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A STUDY OF THE FEMALE FORMATION OF IDENTITY DURING THE HIGH
SCHOOL YEARS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

by
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A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
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at
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Approved by _____
Dr. Donna W. Jorgensen

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ABSTRACT

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A STUDY OF THE FEMALE FORMATION OF IDENTITY DURING THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARS: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

2003/2004

Dr. Donna Jorgensen

Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this research project was to examine the factors that influence and affect identity formation by female adolescents during the high school years. Group discussion sessions were held for a sample size of 6 participants that introduced certain topics that were deemed relevant to adolescent females' identity formation. Through the group discussions, participants demonstrated that these topics, including body image, family pressure, and relationships, were inherent to the ways they form identity during the high school years. Upon completion of the data collection, the discussion sessions were coded for each topic and then divided by those responses deemed positive, or characteristic of self-worth and acceptance, and those that were deemed negative, or characteristic of submission and inferiority. By coding each response, it was clear which participants had begun to form a healthy identity and which participants were more apt to continue to form a negative identity. Implications for educators on the topic of identity formation in female adolescents and what improvements can be made are discussed, while specific identity analyses of each participant are given.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	3
Research Questions.....	4
Definitions.....	6
Chapter 2: A Review of the Relevant Literature.....	8
The Role of Educators.....	10
Popular Culture and Other Societal Factors.....	12
Women’s Perspectives on Adolescence: What Girls Go Through.....	15
Methods Available to Track Identity Formation.....	17
Summary.....	19
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	21
Participants.....	21
Instruments.....	22
Procedures.....	22
Data Analysis.....	24
Chapter 4: Findings.....	26
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	50
References.....	86
Appendix A.....	89
Appendix B.....	93
Appendix C.....	109

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Number of Total Responses in Specified Categories.....	27
Figure 2. Total Number of Responses Given by Each Subject in Each Category.....	28
Table 1. Percentages of Positive and Negative Responses for Each Category.....	29

Chapter 1: Introduction

Throughout the stage of adolescence, females begin a journey that involves a merging of the mind and body that will ultimately bring about the formation of an identity that each can call her own. Over the past decade, considerable research has been done investigating exactly what forces, ranging on the continuum from internal to external, contribute to the formation of identity among adolescent females (Marshall & Arvey, 1999). Most studies have produced results that offer insight into the experiences encountered during the female adolescent years, which comprise a pivotal transition period, and research shows that adolescence can be a far more difficult stage for many teenage girls than has been previously supposed (Kaplan, 1997). The bulk of this research has been done in a qualitative format and has centered on certain psychological models of identity development, such as Erikson's stages of identity and intimacy (Horst, 1995). The studies done thus far have contributed to the knowledge base and information that is available on adolescent females' identity formation. Yet, there are still significant limitations surrounding the previous research, limitations that fail to take into account that many adolescent females fall into a path of silence and inferiority instead of a path of courageousness and self-acceptance, especially in the high school setting under the supposed guidance of educators.

Adolescent females will encounter increasingly substantial problems and challenges as the 21st century moves forward. These encounters will occur not only in social settings, but also in the school setting, where an adolescent female continues to shape and mold her permanent identity. Such taboo topics as body image, drug and

alcohol use, and sexuality are pushed aside and not discussed in a meaningful way with girls during the high school years. But there are other, more subtle issues that are rarely dealt with by teachers in the classroom setting.

In her book, *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, Simmons (2002) points out, “it is in the classroom that a girl can be socialized into a consciousness of alternative aggressions as nonassertive acts and teachers can show girls that indirection and manipulation are unsatisfactory ways to express negative feelings” (p. 226). It is quite difficult to see such ideas of assertiveness reach fruition without diligent and hard work by educators, parents, and adolescent girls alike. Hence, in order to “understand the processes that girls use to construct or constitute their identities, it is necessary to use newer and more holistic models and metaphors for understanding self-identity” (Hoskins, 2001, p. 233). What Hoskins means is that with the increasing complexity of the social world, “rules, codes, norms, and values are not singular, nor do they fit together into a cohesive account of how to live one’s life” (p. 237). Hoskins realizes that newer ways of conducting research concerning adolescent female identity formation are necessary not only because each individual female is different, but also because “we create ourselves not within a fixed, local community with explicit rules and norms, but within vast and complex physical and virtual spaces” (p. 237). Hoskins believes that these kinds of holistic models and metaphors that include social contexts of identities will provide new insight into the thoughts of adolescent girls. Simmons agrees, and her research has utilized the kinds of insightful methods necessary to discover how girls feel about themselves and one another. A qualitative study on how adolescent females form identity

is warranted, as young girls continue to be bombarded with images that encourage submission and inferiority instead of self-worth and acceptance.

As the 21st century progresses, many adolescent females are up against tremendous odds as they attempt to form positive and healthy identities that will take them through a meaningful, moral, and ethically responsible life. Unfortunately, in the school setting, Marshall and Arvay (1999) show evidence that issues around the struggle for authority and concerns regarding student autonomy need to be addressed more thoroughly by educators. Marshall and Arvay also discuss how adolescents often experience feeling silenced and how the school environment needs to be a place where students feel empowered to use their voices. Simmons (2002) further emphasizes this point in her dealings with the silencing of adolescent females, calling silence “deeply woven into the fabric of the female experience” (p. 3). Thus, adolescent girls need to feel that they are being listened to and that their voices matter. During a time of such crucial identity development, adolescent girls need to express the concerns that they are dealing with in a manner that will help them to obtain the tools necessary to form solid identities that are based on sound choices and not on peer or societal pressure.

Statement of the Problem

This research project was designed to obtain further insight into what factors contribute to identity formation in female adolescents during the high school years. The project was designed to answer questions that this researcher believes are fundamental in determining the extent to which the adolescent female formation of identity is a both a universal and an individual experience. Sound identity formation during the female adolescent years is vital in order to produce girls who are capable of standing on their

own, making their own decisions, and changing our world. As long as educators continue to ignore the specific needs girls have as they progress from grade to grade, these girls will not be able to develop the kinds of critical thinking skills necessary to confidently assert themselves in situations that warrant a strong, solid identity construction, nor will they be able to avoid falling into the traps of submission and inferiority instead of discovering their own self-worth and acceptance.

Research Questions

- What factors influence and affect identity formation of female adolescents during the high school years?
- Are identities more likely to be revealing characteristics of submission and inferiority than self-worth and acceptance?
- Are there class, race, ethnicity, and/or gender connections to submission, inferiority, self-worth, and acceptance?
- In what manner do adolescent girls exhibit their identities: positive or negative?
- What roles do parents and peers play in identity formation?
- What role does body image play in identity formation?
- How is identity defined by same sex relationships, by opposite sex relationships and by perceptions of self and expected roles?
- Will group-talk sessions and written work reveal the same or different issues of identity formation?

The researcher predicted that adolescent girls would have a difficult time while dealing with all the issues surrounding identity development during the high school years. The researcher hoped that the participants would speak about their experiences openly

and honestly, in order to collect the most meaningful data possible. It was also important to have group interview sessions to answer the research questions posed, as Zinck and Littrell (2000) found group interviews to be the best way for young females to share personal information with their peers.

A review of the relevant literature establishes a context for the research by summarizing and synthesizing the information about what topics have come forward as relevant in order to produce a theoretical basis for performing this study. The review will cover the most current information available on identity formation among adolescent girls.

Definitions

Alternative Aggression is covert behavior in which the perpetrator makes it seem as though there has been no intent to hurt at all, when it is really intended to damage self-esteem or social status within a group (Simmons, 2002, p. 21).

Acceptance is favorable reception; approval. It also indicates a positive valuing of self-worth or identity.

Anti-Girl is “the girl no one wants to be.” She doesn’t blend in. She doesn’t agree and she doesn’t get along. But persistence, maverick thinking, and a fighting spirit are precisely the qualities girls are taught to embrace in the heroines they grow up to admire. The competing messages translate into conflicting versions of the women they are supposed to become (Simmons, 2002, p. 126).

Covert is something that is private; hidden; secret; disguised.

Identity is who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others; it is the distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

(Note: this definition is interchangeable with *self-identity*)

Inferiority is the state of being lower in rank, status, or accomplishment than that of another person.

Peer Pressure is pressure from one's peers to behave in a manner similar or acceptable to them.

Self is a person’s perception of his or her nature, character and individuality.

Self-Efficacy is “the belief that one has the capability to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action necessary to exercise control over one’s environment” (Koesten, Miller, & Hummert, 2001, p. 10).

Self-silencing is an experience many adolescent females have that “involves a desire to be perceived as nice or caring, which is more important than speaking one’s truth. Girls are prepared to sacrifice their voices for relationships, and therefore, self-silence” (Marshall & Arvay, 1999, p. 7).

Self-worth is self-esteem or self-respect.

Social Identity is “a way of evaluating oneself positively through group memberships that is ultimately achieved through the establishment of positive distinctness of the in-group from relevant out-groups” (Koesten, Miller, & Hummert, p. 10).

Submission is the act of submitting to the power of another.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Relevant Literature

During adolescence, females begin to embark on a journey of the mind and body that will culminate in the formation of an identity that each can call her own.

Adolescence is generally viewed as centrally marked by the dawning of the sense of identity (Blasi & Milton, 1991) and it is a time when a person begins to realize that he or she is a unique individual apart from others. Ideally, during adolescence, young boys and girls will start to develop a sense of their own abilities and talents and will begin to feel valuable as a person with future purpose. For both genders, this period will undoubtedly bring about powerful and confusing changes, both of the physical and emotional kind, that result in what Blasi and Milton found is “an identity that is described by its specific contents, namely the profession, the ideals, the life-style, or the ethnic membership that one finds to be necessary to one’s self-definition” (p. 218). But before this occurs, female adolescents will experience changes that can often lead a young girl to question all aspects of her self, including her own perceptions of her identity that she may have adopted from others in the past, especially those with whom she has surrounded herself, such as family and friends.

In 1994, Pipher wrote a book entitled *Reviving Ophelia* in which she described what she viewed as an extremely troubling time for female adolescents.

Many of the pressures girls have always faced are intensified in the 1990s. Many things contribute to this intensification: more divorced families, chemical addictions, casual sex, and violence against women. Now girls are more vulnerable and fearful, more likely to have been traumatized and less free to roam

about alone. This combination of old stresses and new is poison for our young women. (p. 14)

Pipher (1994) recognizes that adolescence is traditionally a difficult time for young girls but that “it’s harder now because of cultural changes in the last decade” (p. 15). Many girls will find such changes overwhelming and intense, and without proper guidance and support from families, schools, and peers, these girls may fall prey to the kinds of violence, self-harm, substance abuse, eating disorders, distorted body images, and depression that are all evidences of an ill-formed identity.

In her 2001 study, Oliver commented on the perils of young adolescent girls when she pondered the following:

I am still left wondering when are we, as a culture, and more specifically as a collective group of educators and scholars, going to take active responsibility for supporting the kinds of change that might create more socially just and healthy environments in which adolescents, girls and boys, can grow up? (p. 144)

Indeed, such change is warranted and educators need to be aware of the changes adolescent girls are going through, especially during the pivotal years of high school. Oliver’s examination focused on one way of realizing the changes adolescent females go through during identity formation, which was to engage them in critical inquiry. She wanted her research to “co-construct bodily knowledge and reflect critically on this knowledge by tapping girls’ interests and helping girls name how they experience their bodies through the use of critical thinking skills” (p. 143). The culmination of her process discussed numerous pedagogical possibilities for reflecting analytically on the struggles involved in the process of engaging girls in critical inquiry. In discussing her research,

Oliver (2001) states, “by critiquing images in teen magazines, issues such as race and racism, consumerism, gender stereotyping, sexuality, and teen-age pregnancy all emerged as body-related topics and later became the springboard for critical discussion, reflection, and journal writing” (p. 160). Such inquiry will constitute a large piece of the framework for this study on identity formation in adolescent females. Though each female is a unique individual, emerging themes and patterns can only assist educators as they attempt to discover an answer to the question Oliver posed and begin to think critically about identity formation in adolescent females.

The Role of Educators

The National Council for Research on Women (1998) talks about the role schools have in taking responsibility for properly nurturing adolescent females, since schools are a primary influence on adolescent intellectual, social, psychological, and emotional development. The Council gives advice that calls on educators to “strive to create a safe and supportive climate that nurtures girls and encourages them to develop and pursue their goals” (p. 3) while also stressing the unfortunate fact that “girls’ concerns and perspectives are often ignored in the design and implementation of programs and research intended to address their needs” (p. 3). Thus, the Council is calling on educators to realize that they need to have the impetus to create the kinds of environments for girls, both academically and socially, that will have positive, profound, and lasting effects on their lives.

In 2002 Simmons wrote an insightful and profound book called, *Odd Girl Out: the Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*, which chronicled her research surrounding the secretiveness in which adolescent girls deal with their problems with friends, family,

relationships, and identity. Simmons (2002) introduced the term alternative aggression, which is defined as “covert behavior in which the perpetrator makes it seem as though there has been no intent to hurt at all, when it is really intended to damage self-esteem or social status within a group” (p.21). Through her research, Simmons showed that these alternative aggressions exist in virtually every classroom in America, from the rural to the urban, and that their existence is damaging to young girls attempting to form positive and healthy identities.

In a workshop, Simmons asked young teenage girls to write down words that make a good leader. Her results should be astonishing to educators who strive to create classrooms where both boys and girls are equal.

Passive, yielding, and caring words overwhelmed the list. Only 4 of the words suggested a person unwilling to be nice. To these girls, a good leader was a good girl. Taking charge, saying no, and engaging in conflict were not signs of their good leader. The girls’ leader was easy to get along with. She was nice. She was caring. (p. 265)

When Simmons later compared this list to a previous list of what constituted the anti-girl, a term she used to describe the “girl who no one wants to be” (p. 124), she was shocked to find words such as “independent,” “brainy,” and “opinionated.” Her conclusion: “The qualities that are the ingredients for a strong leader are the qualities of a bad girl” (p. 265).

Thus, educators need to take note of Simmons’ research in order to create classroom environments that allow for females to feel comfortable enough to voice their opinions without fear of being put down. Simmons emphasizes that the stereotype of

“assertive, professional women as cold, frigid bitches communicates to girls their worst fear: that to become assertive in any way will terminate their relationships and disqualify them from the primary social currency in their lives, tenderness and nurturing” (Simmons, 2002, p. 127). Girls need to realize that this stereotype is just that, a stereotype, and not a way of living that should be advocated or allowed by educators or anyone else who encounters girls during the adolescent years. Thus, the idea of alternative aggressions in adolescent females is something that educators need to take into consideration when they deal with the nuances associated with teaching high school students.

O’Dea’s 2002 study also examined the relationship between educators and adolescent females, as the researcher found that the voices of young adolescents can never be stifled when the issue of identity is at hand when she stated:

The many useful comments and suggestions contributed by the young participants in this study demonstrate that they have an important role to play in the design of the educational activities in which they are expected to participate and from which they are believed to derive benefit. (pp. 10-11)

Thus, the voices of adolescent females need to be heard in all aspects of their lives, even when educators may feel that they have no say in the matter.

Popular Culture and Other Societal Factors

The extent to which adolescent females are confronted with external factors that can influence their identity formation has reached epidemic proportions, as evidenced by any number of magazine racks, billboards, or television screens. Images of seemingly perfect celebrities, advertisements of sexy women drinking alcohol, and newly coined

terms such as Botox are abundant and all contribute to a society fixated on the external representations of identity. Yet, few researchers have undertaken the challenge of delving into the relationships between culture and self-identity, as Hoskins pointed out in her 2001 study when she stated that these researchers instead “choose to focus on individual traits and family dynamics that take into account the perspective that a singular, bounded self develops within a closed and bounded system and cannot adapt to the complexity of postmodern life” (p. 232). In moving forward, Hoskins began to examine the processes of self-identity in a postmodern world and challenged older theories by “paying close attention to the processes of self-creation in relation to culture or discourse” (p. 231). In so doing, Hoskins touched upon the impact that television, sexuality, and eating disorders have on young girls who are in the midst of identity construction.

Another study also chose to focus on how images from popular culture can affect identity formation. The study examined the choice of young adolescents' heroes and heroines and how it is a powerful way to explore the socio-cultural factors that shape the self (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999). The results of the study confirm the notion that adolescents look to members of society other than their families and peers, especially media and sports icons, when choosing whom to look up to and admire. Such idolatry is certainly developmentally appropriate for adolescence, but it also merits closer consideration as the study sheds light on the growing number of external factors that influence how an adolescent chooses to form his or her identity, and what external factors there are to choose from. The study is also quick to point out that “youth is seen as a social process, where the establishment of an identity is not necessarily fixed and may go through significant changes” (p. 3). Thus, identity at this age is beginning to be defined

by social norms and “young people start to walk a tightrope between individualism and collectivism” (Bromnick & Swallow, 1999, p. 7). Thus, identity begins to be affected by many outside influences that an individual must choose to either accept or reject.

Another study examined an additional societal pressure that females are often confronted with. O’Dea (2002) wanted to determine whether young girls would be likely to engage in negative feelings and attitudes toward their bodies and self even if they participated in preventative strategies as outlined in body image education programs. Her results are rather eye opening, as they determine that the psychological impact such programs have on adolescent females may not be all positive. The phenomenon known as social comparison occurred in this study, meaning that “the girls compared themselves unfavorably with the models in the images given to them” (p. 8). Hence, O’Dea arrived at the important conclusion that young girls need to voice their concerns even while educators are attempting to design programs that aim to do good.

Perhaps the most shocking and telling research in recent years is contained in the 2003 film *Thirteen*, which was co-written by then 13-year-old Nikki Reed, a young girl who went through many unimaginable experiences at a pivotal time in a young female’s life. Ms. Reed joins Evan Rachel Wood as they portray two young girls on a journey through adolescence that leads them to alcohol, sex, and drugs and a quest for an identity that is all too tenuous for the both of them. In playing the mother of Evan Rachel Wood’s character, Tracy, actress Holly Hunter explains why she wanted to delve into such a role, in a review located on the Internet site, Rotten Tomatoes.

I felt like this role was a chance for me to express something that I see all around me: this culture of youth, this changing world where nothing is the same, and

where there's this tremendous confusion about how to be a parent, how to be a girl, how to connect when there's no real sense of what's right and what's wrong anymore. (2003, Parenting Thirteen section, para. 2)

Indeed, the world in which adolescent females find themselves in the 21st century is a place where things are faster, identities are shakier, and even 13-year-old girls are feeling the pressure of becoming someone who can stand on her own physically, emotionally, and intellectually, however daunting the task may be.

Women's perspectives on adolescence: what girls go through

In her book, *Appetites: Why Women Want*, Knapp (2003) shared her vision of the ideal world of a woman:

If only we lived in a culture in which internal measures of satisfaction and success – a capacity for joy and caring, an ability to laugh, a sense of connection to others, a belief in social justice – were as highly valued as external measures. (p. 154)

As a woman in her forties who has experienced the anguish surrounding alcoholism and anorexia, Knapp honestly captures what is wrong with the way women think about themselves today. Indeed, adult women offer a needed perspective on the journey of adolescent girls, as they have already made their way through the difficult process. This researcher believes that the personal opinions and views of adults can greatly contribute to the kinds of knowledge and understanding needed on what kinds of things shape a young girl's identity, and what is missing in young girls' education today.

In her 1997 study, Kaplan examined women's perceptions of their adolescence and asked questions about relevant experiences and specific strategies used to handle any

problems. An interesting result of her study made a bold claim about the power of group discussion.

All of the women agreed on the need for professional help during the adolescent years. One woman thought of the focus group as a support group that helped her grapple with her earlier years: "I had a couple of emotional responses to these discussions. Hearing everyone's experiences, you can tell that everyone was going through the same experiences and struggles." (Kaplan, 1997, p. 12)

Indeed, Kaplan's results offer much insight into the issues surrounding adolescence and identity formation and what is needed for the adolescents of today, from support systems that range from professional counseling to families or other such groups that can discuss such taboo topics as body image, sex, drugs, and alcohol.

Koesten, Miller, and Hummert (2001) also delve into this realm of risk behavior and its contributions to identity formation as their study talks about certain cognitive, social, and communication skills needed in order for adolescent girls to become sound moral and ethical contributors to the very society they are born into. Correlations between family communication, culture, social identity and self-efficacy are discussed and the results bring to light many ideas, including certain links between such things as social identity and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, in particular, "is highly connected with young women being able to articulate their opinions, establish boundaries, and make decisions that put them in control and thus decrease the incidence of risk behavior during identity formation" (p. 24). Thus, this study is an important one that establishes the need to identify the connections between many factors that influence and affect the identity formation of female adolescents.

Methods Available to Track Identity Formation

Numerous methods are available to analyze the patterns and themes inherent in the identity formation of adolescent females. One action research study by Zinck and Littrell (2000) shows that group counseling has a positive effect on the behavior, self-concept, and attitudes toward self and others of at-risk adolescent girls in high school. This study conveys the enormous importance of trust in a young female's life as well as the valuable possibility of sharing personal information with a peer. Though the girls in this study were at-risk, this researcher believes that the idea of group counseling is one that cannot be ruled out as beneficial to any female, especially when going through the journey of adolescence and identity formation. Knapp (2003) added to this perspective when she bluntly said, "Pain festers in isolation, it thrives in secrecy. Words are its nemesis, naming the anguish the first step in diffusing it, talking about the muck a woman slogs through a prerequisite for moving beyond it" (p. 158). This is reminiscent of the results of Simmons' (2002) study, as the idea of secrecy is viewed as detrimental to a female's identity formation. Thus, group counseling can serve to assist adolescent girls in talking about that which is most private and personal in their struggle to mold a healthy identity.

In tracking identity formation in adolescent females, it is important to obtain data from girls who come from diverse backgrounds, as Tolman and Porche (2000) disclosed that a goal of their research examining femininity ideology was to "create a scale that is inclusive of adolescent girls from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds in that we anticipate that girls living in various circumstances will be both more and less vulnerable to aspects of hegemonic femininity ideology" (p. 367). Thus, this researcher

believes that it is pertinent in the world that we live in to conduct research that examines the journeys of not one, but many different groups of adolescent females.

Analyzing the writings of adolescent girls is another method of tracking identity formation that can also provide clues as to what influences their identity formations.

Rhedding-Jones (2000) conducted a study where she discovered writing to be a prime site for identity location and construction of selves. She indicated that “in narrative writing the voice of the writer is the ‘I’ who watches herself but at the same time the awareness of others as readers creates a knowledge of the ‘I’ who is watched. In this way writing becomes a mirror of many kinds” (p. 12). This is reminiscent of the idea that just as the “I” of the writer can shift so can the “I” of adolescent females during identity formation. Rhedding-Jones also points out that she sees writing, “together with the events that surround the production of what gets written, as sites for construction of selves” (p. 12). Providing young girls with the opportunity to express themselves through writing is just another way to figure out what exactly they deal with while forming their identities.

Thankfully, writing exists as a tool to assist girls through identity formation, because the idea of a young girl voicing her concerns is one that is rarely utilized by many adolescent girls today. Marshall and Arvay (1999) discuss the experiences of silencing and loss of voice that adolescent girls are continuing to feel. Girls often feel as though they are not being listened to, often during times when they need to be heard the most, and as a result of this lack of listening, they learn to self-silence and simply not speak. It is of the utmost importance that these girls feel they have a context in which to voice their concerns, if not vocally, then through writing, drawing, acting, or another medium that is capable of expressing the feelings of an adolescent girl in a meaningful

and relevant way. As long as adolescent girls continue to feel silenced, they will also continue to feel disengaged about their own identities and instead of discussing their personal issues, they just may turn to the kinds of risk behaviors that Knapp (2003) did, that are so detrimental to the formation of a healthy identity during the high school years.

Summary

In conclusion, the review of the relevant literature reiterates the importance of establishing an awareness of the adolescent female's journey of identity formation in the educational setting in order to contribute to a healthy formation of that identity. The research shows that girls use many covert ways to deal with emotions and issues and educators are at the forefront of these issues, as young adolescents must attend schools throughout this stage of their journey. Thus, following the views set forth by the researchers in the review of the literature, educators need to continue to learn new ways of dealing with the emerging identities of female students in their classrooms. Not only should group counseling or discussion sessions be encouraged, but also important rules and regulations for regular classroom management should be discussed and enforced, as they address the concerns of identity formation. Educators can also look for signs of trouble or improvement through analyzing the writings of female students. But most importantly, the job of an educator must not be finished when the door of the classroom is closed. During such a time of crucial identity formation, female adolescents need to be able to voice their concerns and not silence themselves or keep their emotions locked inside. A voice is a powerful tool, and the data collection methodology of this research shows that the ability to voice concerns in a non-threatening and safe environment is a

pivotal part of helping adolescent girls become strong, powerful, and able to always feel as though they, and their identities, matter.

A clear and concise description of the methodology follows that will include a description of the research subjects and setting, the data collection approach, the data collection instruments, and how all of this data was analyzed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Participants

The participants chosen for this study were selected from the school where this researcher did her student teaching. The sample was chosen from a population of convenience. This researcher chose to select participants only from the classes of her cooperating teacher in the spring of 2004. The student teaching placement was in a South Jersey high school with a student population of approximately 712 students during the 2003-2004 school year. The school was 64% Caucasian, 32% African-American, 3% Hispanic, and <1% Asian.

This researcher initially distributed permission slips and information packets to 75% of the students in the cooperating teacher's classes, based on a judgment call about the likelihood of participation. 10 students returned permission slips and all were designated as participants in the study. Participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 and grades 10 to 12. There were 2 seniors, and 8 sophomores. The number of participants varied at the group interview sessions. At the first session 6 participated; at the second, 5 participated; at the third, 5 participated; and at the final session, 5 participated. The racial composition of the sample was 50% Caucasian, 37.5% African-American, and 12% Hispanic. Subject A was 18-years-old, a senior, and an African-American with a small frame, Subject B was 16-years-old, a sophomore, and a Caucasian with a small frame, Subject C was 16-years-old, a sophomore, and a Puerto-Rican with a large frame, Subject D was 15-years-old, a sophomore, and a Caucasian with a small frame, Subject E was 15-

years-old, a sophomore, and a Caucasian with a medium frame, Subject F was 16-years-old, a sophomore, and an African-American with a small frame, Subject G was 16-years-old, a sophomore, and an African-American with a medium frame, and Subject H was 15-years-old, a sophomore, and a Caucasian with a medium frame. Subject F attended only the first session as she left the school district shortly after the beginning of the project. This researcher was a participant observer during this study.

Instruments

The instruments used to collect data for this study were videotapes and writing prompts. Videotaping was deemed the most appropriate method of recording important information from the sessions because frequently the body language and facial expressions are crucial to identifying elements of identity. All participants gave permission to be videotaped and to have their words and actions transcribed for purposes of this study. During certain sessions, a warm-up activity in the form of a writing prompt was used. The writing prompts included questions relating to identity, beauty, and self-esteem (see Appendix B).

After the final session, this researcher transcribed the videotapes in order to provide a hard copy (see Appendix C) that could be coded for the themes that emerged during the study. The writing samples were also coded (see Appendix B).

Procedures

First this researcher obtained permission from the school district to conduct the study with students and obtained the necessary Rowan University permissions. Following that, she prepared and distributed information packets outlining the nature of the study and the plan for implementation. This plan, plus detailed permission slips (see Appendix

A) were given to the selected female students. The information packets and permission slips stressed the importance of confidentiality during the group interview sessions and this researcher repeatedly reminded the participants that their participation would be confidential. There was an attempt to obtain a maximum variation sample, with regard to ethnicity and race, as previous research showed pertinent racial and ethnic differences would be preferable to include in a study of this nature (Tolman & Porche, 2000). Permission was gained to use a classroom after school hours for the group sessions. 10 students returned permission slips and became the sample for the study.

The study was designed to include 4 bi-weekly discussion sessions over an 8-week period. Each session had its own topic, beginning with gender issues and relationships and continuing on to racial images/issues, peer pressure, body image, and self-esteem and aggression in females. Each session was conducted in an open format, and allowed for unstructured circle discussion and sharing. A warm-up was provided at each session and included opportunities for participants to discuss personal issues that were relevant to them, and sometimes included a writing sample. There followed an introduction of the theme of the session, expressions and sharing based on that theme, and a closing of the session. Prior to each session, this researcher gave a letter to each participant, outlining the session's topic and what each participant should come prepared to discuss.

The topical outline of the sessions was:

- Session 1: Introduction and Gender Issues, Racial Images/Issues and Relationships Discussion
- Session 2: Body Image, Sports, and Relationships Discussion

- Session 3: Peer Pressure Discussion/Body Image Discussion/Identities writing sample/Beauty writing sample
- Session 4: Self-esteem and Aggression in females Discussion/Ideal v. Anti-girl writing sample

Each session consisted of:

- Warm-up: Researcher invited the participants to engage in a brief warm-up session that enabled them to express their current concerns. After the warm-up, this researcher asked an open-ended question to each participant in order for her to verbalize her feelings.
- Theme introduction: Topic was introduced and discussed. Researcher always stressed that the environment was safe and that no girl should repeat outside what was said during the group discussions. Researcher also utilized writing samples as a way to brainstorm a topic and get the girls thinking about their feelings regarding a certain area of identity formation.
- Closing: Sessions closed with each participant answering an open-ended question that pertained to the topic discussed.

At the conclusion of the study, all videotapes were transcribed by this researcher and then coded for themes related to each of the research questions.

Data Analysis

The videotape of each of the 4 sessions was reviewed and this researcher transcribed not only the words of all participants but also made pertinent remarks about body language, facial expressions, and emotional reactions such as laughing or crying. Each transcription was then analyzed and coded for themes this researcher had identified

as important based on the research questions asked. These themes included: peer pressure, family pressure, gender issues, body image, racial image/issues, and relationships. Each theme was color-coded using a different colored highlighter. The total number of responses for each theme was then counted. Next, this researcher went back and determined whether each theme should be included under the positive category of self-worth and acceptance or the negative category of submission and inferiority. After penciling in a plus or a minus, this researcher then went back and counted the number of positive and negative experiences for each theme that occurred. Then the themes and categories were divided based on individual subjects and the total number of responses in each theme for each participant was counted. Following all of the coding, a table was created to show the percentages of both positive and negative responses given by each participant. The final data analysis that is discussed in the following chapter outlines what was found to be unique and worthy information experienced by each individual female in the study. The analysis discusses both similarities and differences in experiences among the participants and indicates how each individual female has attempted to form an identity during the high school years.

Chapter 4: Findings

Of the 8 participants, Subject E attended all 4 sessions, Subjects A, B, C, D, and H attended 3 sessions, Subject G attended 2 sessions, and Subject F attended only 1 session. It is pertinent to note that subject F, who only attended 1 session, left the school district in the week following her participation in the first group interview session, and thus, her responses are extremely limited and not discussed when comparing Table 1. The findings of the data collection are outlined according to each research question posed.

What factors influence and affect identity formation of female adolescents during the high school years?

The findings of the 4 group interview sessions indicate that the research questions were pertinent and that the topics planned were followed. The topics of the 4 sessions were slated to include: gender issues, racial image/issues, relationships, body image, sports, peer pressure, self-esteem and aggression in females. These topics were always introduced, but other topics were permitted to be discussed. The topics were chosen as a result of the review of the relevant literature and what this researcher deemed necessary to include in a study on identity in adolescent females. Of all the topics outlined for the sessions, this researcher decided to code six particular categories of interest that indicated what these girls considered to be the most important factors that influence and affect their identity formation during the high school years. These six categories included: peer pressure, family pressure, gender issues, racial images/issues, body images, and relationships. The total number of responses given by all participants for each topic is shown in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows how there was ample discussion for

all topics, although certain topics like family pressure, body image, gender issues, and relationships yielded more responses from the participants in the group interview sessions.

