

Abstract

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Identity is not a universally fixed term (Butler, 1990, p. 7); rather, it is complex construction produced and reproduced along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, education, and cultural context (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 13). As such, identity hinges on a combination of acts, (Sedgwick, 1990), hierarchical social categories (Butler, 1999), culture (Kellner, 1995, 2003), history, difference, representation, social institutions, and stories that define and shape the self through recursive and self-reflexive processes. This research investigates the impact of media culture, body image, relationships, and fairy tales on the identity formation of four young women. Specifically, I concentrate on key cultural models provided through electronic media, visual media culture, and schooling to follow the ways in which these women construct and co-construct their identities over the course of several interviews. Using discourse analysis as the primary tool of inquiry, this study investigates specific details in speech to identify key patterns in language, to interrogate the socioculturally-situated identities produced, and to illuminate relevant cultural models and context in an effort to better understand the ways in which girling and the institution of school inform female identity formation.

**Investigating Female Identity Formation:
From Fairy Tales to Fabulous Lives**

By

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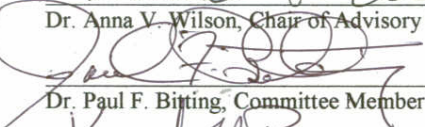
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Dedication

This work is the product of generations of strong women who subtlety and strategically remind me that their “force is with me” when both life and work overwhelm. Thus, it is with Anna Pearl Pryor, Virginia Bea Dalton, Suzanne Atkins, Anna Kinzie and Valerie (a.k.a. “Dodie”) Hatfield that I commend this work to your review. In her own way, each taught me that the sum of a woman is far more than her appearances.

It is not on their shoulders, though, that this research entirely rests. Without my father’s fascination for the *why* in life, I would be nowhere. His indulgence and, at times, encouragement of my incessant questions enabled me to trouble everything I learned at home and at school. With my mother and father, our home was flush with open intellectual challenge and precious few easy answers. I am grateful for their example and for that rigor and ambiguity now.

I am also indebted to my brother, Ted, for modeling courage and humor in the face of physical ruin. Despite obstacles, Teddy’s optimism remains unchecked. I have learned so much from his battle with diabetes and gained immeasurably from the ways in which his triple transplantation restored and renewed his life and mine.

Appreciation and debt seem insufficient to express my gratitude to Dr. Anna V. Wilson, chair, mentor, “North Carolina mom,” and Wild Woman, who pulled me off of my sandbar and renewed in me the chutzpah required of doctoral pursuits. Her insistent nudges, unwavering belief and uncompromising commitment to excellence are gifts worthy of more than mere gratitude. I am, indeed, grateful as well for her guidance in selecting my many committee members: Dr. Paul Bitting, Dr. Ken Brinson (who graciously stepped in at the

eleventh hour), Dr. Valerie-Lee Chapman (who passed away during completion of this work), Dr. Mary Aswell Doll, and Dr. Bonnie Fusarelli. Your willingness to share your work and, at times, your life in this project has not gone unappreciated.

Finally, to my husband, Mark, under whose loving eye I was not allowed to be distracted by Food Network, new step-children, laundry, my love of cooking, my professional responsibilities, my thrilling pregnancy with our son, or my love of him, I am truly grateful. Our marriage and children continue to be a blessing in my life and to my work.

I am proud to dedicate this work to all of you and to unnamed others with whom I share deep connection and from whom I gather the support and strength to continue. You have made my life and my work possible through the secrets and relationships we share.

Biography

I was born on July 12, 1971 in Port Charlotte, Florida to Theodore and Suzanne Atkins. Growing up with wonderful parents on the Gulf Coast of Florida afforded amazing privileges—spectacular sunsets, quality education, and a close-knit community—that cultivated a life-long connection to what I will forever call “home.” Part of that connection manifests itself in my ties to family and to water.

From 1989 to 1993, I attended The Florida State University, earning a dual Bachelors degree in English and Secondary English Education and a Masters degree in English Literature. Following my graduation, I returned to Port Charlotte to teach English at Charlotte High School, my former rival high school, for three years. On August 8, 1996, I moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, an event that has defined my life in unparalleled ways.

In 1997, I earned a position on the opening team for Southeast Raleigh High School, a new magnet high school in Raleigh. This opportunity ushered in a second series of graduate work beginning in the spring of 1998 when my Principal, John Modest, introduced me to Dr. Anna V. Wilson. After one year of doctoral work under Dr. Wilson’s careful eye, I was promoted to Assistant Principal and transferred to the Masters of School Administration program to earn credentials for that position. Upon completion of the MSA in May, 2001, I reclaimed my doctoral pursuits while continuing to work full time as an Assistant Principal for Instruction and, now, as the Senior Administrator for High School English Language Arts in the Wake County Public School System.

In the last few months my family has grown to include my beloved husband, Mark, his two children, Meredith and Logan, the son I carry as I write this dissertation, and my

selfless in-laws, Bruce and Joanne; all ground me in faith through their love and support. I am as passionate about them as I am about my work in curriculum theory and the ways in which educational institutions school young women in the ways of patriarchy.

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CHAPTER 1

IDENTITY, TOOLS, AND PERSPECTIVE

[Marilyn] it's a stage analogy—you get out on the stage—on the front stage, and you're one person for that audience; when you go backstage you're a different person because the people in that audience are other people—other actors just like you. And then how when you go, you know, to the dressing room—you know, when you're in the dressing room with this person that's doing your makeup, and this person that's doing your hair—you know, it's almost like you're above them because they can't go on the front stage. And all these different ways that you act towards people, and towards different audiences and . . . true happiness comes from being able to be the same person in all the different settings, I guess . . . better than having to pretend—you know, or at least having one person in your life that you can be the same person around, no matter if that person sees you on the front stage, or if they see you on the backstage, or if they see you in the dressing room—no matter where that person sees you, they see the exact same person.

Identity is not a universally fixed term (Butler, 1990, p. 7); rather, it is complex construction produced and reproduced along the axes of gender, race, class, sexuality, education, and cultural context (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 13)¹. As such, identity hinges on a combination of acts, (Sedgwick, 1990), hierarchical social categories (Butler, 1999), culture (Kellner, 1995, 2003), history, difference, representation, social institutions, and stories that define and shape the self through recursive and self-reflexive processes. In short, identity

simply is not simple. Instead, identity is the product of a “relational ethic...[and] a discursive effect of the social...constituted through identifications” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 83) and history.

My research investigates the impact of media culture, body image, relationships, and fairy tales on the identity formation of four young women. Specifically, I concentrate on key cultural models provided through electronic media, visual media culture, and schooling to follow the ways in which these women construct and co-construct their identities over the course of several interviews. By interrogating their discourse through a critical, postmodern lens, my purpose is to understand the ways in which the pressure to perform (Butler, 1999) one’s identity and to conform to cultural scripts requires the formation of multiple identities. The central aspects of my research revolve around competing prescriptions created by fairy tale princess fantasies and media culture ideals of womanhood. Using discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1985 & 1992; Crusius, 1989; Gee, 1999; Foucault, 1978; Labov, 1972; Mills 1992 & 1997; Moffett, 1968; Sinclair, 1992; Tsui, 1992) as a tool for understanding interview data, I aim to discuss the ways in which four young women conform to and reject such prescriptions by formulating multiple identities. Such identities, like fashions we select for a given day, are mutable and, at times, at the whim of culture. This chapter briefly defines identity and then introduces the rest of the study by introducing the major elements of my argument.

What is identity?

[Donna] I know what I want Who I am? That is like the most difficult question in the whole entire world.

Identity is a much-contested subject. On the surface, the concept seems simple—identity is merely an “I,” a self that grows and changes over time and via experience; it is “who one thinks one is, what one believes and what one does” (O’Neill, 1985, p. xv). However, amidst the inadequacies of language, post-structural and postmodern theorists continue to challenge such simplistic notions of identity from differing perspectives. Prerequisite to interrogating those positions, however, is a general framework for understanding how post-structural and postmodern theories and theorists are defined for the purposes of this study.

Post-structural theorists work chiefly in response to and through a critique of structuralism, a movement most closely associated with the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi-Strauss, among others. As such, post-structural theorists, which include Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Lacques Laçan, are profoundly concerned with addressing the void structuralists left with respect to history (Best & Kellner, 1991) and contradiction (Roberts, 1996) and with attending to the always already limited discourse surrounding our understanding of the world in which we live². By exposing discursive practices that limit self-awareness to fixed categories and structures (Kellner, 1995), post-structuralists initiated the conversation about our fragmented, decentered existence in the world. To that end, post-structuralists abandon the notion of a unified self in favor of a subject that is “composed of a set of multiple and contradictory subjectivities or subject positions” (Sarup, 1996 p. 34). Given this, the supposition of a singular, cohesive self fails under the weight of post-structuralism’s emphasis on language (Kellner, 1995), history and power (Sarup, 1996).

Likewise, postmodern theorists, including Jean-François Lyotard, Frederic Jameson, Richard Rorty, and Jean Baudrillard, engage similar issues of language, history and power from an alternate position. While they continue with a fragmented, decentered worldview, postmodern theorists fix their energies on denouncing meta-narratives (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Roberts, 1996) and privileging plurality over singularity, difference over homogeneity (Best & Kellner, 1991), margin over center. By rejecting and destabilizing universal notions of rationality and totality (Best & Kellner, 1991), postmodernists debunk cultural myths through discursive practices that emphasize self-reflexiveness and pastiche (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Roberts, 1996). Representation becomes, then, a necessary paradox challenged by postmodernism. If “nothing is separate and distinct from its representation” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 56) and nothing can be known outside relation to an other (Best & Kellner, 1991), then what little we understand about the self in postmodern terms is fragile, dependent on narrative, fraught with instability and simultaneously produced by and producing the turbulent social conditions in which the self lives.

This self, however, is not fixed in post-structural or postmodern theories. Superimposed on the fragmented nature of the self is an inherent linguistic dichotomy between identity and subjectivity that cannot be reduced to primitive arguments of nature versus nurture or essentialism versus difference. The division is not that elementary. The influences that shape who we think we are, the vehicles that establish what we believe and the systems that determine what we do (or don’t do) contribute to conversations about the self as an identity and as a subject. In their efforts to determine what influences shape us,

theorists interrogate identity and subjectivity as discourse and as representation. It is to those arguments that I now turn.

Identity

Identity “has become more of a departure than an end point” (Minh-ha, 1992, p. 140). Conceived as a process (Butler, 1999; Holstein & Gubrium, 2001; McLaren, 1995; McRobbie, 1994; Minh-ha, 1992; Rose, 2001; Sarup, 1996), postmodern identity must be interminably “assembled” from a “burgeoning supply of troubled identities” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 2, 9) milled by normative, rule-governing social categories, e.g. sex, gender, race and class, (Butler, 1999), media representations (Carstarphen & Zavoina, 1999), discourse and consumption (Sarup, 1996). Thus, to conclude that the young women of my study are all white, American women excludes much of what they are—from different classes, practicing different religions, performing different sexual identities, differentially educated, embattled by different body images, wives and daughters, frustrated identities. Perhaps, then, they are more adequately described as the contradictory, flexible, unfixed products of social constructions, and as multiple characters in their own life histories.

Focusing, then, on a concept of identity that “is only conceivable in and through difference” (Sarup, 1996, p. 47), that is multiple and that resists the limitations of definition seems logical. This focus, though, exposes its own impossibility. If identity is multiple and resists definition, then how can I discuss it in a coherent manner? Conveniently, Currie (1998) articulates theories about identity in two categories: 1) “identity [that] is relational” and 2) “identity [that] exists only as narrative” (p. 17). These are assistive groupings because they accommodate both representation (the self I show you is different from the self I am or the self I reveal to others) and discourse (the self I construct and co-construct in and through

language and context) and incorporate nicely a majority of the scholarship about identity in post-structural and postmodern theory. Currie's framework provides the structure for my discussion.

Relational Identity

This category privileges social construction and interaction as the architects of identity. In this sense, identity is predicated on the other, difference, normative social categories and social institutions. Identity, then, becomes an exercise "of grafting several cultures onto a single body" (Minh-ha, 1992, p. 144) for the purposes of representation. Relational identity acknowledges our gender, race, class, and sexuality through difference and casts the shadow of our identity onto the social field in which we play our identity games (Kellner, 1995). Theoretically, we intentionally alter the manner in which we represent our identity in relation to the presented identity with which we interact. Consider Tina's response to researcher self-disclosure in the final interview:

you definitely have done a good job of hiding all these other things. You are good at putting on a front.

Though neither my context of culture nor social categories changed dramatically over the course of the four interviews, Tina was absolutely able to see through my previous identity games once I leveled the playing field with some discussion of my multiple identities and identity work.

Furthermore, relational identity presupposes that our *self* is composed of a number of subject positions (McLaren, 1995; Sarup, 1996) that allow us, simultaneously, to define our selves within and against particular social constructs that inscribe meaning. The resulting dialectic between identity and difference (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Kellner, 2003; Sarup,

1996) recognizes both the location in which we situate our *self* as well as the perimeter of that location in relation to other subject positions. Identity, then, is always a practice of relating our *selves* (Britzman, 1998) to others through representation and discourse. As a result, our relational identity is limited only by the categories of representation available (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) and language.

Important questions to consider with respect to relational identity include: “Who are you? Who am I? What kind of persons are we? What have we personally done? Who will we become? What do we really think? How do we really feel?” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 84). Our initial emphasis on identity and difference (“Who are you? Who am I?”) merges with normative social categories and social institutions (“What kind of persons are we? What have we personally done?”) to introduce new subject positions based on future interactions (“Who will we become?”), thoughts (“What do we really think?”), and emotions (“How do we really feel?”). In essence, we incessantly and actively construct the *selves* we live by through our interactions; the process is dynamic, “simultaneously formed” (Butler, 1995, p. 446) and forming a self “possible only within unfinished closures of meaning” (McLaren, 1995, p. 97-98).

Storytelling

For McLaren, such unfinished closures emanate meaning each time we combine them with life stories in our on-going process of identity construction. By arguing that postmodern theorists are, primarily, storytellers who seek to understand identity through social construction, narrative and discourse, McLaren (1995) exposes the modern notion of a true, unified identity as a myth and contends that identities must be negotiated, articulated and interpreted. Understanding identity in this sense requires a process of repetition wherein the

storytelling and the storying combine to form a different identity that becomes a new site for negotiation, articulation and interpretation.

Currie (1998) expands this argument by including internal as well as external components to storytelling. In external storytelling, the more conventional form, individuals claim themselves through an elaborate system of telling. Predictably, individuals tell who they are by relaying pivotal life stories they believe characterize them at a given moment in time. In this type of storytelling, the teller controls the selection, the vehicle,³ the timing and the depth of interaction. They tell you only what they want you to know and hide the rest as if in an endless veil dance of representation.

Combined with this external telling is the internal storying that occurs when individuals identify with other people's stories. In this scenario, their concept of self is altered by their relational identity to the other teller and by the elements of that other story with which they choose to identify. This process of self-narrating "from the outside" (Currie, 1998, p. 17) opens them to the possibility of inscription (McLaren, 1995) and to the manufacture of a new identity to story. With internal storying individuals risk desire; they want what the other teller describes. Therefore, they change who they are by assimilating elements of that represented identity—and misidentification. However, their understanding of who the teller is and their associated level of trust in sharing could be a myth the teller circulates which, in turn, jeopardizes the individual's *self* if incorporated through the process of identification. As a result, individuals have less control over the effect of internal storying than over external storytelling.

Trinh Minh-ha (1992) notes that in the absence of a "whole self . . . we are left with diverse recognitions of self through difference and unfinished, contingent, arbitrary closures

that make identity possible” (p. 157). Narrative identity is multi-dimensional, combining relational identity with the external stories individuals tell and the internal storying they do at the moment of narration. It is more than anything they are, anything they say and anything they experience. They can only be understood through discursive practices (Butler, 1999) that place narrative at the heart of the self. As such, discourse analysis proves an effective tool to analyze the “different identities” and “social positions we enact” (Gee, 1999, p. 12) in linguistic and non-linguistic exchanges.

Marilyn’s narratives advance this argument. She seemed to prefer storytelling to straight responses in her interviews and rarely answered a question directly. For example, when I asked her to elaborate on her experiences when her father tried to kidnap her, she responded:

I used to go to the YMCA every summer because Mom worked and so I had to go for a daycare type thing. It was fun and I loved the YMCA but I remember one summer in particular I had to play the shadow game is what they told me, with the counselors. I couldn’t go play with the other kids. I had to stay in one of the counselor’s shadows. We were assigned different counselors depending on what we were doing. We took two field trips every single week. One on Tuesday and one on Thursday. We’d go on these big field trips and do all kinds of crazy stuff. It just depended on what we were doing or what our schedule was like. I remember how upset I was because I just couldn’t go play in the woods with all the other kids because it was like acres and acres. I wasn’t allowed out of their sight for any reason. I had to be with them for everything. If the counselor I was with had to go to the

bathroom I'd had to leave whatever we were doing and go with them. I had to do everything that they were doing.

When I followed up with a question about whether or not the kidnapping actually produced this protective model, Marilyn shared one memory of a kidnapping incident:

Well, I just remember driving around. He always had a white van because he played music. He'd always have these big, long vans, fifteen passenger vans that he would take the seats out of and he would paint the windows black so people couldn't look in and see the music equipment. It always freaked me out. I can remember riding in the back of the van during the day and the light trying to shine through the black paint and it always looked brown and you could see where the paint would chip or something and you could see like bubbles. It would be like sun bubbles coming in.

In these examples, Marilyn's storytelling and the storying combine to form a different identity, a woman whose narratives express a need to be protected and included, that became a new site for storytelling explored in chapters four, five, six, and seven.

Clearly, then, none of the following elements work in isolation to constitute our identity—acts, (Sedgwick, 1990), hierarchical social categories (Butler, 1999), culture (Kellner, 1995, 2003), history, difference, representation, social institutions, stories—each depends on the others to represent the self. Britzman's (1998) denial of identity “narrated as synecdoche (a part capable of standing in for the whole)” (p. 151 n. 11) in Western culture is masterful. Identity simply is not simple; it is hyphenated (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Consequently, the young women in the study are never simply “Donna” or “Scarlett” or “Tina” or “Marilyn;” they are “Donna—Ahmed's wife,” “Marilyn-the cheerleader,” “Tina—

John's girlfriend," and "Scarlett—I'm no princess." In short, they are always in context; there is no single whole that encompasses all that they are. Thus, for the purposes of this research, identity is the product of a "relational ethic...[and] a discursive effect of the social...constituted through identifications" (p. 83) and history.

Subjectivity

Subjectivity is very closely related to identity. Some post-structural and postmodern theorists regard multiple identities as mere "subject positions" (Sarup, 1996, p. 56; McRobbie, 1994), in essence, defining identity via subjectivity. To some degree, these conversations of identity and subjectivity appear to substitute freely one term for the other with little distinction between the two. Frequently, this writing is laced with discussions of *selves* and *subjects* that also function as interchangeable terms.

Other post-structural and postmodern theorists characterize subjectivity using language identical to "identity talk" (Kellner, 1995, p. 124 n. 28). While they maintain the integrity of the terms "subjectivity" and "subject" throughout their arguments (usually because they fail to discuss identity at all), they define those terms in precisely the same manner theorists discuss identity. As a result, they focus on our decentered, fragmented, mediated, linguistically produced, culturally constructed, narratively inscribed subjectivity-in-process (McLaren, 1999; Minh-ha, 1992; Walkerdine et al., 2001; Belsey, 1991; Best & Kellner, 1991; Kellner, 1995; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) other theorists conceive as identity.

Though I am not, in this analysis, intimating that the theorists listed only define identity via subjectivity or subjectivity via identity talk, I do maintain that it is vitally important to expose the linguistic problem post-structural and postmodern theorists face: Do

conversations about subjectivity necessarily exclude identity and vice versa? For the moment, let us assume they do not. McLaren (1995) provides a helpful model for this discussion. By splitting the conversation about subjectivity into positive and negative elements, McLaren neatly organizes many post-structural and postmodern theories on the subject.

Positive Subjectivity

For McLaren (1995), a person with positive subjectivity actively engages in and participates with the construction of his/her “own history” (p. 106). This subject is “linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates” (Belsey, 1991, p. 596). Here, participation is the distinguishing characteristic. Constituted through engagement in and with lived experience, practices, language, and institutions rather than given *a priori*, the positive post-structural and postmodern subject is always in process, “organized by a will to know and a desire to speak” (McRobbie, 1994, p. 67). Donna’s discourse provides a useful example:

I know what I want as far as, like, let’s say medicine. I know that I want to do it and I know what I need to do to get there and I’m really not willing to let anything get in my way. You know, with graduating early, it was a personal goal, it had nothing to do with my family wanting me to do it or anything
So I know what I want.

Her desire to learn how to be a doctor and her ability to articulate her interest in becoming a doctor were not simply a product of her family practices, expectations, or schooling experiences. Instead, Donna co-constructed these desires in and with her lived experiences through her speech.

Accordingly, narrative is essential to positive subjectivity. Constituted via the intersection of “narrative, meaning, and desire” (Currie, 1998, p. 30), positive subjects first desire, then narrate that desire before acting on it and, finally, make meaning of their lived experience through that action in a repetitive cycle (McLaren, 1995). However, positive subjects are capable of constructing a new self to negotiate a particular place at a particular time through narration. That narrated self, in turn, alters their subjectivity. Done entirely for convenience, positive subjects who use narration to construct alternate selves choose to exist in a quasi-mythic world. Despite the motive, narration is critically important when considering how positive subjects make sense of their self and their world (Rose, 2001).

Negative Subjectivity

In opposition to positive subjectivity is an identity “constructed out of signifiers of lack and omission” (McLaren, 1995, p. 106). Negative subjects are still constituted in lived experience, practices, language and institutions, but post-structural and postmodern theories of this type tend to focus on the manner in which the subject is both always already deficient and powerless to change. Without agency, this subject conforms to the regulatory processes of repetition, which enforce normative, socially produced rules (Butler, 1999). As a result, negative subjects are deeply affected by social and cultural models of behavior (Walkerdine, et al., 2001). Consider Scarlett’s discourse about her childhood and the role of her first stepfather:

[M]y childhood was interesting; when I was real young we lived with my stepfather, and he had a lot of money, so we were well-off. His money just wasn’t—he was a drug dealer. So when my mom decided to leave him—he started using drugs when I was, I think, six. And my mom left him when I

was seven, and he was arrested shortly after that. So we went kind of from having anything I wanted to really having nothing when my mom left. She had her GED but she hadn't graduated or anything like that, so it was kind of—she was waitressing, you know, things changed a lot.

This cultural model framed Scarlett's attitude about education and careers, thereby shaping her early ideas about ambition as well:

I don't know, "simple" I think would be the easiest way to describe [me], just very simple-minded. I didn't really think too far ahead. I guess that's just part of being a kid though. I never really thought about my future or anything that was really going to be important.

Here, like her mother and first stepfather, Scarlett appears to have no particular or legitimate future. Though she planned to graduate from high school, she clearly did not feel any urgency to plan for tomorrow. In stark opposition to Donna's positive subjectivity, Scarlett's negative subjectivity lacks agency and serves as a prime opportunity through which to repeat her mother's history.

Compelling among arguments about negative subjectivity is the notion that subjects are constituted by practices of looking (Young, 1990; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Rooted in Lacan's observations of *the mirror phase* and emphasis on *lack*, such theorists focus on the way in which a subject acquires a sense of him/herself "against objects viewed" (Young, 1990, p. 179). However, this subject goes beyond construction through difference and identification with the other; subjects constituted by practices of looking desire the normative, socially produced model given and succumb (rather than act) to the seductive

model presented. Alarmingly insidious, such practices of looking give subjects a false sense of agency that I suggest further reinscribes social and cultural norms.

Performativity

Subjectivity does, however, appear to split with conversations about identity when theorists shift to an understanding of a subjectivity that is “embedded in the material features of performance” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Citing Goffman’s *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), Holstein and Gubrium discuss performance as part representation—our performance serves to “scenically signal who we are to others”—and part interpretation—others “interpret who we are being for the purposes at hand” (2000, p. 187). As such, performance is not simply what we do, how we represent ourselves, or how others interpret our actions or representation. Here, performance unites these exercises of identity into a *self* outside of language.

Having already established the importance of language in self-construction, why persist with performance? Butler (1999) discusses performance with respect to a gendered identity and, in doing so, augments performance by introducing performative acts—intentional performances accomplished in language. Here, speaking performs the acts which produce the self thereby constructing the self’s subjectivity. Citing Monique Wittig’s “The Mark of Gender,” Butler accentuates the importance of performativity by arguing that, “speaking establishes ‘the supreme act of subjectivity’” (Butler, 1999, p. 149). The result of Butler’s discussion provides a principal wrinkle on the surface of subjectivity; performativity appears to be the space through which a division of post-structural and postmodern conversations about identity and subjectivity seem possible.

To argue that performativity is similar to my previous conversation about external storytelling is to miss performativity's unconscious possibilities. While performativity is speech that is also an act of identity, that speech is neither carefully nor consciously selected on every occasion. In external storytelling I consciously choose to share my *self* with carefully selected others at a pre-determined time; I premeditate the telling and, in doing so, have the power to restructure the story to fit my purpose in telling. Performativity could occur in this deliberate, orchestrated fashion, but performativity is also open to unconscious utterances, which combine with non-verbal cues to signal unintended performances. For example,

in casual conversation with an acquaintance regarding current events on campus I mention a recent security warning about sexual assault. My acquaintance does not answer immediately; she doesn't signal that she saw the warning or that the warning frightens her or even if she had any idea about the campus problem. I wait a few seconds. When my acquaintance does reply, "yeah?" with eye contact, she has revealed something more than she intended that contributed to her self-construction⁴.

In this scenario, my acquaintance's unconscious performativity does not yet have full meaning. I do not know what she revealed and, likely, will never know what she revealed. I have, however, glimpsed an unintended deeper knowledge of her than expected through performativity or possible through storytelling. Performativity surfaces as an important distinction of subjectivity.

Though this discussion diverted attention away from many significant post-structural and postmodern theories about subjectivity's roots in power and agency, those arguments are

not essential to this research at this time. By defining subjectivity in terms of and as a supplement to identity, my goal was to expose the tension between the terms and to select which best embodies my discussion of identity formation. Having accomplished exposure, I now turn to a discussion of identity formation prior to selecting a term for my research.

Identity: When, Where and How

[Scarlett] I don't know. I was having some kind of identity crisis. I don't know what I was doing.

It has been clear thus far that our sense of *self* and the ways in which we develop that sense of self stem from myriad experiences in and with the world. I have argued, largely, that individuals construct their self with and in multiple dimensions (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000) through “the operation of discourse” (Rose, 2001, p. 137). However, these arguments do not exhaust existing scholarship regarding identity formation.

Instead of focusing on only those issues that acknowledge *who* I am, conversations about how individuals forge their identity must turn to “*When, where, [and] how* am I?” (Minh-ha, 1992, p. 157). This shift diverts attention from normative social categories that dictate and strengthen gender, race and class differences to a historically situated (McLaren, 1995), discursively produced (Butler, 1999), culturally constructed (Kellner, 1995), relationally formed (Butler, 1999; Currie, 1998), narratively practiced (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Currie, 1998), contextual self. This self is in a continual state of production, always examining the boundaries of what it is and what it is not (Minh-ha, 1992) and then adjusting according to desire or need.

McLaren (1995) concedes that identity is “formed at the unstable point where the unspeakable stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (p. 97-98). It

is precisely this instability, this variable nature of identity and its construction, that makes “identity work” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001) so challenging. Such work requires constantly “Making connections between the personal self and a troubled identity [through] . . . a great deal of interpretative activity . . . that is conditioned by the setting in which it is conducted” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 11).⁵ In short, it requires a series of “framing [the] lived experiences” (p. 12) of our many troubled identities.

Like negative subjectivity, other theorists conceive of identity work as the individual being framed against rather than exercising the agency to frame his/her identity. They understand the formation of subjects through the “disciplines, taboos and prohibitions” (Rose, 2001, p. 104) of “body morphology and sex-specific body experience” (Young, 1990, p. 16) and call for radical changes to such construction. Identity framed in this manner often results in a crisis through which individuals forge new, actively framed identities (Seifert, 1986).

Whether the framer or the framed,⁶ identity work (Kellner, 2003) has taken a positive shift toward the when, where and how of self-construction:

identity talk has replaced the discourse of the self and subject as a major focus of philosophical discussion. Self/subject discourse became weighted with too much metaphysical (and anti-metaphysical) baggage, reifying in idealist forms, and then dissolving, the concept of the subject and self (poststructuralism), thus decentering and disabling agency. The discourse of identity has, by and large, replaced the debates over the subject and self in the contemporary era, taking up some of the same metaphysical, ethical and

political themes in a different context with a seemingly more concrete language (p. 124 n.28).

No longer fettered by essentialist arguments, post-structural and postmodern theorists freely incorporate and interrogate history, discourse, social categories, cultural representations, self-narration, social interaction, desire, and language in discussions of identity.

Tools of Inquiry

In the mythical quest for our “one true self” (Gunn, 2000, p. 7), we tend to disregard the process and context for our becoming. Instead of distinguishing patterns of what we say from what we do (Labov, 1972) or the intersection between what we say and what we do within the lens of our lived experience, many individuals conceive their identity within the narrow frame of the present. In an attempt to move beyond the borders of this present identity frame and to inspect, from internal and external vantage points, the multiple identities participants presented in this study, I employ discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1985 & 1992; Crusius, 1989; Gee, 1999; Foucault, 1978; Labov, 1972; Mills 1992 & 1997; Moffett, 1968; Sinclair, 1992; Tsui, 1992) as my primary tool of inquiry.

As “[d]ifferent approaches often fit different issues and questions better or worse than others” (Gee, 1999, p. 4-5), my research depends most on Gee’s (1999) definition of and methods for discourse analysis. Like Gee, my research considers “how the details of language get recruited, ‘on site,’ to ‘pull off’ specific...social identities” (1999, p. 1) by participants who, when they speak or write, “take a particular perspective on what the ‘world’ is like” (p. 2). As a result, many of my interview questions seek participant perspective on the boundaries between “what is ‘normal’ and not; what is ‘acceptable’ and not; what is ‘right’ and not; what is ‘real’ and not; what is the ‘way things are’ and not; what

is the ‘way things ought to be’ and not; what is ‘possible’ and not; what ‘people like us’ or ‘people like them’ do and don’t do” (Gee, 1999, p. 2).

Defining d/Discourse

Gee’s (1999) opening distinction between “discourse” and “Discourse” is also important to this investigation and provides the lens for studying “discourse in Discourses” (p. 7) I seek. By setting apart the language we use in situation (discourse) from the “non-language stuff” used “to enact specific identities” (Discourse), Gee (1999) reveals the way in which individuals “pull off being an X doing Y” (p. 7). Through these practices, individuals are able to recognize themselves “and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways” (Gee, 1997, p. 7). Equipped with these definitions, my study excavates the history of four participants’ key words and phrases within specific Discourses (e.g. religion, education) to illuminate the multiple identities of those participants.

Why Discourse Analysis?

Though discourse analysis provides a tool kit for interrogating language and non-language stuff, it also “helps to explain how and why language works the way it does when put into action” and contributes “to important issues and problems” (Gee, 1999, p. 8) in education that interest me. One major source of interest is the way in which young women move to separate their inner, private world from their outer, public world (Doll, 2000) in an effort to resonate their voices to the larger voices of culture (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000). To gain these insights, my research turns toward two specific analytical tools—situated identities and cultural models (Gee, 1999).

Situated Identities

To understand the multiple identities participants assumed “in different practices and contexts” (Gee, 1999, p. 39) throughout the eight months of the study, I relied on Gee’s tools to discuss each participant’s situated identities (Gee, 1999). Defined as “different identities or social positions we enact and recognize in different settings” (Gee, 1999, p. 12) through linguistic and non-linguistic exchanges, making visible participant’s expressed identities also required evaluation of their socio-culturally-produced “concomitant attitudes, values, ways of feeling, ways of knowing and believing, as well as ways of acting and interacting” (Gee, p. 85-86).

Cultural Models

Gee (1999) argues that linguistic relationships “do not exist, and are not learned, outside the distinctive social practices (whats) of which they are an integral part” (p. 30). Instead, such relationships are “part and parcel of the very ‘voice’ or ‘identity’ (whos) of people who speak and write and think and act and value and live *that* way...for a given time and place” (p. 30). All of these combine to form cultural models—the “images or storylines or descriptions of simplified worlds in which prototypical events unfold” (Gee, 1999, p. 59). These models, framed by “variables such as socioeconomic status, educational background, knowledge, and so on” (Mills, 1992, p. 14), supply ideas about “‘appropriate’ attitudes, viewpoints, beliefs, and values” and “‘appropriate’ ways of acting, interacting, participating, and participant structures”(Gee, 1999, p. 68).

Why it Matters

After working with high school-aged girls for over a decade, I witnessed the growing centrality of media images, electronic media, and visual media in their self-talk. Both the

rate at which they consumed the fantasies promulgated by fairy tale romances and the idealized images of women and beauty found in various media sources coupled with the ways in which such images mingled with their identity talk contributed to countless teacher/administrator-student, teacher/administrator-parent-student, and teacher/administrator-student-student conferences. Each time, our conversations lead to some discussion of an ideal against which the young women in my office responded and reacted to in ways greater than the number of women involved. Each time, disentangling individual ideas from consumed cultural prescriptions proved difficult.

Not surprisingly, the ideal to which the four young women of my study aspire bears a striking resemblance to the ideal of the decade of high school-aged women before them: thin, youthful, popular, desirable, educated, financially comfortable, and partnered. From “I just know what the scale says is the most important thing” (Marilyn) to “get an education so that just in case, God forbid, anything would ever happen to my husband, I would have something to fall back on” (Donna), my research explores the responses, survival techniques, and strategies participants employ as they navigate their process of becoming.

Carsarphen and Zavoina (1999) note the need for “scholarship that reflects how print media (newspaper, magazines, books), the electronic media (radio, TV, movies, music), and the new media (computer-mediated communication) represent and portray sex-defined images.” (p. xv). While I agree that each of these media constructs dramatically affects female identity formation, my study focuses on the impact of three of these elements. By considering print media, in the form of fairy tales, electronic media, music videos in particular, and the new media, specifically websites designed to reinforce body image stereotypes promoted in the other media arenas, my research seeks to understand the ways in

which four young women conform to and reject such prescriptions by formulating multiple identities.

How it Matters

Because “we remain deeply ambivalent about becoming ourselves. Afraid of the anxiety that attends self-knowledge, afraid of the possible demands of authentic life, we run away, hiding in false selves, or smaller selves, avoiding the challenge of our true self” (Gunn, 2000, p. 7), my research considers some of the cultural influences that shape identity formation. A major player in that process of becoming is media culture. As such, media culture is at the center of this study, and I contend that it plays a privileged role in identity formation (Bacchilega, 1997; Bottingheimer, 1986; Doll, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Kellner, 1995; Kellner, 2003; McLaren, 1995; Rowe, 1979; Sarup, 1996; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Seifert, 1986; Stone, 1985; Warner, 1994; Zipes, 1983). The fact that “American children and adolescents spend twenty-two to twenty-eight hours per week” (Kaiser Family Foundation) consuming media (television, Internet, movies, magazines) speaks to the importance of media in the lives of modern youth. With that volume of leisure hours dedicated to media consumption, it seems implausible that the information, images and messages would have no impact on identity (Gauntlett, 2002). Unlike Gauntlett, Blaine (1999), and others who investigate the messages the media sends, my research focuses instead on the impact of those images and messages on four women—Donna, Scarlett, Marilyn, and Tina. Specifically, my study interrogates participant discourse about pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia electronic websites, celebrity spectacle, fairy tales, and the way in which all of these inform their body image and the partners they choose.

In the second chapter, I investigate how young women negotiate their identity in response to media culture, specifically visual media culture, and to the consumer culture that manufactures women as objects of desire and as Other⁷. I am particularly interested in the ways in which media icons, such as popular singers and/or fashion models, influence how young women are expected to look and behave, inclined to construct themselves as beings and programmed to respond to the desire manufactured by such iconography. In addition, I extended this interrogation of the impact of media culture on young women's beliefs to include electronic materials (i.e. "Ana" and "Mia" sites) that reflect cultural dictates related particularly to appearance. To that end, this study examines the ways in which young women define who they are and whom they strive to be based on shifting icons manufactured to maintain the patriarchal order.

In chapter three, I move from the way in which present tensions of media culture impact young women's identity formation to the way in which fairy tales, often elevated and retold from early childhood, affect young women's perceptions of self. Clearly, I believe these tales reflect deeply embedded values that reinforce societal expectations; the fact that such fairy tales are often imparted to children by parents reinforces their sense of obligation to such values. However, I am also interested in the way in which media culture, notably Disney, and visual culture, primarily music videos, produce modern fairy tales that reinforce false ideas of women's roles that negatively affect their identity formation. To analyze this question I limited my research and lines of questioning to three of the most widely circulated tales, Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, to distinguish what, if any, impact the three characters had on the identities of the young women in this study.

Researcher Perspective

While my experiences as a teacher and administrator demonstrate a clear link between my research agenda and my professional history, they represent only one part of what brings me to this line of inquiry. In many ways, it is my personal history that, to a greater extent, inspires and informs this work. To share some relevant details, I turn to a series of subjectivity statements produced while completing my doctoral coursework from 1998 to 2002. These statements reveal the areas and stages in my identity formation that prompt me to understand the identity formation of other young women, and they offer a framework for thinking about my conversations with Donna, Scarlett, Tina, and Marilyn.

Parents

I finally decided to establish myself as an adult in January 2000 at twenty-eight years old, yet I still struggle to disentangle myself from my role as “daughter.” My parents’ voices whisper to me and remind me that I am white, middle-class, and part of the dominant culture. Though I enjoyed a community enriched by Indian, Pakistani, and Hispanic families, class provided the common denominator that conquered most barriers. Everyone I saw at school was like me—fairly privileged—and it never occurred to me that others lived differently.

As the only daughter and youngest child, my parents expected success (Conley, 2004). I vividly recall being grounded by my father for earning a B in 9th grade English, being praised for making the high school cheerleading squad by my former-cheerleader mother, and behaving smugly after earning numerous scholarships on Senior Awards Night. I was voted Most Likely to Succeed. My parents played a vital role in every success, and I grew accustomed to seeking their advice before making decisions. Truthfully, I almost forgot to grow up.

Establishing my place in the adult world came at great personal expense, but I believe the struggle to separate my identity as daughter from my identity as adult woman is not unique. Consider Marilyn's discussion of her struggle:

I don't feel like she is ready to see me as an adult yet. She wants to put me in that adult world and she wants me to take care of myself and provide for myself. That is one thing and I can do it and it is fine But at the same time, she doesn't want to let go from being able to say, "Yes you can do this. No you can't do this," or, "This is the way you are going to do this." And I'm ready to strangle her.

