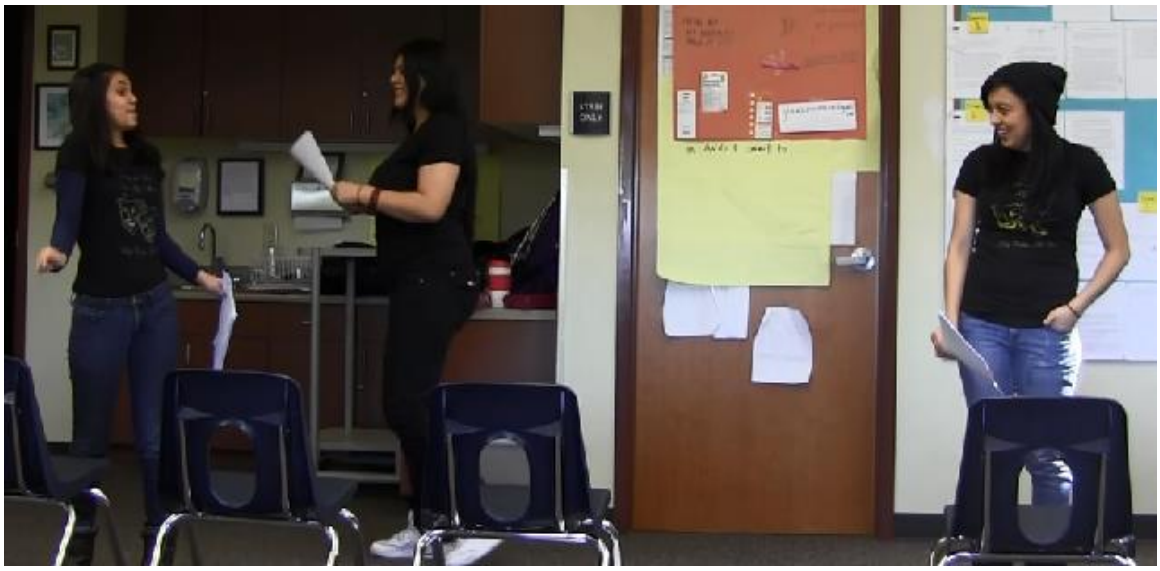

Figure 15. Trip 1, Girl 2 (Ari) finds her perfect pair.

2: Um, no! Gross!! Ew, not my type. REALLY? No! (*Finding a pair she likes*). OOOOooohh! These are perfect!! (See fig. 15).

(GIRL 2 grabs the shoes. GIRL 3 begins her quest.)

3: Haha these look like shoes my grandma wears. These are too tall. Uh, these are way too shiny! (*Sees the perfect shoes*). These are perfect. I found them!!

(With their shoes in their hands, the girls turn to address the audience.)

1: You will never understand…

2: my life, until…

3: you walk in my shoes.

(They exit.)

Trip Two

Character Breakdown

GIRL: Soledad

(Spotlight as a new girl enters.)

GIRL: My shoes, I can run, skate, jump, hop, and walk comfortably in 'em. I'll draw on um, toss um, I'll even jump in puddles with them with no problem. I like them yes, but I won't die for um.

(Exits.)

Trip Three

Character Breakdown

GIRL 1: Non-research participant

GIRL 2: Non-research participant

GIRL 3: Non-research participant

(More girls enter store.)

1: Ima go buy some new shoes.

2: Eyy! Ima buy some too.

1: Which ones?

2: The green Ed Hardy ones.

1: Why? They're so ugly.

2: B/c they're comfortable and I like to be comfortable when I go to school. Why do you wear your Vans all the time?

1: B/c if I'm going to be walking around all day I might as well wear the shoes I like.

3: Ima buy me some shoes too.

1: Which ones?

3: These flats, just like I always wear!

1: You always wear those, why don't you buy something new?

3: B/c I want to be comfortable too and I'm too lazy in the mornings to ties my shoes.

1: Alright, look like we all have our favorites.

(They exit.)

Trip 4

Character Breakdown

GIRL 1: Yesenia

GIRL 2: Melissa

GIRL 3: Natalia

Figure 16. Trip 4, Girl 1 (in mid-hair toss) urging Girl 3 to purchase heels.

(Three more friends enter a shoe store.)

The three girls playing the characters in Trip 4 enter the makeshift stage which serves as a shoe store and walk to a shoe display (a row of chairs stands in for an actual shoe display). They each stop and, consciously or not, strike a pose. Girl 1 stands with her hip cocked to one side, the opposite leg extended out with toe pointed as if she is about to have her picture taken on the red carpet. She tosses back her long brown hair with her hand, which comes to rest on her tilted hip. She insists to Girl 3 (standing right next to her) that she should wear heels to the upcoming party.

1: Since the party is going to be fancy you should wear heels.

2: You don't have to wear heels, you can just wear flats.

Girl 1 leans back slightly; her weight shifting to the other hip while playing with the gold necklace as she raises her eyebrows and scrunches her face at Girl 2's suggestion that Girl 3 doesn't have to wear heels.

3: Let's just try something that your feel ok and right for the party.

Girl 3, positioned between Girl 1 and 2, stands with straight posture, shoulders back, feet planted hip width apart as the argument begins. As it escalates Girl 3's head turns back and forth between the other two girls as if viewing a tennis match. As it escalates her body shifts in the direction of the speaker.

1: It's more common to wear heel than other kinds of shoes at parties.

Girl 2 stands with toes pointed inward, shoulders hunched forward slightly preventing an assessment of her chest. She leans forward

gesturing with her hand in emphasis when contradicted by Girl 1. Girl 2's voice raises in volume, deepening in tone as she enters Girl 1's space.

2: It's more comfortable to wear shoes than heels.

Girl 1's voice becomes lighter and she steps back slightly tossing her hair back several more times while replying to Girl 2's challenge.

1: Yeah, heels make you look taller, there's all kinds of heels, really cute ones.

3: Why can't I get the shoes that I want?

2: What kind of shoes do you want?

She stands up tall when asked what kind of shoes she wants and firmly declares,

3: I want boots.

1: There's cute heeled boots (see fig. 16).

Girl 2 reacts with a smirk nudging her elbow to Girl 3's ribs as she exclaims that there are "flat boots too."

2: There are flat boots too.

Girl 3 shakes them off waiving her arms back and forth, her head moving in unison.

3: Let's just get something that fits.

They end the scene by walking out of the shoe store. Girl 2 exits first with long, bold strides leading with her head, shoulders slumped down, and chest sunk in. Girl 3 follows shaking her head in frustration. Girl 1 leaves the store last tossing her hair back one last time.

(They exit.)

Trip 5

Character Breakdown

GIRL: Valentina

(Girl enters. Finds the perfect pair of flats.)

GIRL: Flats, they're comfortable. I feel barefoot, free, like I can do anything. Of course I could wear sandals if I wanted my feet to be free but I am too paranoid, what if something fell on my feet and cut my toes off! I could also wear tennis shoes as well but I feel like my feet are suffocated. I'm claustrophobic. They're my shoes.

(She exits.)

Trip 6

Character Breakdown

GIRL 1: Luz

GIRL 2: Valentina

GIRL 3: Non-research participant

(*Three more girls enter already in mid-conversation.)*

1: Oh! So did you get invited to Sandy's party?

2: Yes! Did you?

3: Yes!! I did.

1: What are you guys going to wear?

3: I don't know, but I need to go shoe shopping!

2: Let's go to Charlotte Russe! They have the cutest heels!!

3: Noooo! I hate wearing heels! I rock out my boots.

1: Dude! Me too! I HATE heels!

2: You can always try something new, and there might be cute guys!

3: Oh yeah, true, true, true.

1: I'm not into heels doe!!

2: Let's go!

3: Ooooo…look at them cute boots!

1: They don't have any Vans here

2: Just wear heels!

1: I'll pass!

3: Hey! Ama buy these boots for her party! They are really cute!

2: Ugh! Whatever!! Ama buy these heels.

1: I'm never wearing heels, so I'll just buy some Vans tomorrow!

2: Well let's go pay cuz I'm starving.

3: Okay let's go!

(They exit.)

Trip 7

Character Breakdown

GIRL: Mimi

(GIRL enters, looks around, and then points to her shoes.)

GIRL: These are my quick, comfortable in-a-hurry shoes. These shoes are the ones I wear when I'm lazy. They let me walk to the corner store. Man I love these shoes.

(She leaves.)

Trip 8

Character Breakdown

GIRL 1: Natalia

GIRL 2: Rosalinda

GIRL 3: Ruby

(GIRL 2 and 3 enter and begin to look at shoes. GIRL 1 enters. They walk by each other.)

3: (*speaking to GIRL 2)* . . . and then she was like, I don't even eat pasta.

2: Who doesn't eat pasta? That's so weird.

3: Right?! I don't even know what her deal was.

(GIRL 1 enters. Looks GIRL 1 and 2 up and down.)

1: Ditzes, you can tell by ur shoes.

(GIRL 2 and 3 turn and look at GIRL 1.)

1 and 2: Excuse me!?

(GIRL 1 throws her hand up in the faces of GIRL 1 and 2. "Freezes" the action by addressing the audience.)

1: Freeze. (See fig. 17) Come on, people. Come on. Look at this. What is this Hollywood? Their shoes say it all. Their daddy must be making bank. I got those shoes today. I'll get another pair tomorrow. I just got another yesterday. Come on this is ridiculous. Like I said you can tell by their shoes. Classis Hollywood Barbie dolls. Unfreeze.

(GIRL 1 turns back to face girls. They argue, speaking over each other. GIRL 2 cuts the argument off by "freezing" the action and delivering her own monologue to the audience.)

2: Freeze. I love shoes. I love sparkles. I love glitter. I love fashion. I love the feeling I get when I wear a new pair of shoes. My choice of shoes does not change who I am as a person. Material items should not determine who you are. Unfreeze.

(GIRL 2 re-enters the ongoing argument. After a brief moment arguing GIRL 3 "freezes" the argument and addresses the audience.)

Figure 17. Trip 8, Girl 1 sharing her thoughts on the "ditzes."

3: Ugh. Freeze. O.k., my mom always told me you could tell a lot about a person by their shoes. Where they've been. Where they're going. BUT, that don't tell you what kinda person they are. You don't know their whole life story. My daddy works in a warehouse. I got these at Goodwill. FIVE bucks. Unfreeze. (See fig. 18).

(The argument continues, increasing in volume.)

2: STOP talking. Look lady (*addressing GIRL 1*), I am gonna give you till the count of three, or else.

(Brief stand-off. They all turn to the audience.)

ALL: Freeze. You don't know who I am till you've walked a mile in my shoes.

(Turn to audience. All exit. End of Shoe scenes.)

Figure 18. Trip 8, Girl 3 shares her real story.

Act 1: Insights

Trip 4 serves as an excellent example of the performance of girlhood through the depiction of various girls in Act I. The embodied performance of Girl 2 with her outward demonstrations of confrontation stands in contrast to the softer, meeker performance of

Girl 1. Girl 1's performance calls attention to signifiers of the feminine body – long, lush hair and curved hips – while Girl 2's actions and posture block those features that mark her as female. Her shoulders mask, or attempt to mask, the appearance of breasts; her arms held up and outward in front of her make her presence larger. At one point her presence challenges the space of Girl 1 who responds by shrinking. Girl 2 invades the space of Girl 3 through emphatic physical contact. Girl 3 stands, literally, somewhere in the middle of the other two. Her physicality becomes a half-way point between assertive masculinity and diminutive femininity.

In her discussion about the debate over the concept of the construction of gender, Butler explains the body "appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed . . . the body is figured as a mere instrument or medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related" (*Gender Trouble* 12). The performative acts of the girls in Trip 4 can be read by the audience as masculine or feminine because we have become conditioned to understand and connect certain "externally related" actions to gender. Butler asserts that society's compulsory heterosexuality, the normalization of opposite sex desire, requires masculine and feminine exist in opposition. The masculine and feminine then become attached to the male and female as expressions of identity (*Gender Trouble* 24). What happens when the corporeal acts do not match the sex of the performer as in the case of Girl 2? These acts are read as unintelligible, deeming her existence as impossible or against the laws that govern gender (24).

The non-conforming performance of gender displayed by Girl 2, intensified in comparison to Girl 1's intelligible acts, serves to bring to light the fact that "gender is

always a doing" (34). Butler goes on to suggest that "gendered bodies are so many styles of flesh" constantly conditioned by history and "constituted in time . . . a constituted social temporality" (190-191). This understanding of gender as a construction, fluid and slippery, rather than a stable, fixed identity allows for flexibility, play, and subversion. If, as Butler asserts, gender can be neither true nor false, but rather a "regulatory fiction," what can be learned in an analysis of the girls' performances of girlhood? We can begin to identify the way contemporary female gender has been constructed, specifically with regards to girlhood, and then examine the way girls are "doing girlhood" or "girl-making" (Currie, 2009; Bloustien, 2003). In our theory creation groups the girls shared their understanding of girlhood as multiple and different, as exemplified by the girls in Trip 4, paralleling Butler's ideas. In Chapter Five I further discuss my work with the girl-theorists examining their work, artistic creations, and performances and expanding on their ideas.

This collection of eight shoe shopping trips reveals several intriguing ideas about contemporary US girlhood, specifically regarding how girlhood is performed as a daily practice. The shoes in many of the skits serve as readable presentations of self-identity. Each style of shoe can parallel a type of performed femininity. The Vans, for instance, represent the low-maintenance, low frill girl – a girl who shuns outward manifestations of socially constructed and acceptable girlhood. In choosing a shoe type, then, girls wear or choose their versions of girlhood. Their choices may play with gender lines and limits. Their choice may even be a rejection of her gender (as understood/constructed by society) altogether. In fact, during the discussion around the play's title, several of the participants suggested the title "In Her Heels." This suggestion resulted in a long debate

over whether the decision to choose a specific type of shoes for the title was limiting for other participants. One group of participants argued that by using "Heels" in the title, it would signify more directly that our play was about the experiences of girls. Another group argued against this, saying that this was an assumption about femininity they did not want to perpetuate: that all girls/women wear heels. Several girl participants had very strong feelings against heels, advocating that heels were another way society forced girls into limiting situations. Heels after all, quite literally, force girls into a position of instability, limiting mobility and freedom – even placing girls in danger. The pro-heel group argued that heels, in fact, could be empowering for some girls. Not only did they increase a girls' physicality in height, heels could exert a certain power for girls sexually.

Act I brings our class debate to the stage. In trips four and six, specifically, the girls urged their friends to consider high heels as the ideal shoe choice for the party: "the party is going to be fancy [and] you should wear heels" and "there might be cute guys." These comments reify a feminized version of girlhood that involves dressing in girl-acceptable, boy-attracting shoes. Both the acceptance and rejection of a constructed girlhood are questioned directly by trips one and eight, as the girl shoe-wearers in these scenes make it clear that they cannot be assessed by their shoes and, in fact, no one can be judged by their shoe choice: "You don't know who I am till you walked a mile in my shoes."

Act II: Introduction

Many topics were covered in our exploration of girlhood over the semester. Using theatre games, improvisation, Newspaper Theatre, and storytelling the girls discussed issues such as:

- Bras/breasts
- Puberty
- Periods
- Pregnancy
- STDS/AIDS
- Prostitution
- Peer pressure
- Rape
- Female stereotypes
- Romantic relationships
- Sex
- Competition between women
- Girl drama
- Sexuality/sexual orientation
- Treatment of women across the world
- Suicide
- Gender inequality
- Bullying
- Racism
- School/Education for females
- Family
- Friendship

In deciding what stories they wanted to share with an audience, I asked the girls to form self-selected small groups. In those groups they were to return to a topic they felt was important to girls' experience. Together they were to develop a scene with a twist. In order to tie these disparate scenes together, each scene had to end with the realization that the protagonist was dreaming. This dream sequence technique had been suggested earlier in the semester by a participant and explored in our work with excellent results. The groups decided on their topics and improvised a short scene which was then presented for the class. The scenes were collectively critiqued and the groups continued to work on developing the ideas into a scripted scene. The five final scenes were placed in an order the girls felt made sense, and then we worked to connect one scene to the next so that the scenes could be presented one right after the other. The girls chose to follow

their own familiar daily schedules of waking to get ready for school, attending school, traveling home from school, spending time at home, and heading to bed at the end of their day. The first scene explores girl friendship and stereotypes in a school setting. The scene begins and ends with a girl late for her first day of school. The second scene remains at our school setting and begins as the protagonist from the previous scene runs by our new protagonist, a nerdy girl entering her first class of the day. This scene explores school bullying involving girls. The third scene transitions from the school classroom to the light rail station, as a new female protagonist heads home from school. At the light rail station, she and her friends explore a familiar scene of heterosexual first love. Our fourth scene places the action at the home of another girl from the light rail station. This scene humorously brings to the stage the girl's multi-generational family home-life as she experiences her first period. Our fifth and last scene of Act II examines gender inequality, and imagines what would happen when the first female president and female vice-president of the United States take office.

ACT II: The Dream Scenes

Scene 1: 1st Day of School

Character Breakdown

Girl 1 (Ruby): New girl at school

Girl 2 (Natalia): Nerdy girl who offers tour to new girl

Twin A (Valentina): Mean girl who has a past with Girl 2

Twin B (Soledad): Constant companion to mean girl

(Frozen Picture: GIRL 1 in bed with diary. She grabs journal and starts writing.)

1: Dear Diary tomorrow is my first day at a new school, I hope and pray that it will be great and I will meet some new friends.

(Lies down and falls asleep.)

As Girl 1, played by Ruby, rises from her stage bed and enters her new school, Girl 2 immediately greets her with a high-pitched, "hurry up, hurry up, hurry up." Her quick-paced speech and movement match Girl 2's words to Girl 1. Girl 2 grabs Girl 1's hand and pulls her with all her might. Girl 1 pulls her hand back and stops, her face awash in confusion.

2: Hurry up, hurry up, hurry up

1: Why are we hurrying, we got a whole half hour till school starts?

2: Well if we don't hurry, we're gonna be late for being early

1: Eh???

Girl 2 emphatically gestures with her hands in response to Girl 1's hesitancy. Once again she snatches Girl 1's hand and drags her from room to room, describing with rapid fire speed the purpose of each room.

(GIRL 1 follows GIRL 2. 2 points at different areas as she walks.)

2: This is the Spanish room and this is the English room, I love the English room it's my favorite. This is the down low of the school; (*snort-giggles*) down low that's such a funny word.

As Girl 2 stops at each room her body rocks back and forth in excitement, legs crossed one in front of the other as if she must twist herself up or she will explode in excitement. Her facial expressions alternate between a look

of ultimate bliss as she looks at each room and a plea for acceptance and understanding as she looks towards Girl 1.

(TWINS walk towards them. GIRL 2 stares at them briefly, wide-eyed in fear.)

She freezes in horror when she sees the Twins walking towards them. She stutters in fear while she rocks back on her heels and her whole body quakes. Her head shakes back and forth as if it might spin off her neck, and she throws up her arms in front of her running off the stage.

2: Uh, oh I gotta go.

(Running zigzag, GIRL 2 tumbles. Quickly picks herself up and scurries off.) (See fig. 19).

The Twins slowly saunter towards Girl 1. Their movements exude confidence. They stop in unison in front of Girl 1 and strike the same pose: right hip cocked to the side, left leg jutting out in front of the right, and head tilted to one side in a display of curiosity. Their unhurried action which continues through their next exit and entrance match their slow, sing-song speech.

(TWINS stand before GIRL 1.)

1: What?

TWIN B: Who . . .

(TWIN A puts her hand up to TWIN B cutting her off and continues.)

A: Who are you? I like your braid, it's pretty

1: Huh?

(TWIN B leaves.)

A: We should be bffs. We could go shopping…

1: I don't even know you

A: but I still like your braid

(TWIN B comes back and grabs TWIN A.)

Figure 19. Scene 1: 1st Day of School. Nerd flees and hides from the Twins.

B: Get your butt over here

(GIRL 2 pops up and breathes with inhaler.)

2: Sooooo where were we?

1: You left me alone with those creepy twins

2: Right. Sorry. But girls like me and the twins don't get along. If I were to talk to A she'd probably beat me up and B, well, she'd probably make fun of me.

1: But they seem kinda sweet.