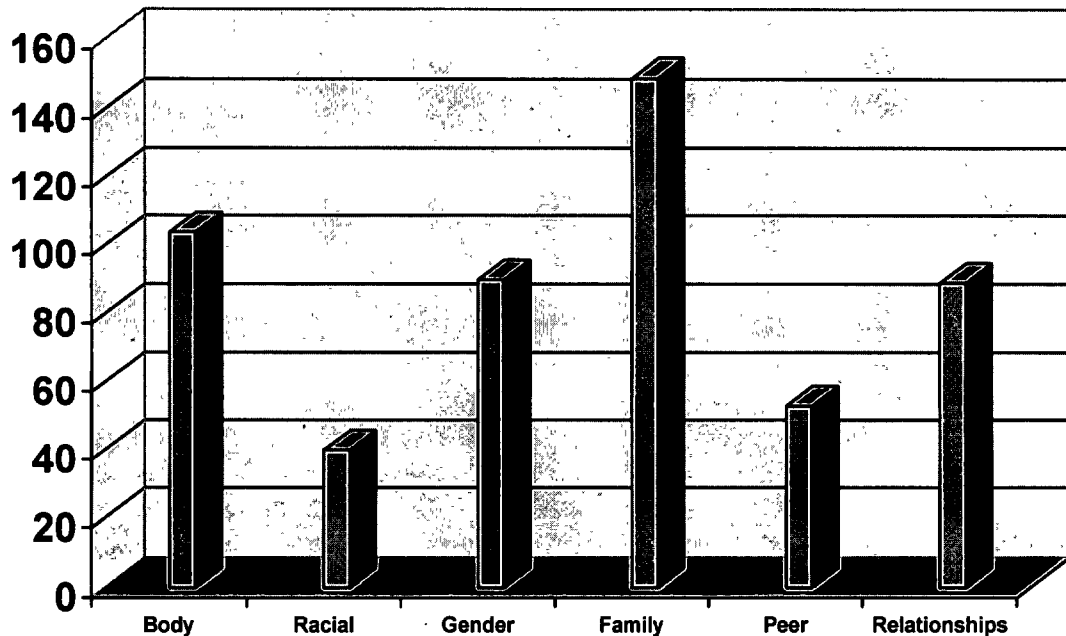


Figure 1. Number of total responses in specified categories.

Out of all the larger categories, the topic of relationships was broken down to distinguish between romantic relationships and relationships that were strictly platonic. Though this is not shown in Figure 1, it played a role in determining whether certain responses should be coded under strictly relationships, or other categories like gender issues. Other topics discussed included gay and lesbian issues and teacher and school oriented issues that were not ignored, but coded under other larger categories.

Are identities more likely to be revealing characteristics of submission and inferiority, or self-worth and acceptance?

After coding the responses for all of the categories, this researcher then went back and counted the total number of responses each subject gave that corresponded to an indicated category. Figure 2 shows this data. The legend shows each subject by the appropriate letter name and the figure details exactly how much each subject participated and which topics held the most interest for them. It is important to recall that Subject F attended only 1 session, Subject G attended 2 sessions, Subjects A, B, C, D, and H attended 3 sessions, and Subject E attended all 4 sessions, which would account for why she has such a high number of total responses, especially in the family pressure category.

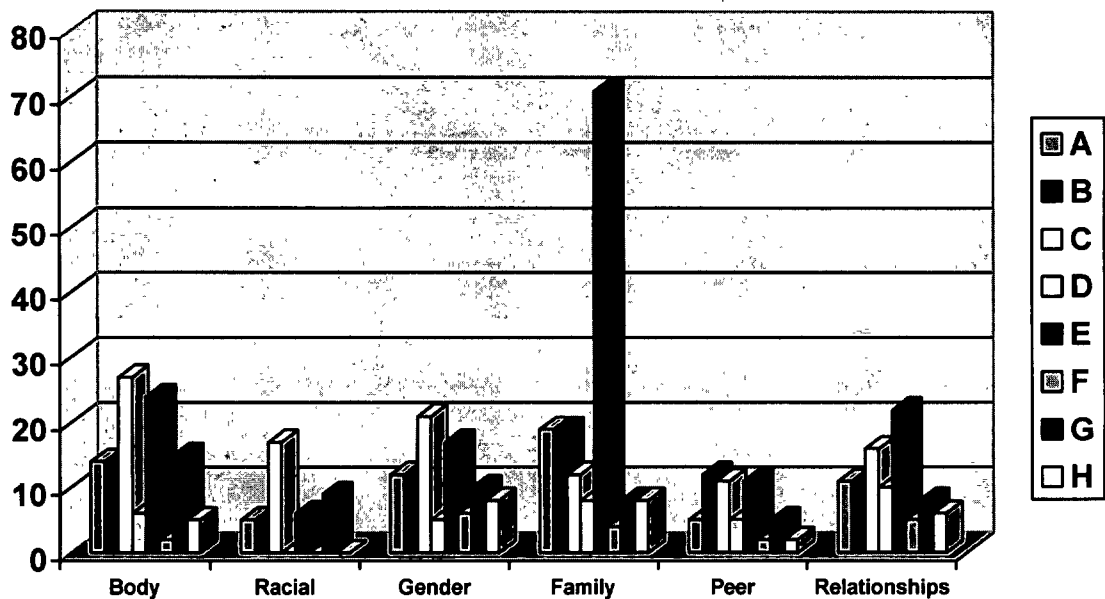


Figure 2. Total number of responses given by each subject in each category.

After separating the responses given by the chosen categories, this researcher then went back and decided whether each response should be given a positive plus sign that indicated self-worth and acceptance or a negative minus sign that indicated submission and inferiority. A response was deemed positive if the subject was clearly responding in ways that were characteristic of self-worth and acceptance; a response was deemed

negative if the subject was clearly responding in ways that were characteristic of submission and inferiority. While such determination is certainly highly interpretive, a decision as to whether to put a response either in the positive or negative category was made by combining certain classifications that were helpful in choosing the correct characteristic. These classifications included the specific words used by the participant, the attitude displayed by the participant in the videotape, and the nonverbal language shown by observing the participant. After determining the exact number of positive and negative responses each subject gave, a table was created to show the percentage of both positive and negative responses that each participant gave, and thus, the table gives an indication as to whether each subject responded more positively or negatively. This data is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Percentages of Positive and Negative Responses for each Category

	Body	Racial	Gender	Family	Peer	Relationships	Total
	Positive Responses						
SA	64	20	67	79	100	82	71
SB	18	100	36	47	17	64	40
SC	26	29	48	25	73	19	35
SD	0	0	20	0	0	10	6
SE	33	33	41	18	82	55	34
SF	0	0	17	25	100	20	26
SG	20	44	20	38	60	38	33

SH	80	0	75	50	0	83	66
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	Body	Racial	Gender	Family	Peer	Relationships	Total
	Negative Responses						
SA	36	80	33	21	0	18	29
SB	82	0	64	53	83	36	60
SC	74	71	52	75	27	81	65
SD	100	0	80	100	100	90	94
SE	67	67	59	82	18	45	66
SF	100	0	83	75	0	80	74
SG	80	56	80	63	40	63	67
SH	20	0	25	50	100	17	34

Table 1 shows that only Subjects A and H had a higher percentage of responses in the positive category that contained evidence of self-worth and acceptance. All other participants had a higher percentage in the negative category that contained evidence of submission and inferiority. Subject D had the highest percentage of negative responses with 94%. She had only 6% of her responses included in the positive category. In the second group interview session, Subject D stated, "I don't like my body," while Subject A stated, "I think mine is perfect for me." Since only Subject A and Subject H had higher responses in the positive category of self-worth and acceptance rather than submission and inferiority, the numbers indicate that during the high school years, identities are more likely to be revealing characteristics of submission and inferiority.

In categorizing, this researcher found key words that emerged that helped to discern which statements pertained, for instance, to body image, and which to gender issues. Many statements for gender issues and body image also corresponded to relationships, and were coded for two categories. An example was a negative statement from Subject C that was coded for both relationships and body image. She stated:

This guy was, like, wanting to hang out with me cause he wanted to deflower a virgin and also that 'fat bitches need love too,' so I'm like, alright, that's cool. I mean, it definitely put down my self-esteem a little bit cause you figure like, well, I just thought he was different.

When coding for relationships, this researcher identified words such as "boyfriend, girlfriend, friends, trust, and sex." For racial image/issues, words like "prejudice, racist, whites, and blacks" were examined. Words that indicated a statement belonged to body image included, "fat, skinny, thin, ugly, pretty, and girly." For gender issues, words such as, "male, female, and sex" were examined. Peer pressure statements included words such as "alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, yes, and no." And statements that indicated family pressure included words like, "Mom, Dad, parents, curfew, rules, fight, grades, college, brothers, and sisters." Out of these words, statements were then examined for their either positive or negative quality and coded under submission and inferiority or self-worth and acceptance.

Subject F participated only in the first group interview session, but it was clear that her responses indicated that she had gone through many negative experiences in her life that contributed to her identity being muddled and confusing. This researcher learned that Subject F had moved back into a large city with her mother, whom Subject F had

spoken negatively about during the first session. It was clear that Subject F wanted to be different than her parents, whom she claimed were both drug addicts, but it was also obvious that this task was daunting to her.

I just think, like, it happens (drug abuse) so much, and if it's in your family, somebody has to break the chain somewhere and if it has to be you, then it has to be you. Cause, like, there's so much out there that can't there be one person out there to stop it? But it's like, once you do something you're always going to have your past looking at you, your past is always going to be with you, you can't hide it and you can be known for that. Like a drug addict is always gonna be a drug addict and an alcoholic is always gonna be an alcoholic and a drunk is always gonna be a drunk cause that's just how it is.

This researcher would also like to note that Subject F was in one of her cooperating teacher's classes and was often a problem during the lesson, continually talking back and disrupting class time.

Are there class, race, ethnicity, and/or gender connections to submission/inferiority and self-worth/acceptance?

As evidenced by Table 1, Subjects A, C, E, and G displayed a higher percentage of negative responses under the racial images/issues category. It is important to note that Subjects A, C, and G are of a minority background. Only Subject B displayed 100% positive responses under racial image/issues. Subject B was of Caucasian descent. Subjects D, F, and H did not mention anything having to do with racial images or issues and its connection to their identities. Subject B indicated that she had gone through a

transformation during the high school years that made her feel more akin to those of a different race. She stated:

This school did teach me something cause when I went to elementary, there wasn't a lot of blacks there and when I came here there were a lot of black people and I realized that there's not much different between whites and blacks but I didn't know that when I was in elementary school cause people would always say to stay away from the black people cause they're bad, but when I came here, I realized that it doesn't faze me to be around black people.

However, no other subjects talked about a similar experience. While Subject A agreed with Subject B and stated, "I think that this town is the best place where blacks and whites can get along even though it's not really like the real world," she also stated about another Subject's boyfriend that he "is prejudiced and thinks we should go back to slavery days." Subject A said this with a tone that indicated that she was disappointed that things are still this way in the 21st century.

Subject C stressed how important her Hispanic roots were to her and was disturbed by the fact that many people thought she was white and not Puerto-Rican. "I tan because I want to look more Hispanic. And I'm, like, so white. Cause I got Italian in me, that's olive, and Hispanic, so I should be darker, but I'm not."

Subject G also talked about the way of life in the high school cafeteria when she stated, "It's, like, it's all segregated. They got, like, all black people and all white people. Like, that's just how it is."

All subjects joined in a discussion of how the two towns that contribute to the population of their high school differ greatly in their identities and images. Subject C

talked about how “the stereotype is that girls from the one town are prissy and girls from the other town are the ‘B’ word.” Subject E reiterated this statement by adding, “that’s where prejudice comes from. You meet one girl and you try to talk to her and she’s like, ‘Oh! Go away!’ And you’re like, okay, well I guess if she’s that way then everybody else must be.” There was certainly a clear delineation between the girls from one town and the girls from another town. All of these comments contributed to the fact that there were more negative responses having to do with racial images and issues, instead of positive and healthy comments.

In what manner do adolescent girls exhibit their identities: positive or negative?

Although only 2 subjects exhibited a higher number of positive comments relating to their self-worth and acceptance, it was clear that many of these girls do, in fact, have fairly healthy identities. It was also evident that most of the girls tended to be more positive about themselves as the group interview sessions continued. Subject E, in particular, discussed many negative aspects of her life, but also indicated the fact that she doesn’t allow herself to focus on the negative things in her life because she knows they will bring her down. When asked about how Subject E manages to get good grades and be a positive energy in the classroom, she responded by stating:

Well, I guess it’s cause I look on the positive side of things. If I think about the bad stuff, it puts me in a bad mood. That’s how you have to look at it, that’s how I look at it; otherwise, you go through life as a pessimist.

Subject E hardly spoke in the first group interview session, but since she was the only subject to attend all 4 sessions, she ended up having the most responses, and even though

most were negative, the positive ones indicated that she understood how to overcome the obstacles in her life.

Subject C was a similar case, and although her issues with her physical identity were negative, it was evident that there was a counter-point of a positive sense of identity in each response. She stated:

I don't want to be pretty. I want to be me. And I'm intelligent and I'm gonna go to college and I'm gonna be someone and that's what I want and I know that I'm not gorgeous, I don't even think I'm pretty. But I'm gonna be something.

This was the case with most of the subjects in the group, with the notable exception of Subject D. Subject D clearly exhibited evidence of a negative identity during the group interview sessions. She was extremely difficult to hear, and this researcher often had to rewind the tape of the sessions in order to deduce exactly what was being said. During the first session, Subject D talked about a past relationship and stated:

My boyfriend last year tried cheating on me with my sister and he did cheat on me with this other girl. One time we were at a party and he tried to rape my sister and I was still with him after that.

Clearly, Subject D stood out not only in the stories she told, but also in the way she told them. She always hid her petite frame in an oversized jacket with her arms crossed. Also, her meek voice, terse and short responses and aloof manner indicated that she exhibited her identity in a much more negative way than her peers in the sessions.

Another emerging theme having to do with the way the girls exhibited their identities was that of the tremendous amount of empathy found from all subjects during the group interview sessions. All of the subjects displayed at least one instance of

understanding how to comfort one another, which is a necessary aspect of a healthy identity. Subject A, in particular, had many statements that contained elements of empathy. When Subject E talked about how her stepfather used to hit her, Subject A responded immediately with, "I don't like that. I don't like that at all." This kind of sincere empathy indicates that although some of the girls have been through struggles in their young lives, they never cease to try to make things better and are always attempting to exhibit their identities in a positive, rather than negative manner.

What roles do parents and peer play in identity formation?

By far, this research question yielded the most responses from all participants, particularly those who have had sincere struggles with their home lives during this pivotal time of growing up. Subject A was the only subject with a higher percentage in the positive category of self-worth and acceptance relating to family pressure. Subject H had 50% in both categories. All other subjects had a higher number of responses in the negative category of submission and inferiority. Subject A also had 100% positive responses having to do with peer pressure, while Subject D and H had 100% negative responses, which is interesting to note because of both girls' quiet demeanors and meek voices.

Subject A repeatedly talked about the fact that she "tells her mom everything," while all other girls indicated the exact opposite, with the exception of Subject C, who lives with her cousin, acting as her guardian, and in whom she displays an enormous amount of trust and sincerity. Subject A also talked about her philosophy of parenting and said, "if you're strict, they're gonna go out and be wild. Most people that parents were strict, they want to drink, get in trouble, smoking, being whores, having babies.

Mmm-hmm!” Subject A clearly exhibited the most positive family environment and did not show signs of having any undue pressure put upon her. She also exhibited 100% positive responses in the peer pressure category, which indicated that it wasn’t an issue for her identity. When discussing why some girls have unprotected sex even after hearing about all the dangers associated with the act, Subject A responded by stating that those girls “want to be popular. They want to be down. I don’t care. I ain’t got time for that.” Once again, Subject A showed that having a positive family environment led to being more apt to resist peer pressure.

Subject H experienced family pressure to follow in the footsteps of her older sister and said, “it makes me mad cause she’s really smart. It makes me feel like I have to do as well as her.” Subject H also had 100% negative responses having to do with peer pressure, which indicates that her quiet demeanor could be detrimental to her ability to form a healthy identity when she is around her peers.

Subject B went through similar experiences with her own family, especially having 2 older brothers. “My brother had this girlfriend. And, like, they were allowed to go upstairs. And me and my boyfriend, we’re not allowed to go upstairs. It’s because I’m the girl. That’s what my Dad said.” But Subject B also said that she “tells her mom everything,” and frequently talked about how important her family was to her in her life.

Subjects D and E had the highest percentage of negative responses having to do with family pressure. Subject D clearly felt as though she was constantly being compared to her older sister and stated that she feels “like crap, cause I’m not like her,” when her mom compares her to her sister.

Subject E talked about the horrible home life she came from and how she can't wait to be 18 when she can finally live on her own. She talked about how she isn't allowed to have friends over, how her mother doesn't care about her good grades in her honors classes, and how her stepfather hits her and curses at her, once knocking down her door telling her "privacy is a privilege." In a particularly disturbing statement, Subject E talked about her mother telling her about how she was conceived. "She's like, 'Oh, well, don't make the same mistake I did. You were a broken condom. I didn't really want you, but I had no choice.' That's what she told me. So I'm a broken condom, isn't that fun?" Subject E also talked about how she never eats breakfast at home, would rather stay at her grandmother's house, whom she adores, and how her parents have no respect for her.

My parents will tell me that I'm the worst possible kid they could have ever had and that's the sad part cause I'm not. I keep telling them that all the time, I say, 'Mom, I have friends that do this and that!' And I'm not even allowed to cuss at them and I have friends that cuss their parents out, so it's like, I don't do anything wrong and it really bothers me and they still say that I'm the worst possible kid that they could have had and I'm just, like, 'Okay, sure! Sure I am.'

Subject E had the most to overcome, but she seemed amazingly conscious of everything she needed to do to not let her situation bring her down.

Subject C came from extraordinary circumstances, having her father die when she was 7 of a drug overdose, and her estranged mother still a drug addict. She talked about how her mother started doing drugs when she was 16 and got her father hooked, how her father used to beat her mother, and how her mother was a horrible mother to her.

My mom wanted me and my sister to move back with her and I was like, after all this you put me through, after all the drugs and all that, and all the beatings that you gave me for no reason, you just came home drunk in the middle of the night or didn't come home at all, and all that, and you had chances, but you missed all our visits and all that, and you want me to come back and live with you? I'm not gonna give you the *honor* of me coming back to live with you. (Fights back tears) You're missing out on me. It's my time. I'm going on with my life. You do what you have to do.

Subject C also talked about how she believes drug abuse is inherited and how she would never try drugs because of that reason. "My mom and dad were drugs addicts and I don't want to go down the same road as them and that's why I don't try drugs." Subject C was adamant about not giving in to peer pressure, and was also immensely appreciative of the life she has been given with her guardian, her cousin.

My relationship with my cousin is so open that I can actually tell her more than I could ever tell any friend. I feel like she's actually my best friend and if I ever had a problem, she'd be the first person I'd tell.

Other subjects did not experience the same kind of difficulties growing up, but did experience the kinds of peer pressures associated with forming an identity during adolescence.

All subjects admitted to drinking at least once. Subjects D and E also admitted to smoking cigarettes. When discussing the positive and negative aspects associated with drinking and pot smoking, Subject D stated, "you don't die if you smoke weed. There's no way you could die. You could never prove it." Subject B countered with, "but I've

always been told that it's worse to smoke weed than to drink. And that's why I think I don't do it." Subject G also added that she think there is a class and race issue associated with both substances and stated, "I think in the one town, they smoke weed more than they drink, but in the other town, they are into drinking more."

Subject B and E admitted to feeling peer pressure, especially when related to drugs and alcohol, while Subject H reported feeling pressured, "sometimes." Subject B talked about the peer pressure that is associated with smoking cigarettes.

After awhile you just get tired of telling them, 'No! No! No!' And, like, I was around it so much and, like, I never did it, but I would think, like, God, I should just do it to get it over with but still, I never did it.

Subject E also talked about feeling pressure to try smoking.

The only reason that I used it in the first place was because you get tired of hearing that it's no big deal, just try it, you'll have fun, blah blah blah blah. And you get tired of it, so you're like, 'All right! Fine!' Like, it gets to that point and that's like the only reason that I tried cigarettes in the first place anyway and I did get hooked on them for awhile but I got over them because one of my other friends didn't do it and I listened to her which was better.

Clearly, with the notable exception of Subject A, many girls experience some form of peer and family pressure during the high school years.

What role does body image play in identity formation?

The body image of the subjects in the group interview sessions is clearly a key factor in whether they form healthy identities or not. Only Subject A had a higher percentage of responses in the positive category of self-worth and acceptance, and she

clearly had the best self-image out of all of the girls in the group. She spoke frankly about how she knows her body isn't perfect, but that she loves it anyway.

I got rolls. I don't care! No, I do wish my stomach was flatter, but people like actually go and get tummy tucks and stuff like that and them models, they be sick. They're sick. I like my body. I mean, I could do some crunches, but I think mines is perfect for me.

At times, body image dominated the discussion, especially during the last session, when talking about the ideal girl. Subject C was disturbed that some participants chose the word, "pretty" for the ideal girl and "ugly" for the anti-girl.

Why does an ideal girl have to be pretty? Why can't she just be intelligent and have common sense or just be athletic or something? Why do you always have to be pretty? Why does society make it that you have to look like a model or something? I don't understand that.

The other girls rationalized by stating that everyone wants to be pretty and that guys put pressure on girls to look a certain way. Subject A elaborated on this topic.

I think boys, the reason why they make it seem like you have to be this pretty skinny type thing is cause they look at those videos and I mean they definitely are airbrushed. I mean, every little thing and every little flaw, they erase it, but boys look at stuff like that and that's why they think girls need to be like that.

It is evident that society and popular culture do play a role in the way adolescent females feel about their body image. It is undesirable to be "fat," even to girls who are athletic and strong. Subject G, for instance, repeatedly talked about how fat she would be if she didn't play sports stating, "I'd be so fat if I didn't do sports because like, I eat so much. I

would be fat if I didn't do nuttin." When asked if they would ever change something in their appearance, Subject G said her thighs and Subject E her breasts, while Subject H stated, "I wouldn't change anything medically, like I don't like when people do that. If I wanted to change something, I'd just exercise." Subject E talked at length about the size of her breasts and how she someday wants a reduction because of the way they negatively affect her identity and self-esteem.

I despise my breasts a lot cause I have really big ones and I want to get rid of them badly. And my friends don't like them because some of them get really jealous and say, "Oh, give them to me!" And that bothers me cause everybody is like, "Your boobs are great! I want them." And I'm like, they're not that great cause I can't wear anything. And guys constantly talk about it like it's a big deal and it's really not and all my friends keep telling me to wear something that'll push them in so they don't look so big and they don't understand that it would hurt.

All in all, body image noticeably plays a key role in the way adolescent females form their identities during the high school years.

How is identity defined by same sex relationships, by opposite sex relationships and by perceptions of self and expected roles?

Beginning with the "ideal versus anti-girl" experiment modeled after Simmons' (2002) research, this researcher found that the subjects did choose the kinds of "passive, yielding, and caring words" (p. 265) for the ideal girl that Simmons indicated her group also chose. It is evident that during adolescence, girls do not easily choose words that indicate that the ideal girl should be "taking charge, saying no, and engaging in conflict"

(Simmons, 2002, p. 265). A sample of the words the subjects chose include: kind, pretty, happy, nice, intelligent, trustworthy, honest, respectful, and caring. The list of words chosen by each subject can be found in Appendix B.

It is evident that many girls experience difficulty forming bonding relationships with other females. When prompted with quotes from Simmons' research such as, "girls are manipulative" (p. 16) the subjects had an overwhelmingly negative response that agreed with the sentiment. The subjects indicated how it is easier to be friends with boys because of the way girls treat each other. Subject E stated "I do think it's easier to be friends with guys because girls let their feelings get in the way, like jealousy, and they lose a lot of friends over stuff like that." Subject B agreed and stated "you can't trust girls," while reiterating a story of how peers at school started nicknaming her and her friends WBC because they always wore white belts. Subject D also agreed, stating, "girls just love telling everyone everything. I used to be friends with a lot of girls but then I realized how mean they can be because girls sit there and judge you all the time and guys don't." It was also clear that girls can be harsh to one another, especially when Subject C agreed that girls do judge you on your appearance.

People tell me I wear dude's clothes, and a girl asked me if I was a dyke cause I was wearing dude's clothes and I'm like, are you serious? I wear what's comfortable and I'm not gonna change for nobody no matter what they want. Like, I'm not gonna dress like a girl. I'm a big girl and I can't wear clothes like other girls so I'm gonna wear what's comfortable with me and guys won't say nothing to you cause that's what they wear and it doesn't really bother them.

Clearly, the high school years are extremely difficult for girls as they try to form close and lasting relationships with other females, and even other males.

When asked about their feelings towards homosexuality, there were mixed responses. Subject A said that she didn't feel threatened, even going as far as to state, "I feel like I don't get two guys being together, but two girls, like girls are soft and feminine, like, okay don't get any ideas, I'm just saying like two guys they're all hard." Subject D indicated that she doesn't have a problem with homosexuality stating, "if you're gay, you're gay and that's who you are, but if I'm around it, it kinda skeeves me out." It was Subject E who had the most intense response.

I don't feel weird around lesbians at all because just because they're a lesbian doesn't mean they're gonna like you cause it has nothing to do with that and it really angers me when people say that they're scared of lesbians and they don't like gay people cause I know a lot of gay people and my favorite cousin, she's one of my favorite people in the world and she's a lesbian and I wouldn't see any reason ever to be scared of her because they're normal people and I don't see why people would discriminate against them. It's not fair, it's like saying, oh you're black, I don't like you.

It is important to note that Subject E also pulled this researcher aside to disclose that she circled the word "bisexual" on a warm-up sheet having to do with identities, but that she did not want to share this information with the rest of the group.

On the topic of opposite sex relationships, Subjects B, D, E and G admitted being involved in relationships with a member of the opposite sex. Subject A indicated that she was involved in a relationship for 3 years, but that they were taking a break since he was

away at college. When prompted about the way guys treat girls in general, Subject G talked about how she doesn't appreciate the way guys talk about her body.

I'm like, get out my face! It's like they'll be attracted to you and they'll say stuff and I'm like, 'Shut up!' and sometimes I feel like if I didn't have my thighs, I wouldn't have to deal with all those comments and stuff like that. A lot of girls like them comments and stuff like that but I don't.

Subjects E and H agreed, with H stating that boys "exaggerate too much, they're too forward with it and it just makes you feel so uncomfortable. Subject E also talked about the way guys make comments about her breasts and how it bothers her. She also spoke about how it is difficult for her to trust her boyfriend because of the stories people tell her.

I don't trust the boyfriend that I have now. I don't trust him when he tells me he loves me, I don't believe him, I'm just like, 'Yeah, sure you do.' And he's going crazy cause he keeps saying he loves me and I'm like, 'Sure you do.' And I don't trust him around other girls.

On the subject of sex and sexually transmitted diseases, only Subject H spoke up about how and why she has chosen to stay abstinent.

I don't have sex. And if you think about it, it does scare me a little bit cause there're so many people in this school that go around and do stuff so you could just be walking next to somebody and they could have something and you don't even know about it.

Other subjects talked about the pressure to have sex and how there is a double standard when it comes to boys. Subject E explained:

One minute they'll tell you, 'Oh, it's okay, I won't tell anyone,' but then when they're talking to their friends it's like, 'Oh, she's a smut, she's a slut.' But then as soon as she comes around again, they'll want to have sex with her. The guy is a ladies man, but the girl is the slut.

In a discussion about how more young girls seem to be interested in sex, Subject A candidly stated, "it just makes me think back to when I was in the 7th and 8th grade and I was not worrying about nobody having sex." The girls were obviously aware of the dangers associated with unprotected sex, with Subject D stating that girls don't care about the consequences sometimes because, "they want guys to pay attention to them so they think if they have sex, guys will pay attention to them more." Subject E elaborated by talking about the way many young girls feel invincible and are desensitized even by what they learn in school.

They think it won't happen to them. They'll say, "Oh, I got friends that it happened to, but it won't happen to me.' Or if they don't have any friends who have anything, they think it won't happen to them. It's that kind of a thing.

They're so sure that there's nobody around here that has anything. That, 'Oh, he's clean, he doesn't have anything.' That kind of a thing.

Thus, the subjects have clearly begun the process of delineating the importance of relationships and the ramifications that some unhealthy ones might have on their identities.

Will group-talk sessions and written work reveal the same or different issues of identity formation?

In addition to the group talk sessions, this researcher also handed out warm-up and closing activities in order to see whether girls respond to prompts differently in writing than in discussion. The first writing activity was a simple identities worksheet in which each participant was asked to circle aspects of her identity under certain topics like, relationships, age, ethnicity, and class. (See Appendix B for all writing samples) This activity revealed many things that were discussed in the group interview sessions, but also introduced new ideas that had not yet been communicated. An interesting discussion about politics emerged when Subject C stated that she felt that all of her peers should circle Democrat because “it’s working class, middle class.” The other subjects were unsure of this category, as well as whether or not they lived in an urban, suburban, or rural dwelling. Subject C also introduced the topic of religion when she told the group that she was an atheist “because I believe after all the stuff that happened to me in my life, I don’t believe in a God.” The other girls showed empathy in this situation and attempted to show Subject C that you don’t have to believe in organized religion to believe in a God.

There were a few things that showed up on the identities worksheet that were not discussed in the group interview sessions. The first included Subject H circling that her ethnicity is American, White, and American Indian. Subject G also circled that she was Jewish and Native American. And Subject E circled that she was bisexual, and specifically told this researcher that she did not want the information disclosed in the group sessions.

The next writing sample was about beauty and recognizing inner beauty, power, greatness, strength, talents, and passion. These short responses revealed that the girls

were clearly learning to discover positive aspects of their identity that dealt with self-worth and acceptance instead of the negative aspects of submission and inferiority that often dominated the group interview sessions. Subject B stated that she is beautiful because, “I live my life to the fullest – never taking the bad too seriously. I don’t judge people by the way they look.” Subject C stated that she is beautiful “because of my inner self” and that she is powerful because “of my education.” Even Subject D could see the inner beauty in herself when she stated that she really loves to “be myself. I can never try to be anyone else but me.”

Subjects E and G had responses that echoed a different mood than the other girls. Subject E stated that she is powerful because “I’ve gotten through my life so far without killing myself – I don’t plan on doing it anytime soon either.” This idea of killing oneself was never brought up in any group interview session. Also, Subject G stated that she is great because “I’m not.” This response was out of sync with the other responses and also with most of Subject G’s participation in the group interview sessions.

The last writing sample was the “ideal versus anti-girl” activity modeled after the Simmons (2002) study. This sample also asked the girls to choose qualities that make a good leader. It is interesting to note that the qualities of a good leader contain more words of strength and persistence when compared with the qualities of the ideal girl. According to the subjects, a good leader should be “responsible, devoted, outgoing, and confident,” while the ideal girl still has aspects of her identity that are physical and passive, including the words, “pretty, sweet, and popular. The responses to this writing sample were discussed heavily in the group interview sessions and are included in previous sections of this chapter.

