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## BEAUTY, BREASTS, AND BRAINS:

AN EXPLORATION OF USING THE ADOLESCENT FEMALE BODY AS A RESISTANCE SITE

by

HANNA ANDREWS BEALL

(Under the Direction of Julie G. Maudlin)

### ABSTRACT

Adolescent girls are continuously barraged with messages regarding what it means to be a girl and the appropriate way in which to do so. Particularly within the South, there are strict boundaries for acceptable forms of femininity both within school and in the broader social context. However, within the walls of the classroom, these lived experiences of girls are often ignored. By ignoring the lived experiences of girls in schools, many girls are being marginalized, trivialized, and dismissed from the school environment.

This dissertation examines the hidden curriculum as it applies to adolescent girls in schools today and offers a framework within which I can identify my own experiences as a marginalized female adolescent in the school environment and explores new ways in which educators can include the changing female adolescent body within the school. Through exploring my own autobiographical roots, this work is placed in context of a larger group of adolescent girls within the South struggling with identity development in schools today. Due to the limited access to power and voice girls are granted by their position within the school and society, they often use their bodies as a way to rebel against patriarchal and societal norms. I seek to offer conclusions in the form of a new way to think about curriculum as a bodied text so that curriculum workers, teachers, mothers, and girls themselves may create and find spaces for resistance and new and powerful discourse related to their bodies.

INDEX WORDS: Curriculum, Hidden Curriculum, Adolescence, Female, Teaching, Body, Education.

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by

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B.A., LaGrange College, 2004  
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

2010

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Electronic Version Approved:

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Chloe Makayla Beall, who inspired to me become a better woman and helped me find my place within the world.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Female Adolescent Girls in the South**

#### *Becoming...*

Identity development is a complicated and complex process for all adolescents regardless of sex, race, and gender. However, due to the increasingly multiplied messages received from a variety of sources, girls face a unique and complicated passage from girlhood to womanhood. Additionally, due to the historical and cultural eccentricities in the Southern region of the United States, Southern girls face an increasingly multifaceted role with prescribed notions of beauty and development. The South, as a place has, since its formation, created unique and rigid roles for all members of society, particularly women. While many groups have been known to establish rigid boundaries for particular members, the South is unique in that it carries the weight of its history in its doing so. As Applebome (1996) states about the South,

Looked at one way, it's a place of grace and faith that has purged most of its old sins while maintaining most of its old virtues... Looked at another way, it's a Potemkin Village of mirrors and trap doors, where old inequities are cloaked in new forms, a chameleon South changed only on the surface, now pumping old poisons into new veins...(p. 20).

These old poisons can be seen in the ways throughout the South that women have historically filled roles created for them due to their particular place. These roles often include that of mother, daughter, wife, and student and are continuously influenced by race, power, gender, and the ever changing status of adolescence itself.

Contributing to these roles are cultural influences, the entertainment industry, and an establishment of a consumer mentality, through which young girls are constantly bombarded with glamorized notions of womanhood. Through seemingly innocent toys, such as Barbie, and cultural icons presented in media like beauty queens and the image of Southern belles, young girls and women are often presented with unrealistic notions of womanhood and beauty. Through powerful discourses on body image and diet, many students are forced to assimilate to the ideal of the perfect body through the institution of the public school. By examining the effects of the explicit and implicit curriculum on identity development in girls, we can explore the role of the school and society in the shaping of these identities. Livingston (2004) adds that, "Through repeated cultural practices, those with more social cultural capital have succeeded in creating institutions, organizations, and values that perpetuate the ideal self in their own image" (p. 38). Due to the cultural emphasis on the idea of beauty focusing on the body, many young girls choose their bodies as sites of rebellion against expected norms.

Adolescent girls, particularly in the South, face a constant barrage of messages, influences, and roles, of which they must constantly attempt to incorporate in their daily lives and ongoing identity development. Whether these influences are met with assimilation into daily life or rebellion against societal expectation, more research is needed within the field to provide opportunities to explore the complex relationships regarding the identity development of adolescent girls and ways in which to empower their daily struggles. As Bettis and Adams (2005) argue,

Adult feminist scholars must know what the day-to-day habits of life are for adolescent girls. And if these daily habits include talk of who is nice, who is not, and how to change

a tampon, then that talk and focus must be taken seriously, explored, played with, explained, and theorized (p.3).

This study seeks to examine the complex relationships regarding the identity development of Southern adolescent girls and their bodies and bring these relationships into the daily educational practice of educators and the discourse of curriculum in a way that strengthens the positions of adolescent girls situated within the South. Particular focus will be placed on the influences of outside forces, such as place, curriculum, media, literature, culture, resistance, and the body, and ways in which an embodied curriculum can provide a meaningful expression of power and change for adolescent girls.

### ***Finding connections within the literature***

In a school and social environment increasingly being driven by standardization, young people are constantly being bombarded with boundaries within which they are pressured to fit. Nowhere are these boundaries more evident than in the identity development of young girls. The period of adolescence in itself is a complex and formative period for all students. However, it is important to acknowledge that adolescence cannot be viewed as a universal and static construct. As Saltman (2005) points out, understanding adolescence is “to recognize that the meanings assigned to adolescence are not arbitrary but rather relate to broader material and symbolic power struggles” (p. 17). While both boys and girls undergo changes during this period, for girls, this time is complicated by “physical and hormonal changes taking place that have a powerful impact on how girls think about themselves, their bodies, and their move toward womanhood” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 8). Additionally, these thoughts are influenced by outside roles from the media, cultural practices, and dominant norms of femininity.

In order to fully examine the experience of female adolescent girls, it is necessary to explore the multiple areas in their lives in which they receive powerful messages regarding their identity. These spaces include, but are not limited to, schools, geographical location, popular culture, and their own personal experiences within these places. It is from these sources that girls begin to make meaning of their lives within a larger historical and social context. Saltman (2005) supports this idea by saying

Identity formation is not just a matter of individual decision making about ‘what I’m going to be.’ Identity is not simply an individual creation...Rather, individuals are positioned in a larger constellation of social relationships, as well as in the larger social order of hierarchical relationships, which contribute to the creation of particular social identities and related meanings (p. 238).

Therefore, it is these larger relationships and social structures that must be explored in order to fully examine the identity development of adolescent girls.