2: Sweet????? The Twins????? Those two-faced back stabbers that ruined my life.

(Twins come back.)

1: Gotta go to the bathroom.

(GIRL 2 runs off.)

A: Let me give you the scoop on GIRL 1. We were best friends in middle school. I know right! I don't even…whatever! So anyway when we got to high school we all got our different interests and she, like, got all weird! Like if we would go outside to hang with our friends she would be like why didn't you call me back? And we'd be like why are you so obsessed with me. Then her mom called our mom and started yelling. It was so crazy.

B: And now I guess she's a nerd

1: Woah.

B: And then she started this petition and . . .

(*TWIN A cuts B off.)*

A: B, stop no enough.

1: Woah, this is crazy, it's like a dream

(GIRL 2 reappears suddenly and walk slowly towards GIRL 1.)

2: That's because it is.

When the scene jumps suddenly as Girl 1 awakens from her bad dream Girl 2 and the Twins transition into relatives of Girl 1. The actors drop the exaggerated and contrasting movement and speech of their previous characters. The scene ends with the repeated action of Girl 1 hurrying off to school.

(All circling GIRL 1. Cover her in blanket. Lights out. Alarm goes off.)

1: (*now a new character, perhaps a sister of GIRL 1*) GIRL 1. You're gonna be late for school. Get up Get up Get up!

B and A: (*also new characters, much like GIRL 2, perhaps other family members of* GIRL 1) Get up, you haven't showered Get up

1: Guys be quiet I still have an hour!

B, A: Oh

1: Now if you guys can just do me a favor and GET OUT OF MY ROOM

B, A, 2 leave. GIRL 1 sighs and rubs her face trying to wake up. 2 bursts into 1's room again.

2: GIRL 1 it's actually 7am. You need to get up now!

1: Oh crap.

(GIRL 1 runs everywhere to get ready. Leaves. Re-enters and passes by NARRATOR who begins the next scene by standing slightly apart from action.)

Scene 2: Bully Scene

Character Breakdown

NARRATOR (Yesenia): The BULLY in the future retelling the details of the day.

BULLY (Non-research participant): Mean girl always picking on NERD.

FRIEND 1 (Non-research participant): One of BULLY's friends, urges her on.

FRIEND 2 (Non-research participant): Another of BULLY's friends.

NERD (Luz): High school girl picked on because of her nerdiness.

NARRATOR: Dear Diary, today I had such a weird dream in class. You know Nerd, well, I was bullying her again today like always and when I went to class I fell asleep and had the weirdest dream. Here's how the day started……

BULLY: Hey you guys here comes the biggest nerd ever Victim!!!!

FRIEND 1: Ha-ha- ha I know right you should show her who's boss.

FRIEND 2: Yea you should, here she comes.

Nerd bounces across the stage eager to take her seat in class. A backpack stuffed to capacity sits on her back, and glasses perch at the end of her nose.

NERD: I am so excited to be in school today!!!!

Bully, looking like a boxer about to work out with the hood of a light gray, oversized sweatshirt pulled over her head, menaces Nerd.

BULLY: You are such a nerd!!!!

NERD: According to my calculations I am not a nerd!!!

F1: Get outta here!!!

F2: Yea nobody wants you here!!!

Bully strides to Nerd blocking her way into the classroom, and with an open palm and a smile Bully slams the books out of Nerd's hands. Nerd's bubbly posture crumples and she sinks to the floor sniffling to pick up her books.

(BULLY knocks the many books out of NERD'S hands which fall to the ground. She picks them up. Everyone exits into classroom.)

NARRATOR: Nerd just stood there and didn't say another word so I slammed her books on the ground!!! I felt bad especially when she started crying, but I just walked away and went to class. When I walked by her I gave her dirty looks and sat by F1 and F2.

F1: Did you see her crying after you slammed her books on the ground!!

F2: I know!!!! It was so funny I couldn't stop laughing!!

BULLY: I know I'm the BOSS!!!! She thinks she's all that just cause she's smart!!!

NARRATOR: So then class started and I kinda dozed off and this is what happened in my dream!!!!

The scene soon transitions to the Bully's dream and Nerd undergoes a dramatic transformation. Gone is her bouncy walk and bright smile. Instead she surges, shoulders and chest puffed up and out, towards Bully (now the nerd).

(BULLY falls asleep while class action is mimed during narrator's lines. BULLY wakes up suddenly.)

BULLY: What the…. Why am I wearing these ugly glasses!!!??

(BULLY walks out of the classroom and bumps into NERD.)

With one shoulder the transformed Nerd body checks Bully.

NERD: Watch where you're goin' nerd!!!

BULLY: you did not just call me a nerd, NERD!!!

F1: OOOooo are you gonna let her talk to you like that?!

F2: Yea you better do somethin!!!

Bully's demeanor of strength morphs, shoulders sinking and head slumped into her chest, now more closely resembling the Nerd trying to recover her books.

NARRATOR: Next thing I know she punched meeee!!!! I mean how dare shheeee!!! But anyway I woke up and I ran to find NERD.

BULLY: Hey NERD wait up!!!

NERD: Please don't hit me! (See fig. 20).

BULLY: I won't. I just wanted to say I was sorry for bullying you. I feel really bad.

NERD: It's okay, I can't hold grudges anyway.

NARRATOR: And then we skipped off into the sunset and became best friends. Well that's it diary and I decided something Ima stop bullying people. I decided that if it was

Figure 20. Scene 2, The Bully Scene. Nerd pleads with Bully.

me I wouldn't want people bullying me. I can't believe I learned all that just by walking in someone's shoes for just a day. Bye Diary.

(Transition: ends with the two girls skipping off, passing by a girl walking to the light rail who sits and writes in her diary.)

Scene 3: The Light Rail

Or The Self-Consciousness Scene

Character Breakdown

LOVE-STRUCK (Mimi): Girl in love with boy at the light rail station.

FRIEND 1 (Melissa): LOVE-STRUCK's friend who urges her to speak to GUY.

FRIEND 2 (Soledad): Another of LOVE-STRUCK's friends

GUY (Valentina): Cute boy waiting at the light rail station.

Valentina, playing the character Guy, walks across the stage holding her hand over her mouth. She takes her position on the stage and the scene begins. She lets her hand fall to reveal a thick, false blond mustache taped above her lip. She takes a relaxed pose with a wide stance, one hand in her pocket while the other holds her script. The audience begins to murmur and laugh. At one point a girl in the audience hollers out, "Damn!" Followed by another girl shouting out, "Look at that cute boy." Valentina struggles to remain in character and at one point turns away from the audience unable to hold her laughter.

LOVE-STRUCK: December 3, 2012 dear diary, I saw a guy today… (Sigh) He is really attractive and appears to be an easy going guy. I guess you can say that I like him… a lot!

But obviously he has no idea of my existence. I'm too shy to talk to him and I know that this way I'll never be able to surpass just having him as a crush.

(Two other girls enter and sit by LOVE-STRUCK who is eyeballing GUY standing across from her. FRIEND 1 and FRIEND 2 look at each other knowingly. LOVE-STRUCK continues starring. FRIEND 1 and FRIEND 2 look at LOVE-STRUCK, then GUY, and then each other.)

FRIEND 1: (*Nudges LOVE-STRUCK*) Someone's melting like butter.

FRIEND 2: You should ask him out!

FRIEND 1: Do you want me to call him over here?

LOVE-STRUCK: No, No! Don't do that! (See fig. 21)

(GUY turns around and looks at them. The three friends sit up straighter and go silent until GUY turns around. FRIEND 1 and FRIEND 2 pull LOVE-STRUCK to her feet and push her toward GUY. LOVE-STRUCK stands behind GUY, shaking and starring nervously.)

As they push her towards him, Guy turns and confidently smiles at her. Love-Struck's voice rises to a high-pitched squeak as she runs off.

LOVE-STRUCK: I can't do this.

(LOVE-STRUCK grabs her friends and runs away.)

LOVE-STRUCK: Day 2: December 4, 2012. Dear Diary, both of my friends were teasing me for looking at the guy I like. We were sitting down at the light rail and suddenly they picked me up and pushed me towards this guy. I swear my heart was going to explode.

(LOVE-STRUCK and her friends sit with LOVE-STRUCK in the middle. GUY is leaning against the door.)

FRIEND 1: Hey look it's that guy again

FRIEND 2: Come on stop being such a scaredy cat!

LOVE-STRUCK: Fine! Geez stop pressuring me!

(LOVE-STRUCK stands up looking confident for her friends.)

Figure 21. Scene 3, The Light Rail Scene. Love-Struck (center) pleads with her friends not to call over Guy (standing).

LOVE-STRUCK: Pfft this is easy

(LOVE-STRUCK walks up to GUY who looks up at her as she approaches.)

She stands confidently and crosses to Guy with purpose, but when Guy turns and smiles at her all of her confidence disappears as does her straight posture and normal voice. Her hands raise from her hips to shake

in the air as she bounces quickly from one foot to the other, then she squeals in embarrassment in fear as she turns and dashes off with small hops.

GUY: Hey

(LOVE-STRUCK laughs awkwardly, smiling.)

LOVE-STRUCK: Hi… Well I gotta go! Bye! (See fig. 21)

(LOVE-STRUCK grabs her friends and drags them off the light rail while FRIEND 2 makes a 'call me' hand motion and points at LOVE-STRUCK toward the GUY.)

LOVE-STRUCK: December 5, 2012 Dear Diary, I'm so stupid I couldn't even get my word out of my mouth. "Hi, bye!" Really?! Gosh I just hope that next time he won't recognize me.

FRIEND 1: Come on, when are you going to work up the nerve to ask him out!

FRIEND 2: Yeah!

(GUY walks up to stand in front of LOVE-STRUCK, the three friends look up.)

GUY: Hey

FRIEND 1: Well LOVE-STRUCK, we gotta go

FRIEND 2: Later

(LOVE-STRUCK stands up panicking.)

LOVE-STRUCK: Wait! Ahh… shit

GUY: I'm GUY, we should hang out sometime

(LOVE-STRUCK is silent. GUY leaves and LOVE-STRUCK sits in disappointment/horror and eventually falls asleep. GIRL enters and shakes LOVE-STRUCK awake.)

GIRL: Hey wake up! This is the last stop.

(LOVE-STRUCK wakes up startled.)

Figure 22. Scene 3, The Light Rail Scene. Love-Struck runs away from Guy unable to summon the courage to speak to him.

LOVE-STRUCK: What was that just all a dream?

GIRL: Whatever I am going home.

(Transition: GIRL heads straight to the bathroom and the next scene begins.)

Scene 4: Period Scene

Character Breakdown

GIRL (Ari): Teen-age girl who experiences her first period.

NANNY (Yesenia): Elderly grandmother of GIRL, constantly telling stories of her youth.

MOM (Non-research participant): GIRL'S mother, impatient and irritated with her daughters arguing.

SISTER (Non-research participant): GIRL'S younger sister. Has to pee.

OLDER SISTER (Mimi): GIRL'S older and wiser sister.

(GIRL sits, writing in her diary before going to bed.)

GIRL: Dear Diary, Dec. 22 2012. I have a strange feeling that I might be in heaven right now since the world ended yesterday! I'm not sure but if I am dead I want you to know that you were really good to me, you were the only one that really listened to me and understood all my feelings. But if I'm not dead, the Mayans are some piece of bullshit. Anyway did I tell you that I might be in heaven right now!! HA-HA FUNNY! Anyway goodnight I think I see an angel coming… wait it's just nanny!

Nanny (Yesenia) enters the bedroom of Girl (Ari) just as she finishes her diary entry. Immediately the audience burst into peals of laughter. Yesenia, as Nanny, wears a short curly wig and carries a meter stick as a make-shift cane. On her back she wears a back pack which she has covered with a sage green patterned shawl tied at her chest. A black and white skirt with dizzying whirls and swirls along with unfashionable brown slip-on flats complete the mismatched outfit. The ensemble ages Yesenia well past her fifteen years, and helps to create the character of Nanny, an elderly, outspoken grandmother bent and crooked with age. Nanny says goodnight to Girl with a high-pitched, wavering voice and the scene shifts to its dream section.

NANNY: Hey honey, I just came to say Good Night! (See fig. 23).

(Nanny leaves the room. GIRL goes to the bathroom sneakily tip toeing.)

SISTER: *(Goes to the bathroom. Knocks on door)* Umm… Girl can you hurry up because I have to go pee?!

GIRL: *(through the door)* Go away I'm busy there's plenty of restroom around the damn house you heard me!

MOM: Oh No! They are awake!

NANNY: Girls hurry I need to get my dentures!

SISTER: What's your problem? Why are you taking so long in there?

GIRL: *(opens the door slightly and peeks head out)* I NEED a bandage because I think I have a cut! *(slams door)*

MOM: What's all the screaming? What's going on?

SISTER: Mom, my sister is being so annoying. She doesn't let me pee and she doesn't want to let Nanny get her dentures.

NANNY: Honey, when I was your age, I had no sisters. You have to get along.

GIRL: *(opens the door slightly and peeks head out)* Stop you guys! I'm dying and you guys are out there having fun. What kind of family are you? *(Slams door.)*

Again and again, in response to her many relatives' demands that she exit the restroom, Girl pops just her head out of the door and with a desperate urgency in her voice and her face pleads to be left alone.

SISTER: Okay, so you said you cut yourself. Where's your cut?

Despite the consistent laughter from the audience at the comic responses of Nanny, Ari remains committed to her character's belief that there is something horribly wrong with her. In response to her sister's question

about where she cut herself, her head peeks out from the door this time rather slowly, as she replies in a hushed, shameful tone.

GIRL: *(opens the door slightly and peeks head out)* So I was peeing and I think I kind of paper cutted you know where, with the toilet paper. *(Slams door.)*

NANNY: When I was your age, I thought the same thing…

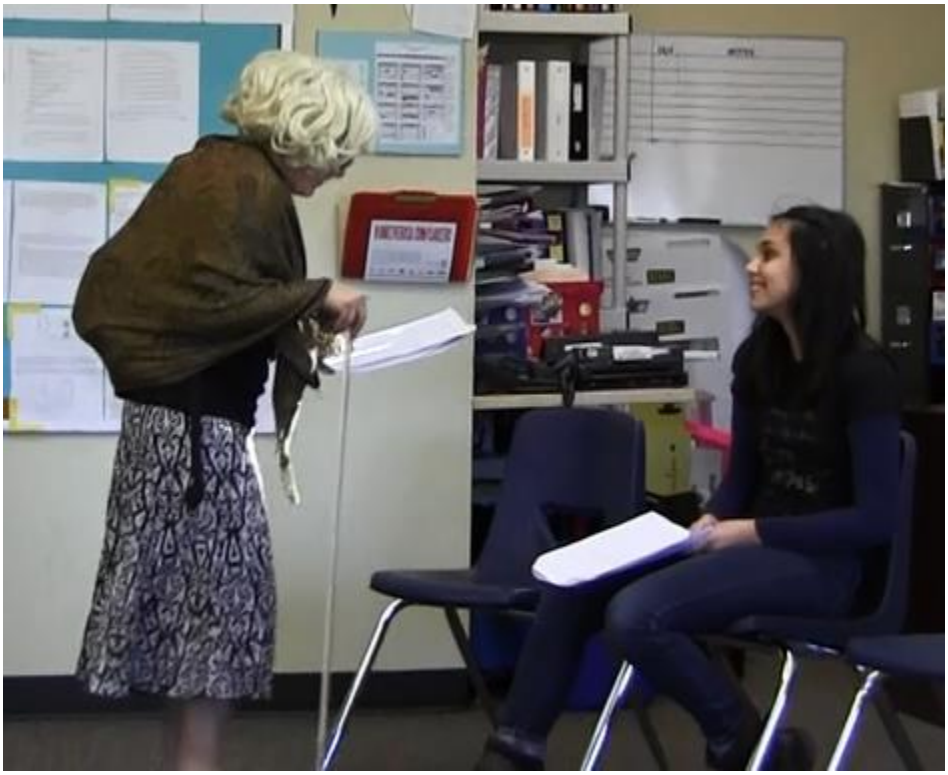

Figure 23. Scene 4, The Period Scene. Nanny tells Girl goodnight.

Her earnest explanation combined with Nanny's recollection that when she was Girl's age she had to wear diapers, results in the largest laugh from the all-girl audience.

MOM: Oh mom. Just stop with you old ages. Girl, what you need is a pad.

GIRL: *(opens the door slightly and peeks head out)* Awe man no. Are you serious?

(Slams door.)

NANNY: When I was your age, I had to wear diapers.

SISTER: Oh Nanny, that was 1000 years ago.

MOM: Now now, don't be disrespectful to your Nanny, mija.

GIRL: *(through the door)* Okay, where are the pads.

NANNY: When I was your age…

GIRL: *(through the door)* Nanny, shut up, you're old, get over it. Where are the damn pads?

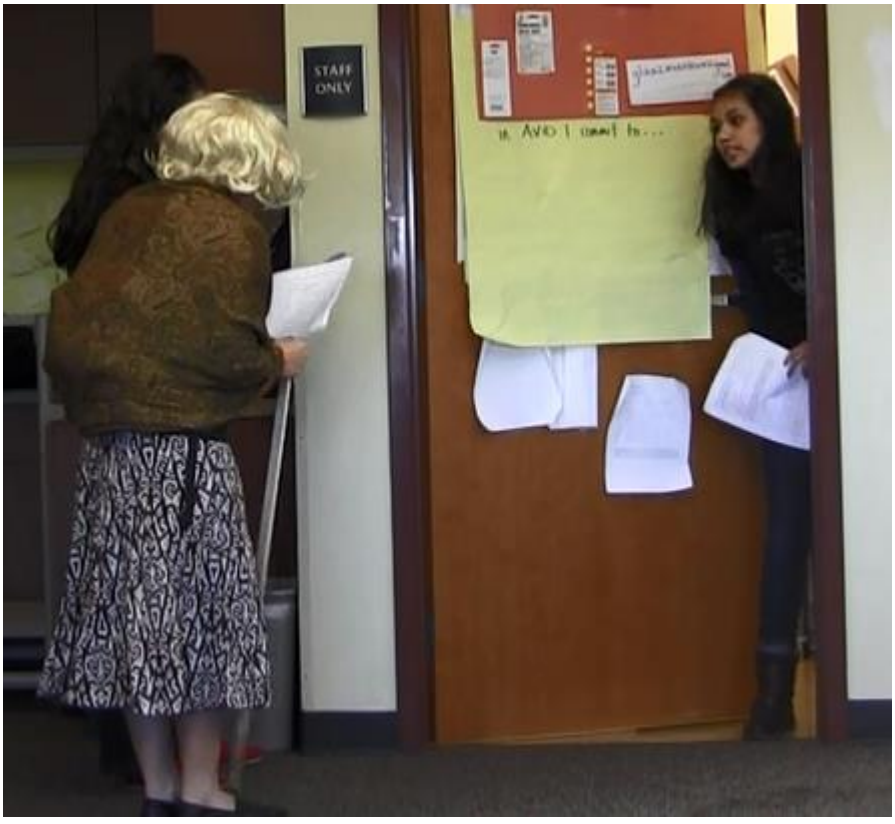

Figure 24. Scene 4, The Period Scene. Girl pleads to be taken to the hospital.

MOM: First drawer to the right.

GIRL: *(through the door)* Is this deadly? I demand you to take me to the hospital this instant. (See fig. 24).

MOM: This is normal, you don't need no hospital.

NANNY: Well I'm going to hunt down something to eat so I'm demanding you to give me my dentures because I'm starving.

MOM: Girl, please come out, we need to talk.

(Lights out. Girl returns to her bed and wakes up when lights come up.)

The scene ends with a transition back to reality as the lights shift and Girl wakes abruptly from her dream. She sighs deeply in relief, before dramatically pausing in frozen horror.

GIRL: Whoa, what a nightmare.

Looks down at her bed stained with blood.

She reaches down to her lap with her hand which she slowly raises up in the air to reveal blood[28]. A long scream for Mom breaks the silence.

Girl: MOM!!!!!!!!!!!

SISTER: Girl shut up, it's 3 in the morning and Mom's sleeping.

GIRL: I'm bleeding to death!

(SISTER walks over to GIRL, realizes she has started her period.)

SISTER: My little sister is becoming a woman. Stop being so dramatic, go get a damn pad.