Summary

Overall, it is evident that the girls went on a transformation from feeling negative about themselves, to feeling more and more positive as time went on. The writing samples demonstrate that the issues discussed in the group interview sessions are only elaborated on when girls are asked to write their ideas down on paper. The review of the relevant literature was instrumental in discerning what these girls would be going through during this pivotal time in their lives and what issues would be at the forefront of their dealings with the many faces of identity formation, including those of self-worth, acceptance, submission, and inferiority.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In discussing the findings of the group interview sessions, the first notable result was of each subject's eagerness and willingness to participate in such a project. Each week, this researcher was astonished at the amount of courage and bravery that was evident in each subject. There was never a question of whether confidentiality would be kept; it was always a given fact. These young females demonstrated extremely mature and honest behavior in their desire and wishes to participate in a study that was designed initially to have them answer certain research questions, but also for them to open up to themselves and one another.

The results of the group interview sessions indicate that the research questions posed by this researcher were relevant and that the topics discussed at each interview session applied to each subject involved. The results indicate that, although each girl went through very different and specific experiences regarding her identity formation, many of the experiences were similar and having a place to talk about these experiences proved to be tantamount in getting adolescent females to realize their potential in determining their future identities.

What factors influence and affect identity formation of female adolescents during the high school years?

The topics chosen for each group discussion session were very applicable to each individual subject. Participants gave ample responses to each discussion topic, and this researcher believes that the six topics examined contribute greatly to the factors that

influence and affect identity formation of female adolescents during the high school years. The category of relationships and gender issues were the only two that were broad in nature and were broken down to distinguish between issues involving girls, boys, and romantic and platonic relationships. The relaxed nature of the discussion sessions produced both candid comments and statements that were very personal and private in nature. This researcher would like to commend the extreme trust these girls put in one another and this researcher, and that although each individual subject realized certain factors affected them in the identity formation, the girls never hesitated to provide as much feedback to this researcher and to one another during the group interview sessions, even when discussing such taboo topics like homosexuality, sex, and drugs.

Are identities more likely to be revealing characteristics of submission and inferiority or self-worth and acceptance?

This researcher found that, with the exception of Subject A and H, the girls had more responses that fell under the characteristics of submission and inferiority rather than self-worth and acceptance. This researcher was not surprised at this result, since these girls are still going through the growing pains associated with being in high school. It is important to note, however, that although more subjects had negative responses, this researcher does not believe that this indicates that they are doomed to have negative experiences of identity formation in the future, only that during a group interview session, it is easier to discuss that which is a struggle, rather than that which is easy. The sessions offered the opportunity to have the participants ponder the negative and make decisions about how to turn certain experiences into positive ones. The sessions were clearly an eye opening for the participants as they were for this researcher.

Subject A had the highest percentage of overall positive responses with 71%. This researcher was not surprised at this result, since Subject A displayed the most candid, open, and honest responses during the group interview sessions. She had a unique way about her personality that displayed the fact that she was proud of who she was. Even her responses to the other girls indicated that she wanted badly for them to realize how beautiful and important they were to the world, just as she knew she was. A particularly telling statement told another subject about how she didn't need to feel inferior to boys who treated her badly. "Ain't like you ugly, you pretty, so if he was gonna treat you like that you didn't need to be with him in the first place cause I don't like that, I don't like that at all. Let me catch him!" Subject A often displayed the tendency to protect the other girls and she often attempted to show them that they should be proud of themselves. Subject A also used sarcasm in her responses, and this researcher believes it was purely in fun, and not to hide anything beneath her exterior.

Subject H also had a higher percentage of positive responses, with 66%. However, it is important to note that Subject H did not contribute as much as Subject A did, and Subject H was notoriously quiet and shy throughout the discussion sessions. Nonetheless, she did contribute responses that would indicate that she is on the way toward an identity formation that has more characteristics of self-worth and acceptance, rather than submission and inferiority. But this researcher would like to note that Subject H had 100% negative responses having to do with peer pressure, and that it stands to reason that because of her quiet demeanor, Subject H could be very likely to succumb to many of the pressures that female adolescents face.

Subject C had more negative responses, but they clearly reflect the difficult home life she comes from and what she has experienced in her young life. This researcher believes that Subject C has the most drive and determination out of all the subjects, and that this comes directly from the horrific experiences she has gone through. "I just want to be successful in whatever I do, cause nobody in my family has ever been successful. My grandpop wants me to go to college. He wants me to be like Hillary Clinton." Thus, although Subject C contributed more responses that were coded under the submission and inferiority categories, this researcher fully believes that Subject C will be able to overcome these obstacles and form an identity that is more characteristic of self-worth and acceptance.

Subjects B, E, and G all had percentages higher in the negative category of submission and inferiority, but their individual responses indicate that they could go either way during their formation of identities. These girls had responses that indicated that they felt submissive in relation to their peers at times, but that they also had many goals in their lives that they would not allow outside influences to hinder.

Subject D is the girl this researcher has the most concerns about. She rarely had anything positive to say about her identity, and she was so quiet in responses that it was often impossible to hear exactly what she was saying. Subject D clearly is an example of a female adolescent who bases the forming of her identity on characteristics of submission and inferiority rather than self-worth and acceptance. A typical response would be given while sitting cross-armed and legged and often looking down instead of at the researcher or her peers. Subject D was often so quiet that it was virtually impossible to clearly hear what she had to say. Subject D also didn't speak in the group

setting often, and simply sat and observed. She often spoke about how important it was to have a relationship with a boy. "I think every girl has it in her head that they should be perfect so that they can have a relationship with guys." Unfortunately, Subject D wasn't at the session where the participants filled out the warm-up comparing the anti-girl to the ideal girl, and this researcher would have liked to have her input in this kind of an experiment.

Lastly, Subject F was a unique participant in the project, since she came only to the first session and subsequently moved back with her mother in a northern part of the state. Subject F was headed on the way to having more statements that contained the negative characteristics of submission and inferiority rather than self-worth and acceptance, although it is too difficult to predict where she would have ended up had she attended more sessions. In the short time she was there, this researcher learned that Subject F had a difficult home life, with both parents being drug addicts at some point. She also pointed out the pressure her family put on her to do well in school and not screw up like other family members had. This researcher would like to point out that Subject F left school without saying goodbye to many of her friends. The other girls in the group commented once about how she seemed to have left abruptly without explaining herself. Subject E stated, "I hope she comes back to say goodbye. I miss her!" The reason for Subject F's departure was obviously confusing to the girls and it contributed to the already confusing components of their own identity formation.

Are there class, race, ethnicity, and/or gender connections to submission, inferiority, self-worth and acceptance?

It is pertinent to note that Subjects A, C, E, and G displayed a higher percentage of negative responses under the racial images/issues category. Subject A, C, and G are of minority descent, and it was clear that they had already been through some issues involving their identity and its connections to their racial image. Even Subject A, who had the most positive responses overall, was affected by her image as an African-American woman. Subject A was from the town that is home to more minority students, as opposed to the town that typically houses more students of Caucasian descent. She stated of her town that “people are always trying to say that this town has so many more fights and stuff.” But Subject A did not seem to let these kinds of things bother her, and she was certainly more positive about life and her identity.

Subject G had a similar response to the racial images/issues category. She talked about how she can be friends with anyone, regardless of their race.

I think that I am likeable. I’m a likeable person because I talk to a whole bunch of people. Like how some people are mean to certain people, like I’m cool with a bunch of people, like I’m cool with everybody. I can’t explain it. I’m not trying to make it a whole black/white thing, but like a lot of my white friends, like certain people wouldn’t even talk to them, like not because it’s racist but because they don’t talk to them, they’re not cool with them, but it’s different for me. Like me and this boy. Me and him are so cool and it’s like we are so opposite! But we’re still cool. That’s just how I am.

Clearly, Subject G is also trying to erase the kinds of negative associations she has had in the past with her racial image, and she, just as Subject A, realizes that it is more important to try to focus on the positive, rather than dwell on the negative.

More than one girl commented about Subject E's boyfriend and how he is perceived as being racist, although Subject G stated, "a lot of people think he's racist, but I just laugh about it cause I know he's not racist cause I been cool with him for awhile." Subject E seemed discomforted by the other girls' comments about her boyfriend and repeatedly defended him to her peers. "I know a lot of people think he's racist, but he's really not." This researcher would like to add that she had heard gossip concerning certain prejudices and racisms that were connected to Subject E's boyfriend, but that nothing in question was ever witnessed or confirmed.

Subject C indicated on more than one occasion the importance her ethnicity was to her identity, and was often angry when people thought of her as simply "white," or "Italian." She was clearly the subject who had the most ethnic pride, and mentioned how essential her Hispanic roots were to her identity. This researcher believes that Subject C connects so strongly with her ethnic roots because it gives her a sense of how much negativity she has overcome, despite her background and past. Subject C clearly uses her ethnicity to her advantage and would never take it for granted.

Subject B had the most profound change of heart in regards to the way she perceives those of another race or ethnicity. She was clearly humbled by this change and it was obvious that it is a permanent part of her identity as a female who is accepting of all. She stated that she doesn't judge people by the way they look and that, "If I liked a black guy, I wouldn't think anything of it. I would like them as a person. I don't see what the big deal is." Subject B admitted that going to a school that is culturally and ethnically diverse greatly contributed to her understanding of those who are different from her. All subjects agreed that for all the negativity associated with their school, they are grateful

for the kinds of multi-ethnic and multi-racial relationships they were able to form without the fear of racism or prejudice.

In what manner do adolescent girls exhibit their identities, positive or negative?

Though there were many statements that fell under the negative characteristics of submission and inferiority, the subjects in this group interview process seemed to exhibit tremendous awareness and perception of their own personal struggles and what they each needed to do to make themselves form identities that each could call her own. In particular, Subject E demonstrated tremendous strength and fervor in the idea that she was not going to follow in the footsteps of her mother and stepfather, who have basically treated her like a non-person in her 15 years.

I think that what you allow to happen in your relationships all depends on how you were brought up. I personally made a decision that nobody will ever touch me or beat me because I will not put my kids through what I've been through. My stepdad was a severe alcoholic and he did drugs constantly and he just beat me all the time. And I didn't even do anything and he would just chase after me and beat me. And my mom would make me wear long sleeves in the summer to cover it up. She constantly lied about it. But that was because she grew up without a dad. Her dad walked out when she was like 5. So she was never around anybody who did that. But, just like I said, I would never put my kids through that, I mean, he never beat her, but he always beat me. All the time.

For all that Subject E has been through, she has tremendous fortitude and resilience to remain fixed in her ideals and not to succumb to the decisions made by her parents.

Subject E was consistently the best writer in this researcher's class, and she also received

consistently high grades. Her love of learning is an important tool that she keeps in order to sustain her for the life she plans to eventually live outside of the influence and control of her parents.

Likewise, Subject C also exemplified the fact that she was determined to overcome all the negativity she had been through by focusing on the positives in her life and the desire to make a difference in the future. She often talked about going to college, and that the many colleges out there overwhelmed her, but that she knew that she was meant to go. This researcher would like to point out that Subject C was pointedly distraught at the conclusion of the research project and she kept in contact with this researcher after the conclusion of her student teaching. In a card from all the students this researcher taught, Subject C wrote that this researcher “made a huge impact on my life.” This researcher believes that Subject C clearly needed a mother figure as a role model and humbly suggests that she was this role model for Subject C. Though Subject C experienced such negativity in her life, she also chose to focus on the positive and often exhibited her identity along the positive characteristics of self-worth and acceptance.

Once again, Subject D was really the only subject who displayed her identity in a more negative fashion. She constantly wore oversized clothing that was huge on her petite frame. She spoke in a manner which this researcher believes indicates that she is self-conscious and shy about many aspects of her identity, and she mainly focused on the self-worth that comes only when she is validated by boys. These boys she felt validated by often treated her badly, but Subject D didn't seem to realize how detrimental they were to her identity and self-worth. When asked whether she would rather be single or in a relationship, she stated, “in a relationship, cause you're never bored. It makes you feel

good.” At such a young age of 15, Subject D is already displaying signs of being submissive to the males in her life. Having only mentioned a mother and not a father, perhaps this is indicative of the fact that there is no father figure in her household, and that there is enormous pressure on her to live up to the standards of her older, high-achieving sisters.

One of the most surprising yet welcome findings of this study was that of the enormous amount of empathy that these girls had for one another in the group interview sessions. From the beginning, it was clear that these girls empathized with one another, even if they didn’t necessarily fully identify with each other. In the first session while discussing role models, Subject C quickly talked about how her parents were both drug addicts, and right away Subject F stressed how brave she had been in disclosing such personal information. “It seems like you felt so comfortable just being able to say that. Without a tear.” And when Subject F began to divulge her own battles with her parents’ drug addictions, Subject A put her arm around her and comforted her through her tears.

In this area, the subjects showed amazing maturity and keen skills of psychology as they knew just when to empathize and just when to let someone speak freely. The girls clearly did not like when someone would speak negatively about her body, and were quick to point out that beauty is only skin deep. This kind of reaction was very welcome, but certainly unexpected coming from a group of girls who barely knew each other collectively and had only 4 short sessions to form a bond with one another. This researcher would like to point out that at the conclusion of the study, Subject B wrote a note that stated how the sessions “made me think about things in a different way.” Subject C also mentioned how she was now friends with Subject B when they barely

talked before. This researcher would like to believe that sharing a common ground of being an adolescent female forming an identity served to bridge the gap between the kinds of race, class, and relationship differences among the subjects and allowed them to be more open to many new things in their own lives.

What role do parents and peers play in identity formation?

Parents and peers were obviously huge parts of these young girls' lives. It is difficult to draw specific conclusions between peer and family pressure, but Subject A clearly exemplified the kind of girl who came from a positive home life and thus, did not have many negative experiences with succumbing to peer pressure. Subject A talked about how open she was with her mother, saying that she was a role model to her and that she tells her everything, even when it comes to sex. It was clear that Subject A truly loves her mother and that her mother has had a huge impact on the way Subject A has chosen to live her life. Subject A talked about how angry she was that so many young girls are having unprotected sex.

It's crazy how many young girls is having sex. I don't even know if I want to have kids. Little girls around here be talking about it and I'll be like, they did what? They need to still be playing with their dolls and stuff!

Subject A clearly has a balance of knowledge from her parents and her education in school that contributes to the fact that she does not fall prey to peer pressure and that she had the most positive self-image out of any of the girls in the group.

Though Subject H also comes from a positive home life, she also indicated falling victim to peer pressure at times and this researcher believes that her quiet demeanor could contribute to future instances of peer pressure situations. This researcher would also like

to mention that Subject H was the victim of school gossip one day after a weekend in which she was drinking and ended up passing out cold and had to be brought home by one of this researcher's students. This kind of situation leads this researcher to believe that Subject H will most likely encounter situations of peer pressure in the future.

Subject B empathized with the subjects who came from rough families and talked about how she was appreciative of the close-knit nature of her family, even when they could be annoying at times.

I know I don't have it bad, like, I have a good family, like they're annoying cause they're always together, but I'm glad about that cause some people don't have families like mine, and my friends are like, 'Oh my gosh! How can you talk to your aunts like that?' They mean cause I don't curse at them and I tell them every problem that I have and they don't understand that, and it's cause I feel comfortable telling them my problems. I just love my family.

This researcher believes that because of her strong family values, Subject B will be more adept at making decisions regarding peer pressure situations in the future.

Subject D spoke negatively about her home life, and how her mother is not a good parent. "It's like she's a parent, but she doesn't know what she's supposed to do."

Unfortunately, Subject D did not elaborate on her family life too much, although she certainly stressed how horrible it made her feel to be compared to her older sisters. She also indicated that she smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol, "to have fun." This researcher believes that Subject D has a very negative identity associated with her family and that she often attempts to rebel against her family by using substances and engaging in questionable relationships with boys. This is especially in response to Subject D's

disdain for the kinds of comparisons she finds herself in with regards to her older sisters, whom she stresses that she doesn't want to be like at all, even when they clearly have a more healthy identity than Subject D does.

Subject E had the odds stacked against her in her home life, having discussed numerous instances of abuse, both verbal and physical in the past. Subject E indicated that the physical abuse had ceased, but that the verbal abuse continued and continues to this day. Subject E was not permitted to have friends come into her home, was given an early curfew and was made to feel unwanted and unloved often in her life. Remarkably, Subject E has been able to grasp more positive things in her life, instead of being pessimistic and dwelling on the negative. When discussing the importance of grades, Subject E rules out any kind of pressure parents could put on her, namely because they do not put on any at all. Instead, she talked about her close relationship with her grandmother and how she is the saving grace for all of her problems with her mother and stepfather.

My parents have nothing to do with it. My grandmom does though. Most of it is because I want to get into a good college and I want to do good for my grandmom mostly because if I did that, I'd be the first person in my whole family, both sides, to go to college. That's why I want my grandmom to be so proud of me. She's really one of the only relatives whose opinion I care about. My mom really doesn't care, she told me I could drop out, as long as I had a job.

Subject E also discussed situations where she had succumbed to peer pressure, but this researcher believes that she is now capable of making decisions on her own. This researcher would like to point out that, just as Subject D has been involved in numerous

relationships with boys, so has Subject E, which could indicate that they are both trying to fill voids left by the absence of a true father figure in their home lives.

Subject C also came from horrific beginnings, as her father died of a drug overdose when she was 7, and her mother is still using. Subject C talked about how her mother desires to have a relationship with her, but that she has no interest because of the way she treated her and her sister in the past. Subject C never learned about the true nature of her father's death until she was 13-years-old. At the time of the group interview sessions, Subject C was 16-years-old. Subject C admitted to being a very angry girl upon the death of her father, and only changing her outlook on life after she learned the truth about his death. Only then did she form beliefs that drug abuse can be genetic and that she would never let herself use, because of what happened to both of her parents. Subject E talked about how Subject C used to be. "Back then she just got mad for no reason. She got angry at everybody." Subject C explains her behavior by stating that she "couldn't come to terms with my father's death. I wouldn't accept it." Thus, this researcher believes that in some way, the revelation of her father's death was a cathartic experience for Subject C, one that allowed her to begin to make decisions that would steer her more towards the positive characteristics of identity formation involving self-worth and acceptance, and avoiding things that would contribute to submission and inferiority.

On the topic of peer pressure, this researcher learned that in the 21st century, adolescent females are trying drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes at younger and younger ages. All of the girls in this study admitted to having drunk alcohol before, and a few admitted to trying marijuana as well as cigarettes. Though it wasn't explicit, this researcher believes that Subject D smokes marijuana as well as cigarettes, based on information

given by Subject D's older sister, who was a member of one of this researcher's classes. More information is needed, but this researcher would like to note that these girls do not seem to think that drinking is a big deal, and are obviously far too young to understand the implications of being vulnerable to the effects of alcohol consumption at such a young age. Only Subject C had a kind of scolding attitude about the topic, and stated that young people "think that if they're drinking, they're like grown up and rebelling against their parents, so they feel like they have a freedom maybe." Since only Subject C discussed the topic in this way, this researcher believes that the issue of peer pressure in an adolescent female's life greatly presses upon the formation of her identity during the high school years.

What role does body image play in identity formation?

There were many discussions of body image throughout the group interview sessions, and this researcher believes that a healthy body image is crucial in developing a solid identity for an adolescent female. Subject A clearly had a healthy body image, and often talked about how she realizes that she isn't perfect, but that she truly loves herself despite her flaws. This researcher learned that the smaller framed girls, which included Subject A, B, and F, seemed to display the most acceptance with their own bodies. Subject D, who also had a small frame, dismissed her body as too "boyish" and her body image was clearly not as healthy as some of her peers. This researcher believes that the very fact that Subject D often hid her small body indicated that she was extremely uncomfortable with exposing herself, both physically and emotionally.

The medium and large framed girls, Subjects C, E, G and H comprised a mixed reaction to body image and its effect on identity formation. Subject H seemed satisfied

with her curves and even wrote that a healthy weight should be a trait of the ideal girl, which is “not too skinny or too thick.” She also added that she doesn’t think there is an ideal figure to obtain as a woman because “everybody likes something different. Some guys like big girls and other guys don’t so having a variety of different girls I think is healthy.” Subjects E and G had certain issues with their bodies, which indicated that they do concern themselves with how they look to the outside world. Subject E “despised” her breasts, while Subject G hated her thighs. It is interesting to this researcher that Subject G had a body image hang up, since she also admitted that she didn’t feel the need to wear make-up and that she was very athletic, and a participant in a sport every season of the school year. This researcher rationalizes that body image issues can occur in any adolescent female, regardless of the way her body or her image is perceived by others.

Subject C was an interesting case, regarding her body image. She had the largest frame out of the participants in the study, and yet, she seemed to have attempted to develop a healthy body image that was accepting of the frame she was given. Subject C indicated that she often worried about the medical effects carrying excess weight could have on her, saying that she wanted to lose weight because she “had heart problems in my family.” She admitted this was a struggle, and this researcher believes that Subject C truly believes that girls shouldn’t focus so much on what they look like physically and instead focus on what is inside.

The pressures popular culture and the media put on these young girls were especially evident in the discussions. Subject E talked about how it bothered her.

I don’t like it. I don’t like it because you know that in just about every movie there are these stick thin women and nobody looks like that! Nobody looks like

that unless they're anorexic or something. And that bothers me because a lot of my friends get bothered by it because I have a lot of heavy friends and they get upset about stuff like that. They get upset and start calling themselves fat and ugly and it upsets me that women are portrayed like that because not all women are skinny.

Indeed, these young girls were acutely aware of their role as consumers and target audiences for advertising and talked about some of the pop culture icons of the time such as Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson and how even they are made to be objectified in the eyes of society. Though the girls talked at length about how boys and the media put pressure on them to be thin, some were keen enough to realize that this pressure is sometimes put upon oneself. This researcher believes that for all her struggles, only Subject C displayed the healthiest of body images, especially in a poignant comment. "I don't think that a perfect girl necessarily has to be perfect on the outside because I don't think that being a good person has anything to do with what you look like." Out of all the girls, Subject C was surprisingly the most conscious of her weight, and yet the most willing to discuss how she did not want to be judged by it.

How is identity defined by same sex relationships, by opposite sex relationships and by perceptions of self and expected roles?

Though the girls chose words that were akin to the "passive, yielding, and caring words" (p. 265) found in Simmons (2002) research, this researcher believes that this particular group of girls were also quite capable of choosing words that indicated a strong female who could also be a great leader. A few girls in the sessions, Subject B, E and H included physical traits for the ideal girl, but they balanced them with non-physical traits

that emphasized personality and self-worth over mere looks. This researcher believes that because this experiment was conducted during the last group interview session, the girls were able to synthesize all that they had learned throughout the group sessions, and chose words that stressed the importance of the ideal girl to be proud and display characteristics of self-worth and acceptance, rather than submission and inferiority. In this regard, this researcher believes that the group interview sessions clearly had an impact on the way the subjects perceived identity formation.

The fact that many girls in this project indicated that they had difficulty forming relationships with other girls echoed sentiments expressed in Simmons (2002) research, which found that “there is an aspect of evil in girls that there isn’t in boys” (p. 16). A few girls re-told stories of feeling inferior to other girls and this researcher had an eye-opening experience listening to how very right Simmons was in her research that girls in the 21st century are having trouble aggressing against one another, and are all too often turning inward and holding feelings inside rather than dealing with them in an honest and open fashion. The girls indicated that it is easier to be friends with boys because they don’t judge you, but this researcher believes that this does not tell the whole story. During adolescence, boys who have raging hormones are certainly going to judge the very girls they are interested in, so it is fascinating to hear girls say that boys judge girls less than other girls do. This researcher believes that girls are more harsh to one another and that, in order to seek refuge, girls will often find comfort in the form of a boy who can do more than comfort, but who can also protect, love, and help give a sense of identity. Though this may not be healthy, this researcher understands that it is a part of

life that these girls go through and that the idea of girls being manipulative to one another is nothing new, but perhaps is more strengthened during the adolescent years.

Turning to other relationships, the topic of homosexuality was briefly discussed and brought about interesting morals and ideals from the group. The girls did not indicate that they were against those who chose an alternative sexual lifestyle, which this researcher believes to be a direct result of the era in which these young girls are growing up. Homosexuality is no longer a taboo subject to these girls, and a few even view it as a civil rights issue that should be as simple as the civil rights of the 1960s. It is important to note that Subject E admitted to having feelings of bisexuality to this researcher, but that they were never discussed in the group interview sessions. This researcher believes that Subject E had begun to feel extremely comfortable around this researcher and was not afraid of being judged. After the last session, it was overheard that Subject E was going to really miss the group interview sessions because this researcher talked about things that mattered. This researcher can only assume that homosexuality was one of those things.

Turning to opposite sex relationships, this researcher wasn't surprised to learn of their importance to the girls in the group. Subjects B, D, E, and G indicated that they were involved in exclusive relationships and that they were important to their identity. Subject B glowed when she talked about her boyfriend, as did Subject E, whose boyfriend seemed to serve as a saving grace from her family life. She was often seen around the school with him, holding hands and extremely attached, both physically and emotionally. Subject D had a boyfriend as well, who seemed to be the focus of Subject D's young life. Subject G talked about her boyfriend in an indifferent way, almost as if

she didn't really need him, but since he asked, she thought, 'Why not?' It seemed as though dating was a rite of passage for these girls, and that it was also an extremely important part of their identity formation. Though Subjects C and H did not have boyfriends at the time of the group interview sessions, this researcher could clearly see that, even without boys in their lives, boys do have an effect on the way girls learn how to form their identities during the high school years.

When talking about sex, the girls indicated how aware they are of sexually transmitted diseases, and this researcher was surprised to hear the girls talk about how they realize that they are not invincible to the transmission of such diseases. Subject A was the only participant who openly admitted to being sexually involved with one person in the past, her boyfriend of 3 years. No other girls chose to disclose such information, though Subject H indicated that she had chosen not to become sexually active, mainly because she was not ready. This displayed an extremely mature way of living that this researcher did not expect from girls of such a young age. It is evident that the combination of family values, learned values, and values taught in school can certainly form enough of a value in an adolescent female's mind that can contribute to the understanding of the responsibility of one's choices and actions, especially when it comes to engaging in sexual activities.

In conclusion, the kinds of relationships that these girls form with other girls, with boys, and with themselves serve to indicate whether or not they will be able to form identities that have more characteristics of self-worth and acceptance or submission and inferiority. This researcher believes that these participants, with the notable exception of Subject D, show signs that indicate that they are able to recognize exactly what they need

to do to begin to form these healthy identities, and this researcher also believes that the group interview sessions were just the beginning of a commitment to constantly thinking about and evaluating the kinds of choices one makes in life on the way to an identity that one can call her own.

Will group-talk sessions and written work reveal the same or different issues of identity formation?

The addition of warm-up activities that asked the girls to write about their feelings only reiterated the fact that these girls had been on a journey that asked each to discover the ways she formed her identity, and that the journey concluded with the girls feeling more and more positive about this construction as time went on. Many of the ideas discussed in the warm-up activities were indicated in the group discussion sessions, but there were notable exceptions.

The warm-up activity that asked the girls to circle certain aspects of their identity under categories brought about areas that were never discussed in the larger group. For example, Subject H circled that her ethnicity was American, White, and American Indian. This was never discussed in the larger group, which could indicate Subject H's shyness regarding the subject or just the mere fact that she doesn't find such information relevant. The same situation occurred for Subject G, who circled that she was Jewish and Native American, two aspects of her identity that were also not disclosed in the larger group. This researcher wonders whether or not this was deliberate, but can really never know because it was never fully discussed.

The situation that merits the closest consideration is the fact that Subject E circled that she was bisexual and specifically told this researcher that she did not want the

information revealed to her peers. This researcher finds this curious, since Subject E displayed the most sensitivity regarding gays and gay rights during the discussion, a kind of sensitivity that did not go undetected, and was all but reiterated by her peers. Not one girl indicated that she felt that homosexuality was wrong, just simply that it wasn't right for her. This researcher would have liked to discuss the situation in the larger group, but naturally respected the desires of Subject E to keep such information confidential.

The writing sample about beauty reiterated some of the larger themes that were discussed by the group, such as inner beauty, strength and talents, but it also revealed some new insights about certain participants. Subject E never spoke about the idea of killing herself in the larger group. In fact, this researcher often commented on the tremendous strength Subject E displayed, despite her difficult background. Because she made a comment about how she has “gotten through life so far without killing myself – I don't plan on doing it anytime soon either,” this researcher believes that though the group interview sessions revealed much about the covert ways girls deal with identity formation, they could never fully reveal every nuance associated with the struggles that can accompany such formation. Subject E never indicated that this was a thought in the group interview sessions, and though it was said in a subliminally positive way on the activity sheet, this researcher believes that it must be a kind of ingrained thought that may be fleeting, but nonetheless is certainly conscious in the mind of Subject E in her daily life.

Subject G also gave a response that was counter to the way she behaved in the group interview sessions. She stated that she is great because, “I'm not,” which indicated that she may not be fully aware of all her strength and sources of power just yet. This

researcher was definitely surprised to learn of the body image issues that Subject G had, as well as how indifferent she was to her relationship with her boyfriend simply because Subject G displayed a positive energy in the school and was often seen smiling and happy. This researcher believes that the written work of Subject G reveals that adolescent girls can often hold on to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority even when they don't display them overtly.

The last writing sample dealt with Simmons' (2002) research that asked the girls what qualities the ideal girl had versus the anti-girl, as well as what qualities would make a good leader. As previously discussed, a few of the girls chose qualities that echoed the fact that they believed the ideal girl had to look a certain way and not be "ugly." However, because this activity occurred during the last group interview session, this researcher believes that it was easier for these girls to realize that qualities of strength and acceptance should outweigh qualities of passiveness and inferiority. Though there were still evidence of passive words making it onto the list, many of the girls showed evidence of understanding what qualities should comprise the ideal girl and a good leader, especially after all the discussion that had taken place. This researcher would have liked to include this warm-up activity during the first and last sessions, in order to compare just how much effect the discussion in the groups would have on the way the girls feel about these qualities initially, and after much discussion. In another session of this kind, this researcher believes this would be relevant and worthwhile.

All in all, this researcher believes writings can reveal things that are often not on public display, but nonetheless have an impact on the factors that influence and affect identity formation in adolescent females. The writings of these girls indicate that some

things can be easily discussed in the open, but that other things are still private in nature, and still too difficult to talk about freely and openly to oneself and to one's peers.

Summary

Each girl who participated in this project brought a unique and important piece of the identity puzzle to the table each week. The girls certainly had a group identity when together, as demonstrated by their ability to be empathetic and honest with one another. After the group sessions, a few of the girls commented to this researcher about how they would have never spoken to one another had they not been a participant in this study and, thus, they were able to think about new ideas in new and different ways. It is really remarkable how well such a diverse group can get along, but it is also indicative of the environment which these girls come from. Their high school is a rather small one, one where many students know everyone. It is refreshing to learn that even when individual identities are so different, girls are still able to relate to one another because of a common and shared experience of simply living the high school years together. Before moving on to discuss the limitations and recommendations for further study, this researcher would like to give an individual identity summary for each participant and make predictions about the future of these girls and the future of their identities.