There are several bodies of work that contribute to the literature regarding adolescent girls and the forms of resistance to dominant norms that they use. As the purpose of this research is designed to explore the issues of identity development in adolescent girls from an autobiographical perspective, I will review areas of work that have contributed to the knowledge base of adolescent girls both within and out of the school environment. The review will consist of the following areas:

1. The implication and literature of the hidden curriculum and how it specifically relates to and affects girls in schools;
2. Theories of identity as they relate to Southern young women;

3. Feminist works on beauty and the body;
4. A discussion of autobiography and critical theory as the lens through which the literature is reviewed

Within the topic of the hidden curriculum and how it relates to girls and their identity development, one of the most universal and constant presences in girls' lives is the institution of the school. From the school, girls often receive multiple and often conflicting messages in regards to identity development. However, in order to see the full effects on girls in schools, one must look past the formal curriculum that is being carried out in schools and examine the role of the "hidden curriculum" in order to see the underlying messages girls receive about acceptable standards of behavior and appearance for women. While the hidden curriculum was once viewed as a means of reproducing class systems, "in our culture, the 'hidden curriculum' has recently been applied to the ways in which schools help reinforce gender roles, whether they intend to or not" (Orenstein, 1994, p.5). Furthermore, as a form of resistance to the messages of patriarchal gender roles and traditional notions of beauty often found in schools, girls often choose to challenge the accepted norms of behavior and appearance. These forms of resistance are carried out through the use of the body, dress, aggression, and other token symbols of resistance that have little lasting impact on the messages these girls are receiving. Further complicating these developments and acts of resistance are both cultural traditions and the notion of place as it relates to the identity development of young girls.

Identity development and formation is a complex process in every geographical location of the world. However, certain geographic locations, such as the South, merge with increasingly complex cultural and social norms within which Southern girls must shape their own identity.

As Bettis and Adams (2005) describe, “Typically, a critical lens has focused identity issues on race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and sexual orientation. Although these layers of identity are salient...we would like to encompass an underdeveloped question, ‘Where am I?’” (p.4). When examining identity development in young Southern girls, it is imperative that this idea of place is encompassed in the discussion. As Massey (1994) notes, the idea of place “has remained relatively unexamined” in relation to identity (p. 167). Adding complexity to this thought is the fact that, “Geographers now argue that places are contested, fluid, and uncertain. It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion” (McDowell, 1999, p. 4). These complexities are ever present and represent a driving influence in the identity development of those in all areas of the world, particularly the South. These complexities and relationships “raise crucial theoretical questions...across curriculum studies...These are questions of identity, which get framed differently according to which dimension one emphasizes” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2002, p. 341). When examining identity development of adolescent girls located in the Southern region of the United States, this Southern influence cannot be excluded. As does Wing (2003), “I (also) use the term *multiplicative identity* to describe the concept that women of color are not merely white women *plus* color or men of color *plus* gender. Instead, their identities must be multiplied together to create a holistic One when analyzing” the identity development process (p. 7). Girls in schools must be examined, discussed, and theorized with along multiple levels in order to create meaningful change. The ideas of gender, adolescence, race, and place must be combined within the daily lives and experiences of adolescent girls in order to truly examine the identity development process.



While both schools and geographic location are salient in the exploration of the identity development of young girls, the overarching role of society and popular culture cannot be ignored, for it is within this area that girls attempt to position themselves within the broader constructs of society as a whole. Unfortunately, Wiseman (2002), in her study of adolescent girls, points out, “in trying to prepare girls for adolescence, adults are failing. We refuse to see what’s really going on in their lives. We trivialize and dismiss these experiences as teen drama” (p. 13). By dismissing these experiences of girls in schools due to the demands of the hidden curriculum, confines of geographical spaces, and societal norms, girls are forced to the edges of the school environment. When girls are forced into these areas, many are left with little options and space for finding their own voice. By limiting the areas in which girls can find their own place within the school environment, many girls choose to resist this environment through a variety of ways, including the use of the female body.

Personally, these dramatic situations took the form of relationship angst, strict religious boundaries, and a stifling school environment. There was no area in my public life that invited or even allowed conversations regarding what was really happening in my own world. As many teenagers do, I quickly became absorbed in my relationship with my boyfriend and how this relationship made me feel more ‘adult’ and ‘in control’ of my own life. However, all discussion of relationships in the church setting quickly turned into a sermon on abstinence, quite fitting for a Southern Baptist church in the heart of the Bible belt. Also, the school did not seem to recognize that curriculum extended far beyond the stated standards and objectives due to the fact that they are full of living, breathing individuals. Lastly, while seeking a place in the community, I quickly found a young Southern girl was either seen as an extension of her parents, church, or school, or was labeled deviant.

This lack of communication and conversation eventually led to sexual activity, quickly followed by a teenage pregnancy. If I thought my life was left out of the school curriculum before, I quickly had a rude awakening. A poignant example of this isolation occurred soon after the school and community became aware that I was pregnant at the age of seventeen. While sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> period one morning, an all call came over the intercom paging approximately twenty girls to a vacant room in the vocational building. When I heard my name called, my mind began to race to try and determine what it was that all the names called had in common. As I began my walk to the designated location, I realized that all the girls' names that had been called over the intercom for the entire school to hear were pregnant. As I looked up, the only other students in the hall were pregnant girls. While not comfortable with my own pregnancy at the time, I immediately felt sick as I realized that I had just been included in a group that had just been called out in front of the entire high school population. I will never forget the "Circle of Care," as the group leader had deemed the group of girls. She shared that she had come to provide us help in custody situations, child support, and seeking other forms of assistance while raising our children. While looking back, I realize that the intentions of the group were good and might have been needed and even welcome for some of the girls sitting in that room. However, the majority of girls present, including me, were so isolated and absorbed in our own personal situation and all the complexities they entailed that we were completely closed off to even listening to what was said. This was the only time during my entire pregnancy that my changing body and life situation was ever formally addressed and the way in which it was addressed in this instance proved so isolating that it only hurt more than helped. The "Circle of Care" met several more times during the school year, but as soon as the names were called I quickly found a way to make a quick detour and eventually had my name removed from the list. In a few short minutes,

the school had successfully isolated me from all my peers and labeled me as someone who needs help, someone different.