[28] No stage blood was used. The blood was all inferred through mime and dialogue.

GIRL: Fine!

SISTER: Kay, I'm going to sleep.

(GIRL exits. SISTER goes to room and writes in journal, goes to bed. Older sister begins new scene.)

Scene 5: 1st Female President

Character Breakdown

SISTER/PRESIDENT (Mimi): Girl who dreams of becoming the first female US president.

VP (Sadie): First female US VP.

SECRET SERVICE (Ruby): Body guard to the PRESIDENT.

RIOTERS (Rosalinda and Yesenia): Angry members of the public.

(Cue music HAIL TO THE CHIEF)

Sister (Mimi) sits on her bed, shoulders slumped writing in her diary, legs crossed, her right foot on her left knee and her left foot tucked underneath her right thigh. She tilts her head in contemplation as she writes about the upcoming presidential election. She brushes her bangs from her face as she writes.

SISTER: November 5, 2012. Dear diary, tomorrow is Election Day. By the end of tomorrow we will have a either a new president or a re-elected one. I hope that Obama is re-elected. Barack is an inspiration because he is the first black president.

(She falls asleep and a dream scene occurs upon her waking.)

She lays down on her side legs curled up to her chest and she drifts off into dream world. She wakes to the notes of "Hail to the Chief" and rises slowly from her bed.

SISTER: I can't believe that I am the first female president. This is such an honor and accomplishment that I have made such a historical moment for this world.

Her posture erect, she holds herself tall with pride and amazement as she spins around the room taking in her new surroundings at the White House. As she continues to talk about being president her demeanor becomes more and more professional. She stands straight, her hands gesture in emphasis, while her head and eyes scan the room engaging the audience. Sister has transformed from a teenage girl into a professional politician at a speaker's podium introducing her vice-president.

SISTER: I would like to take a second to thank the one person who got me to where I am today. She has gave me endless support and belief in me that without her, I probably wouldn't be standing here talking to this audience. This wonderful woman is your very own new female vice president, VP!!

The Vice-President (Sadie) enters and takes her place next to the President.

VP: This is a very happy moment. I want to thank everyone that helped up with the campaign and….."

Suddenly in the middle of the Vice-President's (VP) remarks, a secret service agent barges in to announce rioters outside the White House. The agent (Ruby), wearing dark sunglasses, walks stiffly, shoulders back,

arms at his waist, while his deep monotone voice conveys authority.

SECRET SERVICE walks to SISTER.

SECRET SERVICE: There's a riot outside the white house. (See fig. 25).

The President calmly announces that they will continue the speeches shortly as she and the VP follow the agent.

RIOTERS: No girls allowed!

As they view the rioters, hollering "No girls allowed," the agent blocks their view with his body arms splayed widely as he walks forward pushing them back from the windows. Back in the oval office, Sister invites the VP to sit and discuss the situation. They sit, leaning forward toward each other, facial expressions filled with great concern and concentration, reminiscent of dramatic oval office scenes from The West Wing.

(SISTER reads a hate letter.)

SISTER: Girls belong in the kitchen! This was the worst mistake! Girls belong in the house, but not the white one!!

(Calls VP.)

SISTER: VP, please come to my office now.

(VP walks into office.)

SISTER: I don't know if I want to be president any more… this is so much stress! I'm getting so much hate mail. I'm not safe. I don't know what to do…

(Rioters get louder and louder, begin throwing things.)

VP: Are you going to pass the bill? Well???

The scene abruptly transitions back to Sister's bed when the lights change. A radio alarm clock blares and Sister jerks awake with deep sighs; she catches her breath hand on her heart. She breathes a final sigh.

(Cue song "Just a Dream." Lights change and SISTER wakes up, breaths an audible sigh.)

SISTER: Oh, it was just a dream. Thank God.

(Transition to "I am . . ." Poems.)

Figure 25. Scene 5, 1st Female President. The President (right) and VP (center) learn there is a riot outside the White House from the Secret Service (left).

Scene 1: Insights

When the girls performed this scene for an audience, in both improvisation and readers' theatre formats, Natalia played Girl 2 with a great deal of physical comedy. She

has quite a knack for comedic performance and was not afraid to take some rather large risks with regards to character choices. She clumsily tripped all over herself, snort-laughed, and found a way to "hide" her character that the audience responded to with repetitive laughter and positive comments during the class creation analysis, audience talk-back, and theory-building sessions.

Girl 1 (the new girl), the scene's protagonist, seemed a reachable, familiar character to the target audience. An everywoman character of sorts, she represented all the girl participants who at one time or another experienced being the new girl at her first day of school, worried she wouldn't fit in. In comparison to the physical demeanors of the other characters in the scene, Girl 1 came across as "normal," relatable to the audience. The scene presented four characters which represented three familiar types of girl characters. Girl 1 served as the new girl, uncertain of her place and hoping to fit in. Girl 2 represented the outcast, in this case the nerd, ostracized by her former friends. The Twins, as the cool girls, embodied the ultimate desired status of power. The heightened mode of representation of the characters combined with the scene's humorous dialogue helped to portray the characters as ridiculous, worthy of being mocked. Rather than affirming the characters as genuine girls, the scene exposes them as stereotypes. This use of satire and exaggeration appear in all of the scenes helping to develop a strong underlying message about girlhood identified by the girl-theorists during our focus meetings.

Scene 2: Insights

In this scene, much like the first scene, the physical comedy was played up as was the one dimensionality of the stock characters. Nerd, played by Luz, was an uber nerd

complete with a huge stack of books and a pocket protector, and when she transformed into the bully during the dream a meanness exuded through her tough, masculine posture and physicality as well as her stern facial expressions. She practically stomped her way across the "stage" to the attack the Nerd.

In class discussions, the girl participants had discussed and written about serious bullying experiences. When asked to bring in news stories that reflected a girls' experience today, many of them brought in articles that discussed girls committing suicide after being slut-shamed[29] by other girls. In writing and performing this scene about bullying, a topic very significant to their daily experiences, the girls chose to perform a comedic scene. Bullying, a complex subject, was simplified and ended with the bully learning her lesson asking for forgiveness which is easily granted by the Nerd. Once more, stereotypes serve to satirize experiences shared by many girls. The one-dimensionality of the nerd and bully characters combined with the all-too-easy, and rather unrealistic ending resulted in an incongruity. The discrepancy between the comedic scene on stage and the lived experience of girls, highlights the complexity of real-life bullying and the need to address these situations as real and serious.

Scene 3: Insights

As the school site was an all-girls school, any scene which involved male characters required girl participants to play the opposite sex. In this scene, representative of much of the theatrical work that involved females playing male

[29] Many of the girls were well aware of this practice and used this term to describe the way girls can be bullied, specifically shamed, (by both girls and boys) for being thought of as too sexually promiscuous. This can happen whether or not the girl being victimized has been sexually active. Often the status of slut can be given due to perceived flirting or revealing attire. The perception of sexual activity by a girl puts her at risk for being shamed as a slut as in the case of Phoebe Prince.

characters, what resulted was an interesting commentary on both femininity and masculinity. As one might expect, when gender-bending occurs onstage, both genders became the subject of ridicule. Love-Struck's large sighs, moony expression, and squeaky voice marked her as girly/feminine/diminutive, while Guy's silence and strong stance created an aura of male mystery affirming him as manly/masculine/strong. The star-crossed lovers of Love-Struck and Guy were played with much humor and stereotypical characterization. The girl in love was shy, unable to speak, and in awe of the awesome masculinity of Guy. Guy came across as nonchalant, cool, and monosyllabic. The interaction between the two characters caused hoots and hollering, along with a great deal of giggling from the audience.

Their satirization of heterosexual first love raises questions about the expected performance of gender during interactions with the opposite sex, especially in regards to heterosexual desire. The scene makes light of assumed gender roles, bringing to light possible inaccuracies. This becomes heightened due to the drag performance of Valentina. Butler suggests that "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity" (*Gender Trouble* 186). She goes on to explain that gender parody erases the idea of a normal female or male gender and this "loss of normal . . . can be its own occasion for laughter, especially when the 'normal,' the 'original' is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one, an ideal that no one can embody" (*Gender Trouble* 189). In the scene Love-Struck finds her desire to approach the silent, dreamy Guy confounded by her terrible shyness, a shyness that perhaps reveals something significant about girlhood. Society teaches girls there remains a delicate

balance between being assertive and being aggressive, the latter an unwanted characteristic in a girl, especially a girlfriend. Guy in his stoic silence displays a surprising lack of emotion – no embarrassment, no excitement, no empathy – in response to Love-Struck's erratic actions, reifying the idea of boys as guided by the rational/mind and girls as directed by the emotional/heart. The parodic performance of both the male and female lovers in "The Light Rail" reveals both the impossibility of a "normal" gender and the complexity of romantic relations when having to negotiate expected gender roles.

Scene 4: Insights

As discussed in Chapter Three, many of the girl participants began our time together as timid, almost painfully shy performers; however, over the course of the semester many of them became braver, some could even be called bold, as is the case with the female actors who played Girl and Nanny, Ari and Yesenia. Despite the fact that all girls experience menses, and that the group chose to focus on this as the subject of their scene, the prospect of performing the scene either in front of class or for an invited audience of their peers was daunting.

Ari and Yesenia began the class as some of the shyest, and Yesenia, who developed the character of Nanny, almost refused to perform in our Readers Theatre sharing. Despite their beginnings, both of these girls managed to develop and perform two of the most challenging and memorable characters of the play. This in itself is significant, but when combined with the potentially embarrassing subject matter, their achievements are representative of the growth and challenging nature of the entire group.

Beyond the personal growth reflected by the risk-taking of these girl performers, "The Period Scene" represents a significant display of embodied power. As it is the only scene that could be classified as challenging or controversial, after all menstruation remains a topic rarely discussed in public (especially by adolescents) and girls often hide its existence tucking feminine sanitary products out of sight, I view the girls' decision to include it in the play as a challenge to society's silencing of the lived realities of girlhood. In her book, *Girls in Power: Gender, Body, and Menstruation*, sociologist Laura Fingerson interviewed girls and boys individually and in groups (both single and mixed gender groups) about their understandings and experiences of menstruation. One of Fingerson's more interesting findings and applicable to "The Period Scene" revolves around power dynamics. She explains that the menstrual talk revealed a persistent struggle between power and resistance. The embarrassment connected to menstruation stems from society's shaming of bodily functions, especially female bodily functions. Girls do not simply accept this view of menstruation. Fingerson finds

> girls resist these discourses by using their bodies as sources of agency in their everyday lives and social interactions. For example, although the boys attempt to silence menstrual talk and label menstruation as not a valued subject of discussion, the girls resist this silencing and continue their menstrual talk. Boys must respond to this reversal of gendered power. (149)

The girl playwrights' decision to talk about menstruation in the play parallels the girls in Fingerson's study refusing to stop their menstrual talk.

The girls in my study complained profusely about menstruation in their solo interviews, citing menstruation as the number one thing they would change about being a girl. These complaints highlight another of Fingerson's observations: "the girls both accommodate the dominant culture's constructions of menstruation as gross and medicalized and resist them by providing their own constructions of menstruation as 'not a big deal'" (149). This struggle can be found within the scene[30]. Girl wakes horrified to find blood, demanding her family take her to the hospital. Both in the dream and after she wakes, her family responds in a nonchalant manner. Her dream mother calmly explains what is happening and where she can find the pads, while her older sister tells her "to stop being so dramatic, go get a damn pad." Fingerson believes that "girls can use menstruation as an opportunity to exert power over their social worlds and to resist the negative cultural definitions of women's bodies and menstruation" (149). Both the inclusion of "The Period Scene" and the satirization of menstruation allow the girl performers/playwrights to gain power by voicing a part of girlhood often shushed while illustrating how ridiculous and harmful this silencing can be.

Scene 5: Insights

Like the other scenes in this act, scene five was played for laughs. The Secret Service and Rioters were genderized as male and overdramatized in their physicality. This scene was particularly interesting to me, as I must admit I found it problematic that when imagining and playing out a scene where the first woman was elected to the United States of America the girl participants imagined a scenario where the reaction of the

[30] This struggle also appeared during our first theory building meeting. See the section "Girls are Complicated . . . Complicated Creatures" in Chapter Five.

public (while played specifically as male) was negative resulting in rioting and a President fearful for her safety. Despite my reaction, the way the scene was performed left the ending up for interpretation. The female actor playing Sister/President woke from her nightmare and sighed. This sigh caused much consternation for both the class, its invited audience, and the smaller theory-building group. What did the sigh signify? Relief that the character was just a girl again? Disappointment that a female president might not be embraced, despite being elected? "It was just a dream," Sister breathed. The possibilities contained in dreams and suggested by Act II's scenes warrant additional considerations.

Act II: Insights

In interrogating Act II, I think it is important to note that the dream sequence and diary story devices used in each of the scenes, not only serve to unify the scenes despite their separate protagonists, but also provide a source of power for the girl actors. The diary convention allows the girl actor and, by proxy, the girl playwrights, to directly address the audience. For a beginning performer breaking the fourth wall and directly addressing the audience can be daunting, but by using the diary the girls provided themselves a safe, non-combative method to express inner thoughts directly to the audience. The power gained by the girl performers in speaking straight to the audience should not be dismissed or overlooked, despite the safety net granted by the diary convention. By directly addressing the audience the actors leave the passive position of object watched on stage, and place themselves in the position of active subject, free to make commentary on the action occurring in the stage world.

Three scenes, in particular, help to illustrate this. Girl 1 begins "The 1st Day of School" by sharing her diary entry with the audience. The audience learns that she will begin her first day at a new school tomorrow. Girl 1 reveals her hopes that it will be great and that she will make friends, setting up the scene's future interactions between Girl 2 and the Twins. In "Bully Scene," two girl performers play the bully. The Narrator represents the inner workings of Bully who acts out the story as relayed to the audience by the Narrator. While the outward performance of Bully demonstrates a great deal of enjoyment from torturing the Nerd, the Narrator reveals the feelings of Bully to the audience. Throughout the scene Narrator exposes Bully's inner monologue, and at the end shares Bully's epiphany that her actions are wrong. She expresses Bully's new sudden empathetic awareness, although the fact that this occurs only after the bully becomes the victim increases the improbability of the swiftness of the Bully's change of heart. The Narrator helps to illuminate the ridiculousness of Bully. In "The Light Rail," Love-Struck's diary entries allow her to explain her thoughts and actions to the audience. In doing so the audience comes to understand Love-Stuck as more complex than the simpering, overwhelmed by love, tongue-tied girl we see her to be in her interactions with Guy. In each circumstance, the girl protagonists connect with the audience and direct their own story through their revelations. They lead the audience, thus preventing (at least in some ways) or challenging the audience from making assumptions about the main characters.

In utilizing the dream convention in the scenes each group of girl playwrights secured another supply of power. In each scene the dream tactic provides a commentary on the scene that has just played out for the audience. The events of each scene prove

dissatisfactory for the girl protagonist, and in starting the scene from the beginning using a dream, the power is placed back in the hands of the female protagonist. She has learned something through the dream and now has a chance to create the ideal or, at the very least, a corrected girlhood. In the case of "The Period Scene," the protagonist experiences a rite of passage into adulthood. The protagonist and the audience have both witnessed the screwball comedy version of a girl's first period. In starting over from the discovery that the girl has started her first period, the girl playwrights comment on ineffectual societal and familial reactions to a significant but common girlhood event. This intervention requires the audience to question their acceptance of the events and consider a potential revision of girlhood. The scenes end at the moment of realization, allowing the audience and each girl actor/playwright to complete new girlhoods on the stages in their imaginations.

The use of comedy as a tactic by the girls to comment on girlhood must also be examined. The girl theorists tackle their understanding of their use of comedy in Chapter Five, but while the girls discuss their reasons for choosing comedy and the message comedy helped to express, I feel it important to consider the power gained by the girls in their satirical take on girlhood in Act II. While scholars of comedy, like Robert C. Elliot and Leonard Feinberg, conclude that the long history of satire and its diverse modes make narrowing down a single, agreed upon definition virtually impossible, for the purpose of my analysis I will rely on the Oxford English Dictionary's explanation of satire as a type of "derisive humor or irony . . . mocking wit; sarcasm, especially as employed against something perceived as foolish or immoral" (Test, 7). Both Act I and II, especially the scenes of Act II, satirically examine and mock girlhood. The media often depicts girls

and their experiences as "foolish" and/or "immoral." The portrayal of girls as only or overly concerned with fashion, status, and romantic entanglements have defined them as worthy of mockery.

Important here is the fact that the girl playwrights serve as the satirists mocking the subjects of girl and girlhood. Feminist humor scholars like Barreca, Walker, Blakely, Kaufman, and Merrill focus on the specific nature of female comedians/female humor, often remarking on the use of subversion to disrupt the dominant culture and question the status of women. Merrill explains:

> Comedy is both an aggressive and intellectual response to human nature and experience. A cognizance of women's right to be both aggressive and intellectual is a relatively new historical phenomenon. What is even more recent and radical though, about feminist humor is that it addresses itself to women and to the multiplicity of experiences and values women embody (278).

The scenes written by girl playwrights for a girl audience show a variety of stereotypical girls placed in familiar situations of girlhood. In their use of stock characters (girl next door, the nerd/geek, the bully/mean girl, and the love-struck) the girls ridicule a stereotyped girlhood revealing its artifice. The use of the dream convention helps to illuminate this. Love-struck awakens after her bumbling interactions with Guy to reveal a girl waiting at the light rail stop. Girl 1 rouses after her nightmarish first day of school to find the dreamed caricatured girls at school transformed into her sisters, girls like her filled with complexities that cannot be so easily labeled. Bully realizes that Nerd has feelings just like her and she vows to stop being a bully. The senile Nanny,

unsympathetic sisters, and inept mother highlight the ridiculousness of a teen-age girl so ill-informed about something as natural as her menses. The third act, which switches in modes from linear storytelling to the poetic, confirms the pretense of girlhood displayed by the girl stereotypes in Act II by presenting a vastly different, more dramatic, and more honest girlhood filled with depth and difference – a girlhood that goes beyond questioning the rules. The girls' satire succeeds as it "both elucidates and challenges [girl's] subordination and oppression . . . hold[ing] nothing sacred . . . deny[ing] the rules rather than merely breaking them" (Walker 152, 156).

Act III: Introduction

Our third and final act is a series of five poems presented in small groups. The basis of the poems came from the *I am* poems previously introduced and shared in Chapter Three. Once each girl had completed her version of the poem, she formed a small group with four or five other girls. Everyone shared their poems one by one. Then each group was given the task of taking the individual poems and creating a larger group poem. The groups did not have to follow the format, but their poems had to include something from each poem and be at least fifteen lines in length. Each group combined their poems to create an original group work that was then presented by the group. They could divide up the lines as they saw fit. The only requirements given to the groups were that they play with sound, volume and movement in their presentations.

Act III: I Am Poems

Poem 1

Soledad sits perched on the back of a chair. Next to her Natalia lies on her stomach, feet crossed in the air. Ruby sits beside her; she leans on her right

arm resting her weight on her right hip, her legs bent to the left tucked closely to her body. Just a small distance away, Melissa sits upright in a chair (see fig. 26). In unison they say,

We are creative, but different

Individually, they recite the next four lines of their group poem,

I say never sacrifice who you are just because someone has a problem with it

I say I'm right even when I'm wrong

I say it's ok to be different

They transition to new poses after Natalia exclaims,

I say family is different

Figure 26. Poem 1.

Together they move from their original places and kneel in a line. They assert simultaneously,

We are opposites and we are magnetized together

Each of the four girls shares another line and then they rise to their feet, shoulder to shoulder.

I hear the building shouting for me

I hear screaming hearts

I hear the screams of every silent person

I hear the sky screeching as it falls

Together they claim voices rising,

We are puzzle pieces that fit together

I feel challenged against my fears

I feel compassion of those like me

I feel like I am an alien

I feel the silk touch of my imaginary friend

Together they say, "We are," and then each girl shouts a descriptive word solo

We are brave, artistic, insane, and curious

"Brave," "artistic," "insane," and "curious" ring in the air as the girls exit together.

Poem 2

Four girls enter the playing space. One girl takes her place in the center while the other three girls create a half-circle around her. The girl standing to the left of the girl at the center recites the first three lines of the poem.