Subject A

Out of all the girls in this study, Subject A demonstrated the most positive identity. This researcher believes that this is in part due to her age, as she was the only senior in the group, but also in part to the tremendous amount of self-worth and acceptance that was constantly reiterated in Subject A's statements. Subject A seemed to have come from a healthy family environment, in which she was given freedom, but also

life lessons on what is right and wrong. She could accept the flaws in her body and still think she was beautiful. She demonstrated the remarkable ability to openly speak her mind, even on issues that were close to her, such as racism. Being an African-American female empowered Subject A, and she was clearly proud of her heritage and the way she could get along with those who were different. Subject A was always outspoken, and had something to say about every issue discussed. She was also the participant who displayed the best awareness of empathy, and often tried to comfort her peers while also steering them in the right way to think about certain issues. This researcher believes Subject A to be confident, assertive, and a true individual who will undoubtedly be a success in whatever life endeavors she chooses to be a part of.

Subject B

Subject B is an intelligent and physically beautiful young woman whom this researcher believes is on the right track to a healthy identity formation. Although she admitted to succumbing to peer pressure at times, this researcher stands by the fact that because Subject B is so close with her family, that she will be able to make the right decisions about issues in her life in the future. Subject B displayed enormous gratitude for being able to attend a school where there were those of a different race, and how she even attempted to transfer her newfound beliefs of equality to the mind of her grandmother, who had difficulty accepting such a radical idea. Subject B seemed to look at every new thing with a fresh eye, and this researcher believes that her inherent sense of innocence is not often seen in high school females today. She wrote a farewell note to this researcher after the completion of student teaching that reiterated her thanks for being able to be a part of such a great project. She was the only Subject who repeatedly

spoke of her desire to read the completed project. Subject B is a perfect example of how a loving family life can contribute to a lasting and profound sense of value among adolescents. As long as she retains the importance of her family in her life, her identity has less of a chance of being compromised.

Subject C

Though Subject C came from extremely difficult beginnings, she has risen above them extraordinarily and has been able to utilize her knowledge of what she *must not do* in order to create a plan for what she absolutely *must do* in her life. This researcher certainly believes that a strong family background complete with unconditional love can be tantamount to creating healthy and sound adolescents, but this researcher also fully believes that there are numerous, and sometimes greater, exceptions to this rule. Subject C is one of these exceptions. Having had a father who died from a drug overdose when she was 7, and a mother who remains addicted to drugs could have created an extremely volatile and disastrous upbringing for Subject C. She even admitted to being angry about her father's death until she learned the truth about his drug addiction, which is when she turned her life around. She decided right then and there that she would not end up like he had, and that she would never try drugs because of the possibility of the genetic connection to addiction. She was also the only participant to fully believe in the dangers of alcohol use, and she was keenly aware of why some adolescents want to experiment with substances. She refuted these signs of rebellion, stating that she is so close with her guardian, her cousin, that she does not need to rebel. Subject C has an extremely mature point-of-view regarding a lot of issues for adolescents, and this researcher believes that her beliefs are necessary in order for her to continue her life in such a positive manner.

The only two issues that seemed to bother Subject C were her body image and her racial image. Being a Hispanic is extremely important to Subject C, and this researcher believes that it is something Subject C believes makes her special and unique. Subject C seems to want to be different, and when people do not recognize her heritage, it upsets her. She obviously wants to do well in order to show all Hispanics that they have the ability as well. Her lofty goals of law or medicine are definitely achievable, and Subject C has her mind set on being a success, even as a sophomore in high school. For Subject C, being a success also has nothing to do with physical appearance, and she often questioned the group's tendency to focus on the physical traits of others. Subject C seemed to have accepted her large frame and the specific types of clothing she wears. She does not want to be a girly girl. She does not want to be like everyone else. She wants to be healthy, but not at the expense of who she is. Though her body image could be a little more positive, it does not seem to be a deterrent to Subject C doing exactly what she wants to in life, and being the kind of leader who focuses on the internal, rather than the external in herself and others.

Subject D

Subject D is the one participant that this researcher worries the most about. From the beginning, this researcher had an inclination that Subject D had issues going on in her life that have kept her from developing or even attempting to develop a healthy identity. School does not seem to be a priority for Subject D. She was frequently absent, and never spoke up in class. This behavior was reiterated in the group sessions, as she would not often volunteer to speak, although she did attend 3 out of the 4 sessions. This researcher believes that her attendance at the sessions indicates that she did find some value to what

was being discussed; otherwise, she would not have felt the need to attend. This researcher believes that Subject D enjoyed being paid attention to, and that she is not often paid attention to by other teachers or her family. This kind of invisibility was easy to detect in Subject D's actions, as she often crossed her arms, spoke softly, or hid her petite body in large clothing items. The content of Subject D's statements indicated that she had difficulties feeling important in the eyes of her mother and her sisters. The fact that she has had 2 steady boyfriends already as a sophomore could mean that she has attachment issues, and needs to feel loved. This researcher could sense this, and tried often to make Subject D feel important in both the school setting and during the group interview sessions, soliciting responses and ideas from her. From what this researcher has heard inside and outside the group sessions, it is clear that Subject D is headed down the wrong path towards an unhealthy identity formation that could involve drug and alcohol abuse, unprotected sex, apathy, and trust issues. Though this researcher would like to believe that the group sessions were helpful and insightful for all participants, the reality is that Subject D came with a lot of baggage, which perhaps was too much for her to unload and deal with. This researcher worries the most about Subject D, and it makes the claim that many girls can fall through the cracks during high school, and that educators need to strongly attempt to recognize and try their best to salvage the lives of girls like Subject D in the future.

Subject E

Subject E was another interesting case of a girl whose family life was extremely dysfunctional, and yet who has consistently demonstrated much intelligence, insight, and awareness of what she needs to do to succeed. Out of all the girls in the group, Subject E

was the most academically gifted, in all of her subjects. She was an amazing writer and extremely analytical thinker. Subject E brought these talents to the group sessions, especially when she discussed the horrible home life she has experienced and what she intends to do to combat it for the future. Subject E admitted to being abused both physically and emotionally by her stepfather and mother, and how she has only found salvation through her relationship with her grandmother. Without her, this researcher believes that Subject E could very well have given up on her education and herself. Instead, Subject E decided to retaliate. She consistently earns A's in school. She displays a positive and healthy attitude constantly, and she admits to not dwelling on the negative. Her remarkable ability to realize that she will never raise her future children in the way she was raised demonstrates her intelligence and awareness that what has happened during her young life is wrong. She is a great example of how education can help one overcome their travails in life, as she is well read, well spoken, and well mannered in her life.

The one place where Subject E could go wrong is in her ability to form healthy relationships. She has already had at least 2 serious boyfriends in her young life, and this researcher believes that she is sexually active. Because she has never had a father figure that she has admired, perhaps she forms such close relationships with boys because she is trying to fill a void in her life. Observing her actions with her boyfriend, she is clearly very physically and emotionally attached to him, but even Subject E herself discussed how it is difficult for her to trust her boyfriends. This could be natural, or it could indicate problems for the future with the ability to be a strong and independent woman. Hopefully, with the kind of capacity for knowledge that Subject E has demonstrated, she

will be able to recognize that she may be substituting boyfriends for a father, and this researcher hopes that Subject E will be able to develop relationships that are truly healthy and full of the trust that she so deserves in her identity and her life.

Subject F

Because Subject F attended only one group session, it is difficult to assess a future identity for her. However, the very fact that this researcher learned that Subject F moved back into an inner city with her mother indicates that the future could hold problems for Subject F, considering the statements about her mother that she spoke about during her brief time with the group. Subject F was often a behavior problem during this researcher's classes. A specific example of this occurred when this researcher got into a verbal argument with Subject F, which ended up being resolved in the hallway. Subject F's volatile personality and choice to not fully respect authority could indicate that she has had problems in the past related to the way her parents did or did not discipline her. Subject F was often a hot or cold personality; either she was in an extremely good mood or an extremely sour one. Clearly, racial issues were important to her, just as family pressure was. She was an intelligent girl, one who liked to question ideas. It is still very difficult to make complete assumptions about her identity, but based on the information about her parents, this researcher believes that Subject F could very well form a solid and strong identity, but just as easy could succumb to the pressures of her family and rebel by involving herself in anything that would be a hindrance to her ultimate success.

Subject G

The personality of Subject G in the group sessions was surprising to this researcher, as she was often loquacious during class, unafraid to let laughter or outbursts

come through. During the group sessions, however, Subject G was often a subdued presence, choosing more often than not to listen rather than speak. This researcher believes this could be a result of the topics discussed and that perhaps Subject G had never really thought about them before. She often responded by saying that she did not know the answer to a question, which could indicate that she may have felt uncomfortable answering them in a group setting or simply that the questions were not important to her. During the discussion on body image, Subject G repeatedly spoke of how she did not want to get fat, but that she did not know why. She also could not really state why she chose to go out exclusively with her boyfriend, only stating that he asked, so she said yes.

Subject G was a fascinating case, simply because she behaved so differently in the group setting than in the classroom setting, or even the hallways. As an African-American female, perhaps the topics chosen for discussion did not really pertain to what she thought about during identity formation, or perhaps she would have felt more comfortable with more girls of her racial background attending the sessions. Whatever the case, because she demonstrated such a different attitude in the group sessions, this researcher cannot predict what the future holds for Subject G, only that there could be room for improvement in the ability to speak her mind and stand up for what she thinks is right.

Subject H

Subject H was an innocently shy kind of girl, one who demonstrated good manners and politeness, while also coming up with intelligent statements about the importance of a healthy identity for girls her age. She was completely aware of the word

“healthy” and used it to describe how much a girl should weigh, as well as how a girl should view the ability to refrain from sex. Subject H clearly had ideals instilled in her from her family, and her family was of tremendous importance in her life. Though she felt a twinge of competition between herself and her sisters, it seemed friendly and not something that would make Subject H feel inferior or unable to accomplish what she could as an individual. Subject H was very intelligent, but often quiet in both the school setting and the group discussion setting. Because she alluded to having been in peer pressure situations before, this researcher worries that the issue of peer pressure will be a part of Subject H’s life in the future. Having heard a story about her involvement with alcohol indicates that it will not be easy for a “nice girl” like Subject H to effectively deal with the way peer pressure can creep up on adolescent females. If Subject H can learn to be more assertive and avoid situations of peer pressure, this researcher believes that with the love and guidance of her family, Subject H will go on to become a success in life. This researcher predicts that Subject H has the potential to become the type of female with a kind heart that will make her all the more unique in the way she chooses to showcase her identity to the world.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included a small number of participants, a small number of minority participants, and a short period of time given to talk thoroughly with these adolescent girls. Since the process began in January and concluded in May, there was not sufficient time available to fully develop a lasting relationship with each participant. Furthermore, because the nature of the project entailed 4 hour-long sessions, it is virtually impossible to generalize any of the data collected to other girls outside of

this specific high school. Though this researcher was able to make assumptions and predications about each subject as an individual, it would be presumptuous to include any discussion about the implications of this study on any broad local, regional, or national levels.

The nature of such a research project does not entail a quick-fix to the problems inherent in the formation of a female's identity, rather the data collected can only continue to further shape the way teachers, administrators, parents, and policy-makers in this specific district view emerging identities of adolescent females and just what can be done to ensure the most nurturing environment possible to stimulate positive growth. This researcher intends to share the findings with the administrators and teachers of the school district and can only hope that the information learned can be of use to them in the future. Though this researcher would have liked to have been a part of a broader study that could have implications on a grander scale, it is understood that the time restriction and the small number of participants could not have possibly yielded results that could have been generalized to a larger population of adolescent females.

Though the results cannot possibly be generalized, certain ideas were generated that this researcher believes are necessary to discuss when dealing with all adolescent females, regardless of similarities or differences. This researcher believes that identity formation in adolescent females is often overlooked when teachers diligently create classroom management plans in the high school setting. Instead, teachers focus on more traditional problems like discipline and desk orientation, and girls are often left with no one to turn to in this time of profound need. This researcher found this to be true especially with Subject D, who clearly did not feel safe in the classroom environment. A

problem like this could be alleviated with teachers who are more aware of the identity issues that female adolescents go through during the high school years. It is becoming more and more clear that the high school setting is a place not only where adolescent females learn to socialize and continue their academic studies, but also a place where they can have experiences that greatly contribute to the formation of their future identities. Girls who don't speak up in the high school classroom may never learn to speak up in the business world, or in their own homes. Educators need to put a stop to this by radically changing the way adolescent females deal with the pressures of life associated with identity formation. By really understanding the implications of this study, perhaps educators will begin to realize the importance of allowing girls the opportunity to speak their minds in class, and to feel safe, regardless of their ability, background, or family history. As Simmons (2002) stated, "if we care about teaching girls to choose healthy relationships of all kinds, it is vital that we promote awareness of submissive and aggressive behaviors in girls' relationships" (p. 267). In other words, educators need to include themselves in the journey that each female adolescent will embark on during the high school years, in order to be an advocate and an active participant in the best possible identity that can be attained by each and every girl in their classrooms.

Recommendations for further study

In order to continue to learn about the ways in which adolescent females form their identities during the high school years, specific research needs to continue to take place. Stereotyping and generalizations need to continue to be erased. As learned in this study, not all girls who come from difficult home lives will have mirrored experiences, and not all girls with positive role models are excluded from peer pressure or body image

issues. Even more analysis of the kind of connections between family structure, peer relationships and risk behavior is necessary before making any conclusions regarding the factors that influence adolescent females' identity formation. It is important to remember that each adolescent female is an individual, and that no two experiences are alike. Just as the results of this study cannot be generalized, the results of future studies must continue to build on past research, but also strive to reach new and unrealized findings. The future of adolescent females is not one in which there are clear-cut patterns. Though certain patterns do exist, more often than not, each generation brings new kinds of issues about identity formation that educators must continue to deal with. The best that can be done is to strive to make girls be more and more conscious of self-worth and acceptance, and better able to squash feelings of submission and inferiority. As the now 15-year old co-writer and actress, Nikki Reed, from the movie *Thirteen* said about her experiences during adolescence:

When I was 13, I felt pressure to be perfect, but perfection to me basically meant whatever I *wasn't*. I didn't understand the concept of looking in the mirror and being happy with what I saw. My whole identity used to be about the people I hung out with. But they made me unhappy, and I became depressed – and I didn't know why. People forget how painful insecurity is when you're growing up. They think it's about surface things, but it's much deeper. (Gordon & Brown, 2003, p. 124)

Ms. Reed gives future researchers all the advice they will ever need. Adolescent females going through identity may always feel similar pressures to be perfect and happy, but Ms. Reed points out that insecurity is never about what is easily observable; it is about that

which is intangible and cannot be seen. For the future of adolescent girls to be healthier, further research needs to focus on this very fact and remember that those things that are deeply embedded inside young females are the most important and often the most difficult to emerge. But they must emerge, and they must be examined, or the female formation of identity during the high school years will only be about the surface, and that which is unique and individual will never be allowed to break through.

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APPENDIX A
Participant Packet



Secondary Education/Foundations of Education
February 10, 2004

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student teacher from Rowan University. I will be conducting a research project under the supervision of Dr. Donna Jorgensen as part of my student teaching. My study focuses on how adolescent girls form identity in the high school setting. I need 10 volunteers in order to form discussion groups that will meet after school for no more than an hour and a half for a total of 5 sessions. I am requesting permission for your daughter to participate in this research. The goal of the study is to provide further insight into what factors constitute identity formation in female adolescents during the high school years.

Potential participants have been selected to be a representative sample of the [redacted] High School female population. If you allow your daughter to participate, you can be assured that all efforts will be made to ensure complete confidentiality, except if a legal issue arises. As the nature of the study is to allow girls the opportunity to speak freely and often, there will be only 10 participants chosen. Over the course of 10 weeks, biweekly discussion sessions will be held after school from 3:00 – 4:30 P.M. during which topics will include gender issues, racial issues, relationships, body image, popular culture, peer pressure and personal values and morals. Ideas presented in the discussion will be captured and recorded via note-taking and video recording. Each participant will be assigned letter names, such as Subject A to ensure complete confidentiality. All data will be reported in terms of recurring themes and patterns and will not in any way be of identifying detail to any participant involved in this study.

Your decision whether or not to allow your daughter to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in her class. At the conclusion of the study, a summary of the discussion sessions will be made available to all interested parents. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at [redacted] or you may contact Dr. Donna Jorgensen at 856/256-4500 x. 3856. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Rigney
Elisabeth Rigney

Donna Jorgensen
Donna Jorgensen, Ed.D.

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your daughter participate in this study by checking the appropriate statement below and returning this letter to your child's teacher by March 1, 2004.

I grant permission for my child [redacted] to participate in this study. March 5, 2004

I do not grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

[redacted signature]

Parent/Guardian Signature

3-3-04
Date

I agree to participate in a study entitled, "A Study of the Female Formation of Identity in the High School Setting: A Qualitative Analysis," which is being conducted by Elisabeth Rigney in conjunction with a Master's Thesis under her advisor, Dr Donna Jorgensen. The purpose of this study is to identify themes and patterns in the identity formation of adolescent females. The data collected from this study will be analyzed and interpreted and will be a part of the fulfillment of a Master's Degree at Rowan University.

I understand that I will participate in a total of 5 discussion sessions that should not exceed one hour and a half.

I understand that my responses will be anonymous and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree to be quoted, recorded, and interviewed. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used in any way thought best for publication or education provided that I am in no way identified and my name is not used

I understand that there are no physical or psychological risks involved in this study, and that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without penalty.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the state of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator

If I have any questions or problems concerning my participation in this study I may contact Dr. Donna Jorgensen at 856/256-4500 x. 3856 or Elisabeth Rigney at

[Redacted Signature] _____
Signature of Participant

3/3/04

Date

Elisabeth Rigney

Signature of Investigator

3/3/04

Date

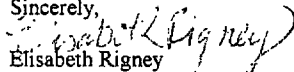
February 23, 2004

Dear Student,

My name is Elisabeth Rigney and I am inviting you to participate in a study for my Master's Thesis that focuses on how adolescent girls form identity in the high school setting. I have selected possible candidates for this study based on the population of the school at [REDACTED] and those chosen will be a representative sample of the diverse nature of the students here at the high school. I need 10 girls to participate in this study. Discussion sessions will be held after school from 3:00 - 4:30 P.M. beginning on or after March 8, 2004. I will hold a total of 5 sessions until the end of my time here in May. The exact dates of the sessions will be decided upon knowledge of the personal schedule of the participants involved. Topics for the discussion sessions will include gender issues, racial issues, relationships, body image, popular culture, and peer pressure. I am curious as to how all of these issues affect the formations of personal identity in the high school setting and your help would greatly assist my research endeavors.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will need parental permission. Also, I would like to make it clear that all efforts will be made to ensure complete confidentiality in all aspects of the discussion sessions, except when a legal issue arises. Participants will be assigned letter names in order to ensure this confidentiality. All other aspects of this study are discussed in the attached consent form. If you are interested in participating in this study, please return the consent form and parental permission form to Miss Rigney no later than March 5, 2004. Thank you in advance for your interest and I look forward to working with some of you!

Sincerely,


Elisabeth Rigney

APPENDIX B
Writing Samples



IDENTITIES

gender
female
male

relationships
single
married
separated or divorced
in a relationship
lover
partnership
mother, father
wife, husband
stepparent, godparent
grandparent
aunt, uncle
niece, nephew
cousin
daughter, son, step-child,
adopted child
sister, brother, half or step-
sister or brother

age
child
young adult
adult
elder/senior

religion
Animist
Atheist
Agnostic
Buddhist
Yoruba
Christian/Metaphysical
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Pagan/Wicca

ethnicity
European American
American
Anglo-Saxon
American
White
African American
Black
Negro
Afro-American
African
Caribbean
Latino/a
Hispanic
Chicana/o
Puerto Rican
Borinqueno/a CHK
Asian American
Asian
Oriental
Chinese American
Native American
American Indian
Amerindian
First Native
____ (nation)
Jewish
Pacific Islander

relation to U.S.
citizen
resident
visitor
immigrant
refugee

class
poor
working class
middle class
upper class

sexual orientation
gay

lesbian
(heterosexual)
bisexual

political affiliation
radical
liberal
moderate
conservative
right-wing
apolitical
Republican
Democrat
independent

geographic
urban
suburban
rural

job/career high school student





IDENTITIES

gender
single
male

relations
single
married
separated or divorced
in a relationship
lover
partnership
mother, father
wife, husband
stepparent, godparent
grandparent
aunt, Uncle
niece, nephew
cousin
daughter, son, step-child,
adopted child
sister, brother, half or step-
sister or brother

age
child
young adult
adult
elder/ senior

religion
Agnostic
Atheist
Agnostic
Buddhist
Yoruba
Christian
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Pagan/Wicca

ethnicity
European American
American
Anglo-Saxon

... American
White
African American
Black
Negro
Afro-American
African
Caribbean
Latino/a
Hispanic
Chicana/o
Puerto Rican
Boinquenc/a CHK
Asian American
Asian
Oriental
Chinese American
Native American
American Indian
American
First Native
... (nation)
Jewish
... Islander
Italian

relation to U.S.
citizen
resident
visitor
immigrant -> grandparents
refugee

class
poor
working class
middle class
upper class

sex orientation
gay

orientation
heterosexual
bisexual

political affiliation
radical
liberal
moderate
conservative
right wing
apolitical
Republican
Democrat
independent

geographic
urban
suburban
rural

job/career Medical



IDENTITIES

gender
sex
male

relationships
single
married
separated or divorced
in a relationship
lover

partnership
father/ father
wife/ husband
steparent, godparent
grandparent
aunt, uncle
niece, nephew

daughter, son, step-child,
grandchild
sister, brother, half or step
sister or brother

age
child
young adult
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elder/senior

religion
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African American
Caucasian
Hispanic
American

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Chicana/o
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Hispanic
Native
(nation)
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Pacific Islander

relation to U.S.
citizen
resident
visitor
immigrant
refugee

class
poor
working class
middle class
upper class

sexual orientation
gay

sexual
sexual

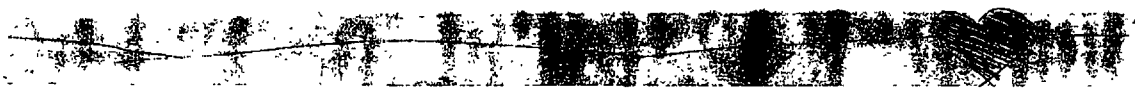
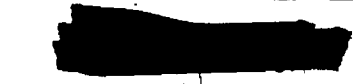
political affiliation
radical
liberal
moderate
conservative
right-wing
political
Republican
Democrat
independent

geographic
urban
suburban
rural

job/career

Chicago
Pizza

Chuck



IDENTITIES

gender
female
male

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mother, father
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Caribbean
Latino/a
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Chicano/a
Puerto Rican
Boricuena/a
Asian American
Asian
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Chinese American
Native American
American Indian
Amerindian
First Native
(nation)
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Pacific Islander

relation to U.S.
citizen
resider:
visitor
immigrant
refugee

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job/career student

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 separated or divorced
 in a relationship
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 mother, father
 wife, husband
 stepparent, godparent
 grandparent
 aunt, uncle
niece, nephew
cousin
daughter, son, step-child,
 adopted child
sister, brother, half or step-
 sister or brother

age
 child
young adult
 adult
 elder/senior

religion
 Atheist
 Agnostic
 Buddhist
Yoruba
Christian
 Hindu
 Jewish
 Muslim
 Pagan/Witch

ethnicity
 European American
American
 Anglo-Saxon
 American
White
 African American
 Black
 Negro
 Afro-American
 African
 Caribbean
 Latino/a
 Hispanic
 Chicana/-
 Puerto Rican
 Borinqueno/a/Chf
 Asian American
 Asian
 Orienta.
 Chinese American
 Native American
American Indian
 Amerindian
 First Native
 _____ (nation)
 Jewish
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Citizen
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sexual orientation
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political affiliation
 radical
 liberal
 moderate
 conservative
 right-wing
 apolitical
 Republican
 Democrat
Independent

geographic
 urban
suburban
 rural

job/career student

CLASS DIVISIONS / DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT

Name: [REDACTED]

❖ Recognize your inner beauty

I am beautiful because:

I live my life to the fullest - never taking
the back to seriously, "don't judge people by how
they look"

❖ Recognize your power

I am powerful because

"Don say so and stand up for
other people instead of sitting back."

❖ Recognize your greatness

I am great because

I have a wonderful family and friends
I always look towards the good.

❖ Recognize your strength

I am strong enough to

deal with the truth even though it
might hurt.

❖ Recognize your talents

I am really good at

understanding and listening

❖ Recognize your independence

I can

be with my family, boyfriend, and
friends

Sometimes I like to be by myself - I'm



Name

- ❖ Recognize your inner beauty

I am beautiful because

of my inner self.

- ❖ Recognize your power

I am powerful because

~~of my power~~

of my education.

- ❖ Recognize your greatness

I am great because

I am strong enough to deal w/ my past.

- ❖ Recognize your strength

I am strong enough to

overcome my struggles.

- ❖ Recognize your talents

I am really good at

video games.

- ❖ Recognize your passion

I really love

hang out with my cousin.

Name

- ❖ Recognize your inner beauty

I am beautiful because
my personality is good. I'm not a bad person

- ❖ Recognize your power

I am powerful because

I know I can do certain things & I don't give up

- ❖ Recognize your greatness

I am great because

I treat everyone equally. And I am who I am
& I think I'm great.

- ❖ Recognize your strength

I am strong enough to

deal with jealousy & hatred from other people.

- ❖ Recognize your talents

I am really good at

Being myself around people I know & don't know

- ❖ Recognize your passion

realize me to

Be myself. I can never try to be
anybody else but me -

I am 

❖ Recognize your beauty

I am beautiful because I can see the good traits in some people who don't have many friends because of stereotypes or preconceptions.

❖ Recognize your power

I am powerful because I've gotten through my life so far without killing myself - I don't plan on doing it anytime soon either

❖ Recognize your greatness

I am great because I can do things some others can't

❖ Recognize your strength

I am strong enough to live through hardships and lots of emotional pain.

❖ Recognize your talents

I am really good at Schoolwork

❖ Recognize your passion

I really love to read and learn as much as I can.



Name _____

❖ Recognize your identity

I am beautiful because

My boyfriend tells me I am

❖ Recognize your power

I am powerful because

I'm strong I can trust I'm powerful

❖ Recognize your greatness

I am great because

I'm not.

❖ Recognize your strength

I am strong enough to

be independent fight my own battles

❖ Recognize your talent.

I am really good at

sports.

❖ Recognize your passion

really love my family and friends, and boyfriend.



WARM UP ACTIVITY:

I want you girls to write down the qualities you think the ideal or perfect girl has. Try to think of as many as possible.

Then, I want you to tell me who the anti-girl is – the girl no one wants to be. Think of a girl you know, or one you see represented in the media. Write these down as well.

IDEAL GIRL

nice
trustworthy
Smart
Cares about
others feeling
Classicy
sweet
funny
nice family
doesn't judge

ANTI-GIRL

~~good~~ mean
not trustworthy
doesn't care about others feeling
nasty
liars
two faced

Now, I want you to think about what makes a good leader.

Finish the sentence: a good leader is _____.

List some more words that describe a good leader.



WARM UP ACTIVITY:

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Then, I want you to tell me who the anti-girl is - the girl no one wants to be. Think of a girl you know, or one you see represented in the media. Write these down as well.

IDEAL GIRL

- caring
- respectful
- giving
- honest
- trustworthy
- responsible
- intelligent

~~believes~~

- high self esteem
- looks for the good in both people and things

Now, I want you to think about what makes a good leader.

Finish the sentence: a good leader is trustworthy.

List some more words that describe a good leader.

- responsible
- believes in her capabilities
- deserves to be a leader (earned it)
- positive energy

ANTI-GIRL

- Catty
- jealous
- worries TOO much about fashion
- lies
- back-stabber
- low self-esteem
- don't take any pride in your appearance
- constant negativity
- fake



WARM UP ACTIVITY:

I want you girls to write down the qualities you think the ideal or perfect girl has. Try to think of as many as possible.
Then, I want you to tell me who the anti-girl is - the girl no one wants to be. Think of a girl you know, or one you see represented in the media. Write these down as well.

IDEAL GIRL

- Smart
- Pretty
- Kind
- Confident
- Talented
- Popular
- Strong

ANTI-GIRL

- Dumb
- Ugly
- Rude
- unliked
- Weak
- Fake

Now, I want you to think about what makes a good leader.
Finish the sentence: a good leader is intelligent
List some more words that describe a good leader.

- Strong
- Confident
- Cooperative
- resilient

WARM UP ACTIVITY:

I want you girls to write down the qualities you think the ideal or perfect girl has. Try to think of as many as possible.

Then, I want you to tell me who the anti-girl is - the girl no one wants to be. Think of a girl you know, or one you see represented in the media. Write these down as well.

IDEAL GIRL

- Very Kind
- Respectful
(to others and themselves)
- Average Weight
(not too skinny or too thick)
- Good Self-esteem
- Happy with their lives and themselves
- Smart
- Natural

ANTI-GIRL

- Mean / angry
- Not Respectful
- No Self-esteem
- Depressed
- Dumb
- Fake

Now, I want you to think about what makes a good leader.

Finish the sentence: a good leader is understanding.

List some more words that describe a good leader.

- intelligent
- Devoted
- Helpful

APPENDIX C
Transcripts

Tape 1

Researcher: You guys can call me Elisabeth during this, if you want. I know it probably feels weird, but if you want.

C: I can't do that! You're Miss Rigney

Researcher: I know, but I'm just saying...if you want.

Always remember that everything you say in these sessions will be kept confidential. No one will see these tapes, except my advisor. Not my boyfriend, not my family.

(Subject F twitches her leg the entire time...)

A: You got a boyfriend?

Researcher: Yeah

(Laughter from all the girls)

F: so that's the one that picks you up in the red car. I see him every day...in the mornings and after school

Researcher: okay, any questions before we begin?

B: Why did you decide to do this?

Researcher: Okay, well, when I was a young girl, I didn't think there were a lot of role models...well, I felt a lot of pressures...to look a certain way...there are pressures from your teachers to act a certain way...to get certain grades...and when I went off to college, I dealt with a lot of issues that I'm sure you girls will deal with...issues like eating disorders...alcohol issues...drugs...it's just what's around you, and you have to be able to figure out what you want to do about it.

A and F are chatting about this privately...

(I hand out copies of first warm-u...)

“Identity formation by high school females is an intricate process that involves a considerable number of factors. If you had to name specific things that have helped you form your identity, what would they be? Are they things like clothing and appearance? Or are they more ingrained in your values and morals? Do you think you are still forming your identity? Or do you feel complete already?
So just think about what you personally have experienced while forming identity.

This is the warm up for the day. The topic for this session will be gender issues and relationships. I want you to think about how your identity is affected by your school, your teachers, your parents, and your friends.

Does anyone want to comment on that?

B: I know I, like, I was affected by my older brother. He was a role model. I mean, I know he drinks, but he doesn't do drugs, and he got into a good college.

Researcher: Oh, let's all say our names; in case people don't know each other. (Subjects go around and say names)

Researcher: Anyone else, role models?

A: My mom... she's so cute. Psyche. Naw, but she's cool. Cause, my brothers. My brothers are in school. They never were like, in trouble with the law. They was never out there with the bad stuff. I mean, they had friends, but it wasn't like that. So, what about you, Moo? (Subject F)

F: I...I don't have a role model.