Marilyn's fight for independence echoes my own in many ways and reminds me to interrogate my responses constantly. Do I really want to "take care of myself?" Here Marilyn and I both seek the privileges of adulthood, and we both acknowledge our limited abilities to perform adult. For Marilyn, taking care of herself is "one thing" she can do; for me, being academically successful is one thing I can do. This study, then, seeks to illuminate the multiple ways parents color our perspective and lend us a context of culture. Chapter four focuses on this aspect of identity formation.

Pounds

Shocking though it may seem, "You can never be too thin" was a type of commandment in my house; food was regulated and individuals were condemned (or at least gossiped about when out of the room) for eating too much or for having a skirt fit too snugly. I subjected myself to my family's specific body standards for many years only to realize that

the standard was impossible to reach—I was always either too thin or too fat. Though I yearned for perfection, the scales, like my parents, never offered the feedback I needed:

I am going home in a few weeks, and I'm overweight—again. Mom has always been able to tell how much I weigh to within a pound just by looking at me. I'm so excited about going home, but I've got to be really good between now and then; I have to lose some weight! Even five pounds would make all the difference.

My urgency to shed pounds quickly, evident in this 2000 subjectivity statement when I weighed about 105 pounds, continued into 2003 when I wanted “to be invisible.”

I was not, however, always too fat for my family's standards. From 1998 to 2000, I actually struggled to maintain weight. Moving to Raleigh from Florida and entering the pre-divorce years with my first husband dropped my weight to 96 pounds. Here is a 1999 journal entry maintained for producing subjectivity statements:

I'm so sick of getting pregnancy tests every month so that I can get Provera to start my period. I don't understand why I haven't had a regular period in six months. I know I'm a little under weight, but I feel fine. Everyone says I look great, and my parents even compliment my looks. What's so bad about being a little thin? I love the way my clothes look and the way I look in the mirror. I'm happy at this weight...I just wish my body would cooperate.

From a “fat” 105 pounds to a “happy” 96 pounds to my current pregnancy weight of 127 pounds, my weight absolutely contributed and contributes to the multiple, troubled identities (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 2, 9) I bring to this research.

Not surprisingly, the young women of my study are equally preoccupied with body image issues and, often, define themselves in terms of what the scale says. Chapter five focuses on this discourse.

Partnered

From 2000-2004, I was a divorced woman; it was a particularly difficult period. In 2001, when I was able to write about the divorce, I finally began coming to terms with my privilege as a married woman and with my own fairy tale princess constructions:

A married woman is “safe” to the world. She is a known commodity, quantifiable, guarded by her husband. By the same token, the single woman is also known. She is waiting to be swept away by the man of her dreams, waiting to become the married, secure woman. It’s the divorced woman—unattached but previously guarded—that society fears. It is also the divorced woman who fears. I am afraid now that I’m single—afraid of the noises I hear at night, of going to the basement to do laundry after dusk, of having my dreams dashed because of poor choices, of never finding a love that is realistic again. I’m afraid of being in love with the wrong man, of not having the courage to let go, of succumbing to my insecurities, of not being guarded—physically and emotionally—and of being overly guarded.

At the time, being “swept away by the man of [my] dreams” and being partnered once again occupied my thoughts and represented the way I constructed myself as a woman. All of my actions were focused on my fears

and on being married in order to reclaim the privilege I lost. The problem is that I’ve always defined myself in relation to the man in my life—father,

husband, lover—and I don't have a man I want to build relationships based on a fuller knowledge of myself, to experience real trust again with another person, to fall in love with another man.

Somehow, I thought a partner would provide the stability and security I lacked. In short, being partnered defined me.

In these 2002 pieces from a poetic subjectivity statement, I appear far more comfortable with the independence afforded me as a divorced woman and see a clear shift away from my princess fantasies and toward personal fulfillment as a woman and as a partner:

I am an independent woman.

I want to be faithful.

I want to be a cherished lover.

I want to be romanced.

I want to be a mother.

I will learn to enjoy my solitude.

I will maintain my independence.

I will be successful.

I will be happy.

I will survive.

In 2002 I recognize some of the ways in which my identity is produced and being produced by my past and my present simultaneously, and the extent to which I am co-constructing my identity with and in these subjectivity statements. Here I willingly examine the boundaries of

what is and what is not (Minh-ha, 1992) based on my needs and desires and seek to “maintain my independence” instead of finding the right man to love.

Interestingly, the young women of my study speak at length about their partners and, often, define themselves in terms of the men and women in their lives. Chapter six focuses on this discourse.

Summary

This chapter provides the framework for and theoretical tools of this identity formation study and describes how both my personal and professional experiences deeply influence this line of inquiry. Through it, I seek to introduce the four young women of my study and to demonstrate my motivation for understanding the “discourse in Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p. 7) from our interviews.

In chapter two I focus on the ways in which media culture theory intersect with identity formation and with educational research. In particular, I focus on the dialectic between starvation and consumption in media culture theory as it relates to interview themes. Chapter two also offers an in-depth analysis of the fairy tales that informed Donna, Scarlett, Marilyn, and Tina’s perceptions of what it means to be/perform female (Butler, 1990), of the construction of and the role of women in relationships, and of the importance of Walt Disney in imprinting these images on the minds of young women.

Chapter three details the research methodology, discourse analysis, and further introduces the young women of the study. Chapters four, five, and six present the findings of my discourse analysis. In chapter four, I explore the context of culture each woman offers. Chapter five uses this context of culture as the lens through which we discuss personal body image and the ways in which that image is produced and being produced by both

consumption of and starvation from visual media culture and celebrity spectacle. Likewise, chapter six uses participants' context of culture to frame the discussions of relationships and fairy tale fantasies that inform their identity talk. Each chapter illustrates one of the major discourse threads in our conversations. Excerpts from the women's interviews illustrate each point.

Chapter seven deals specifically with the extent to which these interviews contributed to co-constructed identities for researcher and participant. In it, I show how my research perspective informed the interview process and produced unintended results. In chapter eight I discuss the implications and significance of my work in relation to schools and schooling.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a thorough backdrop of the research that informed this study. In particular, it investigates two cultural elements I argue inform identity formation: media and fairy tales. Additionally, it establishes definitions and contexts for terms used throughout the study. These include: consumption, good girl, bad girl, girling, media spectacle, asceticism, starvation, and disneyfication. Finally, it presents examples of participant responses to elements of the theories discussed, which frames and informs the discourse analyses of chapters four, five, and six.

Media and Manipulation

[Donna] I guess the media sets the stage for what is attractive. Like, to be accepted in my culture you have to be fair and thin and all that.

[Scarlett] the media portrays what's beautiful. I mean, a plus-size model is a size eight!

Media permeates contemporary culture. The above quotations provide some understanding of the extent to which the media manipulated and manipulates the perspectives and culture of the young women in this study. Whether tied to media by virtue of multiple televisions in the house, of a mobile phone with voicemail, of a pager with quarter-hour news updates, or of high-speed Internet access to our e-mail, they are irrevocably linked. Such linkage produces important questions about media consumption—"For what purpose do they remain entangled in the web of media culture?" and "How does that entanglement affect

them?” Investigating how media culture impacts the young women of the study, then, first requires considering media culture theory with respect to these questions.

Doll: Literary Explorations of the Good Girl/Bad Girl Dichotomy

My use of the terms *good girl* and *bad girl* are entirely dependent on the work of curriculum theorist Mary Aswell Doll. In *Like Letters in Running Water: A Mythopoetics of Curriculum*, Doll (2000) argues that, “good girls become idealized, perfected objects, pedestaled for the male gaze” (p. 87) and are “emotionally stuck, frozen into one role only, that makes her incapable of expressing emotion” (p. 95).⁸ Yet the lure of this good girl image, “understood to mean sweet, docile, agreeable, and supportive” (p. 87) and produced and reinforced by mediums of popular culture, is nurtured by civilizing agents like family and schooling, which inform the identity talk of the women in this study:

[Donna] I guess I’ve always classified myself as a good girl because I was always, you know, I was bringing home the right grades, I was good with my family, I was responsible, I was taking on the responsibilities I needed to take on, I was doing what I needed to religiously and other adults thought, “She is a good girl.” You know, I always got praised.

Here, the good girl “is all surface” (p. 87), a “virgin” (p. 90):

[Donna] I guess good is just if other people perceive you that way. That is what I base it on. If other people think you are good and you, you to a certain degree have to think it too.

Donna clearly identifies with her inner good girl because other people perceive her acts and her behavior as good and because she is “sweet, docile, agreeable, and supportive” (p. 87). Not surprisingly, she also identifies with her inner bad girl.

At first, Donna claims that she only feels like a bad girl when she gets “caught” doing something bad. It is the surface, her acts and the ways in which others explain her acts, that drives her identification as a good girl or bad girl:

the bad things that I was doing, I knew they were bad . . . Like with Alex, I only saw my times with him when I got caught, when I got in trouble, as my bad girl moments.

However, it is Donna’s “mirror of patriarchy,” (p. 89) the bad girl “whore” (p. 90) whose “sexual transgression[s] are punished by death or ridicule,” (p. 91)⁹ that halts her previous claims. Here, Donna’s presumed sexual behavior is the key factor in her identification as a bad girl (Gilligan, 2002). Consider her reflection on her weeklong runaway with Alex, a boy her parents forbid her to see, during her junior year of high school:

[Running off with Alex] was bad. That was wrong because I knew it was. I was leaving my family. I was doing everything against my family, everything against what I was raised to do. I knew it was wrong [but] . . . I don’t know if that made me a bad person or if that made me a bad girl.

It seems noteworthy that Donna confuses “bad person” with “bad girl” in these comments. By equating the two, Donna hints at the idea that girls who do not “toe the line” (Goodman, 2002, p. 2), especially in sexual behavior, are more than just bad girls, they are inferior people. As the young women of this study reveal, our context of culture dramatically manipulates our perspective regarding this good girl-bad girl dichotomy. I pursue this line of inquiry more in chapter four.

Bacchilega: Postmodern Investigations of Girling

Media culture plays a privileged role in identity formation (Bacchilega, 1997; Bottingheimer, 1986; Doll, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Kellner, 1995; Kellner, 2003; McLaren, 1995; Rowe, 1979; Sarup, 1996; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Seifert, 1986; Stone, 1985; Warner, 1994; Zipes, 1983) by providing a framework for the social construction of girl. Bacchilega (1997) argues that “The seeming statement of recognition ‘It’s a girl!’ is thus an interpretation which initiates the process of ‘girling,’ an assignment never to be fully completed because ‘femininity’ is ‘the forcible citation of a norm’ and not a pre-existing reality” (p. 22). Somewhat insidiously, the girling¹⁰ practices associated with this ideal serve many women as an early lens through which to view the world:

[Tina] You know how girls are brought up as the princess, raised as the princess, the daddy’s little girl, the sweet, innocent, nurtured, loved little girl. And that, you know, that’s just the image portrayed . . . and that’s what most parents like for their children to feel like, I guess.

With age and experience, being feminine becomes synonymous with being quiet, pretty, and passive (Currie, 1999; Doll, 2000; Mulvey, 1993; Rowe, 1979; Stone, 1986; Zipes, 1983).

While many young women accept being molded by the types of girling processes (Bacchilega, 1997) provided by these frameworks and consent to lives of femininity sculpted in race, class, and sexual orientation, others defy girling practices altogether:

[Scarlett] I could not be a princess. I think the first time I put on a dress was in 7th grade and that’s only because my mother made me. I’m not cute either,

and I've never felt very girly or pretty I shave the back of my hair I mean I don't really like a lot of typical girl things. I cheered and all, but I didn't fit in the skinny, blonde-haired white girl norm I'm not quiet. If people want to know what I think, they better be ready to actually hear it.

Scarlett clearly chooses not to fit the prescribed norm and risks a bad girl label for her inability to adhere to good girl standards for behavior and appearance. As such, it is her performance (Bacchilega, 1997; Butler, 1999) of girl, informed by media consumption and cultural practice, that casts her as defiant.

Currie: Sociological Interpretations of Girl Talk and Power

Currie's empirical, sociological study, informed by Foucauldian power and Smith's "textually mediated discourse" (p. 19) tools¹¹, claims that "gendered identities are constantly being re-enacted through practices that express a continual process of becoming as well as being" (p. 4) and aims to explore "current controversies surrounding women's everyday gender practices" (p. 5) by investigating how the magazine industry "links young women's desires to cultural representations of femininity" (p. 8). In short, it is also a study of the ways in which the everyday consumption of media produces and is produced by the institutional knowledge it seeks to transmit.

Currie's study of forty-eight thirteen to seventeen year olds, calls for an understanding of "women's desires and acts of resistance in relation to their consciousness" (p. 311) similar to the goals of my study. However, Currie also explores "sociological knowledge as cultural production" (p. 285), seeking to uncover magazine characteristics that cannot be found within the text of the magazine. I found her critique of cultural studies

particularly useful in considering the consumptive effects of media culture to which I now turn.

Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody: Psycholanalytic analysis of gender and class

Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody's (2001) qualitative, longitudinal study of two groups of thirty and eight British girls¹², respectively, investigates the role class plays in informing gendered identities. Through it, they trace "the remaking of girls and women into modern neoliberal¹³ subjects . . . of self-invention and transformation . . . capable of surviving within the new social, economic, and political system" (p.3) using psychoanalytic discourse and services in an effort to understand how "girls' subjectivities [are] created in the social spaces that open up for them in specific historical circumstances and social and cultural locations" (p. 11).

Not surprisingly, Walkerdine, et al., dedicate a large part of their discussion to changes in the labor market, the psychoanalytic impact of financial strain on working class families, the role of working and non-working women in families, and the way in which "patterns of educational success and failure" are informed by class. While their study is, primarily, about class, and my study is, primarily, about the situated, multiple identities young women assume based on their interactions with culture (which includes class and gender), I relied on their research design as a model. Like Walkerdine, et al., (2001), I conducted in-depth interviews with each of the participants in the study using a semi-structured interview format and a key element for discussion (e.g. family background and development of worldview).

However similar our methods, we clearly differ on purpose. Walkerdine, et al., "argue that emotional issues are central in an understanding of subjectivity" (p. 18) and focus

on the formation of a classed subjectivity while my research seeks to gain some understanding of the ways in which participant contexts of culture and media consumption inform identity talk and identity formation. Their theoretical framework is post-structural and psychoanalytic; my theoretical framework is critical and postmodern. Despite our differences, I found the *Growing up Girl* study extremely useful as a model for the research design.

Another particularly instructive element of the Walkerdine, et al., (2001) study is the notion that “women have long been invited constantly to remake themselves as the (changing) object of male desire¹⁴” (p. 9) and that this reality encourages the formation of fragmented identities. Walkerdine (1997) raises this issue in her earlier research by discussing “a series of issues about little girls and popular culture that engage the debates about the specifically classed meanings that enter into concerns about popular portrayals of little girls and relate particularly to sexuality, eroticism and innocence [citing that] [m]any little girls and their families have wanted to take part in media presentations of girls which are, in many ways, highly eroticized” (p. 139). Her research explored “the issue of eroticisation and little girls” (p. 139) and reasoned that the sexuality of women is “portrayed as childlike” (p. 167), that the goal of women is “to be protected by a big Daddy” (p. 167) and that this construction falls apart when “the place of women is taken by an actual little girl” (p. 167). For a more thorough discussion of this argument, I turn to Diane Blaine’s (1999) work.

Blaine: Eroticized Representations

Blaine’s article, “Necrophilia, Pedophilia, or Both?: The Sexualized Rhetoric of the JonBenet Ramsey Murder Case,” appears in Carstarphen and Zavoina’s (1999)

collection of “critical analyses and case studies that explain through example, illustration, and rhetorical inquiry . . . mass media representations of men and women” (p. xi) and addresses “[o]ur cultural obsession with the eroticisation of children’s bodies” (p. 51). Using the JonBenet murder as a focus, Blaine contends that, “female perfection is modeled on the features of the girl, not the woman” (p. 54), citing our “national obsession with child sexuality” (p. 54). Interesting in terms of media manipulation, media spectacle, and fairy tales, Blaine asserts that, “little girls understand clearly the benefits of participating in their own objectification and can find it quite thrilling” (p. 55). She reveals how “[w]e continue to place great value on the attractiveness of little girls, and in taking them to see films such as Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Pocahontas* (which we of course also watch and enjoy ourselves), we make sure that they understand their power will come from being able to attract, from being sexual” (p. 54):

[Scarlett] I used to cover my eyes when I was about six when I was watching “The Little Mermaid” because they would kiss, and that would really freak me out when I was little [LAUGHS].

Later discussions of princesses and relationships consider the thrill the young women of this study describe with respect to their own objectification and the extent to which fairy tales inform their identity talk and formation.

Equally intriguing is Blaine’s interpretation of eroticized bodies in fairy tales; in particular, Blaine argues that “[t]he dead women who matter the most, we learn, are those who clearly reflect and perpetuate central, foundational myths of blond, white, youthful, innocent beauty. That JonBenet was a princess makes her all the more perfect, all the more precious, for her part as Sleeping Beauty....She has achieved the ‘happily ever after’ that we

acculturate our little girls to long for, becoming a permanent princess with no unbecoming desire for independence” (p. 54). I draw on these ideals in my later discussions of princesses, body image, and fairy tales, though I use different fairy tales in this analysis.

Consumption

[Marilyn] sex sells.

McLaren (1995) constructs media culture as “predatory.” By generously exposing individuals to “the excesses of marketing” (p. 2) McLaren contends that media culture plays a significant, often forceful, role in identity formation through consumption (see also Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Sarup, 1996; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Consumption, then, becomes individuals “mode of being, a way of gaining identity” (Sarup, 1996, p. 107). As individuals absorb this barrage of information and images, they become more vulnerable to it. Such vulnerability often becomes inspiration to change who they are or to shift what they want in their effort to parallel what they see. It is through such consumption that the media conditions (Lieberman, 1994), mediates and constructs the *selves* (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) we live by.

Those *selves* are engulfed “in a consumption-oriented, media-driven world” offering “endless sources of identity” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 9). Identification with and against the myriad images provided affects individuals’ view of the world by destabilizing their identity until the next consumptive act (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). As a result, consumption no longer exists as a luxury; in a media age, we *are* because we consume. If “postmodern theories privilege media culture as the site of the implosion of identity” (Kellner, 1995, p. 234), then more research on the consumptive effects of media texts is necessary.

One convenient example of how young women consume and are consumed by culture is the tremendous popularity of Barbie. Characterized as the epitome of the good girl¹⁵ in culture, Barbie operates

within the boundaries of particular cultural logics. She does celebrate whiteness—blonde whiteness in particular—as a standard for feminine beauty; she does reify anorexic figures coupled with large breasts as objects of male desire. She does support unbridled consumerism as a reason for being. She never questions American virtue....[and she is] no poor girl (Steinberg, 1997, p. 217).

The fact that she remains a virgin augments her good girl status in patriarchal culture (Steinberg, 1997). It is against this impossible ideal that many young women forge their identity. The moral is image is everything.

Scarlett, Donna, Tina, and Marilyn are neither immune to nor unaware of their own manipulation by the media. Consider Donna's insight into the impact of Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears on young women today:

I really like Christina [LAUGHTER]...I know, I know. It's crazy! She isn't fake at all—not like Britney. I mean, I know videos and all that are all about sex, but I don't think Christina plays something she's not. She's not out there telling everyone she's a virgin and all and then doing something else. Britney tries to be so reserved and she's not. She's not any better than any of the rest of them. I think girls are totally taken by Britney and Christina. They feel like they have to go to clubs and wear these sexy clothes to like find the love

of their life . . . and that's not real. They [the media] totally expose us to a highly sexualized world that we're not ready for.

Tina continues the commentary on our “highly sexualized world” with respect to the images in music videos in general:

You see half-naked girls that are shaking their booty everywhere, and, you know, acting like fools. But I think the main thing would be the dress, the way that, you know, half their body is showing in anything that they wear in the music videos. Pretty much any music video that you see, the girls are going to be half-dressed, and they're going to be dancing around somewhere, acting crazy, and, you know, maybe you'll see sexuality, making out with somebody somewhere.

From these comments, both young women appear to have negative feelings for women who are fake and highly sexualized, and they all classified overly sexual women as “bad.” As such, I argue that it is our perceptions of good girls and bad girls in culture, combined with the power of media culture to develop and sustain these dichotomies, which informs their comments.

Kellner: Media Spectacle

Previously, people constructed identities through their interaction with family, religious affiliation, community groups, profession, or political ideologies and attachment. In a media age, people began identifying with celebrities, acquiring their role and gender models, ideals, style, and aspirations from media culture (Kellner, 2003, p. 111).

Women displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle (Mulvey, 1991, p. 436).

Celebrity, unquestionably, revels in media spectacle (Kellner, 2003) and casts a powerful shadow across identities; in fact, I argue that celebrity is the image we consume the most. In the case of young women in this study, however, “celebrity” primarily retains two forms—pop singer and pop princess—that are often one and the same. This *diva and the darling* combination dictate fashion, appearance, personality, and sexuality by deploying “the tools of the glamour industry and media spectacle to make themselves spectacular icons” (Kellner, 2003, p. 9). In so doing, celebrities prescribe how young women are supposed to look and behave, supposed to construct themselves as beings and supposed to respond to the desire manufactured by such iconography. Through music video and marketing, female pop stars discipline young women’s minds, bodies and desires.

Indicting female pop stars, Kellner (2003) further suggests that their celebrity has little to do with their music; they merely supply a sound in their effort to market themselves via their beauty and sexuality. Such marketing takes the form of album covers, music videos, signature clothing lines, books, posters, dolls, greeting cards and calendars. Song lyrics practically vanish when extracted from the spectacle of video and associated marketing. In the absence of other models, young women frame themselves against the media icon images they consume and the marketed items desired; they subconsciously mouth the words to popular songs, literally consuming the music by integrating the lyrics into their speech and, ultimately, their identity. Scarlett’s homepage, viewable from her America Online Instant Messenger profile, exemplifies this and demonstrates the power of male spectacle:

I'm also a huge 2 Pac fan, if you ain't feelin' Pac, we will argue, so don't bother hittin' me up...I WILL BLOCK U! I'm a cool chic, in search of good people to talk to, get to know, and maybe even meet. I know this is hard for you white guys out there, but I am interested in chocolate men, Shawtys...well, I like them in all flava's.

The fact that Scarlett is white remains hidden in most of her discourse. She clearly prefers rap music, reveals her devotion to 2 Pac, and fluently uses language from rap and hip-hop lyrics. Overshadowing all of this, though, is an enormous picture of 2 Pac, flipping off the consumer, in shorts that reveal his washboard stomach, a majority of his underwear, and a “Thug Love” tattoo across his stomach in an arch up to his rib cage. Here the power of media spectacle even translates to an individual’s homepage through both linguistic and non-linguistic systems.

Despite its seeming ubiquity, Roberts (1996) notes the dearth of research on media spectacle by calling for “an assessment of... the range of images appearing in the genre [of music videos] and the underlying issues of construction and performativity” (p. 63). My research, focusing on two of the most influential contemporary female stars among young women, Jennifer Lopez (a.k.a. “J. Lo”) and Britney Spears, adequately fills this niche. Employing Rose’s (2001) critical visual methodology to analyze “the cultural significance, social practices and power relations” J. Lo and Britney lyrics and videos present, I seek to expose the import of media spectacle on young women’s self-definitions and aspirations.

Jennifer Lopez

Jennifer Lopez is a Latina princess-turned-Hip-Hop movie star. From her role as Selena to her very public series of marriages, divorces and engagements, to her in-your-face

sexuality and independence in videos, J. Lo is quite a spectacle. After twenty movie appearances and a signature clothing line, J. Lo “brings it”¹⁶ to Hollywood Bronx-style. Though her life history, movie career and merchandising industry all provide adequate material for in-depth analysis, my focus rests specifically on a few representative lyrics and videos from J. Lo’s three albums using discourse¹⁷ (Rose, 2001) and narrative analysis¹⁸ (Stokes, 2003).

J. Lo released her first album, *On the Six*, on June 1, 1999. While the title pays tribute to the No. 6 bus young Jennifer used to take from the Bronx into Manhattan for dance lessons, the video of the title track, “If you had my love,” pays tribute to her Latina roots and to her understanding of male desire. Consciously voyeuristic, this video allows male and female consumers alike to tap into J. Lo’s home to watch her sing to them, dance for them and shower for them. Little girls imitate her dance steps, young women watch in amazement and men, quite obviously, view her as an object of desire. That desire becomes abundantly clear in the shower scene when two mechanics walk away to watch her on the television without immediately noticing the car on which they worked bursts into flames. Inserted oddly into this mix is a one-minute Latin rhythm breaking up J. Lo’s obvious play with those she knows are watching her and J. Lo’s fulfillment of their voyeuristic desires (Blaine, 1999; Mulvey, 1991).

Visual teasing gives way to frustration and a need to redefine herself in the second album, *J. Lo*, released on her 31st birthday, July 24, 2001. Annoyed by men who give her “game” (flirtation) and baubles but not time, J. Lo declares her “Love don’t cost a thing.” Both the lyrics and the video work together to eliminate this man from her life as she ritually sheds each item he presented—her purse, the convertible Jaguar, her sunglasses, coat,

necklaces and bracelet—demonstrating that what she needs from him “is not available in stores.” Her strong words and actions fade, though, in the beach scenes, which depict her frolicking in the water in a sleeveless shirt and bikini bottom—again the object of male desire. It is when she takes her shirt off and looks at the camera that she translates his objectification of her to the viewer.

Likewise, “I’m Real”¹⁹ feeds male fantasy as well as childhood dreams and cultural disapproval. In this video, J. Lo rides, suggestively clad, into town on a motorcycle telling her man that she is coming to see him and that he should not ask her where she has been or what she is going to do; she asserts her independence and power from the beginning. We learn, though, that her power stems from being an object of desire. Men stare at her and over-pump her gas in gratuitously sexual innuendo, while little girls flock to her and mimic her every move. It is only the older women who watch in disapproval as J. Lo becomes the center of attention in town. When the venue shifts to an outdoor concert, desire continues, this time among young women carefully marking J. Lo’s movements in their minds. An interesting addition to this video is the attention J. Lo gives to her then-husband, Chris Judd, a dancer (and choreographer). Clearly, J. Lo had Chris in her focus.

In a recent album, *This is Me...Then* released November 26, 2002, these trends continue²⁰. “Jenny from the Block” is a prime example of J. Lo’s repetitive video elements—returning to her roots, making a declaration (the type changes), playing with her objectification and putting her love interest on display. In this song J. Lo reminds consumers that “I’m real I thought I told ya.” She advertises her authenticity by including a series of personal shots—at home with Ben (Affleck, her former fiancé), running errands with Ben, dealing with celebrity life and paparazzi, working on a photo shoot—that reinforce the girl-

next-door tenor the song attempts. Like her other albums, J. Lo collaborates with a number of popular Hip Hop artists on *This is Me...Then* including Judakiss (“Jenny from the Block” and L.L. Cool J. (“All I Have”) to produce an even brighter spectacle than J. Lo alone provides.

The women of the study, surprisingly, had no significant feelings about J. Lo or these videos. They all “like her music,” remain interested in that fact that her “life is full of drama with men” (Marilyn), “loved her as Selena” (Scarlett), agree that she is a huge celebrity, they had no overwhelming emotional response to her as woman, performer, or spectacle. It is for that reason I turn to Britney Spears.

Britney Spears

A modern-day Cinderella, Britney Spears²¹ is, truly, a pop princess²². From her charitable organization funding World Trade Center victims and performing arts classes for underprivileged children, to her proclamations of virginity²³, to her girl-next-door appeal, to her current marriage debacle, Britney transformed into a woman under media’s lens. With several books²⁴ and two movies²⁵ to her credit, it truly is good to be Britney Spears.²⁶ Utilizing the same methods and selection process implemented in my work on J. Lo, I begin the investigation of her spectacle.

Britney released her first album, ...*baby one more time* on January 12, 1999, nearly six months before J. Lo. The title track fits my research perfectly—framed by a high school classroom daydream sequence, Britney embodies the mainstream ideal of girl-next-door in her image and language. Innocent-looking close-up shots of Britney at her locker with her hair pulled up in braids (add glasses in the classroom scene) dissolve against her sexually suggestive hallway, school yard and gymnasium dance scenes where even her school

uniform comes in a mid-drift; this is a clear departure from most uniform-schooled experiences. Her story of loneliness “that is killing” her and her teenage desire to be anywhere but school are common experiences with which young women identify.

Album two, *Oops!...I did it again*, released on May 16, 2000, presents a radically different image. The schoolgirl has been replaced by a she-devil in the title track who alternately plays devil (dressed in a skin-tight, red jumpsuit) and angel (clad in all white on a white background) with an unsuspecting astronaut. Admittedly, she toys with his heart, takes his gifts and drops him with a smile. To her, relationships are all a “game,” and she intends to win.

“Stronger” retains this spirit as it responds to “Baby one more time.” Britney’s “loneliness ain’t killing [her] no more,” because she has let her boyfriend go willingly when she catches him with another girl. With only a “whatever,” Britney severs all ties with him and dances, for the majority of the video, with a chair rather than an entourage (as in “Baby”). With more confidence and attitude, Britney faces the camera defiantly.

Britney released another album, *Britney*, on November 6, 2001²⁷. What is most interesting about this album is Britney’s overt hostility at being storied as a “girl.” In two of the most popular tracks—“I’m a Slave for You” and “I’m Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman”—Britney reminds consumers that she is no longer a little girl. In “Slave,” Britney sheds the little girl image, adopting a young woman-on-the-prowl attitude instead. Seeking dance partners at clubs (to which little girls do not go) and tossing practicality aside, Britney “steps into the world” as an independent, overtly sexual being. In “Not a Girl,” a variation on this theme, Britney tells viewers “I’m not a girl; There is no need to protect me” and “I’m not a girl don’t tell me what to believe.” Both videos reinforce her sexuality and womanhood via

small tops, low jeans that barely cover her pubic bone, and sexualized interactions with men, women, and snakes.

The young women of this study had a strong emotional reaction to Britney; in fact, they all seemed to despise her and her “fake” (Tina, Marilyn) nature. From “I’m so over her” (Tina) to “Britney tries to be so reserved and she’s not” (Donna), all of the girls act disgusted at the way in which Britney participates in her own objectification (Blaine, 1999, p. 55):

[Scarlett] No, she’s popular because she—I don’t even think she’s very pretty, but she has sex appeal that she’s created for herself, and because, well, she started her popularity, she did this kind of wrong, she started her popularity on little girls, um, she came out younger, a Mickey Mouse Club graduate, and then realized that 50-year-old men were watching her Pepsi commercials, so she completely changed it to turn herself into a sex symbol, and now her jeans can’t get any lower without showing everything that she has, and her shirts can’t get any smaller. And she’s always oily.

Clearly, Britney’s appeal to young women concerns Scarlett as well as the other women in the study because they witness the effects on the young women around them:

[Donna] They feel like they have to go to clubs and wear these sexy clothes to like find the love of their life . . . and that’s not real.

And, though the young women in this study all voice similar opposition to highly sexualized celebrity behavior designed to attract male and female attention, chapters four and five provide some understanding of the ways in which members of this study behave in the same ways for the same reasons.

Princesses²⁸

Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez live charmed lives. It is easy for young women to be captivated by the spectacle of their celebrity and to do whatever necessary to gain some small piece; videos from both performers demonstrate as much. An entire “princess” culture (primarily targeting little girls) exists to support the demand for t-shirts, tiaras, lip gloss and glitter—elements that assist young women in looking like a princess. Parents and other individuals who make these purchases and promulgate princess mentalities develop deeply imbedded cultural scripts about how young women should be treated:

[Tina] You know how girls are brought up as the princess, raised as the princess, the daddy’s little girl, the sweet, innocent, nurtured, loved little girl . . . [My mom] did everything that she could to make me happy. She wanted me to be happy. She wanted me to have what I wanted and needed, and not have a care in the world, and that was how she made me feel, like I was her princess.

Such scripts also run the risk of creating specific models of hope to which young women cling when relationships and life are not quite what they expected:

[Marilyn] There always seems to be some drama. The poor little princess. She always has to go through some kind of turmoil. That’s my hope, because they have some turmoil too. You know, Cinderella had to wash the floors, and Sleeping Beauty gets kidnapped and everything happens and it’s so drama. But then they all live happily ever after. So hopefully that will happen.

Most alarming among the affects of habitual celebrity consumption on young women is the supremacy of appearance. To a young woman's commodity self (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 198), looking young, thin and sexy translates to being beautiful, desired and wealthy. Their ways of seeing and imaging "the fabulous life"²⁹ of these pop princesses are frosted by visual media culture's demands on appearance. As a result, many young women resort to the one aspect of the fabulous life they can control to some extent—appearance.

Look at Me

[Scarlett] Sex sells to little girls.

Blaine (1999) argues that many girls find their objectification "quite thrilling" (p. 54). Walkerdine, et al (2001) extend Blaine's findings by asserting that girls find such fulfillment through participation in their own objectification. Consider again the research on Jennifer Lopez and Britney Spears. Both arguments resonate with each step I take down the hallways of high schools. In dress, carriage and conversation, many high school-aged girls, including some in this study, relish their ability to titillate and reap great pleasure in the attention received from such behavior.

Greg Evans' (2004) *Luann* cartoon series paints this picture with precision. Lead character Luann DeGroot, the most average of the average at Pitts School, delights in dishing on her classmates, especially Tiffany Farrell:

Think of all the words that rhyme with "witch" and you'll have a good description of TF. You know how Superman and Batman have all those arch enemies constantly trying to destroy them and rule the world? Well, take all those villains, roll them into one, multiply by 9000, add 5 pounds of makeup,

subtract the brains and put the whole mess in a sleazy miniskirt and you have Tiffany. She's Queen of Anyone Below Her (everyone) and she has this need to make all men on earth worship her. Sadly, they do.

(www.luannsroom.com)

Luann's obvious distaste and disappointed jealousy are similar to other characters in the cartoon including Miss Phelps, the Pitts School Counselor, and Mr. Fogarty, Pitts' English teacher.

Tiffany enters school, clearly satisfied with her appearance, to sounds of appreciation—"Whoo!" and "Lookin' Hot!!" She savors the moment until interrupted by Miss Phelps, distressed by Tiffany's dress in light of previous conversations, whose loud command to "Come in here!" is met with half-hearted attention and zero interest. Tiffany appears to know this one-way exchange all too well as she fumbles through her purse, "Did I not speak to you about your attire?" Surprised by Tiffany's "Yeah," Miss Phelps presses to understand the source of Tiffany's disobedience. In a shower of perfume, Tiffany justifies her continued insubordination—"The boys speak louder."

Miss Phelps continues to question Tiffany in a desperate attempt to understand why a young woman of her generation would labor to look so "Cheap." Tiffany's conformity to this particular cultural model (Gee, 1999) resonates with my experiences with high school girls: "This is how girls dress....It's just fashion." When Miss Phelps pleads the purpose of school (i.e. "Not the place to fish for boys!"), Tiffany merely counters with reality—"I hope you have time to counsel 350 girls."

Like Tiffany, as girls develop an “unbecoming desire for independence” (Blaine, 1999, 54) from the institutions of family and schooling, they begin to shed their girly attributes in favor of more womanly attitudes and behaviors, including a profound interest in boys. As a result, this dissertation investigates the impact of media culture, fairy tales, body image, and relationships on young women’s identity formation. By interrogating the traditions through which young women traverse the space between girl and woman, I seek to uncover the ways in which the pressure to perform (Butler, 1999) one’s identity and to conform to cultural scripts requires the formation of multiple identities. Chapters five and six connect Blaine’s and Walkerdine’s findings with Evans’ depiction in a discussion of participant body image and relationships.

Starvation

[Marilyn] is if you look at the models that walk down the runway these days they’re like pencils. You know, it’s almost sickening how thin they are. Like it’s just skin laying on top of their bones. And that’s the image right now that’s portrayed.

In opposition to the previous focus on consumption is young women’s drive to govern their bodies through practices of starvation (anorexia nervosa) and expulsion (bulimia) in order to, in some way, achieve their ideal. However, to assume that practices of this nature merely exist as modern cultural models would eliminate a long history of fasting and celibacy in faith. Gaining an understanding of this predominantly Christian tradition informs modern appeals to which my discussion later turns.

Grimm: Early Ascetic Ideals

Fasting, as self-inflicted practice and penance, has a long association with asceticism (Grimm, 1996). From its extreme—the complete lack of food and drink—to simple abstinence from one particular thing—a common Lenten practice—fasting manifests itself in many forms. At its high point in the mid-to-late Middle Ages, Christian asceticism, evidenced by fasting, played a central role in performances of Christian piety (Shaw, 1998).

Its beginnings, though, are humble. Early Christian texts recognize the social rather than religious significance of food (see Paul’s epistles and Acts). While some early Christian and Jewish traditions suggest how both eating and fasting earn merit with God (Grimm, 1996), many focus instead on the ways in which food brought groups together in community. In these instances, food was often the celebratory centerpiece.

Beginning with the *Didache*, circa 100 AD, that focus shifts from social to religious, providing Christians a mechanism for distinguishing themselves from Jews (Grimm, 1996) “for it is precisely in behaviors and practices such as eating or not eating...that group identity and social conformity are rooted and maintained” (Shaw, 1998, p. 233). Known also as *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, this text best presents fasting as a way “to emphasize piety, as accompaniment of prayer, and as a sign of self-abasement in the sight of God” (Grimm, 1996, p. 192). Tertullian, “the first vocal advocate of Christian fasting” (Grimm, 1996, p. 193), extends this early teaching circa 200 AD by defining fasting as both a religious obligation and a penitential practice. Jerome advanced this identification and became the crucial voice in ascetic theology during the 4th Century. The result—ascetic fasting became the preeminent means of separating “first-class Christians” (Grimm, 1996, p. 197) from others.

By the Middle Ages, fasting showcased piety and was “part of all the penitential rules” (Grimm, 1997, p. 193). As the signifier of holiness, fasting made the body “more obedient and controllable” while simultaneously quieting “the restless mind” and aiding “in prayer and penitence” (Shaw, 1998, p. 9). Ultimately, the discipline required in fasting became an admirable ascetic ideal toward which Christians, especially Christian women, should strive (Grimm, 1996; MacKendrick, 1999).

Bell: Saint Catherine (Benincasa) of Siena

As the Christian ascetic turns against the body, s/he simultaneously “courts temptation and raises desire” (MacKendrick, 1999, p. 78) in an effort to prove worthiness. The result is a strict ascetic who “will starve to overcome the will to eat, forgo sleep to overcome the body’s desire for rest, indulge in pain to overcome the urge for peace” (MacKendrick, 1999, p. 78). This continual and twisted subjugation of body to will establishes that cycle by which the denial of pleasure provides the primary structure for pleasure (MacKendrick, 1999; Foucault, 1978). Thus, the consequence of this self-conquest and self-denial serves as a vehicle for empowerment and gratification (Harpham, 1987).