I hear someone calling

I see something coming

I see a shadow over me

The girl in the middle finishes with,

I wonder what tomorrow will be like

The three girls rotate around the center and a new girl takes the speakers spot while the girl in the center remains fixed and stationary. The new speaker continues with the next lines.

I pretend to be happy when I'm feeling blue

I hear the ocean calling my name

I see the future ahead of me

I want to be successful in life

Again the girl in the inside the circle replies,

I wonder what tomorrow will be like

This cycle rotation continues.

I try my hardest

I understand it won't last

I dream that it will last, just maybe

I say just keep living life

I wonder what tomorrow will be like

Em' I going crazy?

Do I need therapy too

When a good thing goes bad

It's not the end of the world

I wonder what tomorrow will be like

A long pause as the girls let the question sit with the audience and then they exit.

Poem 3

The group walks solemnly to the center of the room and creates a single file line behind Valentina. From the audiences' perspective the two girls standing behind Valentina disappear, leaving just one girl standing in front of them. In a clear, strong voice she recites the first five lines of their poem. Her face crinkles in a hopeful expression as she shares her thoughts on love.

I am passionate and curious

I worry about finding love

I wonder about true love

I say listen to your heart

I hope I will find my love soon

From behind her another girl steps out and crosses to stand to the right of center. The next five lines of the poem fill the room.

I want to be a marine biologist

I understand you cannot have everything you desire but I can already

Image the full moon above the ocean

I try to be myself and meet my expectations

And I hope to never lose my friend

Ruby appears from behind Valentina and crosses to the left of center. She pauses for just a moment before sharing the last six lines of the poem. She

does so in a somber voice that matches the tone of the lines. Her face, normally covered in a bright smile, expresses a quiet, serious, vulnerability.

I cry when I can't get something done right

I cry when I have difficult obligations

I pretend to feel okay

I dream I can reach beyond the clouds

I understand you cannot have everything you desire

I hope I will find my true happiness some day

The three girls stand still as the last line hangs in the air. With a communal breath they slowly exit.

Poem 4

Five girls enter in a long straight line. The leader stops and they turn in unison to face the audience. One at a time each girl recites a single line of the poem. As each girl shares her line she steps forward or back from the line. The once straight line soon becomes a haphazard ever-shifting chain of girls linked by their words and movement. Backwards and forwards they continue undulating.

I pretend to be happy when I'm down

I wonder if I will make it through life

I hear the words of hatred towards me

I see him coming

I want to connect the world

I am kind and care for others

I pretend to have no feelings

I feel its gentle breeze

I touch your burning flames

I worry about people's death

I am curious and outgoing

Two girls join together during the next line. They come together and meet each other at their original position.

I understand that happiness is earned

A third girl joins them at the line and in chorus they recite,

I say to just keep living life

Two different girls move from their positions to join the other three girls in the line as they reveal,

I dream that one day I will be happy

Their different voices joining together to create one resounding tone.

Finally the last girl returns to the other girls with the last line.

I hope to be more confident on myself

This time the girl at the end of the line becomes the leader as they turn together and exit remaining in a single file line.

Poem 5

Two girls, Sadie and Mimi, move quickly to take their places. Mimi sits on the ground next to a chair. She rests back on her arms with her legs straight out in front of her. She smiles. Sadie sits next to her in the chair.

She crosses her legs at her ankles and holds her script at her lap. The girls turn their heads towards each other meeting each other's eyes. Mimi begins delivering the first half of the poem with a careful, intense pace.

We are spontaneous, crazy and curious

We can feel the clouds on our fingers

She makes sure to connect with the audience with her eyes and recites some of the poem's most powerful lines with earnestness,

We don't want to hurt you but we need to breathe

We just simply wonder why

We worry about what's going to happen next

We cry when we have no words to explain

We pretend that I don't care

She turns her head to Sadie as she finishes; Sadie begins, rushing a little at first, but she soon connects with the audience and slows her recitation emphasizing important words and phrases like, "deserve," "feel," and "brighter day."

We understand that things aren't always what they appear

Yet there's so much we deserve

We feel way more than we want to or should

We hope for a brighter day

We dream that someday all of this will go away

So we are on our way

We are spontaneous, crazy and curious

The two girls rise from their respective seats, pause for a beat while standing before motioning for all the girl performers to join them on stage for a bow.

Figure 27. Poem 5.

Act III: Insights

All the poems found in Act III contain references to solitude, outsider status, curiosity, concern about the future, and a pretense of normality/sanity. None of the

poems in any way announce the gender or biological sex of the speaker. The speakers are "different," "alien," "insane," "crazy," who feign happiness, indifference, and certainty. There is a sense of emptiness, loss, and strangeness in these combined poems. Considering their creation process which began with many separate poems which were combined into five poems by five separate groups, and then placed in this specific order through a democratic decision making process, I believe Act III speaks to something significant about girlhood as experienced by these girl artists: Girl as Other. I discuss this further in Chapter Five, while the girl theorists examine their poetic work for potential messages about girlhood.

I wish to examine the use of movement in the presentation of each poem which serves to highlight the underlying meaning/message of each work. In Poem One the girls begin in four diverse positions matching the poem's first line, "We are creative, but different." Over the course of the poem, their poses morph, becoming more similar as well as increasing in levels from sitting to standing. In the end they stand shoulder to shoulder embodying the line, "We are puzzle pieces that fit together." While the girls in the poem emphasize their differences, they are all "brave, artistic, insane and curious," and their creativity brings them together. Interesting to note, Poem One is one of the two poems where the girl playwrights combined their poems by changing "I" to "We." This is also the case in Poem Five, although Poem One only changed four of the "I" pronouns to "We," the group writing Poem Five decided to change them all to "We." As the girls perform Poem Two they form a circle around a central, stationary girl. They move around the girl as if they represent different voices in her head or perhaps different girls all worried about their sanity asking, "Em I going crazy?/Do I need therapy too." In

Poem Three the girl performers begin as one, all standing behind Valentina, but as the poem progresses the girls step from behind her standing apart, affirming their different experiences. Much like Poem One's movement, the blocking choices in Poem Four exemplify that each girl is different as the girls move in their own directions before coming back as one.

The tone change between the satirical and sometimes light-hearted Act I and II, and the solemn, poetical Act III also deserves consideration. The poetic language found in the five poems of Act III seems to be much more open to audience interpretation than the straightforward dialogue found in the scenes of Act I and II. As I mentioned earlier in my analysis of insights found in Act II, the contrast between the stereotypical version of girlhood in Act II and the darker, dramatic girlhood of Act III helps to reveal the inaccuracies of girlhood contained within the stereotypes. While Act II's satire openly mocks the girls through stereotypes, Act III exposes various girlhoods filled with different experiences embodied through the movement used in each poem. Act I and II utilize comedy as a tactic to subvert dominant beliefs about girlhood, and Act III employs tragedy[31] to reveal multiple girlhoods. The lyrical mode of poetry with its metaphorical language is just as powerful in its coercive honesty as satire's biting laughter. Both expose the truth. Ultimately it may be the forms themselves along with their corresponding creation methods which enforce different modes of being. The scenes in Act I and II grew from improvisation, a theatrical form that requires flexibility and quick

[31] My use of tragedy and tragic refers to the classic definition of tragedy as a form of drama (the other side of comedy) rather than the more contemporary use of tragedy as some horrible event. As Aristotle explains, tragedy is a form of drama focusing on the suffering of the protagonist, often involving a reversal of circumstances, resulting in the catharsis of the audience.

thinking often leading to the unexpected where humor abounds. The girls collectively composed the poems in Act III from their individual poems. Poetry, a form of expression that often calls for self-exploration and soul searching, lends itself to the tragic. Each playwright followed a poetic format which asked the girls to finish the statement, "I am _____." While some of the girls answered in light hearted ways, the majority of the girls laid bare their inner most thoughts and fears which often revolved around feeling like an outsider. Both modes of being, satirist and poet, allow the girls the opportunity to survey girlhood from different perspectives, broadening the representation of girls and expanding the depth of girls' experiences presented in their play, *A Diary of Me: In My Shoes*. In the next chapter we examine these representations together and develop our own theories of contemporary girlhood.

CHAPTER 5

GIRL THEORISTS

"It's not a theory, but I think, um like, everyone is different, like every girl is different."
- Sadie

I have been taught accommodation.
My brother never thinks before he speaks.
I have been taught to filter.
How can anyone have a relationship with food?" he asks, laughing,
As I eat the black bean soup I chose for its lack of carbs
I want to say: we come from difference, Jonas,
You have been taught to grow out,
I have been taught to grown in.
You learned from our father how to emit, how to produce,
To roll each thought off your tongue with confidence
You used to lose your voice every other week from shouting so much
I learned to absorb
I took lessons from our mother in creating space around myself
I learned to read the knots in her forehead . . .
And I never meant to replicate her,
But spend enough time sitting across from someone and you pick up their habits –
That's why the women in my family have been shrinking for decades.
We all learned it from each other
The way each generation taught the next to knit
Weaving silence between the threads
Which I can still feel as I walk through this ever-growing house
- excerpt from *Shrinking Women,* Lily Myers

Our First Meeting

The excitement in the room remained despite the fact that our "stage" had once again been turned back into a science classroom. The long rectangular tables we had folded away into the hallway once again formed lines two by two facing the white board. The black curtain once draped over the doorway to create a "backstage" area for the girls and an entrance/exit for our staged reading, now sat folded in a pile on the floor with the props the girls used in their sharing. Just two tables remained out of place, pushed

together to create a large square table for our theory building discussion. Around it sat Leila, Mindy, Melissa, Valentina, Soledad, and myself. Ruby, Natalia, Brooklyn, Luz and Mimi sat perched on the tables bordering us (see fig. 28). Sadie, holding a camcorder,

Figure 28. Theory Building Meeting 1. From left to right: Mimi, Luz, Brooklyn, Natalia, and Ruby. Sadie is behind the camera. Natalia answers a question.

also sat on a table just to the side of all of us having volunteered to film our discussion. Just twenty minutes or so earlier the girls finished a staged reading of their play for two other classes. A brief discussion with the audience followed before school ended at noon due to early release for final exams. The rest of the girls in class had either gone home or to study sessions for final exams in their other classes. The girls chatted back and forth

with each other sipping on water and munching on snacks. Our short break was ending and in just a minute our first theory building focus group would start. I had prepared a few big questions, but really hoped for a free flowing conversation that the girls would

Figure 29. Theory Building Meeting 1. Mindy (center) and Melissa (back to camera) listen to Leila (left).

take over. After a brief explanation of what we were going to do for the next hour or so, I posed the first question: "How did the play you wrote, based on the work you did in drama class, how did it show what it means to be a girl? What was your message about being girls?"

The girls replied with silence. They looked around at each other. They looked at the ceiling, the floor, their hands, and their shoes. They picked up the self-portraits projects sitting at the table. Some continued to slowly chew their snacks. Bite, chew,

chew, chew. Sip. Look at the wall. Twist hair around fingers. The silence seemed to span eons, but in reality it lasted just a brief moment before Leila responded (see fig. 29):

> I think our play says that there are all sort of different types of girls. There's not…like in our play we displayed different stereotypes of girls which goes against what it's really like to be a girl, because we're not all exactly a housewife meant to serve your husband. It's like you fall into your own trap.

I breathed a sigh of relief, and with Leila's response our conversation was off. Natalia added her own thoughts, followed by Melissa:

> I think something that our play said was, well we kind of broke our stereotypes in our play. We kinda, yeah, we acted out some stereotype, but we also kind of broke through them and showed that the stereotype isn't the reality of the girl.

"And, how did you break through stereotypes?" I asked. "The words, the lines that we used, our poems. I think our poems did that really well," Natalia replied. "That's what I, that's what I was thinking," added Melissa, "Like, with the acting there was a lot of stereotypical girl action, but then with like the poems it was really like from the soul of us as girls. So, I agree with Natalia." The girls had presented their first big idea, that they had used stereotypes for a purpose. Valentina and then Soledad added their own ideas. The back and forth continued for a while before slowing to a silence, at which point I posed a new question. After thirty minutes our conversation broke for a lunch of pizza and chicken wings. The room buzzed with smaller conversations and questions. "Who requested pizza with pineapple and ham? Gross!" complained Sadie. "Do you think the world will really

end tomorrow[32]?" Soledad asked Valentina. "No, I think it will end in a zombie apocalypse," replied Valentina. A conversation followed that covered the Mayans, ways to kill zombies, and the proper way to eat wings.

As the girls' stomachs reached their capacity, our conversation began where we left off: what was missing from their play. As much as possible I tried to ask open-ended questions, only interjecting to ask the girls to build on their ideas. When the silence indicated the girls had exhausted one topic, I asked a new question. After another forty minutes our discussion came to an end, mostly due to the girls needing to get home to study for their last day of finals. The girls passed around a sign-up sheet for those interested in meeting again next semester for more theory building meetings, and we said our goodbyes.

Our Third Meeting

As I made the short walk from my car to the school building and climbed the staircase to the second floor, I found myself pondering over our second theory building meeting held the previous week. Three months after our first meeting, I met with five girls in the history classroom. We spoke for just under an hour, and while I had been so glad that the girls were interested enough to meet with me again, especially given their busy schedules, I questioned the success of my facilitation of our conversation. During our first meeting the eleven girls fed off of each other; the conversation flowed quickly and passionately. After listening to the recording of our second meeting, I found myself disappointed. The frequent silences during our conversation made me worry that

[32] The next day was December 21, 2012, the much-hyped end of the world date, according to the Mayan calendar.

somehow the ensemble and trust developed over the previous semester had faded during our time apart. As the silences grew longer, I found myself talking more and more, asking more and more pointed questions. I did not want to lead the girls toward the ideas I had been contemplating during our break from each other, and so about halfway through I stopped myself. I asked the girls to pose questions to each other about our class, our artistic creations, or girlhood in general. What transpired was a fun and light conversation about their favorite theatre games and class activities. They shared memories with each other, laughing. “Remember that long improv we did at the pizza parlor,” Brooklyn reminisced. “The one where I played the waiter?” Melissa asked. “Oooh, ya and Mimi and I played a mean married couple,” laughed Ruby. “That was so much fun,” sighed Brooklyn, “Teresa you just kept freezing the improv and adding more people to the scene as someone suggested something. I miss that class.” “Me too,” agreed Valentina and Soledad simultaneously.

While I was secretly pleased to hear that they enjoyed our class so much, I feared our next meeting would not succeed in developing theories on girlhood. I hoped that our slightly stilted conversation might have been a result of the distance between our meeting and our last class combined with the smaller group composition, and now that we were back into the swing of things the girls might fall back into an easy back and forth. Today we would watch the video of our staged reading and analyze it. When the girls heard we would be watching their performance they expressed excitement and worry over watching themselves acting on camera. As I reached the top of the staircase and turned down the hallway, several girls from the class greeted me with hugs as they left school. Ms. Lerner waved hello and walked to me. We chatted briefly and she let me

know we would be in the history classroom again. I walked to the classroom, laid out some snacks for the girls on a large round table, and set up my computer. Ruby and Melissa bounced into the room together talking loudly about how excited they were to travel to Massachusetts over the summer to participate in an invention competition their InventTeam had entered. Soon after that Brooklyn entered, "Terrreeeesaaa is today the day you teach me to cry on cue?!!" I laughed and shook my head at her. Finally Soledad and Valentina sauntered in together giggling at something that Mr. Withers said to them in the hallway. We all sat and watched as the girls appeared on the large screen on the wall. Utter silence from the girls at first. Then many sighs and ughs followed. I paused after the first act, so they could share their thoughts. Ruby's head fell to the table, "I am so ashamed," she cried. "Why?" I asked. "I thought your acting was good." "So did I," agreed several of the girls. She replied, "I don't know. I just think it's weird that when I watch myself – well I mean, I do it all the time for softball, but . . ." She drifted off. I complimented all the girls on what they had accomplished with our staged readings considering that we had only two rehearsals. I assured them that my focus was not on examining their talent as actors, but their work as artists (writers, improvisational performers, visual artists, etc.). Once the girls overcame their self-criticism of their acting performances, our conversation picked up in earnest. My worries faded as we continued, but I kept reminding myself throughout the discussion that I wanted to *listen* to the girls while keeping my influence to a minimum.

Theory Building

I began my work at the Girls' Institute for Future Leaders to explore the state of contemporary girlhood *with* girls through various art forms. I had two prominent

questions at the forefront of my mind: "How do US girls consume mass media representations of girlhood and reproduce or subvert these representations?" and "In what ways do girls perform their understandings of their own identities and what it means to be a girl in contemporary US society through their creations of original art and literature, live theatrical pieces, and digital cultural practices?" After completing a semester of artistic work in a theatre classroom with the girls, watching hours and hours of video documentation, listening to thirteen interviews, analyzing their artistic creations, and meeting with the girls in four theory focus groups, three themes kept rising to the surface of the material: *Separate place apart*, *Girl as other*, and *Performed Girl vs Real Girl*. When I contemplated the links between these I found one overarching idea seemed to capture contemporary girlhood from my perspective and experiences as a facilitator and researcher: Cognitive Dissonance. This idea, however, does not necessarily correlate with the results of the girls' analysis of girlhood.

Over the course of four focus group meetings, the girls served as co-theorists with me as we analyzed our work from the semester and attempted to decipher theories on contemporary girlhood based on this work. The play and its performance served as our main focus in the meetings, but we also discussed the class as a whole, specific class activities, the self-portrait sculptures, the school, family life, and pop culture. The first meeting occurred after our sharing of our play on Thursday, December 20, 2012. Eleven out of the fifteen girls participated in an hour-long conversation covering all the topics previously described above. The next semester, approximately three months later, we

met during three meetings,[33] which included a smaller volunteer group of five girl theorists. During the first meeting we discussed general impressions of contemporary girlhood. We viewed the video of our performance during the second meeting, pausing after each act to discuss impressions, questions, and reoccurring themes and ideas. For our final meeting we reviewed the self-portrait sculptures and discussed their underlying message about girlhood as well as girl labels.

After pouring over the data, I originally decided to present our findings between two chapters. I planned to present my findings first, followed by another chapter filled with the girls' ideas. My original intent was to honor the girls' ideas as worthy of their own chapter. I chose to present the girls' findings in the last chapter in order to value their perspectives by giving them the last word on our subject. While we had worked together to develop theories, time restrictions meant that as the researcher I had much more time and access to the data than the girl theorists. I feel it important to note this, not to diminish the significance of the resulting ideas developed by the girls, but rather to differentiate between the processes under which our culminating ideas developed. As I wrote both chapters I soon identified my structure as flawed. The separation seemed false and diminished our work together. I realized that although my findings differed somewhat from the girls' proposed theory, dividing our final work into two chapters prevented our ideas from building upon each other. While I tried as much as possible not to influence the girls as they developed a theory of girlhood, I realize now that I am sure I influenced them in some ways. After all, I may have developed several preliminary ideas

[33] 3/25/13, 4/8/13, and 4/15/13

about girlhood during my work with the girls over the semester, but my ultimate assertions did not fully develop until I heard from them in the theory building meetings. My assertions are much richer because of what the girls shared with me. It makes sense then, that my questions (no matter how open and carefully crafted) helped the girls develop assertions and build towards the development of a theory. What follows is a blended presentation of our ideas. By presenting them together, I hope to venerate their voices, demonstrating how much I learned from them, while at the same time noting where my ideas diverged from the girls' understanding of girlhood.

Girl Theorists

Again and again during our discussions the girls returned to the single, prevailing idea first suggested by Sadie[34] (although she doubted her idea qualified as a theory) and that Melissa expanded on, putting it this way:

> All girls are different. I think it is kind of like that. That, um, kind of what we discovered here was that each of us kind of goes through some things that are similar, but we're each different people and you can't really like just lump us all together into one thing.

Sadie went on to emphasize the impossibility of categorizing girls saying, "Yeah, and you can't just say ever all girls are like this or all girls are like that because we're all different and we all have, like, bits and pieces of, like, each stereotype." As the girls examined their work and their process they discovered that their theatrical creation demonstrated this central claim, which eventually became their key assertion about contemporary girlhood.