A: I'm her role model. She just doesn't want to tell you

F: I really don't. Because it's like if I do, I will admire that person for a certain amount of time, and then it will switch to another person. Like, I don't have a specific role model. I just like everybody everybody has their own tastes and styles that I admire. And actually, I admire myself. Cause I change everyday.

B: I admire you, Moo.

Researcher: D, what about you, do you have a role model/

D: (very shyly, she is dressed in oversized jacket and hunched over in desk) No.

A: Kerri (D's older sister) should be your role model.

D: Yeah, but, I'm not like her.

Researcher: Do you feel overshadowed by your sister?

D: Yeah, she's better than all of us. All my sisters. She had perfect grades...she's in NJHS...she's just perfect.

A: Kerri's not perfect.

B: My brothers are like that. HE got straight A's...he was on the Dean's list at college. I always feel like I'm compared to them. Well, like, I don't think my parents really compare us, but I kinds feel like they do.

F: Yeah, my parents have compared me to their friends' child. They are not me. Okay, like we were just saying. Ya'all got good grades. Ya'all did this, Ya'all did that. It's like, all right, she sings, we both sang, but she was a better singer than me. Why can't you be more like her? She's not me. Everybody got their own different style. My brother went into the service, so they're like, don't mess up, you're the only one who's gonna go to college. My dad dropped out of college his sophomore year. He just wanted to work.

Researcher: so, parents do tend to push you. And D, you really feel overshadowed by Kerri?

D nods her head.

Researcher: Everybody always compares you to her? How does that make you feel?

D: like crap cause I'm not like her

Researcher: well, do you want to be like her?

D: not really, I mean, I want like better grades in school and stuff, but I don't want to be like Kerri. She's her and I'm me.

Researcher: okay, good! Now, what about you, C?

C: well, when I was growing up, I didn't really have a role model. Or anyone to look up to because my dad died when I was 7 and, um, my mom was a drug addict, so...um...(hold back tears) when I was 13, I moved in with my cousin, and that's really who raised me because

F: like, when you says that stuff...like, do you talk about this a lot? (C shakes her head NO)

Cause it just seems like you felt so comfortable just being able to say that. Without a tear.

C: well, it doesn't bother me because everybody has problems in life, but

F: Cause see, I can't I can't sit here with like a straight face because, I grew up in the city and I went through the same thing she went through. Both my parents were drug addicts. My mom and my dad.

B: See I didn't know about any of this!

Researcher: How does that affect you guys? Do you think about it every day?

F: All the time. It's a constant thought because it's like, Oh God! (Starts to cry) WHY DID THAT HAVE TO HAPPEN TO ME? What did I do?

A comforts her by putting her arm around her.

B: When I heard both those stories, like, I just couldn't believe it cause you both seem so happy on the outside.

F: Yeah, cause you have no choice but to show happiness on the outside. You gotta do something that's gonna make you feel good so you won't be down, so you won't feel like you're in a corner. So you won't feel depressed. It's hard. It's real hard. And I know that everybody drinks, everybody uses drugs. And I guess that's why my parents push me cause I'm the only one...I don't like alcohol and I don't like drugs. I'm not saying I never tried it. Cause you also have to try something to make sure you're not gonna do it later on in life. I hate alcohol. And to see people out there smokin and drinkin everyday and you can't even talk to them as if they had no knowledge, but they know what it's doing to them, but they don't care.

B: I think that some people do it...well, I don't do it, but some people do it to like get away from their parents.

F: Attention. Attention.

A: Soap opera. It's not cool. They don't listen. Its like like, I don't understand how you cal learn about something dumb and still do that same exact thing when you know everything that's going through your body.

B: and not only that, people like have sex and they know that they can get pregnant you know what I mean?

A: yeah

Researcher: I think it has a lot to do with the way young adolescents think at your age. I know I did. You think that you're invincible and even when you learn about STD's or drugs, you think that nothing bad will ever happen to you. It's very normal. But then when you come from backgrounds like you two have (C and F) you probably think that everything bad will happen to you and that you shouldn't take anything for granted. That's what I make of your stories. I don't know if I'm correctly summarizing.

(All agree by nodding heads)

F: over the years, I've learned that you can never say what a person won't do and you can never say that it won't happen to you because the minute you say that, it will happen to you. You may be sitting here thinking, oh that never happened to me, oh that's not going to happen to me, but as soon as you leave here and go out into the real world, you

watch...the minute that you say that, stuff that you said wasn't gonna happen to you is gonna happen to you.

B: I wish I would have said that because I would never, well, I was never around cigarettes before but now in high school, like the people I was hanging around with, they did it all the time and they would always ask me and I would always say no but then after awhile you just get tired of telling them, No NO NO. And like I was around it so much and like I never did it but I would think like, god I should just do it to get it over with but still I never did it.

Researcher: well that's that sounds a lot like peer pressure...has anyone else ever felt peer pressure?

C: I don't let it get to me because I'm afraid...like I think that alcohol and drugs are...um...can be passed through genes and everything and I'm afraid that if I try it, I'll get hooked like that (snaps her fingers) so I don't even want to touch it

F: I just think like, it happens so much and if, if it's in your family...somebody has to break the chain somewhere and if it has to be you than it has to be you...cause like there's so much out there that can't there be one person out there to stop it and just from that point on...but it's like once you do something you're always going to have your past looking at you...your past it always going to be with you, you can't hide it and you can be known for that...like a drug addict is always gonna be a drug addict...an alcoholic is always gonna be an alcoholic a drunk's always gonna be a drunk (emphasis on ALWAYS) cause that's just how it is

Researcher: so who...who has tried alcohol before?

Everyone raises their hands

Researcher: how does it make you feel when you use it?

E: okay well, see, the only reason that I used it in the first place was because you get tired of hearing it's no big deal, just try it, you'll have fun. Blah blah blah blah. And you get tired of it so you're like all right, fine! You know? Like it gets to that point and that's that's like really the only reason that I tried cigarettes in the first place anyway and I did get hooked on them for awhile but but I got over them because one of my other friends didn't do it and I listened to her which was better...so, um, I don't know...I seem like I'm one of those people who are easily swayed but it's not like that but I just like I said I got tired of hearing it after awhile and you just do it to shut them up.

Researcher: what about you D?

She is hesitant

Researcher: you can be as honest as you want, it's okay.

D: I don't know how I started smoking. I think it's the fact that I used to hang out with a guy and he wasn't from like a bad family but they just didn't have anyone to punish them when they did something wrong and I was there for like 3 years straight every day and that's when I started

Researcher: do you feel like in your family there's more structure or no?

D: my mom...we used to fight like every day last year when I was with my old boyfriend. But now it's fine.

Researcher: you don't have the same boyfriend?

D: shakes her head no

Researcher: that's a good thing?

D smiles and laughs

Researcher: here's some quotes that I found from this book I'm reading...this has more to do with the way women treat other women

Tell me what you think about these words...do you think they're accurate?

They destroy you from the inside

Girls are manipulative

There's an aspect of evil in girls that there isn't in boys. Girls target you where they know you're weakest

Girls plan and premeditate

I feel safer with guys with guys you know where you stand

F: all those quotes are all true

Researcher: yeah? Let's talk about that

D: I have more guy friends than girl friends

Researcher: really? Why is that?

F: its cause...I could tell you why, it's cause we're so much alike we're not exactly alike, we might think differently we're all female, we go through the same thing every month, the same body changes so it's kinda like looking at yourself and we all tend to not like ourselves at some point so those words are supposed to be said to others, but really, you're just talking about yourself and when you talk to a male, he's a member of the opposite sex so when he talks about you its okay cause you feel like you're talking to

someone different, but when you talk to females its' like you're talking to yourself it's like when you ask for advice you know what she's gonna say and you don't want to hear it and when you talk to a guy it's like a different perspective and you respect them for being honest

Researcher: what do you think a?

A: I think, most girls, like I agree with a lot of what you said, F, but like but not all of it cause like all girls are not alike cause some of them they are so messed up in their life that they try to push it on you like you did something...like I don't know like, anyways, I'm gonna go right to this. A few people call me and my friends the "too cute crew" and I'm like, it's nothing, it don't really phase me but it's like I think that they're mad because they want what I got on or something or they're just mad cause the boys is looking at us and no at them and it's like a whole big issue and then they see me and I'm nicely dressed and I'm never ignorant to nobody and I don't know if they like admire me and that's why they're talking about you? Cause sometimes like, when the boys look at me I don't know, but it's a problem but I don't sweat it though

F: but obviously you do have an issue with it cause that's why you brought it up

E: but I think that guys are pretty much the same as girls because a guy will use you in the same exact way that a girl will and a guy can play with you the same way that a girl will...you can't trust a lot of people but I do think it's easier to be friends with guys because girls let their feelings get in the way like jealousy and they lose a lot of friends over stuff like that

B: um, I know there's like a group of girls, my friends that hang out and like our parents treat us different because, well I guess it's because I'm totally honest with my mom, like I tell her everything and she gives me a lot of freedom, but my other friends, their parents are really strict so like they're not allowed to do a lot of what I do and sometimes when I want to hang out with girls besides the two I'm closest with the other girls ask me why I I'm always with them (the two close friends) and its not like I like them better but I guess I just trust them more I guess and it's so weird because they try to talk about my two best friends in front of me. And that's not something you talk about...and it's stupid stuff like we all wear we all have white belts...and we don't plan to wear them on the same day like I really don't call up my friends and say, wear this! Like we don't do that but one day we all had on white belts and one of my good friends who's friends with like everybody was like, they're calling you guys the WBC and I was like, what does that mean? And she was like, the white belt club and I was like, are you guys serious? Like how stupid like we're in high school and you think I'm gonna try to make up a club for only white belts?

It just shows me that you can't trust girls...like me and my best friend, we trust each other with everything you know what I mean? But like the rest of the girls, they think cause like we're all friends we just tell everybody everything and I don't agree with that like I hang out with a bunch of girls and I don't tell them everything, I just tell my two best friends

F: I feel that if you use that expression too much with too many people, it's bragging, like your crew, I seen who you hang out with like they tell everything because they want you to know and they'll be like, oh, I did this last night and I was with this person and I was with him...just to be cute or just to be cool...yeah, the cool crew!

(Laughter from girls)

A: I mean some people are really trying hard to be cool cause I seen that movie on LIFETIME, "she's too young" and she was like 14 going around having sex and like the whole school ended up having syphilis. That movie was off the hook

B: but like, guys

F: guys don't do that!

B: okay, like Tee, my cousin, we're the same age, we live in the same town it's a really small town, so whenever he has the guys over I'm usually there and like it's better hanging out with guys cause like they don't like expect like I don't know like they don't care what you're doing

F: it's like you're one of the fellas...it's something how they make you feel like you're one of them...it's something about...like...it's like a one day chance to be a member of the opposite sex

EVERYONE AGREES WITH THIS AND THERE IS UPROAR OF DISCUSSION AND LAUGHTER

RESEARCHER: but why does that make you feel so good to be like one of the guys?

Everyone says something at this point like they make you feel more comfortable, you can be like yourself...etc

C: well, I have a personal experience to share I've been friends with this girl since like kindergarten and we were like real tight growing up and everything but something happened in like second grade and we didn't really hang out and then in 5th grade we started hanging out again and that's when we were the closest we were inseparable...hanging out every day, she was the only person I told anything to because she was the only person I trusted. Well, when I moved in with my cousin, she stopped talking to me, like I wasn't good enough for her and um I didn't understand why, like I thought that maybe she thought I wasn't good enough for her like she was better than me, like she had more stuff than I did or something and that's when I started thinking when you need your friends the most that's when they're supposed to be there for you and she just left me out in the dust when I needed her. So um, she had a situation come up last year and I was right there for her and we were friends again and I always am there for her, but when I need her she's never there, but she always needs me to be there for her to give her advice and I'm not like that anymore, I'm not being somebody's puppy that they

can just pull around whenever they need me. It's gonna be equal or it's gonna be nothing and girls usually are really catty and jealous and a lot of them think that you should just do stuff for them and and they don't want to treat you with respect and that's why I'd rather be friends with guys cause they'll listen to you but even if they're not listening, they still wont go and tell what you said I don't know girls are just too catty for me I can't stand girls

F: C don't worry about her, don't pay her no mind

D: girls just love telling everyone everything

B: yes! I agree with that! They're proud of gossip, they can't keep anything in don't tell her, okay it's a secret

Researcher: and how does all this affect your identity and your self-esteem?

F: because some things aren't meant to be told

A: cause like I got a couple close friends

F: but the ones that you think are the close ones sometimes ain't that close

A: Trust me. I got Shayla, I got Lizzy and they don't tell nobody nothing.

D: I used to be friends with a lot of girls but then I realized how mean they can be
EVERYONE AGREES WITH THIS

D: like if someone's having a party and there's all girls there I won't go, but if there's all guys, I'll go

Researcher: do you feel more confident in front of guys than girls?

D: yeah, because girls sit there and judge you all the time and guys don't and girls just judge you, like what you're wearing

A: I like you (to D) I like you! That's like my little sister!

Researcher: do you feel like that? That girls judge you on your appearance?
EVERYONE AGREES

F: yeah when a new girls walks in somewhere, first thing girls do is check out their outfit
C: yeah like people tell me I wear dude's clothes, and yeah, I'm wearing dude's clothes a girl asked me if I was a dyke cause I was wearing dude's clothes and I'm like, are you serious? I wear what's comfortable and I'm not gonna change for nobody no matter what they want like I'm not gonna dress like a girl. I'm a big girl and I can't wear clothes like other girls so I'm gonna wear what's comfortable with me and guys

won't say nothing to you cause that's what they wear and it doesn't really bother them.

F: I think it's cute!

Researcher: but words can really hurt can't they?

F: it hurts as much as you want it to hurt

C: no because I think the girl that said it to me IS a lesbian

A: she probably was tryin to holla at you!

LAUGHTER from everyone

Researcher: do you girls feel threatened by lesbians or gays?

A: I don't

F: I do cause at one point my mom was a lesbian and I was like ew ew ew and I feared them and I really feel like they can turn you out cause they start out as your friend like my one cousin, she's gay and I'm scared that she's like gonna touch me or something like I just can't e alone in the same room with her I get scared.

C: my cousin is like that like she's a phobic like if she's friends with a girl she won't even hug her, like she wont' even hug her own daughter and I assume that you won't even hug your friends (to F)

F: no.

C: and like, even if they say they don't have a sexual attraction to you, they might cause if you're a lesbian you're a lesbian.

LAUGHTER FROM GIRLS

B: um, this guy who's a friend of the family, like no one knows he's gay but he would like tell me things but he was afraid cause like all his uncles are hunters and he really liked this guy and he would only tell me cause he couldn't tell anyone else and he was afraid that they'd think he was like sick or something and like I didn't judge him and I felt bad because he kinda looked gay but the thing is I would feel bad because people would say, oh you're gay and I think he's so afraid to say he is and I feel bad for him and there was this other girl who was my cousin's friend who was a lesbian and I guess I did feel weird when she would look at me cause I would think, is she looking at me?

Researcher: do you girls feel weird changing in front of other girls like in the locker room?

F: oh yeah, I change in the bathroom

A: especially if you got a thong on or something, like I'll put my butt inside the locker

B: I'm really comfortable; I just change in the room

C: like I've had friends who are lesbian and they always talk about your boobs and stuff and one time one of them hit my boob and it was just skeezy cause they ain't turning me out!

E: I don't feel weird around lesbians at all because it's just like guys like just because they're a lesbian doesn't mean they're gonna like you cause it has nothing to do with that and it really angers me when people say that they're scared of lesbians and they don't like gay people cause I know a lot of gay people and my favorite cousin, she's one of my favorite people in the world and she's a lesbian and I wouldn't see any reason ever to be scared of her because they're normal people and I don't see why people would discriminate against them. It's not fair it's like saying, oh you're black, I don't like you

A: you go with that boy Cole?

E: yeah

A: he's prejudice he was saying we should go back to slavery days

E: he told me he didn't say that

A: All right, well that's a whole different story there

C: okay lesbians and gay people are two different situations to me because if you're gay, you like men so it has nothing to do with you, like you can keep it away from you cause it's a guy and a guy, but if you're a lesbian lesbians like girls so they might be attracted to you so it's a different situation, but I don't really discriminate against gay people because I have 3 gay uncles, so I'm kinda used to it doesn't really bother me. I think gay people are cool

D: I don't really have a problem with gay people it's like if you're gay, you're gay and that's who you are but if I'm around it, it kinda skeeves me out

A: I don't have a problem with it. Cause my cousin's gay and I haven't seen her girlfriend and I really wanna see her!

D: but if they're all over each other, I don't really want to see that

A: you know what? I feel like I don't get two guys being together, like two girls, girls are like soft and feminine, like okay don't get any ideas, I'm just saying like two guys they're all hard like I saw this thing on Maury of these guys who were bi and they were like drug dealers and they said they liked girls and oh well, whatever

Researcher: okay, let's move away from this topic because I want to talk more about you guys and your identities. How do you feel your identity is affected by your school? Do you feel connected to your school?

C: nope, not at all

D: no

C: this school doesn't care about you at all. I had a situation yesterday that I had to leave for and they would not let me leave because she wouldn't let me use the phone so I had to use my friend's cell phone in the bathroom even though it's not allowed cause they wouldn't let me use the phone. And she was like, well you can't sign out cause you don't have permission and I said, well if you would have let me use the phone I would have permission and she said well I can't help you you're gonna have to fine the VP and tell him, well he was in the cafeteria so I just left cause I had a situation that I had to take care of and I felt that they didn't care so I just left. And then today at lunch our table was a mess and I was like, can somebody clean our table before we eat and she was like, get a rag and I said, isn't that your job? And I was like, well it's not my job I come here to learn, what do you get paid for? This school they don't care one bit about a student. I don't know what they care about.

D: a lot of teachers have favorites

B: I believe that

C: and they come here just to get paid. Like they don't care about the students like they just give you worksheets and tests. How are you gonna learn from that?

A: I think it all depends. I have good teachers. It's my senior year I've been here a long time and I'm ready to get out

C: a lot of teachers don't like me but its like this way you either love me or you hate me there's no in between with me because a lot of people don't like the way I am and I don't care, if you don't like me don't talk to me don't look at me and a lot of people don't like that. Mr. K hates me because I argue points with me. When I think I'm right I argue a point. And he doesn't like that

A: so it's either his way or the HIGWAY!

Researcher: how do you feel b?

B: well this school did teach me something cause where I went to elementary, there wasn't a lot of blacks there and when I came to Paulsboro there were a lot of black people and my friend's mom's boyfriend doesn't agree with blacks and whites dating and she ended up going out with a black guy and he had a problem with it, but I don't cause like I came to Paulsboro and I don't think it's weird cause people who are black and people

who are white, there's not much difference between them but I didn't know that when I was at elementary and middle school cause people would always say stay away from the black people, they're bad but when I came to Paulsboro I realized that it doesn't phase me to be around black people

A: it's cause I think that Paulsboro is the best place where blacks and whites can get along even though it's not really like the real world cause the real world is crazy and not like this but here in this town black people and white people really do get along. I mean there's a lot of fights and people are always trying to say that Paulsboro has so many fights and stuff but black people and white people get along a lot.

B: I try to tell my family that too cause they're like living in the 18th century or something and I try to tell my grandma, Grandma, we're not the only family with two mixed children running aoround. Its normal you're just not used to seeing it. Like if I liked a black guy, I wouldn't think anything of it. I would like them as a person like I don't see what the big deal is

Researcher: do you think that begin in this school has helped you develop relationships with other races? Would you rather be here than an all white or all black school?
DEFINITELY

C: It's the education and the faculty. Like I like the students I just don't like the faculty

B: okay, can I talk about Mrs. H?

Okay, like in the beginning of the year she was really helpful and she would help us out a lot but, Miss Rigney, she would be on her cell phone during class

A: yeah she would

B: and I would get so mad sitting there cause like she's a teacher and all yeah, but still she's on a cell phone in the middle of class and when that whole cell phone thing happened, she put me on the spot and wanted me to rat out whoever it was and I really didn't know but she kept pressuring me like I know you know and I was like, I really don't, so that just made me mad

And like Mr. V he is just crazy like I don't know how I learn in that class. I mean, he teachers in a weird way and he's like yelling and screaming and getting mad at kids

And like teachers will see kids talking about someone and they won't do anything, so it's just like teaching them that they can talk about other people in a bad way

Researcher: well, is there any teacher that you do like?

MRS DAVIS! (This is unanimous) they are all in favor of her

C: instead of giving us worksheets she makes games out of everything so I think the information stays in our heads more

A: yeah, she makes it fun

C: and you're having fun while you're learning

A: she used to make songs out of things too

B: in other classes, I might feel intimidated sometimes if I don't know the answer, but in Mrs. Davis' class if you don't know the answer she doesn't flip out on you

A: yeah, she makes it like a joke

B: and even if it's wrong, it's okay

E: the thing about Mrs. Davis is that she's always happy, like she's always happy like one of my real good friends, he is always unhappy and he always puts his head down in her class and he's always depressed but she is always nice to him and she's never mean to him even when he's in that mood

B: there is this one teacher and I told him I wanted to vote him teacher of the year and he was like no don't do that I don't want to be teacher of the year for this high school. And I got mad, like go to another high school if you don't like it here, you know what I mean?

A: I had him last year and I do not feel him because like I don't think he's prejudice, but he would put us in groups and not talk to all the groups and then he would give us tests and I would be like, TEST? I didn't know about no test and he would be like, well how do they know and I would be like, well probably cause you only talk to their group so I was just like look I ain't got time for this. So he definitely used to play favorites

C: yeah cause he would like leave for weeks at a time and then come back and expect you to have everything done for him and have no questions

A: yeah, he was like in the military or something. Why are you a teacher then if you have no time for it?

D: like Mr. m last year I had a lot of problems and I would miss school for like two weeks at a time and when I would come back I would ask him for help with my makeup work and he would just say read the book and when we would have tests and quizzes s I would ask for help and still he would say read the book and one time e we had a test and I didn't know anything on it so I just wrote in big black marker, I don't know this cause you can't teach. And he held it up for everyone to see, trying to embarrass me when really he just embarrassed himself cause everyone was laughing at him. So the next day I went to guidance and I got my class changed. HE'S A HORRIBLE TEACHER

RESEARCHER: so if you all could name one thing, let's go around. What would make a good teacher? What could a teacher do that would help you?

D: get to know the students

A: be organized. Cause this one teacher lost my test. Cause I asked to see my grade at the end of a marking period and I saw I had an incomplete and I was like what? And he said I didn't have this test, so I found the test and I got a 100 on it, and that's what made me more mad. So point blank period, you need to be organized.

B: I think they should talk to you and try to understand you better. Like just don't think that if someone does one bad thing that they're a bad person

E: I think they should talk to you like you're a person. That's why I like Mrs. D cause she talks to us like we're normal people. Another teacher she talks to us like we're 4 years old and that's not right.

C: well, I think they should trust you and trust your judgment. They need to do their job, as in, they're here to teach students and nothing else so do it well. Cause this one teacher, I had her last year and this year she has my sister. I have 2 sisters and one I don't really talk to cause she started doing bad things this teacher knew all that and she knew I didn't live with this sister cause she lives with my aunt and this teacher told me she set up a conference for me, my sister and her so we could all talk and my sister and I haven't talked for like two year and I was like Mrs. B I appreciate you trying to help but I really don't want to talk to my sister. I don't need that in my life right now and she's like, why don't you want to talk to your sister? I said because she causes too many problems for me and there's more drama than I need cause she tries to get me in trouble all the time and she's like, well can you please come and I'm like, Mrs. B I'm not trying to be rude but do your job, your job is to teach not to be a counselor and she was like, she got real mad at me and after that she didn't treat me good like when the whole class was talking she would stop me and say, C stop talking! And all of a sudden I started getting bad grades when I knew I was the smartest person in that class and I didn't make honors English for the next year and that's why I'm not in it right now because she didn't like me. And one day I went up to her and I was like, what is your problem? Just because I told you I didn't want you to do that session for me now you're mad at me? And she was like, oh no it's not that it's just that you didn't do so good the first half of the year and I was like whatever your job is to teach. And I have a counselor, so I don't need you.

A: and you know what else? If teachers talk about you, like if you were bad when you was younger they say like, ooh she's gonna be bad! That's not good either when teachers talk about other students they should give them a chance before they believe what other teachers have to say

Researcher: okay, we'll end after this next part. I want you to describe the perfect girl. Do you think there's a perfect girl?

A: there's no such thing anywhere

Researcher: if you could build one, what kind of qualities would the perfect girl have?

C: well, I don't think that a perfect girls necessarily has to be perfect on the outside because I don't think that being a good person has anything to do with what you look like so looks wise, she would look whatever way but on the inside I think she would be caring, very trustworthy, honest, and trusting cause if you can't rust somebody you can't start a relationship or anything like that respect, you need respect and I don't like jealousy cause I'm not a jealous person and If you did something better than me, I'll shake your hand you know I'll be like good job because I'm easy to get along with like that I'm not catty at all...I'll tell it like it is...and not really really a genius, but like intelligent because I'm not trying to be ignorant but I can't stand having a conversation with a really dumb person it bothers me to have to keep repeating myself they need to be like on your level

E: she said pretty much everything

B: like I was at the mall with my aunt and she's in a wheel chair cause she got in a pretty bad car accident and these people were talking about her cause they didn't know I was with her and that just made me so mad cause they didn't eve n know her and they were just judging her by how she looked and another thing was when I went out with this boy and my friends were like, why do you like him, he's ugly and that made me mad cause you're not the one liking him and I don't' judge people by the way they look

A: It really don't matter the way they look it matters how they treat you and how they act towards you

E: well I just wanted to say that I think most people are perfect cause we're all individual and having problems just makes you more individual and I don't know if I could like someone who didn't have any problems. It's boring, what would we talk about?

D: I think it's hard to be perfect. You can't be beautiful, you can't get goo grades, you can't get a good job without having problems

(NOTE: SUBJECT D IS REALLY HARD TO HEAR. SHE HAS A UIET VOICE IS VERY SHY AND NOT ALWAYS OPEN)

B: I agree with you on that one

Researcher: c did you want to say something?

C: yeah, well as far as guys think, I think looks are more important o to them more important than personality and I'm not trying to sound conceited or anything but I think like I think that I have a good personality. And I was going with this guy once I think it was like for 2 months and all of a sudden he stopped talking to me and he started going out with another girl that I was friends with and stuff and and I was still hanging out with his friend and I kept trying to get him to tell me what happened and he was like no, but then like, well, can I use the word he said?

Researcher: of course

C: well, he told me that this guy was like wanting to hang out with me cause he wanted to deflower a virgin and also that "fat bitches need love too" so I'm like, alright, that's cool

A: I don't like him

Researcher how did that make you feel?

C: um, I tried to act like it didn't bother me, but I really did because I thought he was different because you always think that, but whatever it didn't phase me

B: like girls think that a guy will care about them, but like I went out with a guy once and he ended up cheating on me with another girl and his friends told me and now he like wants to be with me again, but he should have thought about that before he cheated on me

A: and I think, boys, the reason that I think they try to make it seem like you have to be this pretty skinny type thing is cause they look at those videos and I mean they definitely are airbrushed I mean every little thing and every little flaw, they erase it they do so much stuff but boys look at stuff like that and that's hwy they think girls need to be like that, but I know a lot of boys out there and they like big girls, so girl! Ain't like you ugly, you pretty so if he was gonna cat like that you didn't need to be with him in the first place cause I don't like that I don't like that at all let me catch him

C: I mean it definitely put down my else-esteem a little bit cause you figure like, well I just thought that he was different, so now I don't even try to talk to nobody, I'm just friends with them

E: cause you can't trust anybody like that. That's something I learned cause you know, I was with a guy for a year and a half and I loved him to death omigod, I still do still do I loved him so much but you know what, and I trust him but you know what now all of a sudden now that he moved I'm hearing all kinds of things from all different people, well a lot of girls ARE SAYING THAT THEY GOT WITH IJNM AND I DON'T KNOW IF ITS true and I don't want to hear it and girls are wanting to fight me cause I broke up with him in the first place and it's really retarded but I don't get it. I don't understand what's going on, I really don't. And I don't want to talk bout it cause I love him and it really hurts me but that's all I hear all the time and people say I'm wrong because now I'm going out with one of his friends but it's not fair you know because I'm not doing anything wrong. I'm not still his girlfriend I' not cheating on him and its driving me crazy and making me feel like I'm a really bad person but that's just it and that's my point. It hurt me a lot because it really makes me think that I can't trust anybody anymore cause everyone is saying that he got with other girls I even heard this one girl actually say that he was the father of her baby but when she had the baby, it was a mixed baby, and my boyfriend was white

A: Ain't she young, how old is she?

C: 14

E: so I don't know what's going on

A: well, maybe she didn't know who her baby daddy was I don't know but probably since he was all the way down there she just blamed it on him

E: it's not even that it's just that now that he's gone most of his friends are coming up to me and saying, well he did this and you didn't know about it and I'm like, well you shouldn't have told me that, like I didn't want to know in the first place and it's affecting me now because I don't trust the boyfriend that I have now I don't trust him when he tells me he loves me, I don't believe him I'm just like, yeah sure you do, okay. And he's going crazy cause he keeps saying he loves me and I'm like, sure you do and I don't trust him around other girls, bur, it doesn't bother me too much. Well actually it does. I don't know why I said that!

D: my boyfriend last year tried cheating on me with my sister and he cheated on me with this girl Brittany, not you E. But now I have a boyfriend that doesn't cheat on me and treats me good but it's hard to trust him and he doesn't understand that I mean I can trust him, it's just hard to cause of my ex. My other boyfriend he put me through so much hell. I'm sorry, but he put me through so much. One time we were at a party and he tried to rape my sister and I was still with him after that.

A: you know what? I think that you really wanted to have a boyfriend so bad because you seen Kerri with her boy for so long and I think that was a lot of pressure on you

D: well, I did love him

A: I know you did, I just think that cause you r sisters had boyfriend for so long it put pressure on you

Researcher: well, we're out of time. Next time we'll start talking about boys and relationships I think. Thank you all so much for sharing everything and being so open and honest. This is so much better than I ever expected and I can't wait to do it again.

END OF TAPE ONE

Tape 2

(Only subjects E,
G, and H are here)

G: I love shot.

E: I don't do sports

G: I've been doing sports for like every season.

Researcher: well, this is an interesting way to start; I'm just listening to you guys talk.
Ok, so you two do sports, G and H, but you don't E?

All: right

Researcher: how do sports shape your identity?

G: well, I have an identity of being athletic or whatever. Fall I do field hockey, winter I do basketball and spring I do track. So I do something every whatchamacallit. So when one sport ends, I do another

Researcher: how does that make you feel?

G: good, cause I like doing it! I don't do it cause like I have to. I do it because I want to.

Researcher: how would you feel id you didn't do sports?

G: bored, plus I need to do...I don't know, it wouldn't be me.

H: I get so bored, cause like during winter I don't do anything and, well this spring I'm not doing track, but I'm practicing with boys' tennis but during the winter when I go home from school I get so bored, like I can't sit there

Researcher: so you like to have something to do after school

All: yeah

G: plus, like I don't know, I'd be sooooo fat if I didn't' so sports because like I eat soooooo much.

I eat so much and I would be so fat if I didn't do nuttin.

Researcher: so E, why don't do you sports?

E: I never really wanted to and plus I'd feel weird cause I never really wanted to it would just be weird for me. I never had the chance when I was little, my mom wouldn't let me. She's just weird. She's way too overprotective.