Regardless of the changes in my personal life as a student within and without of school, the school and the curriculum itself continued on as if nothing has changed. As Wiseman (2002) points out, these experiences of girls in schools can no longer be ignored. All too many adolescent girls are being pushed to the edges of the school community and choose to resist forced expectations in the only way that seems accessible to them, through the use of their bodies. As Simmons (2002) points out,

Our culture refuses girls access to open conflict, and it forces their aggression into nonphysical, indirect, and covert forms. Girls use backbiting, exclusion, rumors, name-calling, and manipulation to inflict psychological pain on targeted victims...girls fight with body language and relationships instead of fists and knives (p. 3).

Not only do girls act out towards each other through body language and relationships, they also act out towards the institution of the school in this way. When students are continuously minimized, trivialized, and separated from the formal curriculum of schools, they begin to find ways in which to resist. Doll, Wear, and Whitaker (2006) explain that from a young age

Students sacrifice self and subjectivity and agree to the rules of school when young. Eventually, however, many decide to live outside the school system. Like emotionally abusive relationships, the only way students can escape is to leave. But leaving is not a response that is inherently liberating, although it can become a platform for healing (p. 45).

Further examination of the complex relationships involved in identity development in adolescent girls can provide an important discourse that encourages changes in everyday practice and educational theory in order to better accommodate and strengthen the place of the female adolescent, particularly in the south.

### ***Research Questions***

Throughout my own personal experiences in schools and also through my experience as a teacher of pre-adolescent girls in schools, I am continuously drawn to the ways in which the school plays a part of identity development in adolescent girls. In order to examine the role of the school in the lives of adolescent girls and the ways in which girls learn to live within and out of this school environment, I plan to explore the following research questions in my work:

- 1) How does the hidden curriculum operate within the school environment and popular culture and what ideologies does it hold regarding girls and women in identity development?
- 2) In what ways can examining the body as a site of rebellion lead to an embodied and revolutionary curriculum approach for girls in schools?

### ***Autobiographical Roots: Finding my voice***

For the past five years, I have taught pre-adolescent girls and boys and continuously watched them, their families, and the school struggle with ways in which to deal with and incorporate the changing adolescent body into the everyday life of the school curriculum. I have talked with numerous parents, educators, and counselors regarding this time period in these adolescent lives, most notably girls. In no part of my teacher preparation program was I trained to deal with emotional outbursts, expressing and experimenting with sexuality, and identity crisis

in adolescent girls. I have at times felt distressed, exasperated, helpless, and heartbroken watching these young girls confront both physical and emotional changes in a school environment that tends to ignore and suppress these changes.

From my own personal experiences as an adolescent girl who struggled with these changes, I empathize and sympathize with many of my female students. At the age of seventeen, I defied many traditional societal and schooling norms by becoming a teenage mother. At that point in my life, crisis with my changing body and the formal curriculum of the school reached fever pitch. Terrifying all, I threatened to drop out if some concessions were not made to incorporate my experience into the educational context. My own personal experiences reflect that of many girls in schools across the United States. For, the students I choose to focus on in this study are the students with whom I most identify. Studies show that the United States has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancy with research showing that 760,000 girls or three out of ten young women become pregnant at least once before the age of 20. Furthermore, forty-one percent of teens who begin families before age 18 ever complete high school and only two percent of teenage mothers have a college degree by the age of 30 ([www.teenpregnancy.org](http://www.teenpregnancy.org)). Like myself, many girls find that resistance to the formal curriculum and the ensuing isolation in schools becomes overwhelming and leaves them with feelings of little to no future or options within the school setting.

As a researcher, I am influenced from sources both within and without. Often, those life experiences that are the most formative shape the way we think and who we become, both as a person and as a researcher. As Greene (1978) points out, “each of us achieved contact with the world from a particular vantage point, in terms of a particular biography. All of this underlies our present perspectives and affects the way we look at things and talk about things and structure our

realities” (p. 2). For me, these formative and thought shifting experiences have centered on the education of my body and as Grumet (2007) reminds us “how much of education is about our bodies” (p. xv). As a researcher, I have a unique experience in examining my role as both Southern woman and educator. It is the dichotomy between these two roles which focuses my work and my past experiences regarding girls in schools. The perceived expectations of both girlhood and womanhood combined with an inner desire for something different have formed the basis of my research interest and my passion for my work.

### ***Experiencing Education as a G.R.I.T. (Girl Raised in the South)***

Growing up as a religious Southern girl who excelled in the formal curriculum of the school drew a strong parallel to the life of a teenage mother in a trailer park struggling to come to grips with her own reality. Reflecting on my own personal journey consisting of both experiences within and out of schools has led to my focus on identity development of adolescent girls, particularly in the South, and how they view their bodies as sites of rebellion. As Johnson and Roberts (1999) state, “Adolescents gain much of their value and ideas from various reference groups, such as families, peers, teachers, ethnic culture, spiritual structures, and so on” (p. 11). It is from these sources that I, too, began to both makes sense of and question my own identity and place within the setting of the family, church, school, and South as a whole.

Beginning at an early age, the importance of education was emphasized in my life. Raised in a working middle class family made up of my father, mother, and younger sister, education consisted of both formal and informal educational experiences, moral teachings, and religious expectations. Some of my earliest memories center on the “homework table” and the time my mother spent with us there. High expectations were established from the beginning of

my school career and school success was a large focus from an early age. Education occurred for me in ways in which I found success easily in the form of high grades and praise, but found very little real meaning or relevance to my life. I quickly learned high grades were the ticket to praise, rewards, and were necessary to meet my own personal ideas of a “perfect” girl. Memorization and a night of quick study soon became the method to success and resulted in little to no real life application of knowledge. For as Alderman (2008) points out, “In our society, the tendency is to equate human value with accomplishment” (p. 10). For a time, I found this value and accomplishment in the classroom. Once addicted to the praise and personal feeling of control over grades and averages, I became a school junkie. Praised for conformity to social norms in school settings and recognition in the public community for my educational accomplishments only furthered my focus on perfection in this aspect of my life. I could be placed in the group of adolescent girls “who espouse the belief that good grades pay off in terms of future economic success; they participate in school activities as preparation for adult life; and if they engage in inappropriate social behaviors such as drinking or having sex, they do not advertise these activities to adults” (Bettis, Jordan, & Montgomery, 2005, p. 71). While still appearing to comply with the expected behaviors of adolescent girls within the South and within school, in actuality I was beginning to explore new areas of my life. Still maintaining the image of a “good” girl, I began to choose to different friends and experiment with alcohol, drugs, and sexuality. Yet, through these changes, the school environment and my role in it, did not seem to change.