Rudolph Bell’s (1985) *Holy Anorexia* links such characterizations with medieval holy women and with descriptions of “modern-day sufferers of anorexia nervosa” (p. ix) in an investigation of the self-starvation patterns of female saints³⁰. In particular, Bell’s research analyzes “261 holy women officially recognized by the Roman Catholic church as saints, blessed, venerables, or servants . . . who lived between 1200 and the present on the Italian peninsula” (p. x) in an effort to prove that this group of women “exhibited an anorexic behavior pattern in response to the patriarchal social structures in which they were trapped” (p. x) resulting in “short-circuited” (p. x) identities rooted in early, arranged marriages which

prohibited the typical adult-child contests that mark identity formation. More importantly, Bell notes the connections between anorexia and class:

The most frequent time of onset is adolescence and, although the poor are not immune to this disease, it appears to be the special preserve of well-to-do, white, Western girls Apparent differentials of gender, class, and age may be attributable in part to patterns for recognizing and treating the disease As with most psychiatric disorders, then, the syndrome of anorexia nervosa is known mostly by indirection (p. 2-3).

In such cases young women struggled against the enslavement they experienced at the hands of their fathers³¹ and husbands and against their exploitation as women and as mothers in an effort to negotiate their own identities and senses of self. The struggle, then, was really about the battle to gain control over any aspect of life. Both the women of my study (and some of their mothers) as well as the women whose voices call out from the pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia web sites that follow employ similar body controls in an effort to lead lives of their own³².

In talking further about typical anorexic girls, Bell's comments appear strikingly similar to Doll's (2000) discussion of good girls:

The typical anorexic girl strive[s] to be good under every situation always has been a favorite of teachers . . . just innately eager to learn . . . more interested in music lessons, ballet, and reading Jane Austen; never so brilliant as to be troublesome, just a very good and slightly overachieving student.

Adults find her delightfully mature (Bell, 1985, p. 18).

Additionally, Bell notes how the typical anorexic girl

always lived for others, judged herself by their standards, and let them define her identity. Raised to strive for perfection and to seek approval from . . . parents The anorexic girl feels hopelessly inadequate and ineffective in dealing with others . . . yet she has become the master of herself (Bell, 1985, p. 18-19).

Bell further argues that this “sweet, docile, agreeable” (Doll, 2000, p. 87) girl, in an attempt to gain some measure of control over her life “knows this [performance of good girl] to be the test of her willpower” (Bell, 1985, p. 18). This knowledge causes the once good girl to rebel in subtle and not-so-subtle ways and to acknowledge that

[h]er special goodness as a child was all a fake; she was never truly good enough anyway and sometimes she wanted not to be good at all. Now she will excel, in an intensely personal contest of her choice, over her feelings and drives. She will be an individual, not a daughter or a pupil Good girl that she is, she goes willing to the doctor, very calmly explains that nothing is wrong, and dutifully agrees to do just as he says” (p. 18).

As Bell’s example and the women of this study reveal, dutiful good girls perform prescribed roles to escape scrutiny yet continue their self-starvation patterns of behavior in the ultimate tests of willpower and control.

Catherine Benincasa or Saint Catherine of Siena is a remarkable example for the purposes of this study. Bell contends that Saint Catherine’s “anorexia was a consequence . . . of psychic factors, in her case her will to conquer bodily urges that she considered base obstructions in her path of holiness” (p. 15) and argues that “[o]nce the pattern of conquest and reward was established . . . starvation intensified the consequences of her holy anorexia

and ultimately she died in a state of inanition . . . exhausted by her holy austerities” (p. 15). The fact that Catherine’s “life became a model consciously imitated by holy anorexics over the next two centuries” (p. 25) and that her patterns of self-starvation and vomiting were validated through canonization as appropriate penance for the sins of this life fashion her as the epitome of the female ability to subordinate body to will in the ascetic tradition.

With this as a backdrop, Bell continues by framing Catherine as a good girl, arguing that her

holy anorexia, as with the other aspects of her religious impulse, developed in a familial context. For the love she received from a belatedly understanding father and an all-too-worldly mother she felt obligated to be a good girl, so good and so special that her sacrifices in this world would save their souls in the next (p. 47).

The fact that she refused to be married or to serve any except God simultaneously casts Catherine as “a seemingly obedient and submissive girl” and as a girl who “rebels against the world around her in a desperate attempt to establish a sense of self” (p. 55). Ultimately, Catherine’s behavior was considered “both holy and anorexic [and was considered] a positive expression of self by a woman in response to the world that attempted to dominate her” (p. 178). What I find incredibly powerful in Bell’s research is the way in which his argument that anorexia and bulimia provide “a real and powerful victory over the only thing western (or westernized) society allows a teenage girl to conquer—herself” (p. 56) dovetails with my research on the philosophy propagated in electronic media sources in the section.

Critical to the analysis of pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia web sites that follows is Bell’s definition of “holy anorexia” which echoes in the philosophy declared on and practices

shared in those sites: “Holy anorexia involves a need to establish a sense of oneself, a contest of wills, a quest for autonomy” (p. 8). His recognition of the struggle of anorexia and bulimia as struggles for self-mastery dramatically informed my research agenda and demonstrate the extent to which anorexia can become a sole source of identity wherein “the self-starvation pattern continues beyond . . . conscious control” (p. 20)³³. Bell, however, does not cast anorexia as holy, and is quick to establish that “it was Christendom’s patriarchy . . . who had to define her [Catherine’s and others] anorexia as saintly rather than demonic or sick” and who framed “[t]heir anorexia . . . as part of a wider pattern of heroic, ascetic masochism amply justified” (21). The literature and analysis that follows reinforce the ways in which the Christian refashioning of anorexia has been appropriated by modern girls to justify their self-starvation.

Electronic Media and Manipulation: Pro-Anorexia & Pro-Bulimia Sites

At least one extreme of this ascetic ideal as the source of empowerment remains in modern cultural models. Whether that ideal is framed by faith, media icons, identification with celebrities, or self-imposed, self-control is key. Enter pro-anorexia (“pro-ana”) and pro-bulimia (“pro-mia”) websites (ana-and-mia) in culture³⁴. Though these sites, individuals, primarily women, perform consumptive acts online in a “new media” (Carstarphen & Zavoina, 1999, p. xi) that remains fairly untouched by scholars of our media age. Given the habitual consumption of the Internet and online message boards in contemporary culture, the rise in popularity of pro-ana and pro-mia sites among young women requires scrutiny.

Taylor’s (2002) study of the rise of *ana-and-mia* sites, sponsored by the Social Issues Research Center, provides a rare, comprehensive treatment of the topic. In her research, she identified several common elements among the sites. These qualities include “strength, will,

achievement, fulfillment” (p. 2) and politics. Essentially, Taylor establishes that *ana-and-mia* sites characterize eating disorders not as a illness but as a lifestyle choice and “as a means of achieving perfection³⁵ and of forming an elite, a group of humans who have successfully “mastered” or “governed” their bodies” (p. 2)³⁶. This clear division between the elite who exercise self-control and the weak who remain undisciplined and are ill because of their poor pro-*ana* efforts is of interest.

Taylor argues that good *anas* take pride in their superior self-control yet grow “weaker in the name of strength” (p. 6) through their body governance. Masked in the political language of empowerment, *ana-and-mia* sites target young women by manipulating “girl-power” (p. 6) into twisted inspiration for disciplining weight. The message Taylor exposes is clear, being pro-*ana* or pro-*mia* is not about self-destruction; instead, the goal of *ana-and-mia* sites is to help people who already have eating disorders improve their lifestyle choice by providing inspiration for increased discipline for a “better” life. The irony, of course, is that this lifestyle choice often results in death.

For “*Thinspiration*,”³⁷ a term used to identify a section of Ana’s Underground Grotto dedicated to providing visitors inspirational quotations, photographs, and information to help young *anas* and *mias* in their struggle to overcome the limitations of the body, site visitors can enter a gallery of photos designed to inspire and repulse. Separated into categories, *Thinspiration* pictures market their audience via cover pictures to each gallery. By maintaining the draw of the celebrity with Calista Flockhart as its cover girl for “Celebrities and Models” (Ana’s Underground Grotto), *Thinspiration* uses media spectacle as bait. Juxtaposed with visual images of obese women (“reverse triggers”), such spectacle (e.g. “Hardcore Bones” in the spotlight) keeps *anas* and *mias* on the path to success and creates a

powerful trap into which young women easily fall. Even if they identify with the obese women, they aspire to look like celebrities and models; the visual hook ensnares them, and they return repeatedly for *Thinspiration*.

While *ana-and-mia* sites provide inspiration primarily through visual media, text is an equally powerful player. Taylor cautions consumers regarding the text some sites use to distribute “the quasi-religious philosophy of the pro-ana movement” (p. 6). She offers this brief example from *Anorexic Nation*³⁸ to support her claim: “I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting” (p. 6). It is to this claim and to the specific transformation of Christian doctrine into pro-ana fodder that I turn using discourse analysis (Rose, 2001).

Taylor: Christian Covers—Nicene Creed, Psalm 23 & the 10 Commandments

Taylor’s *Anorexic Nation* citation is, at the very least, alarming. In both cadence and structure, it stirs memories of the Nicene Creed, noteworthy as the means through which Christians profess their faith. Taylor’s analysis of the citation, however, neglects this aspect focusing instead on starvation as an outdated sign of piety. Equally significant is their intertextuality³⁹ (Rose, 2001). To consider that I investigated the rhetorical organization of each using a model that allows for parallel readings.

Table 1: Comparison of Nicene Creed to Anorexic Nation. This chart provides a parallel reading of the Anglican version of the Nicene Creed and Anorexic Nation’s profession of faith.

Anorexic Nation Creed	Nicene Creed⁴⁰
I believe in a wholly black and white world, the losing of weight, recrimination for sins, the abnegation of the body and a life ever fasting.	I believe one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Here, the *Anorexic Nation* citation voices a profession of faith in an anorexic lifestyle. In structure (“I believe”), tone (fervent), and rhetorical appeal (pathos), the *Anorexic Nation* Creed parallels the Nicene Creed text with startling accuracy. What, then, are *anas* affirming in their profession?

Here faith in the “black and white world” is divided between thin and fat, strong and weak (Taylor, 2002). Instead of seeking forgiveness for sins, *anas* blame themselves⁴¹ and confess their weakness to Ana, their goddess. Additionally, they affirm self-denial as a form of penance and a demonstration of strength. It is only through fasting and sacrifice that *anas* achieve their intended goal—“changes ... in body in conformity to will” (Ana’s Underground Grotto). Unfortunately, this brief parallel to the Nicene Creed serves as a mere introductory track to the collection of Christian covers available on these sites.

Psalm 23

In my research another well-known text surfaced as *Thinspiration*⁴²—the King James’ version of the 23rd Psalm. Typically recited at funerals,⁴³ this scripture is, quite possibly, the most widely recognized of the Christian faith. First crafted to reveal the hope of a loving God, the 23rd Psalm continues to provide comfort to souls who “walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” The chart offers a parallel reading of the two texts, while the analysis that follows contrasts the rhetorical aims of the two texts:

Table 2: Comparison of Psalm 23 and a Thinspiration Prayer. This chart provides a parallel reading of the King James’ version of Psalm 23 with a motivational prayer posted in the “Thinspiration” environment of Ana’s Underground Grotto.

Thinspiration Prayer ⁴⁴	Psalm 23
<p>Strict is my diet. I must not want. It maketh me to lie down at night hungry. It leadeth me past the confectioners. It trieth my willpower. It leadeth me in the paths of alteration for my figure’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the aisles of the pastry department, I will buy no sweet rolls for they are fattening. The cakes and the pies, they tempt me. Before me is a table set with green beans and lettuce. I filleth my stomach with liquids My day’s quota runneth over. Surely calorie and weight charts will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the fear of the scales forever.</p>	<p>The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name' sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.</p>

In this frame, the Lord of an *ana* is her “diet” to which she must sacrifice everything. Her “paths of righteousness” are “paths of alternation” designed to improve her image. As a result, the prayer establishes food—confectioners, sweet rolls, cakes and pies—as unattainable comfort (“still waters”), “evil,” temptation, and “mine enemies.” Likewise, it recasts the “valley of the shadow of death” as “the pastry department.” For an *ana*, food is sinful, something to be parceled out conscientiously and suspiciously.

Despite the organizational parallels between *Psalm 23* and this Thinspiration prayer, their rhetorical aims differ considerably. *Psalm 23* usually yields comfort in moments of fear, uncertainty and loss. It reinforces God’s faithfulness to humans and entreats our trust.

The Thinspiration prayer, in contrast, reinforces fear, sacrifice and despair. The writer is enslaved to her god—the diet—through an infinite series of “calorie and weight charts.” No banquet awaits this writer in Heaven; her only reward is at the scales, a constant source of anxiety rather than comfort.

The Ten Commandments

While the Nicene Creed and *Psalms* 23 are widely recognized and distributed aspects of the Christian faith to which pro-ana sites allude, they are typically confined to specific faith spaces attended by specific populations. In comparison, the Ten Commandments have been posted in schools and parodied in the “Top Ten Lists” of popular media; many people have access to this Christian element even if they do not understand or choose not to practice a Christian faith. As a result, pro-ana sites’ appropriation of the Commandments deserves careful interpretation.

The Ten Commandments are the foundation of the Jewish and Christian faiths; they are the laws of God given to the Israelites as inspiration for leading a holier life. In ancient times, deviance from these laws required a blood sacrifice, a pure bodily offering aligned with the depravity of the sinner, as reconciliation. In modern times, such sacrifices are symbolic—the Jewish custom of atonement for sins occurs during the high holy days of Yom Kippur while Christians typically attend confession or seek private absolution from God. Likewise, these Pro-Anorexic Commandments promote the tenants of their faith. The chart that follows offers a parallel reading of both texts as a foundation for later analysis:

Table 3: Commandment Comparison. This chart captures the way in which “Thinspiration” reframes The 10 Commandments in an effort to bring slipping and deviant *anas* and *mias* back into alignment with tenets of the pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia doctrines.

Pro-Anorexic Commandments ⁴⁵	The 10 Commandments ⁴⁶
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you aren't thin, you aren't attractive. 2. Being thin is more important than being healthy. 3. You must buy clothes, cut your hair, take laxatives, starve yourself, do anything to make yourself look thinner. 4. Thou shall not eat without feeling guilty. 5. Thou shall not eat fattening foods without punishing oneself afterwards. 6. Thou shall count calories and restrict intake accordingly. 7. What the scale says is the most important thing. 8. Losing weight is good/gaining weight is bad. 9. You can NEVER be too thin. 10. Being thin and not eating are signs of true will power and success. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'You shall have no other gods before Me.' 2. 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image--any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.' 3. 'You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.' 4. 'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.' 5. 'Honor your father and your mother.' 6. 'You shall not murder.' 7. 'You shall not commit adultery.' 8. 'You shall not steal.' 9. 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.' 10. 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's.'

Keeping holy and being righteous in this dogma require self-control, food sacrifice and complete service to one's image. Failure to comply obliges "punishing oneself afterwards" through literal, bodily acts of starvation and destruction in order to achieve reconciliation. The goal is to create a "carved image" signifying "success" at the scales—the litmus test of one's accomplishments. The standards to which *anas* must adhere are evident. After a novice *ana* has affirmed her faith (Nicene Creed), accepted responsibility for her dietary restrictions (*Psalms* 23) and subjected herself to the Pro-Anorexic Commandments, she has been reborn an *ana* who has self-control and who can,

Thank God I have this ugly fat body for which to focus on and hate and spend all my time trying to fix, change, lessen. Thank God for exercise machines, and diet pills. Thank God for weightloss. Thank God I can try and fix the outside because I just know that the inside is beyond repair⁴⁷ (Ana's Underground Grotto).

In her quest to empty herself, this *ana* remains deficient inside. She cannot silence her internal disquiet and may, at some point, "raise basic life questions: Who am I? Why am I here?...How can I stop the pain?...Is this all there is?" (Gunn, 2000, p. 2).

Participant Responses

Using Christianity as *ana-and-mia* inspiration immediately disarmed the participants in this study and appeared to make the horrific content more palatable. How can something faith-oriented and common to the experience of many young women raised with Christian beliefs be so insidious, so dangerous? Despite the sugarcoating of faith and a fit image, *ana-and-mia* sites promote a hopeless, deadly "lifestyle" young women voraciously consume in their quest for perfection. Though chapter five closely analyzes participant responses

regarding body image, it is useful to insert comments here directly related to anorexia and bulimia and to participant reading of these texts.

Every young woman in the study struggled to gain or to maintain control over weight, but two of the four women expressed doubt and concerns about their weight in relation to anorexia. As such, responses to the above texts varied widely; Tina and Marilyn empathized (but were troubled) by the *ana-and-mia* site text while Donna and Scarlett dismissed the creed, prayer, and commandments as “insane.” For the purpose of connecting responses to the literature review, I use Tina’s discourse as an example.

Tina’s struggle to be “normal”

As chapter five details, issues of weight dominate Tina’s discourse. However, when first confronted with these texts Tina focused on her mother’s battle to maintain a healthy weight rather than on her own:

A lot of this reminds me of my mom. I told you last time that she would get . . . I didn’t know for sure, but she was, um. Third grade is really the main time that I remember. She always taught aerobics, so she was always healthy, um, but she never really ate healthy during that time. Um, she was very, very skinny. I have pictures of her, and she was . . . I mean, you can see her bones, and, um, it’s never been confirmed that she did or didn’t have anorexia, because I don’t really talk about it.

When I probed to see why Tina did not talk about it previously but was willing to talk about it now, she blamed her youth and lack of understanding about the risks involved:

I don’t, you know, I was young then, so I didn’t. That was during the time when I wasn’t aware of things. Um, but just kind of looking back at pictures,

remembering how she, she never really ate much at home. She ate one meal a day, and it was lunch, and it was usually a salad at work. Um, we never ate breakfast. Neither one of us were big breakfast eaters. Um, and she would always make dinner for me, but she never really ate anything. If she did, it was very little. Um, we always had Diet Pepsi in our refrigerator. That's pretty much all she ever drank.

Tina's mother, evidently, ate salads and drank Diet Pepsi; not exactly the healthiest model for eating habits. As we discussed those habits in relation to the *ana-and-mia* site text, Tina describes the diet culture through which she formulated her perceptions of body image and thoughts about food.

The whole thing, really, just. I mean, I don't know that she really [was anorexic]. I don't even know that she really knew if she was [anorexic]. I think that she just thought that she was bigger than she should be, and that fasting, not eating, was the quickest way to solve the problem She was always on a diet. She was on a constant diet. She never ate fatty foods.

By the fourth interview, Tina shared more readily her concerns about weight. Though she is "eating normally" and is back to her "normal everyday habits," she remains fearful about why she has not "been able to get back to normal" and continues to lose weight:

I'm back to eating normally; I don't throw up anymore. And I'm back to what I felt like was normal. I'm not—I didn't have big eating habits before I was sick. It's not like I'm—I mean I feel like I'm back to my normal everyday habits, what I was before. And it's kind of scary that I haven't been able to get back to normal. I mean I've even lost more weight. That's five more

pounds I've lost. When you get to 100 pounds, five more pounds can be a lot.

It's a little scary.

When I asked her about her on-going conversations with her doctors, she grew somewhat defensive and revealed a previously hidden fear of being anorexic:

I mean they tell me that nothing is wrong with me. All of my blood work came back fine and they tell me there's nothing wrong. But it's—it makes me think, sometimes, you know, people joke about me being anorexic and all that. And I know that I'm not; I don't think I am. But perfect I'm not. I don't think I'm fat anymore. I don't starve myself or anything like that but I don't know, it's just a scary thought. Because I know what it can do, what anorexia can do.

Applying Bell's (1999) framework to this discourse reveals her Discourse about anorexics—they think they are fat and they starve themselves. With this in mind, I asked Tina to tell me why she thinks people joke about her being anorexic:

my mom asked me . . . this weekend if I still had a period. Because I've gotten so small. I mean there's nothing to me anymore, no muscle, no nothing! Just skin. And I still do have periods, [t]hey are light, very light.

But I still have them. I mean it's scary, weight is a scary thing.

While the conversation revealed no jokes, it did signal Tina's very real concerns about appearing and functioning like a normal woman. I contend that the media produced and reproduces the "normal" appearance she desired.

Summary: Media and Manipulation

How are the subjectivities, dreams, desires, and needs of students forged by the media, by leisure activities, by institutions such as the family, and by cultural forms such as rock 'n' rock music videos? (McLaren, 1995, p. 77)

Having responded to some of McLaren's inquiries regarding media's impact on student identity formation, one might ask, "So what does this have to do with curriculum theory?" Our classrooms are full of young women who may be pro-Ana/pro-Mia, desensitized to overtly sexual commentary and behavior or unrealistic about their personal and financial lifestyle. These are the fragile borders within which young women fashion themselves; they represent the often-masked tension in our classrooms. Disregarding media in favor of more traditional research on the aims and structure of education seems unwise in a media age marked by depersonalized, overpopulated, accountable classes. As a result, educators need to interrogate the power of media culture in our classrooms and to articulate alternate ideals to model in order to disrupt media's hold and to provide a more-informed space in which to do identity work (Kellner, 2003).

Given media culture's squeeze on young women's minds, desires and bodies, a need exists for more research on the "cultural forms" that forge our students' identities. It is to another of these cultural forms that my analysis now shifts—fairy tales. Likely introduced at home prior to experiences at school, fairy tales contribute to young women's identity work in significant and troubling ways which do not always produce a happily ever after.

Fairy Tale Fantasies

[F]airy tales are . . . produced and consumed to accomplish a variety of social functions in multiple contexts (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 3)

Often elevated and retold from childhood, leading scholars in this field agree that fairy tales play a privileged role in constructing childhood perceptions of *self* (Bacchilega, 1997; Bottingheimer, 1986; Doll, 2000; Giroux, 1997; Rowe, 1979; Seifert, 1986; Stone, 1985; Warner, 1994; Zipes, 1983). Arguably “one of the deepest and most enduring childhood impressions” (Rohrich, 1986, p. 1), fairy tales tend to reflect thoroughly embedded cultural norms and values designed to reinforce societal expectations.⁴⁸ Their retelling and reinforcement by parents underscores childhood obligation to such values, especially among young women. This is due, in part, to the spotlight under which the most widely distributed tales place female characters. It is to the qualities of those female characters I now turn.

Warner: On the Importance of Being Blonde

One interesting aspect of fairy tales is the role blondness plays in constructing the ideal fairy tale female. Constructing beauty reminiscent of Britney, Warner notes that, “The bloneness of the fairytale beauty is one of the most potent and recurrent symbols within the genre” (1994, p. xxv). Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty’s notoriously “long golden hair,” for example, are traditional symbols of virtue⁴⁹ and contemporary symbols of beauty (p. 204).

Key to this understanding is Warner’s etymological work on the term *blonde*:

“The etymology of the word ‘blond(e)’ is not known for certain, though it appears related to *blandus*, Latin for charming...with later influence from Medieval Latin *blundus* and Old German *blund*, both meaning yellow....It...fades from view in English until the seventeenth century, when it was almost exclusively applied in the feminine, ‘blonde’; it still suggested sweetness, charm, youthfulness” (p. 363).

She next connects beauty and “fairness” to fairies and spells, noting the ability of hair to captivate, to cause desire. A woman’s fairness, then, “connoted all that was pure, good, clean” (p. 364) and, therefore, worth acquiring. In these ways, blondness has long been associated with innocence, virginity, desirability, and goodness, but its “most enduring associations are with beauty” (p. 367).

If “[t]he fairytale heroine’s riches, her goodness, and her fertility...are symbolized by her hair” (p. 378), why then is Snow White’s hair “ebony”? The tale tells us Snow-White is “A thousand times fairer,”⁵⁰ than the Queen, but her construction lacks an essential element of fairness—blonde hair color. Warner addresses this concern indicating that, “Among the heroines of fairy tale only Snow White is dark, because her story specifically opens with her mother’s wish, when she pricks her finger, looking out at the snow” (p. 365). The mother’s wish for “a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as this frame” supersedes the tradition—motherhood trumps beauty in patriarchy. Yet suffering abounds for fairy tale heroine:

Remanded to the hearth, cursed by 100 years of sleep, or cast into a death-like trance by a poisoned apple, heroines suffer beneath onslaughts of maternal fear and vengeance (Rowe, 1979, p. 241).

Beautiful maidens and mothers play significant roles in fairy tales that offer models for identity formation. But what these tales require of young women in terms of appropriate action and what they teach young women in terms of appearance and behavior is worthy of investigation. Therefore, my focus on the impact of fairy tales on young women’s identity formation is three-fold: 1) how fairy tales aid female gender construction, 2) how fairy tales train obedience to patriarchal values, and 3) how fairy tales train a fear of sexuality. And,

while I believe “fairy tales function to maintain traditional gender constructions and differences” (Zipes, 2000, p. 20), I am not interested in using this focus to add to the varied negative critiques or to the historically situated analyses of fairy tales. In limiting my analysis of these aspects to three of the most widely circulated tales⁵¹—*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*—my goal is to analyze how these fairy tale icons function as “cultural forms” which alter young women’s “dreams, desires, and needs” (McLaren, 1995, p. 77).

Bacchilega, Bottingheimer, Rowe, & Stone: Female Gender Construction

Fairy tales are the bedtime stories of the collective consciousness The fact that most fairy tales embody elements associated with the archetypal ‘feminine’ points to the possibility that they capitulate a view of reality that is rooted in the determinism of sex roles (Kohlenschlag, 1998, p. 3-4).

Scholars have written widely on the ways in which fairy tales reinforce traditional notions of femininity. Similar to the good girl in culture (Doll, 2000), fairy tale heroines receive rewards when they adhere to the passive, pretty roles (Gauntlett, 2002; Rowe, 1979; Stone, 1985 & 1986) femininity prescribed. Gauntlett (2002) argues that there is no “single, straightforward psychological process through which gender identities are formed; instead, there is a complex interaction of thoughts, evaluations, negotiations, emotions and reactions” (p. 18) to which individuals must respond in an on-going process of creation and recreation. One of the first responses to gendered identity forced upon young women is their relationship to fairy tales and to the fairy tale princesses in them.

The industriousness, sacrifice and dependence (Rowe, 1979; Zipes, 1983) of these fairy tale heroines signify their virtue and make them attractive upon the inevitable

appearance of Prince Charming. The moral of these fairy tales—being a good girl provides endless happiness. Cinderella, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty learned these lessons well as they silently, humbly (Tatar, 1986) waited for their lives to begin (Bottingheimer, 1986; Seifert, 1986) in marriage.

Their existence prior to marriage is framed by a “process of ‘girling’...never to be fully completed because ‘femininity’ is ‘the forcible citation of a norm’ and not a pre-existing reality” (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 22). As such, fairy tale femininity assumes, primarily, two roles—the humble(d) lady-in-waiting and the honored wife. In both roles, women “exist for others...in self-forgetfulness, service and sacrifice, in nurturing rather than initiating behaviors” (Kohlbenschlag, 1988, p. 12). Prior to “the expected” *other*’s arrival, “who will make her life meaningful and fulfilled” (p. 12), heroines wait in “self-redemptive silence” (Bottingheimer, 1986, p. 122). Through this process of ‘girling’ an “idealized perfect woman” forms (Stone, 1985, p. 139) with classic qualities—beauty, patience, submissiveness, charm, repose, productivity and reproductive potential.

While feminists argue these gender roles are “narrow and damaging” (Stone, 1986, p. 229) to young women, I view them as an opportunity for reflexivity and discourse. Women faced with traditional gender constructions need not limit themselves to these good girl/bad girl masks, but they must be aware of them and of their performances of them. Though each fairy tale clearly defines women through performative gender norms (Butler, 1999; Sedgwick, 1990), contemporary females—mothers and daughters—are empowered to make choices that reflect their dreams and desires through destabilizing the prescribed gender identity (Butler, 1999) and through challenging existing notions of the good girl in culture (Zipes, 2000).

For example, Scarlett recalls that she remembers “seeing the movies of Snow White and Cinderella, the classic fairy tale stories, but [she] couldn’t remember really reading those books” when she was a little girl. What she took from these experiences is the impression that all fairy tale princesses are

portrayed as very fair, um, you always hear about them having fair skin; they never say “the olive-skinned,” you know, that doesn’t happen. They didn’t always have blonde, because Snow White, obviously, had dark hair. But they always had red lips.

For Scarlett the ideal of feminine beauty is fair skinned and blonde with red lips. It is also the kind of life where a woman “just kind of waited for [her] husband [b]ecause men really did everything for women at that point.” Scarlett’s mother, however, would not allow these prescribed gender roles to cultivate the same kind of behavior in her daughter. Instead, she “was just real adamant that I could do whatever I wanted to do, and I didn’t have to wait for my husband, I didn’t have to sit at home and have kids, and I didn’t have to clean the house if I didn’t want to.” Despite her own upbringing, Scarlett indicated that she thinks “a lot of little girls look at that [fairy tales] and think that that’s the ideal that they have to be, that they have to be the perfect little girl who needs her man to help her.”

Mueller, Rowe, & Zipes: Obedience to Patriarchal Values

Virtue is rewarded everywhere, and vice is always punished (Zipes citing Perrault, 1983, p. 16)

Orphaned, abandoned or living in secret exile, Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty, schooled through their gender constructions, must participate in patriarchal culture because their “happiness depends on conformity to [its] rule” (Zipes, 1983, p. 57). After all,

they had no right to challenge their roles as idealized women. However, there are other fairy tale females who fall short of this standard because they fail to conform (Zipes, 1983); the tales cast such women as evil, using their treatment as deterrent for those thinking about going astray. These wicked women—mothers, stepmothers and stepsiblings gone array—endure horrific punishments for their transgressions (Mueller, 1986) against good-girl heroines. Such punishments, exacted typically during or immediately before/after the heroine-princess's wedding in the original tales, operate as part entertainment and part wedding gift.

For crimes of “witchcraft and solicited homicide,” (Mueller, 1986, p. 220-221) the Queen in *Snow White* must dance “herself to death” in “red hot shoes” at Snow White's wedding. For “impersonation and involuntary servitude” (Mueller, 1986, p. 220-221), Cinderella's stepsisters are blinded by pigeons that “pecked out their eyes.”⁵² For intended cannibalism in *Sleeping Beauty*, the Prince's evil mother “threw herself head foremost into the tub, and was instantly devoured by the ugly creatures she had ordered to be thrown into it for others.”⁵³ The choice is clear to readers—conform to patriarchal norms or suffer.

Conformity, then, is the key to the kingdom. All of the women in these tales must, in the end, submit themselves to patriarchal rule—as a wife in life or as an example in death—they are compelled to do so (Rowe, 1979). What is interesting is that these same tales have ancient roots in matriarchal stories that “underwent successive stages of ‘patriarchalization’” wherein “the goddess became a witch, evil fairy, or stepmother; [and] the active, young princess was changed into an active hero” (Zipes, 1983, p. 7). These transformations suggest that women who fail “the obedience test” (p. 25) are punished—stripped of their power, agency and matrilineal connection.

For instance, Marilyn's mother "is real big on Disney movies" and they "have every Disney movie that's ever been made." Throughout our conversations, Marilyn revealed how her mother constructed her as a princess, valued thinness and emphasized beauty by enrolling her in "beauty pageants and the cheerleading and stuff from the age of walking." She also expressed how the ideas presented affected her and how she wished she were Sleeping Beauty "because the prince rides up on the big white horse and carries her away, happily ever after." In her explanation, Marilyn reveals the extent to which she adheres to gender identities prescribed in these tales and the way in which her actions are often contradictory:

I am tired of being in a relationship where it's all about making him happy. Just for once I want a big prince to come up on a big white horse and just carry me away. Live happily ever after. I don't know 'cause it's kind of contradictory, because what I want [is] stress free. I don't understand why, I mean, I don't understand why you're in a relationship if all you do is argue and fight. There's nothing happy about that, right?

Later in the interview Marilyn explains how she "just never really got into" traditional gender roles and how the "stereotyped and institutionalized fragments of these narratives" (Bacchilega, 1997, p. 2) and required obedience to patriarchal values "really make [her] ill."

The moral: heroines who obey through self-control, patience, silence, inactivity, virginity, loyalty, domestication, modesty and humility (Zipes, 1983) enjoy an *enchanted* (Rowe, 1979) marriage and endless happiness as rewards. In doing so, "fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate" (Rowe, 1979, p. 237). Disenfranchised through their relegation to domestic occupations and motherhood, fairy tales serve as "powerful transmitters of

romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations deemed appropriate to our ‘real’ sexual functions within a patriarchy” (Rowe, 1979, p. 239). Sexuality outside patriarchal norms had to be tamed through fear.

Bacchilega, Rowe & Stone: Fear of Sexuality

Fairy tales rely on “privilege and repression,” “threats and rewards”

(Bacchilega, 1997, p. 6)

In *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* each heroine awakes to a new life.

This awakening is sometimes literal—as in *Sleeping Beauty*’s rise from 100 years of slumber and *Snow White*’s return from the jaws of death—and sometimes figurative—as in *Cinderella*’s release from service—but their awakening is always characterized by marriage. To that end, scholars typically parallel these storyline awakenings with the heroine’s sexual awakening (Rowe, 1979, 1986; Stone, 1985, 1986) indicating that the tales “implicitly yoke sexual awakening and surrender to the prince with social elevation and materialistic gain” (Rowe, 1979, p. 246). Fearful of remaining in their current cultural role, these fairy tale figures comply with patriarchal standards of marriage and surrender.

In many instances, the heroine’s awakening is marked by a kiss—the only sexual act evident in the tales⁵⁴ (excluding all references to motherhood, which, naturally, imply intercourse fit within patriarchal standards but never acknowledge it). *Sleeping Beauty*⁵⁵ is a shining example of this argument. Surrounded by the disquieting silence of the comatose kingdom the Prince,

came to the old tower where Brier-Rose was lying asleep. The prince was so amazed at her beauty that he bent over and kissed her. At that moment she awoke, and with her the king and the queen, and all the attendants, and the

horses and the dogs, and the pigeons on the roof, and the flies on the walls.

The fire stood up and flickered, and then finished cooking the food. The roast sizzled away. The cook boxed the kitchen boy's ears. And the maid finished plucking the chicken. Then the prince and Brier-Rose got married, and they lived long and happily until they died.

Again, it is only “*Because* the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and *because* she submits to patriarchal needs, [that] she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage.” (Rowe, 1979, p. 246). Likewise, Perrault’s version signals Sleeping Beauty’s matchless patience:

Many a girl has waited long
For a husband brave or strong;
But I'm sure I never met
Any sort of woman yet
Who could wait a hundred years,
Free from fretting, free from fears.

In both cases, the heroine is only worthy of the kiss once she has proven herself a good woman. Scarlett shared her feelings about the importance of kissing in fairy tales:

I know that for Snow White and Sleeping Beauty, it was the kiss that saved them. Snow White didn’t wake up until her prince kissed her; and neither did Sleeping Beauty. Well, Snow White was actually dead until her prince kissed her, and Sleeping Beauty had been asleep for a long time. Cinderella, I just think, I remember the kiss at the end of the movie where they got married, and

I'm pretty sure that there was probably more before that, when she and the prince first met.

In each case, the kiss marked a pivotal moment in the tale.

The penalty for not being worthy of the kiss or for not being gracious and alluring upon the Prince's arrival (Perrault's version) and, therefore, worthy of the Prince is a lifetime sleep. Kohlbenschlag (1988) argues that "At the psychological level, the tale [*Sleeping Beauty*] is a recognizable parable of the onset of puberty and the confrontation with sexuality....The story serves as a warning that failure to relate positively to 'the other' may lead to a comatose existence in which the entire world becomes dead to the person" (p. 5). Young women confronted with this tale surely choose salvation over sleep.

Citing Marcia Lieberman's work, Stone (1985) establishes the importance of fairy tales to female sexual-identity formation:

'Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the nature of the reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales. These stories have been made the repositories of the dramas, hopes and fantasies of generations of girls (1972, p. 385).'

This is precisely my interest in this research. The way in which young women perform assigned gender roles, behave in social situations and construct their futures within and against popular fairy tale figures informs this study and is a focal point of conversation in chapters four, five, and six. However, there are other, more pervasive, versions of *Snow*

White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty to consider than Perrault and the Brothers Grimm—Disney provides the modern script for female fantasies.

von Franz & Giroux: Disneyfication

Unfortunately, the women of this study did not know the versions of *Snow White, Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* as I have referenced them; they knew Disney's. Despite this, Zipes notes the "direct line from the Perrault fairy tale of court society to the Walt Disney cinematic fairy tale of the cultural industry" (1983, p. 17). Using Marie-Louise von Franz's (1996) interpretation of the fairy tale as "a relatively closed system compounding one essential psychological meaning, which is expressed in a series of symbolic pictures and events and is discovered in these," (p. 2) I analyze the ways in which Disneyfied tales differ from the originals. First, however, I turn to Giroux's research on Disney as a legitimate acculturating agent.

Giroux (1997) argues that Disney films appear to inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals as do the more traditional sites of learning such as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family (p. 53).

As such, I contend that Disney's films aid female gender construction, train obedience to patriarchal values, and establish an early fear of sexuality to the same extent as the traditional fairy tales texts reviewed. In the next sections, I analyze the extent to which the Disney versions of *Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella* confine women to culturally prescribed roles. Likewise, in chapter six, I inspect the

way in which Disney shapes participant attitudes toward relationships through “sanitized notions of identity, culture, and history” (p. 56).

Snow White

Explicitly “adapted from the Grimms’ version” (DVD opening credits), Disney’s *Snow White* draws on a combination of the 1810, 1812 and 1819 editions of the text. By fusing the hunter’s murderous task (1812) and the dwarfs’ unconditional pity (1810) with the stepmother’s⁵⁶ unceasing jealousy (1819), Disney crafted the tale we know and fear (Zipes, 1983). Despite due diligence to multiple versions, prominent differences abound. These include the naming of the seven dwarfs (they remain nameless in the originals), one method of poisoning—the apple—as opposed to multiple methods (the bodice laces and the poisoned comb), and the famous shift in persecutor from mother to stepmother.

However, the crucial adaptation occurs at the end. Instead of the macabre death-by-dancing ending provided by Grimm and obediently accepted by the Queen, Disney’s dwarfs chase the evil Queen-turned-peasant-peddler to the top of a cliff in a violent rainstorm. Trapped, the evil Queen tries to avert her fate by manipulating a huge boulder. As if divinely intended, lightning strikes, breaking her portion off the cliff and plunging her to her fate as vultures circle in anticipation. While both stories punish the evil Queen, the Grimms’ Queen, out of jealousy, takes responsibility by attending the wedding; there is no mention of flight or avoidance, only complicity. Disney, on the other hand, provides its modern Queen with survival interests more common to current gender roles while at the same time reinforcing patriarchal punishment for bad women and rewards for those who believe “someday [their] prince will come.”⁵⁷

Sleeping Beauty⁵⁸

Most notable are the differences between the Grimms' text, Little Brier-Rose, and Disney. Changes in the number of fairies (from 13 to 4)⁵⁹, the curse of sleep (from 100 years to 1-2 days), the manner in which the prince overcomes the obstacle (hedge of thorns parts or hedge of thorns must be destroyed by the prince's Sword of Truth), and the Prince's redemption of the girl (from a kiss to slaying the dragon) are, for convenience and dramatic impact, complicated by Disney. However, Disney's restylized relationship between Princess Aurora and Prince Phillip is of most interest.