[34] Sadie first suggested the idea that all girls are different. Her statement is quoted at the beginning of this chapter, but I will repeat it here: "It's not a theory, but I think, um, like, everyone is different, like every girl is different."

Before I share how our theory building meetings led the girls to settle on their key assertion, I need to explain why I have decided to call the girls' statement a key assertion rather than a theory. In his book *The Fundamentals of Qualitative Research,* qualitative researcher and theatre scholar Johnny Saldaña defines a theory as "a statement with an accompanying narrative that explains how or why some things happen by proposing their most likely causes" (83). Saldaña defines theory from a qualitative standpoint and goes on to provide three guidelines a theory must meet. "A theory: 1) predicts and controls action through an if/then logic; 2) explains how and/or why something happens by stating its cause(s); and 3) provides insights and guidance for improving social life" (114). Assertions on the other hand "are declarative statements of summative synthesis generated from an interpretive review of the data corpus," and a key assertion "represents the totality of the data" (119-120). As we examined the "data corpus" and worked to expand the girls' statement that all girls are different into a theory, it became apparent that while their final statement (revealed in Chapter Six) met requirements one and three, it did not meet requirement two. It described what girlhood means and what happens with girls, but did not state causality. At this point I do not feel comfortable claiming a cause for two reasons. First, my study's primary purpose was to examine contemporary girlhood by learning what girls thought about girlhood. While my co-theorists and I worked toward developing theories of girlhood, I find that listening to the girls as well as the process of conducting analysis in our theory building meetings resulted in a well-articulated key assertion supported by our observations and work. The fact that we did not reach the level of theory does not diminish the significance of the girls' work as theorists. Their key assertion describes contemporary girlhood from their

perspectives, which are valid and important, as well as illuminating. Second, the specific setting and context of our work narrowed the scope of my study. Saldaña explains the difficulty of constructing original theory: "we certainly use others' theories for our conceptual frameworks as initial guidance, but it's another matter to persuasively articulate how our findings generalize to other populations, sites, and times" (112). Another group of girls working at a different location under different circumstances might have developed entirely different findings. Until I am able to conduct a follow-up study with the girls and additional studies with other girls, postulating a theory seems premature.

Let's Get Started

"Girls are Complicated . . . Complicated Creatures"

The breakdown of the play served as the site of central discovery for our key assertion about girlhood. The structure itself illuminated the girls' idea of difference. As described in Chapter Four: Diary of Girlhood, the girls first developed the scenes that formed Act II through improvisation, while Act III came from their individual *I am* poems which they merged into group poems. Act I came after we developed the title of our play as an attempt to provide an introduction for the audience. As the girls analyzed the structure of the play they realized something significant about Act I. The premise of Act I reflected society's practice of oversimplifying girlhood and easily labeling girls. Each shoe type represented a different type of girl. Brooklyn explained, "You could say a girly girl would wear heels. Or a tomboy would wear converse. But these are stereotypes that, like, you see in Hollywood." "Trip 8" deconstructs Act I's premise that girls can be understood through outer appearance. The inaccuracy of stereotypes, as well as their

harmful impact on girls, becomes clear through the interactions between the three characters. Ruby explained that when Natalia's character entered the scene:

> she just kinda stood there and judged us [the other two characters played by Rosalinda and Ruby] because of the way we looked, and then all the characters froze while one at a time each character kinda said our back story and just because we're wearing this doesn't mean that's the person we are.

The monologues addressed to the audience further illuminate the idea that all girls are different. Each girl reveals the "real" girl behind the clothes and shoes. Girl 2 revels in fashion and sparkles, but asserts her passion for "girly" things and her love of shoes do not capture all that she is. Girl 3 destroys Girl 1's assumption of Girl 3's wealth and spoiled upbringing when she discloses her father's blue collar job and that her boots were purchased at Goodwill. The scene ends with all the characters saying in unison, "You don't know who I am till you've walked a mile in my shoes."

The second act satirized girlhood's typical experiences further challenging girls' homogeneity. The girls discussed their chosen scenes in Act II, explaining that each scene represented common experiences familiar to many: the first day of school, their first period, a crush on someone, a bullying experience, and a dream denied. In presenting these stereotypical, universal experiences the girls chose to use comedy. The girl playwrights went beyond simply presenting familiar scenes of girlhood. In our discussions I asked them about their scenes and to describe the tone to which they replied "comedy with a twist" or "dramatic comedy." Ruby explained, "So in all of them I noticed maybe they started out seriously, but then they sort of take a turn." Brooklyn

agreed, "like The Period Scene, like how frightening having your first period can be, depending on what you were told, but the whole way they added the ancient grandma, it becomes very, very funny." I asked the girls to consider the girl characters included in these scenes, and to describe them. The girls replied pretty unanimously that the scenes contained lots of stereotypical characters. For instance, both the "1st Day of School," and the "Bully Scene" included a nerdy girl and a mean girl. I asked the girls about the purpose or result of using these stereotypes. If all girls are different why write scenes with girl stereotypes? Natalia thought the audience "would think we were making fun of stereotypes." I pushed the girls to examine that purpose – why were they making fun of stereotypes? What message resulted from their satirical[35] use of stereotypes? Melissa replied their intent was to show stereotypes as wrong or incorrect. She explained that, "while on the outside I think some girls are [stereotypes], but on the inside I think everybody's different." Ruby felt the use of satire helped "to make people think differently about it. Like, oh they approached her this way but she's more than that." During our analysis of the scenes, the five girls in our small group came to the conclusion that the satirical comedy "flipped the script" showing, as Soledad put it, "It's okay to be a girl." Valentina furthered this idea adding, "it's okay to be a girl. Girls are complicated . . . complicated creatures." Embracing their differences and complexity through the satirization of girl stereotypes demonstrates the girls' struggle to negotiate between their

[35] After the girls responded that their characters were stereotypes which they were making fun of, I introduced the concept of satire as a specific form of humor. Some of the girls expressed familiarity with it. I made a concerted effort not to use the word satire until they defined their comedy stylings and instead use open ended questions to try to explore the girls' choice to use comedy as well as the resulting message.

lived experiences and the limiting representation of girlhood presented to them from a multitude of sources.

If Act I set up societal beliefs about girls and then demolished them, and Act II satirically exposed girl stereotypes to comment on their falseness revealing girls contain vast complexities, then Act III served as the ultimate twist pulling the curtain back to show "real" girlhood. Natalia explained:

> We kind of broke our stereotypes in our play. We kinda, yeah, we acted out some stereotypes, but we also kind of broke through them and showed that the stereotype isn't the reality of the girl . . . The words, the lines that we used, our poems. I think our poems did that really well.

Melissa agreed adding, "Like with the acting [scenes] there was a lot of stereotypical girl action, but then with the poems it was really like from the soul of us girls." The girls focused on repeated or similar words/phrases in their analysis: crazy, insane, alien, brave, curious, voices, screaming voices, lots of voices. The girls reported the overall tone as "depressioney[36]," "dark," "deep," and "dark deep serious." Once again Valentina and Soledad worked together to express their ideas about this section's message. "Like, I think it was inside thoughts that we can't really describe," said Valentina. "Or people will think we're crazy," finished Soledad. Ruby added her analysis of the difference between the first two acts and this section saying, "I think more deep inside thoughts than what we could show on the surface." The girls decided Act III addressed the "fear," "anger," and "distress" girls felt when attempting to keep their true selves "secret," as they do not

[36] Girls' own neologism.

want to be labeled crazy. Ruby suggested, “girls always think about, always keep in the back of their minds what other people think about them.” All the girls believed that girls do this more than boys because society, particularly the media, judges girls more harshly. “Yeah,” said Valentina, “it’s the media.”

Girlhood: “It’s Warring”

Learning What’s Normal

Our discussions of the “Bully Scene” led Ruby and Brooklyn to self-disclose personal experiences of being bullied and being the bully. Having attended the same elementary school, they shared a long friendship, which included their mutual mistreatment of a girl named Megan. Megan had at one time been their friend, but sometime in the sixth grade they turned on her. Brooklyn described feeling like her continued friendship with Megan would lead to her own ostracization:

> Hanging out with these kids, the nerds or the lame people, you get talked about. So you’re like, ‘I’m done with you. I’m done with this. I’m going to just go try to be friends with them.’ Even if you don’t want to. And then you see them [the popular kids] bully your old friend and you don’t do anything about it.

I asked for the girls to explain why the kids, including themselves, chose to bully Megan. They hesitated at first and then described Megan being bullied for “her freckles,” “her ears were huge too.” Brooklyn remembered, “I think – Oh, she was really loud too. She was loud. She was loud and crazy.” When we began to discuss the poems and the idea of being thought of as crazy, I brought up Megan again and asked how we learn to become bullies, as well as how we choose who to bully. The girls suggested that you learn what’s

normal. Ruby shared, "I think somebody teaches us. It doesn't necessarily stem from parents, but it could be your parents. Or what you see on television. Or what you witness your friends do." Soledad expressed her belief that over time you learn what you can say and what you can't say, explaining:

> I don't think there's a limit on what can be said, but there's, like the way society puts it, society always says that, 'Oh, you can't talk about periods, because it's a personal girl thing,' or, 'Vagina is a bad word. Penis is a bad word. You can't talk about sex.'

The girls went on to agree that there are unspoken rules that you come to understand living in society. Valentina suggested that when you do not understand these rules, or when your appearance or actions break these rules (consciously or not), "that's, like, when people would turn on [girls] more, that's when they get judged." Soledad concurred, "yeah, when they get outcasted[37]." I suggested that perhaps Megan's appearance marked her as a rule breaker. She wasn't pretty; she was loud and different. Brooklyn reminisced about Megan, "she was a nerd. She had a chipped tooth, and she was like – it was sad. I feel horrible." Our conversation about Megan ended here. Both girls fell into a reflective silence, and at the time I did not feel I could push them any further. Throughout the discussion the girls laughed uncomfortably when discussing their own behavior, and I sensed a sort of resignation from them both as if there had not been other possibilities with regards to their actions. The girls never exactly blamed society/media for their actions, but neither did they take responsibility for their actions

[37] Soledad's word choice.

and admit that their behavior reinforced, or retaught, the socially constructed/enforced version of acceptable girlhood.

Inside versus Outside

The complexity of girlhood continued to be the center of our theory-building discussions when we turned our attention to the girls' self-portrait sculptures. We began by examining similarities between the projects. The girls shared they noticed a repetition of certain colors like pink, purple, and yellow. They also noticed lots of pictures of guys – boy band, athletes, actors, and the like. In attempting to pose a theory about what messages about the girls these similarities relayed, Ruby suggested, "It kind of says like the outside, society, influences what type of person I am." Two of the girls shed light on this idea in what I found to be illuminating revelations.

Ruby's Self-Portrait

Ruby described difficulty creating the inside of her sculpture. Originally she confessed to me that she left the inside empty because she ran out of time; however, in our group discussion she shared her personal struggle:

> Mine was supposed to – I tried to glue the lid to the thing because – well, I don't know, I think I am an open book. That's why I tried to glue the lid so it's kind of hard to – I know for me it was kind of – it's like really hard to pick what I don't let other people see because I'm really like – because I'm like during school I'm really loud and just like tell everybody everything about everything. So it was really like hard when I came to the end. So it was like what don't I let people see?

Melissa's Self-Portrait

Unlike Ruby, Melissa expressed her difficulty in constructing the outside of her sculpture:

> For me I found it more difficult to find out what's on the outside. Yeah, because I don't like to talk to people unless I know them a bit more, but at the same time there are certain situations where I am a little more open. So for mine, there were several boxes because there's a lot of different complicated – there's a lot of different like, sides of me that not everybody gets to see them all. Like when I'm at home sometimes I feel I'm a different person than when I'm at school because I kind of – I notice this about my personality, but I change kind of who I am almost to my surroundings.

Girlhood Multiplicities: Damsels to Rebels, and Everything In-Between

As we continued our discussion of self-portraits, inspired by the outsides of the projects, our conversation deviated toward an analysis of pop culture. The girls analyzed the influence society has on them. Melissa immediately denied allowing outside society, which she defined as the media, to influence her. When I asked how she could prevent the media from influencing her she answered: "I don't watch TV. Solution." I pushed her further, asking if TV was the only form of media she could be influenced by. Even if she could block out all media, her peers were obviously influenced by the media; could they rub off on her? She went on to say:

> I don't necessarily let other people dictate what I do because my dad has always told me you know, you can be whoever you want so I was – and

> whoever I wanted to be and yeah, there's different versions of that, but in the end I don't let people like dictate or just say just because you're a girl you have to do this. If anything, my mom taught me that I should not do that.

I asked the girls to consider girlhood as a range. If we put Melissa on one side as an example of a girlhood which refused (or at least attempted to refuse) to be forced into one specific box – a specific, perfect, expected girlhood – who or what would represent that side of girlhood? The girls discussed various famous young pop stars and ended up landing on Taylor Swift (see fig. 30). They labeled her a "damsel in distress," always writing about lost love, sometimes even requesting a Romeo to rescue her and ask her to

Figure 30. Theory Building Meeting 1. Taylor Swift also came up in our 1st meeting. Here the girls laugh at my singing Swift's "We are Never Ever Getting Back Together."

marry him as she does in her song "Love Story." Taylor performed a type of acceptable girlhood: pretty, polite, demure, and in need of a boy. I then requested the three other

girls try to place themselves on the line between Melissa, as a rebel, and Taylor, as a damsel. Valentina replied that she would put herself right next to Michelle. Soledad explained she found her placement difficult to consider:

> I'm a pastor's daughter so I'm kind of expected to be the girl in the Bible, like they expect me almost to be like how they describe a good girl in the Bible, like being a housewife and having children and all of that. They kind of want me to do like the Taylor Swift type of thing, but then at the same time just watching like nowadays how girls have jobs and stuff, I'm kind of influenced by society and by my religion so they kind of like clash together. I say I'm kind of like in the middle. It's warring. This thing says one thing and this is the other thing and I don't know which one to agree with.

Ruby found herself in a similar situation as Soledad, explaining that her parents and culture had very traditional ideas about gender roles. Ruby phrased her situation in this way:

> "I've been taught like kind of what Bella is saying about religion, that the woman is supposed to be at home, she's supposed to be the housewife having kids, taking care of the kids while the man is out there working."

This "warring" girlhood went beyond an internal struggle over the type of girl they should be, and influenced the type of girlhood they were willing to share for an audience.

Pleasing the Audience: Girlhood Constrained

Curious to examine the girls' choices of scenes and their performance style, I asked the girls about their topic choice. We discussed some pretty serious topics in class

through their improvisations and scene development, but in the end the scenes they chose to incorporate could be described as relatively non-controversial. The girls replied that they considered the audience in their scene selection. Knowing that they might share their final product with their peers outside of class, Leila explained that if they included some more serious topics, "we would scare the audience. Those are very touchy things, very delicate subjects to touch." Mimi added that "Well, I think we tried to make it funny so that we wouldn't bore the audience." Valentina emphasized that "we have teenagers in the audience." Brooklyn suggested that their choice of comedy opened people up, "it kind of like lightens the mood instead of keeping things serious and, I guess I don't want – yeah, I guess like depressing people."

The Final Word: Ensemble Building

Despite their worries about what the audience might think or how they might be judged, the girls' final take-away from our work together seemed to shrug off these concerns. Or at least urges the girls to do so. Sadie drew a connection between our work in class building an ensemble and the message present in our performance. She suggested, "I think the hidden meaning behind the performance is like somehow related to basically your class. The games and exercises kind of taught, I think girls should just be who they want, [they] should be comfortable being themselves." Leila added to Sadie's suggestion remarking, "I liked how the games helped us get comfortable with each other, trust each other. I liked this because it prevented us from being afraid to express ourselves." The connection drawn between our class structure and the message behind the play correlates to the first reoccurring theme I began to contemplate over the course of the semester with the girls.

Putting it All Together

Separate Place Apart

In Chapter Two: A Room of Our Own, I discussed the need to create a transitional space, a place of learning, where the girls would feel comfortable to express their opinions, thoughts, ideas, and creations. Together we created a Room of Our Own by changing the physical environment of the class, developing a space of trust and non-judgment, reforming the traditional roles of student and teacher, and engaging our whole selves (brain, heart, and body) through play. Creating a flexible curriculum that served as a skeletal outline, allowed me to follow where the girls led, rather than relying on a firm set of blueprints that locked us into a predetermined final destination. I placed the onus on the girls to take control of our journey. Doing so shifted our perspectives, and helped to open up the possibilities of what could happen in a classroom; the creation of a Room of Our Own made the exploration of difficult topics permissible and the use of the body and spirit in learning necessary.

During our time together, the girls focused on various topics including bullying, menstruation, romantic love, girl friendship, women in politics, the intersection of gender and power, the media's portrayal of girls and women, rape and violence against women, the importance of self-expression, and pop culture. While the structure and safety of our created space helped make these explorations possible, I think it is important to give consideration to the impact of a single-sex environment on the girls and our work together. Many times in discussions the girls shared feelings of increased freedom because they did not have to share their school with boys. "You have more freedom here," Leila asserted, adding, "I think coed schools have a lot more competition

in between males and females, like everyone and there's more bullying." I asked her to clarify, "more bullying between girls and girls, or girls and boys?" A huge murmur of yes rose up in the room. Melissa expanded on this idea of freedom at an all-girls school:

> I think that because it's like a co – or a single gender school, there's like, it's easier for people to talk about certain things that are specific to girls or specific to guys. Because if there's, you know, like um like if a teacher's trying to touch like a touchy subject that's specific to one gender, you know, the other one's gonna like start giggling or laughing. And then, it kind of becomes awkward.

I asked if the girls would have chosen to include "The Period Scene" in their play if they were at a co-ed school. "Probably not," replied Melissa, Leila, Soledad and Mindy. "Why not?" asked Brooklyn, "They know what it is." Ruby, Natalia, Brooklyn, and Mimi asserted they would have. The girls went on to mention they did not worry so much about what they looked like at school, felt less competition with other girls, and experienced more attention and encouragement from their teachers. Of course there were things they said they missed, boys and a football team for example, but overall the girls expressed being more confident and successful at an all-girls school. The school served to free the girls from societal limitations surrounding the perceived abilities of girls. I find similarities between the stated mission of the school, to provide opportunities for success while nurturing self-confidence and increasing leadership abilities and opportunities, and the guidelines created in our room. Both served to foster a space of safety allowing the learning self to come alive and grow.

I believe our Room of Our Own succeeded to provide a place for learning, creative expression and the expansion of understandings about self and girlhood. Upon reflecting on our success, I realize that our success remained limited by the four walls of our room. The environment faced difficulty sustaining its power when faced with strangers, specifically when men entered our space. Two examples of this remain fixed in my memory. While the school's faculty and administration consisted of mostly women, the school's dean of students, Mr. Withers, was an imposing tall, bald African-American man who wore a constant smile but did not hesitate to reinforce school rules. He entered the class one day in the middle of our rehearsal of "The Period Scene." Immediately the entire class went silent, some cheeks turned red, and then ripples of giggles swept over the class. Like the wave of a tsunami, the awareness of Mr. Withers and the resulting giggles combined to tear down the structure of our room leaving it in rubble, at least for a short time. Mr. Withers stood at our door perplexed at the girls' reaction to his entrance. "Anything I should know about?" he asked. His questions only increased the volume and quantity of the girls giggles. "Nooooo, we are all good Withers," replied several of the girls in unison. Mr. Withers exchanged a questioning glance with me, and I replied with a smile and a reassuring nod of my head. The girls were very familiar with Mr. Withers as he was a well-liked part of their school community. I had witnessed many of the girls in the midst of comfortable and humorous interactions with him in the hallways and other classrooms of the school. They demonstrated no fear or hesitancy around him, but the moment he entered our room during our work a spell seemed to have broken. A similar instance occurred when several male computer technicians interrupted the girls during improvisational work to take the class computers for updates. As soon as they

entered, the mood shifted and the girls withdrew from sharing. Each time it took some time for our room to return to "normal." These examples contrasted with the times the female faculty and administration came to visit. Since our class used her room, Ms. Fitch often walked in and out, sometimes staying to work at our desk. Ms. Lerner entered our room several times for various reasons, as did Rosa. While their presence made the girls pause briefly, their work would begin again quickly and without embarrassment. In fact, Rosa sat in briefly on our first theory building meeting and the girls did not hold back at all.