Unfortunately, as many students in schools often do, I began to feel unchallenged and complacent in my high school years. There were countless others who also made perfect scores and competition became fierce. While taking advanced courses and filling out college applications, I began to feel restless and bored with my place both within the school and within

the particular dynamics that make up the role of a Southern, adolescent girl. I wanted challenge, choices, and excitement. Filling this void began to lead to activities and friends my family did not approve of. It became more exciting to form relationships with others outside of school and participate in activities that made me feel older, more mature, and in control. Like many young women, I was “caught between competing discourses of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, social class, economics and religion, etc.” (Dentith, 2004, p. 466). As I began to feel less in control and less powerful in the school setting, I sought outside ways in which to exert this power. In response, my parents tightened restrictions on curfews, driving privileges, friends, and more in an effort to curb my participation in my newfound activities with my newfound friends. For, as Merten (2005) explains, “The willingness to violate adult expectations by engaging in such prohibited actions signaled that a girl was no longer a compliant child and was instead becoming more independent” (p. 26). No longer was I working so hard to hide my actions from my parents, my school, or the world around me. Rather, I was almost daring them to find out. I felt that if and when the outside world realized the decisions that I was making, they would realize that I was no longer a child. I felt as if I was an adult making my own choices regardless of what others expected or ordered.

### ***Secretly Rebelling***

Finding meaning and power in activities outside of school, I began to pull away from my family, old friends, and religion, all the areas that had once helped define who I was. While beginning to pull away from important aspects of my life, educational demands were still met and the surface appearance of my life was not drastically shifted. To many I still appeared the same girl, the same daughter, the same friend as I once was. These outside activities and choices became ways in which I could rebel against the curriculum and all that I was expected to be and



to become, while not making dramatic shifts in the outer appearance of my life. For as Dentith has noted, “girls’ subversions and transgressions are nearly always contained within and rarely challenge the existing structures that surround them” (2004, p. 466). In the popular words of the current teen girl icon, Hannah Montana (2008), it was “the best of both worlds.” While I appeared to be living a positive public life, my inner private life was filled with searches for meaning and a relevant place within the smaller context of the family, school, and church and within the larger context of the South as a whole. Personally, I attempted to find a great deal of this meaning from my long time on-again, off-again boyfriend.

### ***Becoming a Teenage Mother Changed Everything***

The rebellion against societal norms of perfect female students, appropriate Southern girls, and family expectations led to an unplanned pregnancy at the age of seventeen with my long time boyfriend. In one instant, the world in which I had once existed was gone. Every aspect of my identity was questioned, shifted, and in flux. Never had I thought my adolescent rebellion would so drastically alter the course of my life. Seventeen and terrified, I waited over a month to break the news to my family. Throughout this time, life existed in a haze. Senior portraits were taken, school began, the outside world moved on as normal. As a student, I continued the motions, yet now, I really found no connection with my changing life and that of the school. Once I shared the news, I was faced with many reactions, all shocked, most negative. For as Prettyman (2005) points out,

Teen mothers defy normative definitions of femininity that continue to revolve around the expectation that ‘normal’ women will eventually marry men and have children. Teen mothers often have children...when most adults believe they are not ready to handle such

pressures and responsibilities...(and) despite research to the contrary, public perceptions and media representations of teenage mothers continue to rely on negative and often deviant images of these young women and their futures, as well as those of their children (p. 158).

Many thought gone were the dreams of college scholarships, further education, and a successful future as a whole. How can a teenage mother fit the stereotype of a successful female student within the South? I was quickly discredited, educationally, morally, and personally. While initially shocked and distressed, my family quickly rallied and not only continued, but strengthened their support for me during this time. Surprisingly in fact, many of my biggest critics were found in those who had the potential to play a formative role in my future, the educators who had previously praised me for my academic achievement.

### ***Becoming... the “pregnant girl”***

As I walked through the halls of my high school, things suddenly felt different. No longer were teachers calling out hello. A few of my friends gave cursory nods and moved on. What had changed so differently in my life in a matter of months, even days? Once discovering my “condition,” I was often faced with snide remarks, disapproving looks, and lack of interest in my educational career. This rapidly became a difficult period in my life filled with changes in my personal body and public and private life. I decided to move out in the late fall of my senior year and live with my boyfriend, the baby’s father. Settling into a clean and safe home became top priority, for, “home is a benchmark in the geography of our life world and in the West, home is ideally a place of security and privacy – a place where one can be ‘oneself,’ feel protected, and accepted” (Merten, 2005, p. 20). However, teenage income doesn’t go far and my reality was

quickly shifted from my comfortable childhood home to a trailer park. Going to school became hours in the day to endure. My changing pregnant body did not fit well in the low student desks. My new wardrobe was a far cry from low cut jeans and tanks. My once carefree life was now overwhelmed with changes and responsibility. While I was emotionally well supported from my family and a few friends, I was quickly abandoned by most members of the school and church community. My situation was uncomfortable for most and easier to avoid for, “formal sites of curriculum such as those found in schools, churches, and after-school programs often dismiss such work as risky business” (Dentith, 2004, p. 469). In fact, the only notable support to not only continue, but further my education, came from family and one high school counselor.

During this time, I was also invited to attend a scholarship weekend at a private, liberal arts college to which I had been accepted. A scholarship was vital based on my current situation. Attending that weekend became one of the most intimidating experiences in my life for, as Maudlin states (2006), “apparently, pregnant women were few and far between on college campuses, because I endured constant stares” (p. 19). Eight months pregnant, I participated in interviews, group discussions, team exercises and more, with other students with whom I felt I had nothing in common. During my interview, I discussed my situation as I figured we might as well discuss the obvious. While uncomfortable, it was the first of many steps in finding my new identity. As I finished the weekend, I met my mother for lunch. While there, we received a call that I had been awarded a full scholarship. We cried, hugged, and it was at that moment that education became meaningful. It now had a purpose.

As the time of my due date approached, many days were filled with tears. Where did I belong? I was no longer a teenager experimenting with cigarettes or alcohol. I was now becoming an adult trying to figure out how to experiment with life. My beautiful baby girl was

born on a Thursday in March and her arrival was quickly announced as one friend later shared, “because I wasn’t in third period.” While I was granted homebound for a short six weeks, my homebound teacher made less than necessary visits for fewer minutes than ever expected. I was almost completely cut off from the school environment, yet still a student a few short weeks from graduation. My mother became my advocate not only in encouraging and teaching me how to raise my own daughter, but in providing the necessary communication with the school in order to complete requirements of graduation. As my homebound time came to an end, I was going to be faced with going back to school for three weeks in order to graduate. All my courses were finished and all graduation requirements had been met. However, at this point in my life I was so overwhelmed with my new responsibility and so completely alienated from the school environment, I refused to go back as a “normal” student and threatened to drop out if accommodations were not made.