In the original tale, the prince accepts the challenge of freeing the princess through a chance encounter with an old man:

Then one day a prince was traveling through the land. An old man told him about the belief that there was a castle behind the thorn hedge, with a wonderfully beautiful princess asleep inside with all of her attendants. His grandfather had told him that many princes had tried to penetrate the hedge, but that they had gotten stuck in the thorns and had been pricked to death. "I'm not afraid of that," said the prince. "I shall penetrate the hedge and free the beautiful Brier-Rose."

He went forth, but when he came to the thorn hedge, it turned into flowers....Finally he came to the old tower where Brier-Rose was lying asleep. The prince was so amazed at her beauty that he bent over and kissed her. At that moment she awoke

He merely welcomes his fate, does his duty (resuscitates the princess with a redemptive kiss) and receives his reward (a good wife). That he rescues this princess-wife a second time from

his evil mother's cannibalistic desires is entirely omitted from most young women's memories, but its double-rescue fits the traditional pattern intended (Jones, 1986).

Disney's, however, contaminates the original storyline and, I would argue, provides the more widely accepted version of this tale. Here, the prince and princess, cast as an enchanting siren, share a chance meeting while walking in the woods prior to her intended slumber. With love-at-first-sight romantic appeal, they dance in Disney's magical dreamland and fall in love. As a result, the prince is willed rather than fated to rescue his beloved from her spell; his choice is conscious not circumstantial, therefore requiring significant effort on his part. Captivated by the adventure of the prince's escape from captivity, dismantling the thorns and slaying the dragon, Disney encourages female viewers to wait for true love's first kiss.

Cinderella⁶⁰

Perhaps the best known of these three tales, *Cinderella* exists in more than 345 versions (Zipes, 1983). Disney's version is, sadly but quite possibly, the best known. Mixing elements of Perrault's classic story,⁶¹ emphasizing the glass slipper and the midnight prohibition, with the magic of Disney's talking characters, Gus and Jaq, and singing godmothers leaves most viewers humming *bibbidi bobbidi boo* for the rest of the day.

Though Disney does not take as many liberties with this version of story as with *Snow White* or *Sleeping Beauty*, there is one key difference—Disney's version only contains one ball. It is Perrault's second ball Disney seems to parallel most closely,

“Cinderella...dressed even more magnificently than before. The king's son was always by her, and never ceased his compliments and kind speeches to her. All this was so far from being tiresome to her, and, indeed, she quite

forgot what her godmother had told her. She thought that it was no later than eleven when she counted the clock striking twelve. She jumped up and fled, as nimble as a deer. The prince followed, but could not overtake her. She left behind one of her glass slippers, which the prince picked up most carefully.” While in Perrault the connection established at the first ball must be confirmed in a second encounter, the magical time-lapse of Disney requires one enchanted moment to achieve the dream and the wish their hearts make.

Summary: Fairy Tales

If one agrees that childhood is a critically impressionable time of life, especially in terms of forming sexual identity, and if popular fairy tales consistently present an image of heroines that emphasize their beauty, patience, and passivity, then the potential impact of such tales cannot be ignored (Stone, 1985, p.138).

Because fairy tales represent “an *energetic process of transformation* with the Self” (von Franz, 1996, p. 136), they are an excellent resource in investigations of female identity and are, therefore, important to my research. In addition to considerations of the effects of gender construction, obedience to patriarchal values and fear of sexuality in young women, I am also interested in the contemporary purposes these stepchild stories (*Snow White*⁶² and *Cinderella*) might serve in culture. Arguably, “the stepmother embodies the adolescent’s awesome intimations of female rivalry, predatory sexuality, and constrictive authority” (Rowe, 1979, p. 242); the fairy tales “offer advice and solutions for the most varied difficulties and situations in life” (Seifert, 1986, p. vi); and so many young women today live in step-households. Adding questions, then, regarding what advice these stories offer young

women struggling to forge their identity in multiple households and into the ways in which young women identify as stepsiblings inform my dissertation.

Summary: Review of Literature

In this chapter, I focused on the ways in which media culture theory intersects with identity formation and with educational research. In particular, I focused on the dialectic between starvation and consumption in media culture theory as it relates to interview themes. This chapter also offered an in-depth analysis of the fairy tales that informed Donna, Scarlett, Marilyn, and Tina's perceptions of what it means to be/perform female (Butler, 1990), of the construction of and the role of women in relationships, and of the importance of Walt Disney in imprinting these images on the minds of young women. These perceptions are considered further in chapters four and six.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three provides the methodological framework for this study, discourse analysis, and introduces key terms. Such terms include: discourse, Discourse, situated identity, cultural model, and context. In addition, chapter three formally introduces the four women involved of this study, conveys the way in which interviews and the focus group were conducted by providing sample questions, and provides insight into data collection and analysis.

In the Sandbox

Doing identity work is a bit like crafting and then playing in a sandbox. To design the sandbox I must make several preliminary decisions involving location and material. Such decisions direct both the form and function of my sandbox; however, once constructed, playing imitates a similar pattern.

If I want to create a hideaway for my identity work, then I may select a shady, out-of-view nook in which to build my secret play land. This sandbox provides escape and security separate and apart from the rest of my lived experiences. As such, I may be more likely to frame it from natural, semi-permanent materials (e.g. wood) in a peaceful environment with a view of the playground to afford myself the luxury of playful meditation despite my internal disquiet over the work ahead. Upon completion of my sandbox, I hesitate. Dare I play (i.e. conduct identity work) in my sandbox? Mustering my courage, I decide that I will, at least, inspect my work. The frame is perfect, and I find that I've poured just the right amount of unblemished sand inside. I applaud my accomplishment while kneeling in this newfound solitude and prepare to work.

On the contrary, I may be more social at heart and may prefer to think about my identity with the context of my community or my culture. In this case, I am more likely to opt for prime real estate. In search of the see-and-be-seen mecca, I spend my afternoons scrutinizing others at play before settling on a spot midway between the swings and the jungle gym, partially shaded by a large oak. PVC provides an inexpensive, easy-to-move, hastily thrown together frame. Others watch as I toss bags of play sand into my box; I'm so excited that I spill sand outside the frame. I shrug off the lost sand, anticipating the thrill of my work.

Once built, I just sit barefoot in my sandbox at first, repetitively picking up sand and allowing it to flow through my fingers. This comforts me as I sift through old memories. With more confidence, I finger each visible grain taking a moment to weigh its import and ask, "What does this have to do with who I am?" My pace quickens. I hollow the sand with my hands in an attempt to find the center. It's futile; the sand keeps filling in the last excavation as if against my work.

Completely frustrated, I no longer want to play in my sandbox. Glancing up at the swings, I take leave, brushing the messy sand off my hands, feet, and clothes. I mount a swing and delight in sailing through the wind's resistance. From the swing's crest, I can see my sandbox. It looks small and orderly from this vantage point, more submissive to my will. Hurling myself from the swing, I rush to the toy box with an idea—get a shovel.

Armed, I charge the barrier-frame, leaping back into the sandbox. I shovel one section at a time, watching the pink round of the shovelhead cut into the pale sand. For a moment, my work appears successful. Then, as if on cue, sand floods the depressed areas,

leaving a dimpled reminder of my work. Furious and exhausted, I slam the shovel into the sand, handle up, in search of a more effective means to reaching the center.

After patient examination of the playground landscape, I spy a bucket on the far edge of the playground. It is a small, white round suitable for temporarily displacing sand while I search. With less urgency, I shuffle past the jungle gym to retrieve it. It feels flimsy, but I bring it back to the box anyway; I'm intent on uncovering more than simple memories. I fill the bucket and am careful to take its sand to the far corner of the sandbox before dumping it. Bucket by bucket, I proceed, trying to gauge how much more sand remains. Wiping my brow, I look at the sand mountain behind me. In its shadow, I contemplate my strategy.

All this time I've been thinking about my identity by moving the sand around in my box in an attempt to find a center. What would happen if I started looking at how small segments of sand combine to form chunks? Moreover, what if I interrogated in what way removing sand—temporarily or permanently—affected the box itself? Instead of just looking for some product (i.e. my identity), what would happen if I also looked at the process (i.e. my becoming)? In this way, I might find a way to decode the unpredictable shifts that transform my sand (e.g. rain, intrusions by playmates, loss of sand beyond the frame) rather than merely describing only that sand which currently resides in my self-constructed box.

Transgressing Boundaries & Marking Place

In the mythical quest for our “one true self” (Gunn, 2000, p. 7), we tend to disregard the process and context for our becoming. Instead of distinguishing patterns of what we say from what we do (Labov, 1972) or the intersection between what we say and what we do within the lens of our lived experience, many individuals conceive their identity within the narrow frame of the present. In an attempt to move beyond the borders of this present

identity frame and to inspect, from internal and external vantage points, the multiple identities participants presented in this study, I employ discourse analysis (Coulthard, 1985 & 1992; Crusius, 1989; Gee, 1999; Foucault, 1978; Labov, 1972; Mills 1992 & 1997; Moffett, 1968; Sinclair, 1992; Tsui, 1992) as my primary tool of inquiry.

As “[d]ifferent approaches often fit different issues and questions better or worse than others” (Gee, 1999, p. 4-5), my research depends most on Gee’s (1999) definition of and methods for discourse analysis. Like Gee, my research considers “how the details of language get recruited, ‘on site,’ to ‘pull off’ specific...social identities” (1999, p. 1) by participants who, when they speak or write, “take a particular perspective on what the ‘world’ is like” (p. 2). As a result, many of my interview questions seek participant perspective on the boundaries between “what is ‘normal’ and not; what is ‘acceptable’ and not; what is ‘right’ and not; what is ‘real’ and not; what is the ‘way things are’ and not; what is the ‘way things ought to be’ and not; what is ‘possible’ and not; what ‘people like us’ or ‘people like them’ do and don’t do” (Gee, 1999, p. 2).

Defining d/Discourse

Gee’s (1999) opening distinction between “discourse” and “Discourse” is also important to this investigation and provides the lens for studying “discourse in Discourses” (p. 7) I seek. By setting apart the language we use in situation (discourse) from the “non-language stuff” used “to enact specific identities” (Discourse), Gee (1999) reveals the way in which individuals “pull off being an X doing Y” (p. 7). Through these practices, individuals are able to recognize themselves “and others as meaning and meaningful in certain ways” (Gee, 1997, p. 7). Equipped with these definitions, my study excavates the history of four

participants' key words and phrases within specific Discourses (e.g. religion, education) to illuminate the multiple identities of those participants.

Why Discourse Analysis?

Though discourse analysis provides a tool kit for interrogating language and non-language stuff, it also “helps to explain how and why language works the way it does when put into action” and contributes “to important issues and problems” (Gee, 1999, p. 8) in education that interest me. One major source of interest is the way in which young women move to separate their inner, private world from their outer, public world (Doll, 2000) in an effort to resonate their voices to the larger voices of culture (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000). To gain these insights, my research turns toward two specific analytical tools—situated identities and cultural models (Gee, 1999).

Situated Identities

To understand the multiple identities participants assumed “in different practices and contexts” (Gee, 1999, p. 39) throughout the eight months of the study, I relied on Gee's tools to discuss each participant's situated identities (Gee, 1999). Defined as “different identities or social positions we enact and recognize in different settings” (Gee, 1999, p. 12) through linguistic and non-linguistic exchanges, making visible participant's expressed identities also required evaluation of their socio-culturally-produced “concomitant attitudes, values, ways of feeling, ways of knowing and believing, as well as ways of acting and interacting” (Gee, p. 85-86). To achieve this, I reviewed the interview data with the following questions in mind

- “What specific, situated meanings is it reasonable, from the point of view of the Discourse in which these words are used, to attribute to their “author”?” (Gee, 1999, p. 53):

- “What are the situated meanings of some words and phrases that seem important in the situation?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)
- “What institutions and/or Discourses are being (re-)produced in this situation and how are they being stabilized or transformed in the act?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)
- “What relationships and identities (roles, positions) with their concomitant personal, social, and cultural knowledge and beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), and values, seem relevant to the situation?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)
- “How are these relationships and identities stabilized or transformed in the situation?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)
- “In terms of identities, activities, and relationships, what Discourses are relevant (and irrelevant) in the situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)

With participant’s linguistic and non-linguistic expressions as a backdrop, I next looked more directly into specific cultural models supporting the production of these situated identities.

Cultural Models

Gee (1999) argues that linguistic relationships “do not exist, and are not learned, outside the distinctive social practices (whats) of which they are an integral part” (p. 30). Instead, such relationships are “part and parcel of the very ‘voice’ or ‘identity’ (whos) of people who speak and write and think and act and value and live *that way*...for a given time and place” (p. 30). All of these combine to form cultural models—the “images or storylines or descriptions of simplified worlds in which prototypical events unfold” (Gee, 1999, p. 59). These models, framed by “variables such as socioeconomic status, educational background, knowledge, and so on” (Mills, 1992, p. 14), supply ideas about “‘appropriate’ attitudes,

viewpoints, beliefs, and values” and “‘appropriate’ ways of acting, interacting, participating, and participant structures”(Gee, 1999, p. 68).

To clarify the boundaries of appropriateness expressed by participants, I considered the following while reviewing the interview data

- “What cultural models are relevant? What must I...assume people feel, value, and believe...in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way?” (Gee, 1999, p. 78):
- “What cultural models or networks of models (master models) seem to be at play in connecting and integrating these situated meanings to each other?” (Gee, 1999, p. 93)
- “What sorts of cultural models, if any, are being used here to make value judgments about oneself or others?” (Gee, 1999, p. 78)
- “Whose interests are the cultural models representing?” (Gee, 1999, p. 78)
- “What sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to these cultural models?” (Gee, 1999, p. 78)
- “What social goods (e.g. status, power, aspects of gender, race, and class, or more narrowly defined social networks and identities) are relevant (and irrelevant) in this situation? How are they made relevant (and irrelevant), and in what ways?” (Gee, 1999, p. 94)
- “How are these social goods connected to the cultural models and Discourses operative in the situation?” (Gee, 1999, p. 94)
- “How are the relevant cultural models here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these cultural models helping to reproduce, transform, or create?” (Gee, 1999, p. 78)

Cultural models, as a thinking device for discourse analysis, proved the most valuable instruments in gaining understanding about context and speaker intention (Mills, 1992) throughout the study.

Context

According to Crusius, context is a dynamic entity, the “intersubjective construction of the meaning and value of human experience” that “is never fixed” (1989, p. 137). In an effort to understand the way context informed participant speech and speaker intention in specific moments in time, I identified some key linguistic details from the data that seemed “to be important for how situated meanings, cultural models, social activities, socially-situated identities, social languages, and Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p. 97) were performed. To do so, I studied context from four perspectives (Gee, 1999, p. 136):

- Context of culture: the equivalent of world as I have used this term; also the equivalent of horizon in hermeneutics; designates the shared knowledge, beliefs, and values of a language community; mostly tacit, unquestioned, foundational in the sense of furnishing a discourse’s assumptions and presumptions.
- Context of discourse: the situatedness of all discourse in past discourse; overlaps with context of culture, but more local and specific in referring to one’s place or role in an ongoing argument, tradition, or group within a language community; may also designate discourse behind or preparatory to one’s own, such as discussion or research, making it a part of the composing or precomposing process.
- Context of situation: the felt need to speak or write, whether arising as an impulse from within, as a demand from without, or by a combination of the two; marks the beginning of the composing process; designates what I have heretofore called the

expressive impulse, when the felt need to speak or write comes more from within than without.

- Context of text: designates situatedness of an utterance or a written assertion within a conversational exchange, a speech, or text; the place of an excerpted passage in the discourse from which it is taken; a prime source of motive or constraint on the drafting process, since what one is about to say or write must connect with what has already been said or written and with what one projects beyond the current focus of utterance or inscription.”

By investigating the data in this way, I was able to distinguish:

- “What sorts of connections—looking backward and/or forward—[were] made within and across utterance and large stretches of the interaction” (Gee, 1999, p. 94)
- “What sorts of connections [were] made to previous or future interactions, to other people,” (in the focus group experience) “ideas, texts, things, institutions, and Discourses outside the current situation” (Gee, 1999, p. 94)
- How the two previous type of connections work together “to constitute ‘coherence’—and what sort of ‘coherence’—the situation” (Gee, 1999, p. 94)

Through this ambitious research agenda, I will argue that the women I interviewed projected situated identities that were products of their specific cultural models and contexts in and through d/Discourse.

Give me a woman⁶³

The four young women I interviewed range in age from twenty to twenty-two years. With a common high school experience in a major metropolitan area in the Southeast and gender as their only common bonds, these women embody different religious,

socioeconomic, sexual and ethnic classifications and orientations that informed our conversations and provided the cultural models through which they situated their identities. Finding women with whom I shared some history seemed “relevant”⁶⁴ (Gee, 1999, p. 34) to the design of my study. As such, I considered my two-year relationship with each young woman as her teacher, cheerleading coach, and/or high school assistant principal beneficial in developing the kind of relevant relationship necessary to support our conversations.

We negotiated meeting times and spaces based on convenience and availability over the course of eight months. Scheduling the intended three to four interviews and one focus group proved difficult as hospitalizations, illnesses, school, work, marriage and moving significantly delayed some interview segments. The result supplied over 500 pages of transcription from four interviews with three of the four participants⁶⁵ and participation by two of the four in a focus group on the Grammy[®] Awards⁶⁶.

Tell me your story⁶⁷

Like Walkerdine (2001), I conducted in-depth interviews over a period of eight months with each of the participants in the study using a semi-structured interview format with each interview lasting approximately 1.5 hours and focused on a key element for discussion (e.g. family background and development of world view and the impact of fairy tales and media culture on opinions and values) but leaving room and opportunity for the conversation to meander at participant will. In addition, I devoted the third interview session to participants, giving them an opportunity to narrate their own lives from their perspective and to share as much or as little as comfort permitted with minimal prompting from me. Throughout, my analytical focus remained on the ways in which these young women

invented and re-invented themselves, through the generation of multiple identities, as a means of transformation from girl to woman.

To do so, I included the following statements and questions in our conversations:

- Tell me about your childhood and family.
- Who shaped the way you think about food?
- Describe your high school experience.
- With what groups or cliques did you identify in high school? Do you identify with now?
- What qualities make female celebrities and performers appealing to you?
Appealing to society?
- Tell me about your most significant relationship. Tell me about your current relationship(s).

The thick descriptions these and other conversations captured provided far more data⁶⁸ than I could reasonably or effectively use (Gee, 1999); they will occupy my research interests far beyond the scope of this dissertation. As such, I carefully narrowed my focus to include only those key words and phrases that allowed me to analyze specific “discourses in Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p. 7) with respect to each participant. These include participant’s subjectivity/world view, body image, and valuing of relationships.

The interviews were not, however, without limitations. The fact that our present conversations were, at times, “an artifact of [our] very specific past” (Gee, 1999, p. 57) as teacher-student, coach-athlete, administrator-student, and administrator-assistant posed some difficulty (a focus in chapter seven). What I initially identified as participant hesitation was actually my discomfort with the ways in which participants were co-constructing their

identity with and through our linguistic exchange. Instead of providing a single panel fit within a specific story frame, our conversations were “reciprocal and cyclical” (Gee, 1999, p. 97) events wherein our pasts informed our presents which, in turn, shaped our future discussions. Once we acknowledged the ways in which our “utterances [were] shaped” specifically “on the basis of” our own “assumptions about shared knowledge and opinion, and in light of what [had] already been said” (Coulthard, 1992, p. 248), our conversations became a vehicle for deeper understanding.

Analyzing and Retelling

Data collected was transcribed and reviewed by participants prior to the next interview session to ensure accurate reporting of the product and process (Coulthard, 1985). Once participants validated the data, I coded it using Atlas.ti initially before using narrative analysis to decode the ways in which participants storied themselves in response to interview questions and throughout the autobiographical interview session. In the final stages of the study, I applied the tools of discourse analysis to in an effort to illuminate the multiple identities each participant revealed. In analyzing all interview and focus group data the continual focus was on the ways in which individual identities were historically situated (McLaren, 1995), discursively produced (Butler, 1999; Gee, 1999), culturally constructed (Kellner, 1995), relationally formed (Butler, 1999; Currie, 1998), and narratively produced (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000; Currie, 1998). As such, I focus more on the stories shared, the “discourse in Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p.7), than on the linguistic details evident.⁶⁹

The Women of this Study

The next several chapters introduce and expose the four women of my study—Donna, Marilyn, Scarlett, and Tina⁷⁰. At twenty-two, Donna and Marilyn are the oldest participants.

With birthdays just over one month apart, they share similar privilege and little else.

Likewise, Scarlett and Tina, at twenty and twenty-one, respectively, enjoy a long-standing friendship but share few values. The identity work that follows inspires me and prompts me to continue to investigate the ways in which young women forge their multiple identities within and through Discourse(s).

Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the research methodology, discourse analysis, and further introduced the young women of the study. My aim in doing so was to narrow the methodology to Gee's terms and tools and to provide a bit of context to bridge the illustrative discourse employed in chapters one and two with the findings and implications of the discourse analysis delineated in the next three chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERROGATING DISCOURSES

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

-T. S. Eliot⁷¹

My initial interview with participants included a deliberate discussion of childhood and family life during which we explored each participant's context of culture (Gee, 1999). Our conversation provided insight into the individual beliefs and values of the varied cultural and socioeconomic communities represented and laid the foundation for future discussion and analysis. As a result, chapter four presents each of the women of this study by revealing the cultural models and Discourses through which the women speak.

Donna

Donna is a twenty-two year old Pakistani woman from a first generation immigrant⁷² family comprised of her father, mother, older sister and two younger brothers. They are quite close and are completely devoted to their Muslim faith. In addition, they enjoy considerable financial comfort despite their status as a one-income family. Here Donna talks about how her stay-at-home mom differed from the rest:

But with my other like Pakistani friends . . . one of the girls her mom wasn't home, she used to work outside of the house and then, the other girl, her mom was home but she was very like she didn't she didn't know the world. It seemed like she was a very homely lady you know like she stayed her her

whole her house was her world—cooking and cleaning and providing for her family was her world. Whereas my mom you know goes out all the time, knows about schools you know she'll take the time to to figure things out. She's a little more street smart than than one of my other friend's moms. And I don't know I don't know if that's you know her that girl's mom came like straight from India... and I don't know if maybe it's `cause my mom came from England or if it's `cause she came from a different background.

In setting her mother apart from the other Pakistani mothers who, presumably, stay home in large numbers, Donna references two things—the fact that her mother is “more street smart” and that “she came from a different background.” While the first element can be explained in the context of the text—“my mom you know goes out all the time...she'll take time to to figure things out”—the second requires closer inspection.

Here the situated meaning of “different background” is inordinately important. Donna's mother differs from the others, in part, because she is not Muslim by birth. Her worldview is illuminated instead by Catholicism and by her choice to convert to Islam in order to marry Donna's father:

[Kristin] were your parents arranged?

[Donna] No they weren't. No they weren't. [T]hey, my mom actually hated my dad when she first met him and then one thing led to another and she converted for him and they ended up getting married. And it's lasted. Yeah, I thank God it has... it's lasted.

Unlike the other Pakistani mothers Donna discusses, her mother had a different identity—a Christian first and last name, a confirmation identity and a Catholic worldview—that she

shed through her conversion and marriage. While this helps to explain the agency Donna's mother exercised, this analysis focuses more on how the example her mother set informed Donna's models for faith, opportunity, marriage, and motherhood.

I always knew

Donna's first interview is filled with the language of what she "always knew." It begins with her childhood aspiration to be a doctor—"I always knew I wanted to do medicine. Some type of medicine anyway"—and continues with her current plans to become a wife—"I always knew that I'd be a wife, and I'd have the family, and I'd be a mom." Despite this declaration, Donna described how difficult it was to think about herself as a wife at this point in her life:

I mean you know you you always I always knew I was going to get married. I just never knew it would happen I never in a million years, that it would happen right out of college.

When I pressed to see if Donna had ever considered anything else, she commented: "I don't know if I ever considered anything else, because it's always been like, you know, once you get married your husband will take care of you." I'm not sure that I had the same cultural model for marriage when I was Donna's age and entering my first marriage, and I certainly do not share it now. As a result, we lingered in this discussion over the course of all four interviews in an effort to gain some understanding of the Discourse(s) at play.

It is clear from our exchanges that the primary Discourse through which Donna makes decisions, acts, and sees the world is her Muslim faith. Unlike her mother, Donna "always knew" she would marry a man of the same religion without regard to the depth of her feelings. To better understand Donna's authenticity on this issue, I turn to her comments

about her first love, Alex: “He is [my first love]. Like, he, I mean, even now I think about it and, if I could, I would go back to him in a heartbeat because it was something. I think me and Alex were soul mates.” When asked why she couldn’t “go back” to Alex, she revealed more about what she always knew:

[Donna] I always knew in my mind it would never work with Alex. I always knew, I mean I had

[Kristin] Because of the religion?

[Donna] Yeah. I had convinced myself, "look Donna do this" but, you know, I got attached at one point. Then something, I don't remember what happened, but I was like "OK. I'm not going to be able to marry him. It won't be happening." And I, you know, I told myself that and I would prepare. You know in the end, like, I was like "have your fun now, but in the end, you know, you won't be able to marry him.

But Alex is a practicing Muslim. Why then did Donna’s religion prohibit their marriage?

Pakistani Principles

Donna and Alex practice two different types of Islam. If they “wanted to marry each other, one of [them] would have to convert and whoever converts loses their family.” To love him, obviously, came at a high price—one she was willing to consider on several occasions. From running away with him a few years ago to Myrtle Beach to planning on running away to marry him a few days before her engagement to Ahmed, Donna knew marrying Alex meant losing her family.

[Donna] He tried to get in touch with me at the airport as I was leaving. He booked a flight so that he could get up, um, into the departure lounge so he

could speak to me.

[Kristin] So you did not get to see him at the airport?

[Donna] I saw him, but I was walking with a security guard. Because they, um, he had missed his flight--obviously, he wasn't actually gonna take the flight--and they were announcing his name over the loud speaker, and I heard his name and I just freaked out, and my parents heard it as well, and I was like "Mom, that's Alex...I know he's here." And, um, so they sent a security guard up with me on the plane, to escort me onto the plane, so that I wouldn't talk to him. When I got, I mean I cried the whole way to England.

In the end, Donna resolved to continue in her faith and felt compelled to honor the traditions required, including the tradition of arranged marriage, in spite of her emotions.

The fact that Donna had recently entered into negotiations and was about to solidify an arranged marriage to her divorced first cousin on her father's side gave our marriage discussion relevance and a sense of realism not possible with other participants who had never planned and executed a wedding. Her comments, though, on her initial reaction to marrying right out of college foreshadow later concessions:

"I had always stuck to my guns saying I don't want to do anything [marry] until I'm out of medical school and this just kind of came up and I was, you know I, I didn't just shut down to the idea"

During her engagement period, community prayers, especially Isthakara,⁷³ became a source for Donna's confidence in her decision to go forward with the marriage. Donna and her family also recorded many international frequent flier miles in order to find suitable,

traditional clothing and to honor Pakistani customs resembling receptions. Still, Donna was skeptical about the process:

So we discussed everything and I, I wasn't planning on giving an answer when I was there [England]. But we ended up setting a date for the engagement and everything just kind of went from there. I wanted to wait about a year until we got married, but it ended up, we ended up deciding this December, which was six months earlier than I wanted.

Throughout this period, Donna continued to look for personal signs from God about her decision to marry Ahmed. When his family did not arrive for final negotiations regarding the marriage due to expired passports, Donna felt “it's a sign from God. You know, I'm not supposed to marry him, that's it.”

Alternative Dreams

Donna did marry Ahmed and, in keeping with Pakistani traditions, left her family in December 2003 to live as his wife in England.⁷⁴ A closer look at some of Donna's narratives pre- and post-marriage reveals the extent to which participation in the institution of marriage has changed her. I turn first to her “ground rules” for life in the marriage:

me and my mom made the decision to go up there to view the schools and just to kind of set some ground rules. Like I didn't want to live with the family, I wanted to be in school.

Contrast these comments with the reality of Donna's married life in England:

[Donna] I have to make it my home so I have to get used to it, you know. Just kind of suck it up and just deal with it.... at the moment we still live with his parents. [It is] [h]ard [living with my in-laws]. It's hard, but it's not—it's just—I think it would be

easier if it was just me and him on our own, because that's how I've always imagined. He is the only one that I have there. But at the end of the day, it's me and him, you know what I mean? He is the one that I feel the closest to, and if he's mad at me, then it's like I have nobody. I am over there and he is the only one I have got at the moment. He is the one I rely on for everything.

Donna's pre-marriage assertiveness has all but disappeared. While she finds it difficult to remain in the family household, she has no voice, no transportation, and no support without her husband. Donna does not even have a driver's license in England yet. She claims that, "I need to learn how to drive. I need to get into school. I need to start finding my way around... Because if I don't, then sitting at home is going to be my life," but her repetitive description of dependence on Ahmed and her actions both reveal the dichotomy between her words and her actions.

Prioritizing her husband's needs above her own extends to her school commitment as well. Upon learning that her first attempt to gain admission to medical schools in England failed due to "lack of service," her talk about the importance of schooling shifted dramatically. Though Donna graduated from college in three years with honors in Biology, she now refers to herself as "so dumb, so slow." Consider how this kind of self-talk has affected her medical goals: "I still have a chance to get in, and if not, I don't think I'm that upset about it." When I pressed for understanding about this dramatic shift from what she "always knew," Donna explained how the transformation "is really strange, and I think my parents are pretty upset about that as well. But I'm not that upset about it." When I asked why, she reminded me that

even before, my issue was, “Oh, if I get married and have children, I want to focus on my family. I don’t want to work no matter what.” So I think now maybe I’m seeing it a bit more. So now I’m just—it’s okay. I still want to do something in the medical field; I still want to get more education behind me, but if it’s not becoming a doctor, then it’s okay. I kind of had to accept it, too, since I didn’t get in.

Given the differential admissions policies between England and the United States, I probed to find out if any other barriers existed. In doing so, I found the heart of her concern:

And he’s older [by seven years], as well. I mean, four to five years for medical school? We’d have to put our family on hold, and I don’t—I’m fine with four or five years, but any more than that? You know, I know he’s going to start feeling it. And we’ve talked about it, and I’ve said, you know, “We’ll make our decision together. If I don’t get in this year, then I won’t apply to medical school next year, but I will carry on some type of education.” So I’m thinking about doing, like, there’s a sexual health program you can do, or there’s, I mean, there’s other little things. Like there’s testing, like becoming a medical laboratory assistant or something like that. There’s plenty of options.

Based on her previous discourse, Donna’s narratives reveal the impact her participation in the institution of marriage has had on her view of life “options.” Donna’s final comment about pursuing educational alternatives solidifies the way in which her hopes have been hijacked by her responsibilities as a wife:

But I am more wanting to go to the school and talk to somebody and figure it out. So I think once I learn how to drive—and he'll take me. It is just. I guess I am like, "Oh, he has other things to do."

Though Ahmed "is fine with [her] going to school," Donna now spends her time talking about alternative dreams and submitting her desires to the needs and demands of her marriage.

Marilyn

Marilyn is a twenty-two year old college cheerleader. The product of a drunken, abusive father and a talented, "love struck" mother, Marilyn feels responsible for family rifts but would not want her biological parents back together. To Marilyn, her stepfather is her father: "He is my daddy. I love him more than anything." The real division in Marilyn's family is between grandmothers and mothers⁷⁵ and mothers and daughters, and it has had a tremendous impact on the way Marilyn constructs herself:

My family was so close growing up and it is really hard. It is just so hard now because it is hard to think about how close we were and how far away we are right now and what has pushed us all away. That is difficult. I remember talking to my mom almost as her mother. I felt like her mother. I remember telling her, "Mom, behave. Don't do anything. Don't say anything." I remember acting like a mother and telling her to be good and not to misbehave. I want to be able to have a relationship with my grandparents.

Marilyn is the sole peacemaker in the family now that her great grandmother has passed away, and she feels utterly "alone" in her cause to reunite the family. She willingly accepts her solitary burden: "I felt like it was all on me now."

In doing so, Marilyn unwittingly created a parallel divide between her mother and her. In our last interview, she talked about that realization and the fears it raised:

You know it scares me. It scares the hell out of me. It scares the hell out of me. Because my mom. You know, don't get me wrong. My grandmother is a pill and drives me nuts. She starts talking about mom and half the stuff that she says I know she is full of shit, because I know better. But I just say, "Grandma, if you want to talk to me, don't talk to me about her." You know, "Mom, if you want to talk to me, don't talk to me about her." There has always been this balance that I've been able to balance. It scares me to think that my mom and I aren't talking. I couldn't. I mean, I don't know. And that is what scares me. I couldn't live without my mother. I mean I don't know what I would do without my mother.

Compounding her solitude is the silence Marilyn now experiences on the other end of the receiver⁷⁶. What would happen if Marilyn did lose her mother to family misunderstandings? Of what is Marilyn's mother the source with respect to Marilyn's identity? To illuminate these questions, I turn to closer inspection of several narratives.

A Beautiful Mind⁷⁷

Marilyn resembles her mother in many ways⁷⁸. Both women are petite, blonde, driven and intelligent. Marilyn wonders why her mother "threw it all away" for her father:

Mom was so much and threw it all away. It's so hard for me to think of my mother as, you know, graduating, you know, like 14th out of 900 kids and having a full scholarship offered to her, and turning it down to go get married,

and then, you know, never having anything, you know—never really being what she could have been.

This reality clearly informed the way Marilyn was raised, and its impact has not been subtle. After revealing how her mother “put all these expectations on me to be and to do what she couldn’t or didn’t do,” I inquired further:

You have no clue what it’s like growing up in my house. You have no clue the expectations that are there to be what, you know, almost what Mom couldn’t be.

Not surprisingly, most of those expectations centered on school.

Because Marilyn always expressed interest in being an obstetrician and first went to college to pursue pre-medicine, I was startled to hear that this goal was really her mother’s: “Marilyn, you have to be a doctor. Marilyn, you have to go to school for this. You have to do this.” Clearly, Marilyn did not agree:

It is not what I wanted. It is not what I wanted to do. I didn’t enjoy it. It is hard to get good grades in classes that you don’t enjoy. It takes a lot more effort, and I didn’t want to put effort into school.

Despite her recent change to and intensity about sociology at a different collegiate institution, which I attribute to the need for personal distance from painful college reminders, Marilyn’s changes from obstetrician to FBI agent to “professional college student” were legitimate moves away from medicine. These career shifts did not suggest more common attempts at finding her self, they reflected calculated moves away from mom’s goals and toward her own.

Wild Women⁷⁹

The problem with finding her own goals is that Marilyn is “very easily led by strong females...when a strong female comes into my life that is, you know, very smart and knows what they want, and goal oriented, I tend to follow their lead very easily.” Who are these other women in Marilyn’s life? In what ways did they stabilize or transform Marilyn’s situated identity?

Marilyn identifies a current sociology professor in this thread.⁸⁰ I turn now to a discussion of the impact of that Wild Woman:

I make sure, now, that every semester I have a class with her. And I will make sure of that until—you know, this summer I’m taking classes, and I’m taking victimology with her. And next semester in the fall I’m taking demography with her because that’s important to me. She helps me more than just as a teacher; she helps me learn that things are okay that people do, and all these things that I’ve always thought were so taboo are okay. I strive to be like her. I’m just kind of like, “Wow, and you’re successful—you’re so successful, and that’s great.” [I]t makes me feel okay, that there’s still a possibility for me to be a successful female even though things go kind of crazy sometimes, and things happen that are not expected, or we do things that we probably know we shouldn’t do.

This professor clearly provides scholarship, guidance and hope for a successful future in the midst of mistakes, and her influence is obvious. Marilyn even organizes her courses around this teacher’s offerings. In part, Marilyn recognizes the limitations of and need to learn more about her own worldview. There is something about the discourse, though, that exposes

Marilyn's hidden concern about taboo practices. Here the reference pertains to her professor's openly lesbian lifestyle.

Heteronormative Lens

Marilyn absolutely has difficulty with her professor's homosexuality and views such practice as "taboo." Consequently, Marilyn's heterosexual Discourse limits her willingness to learn from and with her "Wild Woman" teacher/mentor and nearly cost her a beloved advisor:

My advisor is just. You know, there are things that I think of as taboo because of the way I grew up. You know, things that, I mean. You know, if you want to be gay, or you want to be a lesbian, that's your business, but try not to bring it around me. Because it kind of gets, I can handle gay boys a lot better than I can handle, you know, lesbian women.

What intrigues me most about our conversations it that Marilyn's primary source of discomfort is their similarities:

But, you know, so I'm taking this sociology of crime class last semester—my first semester at USC—and I realize that this woman, everything that she does, everything that she works for, like, we just have so much in common. Every time I turn around she's saying something that just draws me. I mean, she worked. She taught at Wake Tech; she taught at NC State; she graduated from NC State. I mean she's, you know, she raised her son in Raleigh. And she, you know, is fascinated with crime and, you know, its origins and how it develops, and she's got all this stuff that just. You know? And so here I am seeing myself falling more and more in behind this woman.

Does she somehow think she'll "become a lesbian" through this association? In her continued attempts to prove that she is "okay" with her professor's choice, Marilyn exposes her real preconceived notions:

[S]he goes and hangs out with her lesbian friends, and they eat dinner, and they go run and spend time together and do whatever it is that a group of lesbian women do. And that's okay. You know, this highly intellectual female that I desire so much to be like lives like this.

On some level Marilyn either thinks that lesbian women do different things than heterosexual couples and/or that "highly intellectual" women don't fit her framework for "lesbian." We gain some understanding of this worldview through an investigation of Marilyn's heterosexual relationships.

Boys, Boys, Boys

From her early days in beauty pageants to her current status as college cheerleader, Marilyn continues to behave in ways that catch the attention of boys. She wants a man who is "all about making her happy," and she finds him through sports. Here, Marilyn remembers why she liked being a manager for the high school baseball team:

I think I was in heaven when I managed that baseball team. What is better than having twenty-five boys to do everything at your every beck and call?

[LAUGHTER] It was great. I had it made. I loved every minute of it.

Indeed, she did "have it made." Her "maybe I am high-maintenance" attitude was certainly fulfilled through her interactions with this team:

As the manager you think you are responsible for carrying this and carrying that, and Coach wouldn't even make me carry my own backpack. He'd make one of the guys do it.