G: I know I didn't start...

E: I mean, she's not overprotective about everything...

G: yeah, cause what about boys? Cause I see you with your boyfriend.

E: yeah, she liked mike and she likes Cole, I don't know, I guess she just wants me out of the house all the time, so I guess it's like something to do.

Researcher: so she likes your boyfriends?

E: well, she acts like she does at least. I really don't know if she does or not, she just wants me out of the house most of the time like I said.

Researcher: what do you mean?

E: she doesn't seem like, it doesn't seem like they want me around all the time

G: get you out of their hair?

E: exactly. Like it doesn't seem like they want me around at all. Especially not my step dad. He does not like me.

Researcher: so you live with your mom and your step dad?

E: yeah.

Researcher: do you feel like, well let me read something to you about parents. Ok, at one end there are parents who are accepting, responsive and child-centered but at the other end there are parents who are rejecting, unresponsive and parent-centered. So what do you guys think your parents are?

G: parent centered

E: PARENT CENTERED!

Researcher: h, what do you think?

H: they're like a mix between the two

Researcher: and then there's control. At one end there are parents who are undemanding and low in control and at the other end there are parents who are demanding and high in control. What do you think about that one?

All: high in control

E: oh, god, they need their control they are scary.

Researcher: do you guys have strict rules?

H: on some things

G: like when it comes to boys or like

H: curfew

G: yeah, curfew or partying stuff like that

E: well, my parents don't really care about me going out or anything just as long as I do not question their authority. Cause if I question their authority, that is it I won't be allowed to do anything and they get really really mad. Omigod. That's when they get scary. They turn into monsters as soon as you say no to them or defy them they want to kill you

Researcher: so do you like to please them and say what they like to hear?

G: I just don't say nothing. I'll be like, (makes a facial expression and crosses arms) alright. (mocks parents, what???) I said alright!

G: like they get mad when I ask for more. Like if I ask to sleep at a friends' house and then I just keep asking for more, they get so mad!

E: well, I listen to my mom, but my step dad is another story, I do not want to listen to him I hate to say I hate him, but I think I do. He's just awful he's been awful to me ever since I was a little kid; he's always hated me. He's always been really mean to me, he's hit me and stuff. He's horrible. And I don't listen to him because I don't want to listen to him. He's not my dad and I don't call him dad anymore cause I just don't like him.

Researcher: how long has he been around?

E: he's been around since I was 6 months old but he's never been a father to me you know what I mean? He's never been somebody I could go to and then...then he'll get really mad at you and...like he's always been so mean to me and then the only time that he ever says, oh I'm your father you have to listen to me is when he has something he wants me to do for him and my mom...omigod, as soon as he says that I and I try to say no, she like runs to me and says, E you have to listen to him he's your father and I have a

dad, like I have a dad, he's still alive and just because he's in Connecticut doesn't mean he's not my dad anymore you know? I don't want my step dad to be my dad I keep trying to tell her that and she won't listen to me so that's how I feel about that. I listen to my mom; I do what she wants, but not my step dad

Researcher: how about you other girls?

G: I live with my dad and my step mom

Researcher: and how do you feel towards your step mom?

G: I don't know, sometimes I hate her well, I don't hate her, but I don't like her other times she's cool. But last night, like I don't know I don't go to her and talk to her about stuff. Like a mother figure... I mean, I'm not gonna go to my dad, and I'm not gonna go to my step mom so like,

E: it's not the same cause it's not your blood, right?

G: yeah, so I just...I I don't know. I guess I talk to my friends about it

Researcher: h?

H: my mom makes all the decisions like, I f my dad tries to say something, she'll be like, no do this. So she's more of like, the demanding one

Researcher: you live with your mom and you did?

H: yeah

Researcher: ok do you feel...this is what I wanted to talk about today. There's something called a true self and a false self that I feel some of you girls experience growing up most girls will choose to split into two selves, one that's authentic and one that's culturally scripted. Do you know what that means? I guess the best way to put it is that to your parents you act one way, like yes ma'am, no sir but around your friends you're different. You'll say to your parents, okay I won't go to that party, but then you will. You act different. Do you guys feel this way?

G: I think everybody does. (smiles) acts different in front of your parents and your friends.

Researcher: do you think it's because your parents regard some aspects of your personality as unacceptable?

All: yeah

Researcher: who do you learn more from, your friends or your parents? Like talks about the birds and the bees?

E: well, I learned all that stuff from my grand mom. My grand mom's more like my mom than my real mom is.

G: I learned it from school. Remember that family life class?

Researcher: did you ever discuss it with your dad or step mom?

G: no...I mean, as I got older I did. I had to, I mean, well about some stuff

E: I don't tell my parents anything because as soon as you tell them something...

G: I don't tell them nothin.

E: they'll use it whenever they get into a fight with you. And my parents will tell me that I'm the worst possible kid they could have ever had and that's the sad part cause I'm not I keep telling them that all the time, I say mom, I have friends that do this I have friends that do that, and I'm not even allowed to cuss at them and I have friends who cuss their parents out so so it's like, I don't do anything wrong and it really bothers me and they still say that I'm like the worst possible kid that they could have and I'm just like, okay sure. Sure I am.

H, you're quiet.

Researcher: okay, I know this I shard with only 3 girls, I wish we had more. But ok let's talk about your body image. This is something I want to go into more at another session but you said before that you want to do sports because you don't want to get fat

G: (laughs) I mean, no I do sports because I want to do it like, it helps me, I'd be really really fat if I didn't do sports, I don't know

Researcher: is that like a fear?

G: what, getin fat? Not really, a lot of my older aunts and stuff are fat

Researcher: so you look at them and think that you could look like that

G: yeah, I guess. But it's like, like I don't never go on diet s or nothin like that like I don't care if I get fat, it don't bother me, I just don't want to get really really fat

Researcher: why?

G: cause I don't! They're not attractive or nuttin. If you get really really fat.

E: well, not all girls cause you know some guys like thick girls. You know that

Researcher: do you guys feel pressures to look a certain way?

E: yes, definitely. I hate especially, like some of my friends. Okay, I despise my breasts a lot cause like I have really big ones and I want to get rid of them badly I don't like them. And my friends don't like them because some of them get really jealous and say, oh, give them to o me. And that bothers me cause everybody is like, your boobs are great! I want them! And I'm like they're not that great cause I can't wear anything. I can't even find a bathing suit that fits I can buy bottoms, but not tops. And especially ones that come in a set or one-pieces, they're the horrible ones. So if there were one thing about my body that I would change, I'd have to get rid of these boobs eventually, I need to get rid of them.

G: I'd get rid of my legs. I hate em !

Researcher: why?

G: my thighs! They're big! My waist, ew I hate it! (Laughs) I'm serious!

Researcher: what about you h?

H: I don't know. I wouldn't change anything medically, like I don't like when people do that. If I wanted to change something, I'd just exercise.

Researcher: I think we all carry some scars. Things we wish weren't here

Why do you hate your thighs?

G: I don't know. Because they're big. I don't know. I just don't like them. Because like when I wear shorts, I don't know. I just don't like em.

E: it's alright, G, a lot of guys like them!

G: I know!!! And that's another thing like, I'm like, get out my face. It's like they'll be attracted to you and they'll say stuff and I'm like shut up! And sometimes I feel like if I didn't have that, I wouldn't have to deal with all those comments and stuff like that. A lot of girls like them comments and stuff like that but I just, I don't know.

Researcher: it makes you uncomfortable

G: yeah!

Researcher: do guys make comments about your breasts?

E: yes. It gets to the point where it's annoying and I don't like it because I WANT TO BE ABLE TO RELATE TO MY friends. I want to wear the same things my friends wear

and I can't wear like tank tops or tube tops cause I need to wear bras and my bras have really thick straps and that's what bothers me cause they could go without wearing a bra no problem and I wish I could do that and guys constantly talk about it like it's a big deal and it's really not it's really not and all my friends keep telling me, oh wear something that'll push them in, push them in so they don't look so big and no it would hurt! Like seriously it just bothers me because there's like nobody I can relate to that has ones that are as big as mine except people in my family my aunt had big ones and my other aunt has big ones but she got a reduction and oh god, she's very happy with them and that's why I want one because it went great for her and she's happy she can wear whatever she wants and my other aunt she went on the deep end and I don't know. She has to get them specially made because they're so big. Her back is curved and she has notches in her shoulders from straps pushing down too hard and it doesn't help that she's really fat and I just definitely don't want to turn out like her. That would be scary I don't want that back ting or the shoulders marks, I'm really scared about that and that's just more reasons why I want a reduction.

Researcher: so when guys make comments about your bodies or your looks, does it ever make you feel good?

G: I don't know, sometimes, like if they say you look nice or something but some people are like, oh look at that and that don't make you feel good

H: they like exaggerate too much, they're too forward with it and it just makes you feel so uncomfortable

E: yeah, like if they say something sexual, that's nasty I mean, if they're giving you a compliment, that's a different story, but they don't need to say something sexual there's so need for that

Researcher: does that hurt your self-esteem when guys compliment your body like that?

G: I haven't had a problem with that lately though cause of my boyfriend cause they all know him and they don't say nothing to me no more like that

Researcher: interesting

E: and if a guy makes a comment like that it's like he doesn't respect you

Researcher: so how about relationships with boys?

G: I been with my boyfriend for like 9 months now

Researcher: really? I didn't know that

A lot of people didn't know I was with him cause like he asked me out the last day of school last year and he was like, you couldn't tell that I liked you? He gets mad at me

cause I couldn't tell that he liked me, like I was worried but we been going out ever since then

Researcher: so does that make you feel complete? Are you happy that you have a boyfriend?

G: yeah, sometimes but sometimes he thinks too much

Researcher: about what?

G: I don't know, about other boys or whatever because when I was younger, I was friends with a lot of boys, cause I was like a tomboy and I still am and well, I'm friends with girls too but like I'm cool with a lot of boys and I guess like I don't know like he feels like if I be with em or something like that he gets jealous but like I would do the same thing if he was always hanging around with girls. I wouldn't like that.

Researcher: so you think he gets jealous?

G: oh he told me he does

Researcher: do you have a boyfriend h?

H: no.

Researcher: but I'm sure you have crushes

H: sometimes

Researcher: you do e right?

E: yeah

Researcher: e talked about her boyfriend last time

E: yeah, a little bit well, I'm actually starting to get a little better with trusting him mostly because he's not embarrassed to bring me around his family that's the thing no, but I do have a lot of problems with him like I'm trying to get him to stay in line, oh my gosh ! he got in trouble again. He gets in trouble so much

G shakes her head

G: that's him. He used to be bad with me last year, like about my hair. (laughs for a long time) he would always be like, why is ya'all hair like this, why does it stay like that? Talking about black people's hair, no but that' shim he doesn't mean to be racist or anything, that's just him curious asking questions. And I'm like, I don't' know, grease or something??? I don't' know just asking dumb questions.

E: I know, a lot of people think he's racist but he's really not

G: like I knew because he said, it's like a lot of people think (student) is racist but I just laugh about it cause I know he's not racist cause I been cool with him for awhile.

E; one of my other friends is and nobody thinks he is. He's just nuts.

No, I just have problems with my boyfriend and the way he can't keep his mouth shut.

Oh! Especially to teachers. Like one of the teachers who gets on everybody's nerves, he cussed her out and that's why he's out of school now cause he got suspended and I keep telling him to keep his mouth shut and he won't do it

G: I have the same problem with my boyfriend.

Researcher: how do you guys relate to them?

G: I don't know

Researcher: what attracts you to them?

G: I don't know. He 'liked me and we was just real cool friends and he asked me out and I thought about it and I don't know, we just started going out I wasn't really attracted to him in that way, he was just a really cool friend. (thinks and laughs) I don't know.

E: well, I was friends with him for a long time and I liked the way that he treated his last girlfriend. And that made me feel good when he asked me out and I though good, he will treat me like that hopefully and so far he has and um, I don't know, our personalities click good because we're different but at the same time we're the same in a lot of ways and I don't know (laughs) we both think we know each other all the time but we always keep each other guessing, you know what I mean? It's weird. It's one of those weird relationships.

Researcher: what would you want in an ideal boyfriend h?

H: I don't know just somebody I could talk to and be comfortable around him

Researcher: kind of like a good girlfriend?

H nods

Researcher: um, we talked about relationships with girls last time, but let's talk about it again. We talked about how girls can be mean to each other like, being catty and your friend one day but talking about you the next do you guys think this is true?

H: yeah

Researcher: g:

G nods

Researcher: why do you think girls are like that?

G: I don't know they can be jealous

H: sometimes they point out bad things about other people so people don't notice the bad things about them

H: probably more girls, but I use to be friends with more boys.

G: boys

Researcher: and you said boys E and a lot of the girls last time said they were closer to guys, so why were you and why are you closer to boys?

G: well, I was because I was like a tomboy and now I guess it's because girls will sit there and talk about one another but boys it's like I'm not a boy so I know they won't just sit there and talk about me or nothing like that. They don't gossip about each other as much as girls do but sometimes when they start talking about girls, I go somewhere else.

H: I'm not really close with a lot of girls. I have 2 or 3 close girlfriends. And then I have just other girls that I talk to but I don't hang out with them that much

G: you have a club.

Researcher: you're in a club h?

G: it seems like

Researcher: what do you mean by a club?

G: it's everybody knows, you know that club they are right e? it's like all of them they all hang out with each other

E: yeah. They just all hang out with each other But I wouldn't call it a clique cause they're not.

G: it's just just. I don't know.

Researcher: so it's just a little gang of girls?

G: the Gibbstown gang. That's what they are

Researcher: that happens in high school. You create groups . do you think the stereotypes exist of the geeks, jocks, and nerds?

G: if you go into the lunchroom that's exactly how it is. You have the tables it's like, I don't know everybody is in like their own group. Its like that's how it is

Researcher: so it's almost like, do you think the groups represent their identities?

G: yeah!

Researcher: how?

G: you'll have one group it's like it's like all boys that clown around and stuff like that and then you'll have like the sports players or whatever I don't know. It's like it's all segregated. They got like all black people and all white people like it's just how it is.

Researcher: so you 're all in the same lunch?

All: yeah

Researcher: isn't it funny how people segregate themselves?

G: it's cause you're with who you're always with who you been with all your life or whatever

E: that's true cause I know that every year I've been at this school I've sat with the same girl every year. We always have the same lunch. But wait, not every year because I used to sit with this other girl and her friends, but I don't really hang out with them anymore. They seem like they changed. I don't know. So I don't think that you stick with the same people if they change.

Researcher: what about peer pressure? It can have a lot to do with your identity. I'm sure all of you have been faced with it. Do you feel that you're strong enough in who you are to be able to deal with it on your own?

G: I know I am.

Researcher: yeah?

G: I know I am. Because I guess it's the way I act cause people will be like, "want this?" and I'll be like, NO! get out my face!" I don't know I just when I say no they ain't gonna try to pressure me cause they know who I am and how I act. I don't know. It's like if I don't want to do something, they know right then to stop buggin me about it.

Researcher: what about you h? do you feel like that?

H: yeah sometimes. (very quiet voice)

G: she's all quiet people probably be like, come on h! and she's like, (acts demure) no...

All girls laugh

Researcher: do you think that because you're more quiet that people try harder to get you to do things?

H: sometimes.

Researcher: okay...(there is a long pause) well if you guys could choose one word to describe you, what would it be? E, you can start.

E: oh, I don't know.

G: I have to think.

G: (thinks long and hard about this) I think that I am likeable. I'm a likeable person because I talk to a whole bunch of people. Like how some people are mean to certain people like I'm cool with a bunch of people like I'm cool with everybody. I can't explain it. But I know like I could be like with...certain people I'm cool with that I know other people wouldn't be cool with. I'm not trying to make it a whole black white thing, but like a lot of white friends, like certain people wouldn't even talk to them like not because it's racist but because just because they don't talk to them they're not cool with them but it's different, like me and (boy) for instance. Me and him are so cool and it's like, we are so opposite. Aren't we total opposites? (asks the other girls agree) but we are still so cool. I don't know. That's just how I am.

Researcher: so you're likeable? You can get along with anyone?

G: yeah. Definitely

Researcher: what t about you h?

H: well, I can basically get along with everyone but I don't know like my friends would probably say that I was the responsible one because like when everybody's doing something bad I'm always like, okay guys, lets stop.

Researcher: everyone can have a classification like that. What about you e?

E: not me, I don't know, I'm just different. I don't know if I have a classification. Cause I'm different from all my friends. Like I'm way different than this girl and that girl. I don't know I'm just different

G: I think I'm a lot like some of my friends. Some of them, we are so alike, like (girl). We are so alike. We just laugh and laugh and laugh at stupid stuff cause I don't know, we just think the same way.

E: I love *(girl). She's so funny!

G: we just crack up. That's one of the reasons we're so close is cause she is so funny.

Researcher: what do you think about girls who have attitudes? Meaning, you three are very often well behaved, like you don't give your teachers problems, well, I imagine you don't. you don't give me nay problems. So what I'm asking is, why do you choose to come into class and respect authority?

H: well, I want to be a teacher. So I wouldn't want someone coming into my class and acting like that, like all loud and everything. I just think it's disrespectful.

Researcher: so how did you learn respect? Where did you learn it from?

H: my mom.

Researcher: your mom.

H? yeah.

Researcher: and obviously it absorbed!

H: yeah (shyly)

Researcher: how about you two?

G: I learned form like a young age, from like your parents, relatives, people in school...you just learn respect it's like why do stuff to get in trouble when there's no point when you can just behave and don't bother nobody? Why be bad and misbehaving and get in trouble and stuff, there's no point. I don't think there is.

E: yeah, I think I learned in two ways, first was because I'm motivated and I want to learn and the second one is that I went to catholic school when I was in kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grade and every day it was like, "be good, be quiet, you have to be quiet because God likes it when you're quiet." you know? 9laughs) I know it sounds stupid they put the fear in you at a young age you know and it scared me because in kindergarten they'd give you lessons about hell and how you didn't want to go to hell you know so you had to be good. Like they would scare you and tell you if you were bad you were going to hell! And they would say, you don't want to go there, right? And I would say, no I don't'!

Researcher: do you think it's good that you learned that?

E: yeah. Like, (boy) he went there to he was in the same class as me, so that's probably why he's quiet too.

Researcher: so how does school shape your identity?

G: well, it makes me smart. Like I pay attention and I know I'm not dumb like some other people. Some people are dumb in school. Like some people can't even do sports because they're not eligible cause of their grades and that makes me mad because if the team needs them, they don't do their work , so they can't play or nothing.

Researcher: why is school important to you guys? Is it motivated by you or your parents/or both?

All: both.

Researcher: so how does it transfer to you then? How do you learn to do your homework on your own? How does it start to come from inside?

H: well, I do it because I don't want to get bad grades because I want to get into a good college. and if you get bad grades you can't do that, so it affects your future.

G: Before, when I was younger, I didn't think about grades, but I was always into sports and I knew that if I didn't do good, then mom and dad would take me off the team and now it's the same thing but also I really want to go to college so that's why.

E: yeah, my parents have nothing to do with it. My grand mom does though. Most of it is because I want to get into a good college and I want to do good for my grand mom mostly because if I did that, I'd be the first person in my whole family, both sides, to go to college and well, if my cousin gets into college, then it'd be both of us but so both of us would be the first to go to college.

G: he probably will for wrestling.

E: yeah, but that's why because I want my grand mom to be proud of me. You know what I mean? She's really one of the only relatives who I care about what she thinks so . my mom doesn't really care, my mom told me if you want to drop out, drop out, as long as you have a job. And I was like, okay, so you know I don't really pay much attention to my mom when she says stuff like that so basically it's just my grand mom.

Researcher: you have cousins in this school, right g?

G: yeah

Researcher: and I know you have sisters H? do you feel compared to them by your teachers?

H: yep. (laughs)

G: it doesn't matter for me

H: it gets me mad cause (girl) she's really smart. She's my cousin and my sister is smart and my other sister, well, she's kinda like how I am but like, when I go into a classroom they're like, "ohh, another "last name". Are you (cousin's) sister? And I say, no (my sister) and they're like, "oh, she's so good, she's' so quiet. And she gets such good grades and everything"

Researcher: and how does that make you feel?

H: it makes me feel like I have to do as well as her.

Researcher: and I know you want to, right? But you just don't want to have to fill her shoes, right?

H: yeah.

Researcher: and you G?

G: well, I did a couple year ago cause one of my cousins was really smart but it's like now, I have all boy cousins and it's like they do alright, but I do better than them, so I guess it's alright.

E: well, I have a younger brother so it doesn't really apply, but I hate to say this, and (to other girls) don't tell my cousin I said this, but I feel like I'm in constant competition with him because it feels like every month I'm hearing about how good he's doing from my aunt, who is his grand mom and I feel like we're in a competition cause every time he gets a good grade, he's like, oh look at my good grade

G: like in science class.

E: yeah! He's always like, oh I got a 990 and I'm like, yeah well I got a 95.

Researcher: do you have a lot of classes with him?

E: yes! I have this class (English) with him, I have science class with him, I have a bunch of classes with him. And that makes it even worse and it just makes it feel like we're in competition all the time and I don't like to brag but it bothers me because I do better than him and he's still always like, oh I got a 95, and I'm like, I got a 100.

A GIRL WHO HAD DETENTION NOW JOINS US

Researcher: hi D. we were just kinda talking about stuff we talked about last week.

ANOTHER GIRL JOINS US. SHE HAD TO GO SHOPPING FOR PROM STUFF.

THE GIRLS SEEM QUIET AND NERVOUS AS TWO NEW FACES COME INTO THE GROUP. IT TAKES AWHILE TO GET THEM TO START TALKING AGAIN.

RESEARCHER: 'let's talk bout the women you see in society, on television, in movies. Do you feel like you have to live up to what they look like?

A: no, because they look fake.

Researcher: they look fake to you?

E: I mean, you know that they're airbrushed. You know that they are.

Researcher: do you ever forget that they are though? I sometimes do.

E: no, when I see a girl who looks really good in a magazine, I'm just like she's airbrushed, you know she got a little fat pocket there and they just airbrushed that out.

A: they do airbrush everything. Cause I modeled before.

Researcher: you don't need to be airbrushed!

A: oh, I got rolls.

Everyone laughs.

Researcher: how do you feel about your rolls?

A: I don't care! No psyche, I do wish my stomach was flatter but people like actually go and get tummy tucks and stuff and them models, they be sick. They're sick.

Researcher: like with eating disorders you mean.

A: mmm-hmmm.

Researcher: okay, well we talked before about how e is self-conscious about her breasts.

A: who's E? oh, you! I thought she meant britney spears and I'm like, where did britney spears come from?

Researcher: and g is a little self-conscious about her thighs, so do you two have things you're self-conscious about/

D: I don't like my body.

A: your butt?

G: no, her body period.

Researcher: why?

D: I don't know I can't explain it.

Researcher: what do you wish it looked like?

D: like my age I guess. I look like a boy.

Researcher: like more voluptuous?

D: yeah

Researcher? What about you a?

A: I'm straight. Psyche. I like my body though. I mean, I could do some crunches. So what do you want to change?

Researcher: well, I had this surgery on my back for scoliosis when I was 11, so I have a huge scar on my back that goes from my butt to my neck. And I've always been self-conscious about wearing a bathing suit or a shirt with a low cut back.

D: I have that.

Researcher: you do? Most people have a little curve. So, today we talked about parents and whether or not they are too controlling or too lenient. What do you think?

A: I think mines is perfect for me, I don't know. I got to do whatever I wanted and my brothers go tot do whatever they anted and then like well, I got beat when I was younger (says this jovially) so we knew what not to do. So like, they knew they could trust me and I used to be able to do whatever I wanted to and now I still do and my mom will call me just to ask when I'm coming home but they still let me do whatever. I don't know, I think they did a good job raising us. But I don't do nothing, I still don't smoke, I still don't drink. Your mom is strict H?

H: yeah

A: (laughs) she's so nice! Her mom is so nice.

Researcher: how about your mom, d?

A: she's nice, she let's her do whatever. (laughs)

D: she's not really a good parent. S
he doesn't know like what she's supposed to do.

A: she's nice!

D: it's like she's a parent, but she doesn't know what to do when it comes to discipline.

A: your mom is nice. I used to be over there with your sister all the time.

Researcher: um, if you guys were parents, what would you want for your kids? Would you be lenient or strict?

A: if you're strict, they're gonna go out and be wild. Most people that parents were strict, they want to drink getting in trouble, smoking, being hoes. Having babies. Mmm-hmm.

Researcher: do you guys agree?

All agree

A: most people

Researcher: do you guys feel like you can tell secrets to your parents?

A: I tell my mom everything.

Researcher: yeah? About boys?

A: mmm-hmm!

Researcher: smooching?

A: Everything. My mom knows everything like that.

Researcher: but you guys don't feel the same way.

All other girls shake their heads in agreement.

Researcher: do you wish that you could or do you like it how it is? Do you desire to be able to tell your parents stuff?

H: I tell my sisters everything.

D: I don't tell my mom stuff cause she would be up my butt constantly.

Researcher: All right, let's talk about boys. How do relationships with guys shape your identity? Like, if you're in a relationship, I mean why do girls feel the need to have boyfriends? Why is that?

A: cause you feel wanted. Or like loved or something.

Researcher: well, why is it better to be with a boy than to be single? Or do you not agree with that?

G: it don't matter to me. Like he asked me out and I didn't care but at first if I wanted a boyfriend or not. And it's cool.

A: awwwww. I'm happy you found him. That's a long time to be together. But not as long as 3 years.

Researcher: you have a boyfriend?

A: I ain't going with him right now cause he's in college. He alright.

Researcher: oh, he's in college. So does that make you nervous?

A: no. I'm alright. But I was like, look, you're in college, we don't need to be together right now.

E
Taking a break?

A: yeah.

Researcher: so you don't get nervous?

A: no. I used to. I don't know, it's not as hard, I just don't care anymore. I don't know it's cause like people don't realize what they got until it's gone anyways. Like it's not like we broke up on a bad note. He play basketball, so it's like he's always at games and stuff. I ain't got time for that.

Researcher: so would you girls rather be single or in a relationship?

D: in a relationship.

Researcher: why?

D: cause you're never bored. It makes you feel good.

A: but when you're single, you don't know what he is doing neither so it's like you know what I mean? If you're single and you're talking to a boy, you already know he's talking to other girls and I ain't feelin that at all.

Researcher: so you mean the hooking up dating thing?

A: do ya'all call it hooking up? (asks other girls) (some agree, some don't). For the longest time, I ain't trying to be racist, but for the longest time when white people be saying "hooking up" I'm like "hooking up." I thought they was talking about having sex! (Laughs) but they was just talking about kissing and I'm like, DAG, that girl hooked up with everybody! I was like, that girl's a smut. I ain't know the whole time they was talking about kissing.

Researcher: so you think it's something white people say?

A: did you say hooking up g?

G: I don't know, I'm just laughing. No, I don't think I ever used that.

E: but it's not all white people cause my mom thought it mean having sex too.

A: no, I'm not saying it like that, it's okay.

E: no, I know.

A: I'm not saying it like that it's just a lot of my friends, me and my friends we though it was sex and it was just kissing and we was like, oh.

E: yeah, my mom and everybody in her workplace thought that it was oral sex. Cause I said something once about one of my friends hooking up and she was like, you're too young to be hooking up! And I was like, mom, you don't even know what that is and she was like (very dramatic) that's giving somebody head.

Everyone laughs hysterically.

E: and I'm like, no mom, it's not.

A: and what'd she say?

E: she's like, no cause everybody at work said it was. And I'm like, mom, you don't know what you're talking about. You're too old.

A: I just never knew what it meant. I always though it was something else. But what do you say?

Researcher: making out?

A: see, that was another one.

Researcher: so you talk to your mom about sex a?

A: (nods her head.)

Researcher: do you feel like you learned more from your mom or from school?

A: I don't know. Yeah, me and my mom be chillin. My mom talk about that stuff with me and my friends.

Researcher: are their moms as cool as your mom?

A: well, her mom is and I don't know about her mom but she be trying to be out with us all the time. I wouldn't tell her nothing.

Researcher: why do you think women do that?

A: cause they don't want to be old

G: they feel like they want to be close to you.

A: I don't know what they're trying to do. I guess they don't want to be old.

Researcher: have you seen mom s like that that dress real young and try to act like a teenager. Why do they do that?

E: they don't want to be old cause the media portrays old people it makes them seem ugly and decrepit. When you turn 40, they make it seem like you're old.

Researcher: how does that make you girls feel? Cause I know some of my friends, they don't even like to tell their age.

A: how old are they? 25???Would you stop it!

Researcher: well, we'll stop now. I know we didn't have some of the vocal girls from last week.

E: yeah, I think F moved. I heard she moved to Newark with her mom.

G: yeah I heard that too.

E: I hope she comes back to say goodbye. I miss her!

A: aww. I'm happy you guys feel that way about her.

Researcher: why, you don't?

A: no, she's my girl! She goes to my church.

Researcher: um, are you guys embarrassed to talk about sex?

A: are you embarrassed D? speak up!

D: I'm not embarrassed.

A: I know H is embarrassed, cause that's (girls) sister and she's quiet.

Researcher: see, there it is!

Researcher: do you think that guys pressure girls to have sex in general?

A: I don't know. Boys know the deal when it comes to me. I don't play that.

E: men are weird.

A: she said they're weird!

E: they are! Cause one minute they'll tell you

Oh it's okay I won't tell anyone but then when they're talking to their friends it's like, oh she's a smut she's a slut. But then as soon as she comes around again, they'll want to have sex with her.

A: I know exactly what she's saying.

G: yeah, they'll call her a smut, but they'll want to hook up with her.

Researcher: cause you know the stereotype that the more girls a guy sleeps with the cooler he is and the more guys a girl sleeps with the sluttier she is.

E: yeah, the guy is a ladies man, but the girl is a slut. But that's the guy's fault too, they don't have to have sex with the girl. Guys can say no too.

A: but they never do!

Researcher: why are guys so into sex?

E: it's supposed to be cool for a guy. They want to be able to come into school Monday and be like, oh I got laid this weekend.

A: oh, she said 'COME' AND like paused after and I was like, What? (laughs)

Researcher: sex is something that seems so forbidden and at the same time it's something that's so natural. But do you girls think it's scary?

A: it's crazy. It's crazy how many young girls is having sex. It's crazy. I don't even know if I want to have kids. Cause I know how many younger people in the 7th and 8th grade is having sex and I don't know if I want my kid to be...uh-uh! You going to a private school!

G: my friend just had a baby. She'll be 1 in May

A: It just makes me think back to when I was in the 7th and 8TH grade and I was not worrying about nobody having sex. I was running around worrying about what party to go to. I ain't gonna lie I used to go to the older parties in 7th and 8th grade but I never smoked. I did drink, but I never smoked and I never got drunk neither. And I never tried to have sex with nobody neither. Little girls around here be talking about I'll be like, they did what? They need to still be playing with their dolls and stuff.

Researcher: do you think there's like a right age to have sex?

A: um, not really but definitely not young.

E: I think you got to be old enough to know what you're doing. I think you should be with someone that you love and that you know is not just gonna hit it and quit it. For lack of better words.

Researcher: do you think it should always be with someone you love?

A: yeah, but it's not like that. Them boys need to watch them health slides. They'll make everybody not want to have sex. I don't care if you got a boyfriend. With all the scabies and herpes and all that. I was just like, mmm-hmmm.