I had made the decision to breastfeed my infant daughter and for that reason it was physically impossible for both of us to adhere to the strict timelines of a regular school day. For, as Fingerson (2005) describes in her discussion of handling menstruation in school, “A large part of this everyday life is spent in school, a place where girls have little control over their schedule and with whom they interact” (p. 115). Not only did the schedule not allow time for feeding my daughter, the school did not have a day care facility, nor a place where I would be able to feed my daughter privately. While I once would have probably accepted these restrictions from the school and suffered in silence, becoming a mother had brought out a transformation within and I now felt empowered to make decisions for myself and knew that every decision I made would ultimately impact my daughter. With only three weeks left of my senior year and no further credits needed for graduation, I threatened to drop out. While in retrospect I realize that this

decision would not have been best for either myself or my daughter, at that time I was only concerned about providing the best for her, and that best was me. Realizing how serious I was, my mother was worried for both my future and my present. Contact with the school, counselors, and administration yielded little results. For it seems that when I left the school environment as a 4.0 honor student and returned as a teenage mother, my life and their investment in it had much less value and importance. The only way that I could remain in school and participate in graduation ceremonies was for my homebound to be extended through my physician. Finally, after weeks of worry and anguish, my physician agreed to extend my homebound for the remaining time of my senior year of high school due to low iron levels. Only at that point were accommodations made and was I able to complete the necessary time for graduation.

After a year in which I learned much more outside the school than I could ever learn in it, I graduated cum laude from my high school with my proud family and sweet daughter looking on. It was at this point in my life that education began to become meaningful and I began to find my place not only as a female student, but also as a mother, wife, daughter, and female within the South. As I started the fall of my freshman year in college as a new wife of one week and a mother of a six month old, my experience was different right from the start. Freshman orientation didn't quite have the same value. However, this time it was different. I was open to changes and the school environment was open to me. Accepted as a young mother, I quickly proved my academic success of high school was not a fluke. Dedication and studying became intertwined with being a mother and wife. The homework table took on a new meaning as my young daughter sat in her high chair and I read to her tales of rebellious Latin American women. While never a traditional college student, I soon became a successful one. I found ways in which to make powerful choices that created friction and openings in the cultural and geographically

influenced roles in which Southern girls are expected to fit. Throughout my time in college, my faith in education began to be rebuilt. My own inner faith in myself was also restored. I knew then that becoming an educator was a way through which I could help change experiences like that ones that I had in school. After applying and being accepted to graduate school, my understanding of myself was furthered along with the political, social, and cultural understandings of the role of the school. And so, now as a student, teacher, researcher, wife, mother, daughter, and one time adolescent girl of the South in conflict with school and community, my hope rests in exploring the lives of adolescent girls and creating spaces for all girls, including my own blue-eyed, blonde haired daughter.

### *Theorizing*

As I have reflected on my own personal experiences within the school environment, I am always drawn to think about the ways in which I chose to exert power over my life due to gender, location, and age. Through my own experiences and my research on the hidden curriculum and the resulting effects on girls I began to understand the true meaning of critical theory, showing the power relations and resistance in education. Paulo Freire (1998) expresses critical theory in his works stating that power lies in race, class, and gender. Freire believes that few create policies for their own benefit and if you are not among the elite, or powerful class, then you are oppressed. In the modern form of elitism, few control many through the institutions, including the education of the world's children. The educational discourse is controlled by a few select leaders far outside the actual classroom, yet affects many students and teachers, but has particularly devastating effects on girls. The powerful are an exclusive club, in which the only criteria are that one must have the same beliefs and preserve the system of the powerful. This idea is also prominent in education. The dominant ideas, beliefs, and values are taught to girls in

schools and many girls are oppressed further due to issues of race and class. For many students of minority race or low social class, they are “mired in discrimination by race and class and...the curriculum teaches these children that their minds and their potential are not worth as much as others” (Orenstein, 1994, p. 136-7). Often times in schools, race, class, and gender are not discussed because many teachers and students “have been taught that it is more important to be blind to difference than to acknowledge it” (Diogivanni & Liston, 2005, p. 127). However, by ignoring race, class, and gender in the classroom, “oppression can be perpetuated and students who are different from the white male norm will find that their lived experiences and existence are denied within the classroom” (Diogivanni & Liston, 2005, p. 127). This denial of lived experience and true essence of being can have devastating consequences on girls.

There are some children who receive and are motivated by the rewards linked with the acceptance of these dominant ideologies and, through the rewards, are indoctrinated into the elite class with elite beliefs (Livingston, 2001). The way in which the ideas of the powerful are presented and indoctrinated into students varies depending on race, class, and gender. However, “young women are subjected to different forms of oppression based on not only their gender but also their race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation” (Adams, 1997, p. 153) When speaking on behalf of women and girls, it is necessary to recognize the fact that this speech is also a result of “power granted to us by virtue of our racial and social class privilege, tacitly accepting racial and social class relationships as they now exist” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 202). Power that lies in the white, middle class male and his values must continually be resisted by women and girls of all races, ethnicities, and social classes. It is necessary to realize that “capitalism and caste work together to create or amplify sex roles, with the main beneficiaries being white, wealthy men” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 207). This resistance furthers the understanding that “adolescent girls do not

unproblematically absorb definitions of femininity, adolescence, and Whiteness that are presented to them by the school- rather negotiation, struggle, compromise, and resistance play key roles in their constructions of self' (Adams, 1997, p. 153). This role of the hidden curriculum is not carried out without resistance and struggle. bell hooks (1994) draws on the work of Freire (1998) to incorporate her feminist ideologies with Freire's work on race, class, and gender in order to strengthen the commitments as "education as the practice of freedom" (p. 6). Using her experiences as a black feminist, hooks combines her work with Freire's standpoint of being a white, middle, class male to call for all educators to become aware of what is happening to all students in the classroom. hooks states, "More than ever before in the recent history of this nation, educators are compelled to confront the biases that have shaped teaching practices in our society" (1994, p. 12). This includes examining the effects of hidden curriculum and the forms of resistance undertaken by girls in school. It is the resistance and struggle of adolescent girls that make their experiences in schools unique regardless of race, class, or ethnicity.