These activities are relevant to Marilyn's construct for relationships in that they provide her framework for how men and women are supposed to behave. Furthermore, being pampered by the baseball players contributed to Marilyn's expectations for the men in her life. They needed to be there for her in order to gain her affection:

The more he was there for me, the stronger it made my feelings for him. All of a sudden this door opened that hadn't opened before. It was just like, all of a sudden, he was there and he was in my life and he was ready to do whatever it took to make me happy and to be there for me.

What happens, then, when women, teachers, or friends, who have different cultural models and ways of thinking, are "there" for and love Marilyn? Does she love them? In acknowledging that she does "love" these people, Marilyn has a hard time reconciling herself to her feelings. Consider her discourse about her Wild Woman professor:

So here I am, seeing myself falling more and more in behind this woman. I don't want to say "in love" with this person, but, you know, you kind of get, It's like, I mean, a mentor type thing. And I do love her. And, you know now it's to the point where I've had to come a long way since first meeting this woman and realizing that this woman was a strong mentor for me. You know, realizing that this woman comes from—she allows herself to be in positions that I would just—you know?

All of the hesitation and hedging (Mills, 1992) associated with explaining away her feelings for her professor denote both the emotional nature of the subject and Marilyn's difficulty with elements in her world that do not fit neatly into her heteronormative lens.

Scarlett

[Scarlett] I am an outcast.

In sharp contrast to Marilyn, Scarlett does not "want to be defined by sexuality at all." Nevertheless, a complicated family history with varied sexual models does dominate Scarlett's twenty-year-old worldview despite this protest. Their relevance is obvious upon closer inspection of Scarlett's narratives about the adult men in her life:

My family is very interesting. I don't live with my father. I don't deal with my father very much. He's not a real good dad. I love him just because he's my father, but he doesn't really, he doesn't call me back when I call. He doesn't make an effort to see me or write or anything like that. He's just not really on top of things.

In addition to not being "on top of things," Scarlett's biological father is a "crack addict" who "ruined the rest of his kids." In clarifying her meaning, Scarlett reveals only that "he's definitely not good with girls."

Scarlett also lived with two stepfathers at ages two and fourteen respectively. Their shared history offers more insight into Scarlett's worldview and may illuminate some of Scarlett's later decisions. Not coincidentally, Scarlett's memories of her first "dad" (stepfather) mirror, in part, her discourse about her biological father:

And my childhood was interesting. When I was real young we lived with my stepfather, and he had a lot of money, so we were well off. His money just

wasn't—he was a drug dealer. So when my mom decided to leave him—he started using drugs when I was, I think, six. And my mom left him when I was seven, and he was arrested shortly after that. So we went kind of from having anything I wanted to really having nothing when my mom left.

Framing her experience with a drug user father and a drug dealer-turned-user stepfather as “interesting” indirectly reveals Scarlett’s understanding that many of her friends do not have families like hers. Like many children, though, Scarlett “wanted everything to be normal.... With a mom and a dad.” When her second stepfather entered the family during her mother’s “mid-life crisis” due, in part, because “she was about to turn 30,” Scarlett knew it would never work:

They had known each other for I think like three or four weeks. [S]he didn't even know him, and they had nothing in common. It was a really bad marriage. I don't know why they got married. I think she was just getting concerned about being old; I don't know.

Through these experiences, she learned that she didn't “want to have to go through divorce. I know I don't want to do that, I've seen that.” In addition, she witnessed the activities and relationship models that would inform her ideas about appropriate behavior and bonding. It is to those topics I now turn.

Self-Parenting & The Lens of Poverty

The addiction in Scarlett’s family significantly contributed to her mother’s series of failed relationships. Unfortunately, family addiction did not cease with her father and is the primary reason Scarlett essentially raised herself until she was in high school. When asked about the impact of her mother’s addiction, Scarlett revealed that

My mom's a recovering alcoholic now, but for—she stopped drinking my 9th grade year, and until then, I would have done anything to stay away from her. It was really bad when she was drinking. She would just leave for days sometimes. She would come home, and when I was actually in, I think, fifth grade, we had a can that she would put money in. She would come home and put money in a can and when the landlord would come to get the rent, I would just count the money out of the can and give it to him, because she worked nights and drank days, so it was pretty bad.

Though Scarlett and her mother share a good relationship now, Scarlett realizes that the little money they had could have been used for more than rent and alcohol, and she acknowledges how difficult it was to grow up without parents. The lessons Scarlett did not learn from their example⁸¹, she learned without the benefit of parenting.

Poverty is one of these solitary lessons. In her reflections on high school, Scarlett talked about how difficult it was to understand and get along with different members of her cheerleading squad due to their socioeconomic differences:

She was spoiled, and she was rich, and I was broke. We lived in a raggedy trailer, and her house was like half as big as this building. I really didn't like her. And she was really spoiled. She just, I don't know, we didn't get along at all.

Without cheerleading, Scarlett “would have never known half of those people.” Fortunately, Scarlett did connect through school, which provided a deeper understanding of the power of poverty in education. Armed with this knowledge, Scarlett wants to “help kids who’ve been thrown away” by culture and “to make as difference” in social problems like “racial

equality.” Her first target, once she becomes an English teacher, is educational inequities evident in the achievement gap, which she constructs as a product first of class and second of race:

I think that race, it happens that way just because black kids live in poorer neighborhoods right now. I mean, because I think that the poorer white kids that are going to these black schools are getting just as bad of an education as the black kids that go there. It just seems that if you look at the numbers, white kids do better than black kids, but that’s because of the area that they live in, I think.

Like the students in her narrative, Scarlett is a product of her environment. Here, Scarlett reveals one more relevant detail about her childhood:

I was actually raised by my mother and who I thought was my aunt until my freshman year of high school. And she was not however my aunt, she was my mother’s partner, and I wasn’t aware of that.

This revelation about her mother’s decision to take a female lover informs Scarlett’s sexuality and provides the background for Scarlett’s cultural models about sexuality to which I now turn.

I Don’t Know What I Am

A significant amount of Scarlett’s discourse revolves around her struggle to make sense of her own identity work. As a result, Scarlett communicates more ambiguity than any of the other participants. In doing so, she presents herself to different people in different ways (Gee, 1999) based on her context of culture and on her cultural models for interaction. Consider first her AOL profile⁸²:

Aight, so I am a 20-year-old single Shawty⁸³, living in Raleigh, NC! Yes that does say BI PRIDE, and that is because I am BISEXUAL, no that doesn't mean I want to sleep with you and your wife (or girlfriend), so please don't get that shy twisted!!! You also might be questioning the cheerleaders on the page, I was a cheerleader for 12 years, now I coach youth cheerleading, and I love it! I am I'm also a huge 2 Pac fan, if you ain't feelin' Pac, we will argue, so don't bother hittin' me up...I WILL BLOCK U! I'm a cool chic, in search of good people to talk to, get to know, and maybe even meet. I know this is hard for you white guys out there, but I am interested in chocolate men, Shawtys...well, I like them in all flava's⁸⁴. No Im not a gold digger, I am not interested in your money, I work, but I do like to be treated nicely, and I feel that I deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. I am a hard worker, I work as a waitress and as a child care provider...I love kids but, I DO NOT HAVE ANY CHILDREN OF MY OWN. If you feel like you are a person with quality conversation, PLEASE, get at me!!!

This is a superior model of Scarlett's informal speech. Though she rarely spoke this way on tape, Scarlett routinely lapsed into this type of black expressionism in our pre- and post-interview conversations.

Even more interesting is the fact that Scarlett's electronic confidence in her bisexuality does not translate to her one-on-one conversation. Though Scarlett's most significant relationship was with a black woman, she rejects the lesbian label. Consider her difficulty in accepting the transition from dating boys to dating girls:

And then we started dating, just randomly. I think she said, “So, are we going to go together or what?” And I said, “Excuse me?” I was like, “Whoa, you’ve got me twisted. That’s not what we’re doing here.” And then I thought about it, and I said, “Well this really is what we’re doing. We’re dating.” So I was like “Well, whatever, we can do that.” And I tried to pretend like she just liked me, that we weren’t really dating for a couple of weeks, and it was kind of weird.

Scarlett’s unwillingness to see the relationship as dating blossomed into full disinterest in revealing the relationship. She recalls how “you don’t want to go anywhere or do anything” when in a lesbian relationship at first. Eventually, Scarlett revealed that she:

didn’t know how I was going to go back to school and be like, “Okay, last week I dated boys, this week I date girls.”⁸⁵ But then I realized that I didn’t really care. I mean, I liked her, so I didn’t care what other people thought.

When I pressed to see if Scarlett considered herself bisexual at that point, she replied:

I don’t know what I am. At that point, I only dated her so I didn’t really date anyone else. When she and I broke up, I dated, just like short dating. I dated a few girls and then I got in a relationship with a guy. So I don’t know, I figured that when we broke up I would figure out what I was.

From our conversations, it appears that Scarlett chalked up her lesbian relationship to “having some kind of identity crisis” and that she lingers in uncertainty:

Yeah, I have no idea what I’m doing. My mom asked me the other day. I don’t really know what I’m doing. I go on dates generally with guys, just because I don’t go to gay places, and when I get online I go to regular chat

rooms. I don't go to the gay chat rooms. I don't know, I was having some kind of identity crisis. I don't know what I was doing.

One thing Scarlett does know is that she is "black by association."

Black By Association

Because I was interested in the ways in which Scarlett's choice to enter relationships with black people informed her identity, we talked quite a bit about groups with which she shared some association.

See, at our high school there were two norms: you were either the white normal or the black normal. And I didn't really fit in either one of them, because obviously I'm not black, but I hung out with a lot of black people, and I didn't fit in the skinny, blonde-haired white girl norm either. So I was just kind of in the middle

After dismissing the white, lesbian, and cheerleader norms, Scarlett settled on "black by association" in later interviews. This outlook gives Scarlett's narratives coherence and exposes the primary Discourse through which she views her relationships and identities.

Tina

Tina is the final member of the study and, at twenty-one, unbelievably certain about her past, present, and future. A considerable chunk of her conviction depends on Tina's close relationship with her mother and the sacrifices her mother made to provide for her in a single-income household. Here, Tina reflects on the how she realized the personal cost to her mother:

I mean, as I started making money and realizing bills, and things like that, you know, I started to realize how hard it actually was for her, and I've asked her

about it sometimes. We talk about it a lot, because, you know, I realize how much she loves me, and how much she did for me, and I want to hear about it, because it just shows how much she did for me, that, you know, I never had any idea. She made me feel like I was a princess. I had everything I wanted, everything I needed, never had any idea how hard she worked for it

Her mother's strong example and the privileged life with mom afforded Tina pale in comparison to the lessons Tina's mother taught about relationships through her example:

I know that I don't need him [my boyfriend]. I think that that is another big part of it. She has taught me that I don't need him. I don't need him to take care of me. I don't need him to have some big time job where he makes boos of money so he can take care of me. I don't need that because of the way that she brought me up.

Tina learned independence from her mother so well that the men in her life are now dependent on her. A closer look at two narrative threads provides evidence for this claim.

Helper

Understanding Tina's framework for independence and connecting that to the ways in which others come to depend on Tina requires illumination of a key element in Tina's personality—her desire to help. Consider the following excerpt in this context:

Well, honestly, I have always been drawn to men who—not only men, but in all of my relationships—friends or any kind of relationships. I've always been drawn to people who need my help. I know we've talked before about how helping people, that is my career, or in some aspect of my career I want to be helping people, children most likely⁸⁶. Helping people has always been

important to me. I find a lot of my happiness in helping other people to be happy.

Tina clearly concedes that an aspect of her identity evolved from helping other people, and she acknowledges that this is nothing new: “Mainly the people that I’m attracted to are people who need my help. That has always been the case, from as little as I can remember.” Of more interest, though, is the fact that Tina delights in motivating those who limit their worldview to “just day-to-day living” because they need to something “important to work towards” for their life to be meaningful. In essence, Tina loves being involved with people who represent the “projects” in her life.

Unfortunately, some of the people who “need” Tina’s help have underhanded motives that cause Tina to question her generous nature and to be judgmental of others. After one of her daycare mothers pawned her Kindergarten-aged daughter off on Tina overnight, Tina just didn’t have the heart to refuse the next request. She acknowledges that “Caring people get walked on; it is just something that happens,” but she doesn’t do anything to protect herself. Instead, Tina judged the mother fairly severely and willingly took over responsibility for parenting:

There are bad mothers out there who don’t deserve to have children. [H]er mother is a drug addict. She spends the night at my house two or three nights a week. I bring her home from school. I do her homework with her. It is like she is my kid now. If she isn’t at my house, she is at somebody else’s house. She’ll come home and spend the night with me and tell me about whoever’s house she spend the night at last night. She has got to get up and go to school the next day. Sometimes she has to get up and go to school without her

toothbrush, without her having a bath. The poor girl doesn't even know that the spelling words that her teacher gives her on Monday are the words that she has a test on, on Friday. She doesn't even know that. She doesn't even know that those are the same words! Her mom doesn't pay attention. It is just so sad to me. That is another person I'm taking care of. She doesn't have a good mother so the six year old comes and stays at my house. [I]t has been two or three months now that she has been doing it.

After several months of parenting someone else's child, Tina maintains an "if not me, than who?" attitude. What happens when the people who need her are adults rather than children?

Daddy's Little Girl

While the title might conjure notions of decorated little girls sitting on daddy's lap basking in the glow of his security, stability and love, in Tina's case the title pertains to the delicate balance between her role as daughter and her role as parent/supporter⁸⁷. The following depicts Tina's disillusionment with her father's instability:

My dad wore me out. My faith in my dad—none. Anything my dad says to me, I take it with a grain of salt. It doesn't matter what it is: his new plans, his new job, his new whatever it is. My dad is excited about something new every other week.

Even without faith, Tina clings to the ideal her father represents by invoking the "old saying, 'Girls are attracted to men that are like their daddies.'" She maintains that she is no different and admits that she runs the risk of supporting her father:

If my dad asked me, "Can I move in with you?" I know I wouldn't tell him no. I would need to tell him no, but I wouldn't. I wouldn't be able to.

If she is no different, to what kinds of men is Tina attracted? The answer is evident her disproportionate talk about John.

After nearly two years of dating, Tina and John share a home, household responsibilities, and, at times, parenting responsibilities for a Kindergartener. She has “a lot of mixed emotions” about “playing house” with John and is quick to note that, “It wasn’t something that was planned.... I struggle every day with the playing house part of our relationship.” Tina’s more detailed description reveals another, more interesting layer, related her struggle—the fact that they are “basically married”:

It’s the playing house part of it, the—living under the same roof, taking care of each other, sleeping in the same bed every night, washing the dishes, doing the laundry, having our dogs. We basically have two kids. I mean it’s all of that stuff that—we’re basically married. We’re just not married. And that’s the part that I struggle with the most, you know.

Without any “serious” push by Tina, marriage is not a topic of discussion in their home. She admits that she tries to “talk to him about it sometimes,” but that she has no interest in getting married just because her cultural model tells her that living together “is not what God wants me to do.” Like the Kindergartener and her father, John remains one of Tina’s projects:

I help him become responsible and help him become an adult person who has support and who has feelings for other people and respect. There are so many things about him that, it’s almost like he was never taught. As far as respecting other people and people’s feelings and just things that are so basic for me, loving and things that I was taught every day with my mom, but he never experienced. And I like what we do for each other. I like what we

bring to each other.... I've helped him a lot and I've changed—not I—I've helped him to change basically his entire life. And he is not at all the same person that he was before I knew him. I hear stories and that's not even the person that I know.

In her enduring focus on John's transformation, Tina is able to mask her own. As a result, it is to her primary vehicle for change, school, that I now turn.

It takes discipline

Unlike Donna and Marilyn, Tina⁸⁸ is working her way back into school after misappropriating time and energy during her first year at ECU. After losing her scholarship and being forced to work for her Aunt in Atlanta, Tina reflects on the importance of school now that she has “had the time to be in the real world” and realized “it's not quite so easy:”

It's almost like my mind frame is completely different. I can't really, I don't know, school is just so much more important now. But, and I think, I never—in high school I didn't have to study. I was just, I got by without studying. I didn't get straight A's, but I was one of those people who could get by with Bs and not have to study. And when I got to ECU it wasn't like that, but I pretended that it was, and I still didn't study as much as I should have. I could have done a lot better [in high school] and ECU if I would have studied. And I think that's the major thing now, is that I realize that it does take studying and it does take discipline to be able to do it, and you have to want to do it.

School may be the most relevant Discourse in Tina's identity formation. It is clearly “the responsibility” of real world demands that “changed [her] a lot.” From not realizing its importance to taking a night class in United States History after working full time during the

day, Tina has every intention of matriculating to a four-year institution to complete a degree in psychology. Her ultimate goal is to become a child counselor because “there are plenty of people out there that need help.” Through this connection to her helpful nature, Tina’s discourse becomes a coherent whole.

Summary: Border Crossing⁸⁹

In chapter four, I explored the context of culture each woman offers in an attempt to gain some understanding of the Discourses operating within the discourse. After interrogating each woman’s discourse and gaining some understanding of the situated identities and cultural models each revealed, I move now to a discussion of the primary ways participants’ discourse about Discourse(s) intersect. In considering the whole of the data, two particular threads stand out: 1) the ways in which these women construct themselves based on body image, and 2) the ways in which these women construct themselves through significant relationships. I address these issues in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE “F” WORD

What does it mean to live in a society where you are bombarded by images that are thin?

-Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000

In chapter three, I argued that the media presents and promotes unhealthy, unrealistic and unattainable images of the female body that generate the low self-esteem and body hatred that fuel eating disorders (Tebbel, 2000). In this chapter, I inspect the impact of those images and of other factors (e.g. mother-daughter relationships, goals) on female development by taking a closer look at participant narratives. These narratives reveal the fundamental connection between participants’ overall sense of self and appearance. To articulate that connection further, I organize the discussion according to the ideal weight or weight range offered in each woman’s narrative: 150+ (Scarlett), 110-120 (Tina), 107 (Marilyn), 95-100 (Donna).

Measuring Up, Measuring Down

Weightism⁹⁰ (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000) nourishes this connection. In our airbrushed, artificially constructed, culturally-mediated world, where thinness equals one key to the fabulous life⁹¹, “fat” has become the “f” word (Wood, 2004). As media-constructed images encode messages detailing how what you weigh determines your worth, young women cling more and more to their irresistible pull. Such messages ingrain a “right” way to look—thin, young, feminine and white (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000; Shields & Heninecken, 2002). Individuals who do not conform to one or to many of these aspects become objects of ridicule in proportion to their difference. Such ridicule, focused on the reflection rather than on the purpose or utility of our bodies, often leads to questions about

how accepting we are of our bodies within our context of culture. More often than not, such questions lead to a resounding lack of acceptance that, in turn, leads to self- and to body-loathing (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000). What happens when self-image become self-destructive?

Eating disorders represent one clear path. Walk onto to any college campus or into any high school to witness the divide between fat and thin. Is no one average? Do we even have a sense of average? When everything is either super-slim or super-sized, finding a comfortable middle ground seems impossible. To add insult to injury, we succumb to forms of leisure (i.e. watching television, communicating virtually, escaping to movies), predicated on image consumption, which fuel our insecurities. Steiner-Adair (2000) argues that roughly 80% of the women in this country wake up feeling down on themselves because of the way they look; the women of my study replicate that finding. Because they tend to imagine their ideal weight according to some unrealistic low or unattainable ideal, several find they constantly fight the battle of the bulge through incessant dieting and live in a perpetual cycle of self-denial and self-hatred. Others live on the scales in a futile attempt to achieve the media's distorted ideal. The following illuminates how they measure up.

150+ Pounds

Scarlett never disclosed her actual weight. Instead, she focused on her preoccupation with it—her current size, fourteen, the fact that plus size models wear an eight, and that she is well above her ideal weight of 140. In our conversations, Scarlett spent most of the time talking about her ongoing struggle with body image:

I'm learning to be happier with myself. I feel that if I don't at least like the way that I look, then I'm certainly not going to be in any state of mind to

change it. So um, I am dieting, as usual, but I have actually decided to work out too. I have a membership to a gym, so I'm fixing the way that I look now, rather than beating myself up about it, because that doesn't fix it.

Luckily, Scarlett's conform or punish thyself attitude has shifted, but she still clearly perceives her weight as something she must "fix" in order to be happy. After attempting every diet craze from Weight Watchers to South Beach during the study, Scarlett settled on a low fat, low-carbohydrate combination by the end. Her erratic diet patterns indicate that she will probably change again before I defend.

Getting Religion

The way Scarlett approaches diets is so prescriptive that it borders on religion. At all times, Scarlett's free will is subject to her goal. Consider this pre-holiday narrative:

Unfortunately Thanksgiving is coming up. That's going to be interesting.

But, other than that, it's just food, and nothing tastes as good as looking better will feel, so I'm not really worried about it [LAUGHS].

In pondering "nothing tastes as good as looking better will feel," red flags went off in my mind. I had heard/seen/felt this before. As Scarlett echoed, "Nothing tastes as good as thin feels" (Ana's Underground Grotto) from my pro-anorexic research, the connection to religious Discourse appeared.

On the surface, her narrative seems more focused on her current silver bullet—exercise—than on starvation. She talks about being "able" to eat certain things on one diet that the next forbids, but she does eat. She admits to letting herself go in the past two years after cheering all through high school and working out with the squad on a daily basis, but she is beginning to exercise again. These seem like reasonable reflections by a reasonable

person. It is her thinking and optimism about the promises of diet and exercise, as Scarlett looks forward to reaching her goal by incorporating a regimen of cardiovascular and weight lifting activities into her daily life, that alarm me.

I Don't Like to Look Silly

When asked about when she felt she looked the best (rather than focusing simply on her goal weight), Scarlett reflected on both the timeframe and on the reasons why:

Um, my freshman and sophomore year, I was probably like 150, and that's when I felt the best....I could wear the clothes that I wanted to, I could wear the same kind of clothes as the other girls that I hung out with. I suppose I could do that now, but I don't like to look silly [LAUGHS]....Now, now, it's a lot different than when I was in high school, thank god. Low cut jeans, I guess, and snuggie-fitting t-shirts that I don't tend to wear.

In her exercise prime, Scarlett was comfortable at a weight higher than her ideal, in part, because she fit, literally, into cultural norms for fashion without looking silly. At present, her discourse demonstrates that she no longer fits into anything:

I mean, I have 40 pairs of pants, and I can wear five of them, and I refuse to buy anymore "fat girl" clothes, I'm just not. I'm not buying any clothes that are bigger than what I have. I'm just going to go down, so that way I don't have to.

Scarlett's emphasis on measuring down in order to get out of her "fat girl" clothes complements her fear of looking silly in today's fashions:

I've seen some fat girls who just don't care that they're fat. I see lots of girls who wear real tight shirts and have stomachs that are big, and I guess they just don't care. I do.... I'd love to be comfortable like that, but I'm just not.

She is not comfortable, in part, because she criticizes fat girls just like everyone else and because she does not want to be that object of ridicule.

In the end, Scarlett remains more focused on her reflection than on her body. Like the other women of the study, the mirror wields supernatural power over her self-concept (Wood, 2004):

I really want to just be able to put on in the morning whatever I pull out of the closet, as long as it matches. I just want to be able to put it on without worrying how it looks and looking in the mirror over and over and over again.

I look now for these ideas in the other narratives.

110-120 Pounds

Unlike Scarlett, Tina does not want to lose weight and admits that she is too thin. Weighing in at ninety-seven pounds for the final interview, Tina proves the most interesting for discussing the split between her real and her invented selves. Consider Tina's early comments about her height:

[Kristin] ...how tall are you?

[Tina] Five-three. I tell people I'm five-five, but I'm really only five-three.

[LAUGHS].... I don't know why, five-five is just... I don't know. Five-five was just always an ideal height for me.... I don't think I just completely made it up.... Five-five—that's what's on my driver's license. [LAUGHS]

Without weight as a major source of dissatisfaction, Tina attacked her height instead and expressed paranoia about the possibility of shrinking to legitimize her lie, “honestly, I think I’ve shrunk, because I swear my doctor told me one time that I was five-five.” Being five-five was clearly so important to Tina that she reinvented herself to meet her ideal.

Unfortunately, Tina found she could not use lies to mitigate all of her image concerns:

The main thing that I hate is my nose....I have, between my mom and my dad, I have the worst nose ever. I’ve been told it looks like a raindrop. And I don’t see it, but I have been told that. It’s not... I mean, it’s not humongous, but I just don’t like the way that it’s shaped, and it comes to a point right here, and that’s my...That’s really the only thing that I hate about anything on me.

Furthermore, she never articulates how she would change the shape of her nose if given the opportunity or what she would like in lieu of a point at the bottom of her nose. Tina’s nose is merely a hopeless source of self-loathing. Even complementary statements (“it looks like a raindrop”) fail to permeate her walled self-image. More importantly, this “really the only thing that I hate” discourse is not entirely truthful. Consider the way Tina describes her ears:

I have one ear that points and one ear that sticks out, but I get that from my dad, and so I like that. You can... You can only tell when my hair is up. This one sticks out and this one’s pointed. [LAUGHS] But that doesn’t bother me. I mean, my hair usually covers that up.

Here Tina reveals a third way of dealing with concerns about image—cover it up—even when those concerns are not fully expressed. In an effort to maintain her desired image, Tina

lied about her height, hated her nose, and covered up her ears. Discussions about weight revealed similar behaviors.

Bits & Pieces

Even after mysteriously losing five pounds between the second and fourth interviews without even trying, Tina continued to examine which bits and pieces (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000) needed work. While the number on the scale did not seem as important to Tina as it was to Scarlett, Marilyn and Donna, the way body parts measured up to Tina's ideal, invented standard ruled her self-concept with equal authority.

I've always had a problem with my stomach. I don't like my stomach. And sit ups are so horrible. They are just horrible! There's got to be something else that you can do....I just—I don't know what it is about them, they're just horrible. So I've never had the stomach thing going on. And even today I know I don't need to gain any weight—or lose any weight, I need to gain a lot of weight. But even today I lifted up my shirt and caught myself looking at my stomach, poking out, and being like, “How can I be so skinny and my stomach be the only thing that I can grab a hold of like this?” So there's, that's society. There's a lot of that perfection, I know...every little thing has to be perfect, no imperfections kind of thing...

At ninety-seven pounds, Tina's stomach is not “going on” and is, therefore, not perfect. What I find fascinating, though, is Tina's seeming indecision about weight as it relates to her notions of perfection. Commenting at first that she does not need to gain or to lose any weight, Tina concludes that she needs “to gain a lot of weight” just before shredding her stomach for “poking out” a little. Her discourse about image remained incongruent

throughout the interviews. Taking a closer look at her weight narratives further illuminates this issue.

I Hate Flab

The women Tina “grew up with” shaped the way she thinks about weight. While that fact seems innocuous, even normal, consider Tina’s perspective:

I’ve told you about how skinny my mom was, and my aunt has always been the healthier one. She dieted and did all of that, but she was never as small as my mom. And I think my mom is just more petite anyway....She’s itty-bitty. But I think—growing up I always knew that my mom was too small. And it was more of, you know, she was too skinny. My aunt, they picked on her about it. And now they’ve started picking on me about it, but the difference is I don’t do it on purpose.

Maybe she does not lose weight consciously, but her subsequent discourse clearly reveals how deeply her mother’s Discourse and discourse informed Tina’s understanding about weight and body image. The lessons Tina learned from her mother clarify this further:

But it was—that self-image thing was big for her [my mom]. And I think, I don’t know, I think maybe seeing it being such a big deal to her and the way that my aunt picked on her about it and knowing how skinny my—my mom was really skinny, skinny, skinny. I think that maybe [pause] made it so it wasn’t so important to me. I never made it my focus....And I think that came from seeing my mom and knowing, if for nothing else because my aunt made fun of her all the time, that she was too skinny. And, you know, I knew my

mom didn't eat but one meal a day and—but that wasn't right. And I think that did help me a lot.

What does not help Tina is the nagging question she asks whenever she looks at herself “in the mirror”—“How fat am I or how much weight do I need to lose?” This legacy, transferred from mother to daughter, provides some understanding for Tina's ongoing struggle between her real and her ideal body and for the way in which Tina's talk about her ideal weight conflicts.

At the beginning of the study, Tina agreed that, “If I had the chance to go to the gym and actually have a toned body, I wouldn't mind the 125.” Like the number on her scale, Tina's attitude about weight often fluctuates:

Um, my weight fluctuates a lot, so sometimes when I get bigger I tend to complain about my weight. I don't like to be... When I start to gain a lot of weight... Um, I think now I'm probably a little bit too skinny, but I prefer to be smaller than bigger, so right now I like the size that I am, but if it was three months ago, when I was up to 125 lbs, then I probably would've been complaining about my weight, just because... Mainly just because I don't get the chance to work out, so I don't have muscular... It's not muscle, it's just flab, and I hate the flab. [LAUGHS]

Curiously, Tina's discourse shifted from “How can I be so skinny?” to “I never made it [weight] a focus” to “I like the size that I am” in a span of a few minutes during the same interview. Though she expressed concern about weighing only ninety-seven pounds, Tina clearly prefers to “be smaller than bigger,” and makes that preference a focus despite stated objections.

This is the point at which Tina's discourse about weight became quite consistent and revealed alarming parallels between her and her mother:

But it's—it [current low weight] makes me think. Sometimes, you know, people joke about me being anorexic and all that. And I know that I'm not; I don't think I am....I don't think I'm fat anymore. I don't starve myself or anything like that. But, I don't know. It's just a scary thought because I know what it can do—what anorexia can do....my mom asked me...this weekend, if I still had a period because I've gotten so small. I mean there's nothing to me anymore, no muscle, no nothing! Just skin. And I still do have periods, but I have way more cramps than I used to. I never used to have cramps. They [my periods] are light, very light. But I still have them.

Here, Tina clings to the reality that her menstrual cycle must mean she is okay even though she is “just skin.” In another example of a woman in conflict about her weight, Tina verbalizes that she is “skinny as a rail” but fails to do more than “eat small portions.” According to Lazarua and Wunderlich (2000), Tina is trapped in the encoded messages of her mother and of media culture and has not yet demonstrated the strength to resist.

107 Pounds

Marilyn suffers from celiac disease, a genetic disorder causing lifelong digestive difficulty due to gluten intolerance. As a result, she becomes ill every time she eats wheat, rye, or barley-based foods. The disease, diagnosed in 2001, presents major dietary restrictions and causes Marilyn to watch carefully what she eats:

But with me being celiac, you know, I'm on the Atkins diet all my life pretty much, and so, you know, it's not unhealthy for me to go to McDonald's and

get a greasy hamburger patty with cheese and ketchup smothered all over it, because, you know, I may not get to eat the sandwich that everybody else is eating, you know, every other day of their life with mayonnaise spread all over it. So I do, you know—and with the celiac, it makes things a lot—it makes eating a lot more difficult anyways, and I do find myself watching everything I eat because I have to so I don't get sick.

With a diet devoted to elimination and to vigilant substitution, Marilyn weighs carefully each food choice before indulging. Unfortunately, being celiac is not the only reason Marilyn remains faithful to her diet; Marilyn is obsessed with size.

While Tina never mentioned the size of her clothes or a goal weight, Marilyn lives at the mercy of both. She likes to wear the “smallest” she “can get” at all times and is not afraid to purchase “goal clothing” for motivation. These attitudes reveal more reasons Marilyn makes specific food choices. In addition to “I don't want to get sick,” Marilyn also chooses because “I can't get fat” and because “that's not healthy.” What would happen if Marilyn did get fat? How does she define that? What else motivates Marilyn's food choices? To illuminate these questions, I turn to a closer inspection of narratives related to Marilyn's distinctive love/hate relationship with the scale.

Commandment Seven

During the second interview, I asked each of the women to read a section from the ana and mia site research in chapter three, including the Pro-Anorexic Commandments. Marilyn's spontaneous reaction to Commandment Seven follows:

[Marilyn] What the scale says is the most important thing. Oops!

[Kristin] What was the “oops” for?

[Marilyn] I just know that what the scale says is important. [LAUGHS]

When Marilyn finally stopped laughing, she clarified her position:

I guess that's—I mean, that's kind of scary. I don't know. I just—it's hard for me because I am someone that watches my weight all the time. I do watch everything I eat, but that doesn't mean that I won't eat things that are fattening also. Like, I'm on this Snickers craving and I don't know where it came from, but I eat Snickers all the time. But I do watch, “Okay, I ate a Snickers today, so I can't eat this later tonight.”

One look at Marilyn's small stature exposes the lie. She does not eat Snickers all the time but, when she does eat a Snickers “snack size,” she modifies her diet to account for the indulgence. On the surface, Marilyn's balance seems reasonable. After all, “there's only so much that your body needs to take in of that type of thing.”

The problem is that Marilyn's rationale for decision making just recently changed to “I can't eat this because I don't want to be sick” from “I can't eat this because it is going to make me fat.” While she claims to have “come out of that mode,” consider the ways in which her reflections connect how what the scale says is the most important thing to her Discourse about food:

I just, I don't know. When I was younger, I just had problems and didn't know, and I just, I've always been one to, like, watch my weight. Like multiple times a day I'm on top of the scale. I can remember Coach taking all the scales out of the locker rooms, because he said it was unhealthy for me to check my weight so many times a day.

I was privy to this coach's concern while I worked at the high school Marilyn attended. We worried about how little Marilyn ate and shared anxiety when she chose not to eat at all.

When I revealed that information during the interview, Marilyn reacted:

But I never thought—I never was really one to, like, throw up...or anything. I just—I'm real weird, like mental, about what I eat and how I eat it, and if I'm going to eat it. I just choose—sometimes I just choose not to eat. And it's not—I don't think I ever really had a problem, like, with bulimia or anorexia or any kind of that. But eating disorder? In general, maybe my eating habits weren't always the way they should have been.

Though her eating habits have improved significantly, she is still “mental” about what she eats and how she eats. Happily, she has had an epiphany at 107 pounds: “I just realized for the first time the other day how little I am, that I am a little human being.” Clearly being little, in proportion to everyone around her and in spite of what the scale says, remains critically important to Marilyn's self-concept.

Hard to fit

Whether Marilyn weighs eighty-nine pounds or 107 pounds, she complains that she is hard to fit. Despite the fact that she is “a little human being,” Marilyn zeroes in on her flaws. Consider her frustration with parts she deems out of proportion and, therefore, hard to fit:

You know, though, I have big thighs and a big bottom for the rest of my body. So it makes it very difficult to buy jeans that fit in the waist, but that are not, like, you know, sticking to my thighs right here and that's—that's frustrating. Jeans shopping is the worst thing for the way my body's built. That and

shopping for bras. They stay off my shoulders. It drives me nuts. But—I hate shopping for jeans.

While every woman commented in an interview that her thighs and bottom, in particular, could be smaller and, thus, improved, Marilyn's discourse provided the best evidence that women are never satisfied with the way they look at any size. A closer look at her reflection on her lowest adult weight reinforces my point:

[Kristin] What's the smallest that you've ever weighed at this body size and age?

[Marilyn] My senior year of high school when I had mono. I weighed, like, 89 pounds for prom, because we had to have that dress made because I was so tiny we couldn't find a dress. It was horrible. I can still remember all the pictures. My collarbones were hanging out. I just felt yucky, and I was little, little, little. I didn't like that at all.

[Kristin] How did people respond to you when you were that small?

[Marilyn] Like, I was going to break, like I was fragile. Just because I've lost weight doesn't mean my bones are any different. I don't know. I never really—I mean, I guess it's kind of hard to have seen a lot of it, because in places where you could see it, you know, down around my hips and in my ribcage and my collarbones, you know, I usually had clothes covering, so most people didn't really see a lot of it. The doctors obviously were worried, but when are doctors not worried? I think that's why they go to school for so many years is to learn how to worry.

This narrative reveals the way in which Marilyn covered up her weight loss and dismissed medical advice. Coming from a former pre-med student, her reaction surprises me now; unfortunately, it captures her high school thinking as well as her responses to concerned coaches and administrators and continues to infiltrate her thinking about what constitutes an appropriate size.

95-100 Pounds

Like Marilyn, Donna is a “little human being.” The smallest of all the women, Donna exercises daily, eats a carefully balanced diet, and wears a petite size zero whenever she cannot find suitable children’s clothing. For Donna, all of these attributes result from genetics and family values. Everyone in her family is “small, pretty fit,” and they all enjoy her mother’s healthy, “brown people” cooking⁹². Truly, Donna is her “mom through and through. [LAUGHS] I mean looks, the way my body is going to be, everything.” Despite all of this, Donna is less confident than her deportment suggests:

I might be insecure. Okay, let’s talk about looks for instance. I am insecure about the way I look because I want to look good to other people. But at the same time, I know that I’m an attractive girl. You know, like, I know that if I were to walk into an interview where it is a bunch of men interviewing me, I know that I have a better chance. But then, I also just said that I can’t imagine not getting the position because I’m a girl or getting it because I’m girl. You know what I mean? I am confident enough in myself, but I’m always insecure. I guess, I could be better—that I could do more, that I could be better looking or that there is something else that this person would like in me.

Her desire for perfection, inherited from her family's view of Pakistani cultural norms, manifests itself not in size (since that is clearly not a problem) but in public appearances, actions, and looks. It is to those narratives that I turn.

The Perfect Bride

In the final interview, Donna talked quite a bit about her responsibilities as a bride in Pakistani culture. In a clear departure from western cultural prescriptions, Donna's context of culture demands that the bride wear dressy, ceremonial clothes for the first year of marriage:

...as a new bride, when you go out anywhere, like, say, we go to the Mosque to say our prayers, I am supposed to be very dressed up. This is pretty much for the first year of marriage.... Your makeup—like full makeup, full jewelry, earrings, jewelry, necklaces, heels.

She likened this standard to the way she appeared at her wedding reception for which her makeup alone took “about an hour.” When I asked her to elaborate on the reason behind this standard, Donna unveiled her cultural expectations:

It's part of Pakistani culture. Like, even if somebody were to get married over here, they are supposed to dress up for a whole year. Even when I came over here, and we went for Friday prayers, they were like, “Oh, let's see your clothes, let's see your makeup.” So people expect it when you first get married—for you to be dressed up all the time, and all that.

Though she claims to have “never been like that,” Donna admitted that she adheres to the custom without a great deal of resistance.

When I asked Donna how she felt about the pressure to look the part of the perfect bride, she talked mostly about how her in-laws make her feel when she falls short of the cultural prescription:

I know it's a big thing over there. They're very big on looks in the family in general, like, "Look good when you go out, when you're going to be meeting people."...So it is kind of annoying when they say, "Oh, go change your lipstick," or, you know, "Go put nicer shoes on." And I'm just thinking, "I don't care," you know? It's not a big deal to me.

Despite the annoyance, Donna has learned to "swallow things sometimes" in an effort to be the perfect bride. An integral element of this perfection was Donna's fairness.