Other cracks in our foundation appeared when it came to the class's decision to share the play they created with the rest of the school. The majority of the girls in class wanted to participate in an informal sharing. I reassured the girls that only those who wanted to participate had to be involved in the sharing; those who chose not to perform could find other roles to help the sharing go well. Ultimately out of the twenty-three girls in the class, five chose not to participate in the sharing. The sharing took place in another classroom, and two other classes joined us as our audience. The girls read from their scripts and included basic blocking as well as some props and costume pieces. Perhaps if we had been able to perform in the familiarity of our classroom, some of the five girls would have opted in. Perhaps not. Either way, despite being comfortable performing and sharing in front of the class for the entire semester, the safe learning space, the site of our girlhood experimentation, could not extend past our room's four walls. It was not a state of mind capable of traveling with the girls, but rather something grounded in location and environment. The same could be said for the school itself. Once the girls left the campus something altered within the girls. I am reminded of Melissa's comments

about her self-portrait, that she alters behavior depending on her location, that she is a different person at home or school or other places. As she stated, “I change kind of who I am almost to my surroundings.” In their interviews several girls mentioned performing one way for girls and another for boys. I discuss this further in a later section, but I bring both examples up now because I think then *that environment can influence and alter the performance of girlhood, despite the nurturing and self-confidence provided to girls. Girlhood then becomes geographically bound, in other words environmentally constructed, with each girl ready with different versions of girlhood to perform depending on their location.*

Girl as Other

In class, and especially in their solo interviews, the girls linked what it meant to be a girl to biology. When asked to explain what it means to be a girl, repeatedly the girls answered like Melissa did, “Well, being a girl is just – it’s not any different than anything else, it’s just a biological difference from being a guy.” Soledad also connected the biological to being a girl simply stating: “to me, being a girl is having female parts.” Valentina put it even more bluntly: “to sum it all up to have a vagina.” The girls also discussed the ramifications of having those “female parts” linked to the meaning of girl. Brooklyn reduced it all to menstruation: “Girls – to be a girl is to have a period. Boys can’t.” While girls complained about the pain and bother of menstruation, many expressed girls’ ability to have babies also defined them as both responsible and honored. Luz explained, “We can get pregnant. We’re the ones having to go through all of that.” Brooklyn warned that having babies made being a girl difficult, emphasizing, “giving birth, labor [makes being a girl hard]. Yes, labor. Hint the word girl, wait until

you're a woman and married." Mimi shared a more positive opinion of female reproduction: "you have the honor to have children, you have the honor to carry your baby, um, a living organism in your stomach for nine months and then deliver it."

Despite the simple explanation that being a girl meant having a vagina and all that comes with it, the girls revealed an understanding of girl as "other." Repeatedly girls shared similar ideas that girls were seen as less than boys, that girls were thought of as weaker and not capable of achieving greatness. Melissa explained, "Oh, well, particularly for me what makes being a girl hard is just this idea that girls aren't quite good enough I guess – that girls are inferior somehow." Rosalinda complained, "I think what makes a girl, um, what makes being a girl difficult is, um, probably all the discrimination we get. Um, people say we are weaker, not as smart or incapable of doing a lot of things," while Luz added, "sometimes people say that we are lower than men. I don't think they should say that because I think that everyone should be equal. Like, no matter if it's a guy or a girl; like, it doesn't really matter."

Girls' second class status placed girls as others, the ones always having to prove themselves worthy. The girls reported that certain rules or expectations had been established, and that society held specific beliefs for girls and boys, even assigning certain things or experiences meant for girls and others for boys. Ruby explained that this might impact her future and that she worried about "gender inequality in the workplace." "Um, I won't be able to get a job because I'm a girl. I won't be able to do a man's job. The things that I want to do in life are usually a man's job." Soledad recounted her experience facing the limitations placed on her desires because she was a girl:

> I have friends, and they always want to be in sports, and they always want to play games with the guys. And sometimes their parents say, oh, no, you can't play because you're a girl. Or even, the people on the team, they're like, oh, no, you can't play because you're a girl. I know because this happened to me a lot of times because I have a lot of boys in my family. Even like smaller boys, I couldn't even play with them because I was a girl.

The girls built on the idea of fighting to prove yourself capable or good enough, explaining that it was not just fighting to show you could accomplish something just as well as boys, something you were not supposed to do, but you also had to conform to societal and familial expectations of what a girl should be. Natalia explains this quite well:

> Then there's the ideals; what a girl should be and the image of a girl. Or people say you should be a certain way and this is what you need to look like to be a girl. And I mean – well, those are the things on the outside. But really, um, how people see us and how people try to create this image of us that's so unrealistic, that's what makes being a girl like more than extremely hard. It's like us in a box that we can't fit in; we're cramped and we're suffocating from all this nonsense that people try to lay on us. They're like you have to be this way, you have to look this way. It's like that's not who I am and you wanna say something but they're just not willing to listen.

Despite the difficulty placed on girls to prove themselves while conforming to, and sometimes in spite of, demands placed on girls, many times in their interviews the girls seemed to revel in being able to demonstrate their capabilities therefore proving everyone wrong. Sadie recounted a difficult relationship with her father who she felt had always treated her differently than her brothers. He praised and encouraged them, while expressing doubt about her abilities. He held her to different standards than her brothers, and saw her as less than. When she began school at the Institute her grades soared. She realized she was capable and intelligent. She explained how that feeling impacted her:

> It gives me kind of like a satisfaction that I proved someone wrong, that looked down on me so much for so long. And I finally got to this point where I can – I'm confident enough to say that I've done something that he said I could never do. So I think that's what's really interesting about being a girl. And kind of fun too because you get to prove people wrong and you get to, you know, show people what you really can do when there was so much doubt.

Leila agreed, sharing that she also found it fun:

> What's fun about being a girl is that you'll come across many people who will try to interfere with what you wanna do, and you could prove them wrong. And I get fun out of that – proving them wrong that just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I can't do it.

The girls explained that this constant requirement to prove themselves involved all aspects of their lives. They had to prove not only that they were intelligent enough to

perform certain jobs or succeed in school, they also had to demonstrate their physical capabilities. The ability to overcome doubts about their abilities on the field brought particular satisfactions to many of the girls. Ruby laughed when explaining that as a big sports enthusiast she loved:

> proving the guys wrong, that I can throw a football. I can throw a baseball. And sometimes even hit them in the face. Just kidding. But I think, like I said before, how we're thought of as the weaker gender, so I think being able to stand up for women and prove that we aren't the weaker gender, that we're capable of doing all the things that men can do, whether it be out on the field, on the court, in, in an office, in, or in the lab.

Perhaps because of the consistent feeling they needed to prove themselves, especially in relation to boys (as good as or equal to boys), the girls upped the ante claiming frequently that girls surpassed boys. They argued that not only are girls and boys different, and that girls are looked down upon or seen less than when compared to boys, but that *in fact* girls are better than boys in several ways – maturity, intelligence, emotional expression, and reproductive abilities. Natalia explained her thinking:

> Well, I think being a girl is just a way of saying that we're a more free version of a man. And I don't mean free as in rights and things; I mean free as in we're more open to reality. We're more open to our emotions and more open to the way things should be instead of the way things are.

Melissa agreed that girls have more freedom to express emotions and went further to suggest that girls' surpassed boys when it came to options for self-expression, especially when it came to fashion:

> So I think girls definitely get more freedom in that area, in that they can, you know dress like they want, they can act more like they want. I think it's more socially uncommon for guys to act like, you know like girls – I think girls can act more of who they are and what they really feel because I think the stereotypes about guys are much more constricting. The whole fact that they have to be strong, you know never show their emotions and how they can't be girlie or feminine in any way. I think those are much more I guess ingrained into the hearts of people, so I think it makes it much easier for girls to actually get out there and do what they want.

Again and again the idea that girls could do what they wanted despite the societal expectations and limitations placed on girls appeared in the solo interviews. Connected to this idea is the notion of choice. Brooklyn explains

> To be a girl is to be independent, resourceful, we can be intelligent if we want. And it might sound weird saying if we want, but it's our choice. If we want to be stupid, that's on us. But to be a girl is to have class, dress appropriately, act lady like, respectful, speak what's on your mind, be aggressive when it's necessary. Don't be ghetto, um, have plenty of confidence, and never be afraid to show your great – greatest abilities.

Luz discusses other choices available to girls. In her interview Luz expressed that one of the things she felt made girls more interesting or powerful than boys was that "you can

give a life to another person. You have a chance to take care of a baby for nine months, but that's only if you want." She goes on to say: "And something else is that we can get ready, look pretty, do our hair, our nails – we can work and still work at the house right when we come back from work . . . so we can multitask." There seems to be a lot of choice here, the choice to have children, the choice to work, the choice to decorate our appearance, but at the end of the day the way her answer is phrased and the fact that the first thing she listed is tied to bodily functions while the second thing is tied to enhancing looks (body) raises questions for me about the realness of choice here. Similarly, Brooklyn stated it was a girl's choice to be independent, resourceful, and to act like a lady of class, but the alternative to these things is lower class stupidity, to "be stupid" or "be ghetto" in her words.

Performed Girl versus Real Girl

One of the interview questions asked how they saw girls presented in the media. Most of the girls expressed feelings of disappointment and disgust with the portrayal of girls by the media. Mimi stated that she felt movies and television never showed girls as the heroes, instead "girls are either the victim – well most of the time the victim, or mistreated, or some porn star." Yesenia agreed and pointed out that "in music you see them being treated as hos I guess you could say, and those women are portrayed as victims sometimes." Soledad shared her belief that the media showed girls as secondary to boys, their existence always connected to boys:

> Usually I see girls – especially movies, they're presented as the sex symbol, like they're kind of there just for the – the strong uh, male lead. They're kind of just like oh, like eye candy for guys. Um, so it's like really

> hard to find a very strong female character in a movie, without her being um, hot or sexy.

Melissa bemoaned the lack of humanity granted to girls by the media's presentations:

> I think women are presented very poorly in the media because they're just things that sell things. They're not people with ideas and hopes and dreams and people who want to do things with their life. They're things that sell things and it's awful. They put them up there to make them – to make an audience want to buy something, not – or to make an audience want to do something. They're used as tools for advertising, which is awful – it's just awful because behind, you know the pretty face, the not-so-pretty face, the hair, the eyes, the – behind all that is a person, a living, breathing person who wants things with their life, who wants to do things and I don't think that's being represented.

In addition to media's portrayal of girls as a thing, object, or nonhuman, many of the girls also noted the media's unrealistic representation of girls. Girls discussed the lack of "real" girls in the media. Rosalinda asserted, "I know like in magazines and stuff, I know it's not real. A lot of it's like photo shopped and a lot of their blemishes and stuff are covered up." Mindy's request echoed Melissa's statement that the media does not show the real human underneath the image: "I don't know – it seems like – they're like I don't know – it's kind of disrespectful. And that it doesn't seem right. Couldn't girls be presented in a way that didn't have to be shown with a lot of skin showing? Like showing who they are instead of what's underneath their clothes?"

The reports of negative presentation of girls in the media, combined with the acknowledged manipulation of girls' images by the media, brings up something I noticed about the girls' self-portrait sculptures. I found the girls self-portraits could be categorized into two groups: projects that told the story of the girl and projects that shared the girls' pop culture preferences. In other words some of the projects created a picture of the girl as influenced by a multitude of factors – family, friends, passions, history, background, education, and dreams – while others formed an image of the girl primarily and inextricably linked to specific media creations and pop culture. In the case of the latter, the delineation between the inside and outside of the sculpture blurred. Often the outside of the sculpture consisted of a decorated cover with a picture of the girl along with her name. These revealed very little about how the girl believed the world perceived her or what she presented to the world. Inside the sculpture, with pages of pictures of boy bands, attractive actors and musicians, song lyrics, and movie posters, seemed to suggest the construction of self through the media. Since the girls acknowledged quite vehemently in their interviews that they did not agree with the representation of girls in the media and realized the media's manipulation tactics, I wonder what can be inferred from the complex aspect of embracing pop culture as so vital to girls' identity creation when the culture depicts girls as less than. I believe it must stem from our consumer society where one of the primary modes of identity performance revolves around the consumption of consumer products and culture.

Mimi brings up an excellent point that further complicates matters:

> It's interesting how a girl will act in front of a guy, but a girl – but how – okay, let me say this again. So a girl will act different in front of a guy, but

> when she's just with the girls, they will act different. Like a normal – you know we try to impress guys; we try to act our best. But when we're just within girls, we talk about everything and anything.

This raises many questions for me. Is there a "real" girl to discover within each girl? Or are girls' daily performances a series of possible girlhoods? From a performance studies perspective, specifically Butler, girls perform their gender identity through a repetition of acts revealing gender as a construct. It makes sense then that there might be a difference between the performance of self/girlhood in front of boys and in front of girls, a series of ritualistic acts performed with each gender. Is there a "realness" or "normality" when girls are interacting with just girls as opposed to when they are in mixed company? These performed girlhoods – girl as potential love interest/sex object versus girl as friend/sister/peer prompt questions about how sexual preference complicate these performances. The assumed heterosexual preferences of everyone by mainstream society (compulsory heterosexuality/heteronormativity) did not seem to register with the girls in the study and instead went unquestioned. Given the data I collected, I must leave this question for another follow-up study and instead focus on the developing binary connected to the performance of girlhood – an ideal girlhood performed for boys (mixed company) and a more raw/true girlhood performed in the company of only girls, as the girls described happening in Act III of their play. I find girls' awareness of this duality in performance particularly significant. The struggle between challenging or accepting (subverting or reifying) an idealized girlhood is at the heart of contemporary girlhood.

Cognitive Dissonance

The concept of cognitive dissonance connects these three themes (see fig. 31). Cognitive dissonance, the stress and mental confusion caused when the mind holds two opposing beliefs or ideas at the same time, can be seen in each of the three themes. In the case of A Space Apart, the girls had been active in the development of a Room of Our

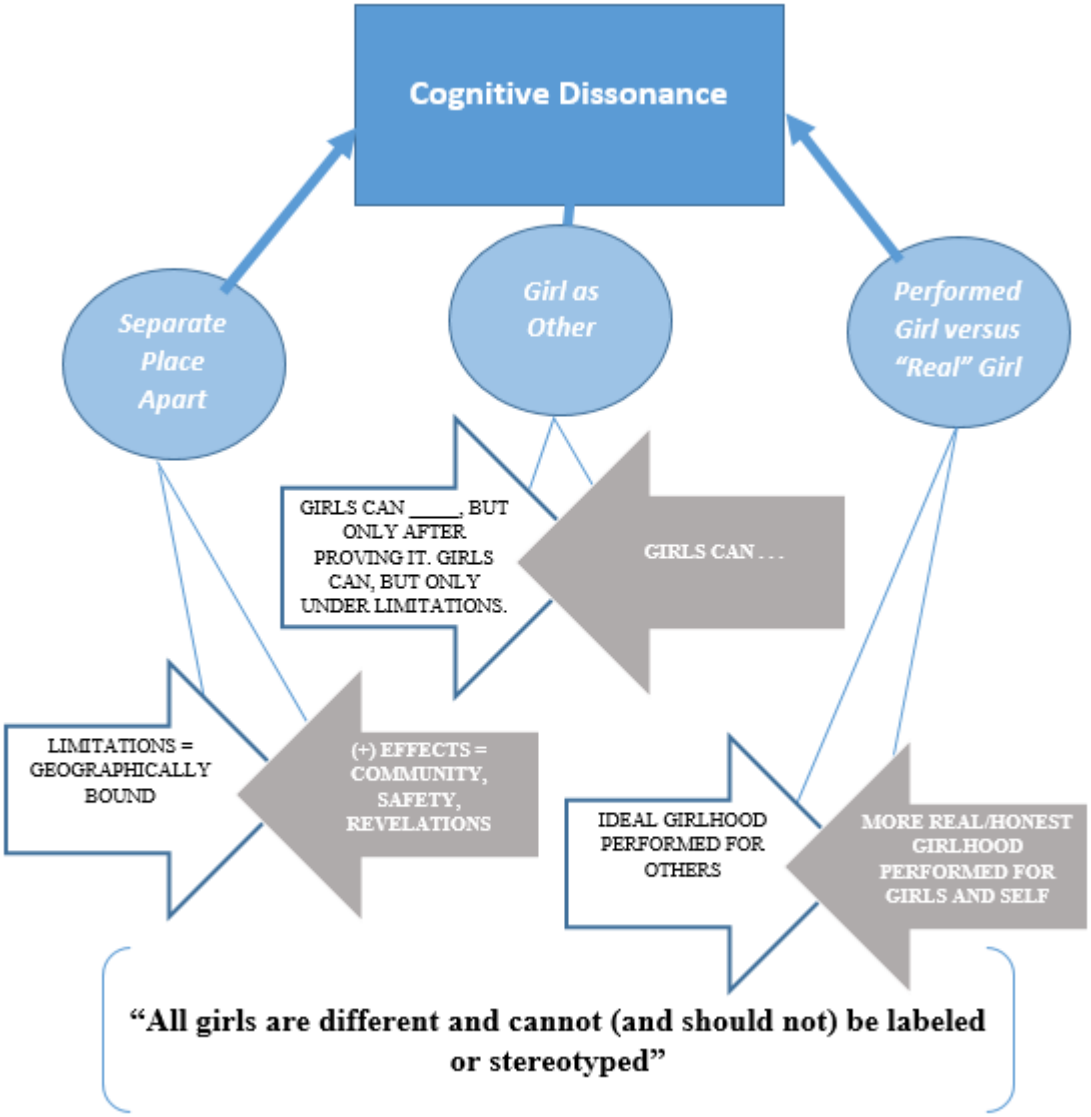

Figure 31. Theory Building Illustrative Diagram.

Own, and supported by the nurturing and challenging environment provided by the all-girls Institute. Despite having experienced safety, reassurance, and success in this environment, several girls could not transfer their experience to a new environment and participate in the sharing of their play. Knowing something, even experiencing something – like for instance, repeated compliments from your peers and instructor about your abilities and ideas – does not automatically shut down concerns of embarrassment and fear.

In the solo interviews the girls expressed contradictory opinions on girlhood. The girls understood their gender marked them as other, but remained constant in their belief in the superiority of girls despite often buying into media messages showing the opposite was true. The girls held firm to the belief that their sex and biological functions were the only thing that made them different from boys, but then connected personality traits to all girls simply because they are girls. For example, emotionally girls are more expressive and open than boys, or girls' ability to nurture and care for families contrasted with the cold, unfeeling nature of boys. *Then* they would espouse the idea that girls could *choose* how to act. Two examples help further develop the connection between the themes and cognitive dissonance.

Rosalinda denied feeling pressure to act a certain way as a girl, but then said there is a need to act a certain way so people don't think about you in the wrong way: "people will definitely think different of you if you're not acting like a certain way." She goes on to say that people should just be who they are. In her answer to what does it mean to be a girl, Mimi stated that basically girls are fragile and need to be "carried like feathers" – that underneath all the attempts to be strong and put up a good defense, girls

are “just little cotton balls.” Later in her answer to what's hard about being a girl she expressed a desire for girls to be more independent and wished there were better role models for girls. This expressed contradiction exemplifies her cognitive dissonance – she actually says that it is empowering to be more fragile than boys: “I feel like everyone knows that a girl is more gentle, more fragile than a guy. And that’s very empowering to girls.”

This reoccurring contradiction and expression of the binary between male/female and strong/weak fascinates me. The assertion that girls are smarter/better than boys despite this weakness – that the fragility actually elevates girls as better – is challenging. One might argue the girls are asserting radical feminism. Or left over “girl power” from the 1990s might explain the competition between boys and girls over who is better. In the end, however, I believe that a struggle with the language surrounding gender resides at the heart of girlhood’s cognitive dissonance.