### ***Methodology***

This work addresses new ways to think about identity development in adolescent girls and how they choose to use their bodies as sites of resistance. Through autobiographical and theoretical explorations, I seek to provide ways in which to envision the curriculum as a bodied curriculum and cultivate understanding and research as to girls' experiences in schools. Current literature regarding adolescents tends to group and categorize teenage girls and teenage mothers in terms of race, class, and gender. However, these labels are not always fitting to one's individual experiences which provide the basis of how curriculum is experienced. As a white, middle class, pregnant, teenage girl in school I defied the boundaries and found a place where I



could find no fit. By seeking to examine these boundaries in order to create new ways to think about, talk about, and experience life in and out of school, a bodied curriculum can be envisioned in which all bodies can find a place.

The roots of my inquiry lie in the fact that I became a teenage mother at the age of 17 and shattered all stereotypes about white, middle class, highly performing adolescent girls. While holding education in high regards prior to this experience, becoming a young mother while still in school prompted me to begin to see education in a totally different light, especially as it is applied to young female students. After continuing my education with strong family support and encouragement, I came to my doctoral program ready to find a place, a curriculum, with which I could identify. Throughout the last three years, my thinking about curriculum and my role as an educator and a past female student have changed dramatically. Curriculum is no longer something that is done to or applied, but rather something that is lived and experienced. However, for curriculum to become a lived experience one must find a meaningful identity with which they can identify. Many young girls in schools have great difficulty finding this place due to racial, gender, and hierarchical norms. Through the examination of my experience and theoretical research regarding adolescents, feminism, reproduction theory, and new ways to experience curriculum, this work interweaves feminist theory and autobiographical landscapes into an inquiry that has implications for educators, curriculum workers, and most importantly, adolescent girls in schools.

This work presents a life-based autobiographical inquiry of identity formation as a teenage girl and teenage mother in school. Through autobiographical exploration, I come to understandings and revelations regarding my own experiences in school and how these experiences shape the educator and mother that I have become. Also, through theoretical inquiry

regarding the hidden curriculum and the bodied curriculum in schools, transformative ideas are set in place for an inclusive and transformative approach to curriculum. By completing this study, I am able to better understand my own life experiences and make the road easier for those that will follow.

By examining female adolescent identity through the lenses of critical theory and feminist scholarship in the form of Girl Studies, this work sheds new light on issues previously marginalized and excluded from the discussion of curriculum and identity development. As Bettis, Jordan, and Montgomery (2005) point out, “Race, ethnicity, and social class intertwine(d) with peer affiliation to create different routes for becoming women” (p. 70). Through the examination of these various routes to womanhood, new paths are created for girls who do not fit into nice, pink boxes of femininity. According to Adams (2005),

For Girl Power to be a truly progressive step in rewriting the cultural scripts for girls in the new millennium, the continuance of a narrowly defined construction of girlhood must be challenged, and multiple ways of being a ‘normal’ girl must be encouraged. Only then will all girls, regardless of their race, class, or sexual orientation, have the opportunity to experience what it means to be a self-actualized, emotionally healthy, socially competent woman (p. 111).

***Significance of the Study: Why it matters***

The current discourse in schools pays little attention to the ever growing need to incorporate the lives of girls within the school environment. Much of educational reform and theory has focused on improving performance and closing achievement gaps, while devoting little space to conversation of the needs of girls within this environment. This lack of inclusion

forces girls to act out in ways that are available to them, including dress, aggression, and the use of their bodies (Dentith 2004, Merten 2005, Simmons 2002, Wiseman 2002). However, these actions often only serve to further perpetuate gender roles and expected positions within the school environment. When students are continuously minimized, trivialized, and separated from the formal curriculum of schools, they begin to find other ways in which to find acceptance and develop voices. As Doll, Wear, and Whitaker point out, “Only through a reconfigured understanding of the way power has been used against them can victims begin to recover subjectivity and their rightful place as significant members of the human race” (2006, p. 45). Therefore, it is imperative that the school and curriculum become a place in which adolescent girls can begin to find their own powerful and positive positions within the school environment. Through a new understanding of their own power, girls can begin to find a place that is uniquely their own within the realm of the school.

For me, this recovery only began when I reached higher education and only fully blossomed in my work at the doctoral level at Georgia Southern University. While I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to reclaim my place in the curriculum, many girls are not this fortunate. All too many girls are pushed out an early age and choose to use modes of resistance that actually only oppress them further. My goal for my female students and the future implications for this work are to help others discover and experience this awakening and finding of one’s place in the curriculum at the beginning of their education experience. For, as Doll (2006), it is time to share the good news, news that has the potential to change the way we think, talk, and do curriculum, “. . .the good news I hadn’t discovered until I was twenty years old: school can be a part of one’s reality; learning changes one on the inside” (Doll, 2006, p. 167).

### *Concerns, Challenges, and Limitations*

Theoretical studies can pose many challenges and one of the limitations of this study includes the unique situatedness of the role of the researcher in this theoretical quest. As a researcher, I must recognize the role from which I speak. As Vidich & Lyman (2003) point out “it is also true that it (research) is always guided by values that are unique to the investigator: We are all creatures of our social and cultural pasts” (p. 95). It is these pasts that we bring to the research that must be acknowledged and recognized in order to enter in and continue the research process in a quest for openness, honesty, and power for all involved. My perspective through which the literature is viewed represents that of a white, middle class woman within the South and may not represent the experiences of others. It is also important to realize that I cannot speak for all girls, that girlhood in itself cannot be generalized as one state of being. For the lives of all girls are uniquely different and special in regards to the experiences they have both within and without of the school environment.

When examining the experiences and literature regarding girls in schools, it must be realized that this examination and interpretation occurs through lenses unique to the researcher. Within this research, I must identify and recognize my own biases and values and the ways in which these influence both the literature selection and the literature analysis. By acknowledging my own personal biases and values, I can incorporate my personal insights gained through my own autobiographical experiences as it relates to identity development of girls in schools. All research is faced with challenges and restrictions due to the human nature of researchers involved. Despite all shortcomings, it is my hope that

Perhaps adults will see that the ‘real’ work of schools is not that found in the pages of schools texts and the marks of standardized test scores only but as a network of social spaces and places in which girls configure their identities and become women (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 13).