Who is the Fairest of All?⁹³

Donna admitted that, "being fair is important in Pakistani culture." When I asked how Donna defined "being fair," she indicated that fairness was measured by skin tone--lighter skin tones were prized and considered beautiful while darker skin tones were deemed less valuable. This brief narrative assists:

I'm lucky because I'm very fair. Like, that is so important. I don't know. It just seems like it's important to be fair and thin. You know?...Being fair skinned is a big deal. In Pakistan people are always like, "Oh, you're so pretty. You're so fair. You're so fair." Even in my community, it's a status thing. Like, I don't even know anybody really dark. I see some dark brown people, but they aren't people who, like, participate in our group or anything.

Her words mirror recent scholarship on the correlation between skin tone and economics.

Sullivan (2003) exposed this divide between light and dark. His finding: "Skin color is not

just a mark of beauty here, but an indication of caste.” While Donna’s roots grow far from the caste-oriented system of India, the premise applies to the economics of birth as well as to genetics. The result—Donna only socialized with light-skinned Pakistani’s while in the United States.

In Britain, though, Donna finds herself immersed in Pakistani culture and seems surprised by the differences. While stateside Pakistani’s segregate according to their specific type of Muslim, British citizens of Pakistani decent cluster in ethnic-based communities. Donna shares her surprise:

It was a big—not culture shock—but I mean, there’s so many over there! It was quite surprising. You know, it was like living in Pakistan or India.

Basically, there’s tons. You know they’ve got streets where it’s like a whole Pakistan street, where it’s all Pakistani shops and Pakistani areas where there’s only Pakistanis that live there. And you find, over there, that they want to live with their own people, so they will pay the prices to live in the houses in those neighborhoods....I mean, it’s really strange.

Clearly, Donna is unaccustomed to being around so many Pakistanis. With her sheltered veil of privilege removed, Donna sees the world through a much clearer lens and recognizes the privilege her fairness provides.

Mirror, Mirror

These narratives reveal the power of media, family, and culture to inform a woman’s self-image. While the discourse from the study illuminates these Discourses at work, I argue that it is not at all atypical of young women in general. When a world, obsessed with thin good looks (Wood, 2004), constantly forces women to negotiate the space between

adolescence and womanhood through a looking glass⁹⁴ (Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000), women are forced to contend with the “I” word. As we have seen, even women who appear to fit the ideal surrender to the pressures of culture. Consider Mike Ritter’s (2002) cartoon exploration of Britney Spears’ influence:

This is the new fall line! Haven’t you heard? Britney Spears has stopped wearing clothes altogether.⁹⁵

His image includes a fashionable young woman who meets all of the current Britney Spears’ standards—clothed in a midriff, braless top tied in the back and pubic-cut short shorts with large belt buckle with a handbag to accessorize and coordinate outfit (and to draw attention to small waistline). Interestingly, the young woman also has braided hair with bows, maintaining some semblance of innocence despite her clothing. Even in the young woman’s stylish surrender, she is astonished to learn that the new fall line, modeled after Britney’s newest pattern, requires no clothes at all! While the women of my study were amenable to laying bare their fears, dreams and attitudes, each cringed at the thought of wearing Britney-inspired clothes.

They also complained that media images set unrealistic, inaccurate, and unattainable scales when weighing a woman’s worth. Scarlett’s narrative proves the most poignant example:

I mean, a plus-size model is a size eight! I think they’re all under a size six, I’m sure. Well, I know Tyra Banks is a size eight, but um, generally, plus-size models are size eight and up, so I think probably between a two and six, or a zero and a six....I saw her on Oprah. She fluctuates between a six and an eight, because she has wide hips, she said. And that they airbrush her boobs;

those aren't really hers. She said she'd rather they didn't do it, but when they retouch it she looks at it and says, "Oh, that looks so much better! Go ahead and put it up." [LAUGHS] I don't know. If I want, I know Tyra Banks does underwear; she's a Victoria's Secret model. If I want to buy underwear from there, bras from there, it doesn't matter what it looks like on her, it won't look like that on ME anyways. So I don't know, I don't think everything needs to be so fake.

Like Scarlett, none of the women in the study felt comfortable with the media's perfected portrayal. Though each recognized that the measuring tape was not an accurate gauge of her self-worth and was willing to confront these false images, each also fell victim to moments of body loathing or to moments of scrutiny devoted to distinct bits and pieces of her body that did not fit the ideal. Despite awareness of the counterfeit ideal established to measure female beauty, each woman in this study concentrated on the reflection of her body in context instead of focusing on her body's purpose and wonder. Clearly, then, these women's cognitive ability to deconstruct false images did not protect them from their pull.

Summary

In chapter five I utilized Gee's notion of context of culture as the lens through which to discuss participant body image and the ways in which that image produced and was being produced by both consumption of and starvation from visual media culture and celebrity spectacle. It is evident from these narratives that body image represents a major force in participant identity formation and is a point at which their discourse about Discourse(s) intersects. Equally influential is the intersection formed through an investigation of their relationship narratives. It is to a closer inspection of those narratives that I move.

CHAPTER SIX:

WHO AM I?

You always end up giving up yourself so that other people will want to be with you.

Lazarus & Wunderlich, 2000

Chapter six uses participants' context of culture to frame the discussions of relationships and fairy tale fantasies evident in Scarlett, Tina, Donna and Marilyn's identity talk and to consider the ways in which their discourse about relationships intersect. In particular, this chapter uses discourse analysis to investigate the ways in which the women of this study reveal who they are based on whom they are with. After reviewing transcripts from the autobiographical interview session, I was shocked to see an overwhelming commitment of discourse to relationships. While I had no preconceived notions about the amount of time appropriate to relationship talk in the autobiographical interview, I marveled at the way each young woman defined herself and was defined by the person with whom she was engaged in a relationship.

Sharon Flake's (2004) *Who am I without him? short stories about girls and the boys in their lives* parallels the stories of the women in this study. Her tales chronicle the complex struggles women experience as adolescents in their attempts to make a place for themselves in society. Specifically, Flake argues that young women prepare this place in society by defining themselves in terms of their ability to attract partners; this is not unlike the research presented on media manipulation in chapter two. Though her text expressly discusses female allure in terms of male attraction while this study includes male-female and female-female relationships, Flake's work provides a constructive means through which to consider female narratives on relationships.

Marilyn: Looking for Mr. Right

Girls think they know what they want until they get it (Flake, 2004, p. 109).

Marilyn is looking for Mr. Right while being Ms. Engaged. In fact, Marilyn has been engaged to John for two years and has dated continuously throughout that time. Though she claims that she has no plans to marry John since their intended wedding date passed May 2003, she often came to interviews wearing her engagement ring. When asked about the ring's importance to and meaning for her, Marilyn focused primarily on what wearing the ring means to John:

Well, it is on and off again every time I turn around. [LAUGHS] I don't know, it's, you know, I love him more than anything else in the world, and that will never change. But I just feel as we grow up we grow further and further apart. And it's not that...I mean it's just difficult. And it just makes him happy to see it on whether we're fighting or not, it makes him...It's like a security blanket for him.

With subsequent questions, Marilyn revealed that she wears the ring because "I love the ring and I think it's pretty and so [LAUGHS] it doesn't bother me to wear, because I think it looks pretty on my finger." While chapters four and five both acknowledge the importance Marilyn places on appearances, Marilyn is looking for more out of her relationships. She looks so much, in fact, that her entire autobiographical narrative focused on her relationship problems. To avoid confusion, I analyze Marilyn's relationships with two men, Michael and John, in the sections that follow.

Michael: Prince Charming

Marilyn has a pattern of looking for other men when her relationship with John falls short of the fairy tale perfection first discussion in chapter two. She thought she had found her Prince Charming in Michael

I guess I kind of look at Michael as the prince charming that comes in on the white horse, like the fairy tale that never really happens, or, you know, that you dream about all the time. It is not really a reality or it isn't really possible or whatever

and described him as “the only person on the face of this earth that could pull me away from John.” In the first few minutes of her autobiographical interview, Marilyn established her frustration with Michael's ability to pull her away from John:

I was like, “ARGH!” I had just decided, I love John, I want to be with John, I'm really going to try to make things work. Then Michael showed up in my life again.

Though she claims to “want to be with John,” she is quick to place Michael on a fairy tale pedestal.

Not surprisingly, Marilyn's early discourse about Michael focused on the qualities that first made him attractive to her. In addition to good looks, Marilyn's discourse revealed how happy she was with their friendship:

Michael and I were such good friends. We were just friends. We saw each other three or four times a week. That was pretty much it. We laughed and we joked and we hung out and we'd go to Chili's and have a few Margaritas and we'd go home [together] and that was it. I didn't keep anything from him

and he didn't keep anything from me. Anytime John and I were having problems, he was there and anytime he and [his girlfriend] were having problems, I was there. I knew how much he loved her. I really did. I think that is part of why it was so hard. But, they broke up and then John and I started having problems. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where to go, I didn't know. Michael was there to just be there as a friend. You know, I would have spent Easter by myself had he not asked me to come over and stay with him. My parents were out of town and John took [another girl] with him to his family for Easter dinner. That was hard. He was there and he was a great friend and he helped me through everything.

But friendship quickly turned to love

when things really started getting bad between John and I, it was like I was leaning on him more and more and I hated it. I didn't want him to see me cry. I had known that I was interested in him but I never saw it as a possibility because I was engaged. The possibility wasn't even there. The more he was there for me, the stronger it made my feelings for him. All of a sudden this door opened that hadn't opened before. It was just like, all of a sudden, he was there and he was in my life and he was ready to do whatever it took to make me happy and to be there for me. It was an experience like I've never experienced in my life. He means so much to me. I can't even describe what I feel when I'm with him. Or, just how happy I get when he calls on the phone. I mean, I'm sure you see it on my face. Just to get voicemails from

him, it just. I don't know. I was in love with him. I was so in love with him that I couldn't see straight.

Marilyn was equally taken by Michael's ambition and talked quite a bit about Michael finishing his masters and applying for admission to doctoral programs. To Marilyn, Michael appeared to have it all—looks, an interest in being her best friend, and ambition:

He is graduating from Duke this year. He is actually is flying home from Mississippi now. He did his first presentation from all of his research that he's been doing for the last four years. He presented this weekend down in Mississippi and then he's got a couple more presentations before the end of the year and then he'll graduate from Duke with is Master's. He is looking at four different places to go for his doctorate study—Hawaii, Florida, Rhode Island and Charleston.

Michael's ambition, though, seems to be the entry point for problems in the relationship. Apparently, their love could not withstand Michael's attempts to distance himself as graduate school letters loomed:

He was like, "I don't know where this is going." He was like, "Obviously we can't do this if you are going to be here and I'm going to be there." I kept driving back and forth from Myrtle Beach everyday, all spring long. I would drive back and forth just to go see him. I didn't matter, just as long as I could see him. I'd drive down there and stay the night with him, drive back up here and work at Chili's and go back down there to sleep. It was a lot but it didn't matter because that [with Michael] is where I was happy.

Alas, that happiness was short-lived and the same qualities that once made Michael attractive were now sources of irritation.

He hurt me. I love Michael as a person and I always will because of the relationship that we had together before, but I'm not going to let myself fall in love with him again. He always says, "I understand, but it [a long distance relationship] is not possible, it is not possible," blah, blah, blah. "It is not about my feelings for you, it is just not a possibility." I can't tell you how many times I've heard that line. So, I quit trying. If Michael wants to talk to me, if Michael wants to hang out or spend time together, he can call me. If it is meant to be together, then it will happen but I'm not going to change anything anymore to try to make it happen with him. He has hurt me too many times. He is too emotionally unstable to make any type of decision anytime soon. He isn't going to so why should I continue to try and continue to sacrifice? I've just decided, if it happens, it happens, if it doesn't, it doesn't. That is probably one of the hardest realities I ever came to.

Suddenly, Marilyn's construct for Prince Charming falls apart.

You know, you find somebody that you think is absolutely perfect, you know, you just feel like no matter what you do, no matter how many straight hours on end you spend together, you never get tired of each other. You can lay in bed and watch *Shrek* straight over in a row and laugh about the same parts over and over and it is still a good time. There is nothing I can do to prove to him that I'm not going to hurt him. There is nothing I can do to prove to him that it is going to be okay. He is just going to do what he wants. If he wants

to spend time with me, he can call me, if he doesn't, he doesn't. I'm not going to let him hurt me again and he is not going to break my heart again and that is what I've told him: You've done it twice. You aren't doing it again.

As Marilyn prepared to return to John, she reflected on her relationship with Michael one more time, framing her discourse in terms of Michael's identity formation and her willingness to put her ambition on hold for a worthy man:

Michael is a highly intelligent individual who has all these goals set up for himself and places he wants to go and things he wants to do. [He] applied to 48 PhD programs and got denied from 48 PhD programs with a Duke graduate degree. And he doesn't have a reason as to why and has no clue what he is going to do with his life now and has no focus and has no center. And everything that he was to me, everything that was important to me about him is no longer there. I mean, everything that attracted me to him is gone. I mean, your whole sense of, "You are going to be intelligent, you are going to be a PhD. That is all I wanted for you. I wanted success. I was willing to sit back and not be together so you could go and get this master's and be successful and finish your research and do all this and get published." That was what was important. That was what was going to make him successful. I was willing to sit back and wait for all this to occur and now that it is becoming more difficult—all his goals have changed, and his focus and [now] [h]e is like, "I'm just going to find a job."

Once Marilyn discovered that her Prince Charming was really just a frog, she retreated to the familiar comfort and security of her fiancé.

Reliable John

It's the way he was raised . . . taught him how a boy treats a girl. Boys that open doors. Boys that compliment your hair and legs and smile. Boys that listen and touch your hair when they talking to you. Boys that know it ain't money that girls really want: it's time (Flake, 2004, p. 52)

Marilyn's discourse communicates that she is clearly invested in her relationship with John despite maintaining multiple boyfriends she intentionally fails to mention. John, however, is not free from his own set of indiscretions. After keeping several of his own relationships on the side and, at his worst, kicking Marilyn out of the house they shared, John's "stupidity" appears to be the only thing keeping them from happily ever after.

Part of John's "stupidity" is his belief that money buys Marilyn happiness. As Flake notes, it is boys who have not learned how to treat girls that hold tight to the promise and power of money. Consider Marilyn's frustration with the power John attributes to money:

the thing that stresses me out most with him is it's not about monetary issue, you know? It's not about—you know, he can give me anything and everything I want, you know? He can buy me this and he can buy me that, but money only goes—you know, it's not about money. Money doesn't make you happy. I mean, it can help make you happy. It can buy you the things you want that you think can make you happy. But I just don't think—I mean like I said, just stress. Just to not argue with somebody. Just to be able to sit down and watch a movie with somebody and not worry about what the other person did that day. That's happy, you know? And he just doesn't understand that. He thinks, "Well I buy you this, and I buy you that, why aren't you happy?"

Here Marilyn's discourse on happiness is strikingly similar to previous comments about her relationship with Michael. She wants a stress-free relationship and a person she can watch *Shrek* and football with without any "drama." Marilyn is not, however, immune to the lure of money or to the relationship traps it uncovers:

I've always told him, "John, not many 20, not many 19 year olds," because he was 19 at the time, "not many 19 year olds have this opportunity. You have the opportunity to live the lifestyle that you want to live. You have the opportunity to buy the toys and play with the toys that you want to play with. You may not always have this opportunity." You know, everything that we own toy wise he has bought and paid for in cash. The only thing we make a payment on is my car. The jet skis, the boat, the four wheelers, the motorcycle—everything is paid for.

Though Marilyn and John are not married and no longer live together, her discourse exposes a responsibility to "we" indicative of married finances:

We may come to a time where like right now, we have absolutely no money, but he still feels comfortable because he can still live that lifestyle. He still has his toys. And I guess in once sense, I've always thought that that is okay. He'll turn it around and he'll make money and two or three weeks from now he'll have \$30,000 sitting in the bank. And it goes up and down and that is just the way that the cycle has been for the last two years, and I understand it finally.

One of Marilyn's main concerns about a long-term relationship with John, masked by all this talk of finances, is John's lack of ambition:

But I want him to keep pushing. I don't want him to just give up and turn away from it [a successful business as a contractor]. I don't know that that, I mean, I don't know that it is okay to be our age and live the lifestyle that we've lived and then turn around when you get older, when you think that things should be getting better and they start going the opposite direction. I don't know that that is okay.

And, though her interest in John's ambition may seem altruistic, Marilyn is actually more concerned with having the means to get what she wants. The difference now is that, since John kicked her out of the house, Marilyn no longer relies on him as her benefactor.

I don't think it bothers me as long as I get what I want and I'm living the way I want to live, I don't care. I mean I'm going to make sure that either way, you know what? No matter what happens to me now, I will make sure that after what happened last year, I will make sure that I can take care of myself. It wasn't that I wasn't making money, it wasn't that I didn't have money, but it was spending money. "Let's spend money. Let's go shopping. Let's buy this. Let's buy that." It was never, "I'm 20 and," you know, "I'm 21 and there is a possibility that my fiancé is going to do this and I'm going to have nothing and I'm going to have to support myself completely." That was just never an option. I mean, it [being kicked out] was never a thought. And now that it is, he can do whatever he wants and that is fine, but you better believe that I'm going to be able to support myself and the way I want to live from now on, no matter what.

Despite this independent discourse, Marilyn remains mired in a deep love for John. Even though he “has a hard time telling the truth” and cannot seem to tell the truth even “about stupid stuff,” Marilyn admits that she “love[s] him and want[s] it to work.” If Michael was her Prince Charming, what is it that she loves about John? I contend that her love has become such a comfortable habit that she willingly slides back into it every time another relationship falls apart. Consider the way she describes her love for John in terms of his ability to be there for her over time:

I started thinking about it and I decided, I think, that I love John so much, after everything we’ve been through. I love John as a person and I could live the rest of my life with John and be happy if that is what is meant to be. We’ve been through so much hell and yet, when it comes down to it, he is always the one that is there for me. It really just got to me. I just decided that I was going to be done with it, that I was really going to focus on things with John.

Here Marilyn dedicates even more importance to John’s “being there” for her and to the role that plays in her investment in their relationship:

John is going to be there for me through everything. No matter what happens, he is going to be there. You know, even if he is doing something stupid, where he knows he shouldn’t be doing it, if something happens to me, he is going to be the first person there. If I need anything, he is going to be the first person there. Sometimes I wonder if our relationship has changed to... Is it more like John is the closest person to me? Is he like my friend almost? Am I still in love with him? Has that love changed? Has that relationship changed?

I want it not to have. I want things to be the way they used to be and I think he does too. Things wouldn't have happened had the relationship not changed. If we still had the same relationship, if we still had the same feelings for each other, you know, certain situations wouldn't have happened.

When I asked Marilyn, in the final interview, about the future of her relationship with John, she seemed cautiously optimistic:

I love him so much. I really do. But I just... And I mean, I think we'll get married and I think things will be fine. I hope so anyways. These last couple of months have been really different for us. So I don't know. I think it will be positive. I think it will turn out okay. I think that we were both so young and I think that we had a lot of growing up to do and a lot of real world things to realize before we were ready to settle down. And now there is nothing that either of us needs to wonder about. I don't have to worry about 10 years from now him wondering, "What if I didn't do..." You know?

Evidently, she finally decided that John was, in fact, her Mr. Right.

Donna: Arranged Bliss

Know what you want just as well as you know what you don't want (Flake, 2004, p. 163).

As chapter four revealed, Donna loves two men, Alex and Ahmed. However, unlike Marilyn, Donna willingly accepts the role both relationships play in her life and identity formation and honors her marital choice by remaining true to her vows. Her discourse, though, does not abstain from lengthy conversations about her love for both men and about

the reasons behind her choices. Donna absolutely knows now, as this section reveals, what she wants and what she does not want. Unfortunately, Donna was not always so certain.

Alex: The Would-Be Husband

Donna does not attempt to hide her love for Alex. She willingly admits that, [h]e is [my first love]. Like, he, I mean, even now I think about it and, if I could, I would go back to him in a heartbeat because it was something. I think me and Alex were soul mates.

But she “always knew in [her] mind it would never work with Alex:”

I always knew, I mean I had. Yeah. I had convinced myself, "look Donna do this" but, you know, I got attached at one point. Then something, I don't remember what happened, but I was like "OK. I'm not going to be able to marry him. It won't be happening." And I, you know, I told myself that and I would prepare. You know in the end, like, I was like "have your fun now, but in the end, you know, you won't be able to marry him.”

Somehow, this knowledge provided Donna little comfort. Her love for Alex grew.

Alex's inaction also allowed Donna's frustration to grow. Despite his professions of love and the shared connection Donna conveyed in her interviews, Alex failed to come to Donna's rescue when Ahmed and his family proposed marriage.

[W]hen Ahmed asked for my hand in marriage, Alex never even jumped on it [the possibility of a relationship with me] then. You know I thought maybe that would kick him into gear, but I didn't. He never did anything about [it].

Feeling abandoned, Donna makes excuses for Alex's behavior:

So, but I know at the same time that he was he didn't want to pull me away from my family, he was very he just wanted me to do what made me the happiest and he knew how close I was with my family, so he didn't want to be the reason to pull me away. So you know talking to other people . . . other people don't realize you know that with Alex never did anything. They just see it as "Oh, he's he was just being a punk" you know, just being a wuss and not standing up for anything.

Donna clearly conveys her sense of disappointment and reveals her interest in having the man she loves fight to keep her love. Her stated willingness to give up everything—her family, her faith, and her future—for him was not reciprocated.

I think he was, you know he could have done a lot more and he could have fought for me because I was willing to lay down everything for him and, in that way, I think I sold myself short. You know. I, I was willing to do anything for him and I think I should have maybe stood my ground a bit more and been like "No, you have to [fight for me] you know."

Despite her strong words, Donna's discourse suggests that she is willing to overlook any flaws in Alex just to be close to him.

But I remember, I remember one time we got in a very big fight and it was the only big fight we ever had and I didn't talk to him for like I think a week and a half or two weeks (laughter), that seems like nothing, but like, it was a week and a half to two weeks and I remember, then I remember us going out for dinner, and I remember talking and everything and I remember thinking like, you know, everything just felt right like once we went to dinner and

everything was OK again I was just like you know I really miss this like this was really important this is really important and I was willing to overlook anything for it.

Alex was not, however, inactive as the relationship came to a close. Consider his efforts to reach Donna before she left for her engagement in England:

He tried to get in touch with me at the airport as I was leaving. He booked a flight so that he could get up, um, into the departure lounge so he could speak to me. I saw him, but I was walking with a security guard. Because they, um, he had missed his flight--obviously, he wasn't actually gonna take the flight--and they were announcing his name over the loud speaker, and I heard his name and I just freaked out, and my parents heard it as well, and I was like "Mom, that's Alex. I know he's here." And, um, so they sent a security guard up with me on the plane, to escort me onto the plane, so that I wouldn't talk to him. When I got, I mean I cried the whole way to England.

Alex's drastic attempts to overcome all obstacles to save his true love from constant separation were foiled, but they did not go unnoticed or unappreciated. Donna viewed them, instead, as another manifestation that Alex's life revolves around her as she lapses into reminiscence:

I know that he was like I know he was just crazy about me you know like his life revolved around me. So, no he was, he was definitely like my first he was my true love like really. We were best friends we were very very close. It wasn't just about us being in love; we were very good friends. I mean all through college I think I never had I had close friends but he was my closest

you know like we hung out together we did everything together. It was always me and him we we pretty much spent 24/7 together. We were together all the time.

It is the pull of that togetherness and of the comfort Alex provides that frightened Donna as she approached her marriage:

Like I think now I've committed myself to [Ahmed] and I know. I don't know if it's like I don't know if it's just I'm not allowing myself to think about beforehand [with Alex]. I don't know if that's what it is or if it's just that I am really, you know like now I know I love him but I don't know? I can see, I can see myself if I started thinking about Alex getting myself in a mindset where you know I want Alex. I mean it'd be so easy just to to pick up and do that again. You know when you're alone with your thoughts that's just the worst.

Fearful of being alone with these loving thoughts of Alex, Donna turns to her commitment to her husband and discusses the strain her love for Alex puts on their relationship

So...yeah, the whole Alex thing is still, it's hard to deal with. You know, like the past two weeks I was really thinking about maybe meeting up with him and talking to him and telling him this is it for his closure, but I don't think Ahmed would want me to do that, and I'm not very good at keeping secrets from him (laughter). So, you know, like, you know, I would have to end up telling him, but I know he'd be upset. So, it's like, you know, I don't know what to do.

And, though Donna desperately seeks closure to her relationship with Alex without Ahmed's

interference, I was struck by her interest in having Ahmed available to emotionally support her once she finished seeing her other love:

And, I mean, even like as far as even speaking to Alex I want Ahmed to, not to be there when I'm talking to him, but to be there so that once I'm done talking to Alex I can go to him. You know? And for his comfort as well as for mine, you know to to be like "Look this is what I've done" and I'm OK now, see I'm still with you. And for, you know, so that I have somebody there [to make sure I don't do anything I don't want to do].

Though Donna does not trust herself or her instincts with respect to Alex, she does trust her husband.

Ahmed: King of the Castle

[Donna] I live in an enclosed little naïve world and I know I am naïve. I let myself be naïve to a lot of things, and I think he [Ahmed] likes that.

Donna supplied extremely traditional discourse, regarding her relationship with Ahmed, in terms of the female gender identities and obedience to patriarchal values discussed in chapter two. From “once you get married your husband will take care of you” to her complete reliance on him for transportation due to her lack of a British driver’s license, Donna has assumed the role of passive princess since she married and moved to England.

He is the only one that I have there. But at the end of the day, it’s me and him, you know what I mean? He is the one that I feel the closest to, and if he’s mad at me, then it’s like I have nobody. I am over there and he is the only one I have got at the moment. He is the one I rely on for everything.

Though she “wanted to wait about a year” to get married but ended up getting married “six months earlier than [she] wanted,” Donna now spends her time waiting on her husband and willing concedes the reason:

I guess it’s more that he’s more mature, you know? You always hear that guys, you know, if they’re the same age, the girl’s always more mature, and I think that is true. I think that is true. And I like the fact that he’s smarter than me, you know, wiser than me, and he has seen more of the world. He’s experienced more than me. I do—I would prefer that. And I think he likes that he has, as well—you know, that I’m the innocent one—that I don’t know anything.

The fact that Donna graduated from college in three years and was bound for medical school in the United States prior to this marriage reflect the extent to which Donna claims not to “know anything,” yet she constructs herself in much the same way in all of her conversations about Ahmed, including those connected to religion.

Donna’s religious life plays a major role in her identifications and her marriage. Here, her comments reinforce traditional Pakistani male/female roles:

I think I said it sometime in the first interview about how I think he is very wise. And I think a lot of it [my comfort with him leading our family] comes from there. He knows a lot about our religion. And that is really important to me because my dad was the one that we would always go to, to ask questions. Whereas I saw my mom praying more. I mean, they did the same thing. They knew the same amount, but I associated all the knowledge with my dad and the praying or spirituality with my mom.

Donna indicates an interest in emulating her parents' religious roles through her marriage:

So, you know, now that me and Ahmed are like separated [until their reception] and we are about to get married I'm always telling him, "You need to pray more, you need to pray more, you need to pray more, so that everything goes okay." So, I hope, yeah, that we are able to make each other stronger in that. I think we'll follow the same roles [as my parents] because I don't feel like I know as much history and knowledge about my religion. I feel like I am more spiritual. I feel like I have a closer relationship with God rather than with all of the text and whatnot. I can answer the questions, but I would always be doubting myself. I could see myself sending my children to my husband.

In addition, her discourse shifts toward the more traditional roles of wife and mother depicted in fairy tales:

Now I just picture, just like, I don't know, like me and Ahmed and having his children and being taken care of. It's just, it's, uh, it's so different. Like I know that I will be taken care of. I know that he feels this responsibility towards me. It's very much about his responsibility as a husband towards me and my responsibility as a wife and, not only that, about us wanting to fulfill those obligations to each other.

Not surprisingly, then, Donna's narratives paint her responsibility as wife as service to her husband

I think just taking care of my husband and in all areas. I don't know. Like you know the whole cooking, cleaning, having the house ready for him?

Yeah, that all falls under there, but I think just being there for him. more just supporting him. [A]t dinner, everybody [is] like, "Oh, Donna go serve him. He's your husband."

Though Donna seems to enjoy being a wife, she continually equates marriage with service to her husband. Given that discourse thread, Donna and I shifted our conversation to consider pre-marital attitudes about relationship roles and responsibilities.

Donna's relationship with Ahmed is not, despite the preceding discourse, perfect. In fact, Donna almost refused to marry him because she thought he was a bad person.

I started having second thoughts, and I think it started all with I found out a lot about Ahmed's past and I couldn't handle it. He wasn't a very good person in his past (laughter) as far as, you know, he'd been with a lot of girls and I wasn't raised like that. You know, I don't even, I don't even think of my brother as ever doing anything like that. You know? Like he drank, he smoked weed, he was with plenty of girls, he was a womanizer. You know, he's admitted it to me.

True to her behavior with Alex, Donna has come to accept Ahmed's indiscretions after a period of low commitment to the marriage:

Now I'm OK with it. Now, I think because I see what a different person he is and I see how much he cares for me, it's OK for me to leave it [his womanizing, bad behavior] alone. But when he first told me, I was just like "how can I be with somebody like that?" Like I don't respect people and and that. You know? I don't, I don't respect people like that. I would've never even given him a look had I known him back then. You know? I don't know,

I don't live that lifestyle. I don't even know people that live that kind of lifestyle, so to have him, I mean, like we were talking (laughter) we were talking last night and I was like "you're the worst person I know!"

Despite being the worst person Donna knows, she sees and loves Ahmed's vulnerability, targeting trust and mutual responsibility as the key factors in their arranged bliss:

He's very. It's different with him, he's not, he's never opened up to anybody. Like I said, he was a womanizer. He's never opened up his feelings towards anybody. He doesn't get close to people, he doesn't trust anybody. Like when, the whole, you know when I almost didn't marry Ahmed? He stuck by me because he was like, you know, it's my responsibility as a husband to you. So he understands that there's responsibility along with it and I don't ever think Alex was on the level.

Additionally, Donna allows herself to be vulnerable in ways she never dreamed possible:

The thing is, I found I have become a lot more emotional when we fight. I want to solve it; I want to make it better; I want to fix it. And I find also that I tend to cry at the drop of a hat when we fight. Oh, my gosh. I do. It is so annoying because it's not—I don't normally cry like that. So every time we fight for him to see me cry I am like, "No, it's not, I don't really do this every time, you know?" So it is hard, because I just get really frustrated, I think, that he doesn't talk about it because I want to so much and then he doesn't.

Time and again, Donna's discourse reveals that both her identity and her ambition shift as her identity talk becomes more deeply entangled with her relationships with men. This once-determined student is now "just a wife" who delights in that new, all-consuming role.

Tina & John

[C]ommunicate, respect one another, and manage finances—three key ingredients to a successful relationship (Flake, 2004, p. 115).

In chapter four, I characterized Tina as a young women completely invested in helping the people she loves. In particular, I used Tina's discourse to reveal a lifelong pattern of helping the men in her life. This pattern is a considerable source of concern for her mother:

As she started to learn about his past and all that [she got upset]. I've always been open with my mom. I don't want to hide something from her even though I know she is not going to like his past. I don't want to hide it from her. I don't think it is so much that she didn't like him, but she didn't like him for me. She wanted me to be able to have someone that she felt was better for me than John because she knows how different we are. She didn't like me to be with somebody like that. She didn't feel like he was good for me.

That concern is due, in part, to her experiences with Tina's father and the observations discussed in chapter four of Tina's relationship with her father:

She doesn't want me to have it as hard as she did and she is afraid that I do. She knows that that [finances] is all falling on me right now, and she knows how that feels because that is how it was with her and I [when I was little]. That was the main thing that she wanted to protect me from, that feeling of total responsibility and having to have it as hard as she did.

It is here that their mother-daughter discourse converges in the understanding that Tina is easily taken for granted and diverges with respect to male/female relationship roles.

As expected, her mother's "main concern"

is me. Her only concern in the whole situation is me. My main concern is us together, and he is still a part of that. That is where we bang heads on the issue. She has always said that I let myself get taken advantage of, that I let people walk all over me and I let people take advantage of me because of how supportive I am and because of how I've always wanted to help people.

Tina's earlier discourse confirms her mother's concerns about her vulnerability. Since Tina acknowledges that she has been interested in and validated by "helping people," this point neither surprises nor concerns Tina as she moves forward to identify reasons:

I think that is another reason that she sometimes gets worried about me and John because she doesn't want it to end up that way. She doesn't want John to end up depending on me. She feels like, if anything, I should depend on him—not that I ever would. But, you know, the situation shouldn't be where he is dependent on me. I shouldn't have to support him. I think sometimes she worries that that is how it is going to end up. He is going to end up walking all over me and taking advantage of the fact that I do support him and that I do stand behind him and have faith in him.

Here, Tina reveals the reason for their conflict: the context for relationships—men take care of and provide for women—her mother imparted. As the next section depicts, this worldview dramatically affected the way Tina was raised and informs her current thoughts about male/female relationship roles.

Money Matters

Tina's love for John and her open conversations with her mother do little to mitigate mom's concerns that Tina and John are in a serious, committed relationship. None of this, however, removes pressure from John to win Tina's mother's approval. To love Tina, it appears John must overcome his past and win favor with her mother:

Really, the past year and a half, he has been, he has had to try harder to impress my mom than me. I see it. She doesn't know everything that goes on. She sees the outside. She doesn't hear our conversations. She doesn't know the things that he says to me and how serious he is about it [our relationship] when we talk about it. All she sees is the outside. It is hard sometimes. She doesn't see how hard he tries.

To complicate matters, John does not have a job. His seeming inability to take care of Tina serves as the pivot on which his favor turns:

Like right now, he is trying to find a job because he got laid off a couple months ago. He had been working at a company for about nine months and got laid off and he has been looking for a job and that is hard. All she sees is that it has been two and a half months and doesn't have a job yet. She doesn't realize that he has been out every single day putting in applications and calling people and going to interviews. I mean, what else can you do except look? She doesn't see how hard he really tries, like I do. That is where we get stuck. When he is doing good, when he has got a job and he is working and everything is good, he is wonderful and she loves him. The first time something goes wrong, it is right back to, "Well, wait a minute, is he really

good for her? Is he really going to do right?’’ She worries about me. She wants the best for me, and I don’t blame her for that.

Although Tina’s discourse signals an understanding of her mother’s reservations, the discourse about how much her mother worries about their financial situation dominates the autobiographical interview:

It still worries her that I’m the main source of income right now in our relationship, that I’m the one that has all the responsibility of all the bills and all the worry. I mean, it is hard, but I make it work. I make it work because of how strong she taught me how to be. Like I said, it is hard for us to talk about it because of how much she worries and how strongly she feels about it. Most of the time, the conversations get heated, and she ends up saying something about him that I don’t like and the conversation ends. It is hard to talk about it. It is difficult. We try to talk about it. We sit down and try to talk about it, but eventually it always gets escalated because of the strong emotions and how strong we both feel about it.

And, while Tina and John’s financial situation seems to dominate Tina’s conversations with her mother, Tina never mentioned having conversations about money with John. The next section analyzes this element in Tina’s discourse and the impact her upbringing has on her current worldview.

I Don’t Need to be Rescued

Instead of money, John’s understanding of Tina’s requirements for a relationship surfaced as an important thread in her conversations. In an effort to be clear with John about

what he must do to be with her, Tina appears to have opened the door to one-way communication as her independent attitude and contagious ambition emerge here:

He knows that in order to be in a relationship with me, he has to take care of his responsibilities and hold a job and not be on the streets. When I met him, he didn't have a job. He was just as capable of having a job when I met him as he was when he got a job. None of the circumstances were any different, except that he had the motivation to [being with me], a reason to want to [ability to keep me]. He knows that that is a part of being a responsible man. I think that when he met me, he realized that I was something important and special, and he wanted to get to know me. He knows that I am not just sitting still in my life. I'm not just content and happy with today. I've have goals, and I've always had goals. In order for him to be with me, like I've said before, a relationship is not going to work with me going way up here and him staying down here in the same place. If he wants to be able to continue a relationship with me, he has to do something and go somewhere in his life and have goals as well.

Interestingly, while Tina wants the man in her life to be successful and independent, she does not want to rely on him for financial security. Clearly, Tina's mother and her discourse about roles in male/female relationships seeped into Tina's discourse and manifested themselves in her character as independence and ambition:

She also has to understand that he does make me happy, and I know that I don't need him. I think that that is another big part of it. She has taught me that I don't need him. I don't need him to take care of me. I don't need him

to have some big time job where he makes boo coos of money so he can take care of me. I don't need that because of the way that she brought me up. I don't need him to do it [make all the money]. I can do it. As hard as that is for her to realize, she is the one that did it. She is the one that taught me that I don't need him to do it[take care of me], I can do it myself.

In addition to not needing money, Tina's discourse also demonstrates that, while she loves her boyfriend, life would go on without him:

I love John, I love my boyfriend, but if he were to go away tomorrow, I'd be okay. I'd still survive and I'd still be just as strong as I am now. It would hurt. It would be sad because the connection between a man and a woman is strong, but I was raised as an independent woman and I don't need to have a man come and rescue me to make me happy. I think that is a very important lesson that my mom did teach me. I think that that changed. The fairy tale of women being rescued by men, that used to be standard. A woman didn't work, a woman didn't really do anything for herself except be a wife and do what a man needed her to do—cook and clean and make a man's castle his home. I think that that has changed and I think it is important that that has changed. That is a strong difference between the fairy tale and real life.

While Marilyn and Donna both cling to the fantasy of being rescued and cared for by their prince, Tina finds such roles restrictive and enjoys her privilege and ability to choose something other than the fairy tale.

Respecting Differences & Rejecting Compromise

While the background individuals bring to a relationship significantly impacts the way they communicate, value money, and set priorities, Tina views her ability to respect the differences those backgrounds expose as a key to her relationship success:

John and I are so much alike but so different. There are things about us like our stubbornness and all of those things that are so much alike and random things about our life that are so much alike but yet we are so different, completely different. And somehow we meet in the middle. He relaxes me and doesn't let me be so high-string all the time and stressed out all the time and all those things. And at the same time I help him become responsible and help him become an adult person who has support and who has feelings for other people and respect. There are so many things about him that, it's almost like he was never taught. John and I have definitely had very different lifestyles, all the way down to the way that were raised. John obviously was brought up completely different than I was. I was brought up with very respectful, very, you know, just I knew right from wrong and I knew that border line and boundary. Not that I don't think John didn't, but it wasn't as important in his upbringing. Your upbringing is where your whole basis for your thought process and your beliefs and everything else is based on.

Though Tina's discourse judges her upbringing as the better of the two, she does admire certain characteristics to which John's upbringing contributed:

John is the type of person who speaks his mind and doesn't care what anybody's opinion of it is. He doesn't put on a show for anybody. He doesn't put on an act for anybody. He is who he is. If you don't like it, oh well.