In a viral video of her spoken word performance at the 2013 College Unions Poetry Slam Invitations, Lily Myers movingly shared her poem about her mother, “Shrinking Women[38].” She explains that she learned to shrink herself to make room for the men in her family. Her realization sparks a conversation with herself trying to reconcile the competing inherited beliefs in her mind. “I have been taught accommodation/My brother never thinks before he speaks/I have been taught to filter.” Myers’ poem, as well as her performance, demonstrates a struggle with language that becomes an embodied fight. She shrinks her body inward making herself smaller as she

[38] An excerpt of the poem is shared at the beginning of this chapter.

describes her and her mother's actions. When referring to her brother and father, her shoulders rise and thrust back while her chest expands, her arms moving outward taking up room on the stage. As Myers' poem demonstrates, the girls' work and our subsequent conversations show the language used to describe girls becomes reflected through the performance of the girl body; powerful language imbued into the body, but not fully absorbed by either mind or body as the girls recognize and acknowledge its falsity. Like a character in a science fiction movie fighting an alien invasion of the body snatchers, the girls waver between being taken over, which might be an easier existence, and holding on to their humanity. The fight continues, an ever constant struggle, even as they understand that as girls society often denies the humanity they try to hold onto.

In a recent article for the Howl Round website, theatre director Jess K. Smith called for a "revolution of language." She rejected the notion that as a director she only had two choices – accommodation (viewed as feminine) or domination (tied to the masculine). Insisting they both came from fear, she calls for a new language of power that blends the brash and the elastic. Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg partnered with the Girl Scouts recently to create the Ban Bossy campaign. An awareness campaign, it asks people to take the pledge to stop calling girls bossy. The campaign explains that while society labels assertive boys future leaders, it calls assertive girls bossy thereby hindering their desire to lead for fear of being disliked or thought of as un-lady like.

The three themes that were constructed from the data, especially the interviews conducted by the girls, demonstrate that *contemporary girlhood means struggling with cognitive dissonance*. The constant fight to reconcile conflicting ideas illuminates a girlhood in flux, a girl becoming. Underlying the girls' cognitive dissonance lies a fight to

negotiate with the language they have been given. The girls reacted to this fight in three ways: 1) accepting the binary building language surrounding girlhood – girly, weak, soft, loving, nurturing, emotional – as is; 2) twisting the language by rejecting the derogatory connotations associated with the language of girlhood and instead associating the difference as powerful for women; or 3) rejecting the association to the language and instead adopting the more masculine terms as their own in order to elevate girls as better, smarter, and stronger than boys. Another, more effective option might be to follow the lead of Myers, Smith, and Sandberg (along with others) and search for an altogether new language, one that is empowering rather than inherited.

CHAPTER 6

GIRL BECOMINGS

"I feel like especially now, being a girl is very important because they want more girls – they want girls leadership in the world. They want girls to become engineers, to become doctors, to become lawyers, to become judges, to become business woman and I feel like now it's – it's the best thing to be a girl."

- Mimi

The Year of the Girl

In 2010, the same year The Girls' Institute for Future Leaders opened, the Kappa Delta Sorority declared each November 14th International Girls Day in order to celebrate the spirit of girls and spread the message that girls can do anything. The following year, 2011, the United Nations passed resolution 66/170 appointing October 11th the International Day of the Girl Child in order to "help galvanize worldwide enthusiasm for goals to better girls' lives." The next year, the year of my semester long research study with the Institute, the Girls Scouts named 2012 as The Year of the Girl, the beginning of an ongoing multi-year project focusing on forming coalitions to support the development of girls. Each organization cited the importance of valuing girls as future leaders and providing them opportunities to become those leaders for the reason behind their actions.

Over the last several years hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of organizations have sponsored special projects focusing on girls across the world. The Girl Effect created by the Nike Foundation works to make girls visible and improve their circumstances around the world. The Coalition for Adolescent Girls works with forty organizations to assist girls living in poverty. Maridadi and Totally Tumba, two fashion companies in Kenya, formed Panties with Purpose, an organization that seeks donations

of panties for girls living in poverty around the world who miss school during their menses due to a lack of undergarments and sanitary products. In the US actress and feminist Amy Poehler started a web series titled "Smart Girls" that developed into an online community that urges girls to "change the world by being yourself."

I bring up these girl phenomena not only because I find their work to support girls around the world amazing, but because I think their very existence reflect the findings of my research study. The girl participants in my study reside in a place and time of flux when it comes to our understanding of gender and girls. The state of today's girlhood lies somewhere between the discourses of "Girl Power" and "Girl in Danger," an in-between place Willis terms hybrid-girlhood filled with "on-the-ground, everyday, personal negotiations of dominant gender discourses" (104). These organizations attempt to empower girls, and in doing so confirm that girls require assistance because of girls' status as "other." Each organization's work or project serves to "empower" girls to move from a position of other to a status of equal. This possible shift in status comes from providing girls with the power connected to knowledge (education), awareness (of girls' status and potential), skills (to negotiate gender discourses, power structures, and their circumstances), and material necessities (panties, feminine products, educational materials, safe living/learning conditions). At the same time, the elevation of girls' status requires the organizations to seek support for girls through legal and legislative action, as well as through a general "enthusiasm" from the public in the fight to support girls. The very interventions of these organizations confirm the assumed powerlessness of girls, or the way society has constructed girlhood as a site of weakness/softness/danger. Well aware of their status inferred by these organizations, the girl participants of my

study battle to make sense of their unlimited potential as future leaders (messages spread by these organizations, the media, and their school) and their lived, day to day embodied experiences which often contradict the empowering messages sent by these organizations. Society's construction of girlhood conflicts often with what girls experience. My study affirms girlhood as an ever-shifting and expanding state of becoming rather than a fixed state of being. I think it important to pause here to further explain what I mean by describing girlhood as a state of becoming.

Contemporary US girlhood, because of its assumed link to age, can be viewed as inextricably connected to western concepts of childhood and adolescence. Before industrialization and the rise of the middle class, most sociologists agree that childhood was not a guaranteed time of carefree recreation and leisure (Lee, 2001; Mintz, 2006; Fass and Mason, 2000). It was not until the Progressive era at the turn of the century that reformers fought to end child labor and guarantee all children public education. The rise of the middle class, combined with the baby boom generation, gave birth to a large number of youth whose only job was to be a child. US society often romanticizes childhood as a time of innocence and wonder, a time where incomplete beings need protection and nurturing. As youth enter their teen years, they are caught in a period of flux. No longer children, and not allowed to enter the world of adults, the US teenager lives in an in-between world. Society bombards teenagers with messages of consumer independence, while at the same time restricting their choices with age-based laws: one must be thirteen to watch a PG-13 film, sixteen to drive, eighteen to vote and view an R-rated film, and twenty-one to drink. US society seems confused: it views the adolescent as mentally capable of understanding right from wrong and will try a twelve year-old as

an adult in a court of law, but that same twelve year-old is not cognitively mature enough to make choices regarding which film to see or which politician to elect. Girls' status as both child and female makes their position in society particularly fraught with complexity, confusion, and contradiction.

Nick Lee explains that as long as society viewed adulthood as "a state of personal stability and completion," childhood continued to be viewed as less than; "children were often defined as what adults were not" (7-8). In other words, adults were human beings complete and stable, worthy of respect and imbued with the rights of citizens, while children remained incomplete human becomings dependent on society, needing to be controlled and guided as they journey toward adulthood (7). Society defines girls as incomplete in terms of age (mental capacity) and as less than in terms of gender. While the connection of girlhood to this deeply entrenched understanding of Western childhood colors the term "becoming" as derogatory or negative, when I refer to girlhood as a state of becoming, I refer to the recent shifting view of identity from a fixed state of being to a "continual process of becoming" (Nicholson, 65). Lee goes on to explore contemporary society's shifting outlook on youth and adults in what he calls "an age of uncertainty" (6). When the clear delineation between adult and child disappears because adulthood's once stable state has become uncertain, the "becoming without end" emerges:

> Far from emptying the category of 'human becoming' and making it possible to recognize everyone, regardless of age, as a human being, recent social change is leading to an abandonment of the category 'human

being', and abandonment of the notions of completeness, stability and journey's end. (85)

Just as the understandings of child and adult can no longer be thought of in terms of fixed states of being, girl and girlhood cannot be viewed as a fixed or stable identity: girlhood is an ever-shifting and expanding state of becoming; an identity "produced between persons and within social relations" (Lawler, 8).

The girl-theorists asserted girlhood and "girls" can be understood as different and multiple. Despite these differences and multiplicities, the girls' performances of girlhood, which both reify and challenge girlhood as singular, demonstrate the containment of girlhood within long-held gender beliefs and the dominant social construction of girlhood. The ultimate barrier of girlhood remains the binary of male/female which encloses girls (both genders actually) in a box, as so eloquently stated by Natalia. The box might be in the process of enlargement, as exemplified by the above organizations' work as well as by the girl artists themselves, allowing girls more movement or freedom, but eventually the girls come up against the boundaries of this box.

What I Learned

I began my research study asking the following questions: *How do US girls consume mass media representations of girlhood and reproduce or subvert these representations? In what ways do girls perform their understandings of their own identities and what it means to be a girl in contemporary US society through their creations of original art and literature, live theatrical pieces, and digital cultural practices?* Additionally I attempted to examine the sub-questions below:

- How do girls "perform" girlhood?

- How can dramatic writing and theatre serve as a site of identity exploration for adolescent female youth?
- How do girls theorize girlhood through original theatrical creations?
- What are the various ways girls conceive of girlhood?
- What can we learn from girls' theories on girlhood?
- How do girls navigate mass media representations of girlhood?
- In what ways do girls accept/reject mass media depictions of girlhood?
- Where do girls locate their agency? How do they utilize agency?

As I sit at my local public library, in the desk by the window that has become my home for many weeks while I dove into the ocean of data and material trying to pull pearls of wisdom through my coding and analysis, I return to the contemplation of my original questions. I struggle to put into concise words the answers to these questions. Ultimately my research has illuminated the vast complexity of negotiating gender constructions through daily performances and artistic modes. I have learned several things *with* the girls-artists-satirists-theorists, *through* the variety of methodologies employed, and *as* a facilitator-researcher.

With the Girls

The girls developed a central key assertion about contemporary girlhood. They deduced that *all girls are different and cannot (and should not) be labeled or stereotyped*. Underneath this assertion, providing a foundation, lies the belief that girls should be who they want and be comfortable being themselves. Differences should be celebrated and honored, allowing the girls to reside in their skins and various spaces safely. Below the foundation, however, lives the ever-shifting seismic reality of the

embodied experiences of girls, which often prevent or challenge girls from easily achieving a secure, comfortable understanding of self and girlhood. The struggle with cognitive dissonance resounds throughout the girls' conversations and artistic work.

In their daily lives the girls performed self *through* limited practices made available to them by the restraining discourses of girlhood. Through their various, specific actions girls performed girlhood, both intelligible[39] (acceptable) and unrecognized (subversive). For example, Rosalinda performed self through her artfully applied make-up and chosen accessories. Mimi performed self through her leadership activities at school (an intelligible girlhood at the Institute, but perhaps an unrecognized girlhood outside of the all-girls school where the potential leadership of girls serves as a primary tenet). Ruby performed self through her athletic prowess (an often challenging performance of girlhood she felt she must constantly justify/prove). Valentina and Brooklyn performed self through their joke making. Soledad performed self through a carefully negotiated balance of religious practice. Natalia performed self through her academic success. Melissa performed self through eschewing all things considered girly and through her denial that she performed (although that in itself serves as a performance). The girls performed self through these various actions, and often what they did and what they said did not align, exemplifying their cognitive dissonance (see fig. 32) Mimi served as the strongest example of this for me. Her performed self as girl leader, a strong and capable young woman with well-articulated opinions she never seemed hesitant to express, contrasted with her expressed view of girls in her solo

[39] I refer to Butler's idea here that gender performance can be read as intelligible or unintelligible.

interview. Interpolated by girlhood discourses around the inherent softness/weakness of girls, Mimi constrains her power as a leader by linking it to her girl fragility:

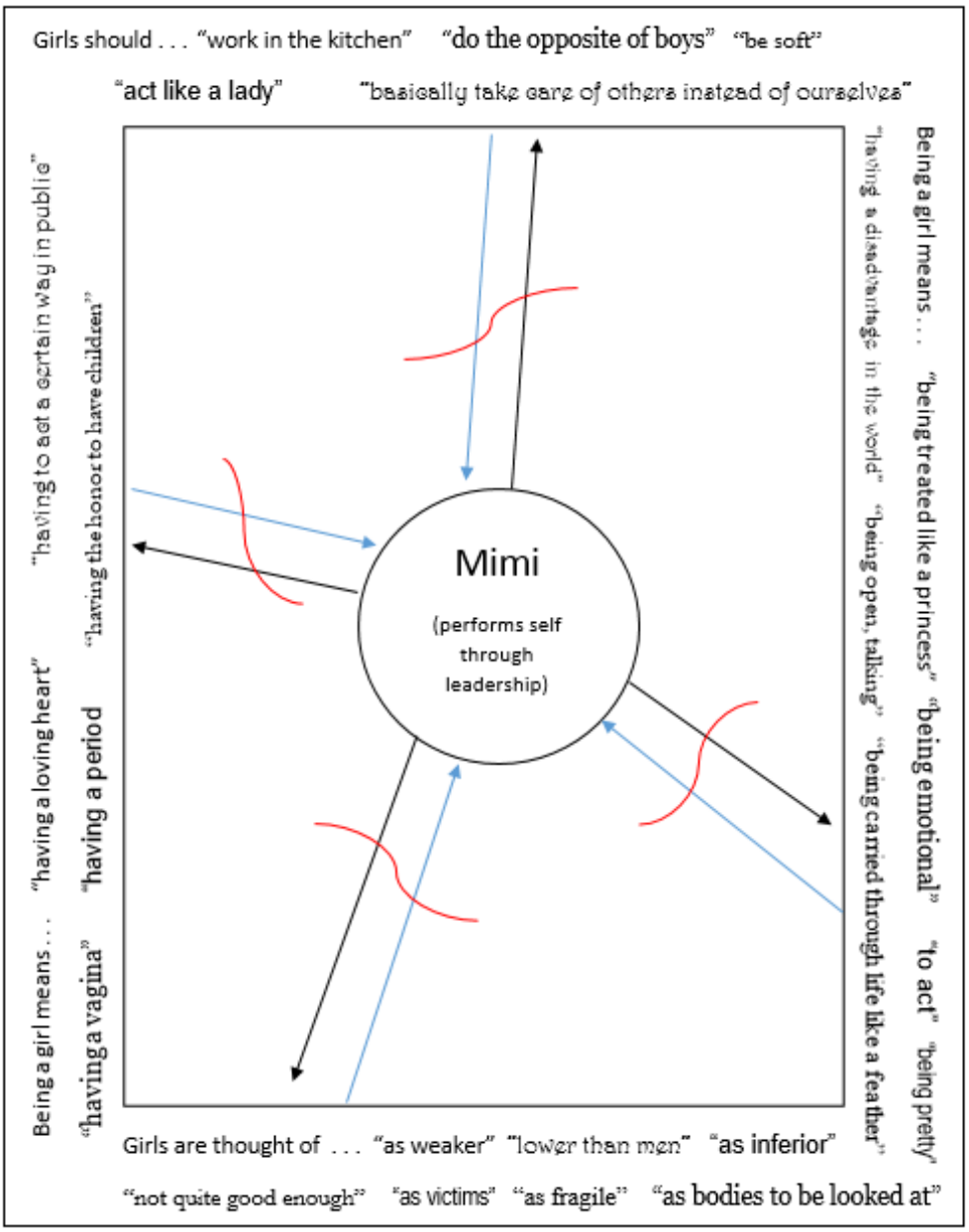

Figure 32. Cognitive Dissonance model. Mimi represents the girls, as such she resides in the box of girlhood. The black and blue arrows represent her conflicting actions and words. The wavy red line represents her resulting cognitive dissonance. She performs her identity through specific action while constrained by the discourses which form the frame of girlhood. Quotes are from the girls' interviews.

> I'm not saying that girls can't be independent, no, but I – I feel like everyone knows that a girl is more gentle, more fragile than a guy. And that's very empowering to girls . . . I feel like girls are fragile and try to act so strong, but in – really inside it – we're just like a little cotton ball.

Most of the girls agreed with Mimi at some level, expressing enjoyment as well as frustration at being treated as the "gentler" sex in need of protection or careful handling. Our Room of Our Own proved to be a site of exploration and experimentation where these discordant performances of self could be played with through different methods/roles.

Through Methodologies

Originally my decision to employ a variety of methodologies in my research came from a desire to acknowledge the multitude of ways girls consume representations of girlhood, while at the same time respecting artistic/performative modes of communication as just as valuable as the written word. The different methodologies utilized in my work with the girls revealed new kinds of performance of self. As I mentioned earlier, the discourses of girlhood consistently and constantly constrain the girls, limiting the practice of self. Our work helped to loosen the constraints in small but significant ways. Each methodology provided a new way for the girls to communicate resulting in a perspective shift for them. In positioning each girl in a different way or role, each methodology exposed a different aspect of girlhood identity. Each girl found power in each method, some preferring one method over the other. As performers the power of ensemble provided the girls the opportunity to embody their experiences

together. Improvisational performance inspired the satirists in each girl, while the poetic performance revealed the unspoken side of girlhood. The self-portrait sculptures brought to light the capacity of each visual artist for self-reflection. The solo interviews and cyber creations (blogs/journals) positioned the girls as social commentators, elevating each girl to a space of power not usually provided to teen girls. Even when some of the girls

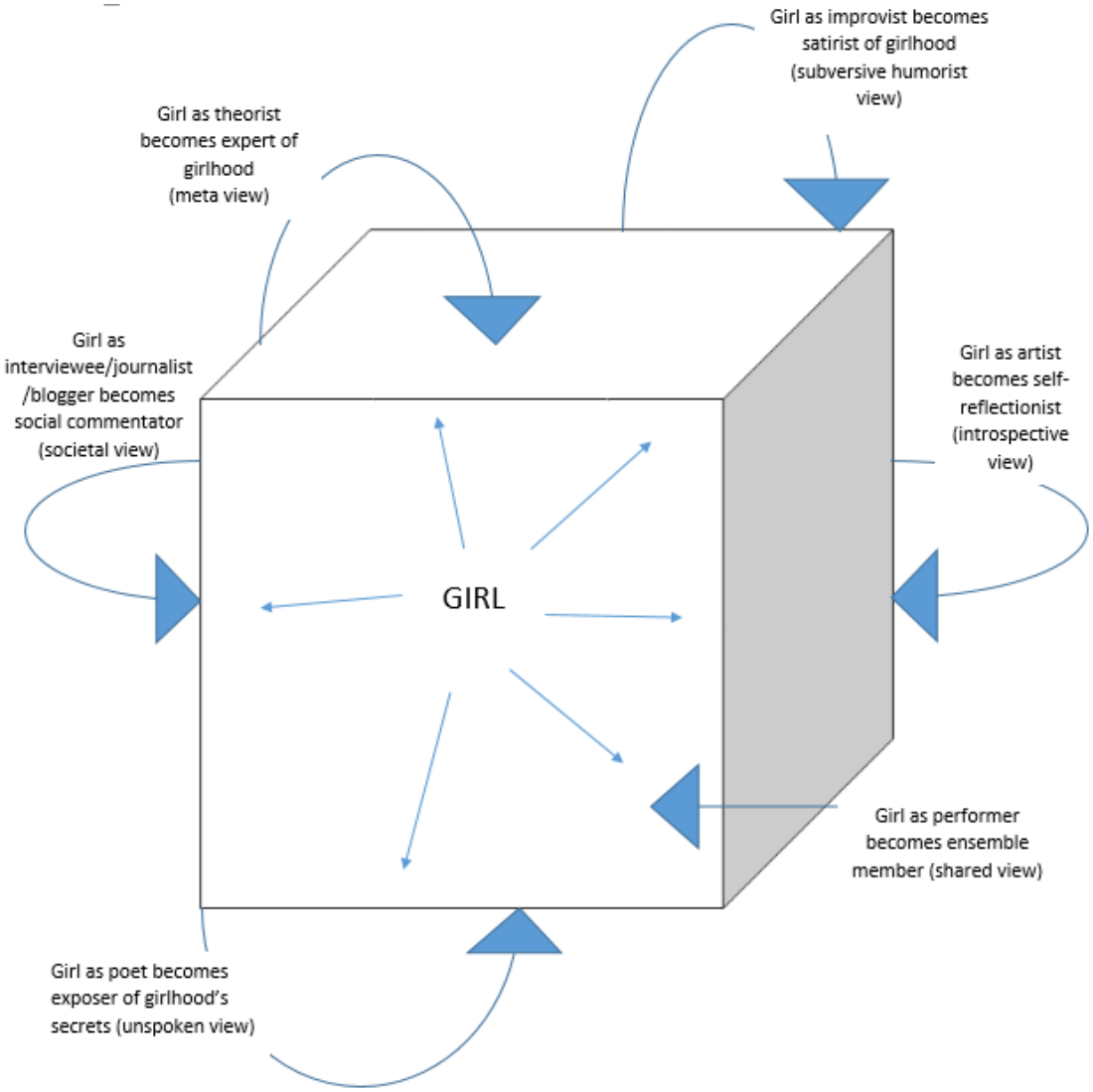

Figure 33. Shifting perspectives of girlhood through methodological roles. The box represents girlhood with girl constrained inside. Through the different roles (marked by arrows) the girls see the different facets of girlhood via new perspectives.

switched from the public blogs to the more private journals, they still acted as social commentators by sharing their views on society with me (something girls do not often get to do with adults). Finally the theory building placed the girls in the role of expert and resulted in meta-thinking by the girls about what it means to be a girl (see fig. 33).