My goal in this work is not to provide a single answer or script to address the needs of girls in schools. For, the experiences and realities of the school environment and the lives of girls within it are so complex and multifaceted that it would be impossible to create a one size fits all solution. Rather, this work seeks to create further conversations within the school environment and prompt educators and theorists alike to examine their own work in terms of the effects it is having on girls. In order to promote these conversations and further research into the field, the untraditional approach and methodology of this work must also be acknowledged. While the theoretical inquiry and autobiographical information presented may not be viewed as valid evidence by some, the lack of information, conversations, and experiences regarding the daily lives of girls supports the needs of nontraditional approaches to understanding girls in schools. It is only through a new understanding of the way power operates in schools and in our own personal lives that we can begin to offer new ways of understanding the daily experiences of girls and strengthen these experiences within the confines of the school.

## Chapter 2

### **I am not alone: Finding support in the review of literature**

#### *Introduction*

Reflecting on my own personal journey consisting of experiences both within and out of schools has led to my focus on identity development in adolescent girls, particularly in the South, and how they view their bodies as sites of rebellions. However, these sites are conflicted with messages from school, cultural traditions, media, literature, and the idea of beauty. Through the framework of critical theory from a feminist perspective, I explore the literature using a theoretical approach designed to raise questions for further research and a call to action for educators and society alike. This is appropriate because, “the point of contemporary curriculum research is to stimulate self-reflection, self-understanding, and social change. Simply put, practical or theoretical research is intended as much to provoke questions as it is to answer questions” (Pinar, et al, 2002, p. 56-57). Through this work it is my goal to bring the theories and practices alive in my own world as well as in the world of adolescent girls. As Maudlin sought in her work to bring the body “into the educational practice and discourse in a way that is meaningful to the everyday practice of teachers and relevant to the future of curriculum at large” (2006, p. 1), I seek to bring the adolescent female body into the environment of the school in ways that acknowledge the female body while giving girls voice, power, and control regarding experiences in their daily lives. As this work is designed to be a theoretical quest, the areas highlighted in this literature review are a) the implications and literature of the hidden curriculum and how it specifically relates to and affects girls in schools; b) theories of identity as they relate to Southern young women c) feminist works on beauty and the body; d) and an exploration of

using autobiographical methods in educational research. The literature review includes books, articles, and government issued reports concerning adolescents, particularly girls, and identity development.

### *Hidden Curriculum*

Through the exploration and further research regarding the hidden curriculum one is better able to understand the ways in which the hidden curriculum and the school environment specifically impacts girls. By first examining the curriculum itself and more specifically, the experiences girls have in schools as a result of the messages and practices instituted by the hidden curriculum, one is able to see the effects of the hidden curriculum on girls in schools. For all students, including girls, schools serve as the place in which “the crowds, the praise, and the power that combine to give a distinctive flavor to classroom life collectively form a hidden curriculum which each student (and teacher) must master if he is to make his way satisfactorily through the school” (Jackson, 1968, p. 34-35). Jackson’s work on the hidden curriculum serves as the foundation for the exploration of the multitude of messages, practices, and beliefs that are instilled through the daily environment in the public school system. Since 1968, Jackson has been making the argument that

School is a place where tests are failed and passed, where amusing things happen, where new insights are stumbled upon, and skills acquired. But it is also a place in which people sit, and listen, and wait, and raise their hands, and pass out paper, and stand in line, and sharpen pencils...Both aspects of school life, the celebrated and the unnoticed, are familiar to all of us, but the latter, if only because of its characteristic neglect, seems to

deserve more attention than it has received to date from those who are interested in education (p. 4).

It is the “unnoticed” to which we must now cast our eyes and attention, as it is this ‘unnoticed’ aspect of the school curriculum that serves to isolate, separate, and alienate many students within the school environment.

While Jackson’s work concerning the hidden curriculum is considered classic in the education field it is still necessary and relevant today when examining the ways in which curriculum conveys messages regarding acceptable notions of gender. According to Orenstein (1994), “The lessons of the hidden curriculum teach girls to value silence and compliance, to view those qualities as a virtue” (p. 35). The lessons presented by Orenstein (1994) attest to the overt power of the hidden curriculum and the effect the school environment has on girls and women in today’s society. Despite much progress in the area of women’s rights, “many of today’s girls fall into traditional patterns of low self-image, self-doubt, and self-censorship of their creative and intellectual potential” (Orenstein, 1994, p. xvi). Additionally, while the hidden curriculum has been recognized and discussed by many, Webber (2003) points out the urgency of viewing and discussing the hidden curriculum as it exists today. In the postmodern world in which we now live Webber states,

At present, schools’ objectives (educational, instructional, social, or otherwise) are dictated by the demands of unrestrained and consumerist culture... When students are required to study a certain curricular content in order to pass an examination, and that examination and the process of preparing for it mean cutting time for social interaction,



classroom commentary, and dialogue, and do not respond to the reality of the students' lives, it is not only pointless, but harmful (2003, p. 4).

Due to a constantly shifting and changing world, the role of the hidden curriculum and the effects it has on girls cannot be ignored. In addition to the increasingly regulated and constricted formal curriculum, the role of the regulated school culture must be examined due to the direct effects of the school culture on student identity and success within the school environment. As Sarason (1990) points out,

To educate postmodern students and help them become successful, understanding their lives and how it affects learning becomes of paramount importance. . . Recognizing and trying to change power relationships, especially complicated, traditional institutions, is among the most difficult tasks human beings can undertake (p. 32).

Both the role of the formal and hidden curriculum attributes to these relationships and dynamics within the school and the child.

As Jackson (1968) describes the role of the hidden curriculum in the classroom, he points out that

The demands created by these features of classroom life may be contrasted with the academic demands-the 'official' curriculum, so to speak-to which educators traditionally have paid the most attention. As might be expected, the two curriculums are related to each other in several important ways (p. 34).

In order to fully understand the role of the school in girls' lives, one must be aware of both the hidden and formal curriculum present in schools. The formal curriculum typically consists in the

form of curriculum guides, prepackaged programs, and both state and national standards. The role of the formal curriculum has become increasingly standardized and rigid due to a focus on high stakes testing and achievement. Curriculum programs are often implemented along with pacing guides and readymade teacher and student worksheets. Both teachers and students are increasingly being pressured to perform in order to prove that learning is taking place. Much of the “teaching” done in many of our schools is rather a dumping of information into the minds of students. Students are usually not involved in what they are learning and many teachers are teaching under the “teach, test, hope for the best” motto. Much of the school environment is shaped in a very controlling manner giving students little power, choice, or control. The increasing rigidity of the formal curriculum has only further contributed to the role of the hidden curriculum in schools.