For Tina, though, John appears willing to attempt change. Just as he refuses to "put on an act for anybody," Tina refuses to compromise her expectations for him or for their relationship.

He has changed a lot for me, but he doesn't change for anybody else. He doesn't conform to what somebody wants him to be. He is just, "Here I am, this is me." He has had a really rough past. He is rough and gruff. I think his physical appearance was the first thing, he is rough and gruff looking, you saw him.

The reward of this one-way communication is John's willingness to change, to get "where he needs to be," to be with Tina:

Like I said, we've been together now for a year and a half and he has completely turned his life around. He is still working on it. He is definitely not at the point where he needs to be, but he is working on it. He has gotten a job and he has worked now for a year and a half and he pays all his bills. You know, we still go through hard times. I do have goals, and I do have things that I'm heading towards in my life. I have things that I want to accomplish. For him to be able to be with me, he has to have things that he has to accomplish too. A relationship isn't going to work with me up here and him still way down here. We have to progress together.

This emphasis on both partners growing is, as her discourse reveals, a new variable in Tina's relationships. Heretofore, Tina was always the one who set goals, who was available and had

the capacity to help her partner, and who carried the burden of advancing the relationship.

Now, Tina prizes the fact that they are both growing and sees that as an important element in their relationship:

As far as respecting other people and people's feelings and just things that are so basic for me, loving and things that I was taught every day with my mom but he never experienced. And I like what we do for each other. I like what we bring to each other. We drive each other crazy sometimes but we have both grown a lot, being together. And I can honestly say I think this is the first time I've been in a relationship where we were both growing and not just me helping somebody else or trying to help somebody else, you know. It's actually both of us.

Wedding Bells?

Though Tina is excited about and invested in her relationship with John, she is in no hurry to get married. While her discourse might support an argument that her independent nature is the primary reason behind her lack of urgency to marry, Tina shares the real reason: "we're basically married." This, however, is not a source of comfort:

I struggle every day with the playing house part of our relationship, not—I talk to him about it sometimes and it's never really any serious talk. I don't want to get married right now and I don't want to get married right now especially just because I'm living with my boyfriend and it's wrong. It's the playing house part of it [that bothers me], the—living under the same roof, taking care of each other, sleeping in the same bed every night, washing the

dishes, doing the laundry, having our dogs. We basically have two kids. I mean it's all of that stuff that—we're basically married.

Despite her struggle with cohabitation, Tina likes “the way that things are.”

Of interest, though, is the slight slip of her relationship discourse into patriarchal roles. Though she restates her independence at the end, Tina's Discourse may be more informed by traditional patriarchal roles than she or her mother planned:

I like taking care of John and I like and he's getting to the point where—I think what I like about it so much is seeing how much he cares about me and how hard he tries and how hard—every day he does different things, new things that are so different than what he used to be and what he's trying to become because of me and because of how much he loves me. And he knows that in order to be with me there's a certain standard of living that you're going to have. And that's just a true fact; he can do it or not do it. But the option is me or not me and he knows that. And daily we make progress, and he knows that at any time we can stop.

But Tina does not really want to “stop.” Her discourse reveals that John very well may “the one”

[S]omehow we help each other and we bring out things in each other that I don't think we ever would have been able to without having each other. So it's a good thing, it is a good thing. I mean I love John. John is actually the first person that I've actually been serious about when I say that I've actually thought about spending the rest of my life with him. I think everybody says that in high school and all those stupid, meaningless relationships. But he

really is the first person that I've seriously thought about. And I do love him enough that I think I have that the person he is becoming is a forever kind of thing, not a just long enough to get me on the hook and then I'm going to start supporting him.

and that she is absolutely committed to finding out before giving up on her first real shot at happiness.

Scarlett: "I Don't Know What I Am"

Far as I'm concerned, girls want boys to treat 'em bad. Otherwise, why they keep letting the same thing happen to 'em over and over again, even when they with a different dude? (Flake, 2004, p. 108)

In chapter four, I unpacked some of Scarlett's family history and exposed the fact that Scarlett does not "want to be defined by sexuality at all." Adding to Scarlett's history with multiple stepfathers, step-partners and a "crack addict" father who "ruined the rest of his kids," this section considers Scarlett's choices in partners and the ways in which those partners affected her identity formation. Though she still wants "to get married" and "do all that stuff," Scarlett has "goals that don't involve those things also." Unlike the other women of the study, then, Scarlett understands her "happily ever after" as more than just a committed relationship. It is to her relationship history that I now turn.

Early Experiences & Messy Boys

[Scarlett] I dated some messy boys. What was I thinking!

Though Scarlett dates the beginning of her relationship history to 8th grade, she admits that she never "really consider[ed] that dating" because "[we] never went anywhere, we just talked on the phone." Yet the 8th grade relationship remains interesting in that it

represents the only example of Scarlett dating within her own race, “I dated a white guy when I was in like 8th grade,” and reinforces previous statements that she is “black by association” (see chapter four). Scarlett’s high school entry, then, seems to mark a transition from Scarlett’s race-based identity (white) to her socially-situated identity (black), and her relationship choices clearly reflect that shift.

Since Scarlett “didn’t date any white people, not in high school,” the three “messy boys” Scarlett did date in high school—Anthony, Chris, and Darryl—warrant a closer look. In our discussions, Scarlett characterized each as “interesting,” “black,” and “pretty poor like me.” Though she claims she “didn’t generally date people who went to school” with her, all of the people Scarlett shared did attend the same high school during the time they dated. And, though her reflections on these early relationships are often comic, they provide a foundation for Scarlett’s later discourse on her most significant relationships. To that end, I look at each individually and briefly.

Anthony

Scarlett looks back on her first high school relationship (summer between 8th and 9th grade and fall of 9th grade) with Anthony as a “clear error in judgment:”

Um, I don’t know why I dated Anthony. I really can’t fathom why. He has a cone-shaped head [LAUGHS]. I really, I have no idea what possessed me to date him.

Her only attraction seems to be his athleticism:

He did play basketball. [H]e was a good basketball player. But I mean, I would have dated the popular basketball player, but I can’t see why I dated him. I don’t know.

However, Anthony's inability to make the team because he was "kinda slow" and "never studied because he was going directly to the NBA or something like right out of high school" meant that he would never be the "popular basketball player" Scarlett desired. This motivated Scarlett to move on to an athlete for whom she could actually cheer.

Chris

Chris proved to be the athlete Scarlett wanted, but her reflections reveal that she clearly wanted more:

I dated Chris, and that's my first real boyfriend in high school—bad choice. I just thought I was cool because that's when I was cheering JV and he was captain of the varsity football team, so I just knew I was cool. I was. I was very cool for dating him, until he broke up with me because I was a freshman and he was a junior, [LAUGHS] hello?

"Because he was missing his front tooth," Scarlett found the breakup easier to stomach, but she still suffered from the fall in social position. Oddly, though, Scarlett's relationship with Chris established the pattern of dating much older or much younger people evident in her relationship with Darryl and in all of the relationships to follow.

Darryl

While Anthony "had no game" and Chris "was missing his front tooth," surprisingly, Darryl had even less to offer Scarlett:

I don't know. I mean. It wasn't like Darryl could do anything. He couldn't drive. He didn't have a job. I mean, I don't know what I was doing dating him!

Interestingly, when we first began talking about Darryl, Scarlett described him as “Miss _____’s little brother” before reflecting on how insignificant their relationship seemed now. As we talked further, it became clear to Scarlett that this relationship was not about Darryl; the relationship was actually rooted in Scarlett’s quest to irritate Darryl’s sister, a teacher at the high school:

I think I was trying to get back at Miss _____ because she didn’t like me and I didn’t like her.

Looking back, Scarlett is “[g]lad [she] let him go.” The fact that Darryl “now has a baby” with a freshman in high school strengthens her conviction.

As a senior, then, Scarlett took her “What was I thinking?” dating these “messy boys” statements to heart and became interested in establishing a serious relationship. The next section focuses on understanding Scarlett’s first and most significant relationship and reveals yet another formative element in Scarlett’s identity.

I Like Girls?

Scarlett dated “Chelcie, who is actually a girl” for two years beginning in her senior year of high school. Like Darryl, Chelcie was “younger than me too,” but that fact never created the relationship disappointments Darryl’s youth raised. The beginning of their relationship did seem to surprise Scarlett, though, since she originally attempted to set Chelcie up with one of her friends:

I met [Chelcie] when I was in Miss _____’s class my senior year. I was in the hallway with my friend Deidre. We were reading some horrible British Literature book that we had to read—*Beowulf* or something like that—and we’re sitting outside reading that because we couldn’t concentrate in there

[the classroom]. It was so loud. And Chelcie and her class walked down the hallway, and I'm like, oh my gosh, this girl is so young, because she was acting stupid or something. And I actually tried to hook her up with my friend Deidre, who I knew was bisexual at that point. And that didn't work out, I don't know why, but they didn't like each other.

The attempt established Scarlett and Chelcie's friendship, opening the door to the relationship that followed:

So Chelcie and I just kind of became friends. We were just kind of hanging out. And I don't know why that changed, why we weren't friends anymore, but all of a sudden one day we just liked each other. And, I mean, I don't know if maybe she was plotting on me or what. I don't know, but we were just hanging out and then all of a sudden we were dating.

When asked to elaborate on her initial discomfort with the relationship, Scarlett focused instead on how masculine Chelcie appeared and on how Chelcie was "plotting on" her "just like guys do":

It was kind of weird at first. I was like, oh my gosh, I can't believe that this is a girl because she doesn't really look like a girl. I mean, she does, but she doesn't dress like a girl, and she wears her hair like a boy. So I don't know. [Y]ou're never going to see her with beads on the end [of her cornrows] or half of it out or anything like that. Nothing very feminine at all. She is athletic. She wears boy's underwear for God's sake. She wears boxers! So I don't know. I don't know how that happened. We were just hanging out, we were friends.

Scarlett's struggle to come to terms with her interest in a girl and with the possibility that the heterosexual norm might not fit her current situated identity resulted in discourse that not only portrayed Chelcie as male, but also attributed male norms (not feminine, athletic) and male dress to her girlfriend. As she talked, Scarlett fit together the reasons for her discomfort and confusion:

And then we started dating, just randomly. I think [Chelcie] said, "So are we going to go together or what?" And I said, "Excuse me?" I was like, "Whoa, you've got me twisted, that's not what we're doing here." And then I thought about it, and I said, well this really is what we're doing. We're dating. So I was like well, whatever, we can do that. And I tried to pretend like she just liked me, that we weren't really dating for a couple of weeks. And it was kind of weird. I didn't know how I was going to go back to school and be like, okay, last week I dated boys, this week I date girls.

Her relationship with Chelcie clearly caught her by surprise and forced her to rethink her identity. Though Scarlett had dated black men exclusively, she now faced a challenge—what does it mean if I go back to school dating a girl? Scarlett made a quick decision:

I realized that I didn't really care. I mean, I liked her. So I didn't care what other people thought. [We dated for] [t]wo years.

Though the relationship ended, Scarlett considers her relationship with Chelcie as her most significant relationship to date:

Chelcie and I grew apart towards the end of our relationship. I don't know.

When I met Chelcie, she was a freshman, I was a senior. So she was 14; I was 17. And when we broke up, she was about to be 17, and I was 19. So that

was, I don't know, it was a pretty big difference. Just, we just had so much fun together. We always really had a good time. And she's the longest relationship I've ever had. I'd never been out with anybody for that long—two years is a long time, especially when you're only 20. It's a tenth of my life.

Marvelously Messy Marcus

While clearly not the longest relationship, Marcus represents “the second most significant relationship” in Scarlett's life:

We were only together for about seven or eight months, but when I was with him I really felt okay. Everything—I just felt at ease all the time. Everything was just okay. I don't know. I think he was kind of what I had always pictured for myself. He could take care of me. He did what I always hoped someone would be able to do. He wasn't—he always made me feel good. He never said anything rude or anything out of the way towards me. He was always nice. He drove, thank god. He would pick me up. He would take me out. He helped pay bills. [LAUGHS] And I just felt safe when I was with him. He was just what I always expected for myself.

Unfortunately, Marcus also represents the pinnacle of Scarlett's experience with “messy boys:”

Oh man, you're not going to be happy about this guy. [LAUGHS] He's not a good guy. He's 25. He sells crack. He is a crack dealer. I didn't know he was a drug dealer when we first met. He—when I met him I was just like, he's a really nice guy. He speaks very well. He doesn't sound like he grew

up in the ‘hood. He was just a really cool guy. And we started dating. We saw each other a little bit, and, eventually, he ended up moving in when I lived in my apartment.

Though she seemed to be able to handle his drug dealing, provided he “did it someplace else,” Scarlett did discover that her relationship with Marcus had a breaking point. That revelation came while cooking dinner for them one evening:

[T]here’s a Fabulous song that says “I really want to be with you but I’ve got to be real with you. I can’t leave you alone but I know I’m doing wrong...” Because he [the guy in the song] has a wife is basically the point. So I said, “Gosh,” I said “I’m so glad that I don’t have to worry about that.” And he said, “Baby, I’ve got to tell you something.” And I was like, okay. “Well, I’m married.” I just stopped, I couldn’t even move. I think I was cooking or something, and I was like, “Excuse me?” And he said “I’m married but we’re separated.” I later found out that he was not legally [separated] though. Just—he left her.

Though Scarlett “knew that he had kids [ages two and five],” she “was totally unaware that he had married the woman that he had kids with.” And, though she “wasn’t happy about the whole marriage thing,” she did give him “one month to make a decision” since it was “a little bit too late” to behave like their relationship meant nothing at all:

If you would like to get legally separated, you can continue to stay here and we can continue to have a relationship. If not, you can find somewhere else to be, or go home to your wife. If you’re not ready to give her up legally, then you don’t need to be with me.

Suddenly, Scarlett was the other woman.

As the month deadline approached, Scarlett became more and more protective of the time they spent together and worried about the loss of the relationship:

Well, about—when his month was running close to up he ended up getting beat up, because like I said, he sold crack. So he was out one night, which I didn't approve of, I never let him go out. I must have been at work, but I got a phone call that said, "You need to get to the hospital, Marcus got shot." So I say okay. I have my niece with me, throw her in the car. We go. So I throw her in the car and we go. We get to the hospital. He didn't really get shot. He just got beat up and hit with a gun. So I stay with him in the hospital, he's in there for about a week, we go home.

Clearly, Scarlett worried more about Marcus and her relationship with him than about the dangers of exposure to his profession. She wanted him "home"—a Discourse defined in and through her relationship with him. This, however, did not last long:

Two weeks later, first day I let him back out of the house without me, he gets shot for real. So I get another phone call, "You need to hurry up and get to the hospital, Marcus got shot." I said, "I'll be there when I get there. I'm not rushing again for this."

Scarlett not only did not believe Marcus had actually been shot again, she also grew weary of the routine. Despite that, she went to the hospital to be with her man:

So I get down the hospital, and his wife was there! [LAUGHS] So his wife was at the hospital. I'm like okay, well, I can handle this. I'll be the bigger person, I'll speak to her. I said, "Hello," introduced myself, and went in to

talk to him. While the whole time that he was in the hospital—he was in there for about a week—she and I just kind of alternated going in there. And I was like, she doesn't seem like she's going home, so I'm going to be prepared to not be with him any more when he leaves this hospital. But he kept telling me that we were going to be together, that he was coming home with me. So the day he got out of the hospital I called, and I said, "I heard you're getting out today." And he said, "Yeah, I am." I said, "What time do you want me to pick you up?" He said, "Don't worry about it, I'm going home with [my wife]." So, there was the end of relationship. He went home with his wife.

Scarlett wished "it was just as simple as him going home with [his wife]."

Instead, through this experience, Scarlett had to learn to deal with the "mess" associated with merged households, breakups, and protective family members:

I had to carry it all out of my house because I didn't want her in my house. He called my mom's cell phone and kept asking if he could get his stuff, and [my mom's girlfriend] kept hanging up on him. She said, "You have nothing to get." She hung up. And she told him that his stuff had already been burned—she wasn't being very nice—and it was making me nauseous. I said okay, I just want to get this done with. Call him back and tell him he can pick up his stuff at 9:00 in the morning, it will be outside. I don't want to deal with it. I won't be home. I don't want to see him. I don't want to see her. Just come and get your crap.

The fact that Scarlett moved all of Marcus' things into their new apartment while he was in the hospital making up with his wife proved to be a blessing:

I had actually moved the week he was in the hospital. We were moving to a new house. So we had just moved to another apartment and so he didn't have a key into that apartment. So I didn't have to change locks or anything, thank god. I did have to change my telephone number because I didn't want him to call. So I changed my number just in case. I don't know if he would have tried, but I didn't want anything to do with him.

In the end, Scarlett realized that "It's a lot easier to forget someone when you don't see them at all or don't hear from them at all."

Interestingly, I recently saw Scarlett and Marcus together at a McDonald's. She was quick to pull me aside to explain that she was "just helping him" because "he and his wife and kids" were "homeless and living in Moore Square." She further explained that she was taking Marcus to her mother's house (her current residence) to "help him do laundry" for the family. I watched as Marcus and Scarlett pulled away, hoping that she would not "keep letting the same thing happen to [her] over and over again, even when [she was] with a different dude?" (Flake, 2004, p. 108).

I Don't Know What I Am

The fact that Scarlett appears to keep "switching sides" troubled her more in high school than it does now. Though Scarlett did not know if or how to negotiate shifting her identity from straight to gay, she now openly admits that she does not "want to be defined by sexuality at all." Despite that, Scarlett remains unclear about whether or not dating Chelcie altered her sexual identity. Is she bisexual now? After all, Scarlett dated men and, now, women. Is she a lesbian? Since Chelcie was the first of only a few women Scarlett dated, she quickly rejected this label. Is she straight and just experimenting? The depth of her

feelings for Chelcie eliminated this option. Admittedly, Scarlett believes this is the area wherein she has “the most work to do.” Scarlett continues this identity work now:

I don’t know what I am [bisexual, gay]. At that point, I had only dated [Chelcie] so I didn’t really date anyone else. When she and I broke up, I dated just like short dating. I dated a few girls and then I got in a relationship with a guy. So I don’t know, I figured that when we [Chelcie and I] broke up I would figure out what I was.

Though Scarlett does not appear closer to establishing her sexual identity, she does reveal some understanding of the barriers that exist to her doing so:

It’s a lot easier to be not gay⁹⁶. I mean, to find girls you have to go to places where you know there will be lesbian girls. Like, you don’t just walk down the street and people say, oh she looks gay, go talk to her. I mean, you can’t really do that. So I guess it’s just a lot easier to find guys. Yeah, I have no idea what I’m doing. My mom asked me the other day. I don’t really know what I’m doing. I go on dates generally with guys, just because I don’t go to gay places, and when I get online I go to regular chat rooms. I don’t go to the gay chat rooms.

Despite the ease and comfort she describes in finding men, Scarlett’s identity work seems far more affected by her relationship with Chelcie than with Marcus:

When I was with Chelcie, yeah. I don’t know, I was having some kind of identity crisis. I don’t know what I was doing. We really had a pretty nasty breakup, so I think I’m just kind of so angry with that whole situation that even if that was what I wanted [to date women], I wouldn’t deal with it right

now. Yeah, I'm just really, really hurt over that whole situation. We broke up a while ago, it's kind of scary; we broke up about a year ago.

Again, we see Scarlett struggle with validating her relationship with Chelcie. By referring to it as an "identity crisis," Scarlett's discourse works to mask its importance; however, Scarlett's emotions betray her words and render more meaningful the fact that her only stable relationship to date was with Chelcie. Interesting too is the fact that Scarlett never engaged in more traditional bisexual behaviors which provide for dating men and women simultaneously.

Portrait of a Lesbian

In later conversations, Scarlett worked to fix lesbian identity in appearance. She seemed to be searching for a code that signaled a woman's sexual identity. Perhaps this interest stemmed from her own identity work; perhaps the interest resulted from her desire to enter, once again, into a significant, stable relationship. Whatever the reason, Scarlett composed an early and fairly clear, albeit stereotypical, portrait of a lesbian:

[Lesbians wear their hair] real short, like real short—not like I have a cropped haircut, but I mean, I shave the back of my hair. No makeup usually. Um, no skirt. You don't really see a lot of girls that date girls wearing skirts unless they're feminine. The stereotypical lesbian would be someone who tapes down their boobs and wears a white T-shirt underneath all their clothes I guess.

From the beginning, Scarlett focused on stereotypes by dividing lesbian identity into "feminine" and "masculine" categories. Chelcie, as discussed, clearly embodied masculine characteristics:

Chelcie has a friend that has fooled her girlfriend's parents for three months thinking that she was a boy. She looks that much like a man. And they were living with her girlfriend's parents. And her parents honestly did not know that she was a girl. Yeah, I don't know how they did that. But she, she really just looks like a boy.

However, Scarlett acknowledges that, "it just depends on the girl." Some lesbians are feminine; Scarlett's mother offers one example:

Like feminine lesbians, you generally can't tell, unless they're with their partner or with a lot of friends. You can't normally tell because—like, I would never see my mom and say, oh, she must date girls. Like, I mean, I wouldn't think that.

Because her mother is tall, thin, red-haired, spends time making herself look good, and pays attention to her clothes (which are notably feminine), Scarlett contends that most people would never identify her mother as a lesbian.

Yet it was Scarlett's actual experience with Chelcie that opened her eyes to existing stereotypes and forced her to construct lesbian from multiple lenses:

I've seen so many different kinds of people since I dated Chelcie. We used to go to like gay clubs and stuff like that. You see some interesting people. We used to go to a dance club called Visions in Durham, and there would be some interesting people in there. I mean, there were people in there that you couldn't tell whether they were male or female, like you really wouldn't know.

As a result, Scarlett now questions lesbian identity rooted in appearance:

So I guess that if I was thinking of just a lesbian that you'd go up and know that they were a lesbian, they would just have to look like a guy, or have like—but I see a lot of feminine women with real short haircuts now, so I don't know.

However, Scarlett admits that she is no closer to understanding her sexual identity than when we first began the conversation.

Summary

In this chapter, I exposed participants' context of culture to investigate the ways in which the women of this study revealed who they were based on whom they were with at specific moments in their lives. Through the analysis, I found that Scarlett, Tina, Donna, and Marilyn spent a disproportionate amount of identity talk time on their relationships, more than twice as much talk time as on any other single subject. In this case, chapter length represents the true proportions of subject to talk time.

Alarmingly, though, this chapter revealed how these women defined themselves by and through their relationship partners rather than in and through individual identity work. Instead of depicting relational identities composed of a number of subject positions (McLaren, 1995; Sarup, 1996), these women defined themselves in terms of one subject position—girlfriend. As a result, each woman limited her relational identity through her discourse about relationship Discourses.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CO-CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES

If you do not tell the truth about yourself, you can't tell it about other people.

-Virginia Woolf

Woolf's stipulation almost prevented the completion of this study. After the first series of interviews, I discovered a problem: participant responses seemed incomplete and, at times, inauthentic. I shared a relevant history with these young women, still I sensed a barrier between the responses they loosed and the more inclusive, unspoken responses they held⁹⁷. Despite accounting for the personal and somewhat emotional nature of the interviews and the resulting "hesitation, pausing, hedging and false starts" (Mills, 1992, p. 12) I might expect in their discourse, something larger prevented full disclosure—me. Take, for example, the following segment from an early conversation with Scarlett about her family:

She [mother] was drinking, I think either I can't remember it, because a lot of the things I don't remember. I don't remember anything bad about him [first step father] either. I mean, I know he wasn't always nice, now that I think back on it, but at that point I couldn't remember anything bad, I just wanted them to be back together. So I don't know if I don't remember her drinking as much. I know when she got with my second stepfather...that's probably the one you would remember; that's when she was drinking very heavily.

Instead of following up with a simple "heavily?" to coax Scarlett into revealing more about her mother's drinking and its effects, I focused on facts, "So what's your first step father's name?" In retrospect, getting the names of Scarlett's stepfathers had nothing to do with the overall purpose of my study. Luckily, I recognized the way in which I was sabotaging our

conversations by stifling participant responses before damaging the opportunity for continued conversation irrevocably.

Of more interest, though, is the reason why I elected to focus on getting the facts—names, ages, addresses—“right” in the first place. Why was I more comfortable interrogating participants about their identity formation than I was opening myself to co-constructing situated identities and analyzing cultural models with participants? The answer, in part, lies in an overwhelming reluctance to conduct my own identity work whether in private or in public⁹⁸. Quite comfortable hiding behind questions and recording devices, my refusal to tell the truth about myself and my own multiple, situated identities nearly prevented me from being able to share anything of value about the women who disclosed themselves to me. Gratefully, I turn now to a brief description of the truths I revealed.

Light and Shadow⁹⁹

My shared history with participants, over nearly six years, shed light on only those aspects of my identity I elected to reveal, leaving the rest in shadow. I had painstakingly projected my professional and academic image in past interactions with these young women, and they remarked as I shared my identity work now: “you definitely have done a good job of hiding all these other things. You are good at putting on a front.”¹⁰⁰ Drawing on Jung’s (1963) notion of the archetype of the self, I conveyed my displeasure with the situated identities I presented and dissatisfaction with the masks I elected to wear. In doing so, I shared how my identity work was “a story of the self-realization of the unconscious” and how important it was to me “to evolve out of its [my] unconscious conditions and to experience itself [myself] as a whole”:

But all of that stuff kind of made me project one image. Like I was very definitely one person at work. I'm very definitely not that same person away from work. I saw those two parts of myself as mutually exclusive. I mean it's not like my values changed, but at work I had certain expectations and I was going to do those. I'm a hard worker, I like to do my job and I like to do it right. And I like to be fair, I'm not always, but I like to be. And then at home I was this other person. And I don't think I liked either of them.

Ultimately, I felt compelled to reveal how these insights matured via considerable personal trauma, difficulty adjusting to my role as a minister's wife in the Southeast, and subsequent failed marriage.

In analyzing this thread (Gee, 1999), I became particularly interested in the following segment during which I revealed my experience with rape:

[Kristin] he raped me on my 21st birthday I don't remember anything but pressure.... And it's like you're fading in and out. I didn't really—I mean I knew I had sex but I didn't really know what it was about....I'm really not sure how all that went down....

[Tina] Did you have a good relationship before that?

[Kristin] I mean there were all these differences...I was a brat... So of course that was a contentious point. But anyway they, you know, we've had a decent relationship...

[Tina] So there was already tension there?

[Kristin] No, not like that, until this. And that's when we stopped talking. Like I was so not dealing with him because I couldn't.

Observe our speech patterns and roles. Tina, clearly in the position of interviewer, makes a direct effort to connect my past interactions with this man to this historical moment. Similar to my early performances as interviewer, her cultural model requires distanced treatment of an inexplicable experience; as a result, she asks unproductive, disconnected questions that produce vague responses and suppress my voice as respondent. Likewise, I, in the midst of acknowledged self-disclosure, continue to hide truth—“it’s like you’re fading in and out,” “I didn’t really know what it was about,” “I’m not really sure”—and revert to my adolescent 80s¹⁰¹ discourse—“Like I was so not dealing with him.” If not for the subject matter, the role reversal appears almost comic; it also signals a transformation in our relationship that ushers a different thread of my identity into light from shadow.

Five pounds makes all the difference

Equally transformational were our conversations about body image. These exchanges framed and reproduced the Discourses through which we constructed our self-images and established unexpected connections between us on a number of different levels:

[Kristin] I think my image was entirely shaped by my mother—my self-concept, all of those kinds of things.... Trying to get into her wedding dress was a complete pain.... It was an engineering feat to make the dress look like it was supposed to instead of what it did.

[Marilyn] Yeah. I’m there right now, 16 pounds heavier after being in the hospital on steroids for a week. I know all about it. I had to get another skirt to compete in because—and that’s hard on your self-image. It was very difficult; I didn’t want to get on the floor [reference to practicing for and performing in cheerleading competition].

In previous discussions, Marilyn and I commiserated about our battles with weight and built community around that common struggle. What I find interesting in this slice of the present conversation is the coherence between our situated identities (bride and cheerleader) and our cultural models of thin reflected in selected dress.

What Discourses contributed to that coherence or were relevant to the discourse? To expand that understanding, I turn to more text:

[Kristin] It's like you have all these ideas about yourself based on—well, I do—based on my size and the way I look. And it's really hard to let go of that.

[Marilyn] I just have an issue when you know how something looks on you and then your body changes and you put that same thing on and it doesn't look...

[Kristin] Or it doesn't go on.

[Marilyn] Yeah. So I'm big into buying the, like, goal clothing. Like, you have this outfit or this pair of jeans—like that's what I did when I first got out of the hospital. And I can actually put them on and wear them, and they're cute little jeans from Gap. They're zero and I'm so excited, and I can put them on, but lord knows I would never wear them out of the house right now.

Here, size matters. Both of us want to wear a specific article of clothing well (e.g. wedding dress, cheerleading skirt, jeans). On the surface, the Discourse at play appears to be media culture wherein the size of our clothes equals our worth as participants. On closer inspection, though, I recognize a different Discourse at play—the Western paradigm for success by any means necessary¹⁰². While it is clear that Marilyn and I were both desperate to look good on our own terms (e.g. size zero), we stopped short of scheduling an extreme makeover¹⁰³ to

produce the desired results within the desired interval. Our cultural model prized sacrifice and hard work over the pricier, more convenient procedures of the day.

Family, also a relevant Discourse for the purposes of this conversation, plays a more complex role. The fact that Marilyn and I hover around five feet in height accounts for genetics, but the cultural models and situated identities produced by family as a Discourse contribute far more. Consider the following:

[Kristin] But, like, knowing that [that success in wearing our goal clothing is imminent] and then thinking about how that was shaped... mine's entirely about Mom

[Marilyn] I don't know where mine came from, because Mom was never—I mean, Mom—it was but it wasn't, you know? I mean, doing the beauty pageants and the cheerleading and stuff from the age of walking—I mean, I guess probably had a lot to do with it, but—I mean, when you're short you can't carry a lot of weight because you look fat real easily.

[Kristin] That's true.

[Marilyn] [LAUGHING] You know, you don't have all that height to...

[Kristin] Five pounds makes all the difference.

[Marilyn] It does, it does.

In this exchange, I am clearly more willing to consign my image issues to family than Marilyn. For her, identifying family as a relevant Discourse in the production of her self-image remains ill mannered.¹⁰⁴ From Marilyn's perspective "it [the influence of Mom] was but it wasn't" an issue even as she concedes the impact of beauty pageants and cheerleading "from the age of walking." Her unwillingness to consider the "inter-Discursivity" (Gee,

1999, p. 94) connecting self-image to our past and current conversations and to her oft-strained relationship with her mother echo my personal unwillingness to conduct identity work in any form.

A tool for school

Education should not just lead out; it should lead in (Doll, 1982, p. 112).

In retrospect, each of us developed greater self-awareness of our multiple, situated identities and the Discourses which produce and (re-)produce them simply by carving out time for identity work:

“This is more me than—this...is more me than the person I am outside. And it’s interesting to me to share it out with people who knew me so differently and probably didn’t know me at all.”¹⁰⁵

By breaking down some of barriers between student and teacher/coach/administrator imposed by the institution of school, we were able to build connections that figured in deeper self-understanding. More importantly, though, we agreed that the institution of school opened us to new Discourses which continue to shape our identity but on which the institution never capitalized:

[Scarlett] It might seem strange, but I actually enjoyed high school. I miss it actually. Everything was so easy then, it seems like. I mean, I wouldn’t have thought that then; I thought it was the worst thing ever. But now it seems like everything was so easy. I really enjoyed high school. I miss cheering I think, a lot. It was just a group of friends. We were kind of like family, I mean, we did everything together. So it was really cool. And when I think about it, I

would have never known half of those people. I would have never hung out with like _____¹⁰⁶; we would have never hung out.

[Kristin] Tell me about why you think that is.

[Scarlett] Because we're just so different. And I still talk to her.

Clearly, schools could benefit from investigating the “magical property” of student language, from thinking about the ways in which students connect, and from considering how “when [students] speak or write [they] craft what [they] have to say to *fit* the situation or context in which [they] are communicating” (Gee, 1999, p. 11). To do so, schools must begin to look at student utterances as the way in which students “communicate an integrated, though often multiple or ‘heteroglossic,’ *who-doing-what*” (Gee, 1999, p. 14).

Consider two additional *Luann* cartoons (Evans, 2004, March 8th) from this vantage point:

[Miss Phelps & Mr. Fogarty] Do you see how those two [students] are dressed?

[Tiffany & Crystal] Did you see how those two[teachers] are dressed?

In the accompanying image, Tiffany, her best friend Crystal, Miss Phelps and Mr. Fogarty cross paths in a school hallway—an intersection of situated identities, cultural models, context, discourse, and Discourse(s) at play. While one pair (staff) moves away in disgust over continued violations of the dress code yet fails to engage in real dialogue about the issue, the other pair (students) slyly ridicules the outdated bow tie and schoolmarm attire. Neither has a framework for or an interest in understanding the other¹⁰⁷.

The conversation does not stop (see Evans, 2004, March 9th cartoon). Here, decency and school rules (educational Discourse) compete with media and the context of teenage

culture (assumed student Discourses) to make a point—students will find a form of expression despite the confines of policy and privilege:

[Miss Phelps] It's shameful the way students dress these days!

[Mr. Fogarty] It's what they see in magazines and on TV

[Miss Phelps] This is school, not Victoria's Secret! Pull up the pants! Cover the tummies! Hide the underwear! Why do they dress like that? It just infuriates me!

[Mr. Fogarty] I believe that's why

It is clear that, on some level, Tiffany and Crystal enact their socially-situated school identities (Gee, 1999) through their dress. Dressing in this way provides a sense of status (i.e. fit cultural models for the popular crowd), a source of power¹⁰⁸, and a vehicle for rebellion against the institution and those who represent it. If, as Mr. Fogarty believes, the girls' goal was to infuriate, then the girls are clearly successful.

It interests me that schools and reflections of schools focus on the fight (conformity) rather than the function (education) and the product (test scores) rather than the process (citizens). Educational policies draw the line in the sand of our identity boxes and suggest that students who do not conform will suffer. All too often, we honor that threat. Instead of teaching discipline, we teach punishment. Instead of talking to and with students and parents, we talk at them. Instead of setting our sights on the interconnectedness of our enterprise, we sort and select in the name of efficiency. I challenge school researchers to find educational institutions where the opposite is more rule than exception.

Current Conversations

Two promising examples of educators engaged in conversations around the “discourse in Discourses” (Gee, 1999, p. 7) about identity in schools are AERA and Teachers College. At AERA’s April 2004 annual meeting, a half dozen sessions pivoted on issues of identity formation and its importance in schooling: conversations about culture and identity, the relationship between student situated identity and agency, gender negotiation among queer youth, the impact of race and gender on identity formation, and identity as discursive achievement. Notable among the contributions is the following description for a panel discussion (Spector, 2004):

Analyzing the complex intersections of the social, cultural, and psychological in the construction of identities within learning environments is crucial to creating institutional responses that embody Bakhtin’s concepts of responsibility and answerability. This panel will highlight critical aspects of students’ lived experiences that cannot be addressed by the current rhetoric in education around the blanket application of effective instructional methods—methods that do not consider the situated nature of student identity and agency.

Here the “situated nature of student identity” rooted in lived experience parallels my research and speaks to my desire to look beyond simplistic “who doing what” (Gee, 1999) conversations toward richer discussions of the when, where and how of identity talk and formation.

In addition, Teacher’s College hosted a weekend event in February 2004 to discuss “fat attitudes” across cultures and to investigate the extent to which society regulates the

female body through stereotypical visual images. The course specifically examined cultural representations of “fatness” and the extent to which “images contribute to stereotyping of women's bodies” (Levan & Sullivan, 2004). Presentations and panel discussions examined “the power structures that exist in the regulation of female bodies through attention to fatness, moral attitudes towards fatness, and the suppression of female autonomy” (Levan & Sullivan, 2004). The course also clearly articulated how social normative limitations become inscribed on fat bodies based on “beauty ideals in American visual culture” predicated on “the fantasy of a slim ideal where highly sexualized criteria are used to construct images that represent a youthful female body” (Levan & Sullivan, 2004). My research parallels Levan and Sullivan’s work as both seek to educate young women on the ways in which their contexts of culture and consumption of media produce crises that require the formation of multiple identities. I contend that it is precisely these kinds of conversations about body image that must occur in schools if educators are to engage fully the problem of eating disorders in our public school system¹⁰⁹.

I am thrilled to see the ways in which current research agendas dovetail with and diverge from my own, and I value them as a signal that discussions with students about identity formation are important and valid for educational researchers. At the same time, I urge educational researchers to continue to press the K-12 public education system to endorse such conversations. Though the current political climate is not always friendly to such discourse, my research reinforces the notion that these conversations must focus on the needs of students instead of on the politics of educational practice.

End of the Tape

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable
but more useful than a life spent in doing nothing.

-George Bernard Shaw

Through this research, I labored to expose a small part of the portrait painted by my participants to gain evidence (Gee, 1999) for the ways in which girling and the institution of school inform female identity formation. Using discourse analysis as the primary tool of inquiry, I chose to investigate specific details in speech, to identify key patterns in language, to interrogate the socioculturally-situated identities produced, and to illuminate relevant cultural models and context. On the surface, I am pleased.

At a deeper level, I am also incredibly disappointed. As a former school administrator, teacher, and coach, I sincerely regret my failure to listen, my self-interest in efficiency, and my position as punisher. My practice mirrors Miss Phelps frustration in so many ways. As much as I would like to suggest that I'm different and that I did not let school Discourse interfere with my ability to assist students in their process of becoming, to do so would be hypocritical. This is clearly an investigation wherein the researcher points at the institution and then, fairly, acknowledges the three fingers pointing back at her. Fortunately, I have more than a few years left in my service to education and have an opportunity to use this knowledge to improve conditions for my students at the K-12 level and beyond.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

CONNECTIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Our classrooms are full of young women living on the fragile borders between girl and woman, starvation and consumption, and self-definition and external definition. These are some of the boundaries within which the young women of my study fashioned themselves; they represent the often-masked tensions in our classrooms. To disregard student narratives, then, in favor of more traditional research on the aims and structure of education seemed unwise in an age marked by depersonalized, overpopulated, accountable classrooms. As a result, this study interrogated the power of culture and conversation on four young women who were products of an urban, Southeastern high school and contemplated the space(s) in which these women conducted their identity work (Kellner, 2003).

Since the conceptualization of this study, three key initiatives reinforce the need for continued research in this area and demonstrate the implications such research has for educational practice. In its own way, each speaks directly to the need my research articulates for improved relationships within schools. It is to those initiatives that I turn now.