Researcher: does it scare you when you learn about s.t.d.'s?

A: yes, gonorrhoea. Chlamydia.

Researcher: does it scare you h?

H: not really cause I don't have sex. And if you think about it, it does scare me a little cause like A says, they're so many people in this school that go around and do stuff so you could just be walking next to somebody and they could have something and you don't even know about it.

A: yeah, I don't like that at all. Scabies, can't you get that from touching somebody?

E: you can get it from kissing.

A: that's why I don't kiss nobody. I've only had one person, and that's the person I been with for 3 some years and that's that.

Researcher: why do you think some girls will hear the information they hear in health class and stiff go out and have unprotected sex?

A: they want to be popular. They want to be down. I don't care. I ain't got time for that.

D: cause they want guys to pay attention to them so they think if they have sex guys will pay attention to them more.

E: they think it won't happen to them. They'll say, oh I got friends that it happened to, but it won't happen to me. Or if they don't have any friends who have anything, they think it won't happen tot hem. It's that kind of a thing. They're so sure that there's nobody around here that has anything. That, oh he's clean, he doesn't have anything. That kind of a thing.

A: they think from clothes that they're okay. Okay, well take the clothes off. Let's turn on the Lights. Let's see what's going on down there.

Researcher: how do you girls know that people in this school actually can get something?

A: oh please, this school probably has one of the highest rates of aids.

Researcher: why are you able to believe that over others/

A: cause I'm smart.

G: cause it's a small town. Everybody gossips. Everybody knows something about somebody.

E: well, yeah, not to mention that blood drive. Didn't 30 people have aids?

G: 30 people had aids in our school. Yup.

Researcher: what?

E: out of the seniors and juniors.

G: they gave blood and they tested the blood for aids cause you can't give nobody blood with aids and 30 people had aids.

Researcher: when did this happen?

A: at the blood drive last year.

Researcher: and did they tell anyone?

A: they told the people I guess? But wait, they didn't know who it was. I don't know the people that it was, but I heard it was 35.

Researcher: does that make you scared?

A: no, I don't touch nobody's blood.

G: but that's like, you got to be 17 or 18 to give blood so that's like all the juniors and seniors.

E: and not to mention all these younger girls they want to mess around with the older guys. And the older guys are the ones that probably have it. I can only imagine.

Tape 3

C, D, E, and B, H, and G are here

Before we officially begin, the girls are talking about the word “gay,” as it is the last name of one of the participants, and they are wondering why the boys think it’s so funny to say, “Miss Gay.”

Researcher: To get started today, I want you to circle as many things on this list that you think apply to you. Whatever you feel comfortable with. You can pick more than one thing from each category.

(Researcher hands out “Identities” Warm-up)

E: Do you want us to put our names on it too?

Researcher: yes.

B: what do you mean by relationships? Like, what I am to someone?

Researcher: yeah, you could be a lot of things under relationships.

B: okay.

(The girls sit quietly while filing out their warm ups.

C: what do you mean by lover? Like if you’re gay?

Researcher: like, if you think you’re a lover.

G: I’m a lover.

The girls continue to quietly chat about the categories and how they fit into them.

B: I don’t know what to put for political affiliation. (Thinks about it for awhile) I’m an independent.

D: Heterosexual means straight, right?

Researcher: yeah.

B: yeah, I had to think about it too!

Researcher: Vocabulary word!

E: I don't know what rural, urban and suburban are?

Researcher: Urban is like the city, suburbs are outside of the city, and rural areas are farmlands.

E: (think about this for a sec). So what are we?

C and B: suburbs!

G: what about for job and career? I can put student, right?

E: unless you have a part time job.

Researcher: okay, so what do you girls think you selected that I the same for all of you?

B: female. (Laughs)

Everyone laughs

C: Daughter.

Researcher: did everyone pick daughter?

G: no.

Researcher: why?

G: cause I didn't see it.

C: Democrat.

Researcher: did anyone else pick democrat?

B: I'm confused on that one.

D: yeah, I don't know what I am.

C: I think that everybody here would be a democrat.

B: what does that mean?

Researcher: politically?

C: it's working class, middle class.

Researcher: well, you choose if you want to be a democrat or a republican. When you guys register to vote, you'll have to register as Democrat, Republican or Independent.

B: Independent! (Smiles)

E: you only get three choices?

Researcher: That's why if you don't know, if you don't want to classify yourself just yet, you can always register as an independent. But traditionally, you're right C. Democrats do historically represent the working class and Republicans are most about big businesses. But you girls shouldn't listen to me because I admit that I've very biased. And I could sit here for hours and tell you all about my liberal views, but we're not gonna go there! So what else did you girls circle?

D: Cousin.

Researcher: does everyone have cousin?

All: yeah.

Researcher: what else?

E: American.

Researcher: How many picked "in a relationship?"

4 out of 6 raise their hands. (B, D, E, and G)

Researcher: you're all citizens, correct?

All: yeah.

Researcher: suburban dwellers, right?

All: yeah.

Researcher: and from previous conversations, I am assuming that you are all heterosexuals?

All: yeah. (Note on this: E returned her sheet and showed me that she chose "bisexual" but didn't want to talk about it in the group setting)

Researcher: okay, so if you could pick just one thing from this list that could represent your identity, what would it be?

C: Ethnicity.

Researcher: Okay, ethnicity. Which would be?

C: Puerto-Rican.

Researcher: why is that the most important to you?

C: because a lot of people think that I'm White.

Researcher: does that make you upset?

C: It doesn't upset me, but people still don't believe me when I try to correct them. And it's a big part of my life.

Researcher: okay, H, which one is most important to you?

H: I'd have to say relationships, cause I have good relationships with my family. I'm close with my family.

Researcher: okay, so daughter and sister are most important to you?

H: yeah.

Researcher: how about you G?

G: I don't know. I'm not sure.

E: I'd say relationships because who you are is mostly determined by who you hang out with.

B: I'd say relationships too because I'm close with my family.

D: I'd say relationships too because I'm close with my friends and boyfriend.

Researcher: does everyone feel like that about relationships? That they are very important?

All: yeah.

Researcher: so do you all feel defined by who you hang out with?

B: no. Just because you hang out with a certain person doesn't mean you're going to act like them. Like, I don't do everything that all my friends do. And they don't necessarily do what I do, so.

Researcher: then how do you become friends with them?

B: because we like the same stuff. Well like doing the same kinds of things. But not everything we do is the same.

C: I think that is very true, but at the same time, if you hang out with somebody that, like if you're a classy person and you hang out with someone that is really cool but might be kinda slutty or something, um people are gonna look at you like you're slutty too.

E: yeah, but at the same time you might turn into being slutty because your friends will say, "h that" okay, you can do that with this guy."

B: but like, I don't follow what people say.

C: Well, I was just saying that people sometimes look at things the wrong way

B: well, people may think that, but. Okay, I know how to say it. Your identity you don't get it by the people you hang out with, but other people get your identity by the people you hang out with, you know what I mean? Like, people see you by the people you hang out with, but you don't base who you are by the people you hang out with. Does that make sense?

C: yeah, cause I know, some of the people I hang out with aren't exactly the best kinds of people, but still they're my friends and people are like, "oh you hang out with so and so" and I'm like, yeah, so what? I'm not gonna change who I'm friends with just because you don't like em. Or some of my other friends are like more prude or preppy and they'll be like, why are you hanging out with her and I'll say, well I've been friends with her a long time and I'm not gonna stop just because of you. So. That's just the way I am.

Researcher: we talked last week about the true self and the false self and how sometimes you may behave a certain way in front of your parents or relatives and another way in front of your friends. Do you two (B and C) think that exists?

B: yeah. Like, I do that sometimes, like well not so much, like I can be real open with my family but like I curse more when I'm with my friends

C: (shakes her head)

Researcher: you don't think so.

C: no. My relationship with my cousin (her guardian) is so open that I can actually tell her more than I could ever tell any friend. That's how open my relationship is. I feel like she's actually my best friend and if I ever had a problem, she'd be the first person I'd tell, and I can curse in my house, if I wanted to do something, she's let me do it. I guess she just feels like, get it out of the way. If I'm gonna do something, it's better just to do it to

get it done early instead of trying to rebel I guess? So, yeah we have a good relationship. Not anything bad I mean though, cause I'm not a bad kid.

Researcher: okay, we briefly talked last week about body image and drugs and alcohol and I just want to expand on that now because things like that can really impress upon who you are as a person. Things like peer pressure, drinking, and the images you see constantly in the media. What do you think about the way women are portrayed in TV or the movies?

E: I don't like it. I don't like it because you know that in just about every movie there are these stick thin women and nobody looks like that! Nobody looks like that unless they're anorexic or something.

G: people look like that.

E: Some people, but most people don't. It's just some people. Because, okay I'm gonna use an example. Do you remember when the Victoria's Secret model show came out? Well, they're all dressed in skimpy clothes and they all look perfect and stuff like that, it makes guys think that there should be a standard for girls too. And that bothers me because a lot of my friends get bothered by it because I have a lot of heavy friends and they get upset about stuff like that. They get upset and they start calling themselves fat and ugly and it upsets me that women are portrayed like that because not all women are skinny.

Researcher: do you girls think there's an ideal figure for you to obtain as a woman?

H: I don't think there is because everybody likes something different. Some guys like big girls and other guys don't so having a variety of different girls I think is healthy.

Researcher: it's interesting that you think that way. Because in reality, most girls you see on the television are all the same. And we all know that they're airbrushed, but sometimes, you almost believe it's real. So how do you know that it's not real?

E: you don't know, you've just got to think it in your head. You have to, otherwise you're feel bad about how you look.

Researcher: how are some girls able to be confident in their body image while others are not?

B: like, the way they're brought up not to care what other people think about them. Like I don't care. Well, maybe I will, so I shouldn't say that. I don't know.

Researcher: but who's ever had the thought that they ate too much or I shouldn't have another piece of cake. I mean, I've had thoughts like that, I think a lot of women do. But is that normal?

C: well, it's not normal for somebody like you!

Everybody laughs.

C: you should have another piece!

Researcher: well, then why do we have those thoughts? Everyone has his or her hang-ups. Why do I have those thoughts sometimes?

G: cause we don't want to gain a lot of weight.

D: cause you want to compare yourself to everyone who is thin.

Researcher: what do you think, C?

C: why are you asking me? I don't know. Maybe you think that if you eat too much you're gonna gain weight too quickly or something?

Researcher: but why is it even bad to gain weight, like why is that a bad thing in our society?

C: cause all girls think it's a bad thing. I can't say I think it's a bad thing cause I've been this way since I was little. I was lean when I was a baby, but I gained weight when my dad died. But I personally don't think it's a bad thing. I mean, I've tried diets, but none worked.

Researcher: do you try them because you want to or because...

C: I wanted to because I have heart problems in my family. My great grandma died from one, my grand mom had cancer. She also had heart problems. My aunt had cancer. I mean, I don't want to have heart problems.

Researcher: well, that's a very mature way of thinking.

D: I think every girl has it in her head that they should be perfect so that they can have a relationship with guys. So other girls that aren't up to their level, they like compare themselves to them.

Researcher: do you think guys think girls should look a certain way?

C: If a guy likes me, they better like me for me, not because of what I look like. Because if they're not with me because of my weight, then I don't want them.

Researcher: E, do you feel the pressure to look a certain way because of guys?

E: oh yeah, definitely. But that's why I have the boyfriend that I have cause he doesn't really care. And that's what I like, cause I can like wake up in the morning and have my hair all over the place, and I forgot to wash my face the night before so I have makeup all over the place and he won't even care. That's the best part. 9smiles)

Researcher: and that makes you feel good?

E: Mmm-hmm. He just doesn't care and I'll be like, my hair is so knotty, I need to brush my hair and he's like, I don't care! You're still beautiful. And you always want to hear that. Even when you feel nasty! You don't want to hear that you have the afro you shouldn't have in the morning. You don't want to hear that. You still want to hear that you're beautiful cause it gives you motivation when you hear people say that and that's why people want to have a certain image. Because they think that if they get the perfect body or the perfect face or something, then they'll get compliments all the time. And I guess that's like the perfect motivation for everybody.

Researcher: do you all wear makeup? Who wears makeup?

All raise their hand but G and D.

D: I do sometimes, when I feel like it.

Researcher: G, you don't wear it? Why not?

G: cause I don't wear it. Cause I don't need to. Why do I need something on my face to look better?

Researcher: but obviously you made a conscious choice to not wear it and I just think that's interesting and I want to hear more about it!

G: I don't know. I can't explain it, I just don't want to wear it. It doesn't interest me. I just don't want to wear makeup. I never did, so.

Researcher: okay, so why do you other girls like makeup?

D: I wear it sometimes to cover up the pimples.

B: I didn't used to wear makeup until I came to high school and my aunt was like, you have to wear makeup, you're going to high school! But I don't wear cover up; I just wear like eye stuff.

E: that's the same thing I do.

C: I don't really wear it here, but when I go other places.

Researcher: do you ever use like fun stuff like glitter or crazy colored eye shadows?

E: no, you get criticized.

Researcher: yeah? Really?

E: you would! Like if (this girl) did it, nobody would care. She does it all the time.

B: she does good makeup. Her eyes look so cool.

E: but people, normal people, well not normal cause I' not saying she's abnormal but

C: but she's weird.

E: well, normal people like us if we did that, it would be like, omigod that's nasty, she looks like a prostitute. Like people would be saying stuff like that.

B: well, I really think, you know how we were talking about TV and how it portrays women, well, I think if you're pretty on TV, you're either dumb and ditzy or (thinks about this for a bit) a whore. Like, I see that a lot, like Jessica Simpson. She's not a whore, so she's ditzy. And like Britney Spears, she's not ditzy, so they like show everything bad about her, all the bad things she does. And like the Hilton girls, they're pretty and the media just shows them as whores. You know what I mean?

E: And dumb!

Researcher: that is a trend I think.

G: not everybody though.

B: well, I'm not saying like every character.

G: oh wait, like that show Love and Marriage...Married with Children! Yeah! She was so dumb!

E: I think they use it more as a stereotype because people think it's funny. Like if you have a dumb blonde or someone who's really pretty and really stupid, like people like to see that. I don't know, some part of you wants to see that.

Researcher: for entertainment purposes?

E: yeah.

Researcher: it's interesting to think about the choices studios make and why they want to have women like that. And even when they try to be cutting edge and different, like with that new show, "the L word." Have you girls heard about it? It's about lesbians and it's

supposedly representative of what lesbians go through, but of course all the women are drop dead gorgeous and I think it's misleading.

B: oh, of course, they have to be hot so guys will watch it.

Researcher: yeah, like they had to look sexy.

E: yeah, and they're normal people. That bothers me too. I don't want to get into that, cause I'll end up saying something bad. But honestly though, like, guys always talk about that, and as soon as they hear "lesbian" they're like, "oh can I watch?" And that that just makes people so mad. Oh! Cause my cousin is a lesbian and one of her friends said that to her when she came out and she wanted to kill him. So bad! But that's just it, that's [probably the only reason they have that show in the first place because guys want to see it or whatever.

Researcher: yeah, well it's a conglomerate. The networks and cable, they all want to make money! But let's get back to, why do you think (the girl) is allowed to wear that kind of makeup when other girls are not?

C: because if anyone says anything to her, they know that she won't care what they have to say because words don't bother her. But if you say something to somebody else, they will care and it will bother them. So they won't wear it.

E: no, I think it's more because everything she does is weird, so nobody really regards it as different when she does something like that. That's why I like her so much.

Researcher: is there something in her personality that you guys would like to have, or do you think you have? Do you know what I mean?

E: I just admire her for being so different.

B: yeah, like she doesn't care.

E: I would hate to be like everybody else.

B: like if I came to school with black hair and pink streaks...

G: well, in the beginning of school last year, she was not at all like that.

D: she wasn't like that the year before that either.

G: she was never like that. But I don't know, she just started changing.

D: she always had the personality that she didn't care, but just this year she started dying her hair and wearing all that makeup.

Researcher: things like that happen in high school. People change a lot from their freshman to senior years. Different things influence you when you're deciding who you want to be as a person. I'm sure you girls are going to be different when you're seniors. Because I think that your experiences around you shape who you are, you know?

Okay, let's talk about experimentation with drugs and alcohol. Um, does anyone feel like invulnerable to drugs and alcohol, meaning that you don't feel like you'll ever be pressured to try...um, has everyone here been involved with alcohol.

All: yes.

Researcher: okay, um, is it easy to say no?

B: I think it's easier to say no to alcohol than it is to say no to somebody trying to get you to smoke weed or something.

G: I think it's the opposite.

C: I think it's the opposite.

G: if somebody asks you to do a drug, it's easy to say no.

B: well I do drink, so no one really pressures me. Yeah, that's probably why. Like, I drink, I'm not gonna lie, but I've never smoked, but I've been asked and asked again and I'm just like, get away from me.

Researcher: and is it hard to say no?

B: it's not hard it's just when they bug you and bug you and bug you like it's like you want to say yes so that they stop asking you.

Researcher: and are you curious?

B: sometimes.

G: so many boys in our class do it.

Researcher: do you smoke?

G: no. I drink here and there, but not a lot. I don't be drinking like that.

Researcher: do you remember the first time that you drank?

All: yeah.

D: I got really drunk.

B: I don't really remember?

Researcher: well, what did you drink? Liquor or beer?

C: it was wine.

H: it was liquor.

E: I drank champagne once at a wedding and after that, I just don't like alcohol. Any kind because it tastes horrible.

B: liquor.

D: I think it was liquor?

Researcher: so why is that such a part of the culture of our country? You're all way underage, so why is it a rite of passage to drink?

G: cause you can find it anywhere. It's always at a party. There's always something to drink.

Researcher: but why is it so fun to get drunk?

C: cause you think that. Well, this isn't for me, but people think that if they're drinking, they're like grown up and rebelling against their parents, so they feel like they have a freedom maybe.

D: I do it to have fun.

B: me too.

C: I don't see what's so fun about it. You throw up. If you drive home you could die. If you walk home you could die. If you get on a bike you could die. If you're running down the street and the cops chase you, you could die.

G: but you could die doing any of those things sober.

C: and it increases the chances when you're drunk, that's all I'm saying.

Researcher: so why does she have one belief and you girls another?

C: but I'm not saying that, I mean, I drink too. I drink once in awhile, but I stay home when I drink. I don't go nowhere because I don't want to put myself in a situation where I'm gonna get hurt or anything.

E: well, most people don't think that there's anything that can hurt you when you drink.

B: you can die from drinking. You could get alcohol poisoning.

E: yeah, everybody thinks that smoking is so nasty, but me, I'd rather smoke than drink.

B: everybody says that. That if you smoke, you just get high and it's chill.

D: you don't die if you smoke weed. There's no way you could die. You could never prove it.

B: but I've always been told that it's worse to smoke weed than to drink. And that's why I think I don't do it.

Researcher: do you think the only reason that a lot of you have only drank and don't smoke pot is because one is legal and another is not?

E: no, that has nothing to do with it. Everybody puts down pot a lot more than they do alcohol. You hear that a lot from teachers. But I was the opposite! I tried pot way before anything else. I don't know, somebody offered it to me that I liked, it was in sixth grade.

B: 6th grade!

E: well yeah, if it's somebody that you really like,

B: I would not do that because I went out with a guy that smoked, and I never smoked.

E: well, did he go, "oh, hey try it, you'll have a lot of fun?"

B: um, not him but his friends did.

E: yeah, well that's his friends, it's not him. If you liked him a lot, like I liked my cousin a lot.

G: your cousin?

E: yeah.

G: what?

E: yeah, my cousin. Not a boy that I liked liked.

G: oh, I thought it was a boy you liked, and I was like, your cousin?

E: see, because I don't have any older brothers and sisters, so I use my older cousins as my older brothers and sisters and way back then, I was hanging out with them a lot and they were always there for me cause I had nobody else to go to.

B: like, you respected them.

E: well, yeah, they were like my older brothers and sisters. You know, B, cause you have them.

B: well, my brother knows I drink, but if he found out I was smoking, he would kill me.

Researcher: do you think he does?

B: no. I really don't think he does. Just the fact that I just don't think that he does.

Researcher: but you were saying that you don't think that the reason is because one's legal and one's not, so what's the reason?

H: I think it's because weed is bad. Like, if you do it you're real bad and like...

G: I think different though, cause I think like in Gibbstown and Paulsboro, I don't know, they like more smoked then they started drinking, but in Gibbstown, they were into drinking more, but in Paulsboro more kids smoked weed and they didn't drink alcohol a lot, but now they are. Like, a lot of Paulsboro people smoke weed, but a lot of Gibbstown people are doing it now.

Researcher: what do you think that has to do with?

G: where you grew up I guess. Like I don't smoke weed, I never tried it. I don't know why people do in Paulsboro.

E: yeah, I'm pretty sure it's what all the older people are doing. That's where you get it from.

C: I know that um, I don't alcohol as really evil because um, for me because I don't think that it's something that I could get hooked on, I just think it's something you can use to have a good time for a night or whatever. But my mom and my dad were drug addicts and everything and the reason why I'm not with my mom anymore is because of that and I don't want to go down the same road as them and that's why I don't try drugs. I'll never put a needle in my arm or powder in my nose or a cigarette to my lip. And I'm not saying that in ever tried cigarettes cause when I was little I did, but I'll never do that again. Or weed.

Researcher: it's interesting how people make decisions like that. You all know that I waitress. And last night one of the waitresses came in and was completely beaten up. She had a black eye, bruises, everything. And she has two kids. Been married for 20

some years. Why do you think some women can't get away from that? Why are some women stronger than others?

B: she probably thought he was going to kill her.

C: well, she's weak. It's obvious that she is. She's not strong at all. Because she thinks she needs him. She's probably saying, "I love him, I can't leave him. I need to be there for him, he's having a tough time." And she needs to get her kids out of there, she needs to do what's right for her and them kids by getting out right now. She's not helping them by ticking around.

G: maybe she needs him for support or whatever. Like she can't leave him with her kids.

C: well, it's called child support, that's all I have to say. Leave, get a divorce and file for child support.

Researcher: so do you feel sympathy or empathy for her, G? Like you can understand what she's going through?

G: mmm-hmmm. I don't know, just I look at things from a different perspective. Like I look at it from C's point of view and I know why she would say that but you got to look at it from her perspective too, you gotta think about how she feels. Like she needs him, she's lonely, she has two kids.

Researcher: could any of you ever imagine loving anyone so much that even if they hurt you you would stay with them?

E: no.

B: well, like a couple weeks ago, my cousin, she's really bad, no one in my family really likes her and a couple weeks ago she said that her boyfriend hit her and when I talked to her she said, "where else am I going to go?" and I said, if they knew the circumstances, they would understand and now she wants to go back to him and I told her that once it happens once it'll happen again and she's just retarded basically.

C: um, well, I know that I think my mom was sixteen when she started doing drugs, and she got my dad to start and they were together for like ten years and then they had me and my sister but they were together till I was like 4 and I know that my dad like beat my mom and everything. And she deserved it, but I remember one time I came home and there was a knife or something but after that she left so um, she didn't, he never got anything, but after the knife incident, she left and everything but basically I guess she figured that was enough and she said she loved him and everything, but I guess she couldn't deal with him hitting her, but she like, I don't know. We lived with my grand mom after that.

Researcher: did he ever hit you?

C: nope, never laid a hand on me or my sister.

Researcher: so, you feel because your father never touched you, you feel sympathetic towards how he reacted when he was on drugs? Like how he behaved?

C: I'm angry that he couldn't realize what he was doing and that he couldn't stop well, actually he did, he did go A.A., and he did stop, but he slipped up once and that's when he OD'd. But I never even knew he was on drugs till I was with my cousin. She told me the whole truth.

Researcher: how old were you then?

C: 13

Researcher: how old are you now?

C: 16.

Researcher: so did you have those beliefs about not doing drugs before you knew about your dad?

C: no.

Researcher: okay.

C: I just like started to believe that the past few years. I was completely different then.

E: yup she was.

Researcher: describe her.

G: well I knew her back since like second grade.

C: she knew me for the longest. So describe me. I was a bitch!

Researcher: she'll describe herself.

C: well, I can tell the truth.

Researcher: is that what you were going to say G?

E: well, she definitely was angry. Not like at anybody, she was just angry.

C: I fought all the time. All the time. I fought, I cursed teachers out.

G: she's still like that.

Everyone laughs.

E: well, now she's not like angry for with no one to blame it on. Back then she just got mad for no reason. She got angry at everybody. And now only if somebody does something to make her mad, then she'll be mad at them.

Researcher: do you think that anger was a direct result of your father's death?

C: yeah I couldn't come to terms with it. I wouldn't accept it.

Researcher: did you accept it when you found out what was behind it?

C: I think it was more the fact that I was fine then. After I found out.

Researcher: were you going to say something before E?

E: yeah, I think that what you allow to happen in your relationships all depends on how you were brought up. Like, her (C) decision not to do drugs came from what her parents did and me personally, I made a decision that nobody will ever touch me or beat me because I will not put my kids through what I've been through. My step dad was a severe alcoholic and he did drugs constantly and he just beat me all the time. And I didn't even do anything and he would just chase after me and beat me. But usually he would end up just giving me horrible bruises and I would just like have to wear long sleeves in the summer and stuff cause my mom would make me cover it up.

G: does he still do drugs?

E: no, he just stopped drugs. I mean, he still drinks a lot but he's better without the drugs. And one time, he um, he punched me in the face and I had a really big black eye and I didn't tell you (to C) why I wasn't able to help you with that project, remember in 8th grade? And you were real mad at me? That was why, I couldn't see anybody, my mom wouldn't let me out of the house cause I had a big goose egg from him punching me and I wasn't allowed out at all. And I told everybody that I was sick, cause I had to cover it up and don't anybody in this group tell anybody about that please.

Researcher: no, everyone should know that everything we talk about is always confidential.

E: but he was always like that and he even, he just was outrageous. He even threw something at my brother one time, I don't remember what it was but he threw something at him and he had to get stitches and my mom made up another lie about that one. She constantly lied about it. But that was because she grew up without a dad. Her dad walked

out when she was like 5. So she was never around anybody who did that. But, just like I said, I would never put my kids through that, I mean, he never beat her, he always beat me. All the time.

Researcher: did you ever talk to your mom about it?

E: she was there! She would be in the same room and she wouldn't do anything. That's part of the reason why I don't like my parents.

G: I wouldn't either. That's awful.

E: no seriously, I mean now he doesn't like I said cause he's off the drugs. But that's how he was every night.

C: well, have you forgiven him? Are you nice to him?

E: I haven't forgiven him but he, he, they separated for a few months and when he came back he told me to just forget everything. Like it never happened.

C: How can you forget something like that????

E: I know, that's just it. I just don't get it why he wants me to forget everything.

(H has to leave us at this point)

C: that's like what happened with me and my cousin. Like my mom wanted me and my sister to move back with us and I was like, after all this you put me through, after all the drugs and all that, and all the beatings that you gave me for no reason, you just came home drunk in the middle of the night or didn't come home at all, and all that, and you had chances, but you missed all our visits and all that, you want me to come back and live with you? I'm not gonna give you the HONOR of me coming back to live with you. (Fights back tears) you're missing out on me. It's my time. I'm going on with my life. You do what you have to do. So, I don't know if she's doing drugs or not, or if she's still drinking but there's always places I see her. She saw me and she started crying.

Researcher: she lives around here?

C: yeah.

G: I remember your mom. She used to always be around, like when we had something at school. Or something like that, right?

C: she came to my little sister's stuff, but she never came to my stuff.

G: oh.

C: but like, is everybody here a religion? Cause I was wondering, and you (the researcher) didn't ask about religion on this sheet thing.

Researcher: oh, I forgot!

C: I was just wondering, is everybody here a specific religion?

D: I'm not really.

E: do you believe in God?

D nods her head

E: do you believe in Jesus?

D: yeah.

E: then you're Christian.

D" but I'm not Christian.

E: It doesn't mean you have to go to church, but if you believe in God and you believe he's our creator and everything, you're a Christian.

C: Well, that's just like a Catholic.

E: well, that's like what's on here, Christian. (Refers to the identities sheet)

C: well, is that what you are? A Christian?

E: yeah.

C: and you don't know what you are G?

G: well, I go to church.

C: cause I don't know about you, but I think this is interesting. I'm an atheist.

Researcher: why?

C: because I believe after all the stuff that happened to me in my life, I don't believe in a God.

B: I don't want to like try to change your mind or anything, but like, sometimes, for a long time, well not that long, like the past 4 months, I wasn't like believing in God because my Grand pop passed away and well, both my grandfathers passed away in the

past two years and like, they were the best old men ever. So I was like, why would you take someone when there are so many other people who could be taken? Then you like realize that you like have to go through like hard times in your life to be stronger I guess? And like, you definitely, like oh my gosh! (to C) If I was, if I had your life, I don't know, I don't think I could survive and I don't know how you went through all that, like without, like you seem so strong and overcoming. If I went through that, like right now if that stuff happened to me, I would probably; I don't know what I would do. So maybe, I'm not trying to make you believe in God but maybe God just did that so that you're a strong person? I don't know. Cause you are! Like, you have to be the strongest person I know right now in my life.

C: thank you. But I.I just don't see how if there is a God, if there is someone who thinks that there's someone as strong as me, or if you're somebody who's such a good person, how can you punish someone who's such a good person?

E: but I don't believe it's a punishment. It's more like experience.

C: Well, I don't think it's a very good experience. I mean, my dad died when I was 7, my grand pop died on my sister's birthday. More people in my family have died than I don't even know and friends of the family and I just don't understand how there could be a God.

E: I don't think that it's a good experience, I just I believe it's like, you learn how it feels

C: I mean, like not to mention, I'm being tested for cancer. I mean, why can't he just let something good happen to me?

E: (sighs in empathy)

C: that's all I want to know. If there is a God.

E: well, that's the way that I see it and it's helped me through everything. You just look at it as a test and it'll be over soon. A test, a learning experience, and it has to get better soon. That's how you have to look at it, that's how I look at it, otherwise, you go through life as a pessimist. You know what I mean?

B: what's a pessimist?

E: someone who looks at the glass half empty, you know?

B: oh! Ok. Oh yeah, I've heard of that.

E: you know, everything's horrible and it will only get worse!

B: that's what I was thinking, and I start thinking like you too, E, because, like I know I don't have it bad, like I have a good family, like they're annoying, cause they're always

together, but I'm glad about that cause some people don't have families like mine, like my friends are like, "oh my gosh! How can you talk to your aunts like that?" like, not curse at them and I tell them every problem that I have and they don't understand that, and it's just cause I feel comfortable telling them my problems. And my uncles, I don't know, I just love my family. (Laughs)

C: actually, my grand mom has 15 brothers and sisters, and out of them, I only talk to her. Mot one of her sisters or brothers, not cousins, no. That's it.

E: so you have relatives you don't even know about! You probably have a bunch of cousins.

B: I'm like close with like my third cousins. Like, that's how close my family is!
(Laughs again)

(Researcher hands out closing activity, which contains questions about beauty)

Researcher: I just wanted to ask you before we leave if you found any of the categories on the "identities" worksheet to be objectionable.

E: I think white and black. White and black is just too broad.

C: I think that um, Negro, what the hell? Negro and African-American, I mean, like African-American is basically black, so they don't need to put black on here again, but I guess African-American is like from Africa, so they can keep black, but what's Negro? That's what I want to know.

G: it's black. Some people call themselves that. Just like a lot of this stuff is like the same thing as white.