As a Facilitator-Researcher: Space and Subjectivity

While the current state of girlhood around the world remains in need of the interventions of the girl-centered organizations and projects I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, it became apparent to me that in order to lift the constraints placed on girlhood by gender conformativity, girls need two specific types of space. The first is a space apart to play out potential alternatives. The space created by A Room of Our Own provided a much needed site of exploration and safe failure. By safe failure I mean a space constructed and controlled by/with girls where iterations of girlhood, especially girlhoods controversial and challenging to the dominant view, might be performed with little to no harm (mental, emotional, or bodily) to girl artists. The girls may face repercussions from each other, but these challenges hopefully resolve themselves through continued play and open dialogue fostered by the creation of the space. These spaces do not necessarily require the use of theatre as the primary mode of play, as was the case in Our Room; visual art, photography, dance, film, and creative writing can open up environments of play equally powerful and compelling, but theatre remains a unique and special mode both because it combines multiple arts in its creation and in its ability to address the human experience through representation and mimesis. Feminist scholar Luce Irigaray explains:

> To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to submit herself—inasmuch as she is on the side of the 'perceptible,' of 'matter'—to 'ideas,' in particular to ideas about herself that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible,' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible. (76)

In other words, girls' theatrical play exposes the inaccuracies underlying the representation of girls by the dominant culture. In replaying these representations through theatre and performance not only do girls acknowledge the validity of their own experiences and knowledge, girls can challenge and alter them thereby becoming the director/playwright of girlhood.

While the performative space apart places girls as active makers/do-ers (or re-doers) of girlhood, the second space positions girls as spectator-critics[40]. Our theory building meetings provided a space for reflection and meta-thinking. The girls viewed their work not as passive spectators, but with a critical lens analyzing their creations and performances asking why, what, how come, and to what result. They became theorists of girlhood. In interviews it became clear many of the girls regularly, even daily, questioned the representations of girls and the subsequent underlying messages they contain, but many expressed difficulty with the interview questions labeling them as deep or hard, or as things they had never thought about before. I assert a communal space (virtual or live)

[40] Here I refer to Jill Dolan's concept introduced in her book *Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1991).

which allows girls to come together to evaluate, assess, synthesize, and theorize girlhood as vital and necessary to the success and well-being of girls (and on a larger scale the well-being of boys and society as a whole). When girls can leave the gendered boxes that constrain them, or at the very least recognize the existence of the boxes, girls can begin to work towards/fight for a more equal, safer world. The communal aspect of this theory building space removes the fear and isolation felt by girls challenging hierarchal structures of power (family, school, media, culture) on their own and should not be discounted or undervalued. As the girls demonstrated through Act III and discussed in interviews and theory building meetings, when thoughts, ideas, and questions go unspoken, girls can question their sanity and value. A space where these things can be shared with others validates and empowers girls.

The girls' validation and empowerment remained foremost on my mind throughout my work with them. My choice to let the girls choose the topics explored in class sprung from my desire to really *hear* the girls voices as undiluted as possible by my own subjectivity. I do not deny that my position as a white, middle-class, heterosexual, US born, socialist feminist, theatre artist in her thirties working to obtain her doctorate influenced the girls in various ways. After all, I chose the broader topic of girlhood as the focus of our work together rather than leaving that up to the girls. My goal to provide the girls opportunity to lead their own learning as much as possible had interesting results. First, and ultimately most exciting to me, our work privileged the girls' interests and experiences. They chose what to focus on, although as discussed in Chapter Five, they placed constraints on their choices when faced with an audience outside of Our Room. In reflection, I imagine that despite my work to distance Our Room from school-related

constrains and my repeated assurances that I would not censor them, my presence as an adult also influenced their choices. Additionally, knowing my interest in girlhood and picking up on my liberal philosophies, they may have worked to please me through their work. During our first theory building meeting I did ask the girls about their perceptions regarding my influence over our work together and their choices. The eleven girls present replied that they felt free to go in their own directions, but I believe I would need to follow up with them individually to better assess this. While I cannot measure the ways my subjectivity influenced the girls, I can identify what went unexplored in our work. While I recognized these unaddressed topics during our work, I felt unable to bring these topics to the attention of the girls without reducing their power and status as artists. In retrospect, I believe my desire to prioritize the girls' choices/interests combined with my status as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman, and the girls' awareness/apprehension of audience meant several significant issues went unexplored.

The Unspoken

The girls' creations, performances and interviews revealed an enormous amount of information about the current state of US girlhood and the power of the arts as a mode of communication and self-expression. Examining the unspoken, important topics never or rarely addressed in our work provides an equally important body of knowledge. During our first theory building meeting I asked the girls if they felt they left anything vital out of the play. Were there topics they wished they had addressed? As I have mentioned before, the girls chose not to address some of the more serious matters explored in class like violence against women and girls, poverty, and human trafficking. The girls explained their concerns about their audience, which provided an insight into

their ongoing negotiations of societal expectations of girls. The girls replied that they wished they would have brought in scenes about school pressure and the difference between co-ed and single gender schools. I asked myself the same question: what remained unspoken during our semester together?

In reflection, the silence regarding three areas scream to be addressed. Given the diverse make-up of the girls, the fact that their specific cultural experiences went largely unexplored seems surprising and significant. Occasionally in theory building meetings and solo interviews, girls mentioned their cultures held certain notions about girls and their proper places (Ruby and Soledad for example), but a broader conversation never occurred in class about how ethnicity, race, and nationality impacted their daily experiences as girls. Prejudice and discrimination with regards to these issues went largely unaddressed. Additionally the girls never directly addressed the topic of sexuality and sexual orientation. In their examination of romantic relationships, assumed heterosexuality remained unquestioned. In informal class discussions heteronormativity silenced a rich site of girlhood. Finally, in the girls' interviews a reoccurring "othering" of non-US girls revealed deeply entrenched beliefs that the US held a superior position in its treatment of girls. Repeatedly when asked what happens to girls who do not act like they are supposed to, girls brought up a dichotomy between the US and other countries. In the US, girls' subversion resulted in relatively harmless consequences (if any), while in "other" countries girls might be physically harmed, even killed. Our work focused primarily on the experiences of US girls (due to the location of the study and the girls),

and rarely expanded beyond the borders[41]. While some of this resulted from practicality's sake and the girls' interests, it also stems from a lack of examination of the narratives about American Exceptionalism and capitalist consumerism.

Resulting Questions

The girls' artistic creations, performances, and theory work as well as the examination of the missing or unspoken issues in our work, raise several questions:

1. How can I better assess in what ways sexuality, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, and class affect girls' conception and understanding of girlhood?
2. What other spaces might provide challenging, safe exploration of girlhood?
3. How can I as a facilitator-researcher evaluate the lasting impact (if any) of our work on the girls?
4. As a facilitator-researcher, in what ways can I better balance the sometimes conflicting end goals of each role? As a researcher I have specific questions I want answered, while as a facilitator I wish to serve the girls' journey and growth as artistic becomings.
5. What might a similar project with just boys reveal about contemporary constructed boyhood and the ways they perform their understandings of what it means to be a boy today?
6. What might a similar project with a mixed gender group reveal about contemporary constructed girl/boyhood and the ways both girls and boys

[41] Our work did explore some international gender equality projects like One Billion Rising (part of Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* and V-Day work) and specific international girl experiences like that of girls' education advocate Malala Yousafzai. These reaffirmed the girl participants' views on international girlhood as a site of extreme danger.

perform their understandings of what it means to be their own gender and the "opposite" gender? How might the gender performances of girls and boys change between a single-gender performance project and a co-ed gender performance project?

Moving Forward

In looking toward the future, I find myself with a set of goals varying in complexity and size. In the near future I would like to contact the fifteen research participants with the hopes that the girls would agree to participate in a follow-up visual art project and solo interview. The central question, motivating the follow-up and posed to the girls through both methods, would answer what lasting impact (if any) our work had on the girls. How (if at all) has their understanding of girl and girlhood changed? Once I examine the lasting impact of the research project on the girls, I hope to make any adjustments to its structure and replicate the project with another group of girls (hopefully at the same site). Following this I would like to replicate the project with an all boy group. This most likely will require partnering with a male facilitator-researcher in order to provide the boys with the same comfort/circumstances as the girl participants (I would serve as researcher only). Finally I wish to bring a co-ed group together for a similar project, this time in partnership with a male co-facilitator-researcher. I believe this series of projects would provide a great deal of vital and significant knowledge about youth gender performance, as well as the power of the arts as a form of self-expression, communication, and mode of research.

As a separate but related project, inspired by the girls' critique of the way the media represents girls, I am currently developing ideas for my own theatre company

which will both develop new female-centered works with female protagonists, as well as re-interpret well-known theatrical works from a female perspective and/or with female actors. A multi-generational theatre, youth will be at the heart of our work, and I hope to develop an on-going ensemble of adolescent girl performers-playwrights. In my future research work, in all its forms, I desire to question and bring to light the way gender construction functions in society and the ways theatre and the arts can serve as tools to identify and deconstruct social injustices.

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APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	Johnny Saldana GHALL
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair Soc Beh IRB
Date:	11/02/2012
Committee Action:	**Expedited Approval**
Approval Date:	11/02/2012
Review Type:	Expedited F7
IRB Protocol #:	1210008464
Study Title:	Girl becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood Through Visual Art, Theatre, and Digital Communications
Expiration Date:	11/01/2013

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

APPROVAL:CONTINUATION

Johnny Saldana
Theatre and Film, School of
480/965-2661
JOHNNY.SALDANA@asu.edu

Dear Johnny Saldana:

On 10/10/2013 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Continuing Review
Title:	Girl becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood Through Visual Art, Theatre, and Digital Communications
Investigator:	Johnny Saldana
IRB ID:	1210008464
Category of review:	(7)(b) Social science methods, (7)(a) Behavioral research
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	None

The IRB approved the protocol from 10/10/2013 to 11/1/2014 inclusive. Three weeks before 11/1/2014 you are to submit a completed "FORM: Continuing Review (HRP-212)" and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 11/1/2014 approval of this protocol expires on that date. When consent is appropriate, you must use final, watermarked versions available under the "Documents" tab in ERA-IRB.

In conducting this protocol you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

APPENDIX B

SOLO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Girl-Becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood...

Investigator: Teresa Minarsich

Interview Questions

Directions: Take your time and look at all the questions. Begin with the first question and record your answer into the voice recorder. Let you mind go and take your time to really answer the question fully. Please begin by stating the question number and the question into the voice recorder before you start to answer. When you are ready to move to the next question, simply state, "I am done with that question."

When you are done answering all the questions, if you have anything you want to add, tell me, or ask me please do so. I am very interested in your thoughts and ideas, so feel free to tell me anything you have on your mind.

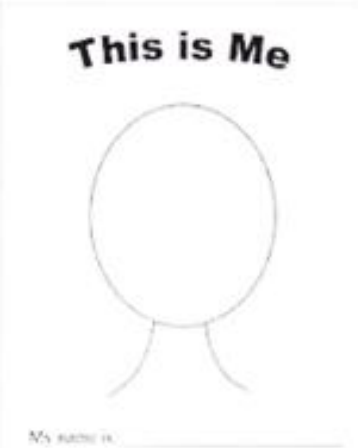
After listening to your interview, I may give you some follow up questions if you are willing.

Thank you for participating.

1. What does it mean to be a girl?
2. What makes being a girl hard?
3. What's fun or interesting about being a girl?
4. What is a girl supposed to do? Who tells you this?
5. Do you like being a girl?
6. How do you see girls presented in the media (TV, movies, music, news, film, etc)?
7. If you could change something about being a girl, what would it be and why?
8. How do we learn to be girls? Or act like girls?
9. What happens to girls when they don't act the way girls are supposed to?
10. Do you feel pressure to be a certain way because you are a girl?
11. Do you consider yourself an artist? What kind of artist?
12. What is your favorite way to express yourself and your thoughts? (Fashion, singing, writing, painting, etc.)
13. How do you use the internet to express yourself?
14. What are your favorite internet sites and why?

APPENDIX C

SELF-PORTRAIT HANDOUT



Self-portrait Sculpture or a 3-D Self-portrait

Create a 3-D portrait of yourself.

Step 1 – Decide on your structure – box, file folder, any 3-D item that has an inside and an outside.

Step 2 – Take photos of yourself and things/places/people that are important to you. Give your camera to Ms. Teresa for development.

Step 3 – Begin to complete your sculpture.

Inside of your structure – should represent the real you, the parts of you that you don't share, that people don't know about, that you only share with those closest to you.

Outside of your structure – should represent how you present yourself to the world, how people see you, what you allow people to know.

You can use pictures, objects, words, lyrics, magazine clippings, poetry, drawings, paper, fabric or any other items you can think of to cover the inside and outside of your structure.

Step 4 – Be sure to incorporate some of the pictures you took.

Step 5 – Give your art piece a title.

APPENDIX D

GIRLS' SUMMITT HANDOUT

Theatre of Girls Idea Summit

Directions:

Today you will hold an idea summit. At the end of the class period we will have a collection of inspirations to spark our future drama work for the semester. Think outside of the box and don't censor your ideas for fear of what others may think.

In your table teams complete the following brainstorming tasks together. Assign one recorder for each task and clearly label each task. When your team is finished staple all your papers together (in order) with a title sheet with your team name and a list of team member present.

Task one:

Create a definition for girl. What is a girl? What does it mean to be a girl?

Task two:

Create a list of at least 50 synonyms for the word girl. Sort your list into 3 columns: positive words, negative words, and neutral words. When you think you can't come up with any more words take a break, go to another task, and then come back and try some more.

Task three:

Create a list of at least 50 synonyms for the word boy. Sort your list into 3 columns: positive words, negative words, and neutral words. When you think you can't come up with any more words take a break, go to another task, and then come back and try some more.

Task four:

Create a list of reasons why being a girl is great. Create a list of why being a girl is difficult.

Task five:

Create a list of things boys can do that girls can't. Create a list of things girls can do that boys can't.

Task six:

Is there a secret life of girls? Are their things that girls experience that rarely get talked about? Create a list of these experiences.

Task seven:

What are the (possibly unspoken) rules for being a girl in your world? This could be specific to your family, your culture, your city, your school, your country. Create a list.

Task eight:

What hasn't been covered in this summit? What other girl-centered subjects, experiences, and/or topics are important to you? Create your own task and complete it.

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Girl-becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood through Visual Art, Theatre and Digital Communications

Participant Letter of Assent

My name is Teresa Minarsich. I study Theatre at Arizona State University. You have been in my Theatre class at the [redacted] throughout the Fall semester of 2012.

I am asking you to take part in a research study because I am trying to learn more about how girls understand what it means to be a girl. I want to learn about how you see girls being shown in magazines, TV, movies, books, and the internet. I want to know what makes it hard to be a girl and what makes it interesting or enjoyable to be a girl.

If you agree, I will interview you and ask you questions about your opinions on how girls are shown in the media, what you think it means to be a girl in today's world, and your experiences in class creating theatre and art. The interview will not last more than an hour, and the audio will be recorded. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. I will film your participation in class during class game time, rehearsals, and performances using video and photography. I will also collect and study your written work and artistic work created over the semester. All of this material will be kept confidential, and your name will not be used when I write about my research in my dissertation or other academic publications. At the end of the semester, if you and the other participants want to you can invite friends and family members to see what we created together. You do not have to share your work or perform in the sharing if you don't want to. At the end of the semester I will ask you to participate in a discussion with the other participants (a focus group) about your experiences in the class and your final thoughts about what it means to be a girl in the US today. This discussion will not last more than an hour and, like the interview, the audio will be recorded.

You do not have to be in this study. No one will be mad at you if you decide not to do this study. Even if you start the study, you can stop later if you want. You may ask questions about the study at any time. If you choose to be in this study it will not affect your grade in Theatre class.

If you decide to be in the study I will not tell anyone else how you respond or act as part of the study. Even if your parents or teachers ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study.

Signing here means that you have read this form or have had it read to you and that you are willing to be in this study.

Signature of subject_____

Subject's printed name _____

Signature of investigator_____

Date_____

For my research it will help me to take videos and photographs of our workshops so that I can remember what happened. I will be the only one who looks at them and I will not share these with anyone unless I ask you first. Is it ok if I take photos and videos of you during the workshops? Please sign your name next to your choice.

_____Yes, you can take videos and photos of me for your research

_____Yes, you can take videos and photos of me for your research *and* for future academic publications and presentations.

_____No, you cannot use videos and photos of me for your research

APPENDIX F

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Girl-becomings: Girls Theorizing Girlhood through Visual Art, Theatre and Digital Communications

PARENTAL LETTER OF PERMISSION

Dear Parent:

I am a PhD graduate student under the direction of Professor Johnny Saldaña in the Theatre for Youth Program, part of the School of Theatre and Film at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study looking at how girls understand what it means to be a girl in the United States. We will be asking what it means to be a girl and exploring girlhood through group discussions, theatre exercises, creative writing, art and interviews.

Your daughter is currently enrolled in my Theatre class at the [redacted]. I am inviting your child to participate in my research. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty (it will not affect your child's grade in my class, her grade in other classes or her standing at school). Likewise, if your child chooses not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your child's name will not be used.

If you agree to allow your daughter to participate in my study, your daughter will be interviewed by me and asked questions about her experiences in my class, what she thinks about being a girl in today's society, and how art and theatre allow her to express her thoughts and opinions. The audio of the interview will be recorded. I will also record your daughter's rehearsals and performances during class using video and photography. These pictures and videos will be used for research purposes, and not be shared publically. There is a chance that my research would be published in academic journals, and pictures might be used in that case (but you can choose below to give your permission for publication). Additionally artistic and written work your daughter creates in class will be collected as part of the research study. At the end of the semester your daughter will be asked to participate in a focus group with the other participants about her experiences in the class.

Your child's participation in this study will remain confidential. All responses shared in the class, as well as in any interviews conducted with your child will be kept confidential. Any written response or artistic creation made by your child will be kept confidential (unless both you and your child give permission to share it at a sharing for an invited audience.)This also means that anything shared by your child within the class or in interviews will remain private. The results of this study will be used in my dissertation, and may also be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your child's name will not be used.

Although there may be no direct benefit to your child, the possible benefit of your child's participation is the opportunity to work and talk with other girls about what is important to them, learning about and experiencing the arts (theatre, movement, visual arts, and creative writing), as well as expressing themselves creatively. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your child's participation.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, please call me at [redacted] (or Prof. Saldaña at [redacted]).

Sincerely,

Teresa Minarsich, M.A.
Ph.D. Candidate, Theatre for Youth
Arizona State University
Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts
[redacted]

By signing below, you are giving consent for your child _____ (Child's name) to participate in the above study.

_____	_____	_____
Signature	Printed Name	Date

For research purposes class performances and rehearsals will be photographed and videotaped. No photograph or video will ever be made public or published without consent from both child and parent/guardian. Please initial next to your preference regarding documentation.

_____ (Initials) I consent to my child being photographed and videotaped for research purposes only.

_____ (Initials) I consent to my child being photographed and videotaped for research purposes *and* academic publications.

_____ (Initials) I consent to my child participating in an end of the semester sharing for invited guests.

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.