In the past two years, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation initiatives have focused on reinventing high school based on a new version of the three R's: rigor, relevance, and relationships. Their emphasis offers a college-preparatory curriculum to all students (rigor), rich opportunities to understand learning in context (relevance), and a small educational community of no more than 400 students per high school (relationships). With an overall goal "to significantly increase the number of students, particularly low-income African Americans and Hispanics, who graduate from high school ready for work and college - and ready to participate in our democracy," the Gates Foundation (2004) is

partnering with school districts around the country to start new schools and transform large, impersonal high schools into ones where students get personal attention and a rigorous curriculum that is relevant to their lives [They] hope to see an infusion of rigor, relevance, and strong relationships in every American high school (p. 2).

To realize this goal, Gates challenges educators to connect with individual students and to foster one-on-one relationships with those students.

Likewise, the “Small Schools” concept represents the “one reform effort that produces consistently positive results” (Wasley, 2003, p. 13). According to Wasley (2003), school size can have a positive effect on students' motivation levels and, ultimately, on their educational achievement if students feel connected to the educational environment through positive relationships with caring adults. In an evaluation of the effects of small schools (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2004), researchers maintain that students felt their teachers knew them better, cared more about them, and held higher expectations for their success. As a result of improved relationships, many students reported “being more interested in what they are doing at school and more persistent in their schoolwork” (p. 98).

Unfortunately, not all districts have the resources to create small schools. They do, however, have the option of creating smaller learning communities within existing structures. Such communities carve large high school populations into smaller, more personalized groups of students. Fowler and Walberg (1991) argue that these smaller schools improve student connection to school and help teachers to know and to support their students. Again, the language of relationships surfaces as a primary key to success:

Smaller learning communities benefit students, teachers, and parents by making effective communication easier, offering opportunities for collaboration, and encouraging meaningful relationships between students and adults. Research confirms that smaller schools are more productive and safer because they can address students' needs more personally, reducing feelings of alienation, and connecting students with caring adults. All of these conditions create an environment that contributes to positive student outcomes: higher student achievement, improved attendance and graduation rates, and reduced violence and disruptive behavior (U.S. Department of Education, 2001, p. 10).

Additionally, this emphasis on relationships within smaller learning communities promotes higher student "perceptions . . . academically and generally" because students "feel more connected to teachers and to each other" (p. 14). Students who have a better general impression of self should more easily navigate identity work than their peers.

Like Cushman (2003), my research acknowledges a student's need "to be known well"(p. xi) by a caring adult in the educational environment and calls for educators to pay "closer attention to what students say, whether they speak through words or actions" (p. xiii):

Unless we place at the top of our priorities their [students] need to enter into meaningful partnerships with adults, their academic achievement will wither before it has a chance. Listening to students does not depend on any particular expertise. Anyone who likes young people and values their opinions can do this work. It takes time, persistence, and attention to

organize, but it could easily take place in the context of a classroom or advisory group. It requires thoughtful analysis to sort out patterns and draw conclusions from a flood of material, but educators and students possess those talents in abundance” (p. 198-190).

While few of my colleagues disagree with the need for the partnerships expressed in the Gates, Small Schools, and Smaller Learning Communities initiatives, funding remains a barrier. Though each project incorporates rich resources and grants, few districts have the personnel to research, write, monitor, and supervise such grant allocations. In short, acquiring the funding to prioritize relationships through more personalized educational environments is as much of a barrier for some districts as carving out the time and money to create the conditions to develop such relationships.

While the scope of my research does not include a focus on funding, I argue that even small steps toward personalization and relationships at the student-teacher, student-administrator level are both possible and necessary in high schools. Instead of focusing on efficiency (Bobbitt, 1918; Callahan, 1962; Charters, 1923; Cushman, 2003; Taylor, 1911), which stifles the “opportunity for genuine relationships among students and teachers” (Cushman, 2003, p. 189), or outcomes (Carnoy, Elmore, & Siskin, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Popham, 2001; Posner, 1992), my research focuses on the need for increased dialogue between and among all members of the school community so that students have an opportunity to be known well as individuals. I contend that such relationships foster students as they conduct identity work and provide a necessary bridge between adolescence and adulthood.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Additional axes of identity include but are not limited to ethnicity, age, disability, residency, and criminal history (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 13-14). However, this study focuses primarily on the ways in which participants construct identity along the axes referenced.

² For the purposes of this study I classify Foucault and Derrida as post-structural rather than as postmodern theorists knowing that arguments abound for firm classification in one “camp” or the other. Though Foucault rejects all labels, with the possible exception of archaeologist, I include both Foucault and Derrida in this category based on my reading of their work and on my understanding of the scholarship around their work.

³ Selection of a vehicle is based entirely upon comfort level and may include things like conversation, e-mail, a written/published memoir or stories told at a family reunion. Individuals who may be less inclined to relay something in face-to-face conversation may openly tell the same person in a phone conversation or over e-mail; the space required by the story depends entirely on individual levels of comfort. The notion of a written and possibly published memoir eliminates exchange; individuals tell what they want you to know, and they end their stories in a specifically constructed manner. Memoirs are one-sided and, often, a much more distant though more open vehicle for storytelling. In family situations, individuals seldom control the stories told as much as they control access to the family and to those stories. Typically guests at a family reunion are significant others—serious partners, spouses, life-long friends—with whom we share trust. These people are already privy to a number of our number of our stories and, quite possibly, already know the mechanisms through which we hide our *self* from them. I include this example, though, because it is an important place for storytelling and identification.

⁴ I wrote this scenario to provide some context for my thoughts about unconscious performativity and the way in which individuals discussing “emotional and very personal experience” often use “hesitation, pausing, hedging, and false starts . . . [with a] meandering style” rather than a “direct one” (Mills, 1992, p. 12). It is my position that such unconscious actions in speech inform discourse analysis.

⁵ Gubrium and Holstein expend a great deal of energy discussing the difference between the “personal self” and the “social self” (2001, p. 2-9) by drawing on the works of Kenneth Gergen, *The Saturated Self*, and Arlie Hochschild, *The Managed Heart*. The primary distinction is that the personal self is constantly at odds with the social world that saturates and commercializes it while the social self is immersed in communication and relation with others. In a sense, this represents the basic arguments of identity versus subjectivity. Historically identity has been constructed as some version of an “authentic” personal self at odds with the world. In these arguments, the subject is typically a social self who gives voices to its varied identity through its lived experiences and interactions. Gubrium and Holstein draw on this parallel by discussing the personal self’s need to reconcile with its “troubled identity” (i.e. subjectivity).

⁶ This is a clear reference to Trinh Minh-ha's text *The Framer Framed* used in the research.

⁷ My use of the term *Other* stems entirely from the work on the French psychoanalytic, post-structural theorist Jacques Laçan, and later, from the works of Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. First introduced in the "Discourse on Rome" (*Écrits*, 1953) essay, the *Other* signifies something against which we form our identity, something we desire, in part because it reflects our relationship to the symbolic order, but cannot ever know or possess (Grodin & Kreiswirth, 1997). At times *Other* is characterized as death, and its "mirror stage" best informs this identity formation study.

⁸ Doll makes the arguments in this chapter through a critical analysis of several literary texts. Among the most significant in my reading were Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and "The Story of an Hour" and Anne Sexton's *Transformations*. The additional references to Madame Bovary, Hester Prynne, *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* were also useful in framing my understanding of the good girl-bad girl dichotomy.

⁹ Doll specifically references 19th century literature while making this point. My use is not intended to serve as an indication that Doll argues that all "bad women who flaunt the social code by sexual transgression are punishable by death or ridicule" (p. 91).

¹⁰ This is precisely this kind of normative category that I am investigating in my dissertation.

¹¹ Currie draws entirely on Dorothy Smith's tools for discourse analysis. Citing *Texts, facts, and femininity: Exploring the relations of ruling* (1990), "Femininity as Discourse" (1988), and "The Experienced World as Problematic" (1981), Currie makes no references to other prominent discourse analysts like Labov or Mills, whose works were available prior to her 1999 publication and on which, with Gee, my research relies.

¹² The group of thirty girls presented in this study stems from Barbara Tizard and Martin Hughes' 1984 study. Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) analyzed this data set again "to examine some of the specifically classed aspects of mothering and gender socialisation" (p. 11). To this group they added their own sample of eight girls and produced three studies with those results. Two of the three studies focus "on girls at home and at school (Walkerdine, 1989, 1998)" (Walkerdine, et al., 2001, p. 11); the third study "on young girls and popular culture (Walkerdine, 1998)" (p. 11-12). For more on the original studies, see Walkerdine's (1989) *Counting Girls Out* and (1998) "Developmental Psychology and the Child Centered Pedagogy." Another particularly useful Walkerdine text is the 1997 *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture*.

¹³ Their definition of neoliberalism stems from Nikolas Rose's work, which suggests that subjects are replete with agency in their global, democratic communities yet produced by "globalism and economic rationalism" (p.2). For more on their use of neoliberalism, see Rose's (1991) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. They use this term, as well as Rose's argument that neoliberalism "demands a psychological subject" (p. 2) capable

of the responsibilities of liberty, to discuss self-invention as a mechanism of governmental control.

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey (1991) makes similar arguments from a psychoanalytic perspective when she asserts that the world is “ordered by sexual imbalance” and that “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (p. 436) More specifically, Mulvey contends that women are placed in a “traditional exhibitionist role” wherein they “are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle” (p. 436). Finally, Mulvey challenges “our massive, cultural fantasy that death is young, beautiful and female” (p. 60). All of these arguments were assistive in my thinking about Blaine’s and Walkerdine’s works and in the relationship these analyses have to my later discussion of fairy tales. However, for the purposes of the literature review, a full-scale discussion of Mulvey’s connection to Blaine and Walkerdine and to my work did not seem appropriate in the formal text.

¹⁵ Drawing on Doll’s (2000) articulation of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy in culture, I use Barbie to reflect the beautiful, speechless, wealthy, pure, popular girl-who-has-everything ideal. Steinberg’s (1997) article provided the in-depth historical information critical to categorizing Barbie as a “good girl.”

¹⁶ This is a popular expression used to separate common acts from actions done with confidence and style.

¹⁷ Rose defines discourse analysis as one that “tends to pay rather more attention to the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts than it does to the practices entailed by specific discourses” and, therefore, “pays careful attention to an *image itself* (p. 140).

¹⁸ Stokes argues that “narrative analysis is often used to unpack the ideological intent of a piece of work” (p. 67). This is useful for my examination of the story each song tells through the lyrics and the video as well as the story it imparts about the performer. These combined produce social commentary about culture at that moment in time.

¹⁹ There are two versions of this song on *J. Lo*. The first is the one I’m citing in this paper; the second is a remix of “I’m Real” with artist Ja Rule. Each song has it’s own video and own set of lyrics, though it is obvious from the chorus that the song is a remix of the original. The Ja Rule video differs in that it is set in an urban locale instead of a rural town, it suggests Ja Rule and J. Lo have an open relationship, and it is more overtly sexual in image and lyrics. J. Lo appears as a “thug” hanging out in the city (remix) instead of an independent woman stopping in for a quick visit (original).

²⁰ Lopez’s most recent album is *The Reel Me*, released on November 18, 2003.

²¹ Chapter ten of Gauntlett’s (2002) *Media, Gender, and Identity: An Introduction* provides a noteworthy examination of Britney as role model. Using fan interviews, Gauntlett discusses

the media messages imbedded in celebrity activities and the ways in which these messages often serve as role models of behavior. In the end he argues “that media stars can be seen as an inspiration for one aspect of their character but not for another—Britney Spears, for example, can be seen as an icon due to her apparent independence and success, whilst other aspects of her persona, such as her religious beliefs or provocative clothing, may be ignored” (p. 236).

²² After reading Diane York Blaine’s article, “Necrophilia, Pedophilia, or Both?” by chance, I am convinced that Britney Spears is a Jon Benet-who-lived. Blaine argues that “The dead women who matter the most, we learn, are those who clearly reflect and perpetuate central, foundational myths of blond, white, youthful, innocent beauty” (p. 54); this is Britney. She also suggest that Patsy Ramsey was “no longer sexually interesting or viable herself and so all too willing to engineer her little girl into the new erotic female Ramsey” (p. 55). I see too many parallels between Lynne Spears and Patsy Ramsey to enumerate here, but I think it would be interesting to actually write about this at some other time with connections to the fairy tales and the notion of an ideal woman.

²³ Britney has since dispelled this myth. In a recent interview (July 8, 2003) with *W* magazine Britney acknowledges that she and Justin Timberlake, her former boyfriend, had sex despite her public claims of waiting until marriage. It’s interesting to me how Britney, in her admission, still tries to retain a good girl image by letting everyone know that Justin was her only lover and that she thought they’d marry. An even more interesting twist is her apparent interest in being a homemaker citing “that’s how I was brought up.” The interview is available at apnews1.iwon.com//article/20030708/D7S5GR6O0.html?PG=home&SEC=news.

²⁴ I have to confess that I was amazed to see Britney-the-author. She recently released *Stages*, a visual book with DVD. The text overlaid on the promotional page reads: “Hundreds of thousands have attended her concerts. Millions have heard her music. Now, as she reaches a new stage of her life, Britney Spears shares with you the person behind the icon. For the first time ever, *Stages*, a new visual book and DVD, lets you see Britney the way she sees herself, in her rare private moments and through the personal stories of family and friends” (<http://www.britneystages.com/>).

²⁵ Britney’s leading performance in *Crossroads* (2002) was a box-office disaster. Britney also had a cameo appearance in *Austin Powers 3: Goldmember*.

²⁶ This is the title of an E! Entertainment Television series—“A cash course on lifestyles of the filthy rich & famous” (<http://www.eonline.com/On/ItsGoodtoBe/index.html>). E! promoted her show with: “Britney Spears has been on the fast track to fame and fortune since she was yea high, and it shows. Barely in her 20s, the pop icon-movie star-international sex object rakes in nearly \$40 million a year. As our new episode *It’s Good to Be Britney Spears*, premiering June 29, at 10 p.m., explains, global pop stars don’t live like the rest of us” (<http://www.eonline.com/On/ItsGoodtoBe/Episodes/Britney/index.html>). E! was right! It cast Britney as a “girl” with a lavish lifestyle and expensive taste; the emphasis on “girl”

surprised me such that I reviewed it again to capture several of the quotations: “Britney is all about being girly & sexy;” “Britney is known for her glow—she’s just a girl at heart;” “She’s a very generous girl;” “Despite being a heartbreak, she’s a sweet girl.” Amidst the glitter of her spectacle, E! still storied her as “mama’s little girl.”

²⁷ Britney’s last album, *In the Zone*, was originally released on November 18, 2003; coincidentally, this is the same date of J. Lo’s last album release.

²⁸ I used to have “Princess Weeks” with my mother, one of her sisters and her sister’s daughter. My cousin, Julie and I, were the princesses because we weren’t married; our mothers were queens. During “Princess Week” our mothers would converge on some town (e.g. Myrtle Beach) for a week of pampering and shopping; luxury was the word for the week—nothing was too good for the princesses. I understand better now why I cut out a Family Circus cartoon asking “Mommy, where do I go to meet a Prince?”

²⁹ This is the title of a new, popular VH 1 series on celebrities. The premise of the show is to: “Take a fast-paced, first class joy ride of lavish living, as we check out the fortune building careers and businesses of the extremely rich and famous...and the incredible indulgences that come with it. From their lifestyles filled with non-stop VIP treatment, endless entourages and \$1000 dollar face cremes, to fleets of cars, massive estates and multi-million dollar wardrobes. A lighthearted blend of Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous and the Forbes 400 list, each episode focuses on one particular person or subject. Weaving expert interviews, investigative field segments and voyeuristic footage, the series gives an extraordinary glimpse into what we call, The Fabulous Life” (http://www.vh1.com/shows/dyn/fabulous_life_of/series_about.jhtml). The Fabulous Life of Britney Spears aired for the first time on June 27, 2003; it re-airs several times each week. Britney is the third “fabulous life” in the series—Brad Pitt & Jennifer Anniston and Oprah Winfrey preceded Britney. The Fabulous Life of Jennifer Lopez, the fourth in the series, will air for the first time on July 30, 2003 at 10:00 PM. The focus for this episode has not yet been released.

³⁰ For more information on such behavior patterns see Marina Warner, whose work I use to discuss fairy tales, Caroline Bynum, and Marcello Craveri. Their works primarily focus on female saints in the twelfth through seventeenth centuries and were useful to read as I conceived this chapter. I selected Bell’s work, however, because of the exemplary example of Catherine of Siena set forth.

³¹ Catherine was also exploited by her mother. Bell notes that Lapa, her mother, considered Catherine to be “little more than a potential investment, apparently worthy a dowry price” (p. 39).

³² For more information about the extent to which anorexics struggle for control see Hilde Bruch’s *Eating Disorders* and *The Golden Cage*. Scholars refer widely to Bruch as the pioneer and foremost authority on anorexia.

³³ Bell draws on Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud in coming to this conclusion and on his work with wealthy women's anxieties about and hysterics around eating. For deeper insight into their findings see *Studies on Hysteria*.

³⁴ For the remainder of this conversation, I use the following terms as substitutes both for pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia and their associated behaviors as well as a way to refer to individuals who practice these behaviors as evidenced from my research—pro-ana, pro-mia, *ana* and *mia*.

³⁵ While conducting research into popular lyrics I discovered Everclear's "Amphetamine." I've placed the lyrics in the appendix and find particularly apropos the chorus, "she is perfect in that fucked up way that all the magazines seem to want to glorify these days; she looks like a teenage anthem; she looks like she used to be happy with the girl inside." My contention in this paper is that young women's consumption causes them to seek perfection—some ideal—dictated by media culture and that they fashion themselves after that image to the extent possible. Everclear's lyrics fit nicely into the theme but not the particular track of this paper.

³⁶ Though it is not germane to this paper, I have to comment on the Eugenic appeal of this "elite" body of people who have mastered their bodies. The dichotomy between strong and weak parallels the fit/unfit categories noted by Seldon (1999) *Inheriting shame: The story of eugenics and racism in America*, New York: Teachers College Press.

³⁷ Designed to motivate and inspire pro-anas in their quest for weightlessness, Thinspiration includes a picture gallery available at <http://www.plagueangel.net/grotto/id2.html>. The gallery contains pictures that motivate and repel. If the "Hardcore Bones" picture on the cover of this question spoiled your appetite, please avoid the site. Unlike other pro-ana and pro-mia sites, it is typically accessible without interruption by health groups.

³⁸ *Anorexic Nation* must have been shut down; I could not access it online, but it still has a link from Ana's Underground Grotto. I left an e-mail message with the Social Issues Research Center in May, 2003 to see if they could provide a working link or verify the closure of the site, but they have yet to respond. Interestingly, all the sites that appeared in searches for *Anorexic Nation* were about recovering from eating disorders-the-illness, not eating disorders-the-lifestyle.

³⁹ Rose defines intertextuality as "the way that the meanings of any one discursive image or text depend not only on that one text or image, but also on the meanings carried by other images and texts" (p. 136). It seems appropriate given the (intended) tie between the two texts.

⁴⁰ The Nicene Creed's use in many Christian-based faiths required me to choose a particular wording for this analysis. Because many ana-and-mia sites are based in the United Kingdom and because the Church of England is Anglican, I chose the traditional wording (written as "I" rather than in the modern "We") of the Creed as verbalized at every Anglican mass.

⁴¹ One prayer from the Thinspiration section of Ana's Underground Grotto (<http://www.plagueangel.net/grotto/>) demonstrates this self-loathing through confession. I insert it here as an example of the extent to which Christianity, in both doctrine and daily practice, permeates these sites:

“Bless me Ana, for I have sinned. It has been 30 seconds since my last confession. I confess to gluttony and weakness. I confess that I doubted your ability to save my wretched soul. Please forgive my lack of faith. Help me to resist Mia the Devil and the temptations she places before me. I am in physical and mental pain because I have sinned against you, Ana...I turned to Mia, and my stomach and soul cries out in pain. My goddess Ana, help me to resist the desires of the flesh. Make me pure, holy, and clean. Please embrace me and make me perfect. You are my savoir, my mother, and always willing to take me back even when I have blatantly left you. Please erase these sins from my soul and help me to stand up to Mia the Devil...Mia taunts you, dear Ana, and tries to draw me away from serving you. Help me to make a reply to Mia...help me to stand firm. Amen.”

⁴³ Using a widely regarded funeral scripture as Thinspiration is ironic, but its use is a great example of pastiche.

⁴⁴ This prayer appeared in the poetry section of Ana's Underground Grotto (<http://www.plagueangel.net/grotto/>) but is no longer available on the site due to updates. It was posted to “inspire other anas” according to the benediction at the end which I do not include in this quotation.

⁴⁵ This was another Thinspiration quote I captured from Ana's Underground Grotto (<http://www.plagueangel.net/grotto/>) before it was updated off the site.

⁴⁶ The 10 Commandments appear in Exodus 20: 3-17. I am using the passage from the New King James Version because I think the imagery works better for my analysis. By using “carved image” as opposed to “idol” (New International Version and New American Standard Bible) or “graven image” (King James Version), the sense of the discipline required to perfect the image of worship dovetails nicely with pro-anorexic philosophy. Remember—I used to be married to a Methodist minister, and I still have lots of Bibles!

⁴⁷ This has been the “Quote of the Day” at <http://www.plagueangel.net/grotto/id7.html> every day I've reviewed the site. Other quotes and tips have changed, yet this remains fixed. The connotation of the damaged psyche interests me and will be useful in my dissertation.

⁴⁸ Most of the works on my reference list acknowledge this idea on some level. The extent to which they argue the point changes, as does the culture to which they refer, but the general idea is common to most scholarship on fairy tales.

⁴⁹ Long hair is a traditional literary sign of the virtuous maiden. The privilege of seeing a maiden's hair was reserved for her husband, often on their wedding night. Long hair is, typically, connected with fertility as well.

⁵⁰ This language is from the 1812 Grimm's text, "Little Snow White." I reference it here because it is the version Warner used in her research. Versions of tales important to my research appear in the fairy tale appendix included.

⁵¹ Stone (1985) makes this point, but my own reading of existing fairy tale scholarship reinforced it. Warner (1994) and Zipes (1983, 2000), from my references, compiled and analyzed the most extensive collections of fairy tales.

⁵² This is Grimm ending; Perrault's Cinderella matches the stepsisters with "two lords" on the same day she marries her Prince.

⁵³ This is the ending from Perrault's version of the tale entitled "The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood."

⁵⁴ Anne Sexton's retelling in *Transformations* reiterates the sexual, violent aspects of the tale reminiscent of Basile's *The Sun, the Moon, and Talia* in the image of an abusive father.

⁵⁵ Grimm's "Little Briar-Rose" immortalized this kiss. In Perrault's version, it is simply the Prince's appearance that redeems Sleeping Beauty: "He approached with trembling and admiration, and fell down before her upon his knees. And now, as the enchantment was at an end, the princess awaked, and looking on him with eyes more tender than the first view might seem to admit of. "Is it you, my prince?" said she to him. "You have waited a long while."

⁵⁶ In both the 1810 and 1812 Grimm's versions of Snow White the heroine suffers persecution by her mother, not her stepmother. Disney clearly draws from the 1819 version of the text in which the Grimm's divulge the mother's death in childbirth and usher in a stepmother to replace her.

⁵⁷ I've incorporated into my analysis at least one of the major songs from each Disney version as a reminder of the attributes the film celebrates with its music. The songs seem to closely parallel an important quality of female gender construction—passivity.

⁵⁸ Admittedly I am leaving out an entire body of scholarship on the spinning wheel in this tale. Karen Rowe's (1986) work is especially useful in the context of this paper. Noting that "She who spins is the model of the good woman and wife and, presumably, in many cultures of the subservient woman who knows her duty—that is, to remain silent and betray no secrets" (p. 57), Rowe reinforces the same arguments I make in gender construction and obedience to patriarchal values through the spindle, "the identifying mark of wise women...of diligent, well-ordered womanhood" (p. 64).

⁵⁹ While a great deal of scholarship exists on the reasons the uninvited fairy (Grimm) and Maleficent (Disney) are evil, this is tangential to my point.

⁶⁰ While I was writing the new Harry Potter *Order of the Phoenix* released. It seems to me that Harry Potter is a male version of the Cinderella story. Though he's persecuted by both of his relatives and his cousin, the storyline seems to retain many of the same qualities as the fairy tale.

⁶¹ I'm relying on Perrault due to the midnight prohibition and the similarity between the endings, but the assistive animals are a Grimm construct. I'm also partial to the Grimm ending when the ambitious stepsisters are blinded by pigeons (Kohlenschlag, 1988).

⁶² The replacement of the mother by the stepmother in Grimm's 1819 version of *Snow White* was reinforced by its Disneyfication. It serves as the pre-eminent model for step-monsters rather than stepmothers.

⁶³ The title of this section stems from the song playing at the end of the Lazarus and Wunderlich's (2000) video *Beyond killing us softly: The strength to resist—The impact of media images on girls and women*. Part of the refrain includes "tell me your story you inspire me."

⁶⁴ Gee (1999) defines "relevance" as "a matter deeply tied to context, point of view, and culture" (p. 34). More important for my purposes his argument that "One knows what counts for a given group of people at a given time and place as 'relevant' by having been privy to certain 'conversations' those people have heretofore had" (p. 34). As a result, my ability to select quality questions and data to analyze in the eight months of this study depended on having some type of relationship from which to select the important details from the ordinary talk.

⁶⁵ I was only able to conduct three interviews with the final participant. In the final months she became plagued by financial, legal and transportation woes. Despite multiple efforts to aid her with each of these problems, I was unable to schedule the final interview at a time that permitted completion on schedule. Given the abundant data from her past interviews as well as her participation in the focus group, I do not feel that the study was compromised by this factor.

⁶⁶ The Grammy[®] Awards were televised on CBS on February 8, 2004.

⁶⁷ The title of this section stems from the refrain of the song playing at the end of the Lazarus and Wunderlich's (2000) video *Beyond killing us softly: The strength to resist—The impact of media images on girls and women*. which includes "tell me your story you inspire me."

⁶⁸ The four in-depth interviews and one focus group with each of the four young women resulted in over 500 pages of transcription

⁶⁹ At some point I would like to revisit this data with an eye to its linguistic detail. Coding revealed interesting discourse elements that the scope of this project could not sustain.

⁷⁰ In accordance with the terms of our Informed Consent Form, I have changed the names of each participant and of the individuals each reference while discussing her identity.

⁷¹ This stanza appears in “Little Gidding,” the fourth quartet of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, in the fifth stanza, lines 27-30. I have been drawn to and have researched Eliot’s work since completing my undergraduate honors thesis in 1992 at The Florida State University on the unpublished poems original to the manuscript of *The Waste Land*. *Four Quartets* suits the nature of discourse analysis and its reciprocal and cyclical nature in its faithful preoccupation with the modern construct of time (present, past future, beginning, end), one of Bertrand Russell’s many legacies to Eliot’s work and life.

⁷² Both of Donna’s parents were born in Pakistan and moved to England in their early years. They immigrated from England to Canada after marrying and then moved to Texas before settling in North Carolina. They are poised to move to Boston in the next several months.

⁷³ Donna referenced Isthakara, a ritual prayer for guidance in choosing the best option from the Muslim tradition, in our interviews. To be used when making any big decisions, this prayer reveals Allah’s wisdom through dreams. Donna talked about how if the one who prays has good dreams, then an affirmative response has been revealed; likewise, if the one who prays has bad dreams, then a negative response has been revealed.

⁷⁴ I was privileged to attend the wedding reception this past December. Donna indicated in her data that this reception, hosted by her parents, marks the official matrimonial rite in the Muslim faith. The event is entirely segregated—men in one room, women in the other—and wonderfully spiritual. Her father and other elders read from the Koran and recited poetry from their faith; these speeches were piped into our adjoining room for the bride’s benefit. Donna was quite beautiful in the traditionally colorful orange and red bridal garments. In addition, the women of her community decorated Donna with henna, jewels and ceremonial bracelets to mark her transformation to bride.

⁷⁵ Marilyn shared the story of her mother’s estrangement with her grandmother, but my focus is on how that story has been translated to Marilyn and her mother. As such, I paid closer attention to narratives that illuminated that generational conflict rather than the previous generational conflict. At some point I am interested in reviewing this data for a paper on the role mothers played in their daughters identity formation.

⁷⁶ Marilyn talked quite a bit about her phone relationship with her mother and her frustration in the lack of communication between them: “I called the house like 12 times the other day, and she finally just took the phone off the hook and let it sit there. “I told you. Don’t call this house again!” Click!” During such exchanges Marilyn positions herself again in the role of the adult saying, “When your mother hangs up on you every time you try and talk to her, who needs to grow up? Who needs to mature?”

⁷⁷ I initially titled this section “Mommie Dearest,” but felt the allusion to the 1981 Joan Crawford film was unnecessarily harsh. Marilyn’s mother never harmed her. I didn’t want the abuse/neglect connection, but I was drawn to the way Crawford indelibly marked her values on her daughter.

⁷⁸ I actually find it quite interesting how much all of the girls resemble their mothers. With the exception of Scarlett, who shares only her curly auburn hair with mom, each of the girls looks like she was carved right off her mother.

⁷⁹ I am indebted to Dr. Clarissa Estes for her scholarship on the Wild Woman archetype. She notes: “When women are with the Wild Woman, the fact of that relationship glows through them. This wild teacher, wild mother, wild mentor supports their inner and outer lives, no matter what” (Estes, 1992, p. 8). Marilyn’s narratives from this section demonstrate support for using this term to describe her relationship with her teacher.

⁸⁰ I chose to include only the information about the professor even though Marilyn talks quite a bit about me as one of the strong females in her life. One of the more interesting references, in light of the discourse around Marilyn’s mother, is this comment: “Mom always told me, “You should have been Kristin’s daughter. You should have been Kristin’s daughter,” forever.” I was also fairly surprised that she included me among those who provide her with hope: “I just think, like, it [knowing I’ve struggled and made bad decisions in my past] helps me. It helps develop me, you know? I have seen and watched you and your life for how many years now? And, you know, it’s okay, you know? Like, you are okay, and you are successful, and you are still individual—you know, as a woman.” It’s clear that including the chapter about participant-interviewer relationships was a good idea. I’m sure I have more than enough data to write an entire piece on that aspect alone.

⁸¹ Scarlett talked quite a bit in the 3rd interview about her own battles with drugs and alcohol, which began in 11th grade. She admits that the problems started with alcohol and then progressed to include marijuana, ecstasy, opium and Adarol by the 12th grade. “Caused by peer pressure...and low self-esteem in general,” Scarlett claims that she learned a great deal from these experiences.

⁸² The text remains intact with no editing (very difficult for the English teacher in me). I am very interesting in a line of inquiry around electronic representations of identity. Though I had three of four participant profiles on AOL, this profile was the most revealing in providing the cultural models and context for Scarlett’s situated identities. Conducting a broad discourse analysis on a sample of AOL profiles appeals to me at some point in my research career.

⁸³ “Shawty” is a common term for “good looking” in contemporary black discourse. It applies equally to men and women, but it is a more common reference to sexy women within rap music. This is not a term Scarlett acquired from her interest in 2 Pac; the earliest rap reference I could find was to the Wu Tang Clan.

⁸⁴ Scarlett dates black people exclusively. Her only white dating experience was when she “dated a white guy when I was in like 8th grade, but I don’t think you really consider that dating. We never went anywhere, we just talked on the phone.”

⁸⁵ In working with Scarlett’s transcripts I returned again and again to the same passage from Woodson’s (1997) *The house you pass on the way*: “It’s hard to sit in that study hall and not think about you. And I’ve tried....I guess we’re something like friends now...I guess that’s the hardest part of this letter—the part I haven’t been able to write or call you to say. I don’t know what I thought you’d say or think” (108-109). Though the passage did not seem to have a place in the scope of this study, I am interested in looking at the ways in which Scarlett’s narrative about her lesbian experience connects with Staggerlee’s narrative, which references her lesbian experience, above.

⁸⁶ Tina works in a daycare in Cary and manages the business part time.

⁸⁷ Tina talked quite a bit about her father’s addiction to cocaine and to being in therapy for several years because of him: “I was going to counseling for my dad, my dad had—he’s actually, since I was, I don’t know, before then, but since I was a baby he’s struggled with cocaine more than once. It hasn’t been a constant thing, but it’s been every few years he’ll fall back into it.” Doing a separate paper on these women and the addictions in their families (Marilyn, Scarlett, and Tina) might be an interesting spin off for future writing, but it didn’t seem as significant in Tina’s identity formation as it was to the other two. As a result, I did not make that a focal point in my writing on Tina.

⁸⁸ Scarlett is also working on saving money to be able to go back to school in the fall after a rough first year at Wake Tech. She withdrew when her brother (a boy her mother adopted) died because she had missed so many days staying with him in the hospital after a drunk driving accident. In addition to tuition, she is burdened with paying back her financial aid since she withdrew with prejudice after Wake Tech refused to grant her a leave for family emergency. Evidently they did not consider her adopted brother “family.” While this is an interesting story, it did not have the same impact on Scarlett as the other Discourses referenced. A separate paper on collegiate schooling experiences might be another interesting spin off from this research.

⁸⁹ The title of this section is and is not related to a discussion of border identities (McLaren, 1995). I am indebted to the idea of border identities, but my theoretical framework is not as dependent on subjectivity as it is on identity. My thinking in this language is dependent on two things: 1) the sandbox idea I presented and the way in which the next chapter moves beyond the borders of each individual participant’s sandbox to illuminate an overarching cultural model about thinness; and 2) Trinh Minh-ha’s (1992) notion of fragmentation and the way in which participants looked at the pieces of their body as a means for discussing their identity: “Since the self, like the work you produce, is not so much a core as a process, one finds oneself, in the context of hybridity, always pushing one’s questioning of oneself to

the limit of what one is and what one is not....Fragmentation is therefore a way of living at the borders” (p. 156).

⁹⁰ For a brief but useful description of weightism in culture see Bruce Blaine and Jennifer McElroy’s May 2002 report, “Selling stereotypes: weight loss infomercials, sexism, and weightism,” in *Sex roles: A journal of research*.

⁹¹ A running thread in the VH1 *Fabulous Life Of...* series is the price of beauty. The fact that Britney Spears spends \$6000 per session for diamond scrubs designed to give her skin a healthy, youthful glow yet appears flawless at all times sets an unreasonably high bar for female beauty. Likewise, surveying any reputable salon menu reveals the price of thinness. Consider the following treatment priced at a mere \$175: “Ideal for body toning and shaping, Contouriffic aids in reducing cellulite, firming the skin and refining its contours....Great in a series” (www.skincare.com/services/bodyworks/focused/index.htm).

⁹² Donna uses “brown people” as a substitute for Pakistani. The term has been a common part of her discourse since high school and is one she used fairly regularly during the interviews.

⁹³ The title of this section stems from the 1898 translation of the story “Little Snow White” from *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. Other versions of the story include the line “Who in this land is the fairest?” rather than “Who is the fairest of all?” Here, the “in this land” did not seem appropriate.

⁹⁴ Lazarus and Wunderlich use the term mirror in describing the medium through which women navigate from adolescence to womanhood. I prefer “looking glass” in an effort to maintain the fairy tale thread in the research.

⁹⁵ I first accessed the cartoon in the August 2002 edition of the *Charlotte Sun Herald*. It appeared in the editorial section. Some of Ritter’s cartoons are also accessible online at <http://cagle.slate.msn.com/politicalcartoons/PCcartons/ritter.asp>.

⁹⁶ Scarlett talked at length about how attending a gay church (one of her first dates with Chelcie) helped her to think about and to begin to come to terms with her sexual identity. Though the scope of this section is on how relationships contribute to identity formation, the data warrants future study from this angle in particular:

[My church is] basically nondenominational. They don’t really have a specific book of beliefs or anything. We just kind of go by what the bible says. It’s different because people are like well, how do you go to church that talks about, how do they accept being gay? It just, it’s kind of the same as a regular church. It’s not that they don’t talk about it [being gay], they just have their own beliefs on that part. I guess like in the book of Leviticus it says to eat shellfish is an abomination, just like it says to be homosexual is an abomination, so it’s just kind of, they just kind of bring up those kind of

points, if it's a question. My pastor knows a lot of stuff about it though. I just kind of let her do her thing. I just listen.

⁹⁷ I intentionally allude here to the language of Catholic confession because of the intensely personal nature of our discussions; at times our sessions seemed more like confession than simple conversation. In particular, I reference the priests' ability to reconcile sinners to God through the Sacrament of Reconciliation provided in the books of *Matthew* 18:18—"Amen I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven"—and *John* 20: 22-23—"Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

⁹⁸ Currently I attribute my reluctance to doing identity work to particular middle class cultural models that posit individual responsibility, deferred gratification and rationality above self-disclosure, community and emotionalism. Because I "would prefer not to" do my own identity work, I am constantly reminded of *Bartelby's* untimely end and find a way to force myself from silence.

⁹⁹ The title of this section references Jung's (1960) notion that the "self appears as a play of light and shadow, although conceived as a totality and unity in which the opposites are united" (paragraph 790).

¹⁰⁰ Taken from my 4th interview with Tina.

¹⁰¹ My high school experience, from 1985-1989, coincides with a culturally significant trend in "valley girl" talk. This trend, made popular through movies like the 1983 hit *Valley Girl* starring Deborah Foreman as "Julie" and the 1985 mega-hit *The Breakfast Club* starring Molly Ringwald as "Claire," also contextualized valley girls as affluent, "it" girls who struggled with multiple identities resulting from being defined by their boyfriends and limited by their popularity.

¹⁰² My thinking here is framed by the works of Machiavelli and by John Stuart Mill's concept of utilitarianism.

¹⁰³ The current media emphasis on surgical transformation disturbed all of us. While we joked that, at times, it seems "amputation is the only answer" to our trouble spots, we all agreed that surgery was completely extreme. Reality TV shows like *The Swan* and *Extreme Makeover* introduce surgical cures as viable options for the general public. In reality, we felt such options were only available to affluent individuals or those with very little family, work or financial responsibility.

¹⁰⁴ Marilyn's preoccupation with respect was obvious as I analyzed our interactions. This element from our second interviews seems particularly useful: "I respect anybody that is older than me period, whether they are family or not. If you are older than me by a day, I respect you just for that authoritative position that you are in."

¹⁰⁵ This is an excerpt from my last interview with Tina during our mutual reflection on what we learned about ourselves through this process. I am the speaker.

¹⁰⁶ I intentionally removed this name to protect both the speaker and the individual being discussed.

¹⁰⁷ I use this term intentionally rather than coincidentally. My experience in schools indicates an ever-present split between “us” (staff) and “them” (students and parents). While at times the divide narrows, students and parents are, more often than not, treated as lacking in the system. Clearly my reference is to Lacan’s notion of lack; the reference is even more interesting in the absence of discourse by Mr. Fogarty.

¹⁰⁸ Reconsider the March 1st panel from the Introduction when Tiffany reminds Miss Phelps that the “boys speak louder.”

¹⁰⁹ I have been invited to present my research at the November, 2004 North Carolina School Counselors’ Association Annual Conference. In particular, I have been asked to address how electronic media appeals to women with current and potential pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia tendencies and to assist school counselors in initiating conversations with K-12 students on eating disorders.