Researcher: so you prefer hearing African-American or black?

C: well, I just say black because it doesn't offend anybody. Does it? I think it makes people angry when you say African-American.

G: not black people.

C: because, it's like, you're trying not to make them mad by saying black, so you say African-American. I don't know.

G: I think that "Afro-American" is weird, that just sounds simple. Afro, like you got an Afro, you're an "Afro-American"

RESEARCHER COLLECTS ALL WRITINGS : END OF TAPE THREE

Tape 4

SUBJECTS B, C, E, H ARE HERE

Researcher hands out warm-up activity.

Researcher: write down the qualities you think the ideal girl has, try to think of as many as possible. Then I want you to tell me who the anti girl is, the girl no one wants to be. Think of a girl you know or someone portrayed in the media.

E: do you want us to write our names on this?

Researcher: yeah, so I have it as a record for the paper when I have to analyze. And just follow the directions for the second part about what makes a strong leader.

C: why does it have to be a girl? Why can't it be a person?

Researcher: well, that's the whole purpose of my thesis. The identities of girls. How girls form their identity, you know.

SUBJECT A JOINS US AND RESEARCHER FILLS HER IN ON DIRECTIONS

B: what's that book you have?

Researcher: oh, it's the book I've been using to read up on the research for my thesis. It's about aggression in girls, the hidden culture of it. It's really interesting. I also read this book, *Reviving Ophelia*, that I really recommend to you all. And a girl who read that book ended up writing a book of her own called, *Ophelia Speaks*. She sent out letters to girls all around the country and asked them to respond.

B: you should write them down so I can get them!

Researcher: All right, let's talk about what you wrote. Ideal girl, how about you just read from your list real quick?

E: smart, pretty, kind, confident, talented, popular, strong.

B: intelligent, happy, optimistic, funny, pretty, athletic, nice family, sense of humor, nice to others, doesn't judge people quickly, fair and equal, tries her best, confident.

H: very kind, respectful to themselves and to others, average weight, good self-esteem, happy with their lives and their self, smart, natural.

C: caring, respectful, giving, honest, trustworthy, responsible, intelligent, high self-esteem, looks for the good in both people and things

A: nice, trustworthy, smart, cares about others feelings, classy, sweet, funny, nice family, doesn't judge.

Researcher: those are good! Nice! How about the anti-girl?

E: alright, dumb, ugly, rude, un-liked, weak and fake.

B (laughs at this)

B: um, does drugs, doesn't try to improve, ignorant, selfish, conceited, not confident, talks about people, grumpy, moody, doesn't care about other people

H: mean and angry, not respectful, no self-esteem, depressed, dumb, fake.

C: catty, jealous, worries too much about fashion, lies, back-stabber, low self-esteem, doesn't take any pride in your appearance, constant negativity, fake.

A: mean, not trustworthy, doesn't care about others feelings, nasty, liars, two-faced.

Researcher: did you all put mean?

E: I put rude.

Researcher: you didn't B.

B: no, but others like it.

Researcher: well, let's talk about mean, cause I did this with you and that was the first thing I wrote. What does that mean? To be mean? Describe what the mean girl does or is.

B: they always point out the negative.

A: (in a mocking tone, but for fun) They make fun of me.

Researcher: are you pretending that you're the victim?

A: I am the victim.

Researcher: okay, they point out negatives, they make fun. What else?

E: they're rude to you when you try to be nice to em.

Researcher: what do you girls think about...in this book, it talks about how as females, we're all conditioned to be so nice to everybody so that someone who is mean sticks out because it's like, "what are they doing?" So if you think about it that way it becomes

really interesting I think. To think that the “mean girl” may just be very assertive about her feelings. Did you ever think about it like that?

B: that’s really interesting. Cause sometimes you just want to say something, but you don’t want to be mean.

C: it’s like in a school or something if you want to meet people and there’s one nice person, she doesn’t stick out, so like everybody around her is being mean so you can’t really miss someone being nice.

Researcher: that’s interesting. Which do you think is normal?

C: what in this school?

Researcher: yeah

C: it depends where you were raised, Paulsboro or Gibbstown.

(A laughs at this suggestion)

Researcher: you think? Why are you laughing A?

A: I don’t know.

B: I’m not from Paulsboro or Gibbstown, so I’m neither.

C: I don’t really think that either town is mean, I just think that one town doesn’t understand the other.

Researcher: ok, why is that?

C: because we grew up two different ways.

Researcher: like how?

C: I don’t know. Like, I don’t have nothing against them but. Like I like people from Gibbstown, but a lot of people don’t. And I don’t understand it.

E: a lot of people form Paulsboro don’t.

Researcher: and vice versa?

All: YEAH!

C: like, you act a certain way if you’re from Gibbstown.

A: you from Paulsboro, B?

B: no, I'm from Bridgeport. It's like at the end of Gibbstown.

A: you're whatchamacallit's little sister, right?

B: yeah. It's like right down the road. But I don't know. I don't have a problem with anybody.

C: some of them can be prissy, some can be mean, some can be just plain out, it just depends on where you live.

Researcher: is there like a stereotype between people who come from Gibbstown and Paulsboro?

C: yes, oh yes.

E: yeah.

A: yeah. (Laughs)

Researcher: well, what is it?

C: the stereotype is girls from Gibbstown are prissy and girls from Paulsboro are the "B" word. But I know that it's not all like that, cause I know girls from Paulsboro who are prissy and girls from Gibbstown who are the "b" word.

E: see that's, just it. You meet one person that fits a category, and they basically represent everybody and if they're mean to you, then you just count everybody as mean to you,

Researcher: you generalize.

C: yeah.

E: yeah and that's where prejudice comes from. You meet one girl and you try to talk to her and she's like, "Uh! Go away!" And you're like, okay well I guess if she's that way then everybody else must be.

Researcher: ok. What were you gonna say A?

A: I don't know. I hate that.

Researcher: why do you hate that?

A: cause I am a "B."

Everyone laughs.

Researcher: have you all felt feelings of competitiveness?

All:” yeah

E: especially when girls brag or someone get a compliment, then you want to get a compliment too. You get all jealous.

C: oh, that’s another thing. Everybody put for the ideal girl that they had to be pretty, and for the anti-girl that they had to be ugly.

A: I didn’t put that. (keeps stressing this throughout C’s discussion)

C: why does an ideal girl have to be pretty? Just because you’re like, I mean, I don’t understand why the ideal girl has to be pretty? Why can’t she just be intelligent and have common sense or just be athletic or something? Why do you always have to be pretty? Why does society make it that you have to look like a model or something? I don’t understand that.

B: I just feel like guys, when a guy will look at a girl...

E: that’s just it, it’s what everyone wants to be. Everybody wants to be pretty.

C: I don’t want to be pretty. I want to be me. And I’m intelligent and I’m gonna go to college and I’m gonna be someone and that’s what I want and I know that I’m not gorgeous, I don’t even think that I’m pretty. But I’m gonna be something.

Researcher: you really don’t think you’re pretty.

C: no. (matter-of-factly)

A: are you for real?

B: you don’t even have a pimple on your face.

C: so, that doesn’t mean anything.

A: Oh gosh!

C: I’m just, but I’m saying...

Researcher: do you measure beauty in a different way than physically?

A: yeah.

C: yeah. It's from inside.

Researcher: so you must think you're beautiful.

C: no, I don't.

A: you're the sweetest little person.

Researcher: I know, and I feel like beauty can be measured in so many different ways, you know what I mean, like intelligence, self-worth, self-esteem.

A: but her face is pretty, so I don't know what she's talking about.

Researcher: but I'm saying, she refuses to believe that.

B: is it like, she's pretty until she opens up her mouth?

Everyone laughs at this comment.

A: I know you not talking about her!

B: no no, I 'm just saying there's a saying, like I went to my brother's college and there was this girl and I said, wow, she's so pretty and he said, oh God, she's so ignorant and...

Researcher: well, all guys initially like girls because they're pretty but in the end, unless they're a total macho scumbag, guys won't hang around a girl just because she's pretty. She's got to have something upstairs or else it gets old fast. I've heard people say this. And I have two brothers, and believe me, they can be superficial about girls. You know, like how hot they are, how big their boobs are, but that stuff gets old and they admit it. But, I was stressing the beauty thing because I feel like you girls have no idea how beautiful all of you are in so many different ways. Oh, you're gonna make me cry! I think just because of my age and growing up, I don't know, you just learn to see beauty in so many different things, and I just love the confidence levels you all have, it's just amazing to me. I don't know. You do think you're beautiful, right C?

C: (shakes her head NO adamantly) Don't look at me like that!

A: you (to Researcher) cry and then you (to C) cry.

Everyone laughs.

A: on the senior trip, this DJ made everybody cry. He was saying, go hug someone, someone you never talked to before.

Researcher: so did you hug someone new?

A: no! I already talk to everyone! But everyone was crying. All the girls was crying. Don't start crying here!

Researcher: um, but I fee like we didn't get past the whole pretty thing. Why do so many people think the ideal girl has to be pretty?

A: that's what society says.

C: so guys will think you're pretty.

Researcher: do you think it's totally motivated by men?

C: yes, I think because guys have to think you're pretty and girls want guys to like them. And I don't think her, her, or her can deny it. (to A, B, and H) or you E.

E: whoo-hoo.

C: do you deny that you don't like guys looking at you?

(H has been giving C a curious look throughout this. Not nasty, but just kind of flabbergasted at the "accusation")

B: sometimes I don't like it cause some guys can be obnoxious and it's annoying when they say stuff to you or try to touch your butt or something. You know what I mean? Like you know how they are H? How they try to touch your butt?

Researcher: what do you do when that happens? Has that happened a lot?

B: I get mad.

Researcher: but do you laugh it off or what?

(This ignites chatter from all)

A: on the trip, there was like these boys from another school and like, somebody hit my butt, and I thought it was people from our school and I turned around and I was like, you know what, I was gonna step. I mean, people from our school shouldn't be doing it neither, but that ain't right. You don't do stuff like that. I don't know why they do stuff like that, I guess to get a laugh.

Researcher: and it's just, it's also, where I work the guys in the back, they grabbed my side before, and immediately I turned around with a finger in their face and said, NO! And I wouldn't have done that if I were your age. I would have been like, all shy and ran away. But now I'm way more confident and assertive.

H: I don't let people touch me like that, I think it's disrespectful. It's like they think they can.

Researcher: that's good that you're like that. It's good to be assertive like that. (Pause) um, what is ugly then?

A: Mean!

C: well, you should ask the people who wrote ugly.

A: I didn't write ugly.

E: okay, like the way that you see somebody, I think it's all perception, like, if you like somebody, you're gonna think that they're good looking. But if you don't like somebody, you're just gonna look at them and think, "oh my God, they're so UGLY! Shut your mouth!" You know, that kind of thing.

Researcher: so it's not necessarily physical?

E: I don't think it's physical. I think it's just your perception, like, it's gonna seem physical, but in your head, you're just gonna be thinking about how much you hate them and they're just gonna seem ugly.

Researcher: right.

E: you know what I mean? I didn't mean to go all Dr. Phil on you!

A: they won't even be ugly. Just full of themselves.

Researcher: who else put ugly?

C: I didn't put any physical traits. I put all mental things.

Researcher: okay, but they could still make the person ugly, right?

C: yeah. Oh, except for the fashion one.

E: yeah, but that's just annoying.

C: but I don't mean, cause she (A) thinks that people call her, what did you say, the two...

A: Two Cute Crew.

C: two cute crew. But like because she like follows fashion and stuff, but the thing is, I don't like the way that people go with every season and have to wear clothes from that

season. That's what I don't like. Like if they're not wearing boots from that season that they're flipping out.

Researcher: you mean if it's out of style?

C: yeah, cause I like the way she dresses (to A)

(note: A has a funky sense of style. Wears outrageous clothing that is most often found on the runway and most students don't wear. She does stick out, although not in a negative way)

Researcher: what were you going to say about that?

A: I don't know. Nothing really.

Researcher: do you consider yourselves leaders?

C: I think I could be. Because, for the reasons that I put down.

(H leaves us at this time.)

Researcher: okay, so you're a good leader because?

C: well, I put down that you're trustworthy, responsible, you believe in your own ability, you deserve to be a leader, you earned it, and you have a positive energy.

A: oh, I didn't do that part! But that's what I would put too.

Researcher: I like that "positive energy."

C: because if you don't have good energy, you won't be able to pump up the people you're supposed to be leading.

Researcher: and you made me think of something when you said, trustworthy. Um, I recently read this article about how our society has become a culture of liars, we all lie and we don't even realize it. Like, who's ever lied to try to get a child ticket at the movie theatre?

Everyone laughs!!!

B: ooooooh!

Researcher: or like, with all the reality shows now, like Average Joe, they lie to the girl, she thinks she's coming onto a show with all these hot men or whatever and they you know, surprise her that they're average.

C: they're ugly losers. See, now there's some ugly guys!

Everyone laughs

C: that's ugly!

Researcher: I never saw it. But what do you think about this? I mean, you've all lied in this sense, or you've been dishonest. Does that make you think twice or no?

C: no, because if you're stupid enough to let me get away with it, then I'm stupid enough to do it. That's how I look at it.

A: she gonna say she's stupid!

B: but you're right! Everybody does lie. (this is like a revelation to her)

Researcher: on resumes, everything.

C: Here's the thing. In Cherry Hill, when you go to the movies there, it's like an automatic thing, you can buy a child's ticket for like \$3 less. You don't have to go to the teller, you can just buy it from a machine. So that's so dumb, you could just ask for all child's tickets, and put the adult ticket at the top, so you could have like 5 child's tickets and one adult ticket. And then they just rip em, and give em back and you go in.

Researcher: or you could buy a ticket for a "G" rated movie and sneak into the "R" rated one. Is that bad?

B: no, I did that to see the Texas Chainsaw Massacre. We did that same thing. I mean, our parents knew what we were doing. But they caught us, and they told us we weren't allowed, but then they just let us in anyways.

E: oh man, if I was in a power position like that, I would have been like, "security!"

Researcher: ok, so this brings up another topic, the one of values and morals. Who thinks they have high values and morals? (No one raises their hands) no, you guys don't have them?

E: high morals about what? Wait, I think I do!

Researcher: how do you define them?

C: like waiting till you're married to have sex.

Researcher: ok, what do you think about that one?

C: well, these two (refers to E and B)

B: well, like people are gonna do it, I don't know, I guess I'm not that religious.

C: wait, is that in the Bible?

A: you didn't know that?

Researcher: see, I'm not very religious. Who here considers themselves very religious?

A: I do.

Researcher: well, can I ask you, do you think you're in violation of God because you had sex?

A: I don't know.

C: I don't think it is. I think it's part of life these days. I think it's gonna happen regardless. And I don't think it's like defying God or anything, I just.

A: everybody believes in something different.

E: well, that's what is says in the Bible, not everybody believes that, I don't believe half the stuff that is in the Bible, I just believe what, basically I just take, like, I proofread the Bible.

A: how you gonna proofread the Bible? (laughs)

E: that's what I did, that's what I did. I just really believe in the 10 Commandments. And then everything else is just not as important. It's not, some of the stuff just sounds ridiculous.

Researcher: you mean how it says that you shouldn't "covet thy neighbor's wife" and the other ones.

C: yeah and it doesn't say anything about premarital sex.

E: no, it just says you can't commit adultery.

Researcher: why do you think that's such an issue with you guys? I know that parents and teachers stress abstinence, like 'DON'T HAVE SEX BEFORE YOU'RE MARRIED!' But I mean, who does that anymore?

C: see, I know a lot of people in this school would say, instead of abstinence, they would say if you're gonna do anything, use protection. Because they know it's inevitable.

Researcher: do people get that talk though?

C: I did.

B: I did too, my brothers told me.

Researcher: well, it's different with girls.

B: OH! Don't say that Miss Rigney, I hate that! That makes me so mad! That's like the worst thing you could say to me.

A: boys always say that too.

E: and besides, if a guy gets a girl pregnant then there is a girl involved too. So what about that girl?

B: exactly. Ok, my brother had this girlfriend. And like, they're allowed to go upstairs. And me and my boyfriend. We're not allowed to go upstairs.

A: well, you'all can go to his house then! (Laughs)

Researcher: does your mom say it's because you're younger or?

B: no, it's because I'm the girl. That's what my dad said. I don't like telling my dad things, because he'll say no. My mom won't say no, but my dad will. Like my mom won't tell me no because she doesn't want to be the bad one.

Researcher: so why is there the double standard?

B: my older brothers! They could do anything. My younger older brother, he doesn't do anything wrong, because he made the Dean's List, he doesn't mess around with a lot of girls, but he's cute, he lifts, I mean, my mom gets on my nerves about it.

Researcher: what do you mean? She's obsessed with him?

A: she said obsessed!

B: well, yeah, she's annoying about it.

Researcher: does she compare you to him?

B: yes, like, I'm getting tired of school, you know cause it's almost summertime and whatever, and one day she drives me to school and my brother was on a trip and I was like, "God, I hate school!" and she was like, "your brother never said he hated school!" And I was like, "I'm not my brother mom!"

A: I would have been like, mom. But I tell my mom everything.

B: I tell my mom everything too.

A: My mom wouldn't do that. But how is my mom gonna call me on the senior trip and be like, "what are you doing? I just wanted to know where you were."

B: so, you mom doesn't fall you in the middle of the day! She just does stupid things. She was like, "do you want me to pick you up after school?" and I was like, mom, I'm in the middle of English class and now I'm in trouble.

Researcher: so do you guys get your values and morals from your parents or friends?

E: grandmom.

C: family. Cause what are your friends' morals? What if your friend's a whore?

B: I think my family more I guess

A: didn't you talk about that cousin?

B: oh yeah, I'll update you. She's trash and now she's living back with that boyfriend, and flipping out at my mom and my grandfather. So yeah, she is just crazy. And first of all, there's like so many of us, and they're all mad at her.

A: I get it from my mom. I don't know. They don't treat me different than my brothers. Well, I don't know. They try to keep it like, cause I think it's ignorant if they treat you different, so they always try to like, my brothers didn't have curfews, so I didn't have a curfew, but I didn't stay out till morning, and my brothers, my brother Chazz, the oldest one, the boxer.

B: that's your brother?????

A: yeah.

B: oh my god! My mom's gonna flip out. She loves him. She like has his picture on the refrigerator. Wow, he's really famous.

A: yeah, that's my brother. Um, he had this girl once and after his senior year, and um, they were going out for like 6 years and she been basically living with us the whole time, so like, but I don't need my parents to tell me I'm not allowed to have nobody in my room.

Researcher: do they tell you that?

A: oh no! I used to have so many people in my room, u used to have parties. I had the party house, everybody. My brother, I got a little brother too, he's older than me too, but

everybody, everybody's friends used to be over there, and then I used to bring all these girls and they had all these dudes from all these other towns, (laughs) and everybody used to come in my room, but like, my mom didn't care. I didn't used to act bad.

B: like Bridgeport is like hick-ville. There are no stores there.

A: I heard of it, I just never really been there.

B it's so small. You just keep going over that bridge to get there. So, at my house, we have this big garage. And my brothers would always have parties there, and my mom knew about it and stuff, and now I can have parties, and I know he was the same age as me and now she's like, "your brother wasn't the same age when he started having parties." And I'm like, "yes he was mom, I remember" and she's like, "no no no" and I know they were drinking, and my mom's like, they never drank.

E: I'm not even allowed to have people in my house!

A: you're not allowed to have people in your house?

E: nobody!

Researcher: why?

E: cause my parents are retarded.

A: not even your boyfriend?

E: nobody. Period. Just me.

Researcher: not even C?

E: nobody. Just me. They have not, I've had a boyfriend for 3 years, and never in the house. It could be raining, a tornado, snow outside and they will make him stand out on the porch.

Researcher: why, that's their rule?

E: my mom had people in the house all the time, my stepdad had people in the house all the time, they just don't let me. They let my little brother have people over. But none of my friends.

Researcher: so have you ever been to her house c?

C: I've met her mom, but.

E: you were over once.

C: I wasn't ever at your house, I met her on a tri p or something.

E: you weren't at my house? I had one party, this one sleepover and I think you were there. In 6th grade? And I think I had 5 girls there? It was the only time I ever had anybody over my house. It's pretty sad.

Researcher: what's up with this rule? How do they justify it?

E: I don't know! It's just like I said, my little brother is 6 years old and he has people over all the time. 6 year olds running around the house. When I was 6 I wasn't allowed to have people over.

Researcher: do you ask? Do you ever ask, can I have a friend over?

E: yeah, but "oh, where are you gonna go, what are you gonna do, this house is so small." And I say, "um, maybe in my room, the basement. "No, you're not allowed to have somebody in the basement, we want you up here where we can see you." And I'm just like, ok. Then they say, "But then they have to leave, they can only be here for 15 minutes." And I'm like, ok? So sometimes they'll say okay, but when it comes time, they'll just say, "I don't want them in here, go outside." Yeah, go wander the streets or something. So that's what we do. We either go walking, or we go to somebody else's house. So if I'm with one of my friends, we either have to go to her house, and I know her mom gets tired of seeing me, cause you know it's like they're babysitting me.

Researcher: but would you rather be there than your house?

E: OH! Definitely. I hate to say it but, I definitely practically live over my boyfriend's house. Every free minute I get, I go over his house because his mom is more like my mom than my real mom is.

Researcher: you mean you feel like she's more a mom to you?

E: yeah, well, she treats me better. Jeez.

Researcher: so, she really likes you a lot?

E: mmm-hmmm. (There is a twinkle in her eye and a big smile)

Researcher: that's good.

E: yeah, that's the weird part. Cause my mom is not interested in anything I do at all. Like, I'll get my report card and she'll just be like, "ok? Good for you." (The tone she mocks is one of indifference and un-interest) yeah, she's just acts like, what do you want a party? And I'm like, oh sure, NO!

Researcher: she's not proud?

E: not at all! No! No, my stepdad, don't even bother with him. If I even bother with him, he's like, what the hell are you doing in here?

Researcher: do you eat breakfast at home?

E: I make a sandwich the night before, and I eat it while I walk to school.

Researcher: so you don't sit down with your parents?

E: no.

Eli: do you have dinner with them?

E: no. I have dinner at my grandmom's house. I go with her after school cause I don't like my house, and that's pretty much how it is. And even if I did stay home, my mom wouldn't make dinner, she'd just be like, "um, there's cereal in the cabinet."

A: so what would she eat?

E: (shakes her head like she doesn't know)

A: what does your little brother eat?

E: he comes with me to my grandmoms. It's better like that, trust me. No, my mom, she's just like, whatever's around. You know. Same thing that she tells me, "there's cereal in the cabinet." (E makes this sound like it's sooo normal)

C: her mom tells her the worst things.

E: I know she does.

C: what did she tell you? About how you were born?

E: oh oh! She's like, "oh, well, don't make the same mistake I had. You were a broken condom. I didn't really want you, but I had no choice." That's what she told me. So I'm a broken condom, isn't that fun? Yeah.

(Everyone is shocked by this. There is quiet for a bit)

C: isn't that the worst?

E: yeah. But, no she's just, I don't know. She doesn't realize some of the things that she says.

A: she doesn't realize that it hurts your feelings.

E: yeah. And that's what it is.

A: like, she just thinks it's funny? I don't know.

E: she's just, I hate to say it, but she's stupid. She doesn't think about a lot of the stuff that she says, and, I mean, I still, I still love her, but um, you know, she hurts my feelings a lot.

Researcher: is your grandmom you mom's mom?

E: yeah. Oh yeah. She's awesome. My mom's just, I don't know where her head is.

Researcher: do you see similar qualities in them?

E: not at all.

A: do you think like, that type of thing is cause of your stepdad?

E: no, she's always been that way. Ever since she was a little kid, she said, my grandmom told me she's always been like that. I don't know, she's just different. Like she's real smart but she's just weird.

A: she works?

E: yeah, she works a lot. But I mean, every choice that she makes is weird. Like, even my stepdad. I don't like my stepdad. He's always been mean, but she still wanted to stay with him no matter what he did. Which is another weird thing, and my grandmom is like conservative and my mom's just different.

A: and you stepdad tries to hit you?

E: yeah.

A: I don't like that. I don't like that at all.

E: oh he does all the time. We get into bad fights. I mean, he broke down my door in the last fight we had. And he did it on purpose, so I wouldn't have any privacy. Because privacy is a privilege. That's what he said.

A: I think he's a perv.

E: I wouldn't know about that.

A: well, you can't have nobody in your room, why does he need to break down the door?

E: I know! I know! But I don't know. They have this illusion, like every time I say anything. Like they think I'm a real bad kid. Yeah, I'm so bad, let me tell you, I go out and party all the time. (She is being extremely sarcastic) you know and they're just like, well, don't compare yourself to other kids, you're not like other kids. And that's just it, I try to tell them, like people go out and get drunk like every weekend and their parents don't do anything. Like, me and my stepdad got into a real bad fight. He threw a table across the room, he was breaking all kinds of stuff, including my door, and I called him an asshole ONE TIME and he curses at me ALL THE TIME, and I got grounded for two weeks. And I'm like, okay mom, what's that for? And she's like, "oh you should respect him." (Mocks her in a meek, sweet voice) I don't think he deserves it, so I don't. That's just me. I don't know. If you were her, what would you do A?

A: I don't think you deserve anything. He shouldn't be cussing at you.

Researcher: can you live at you grandmoms?

E: I would, but my grandpop is a little weird too. It just, it seems so, I don't know. A lot of people that I'm surrounded by are just stupid. They have no sense.

A: how old are you?

E: 15

A: oh yeah.

E: I know.

C: live with your boyfriend.

E: I don't think that will happen. My mom would probably call the cops or something. I just can't wait to be 16, 17, 18. I wish there was a fast-forward button. I don't want to be in my house. I just want to push the fast-forward button my life and be 18 and just leave.

Researcher: and it's just you and your little brother?

E: yeah. But we don't get treated the same.

A: he gets treated way better, right?

E: yeah. But that's because he's my stepdad's real son.

A: oh, it's always like that with step parents. Well, not always, but almost. But like, step parents do that. I don't know.

C: I think it's cause they don't like step children. They're jealous of them and they don't like the fact that they have to take care of somebody else child.

Researcher: yeah, that's like a disclaimer, right? I mean if you get involved with somebody who has a kid, you need to be ready for being responsible for that kid. But I guess that's ideal and it's not always like that.

E: yeah, I just want to leave. It's gonna be the happiest day of my life.

Researcher: but you seem to hide it really well. Like it's very unusual that you get really good grades, you're a very very good student. How do you do that?

E: well, I guess it's cause I look on the positive side of things. If I think about it, it puts me in a bad mood, when I go home, I'm in a horrible mood, and as soon as I see my stepdads face I'm in an even worse mood.

Researcher: do you like being in school more than being at home?

E: oh, much better. I appreciate it a lot. When summer comes, I am not going to be home, I will be at my grandmoms house all day.

Researcher: do you hate summer?

E: I like the school year, and I do like summer because I go to my grandmoms house all the time, so I don't have to worry about it.

B: does your mom get mad if you don't come home?

E: well, I have to. I have to come home at 6:00. I have to. Cause otherwise, my grandpop would kick me out!

A: in the summertime you have to be home then?

E: yeah. But in the summer, she usually gives me 9:30 for a curfew.

Researcher: do you guys have curfew?

A: well, there's the Paulsboro curfew.

Researcher: really?

A; yeah, there's like a bell. There's like one little bell, and they used to like chase people around in cop cars. And you had one warning. There's like a fine. I did get put in a police car once. Because, well it was because of the curfew bell and it wasn't even my fault, cause my friend said something smart to the cops and they just drove me to my house. And then one time I got pulled over for driving when I was like 15. But my dad

told me to go to the store. And I saw the cop car, so I pulled into a lot and he followed me and was like, why did you pull into this lot. And he like knew my brother, so I didn't get in trouble.

Researcher: that's how life is! You have to be lucky!

A: you want to come over my house? Party central? (Says this to E)

E: oh!

B: you could come to my house too.

E: well, I might be able to come to your house, but I'll never be allowed to go to a party. My God!

C: just lie.

E: I've done that before. I've lied and said I'm going to someone's house and I've gone to a party.

B: are you allowed to sleep out?

E: um, yeah, I've done that before.

A: but are you allowed to though?

E: I have done that before, but I have to deal with afterwards, because my dogs freak out when I walk in the door so I didn't do it again.

B: so you have to sneak out and sneak back in?

A: I could never sneak out because my dad and my brothers stay up all night. I don't know, they don't sleep at night.

B: my mom comes down to eat milk and cookies. And my and my friends will be talking and all of a sudden they'll say, "Hi Mrs. _____" and I'm like, mom! One time I was coming in, and she was getting cookies and I was like, CAUGHT!

Researcher: oh wait, I just wanted to ask this, why do so many girls go tanning?

C: because it's awesome to be tan.

B: do you know how white I am?

Researcher: but why is this a trend?

E: I can't get tan. I get red.

C: cause some people aren't comfortable being white.

A: I don't like getting tan. In Florida, that's all people be doing.

Researcher: do you wear sunscreen?

A: they made us wear it. They told us to.

Researcher: it's just interesting to me why all these girls go tanning now a days.

C: why you don't go tanning? You don't like to be tan?

Researcher: I get like sun kissed looking, but I would never go in a tanning bed.

C: tanning beds are cool.

A: this one girl brought her baby in there. You know, them babies for health? She brought it into the booth with her! And it burnt her face.

C: she's a dumb blonde!

E: she could have been in the one where you stand up and then she could have put it down

A: and the cheek got burned!

C: I tan because I want to look more Hispanic. And I'm like so white. Cause I got Italian in me, that's olive, and Hispanic, so I should be darker, but I'm not.

Researcher: but you are darker! Like if you took a picture of the both of us, you would definitely be able to tell where you come from and where I come from. You know what I mean?

C: but a lot of people would say that I'm Italian and not Hispanic. Without even saying my last name.

Researcher: and you don't like that?

C: no.

A: why???

C: because I like my Hispanic roots. You're always messing with somebody A!

Researcher: okay, just to end today, I want to ask you what your biggest dream is in life. Since this is our last session.

A: I want to be my mom.

Researcher: really?

A: no psyche.

E: I know. I just want to have like, 5 kids, and I want to be all successful and all that stuff, but mainly I just want to have a lot of kids and um,

A: and you want to treat them right.

E: yeah, and not only that, I want to be an elementary teacher cause I love little kids.

A: awwww.

E: I do. But that's what I want to do. I don't care what happens to me, I just want to have a bunch of kids. It's weird.

B: I want to go to college. I I don't want to leave my family, like I want to stay close to them and be happy. And I don't know what kind of a job I want, but I always wanted to be a teacher, but I don't know anymore. Cause the kids are bad. But I want to help people.

A: be a nurse!

B: I can't stand blood. I just want to help somebody.

C: um, well, first I want to go to college and be either a doctor, get married and have 2 twin boys.

B: do you have twins in your family?

C: no, but my cousins, they're twins. And um, I want to get married and stuff, but like, some people want me to change my career and I was thinking maybe about being a teacher, and I just want to be successful in whatever I do, cause nobody in my family has ever been successful and my grandpop wants me to go to Rutgers. He wants me to be a lawyer and he wants me to be like Hillary Clinton, and he fought in WWII and a little in Vietnam so I don't know what I want to do now, there's like so many things.

Researcher: well, that's good.

C: but I already got all these college letters to be a doctor, so I don't know.