However, one must also look past the formal curriculum that is being carried out in schools and examine the role of the “hidden curriculum” in order to understand the reactions and resistance offered by students in the school. There are many layered factors that contribute to the hidden curriculum, including the acceptance or rejection of the status quo, power relations between students, teachers, and administrators, and the various forms of resistance offered by students. Jackson (1968) classifies these factors in this way, “delay, denial, interruption, and social distraction” (p. 17). These factors are found in all areas of the school environment, consisting of, but not limited to class schedules, overcrowding in classrooms, taking turns, self denial, constant interruption, and the reminder to ignore those not doing the “right” thing. It is the combination of these four features that ultimately lead to what Jackson refers to as developing “patience,” having to do “principally with the control of impulse or its abandonment” (1968, p. 18). It is this ultimate self denial and the fact that “young people have to be in school

whether they want to be or not” (Jackson, 1968, p. 9) that make the school not only a teacher of formal knowledge, but a site of power struggles and resistance to the indoctrination of dominant ideologies. Jackson (1968) points out in his work that “students have something in common with the members of two other of our social institutions that have involuntary attendance: prisons and mental hospitals” (p. 9). It is this aspect of involuntary and compulsory attendance that adds another hidden element of power to the hidden curriculum for an important aspect of the hidden curriculum is this acceptance of rules and regulations without question. For it must be seen that, “understanding the impact of school life on the student (depends on) some features of the classroom life that are not immediately visible...are not commonly mentioned by students...nor are they apparent to the casual observer” (Jackson, 1968, p. 10).

Apple (2004) further defines the hidden curriculum as “the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers' statements of end or goals” (p. 78-9). Dickerson supports this idea of the implicitness of the hidden curriculum by stating, “The hidden curriculum is comprised of subtle messages that are conveyed to anyone involved in the school system and it unofficially teaches norms, moors, and the culture of the school” (2007, p. 27). The hidden curriculum involves the unstated dominant ideas, norms, values, and beliefs that are passed on through the school. These values and ideas often reflect the values and ideas of the powerful white, male middle class. Schools are designed around the dominant ideologies of a particular class, making it difficult for students of various races, social classes, genders, and socioeconomic statuses to assimilate to the expected norms. Apple states that the schools assists “in both legitimization and establishing some of the prior conditions necessary for capital accumulation” (1995, p. 109). Webber supports this idea of the school devaluing the lives of all students by saying, “In democracies, the political organization of

power and control is such that we have to be dependent on one another and learn to tolerate one another as best we can, whether we like it or not. Students in public schools are protocitizens” (2003, p. 2). The hidden curriculum and the role it plays in social and economic success is a vital aspect of schooling. For it is through the practices of the hidden curriculum that education “validate(s) the unwritten school policies that favor certain students over others, limit(s) student freedom, and hinder(s) positive social interaction” (Webber, 2003, p. 3). It is the ideas of unquestioning, mandatory attendance, full participation, and legitimization that make the hidden curriculum increasingly powerful.

While the hidden curriculum is alive and well and being felt by all students, the hidden curriculum and the school have specific roles designated for girls. Within the context of the school environment, the hidden curriculum defines the “rules of femininity: girls must be modest, self-abnegating, and demure; girls must be nice and put others before themselves; girls get power by who likes them, who approves, who they know, but not by their own hand” (Simmons, 2002, p. 115). The rules presented by Simmons (2002) attest to the overt power of the hidden curriculum and the effect the school environment has on girls and women in today’s society. Research by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (1992) further specifies the role of the school in girls’ lives by stating, “Schools play a crucial role in challenging and changing gender role expectations that undermine the self-confidence and achievement of girls” (p. 2).

Furthermore, the curriculum plays an important role in that it “delivers the central message of education. It can strengthen or decrease student motivation for engagement, effort, growth, and development through the images it gives to students about themselves and the world” (AAUW, 1992, p. 3). The image that the school presents to girls in particular is a rather

negative one. Girls tend to be underrepresented in textbooks, “receive significantly less attention from classroom teachers than do boys,” experience sexual harassment, suffer from less attention from the teacher based on race, and leave school lagging behind their male counterparts in both “higher-level mathematics and measures of self-esteem” (AAUW, 1992, p. 1-2). The role of the formal curriculum is so strong in the implementation of the hidden curriculum and resistance that one could not exist without the other. Apple (1995) states that,

In the daily routine of the school, one met the minimal demands of the institution and tried to keep these demands as minimal as possible—and at the same time one’s group structured its own agenda as well. This agenda centered around resistance to the regularities of organized school life and creating oppositional forms that often contradicted the emphases of formal educational practice (p. 96).

The formal curriculum is designed as such to maintain, even promote, the ideologies of the hidden curriculum. Through both the formal and hidden curriculum present in schools, all students, including girls, receive the messages intended to keep students in roles marked by gender, race, class, geographical location, and age. The demands placed upon students in school serve as a sorting mechanism ensuring that students will fill the role deemed appropriate by those in power.

For girls, these minimal demands that the school requires often serve as constant reminders in appropriate behaviors and responses. Through the teacher’s directions and comments, “classroom interactions, (and) enforcement of disciplinary procedures” girls are constantly reminded of “correct feminine behavior” (Adams, 1997, p. 155). Apple (1995) points out that for girls, “Housework, marriage, and children were the three irreducible facts of life that

stood behind their experience and that provided the horizon against which their activity in and out of school was coded” (p. 99). The problem with this is that all girls do not dream of being housewives, mothers, or wives. In order to fight these conditions, “girls develop cultural forms that give them power,” (Apple, 1995, p. 99) including but not limited to intense friendships, romance, sexuality, and a decline in academic performance. Due to the messages and actions of the hidden curriculum, “the bodies of girls are regulated by the ‘micropractices’ of schooling that either control or dismiss their sexuality or femininity” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 12). When girls choose to challenge the assumptions and preconceived notions of femininity set in place by the school and the hidden curriculum they are often considered abnormal. However, what is considered normal and abnormal is set into motion by those in power. When a “girl’s adolescent identity challenges the dominant discourse of femininity and Whiteness and when cultural rules are broken, those individuals who fail to meet the expectations of the dominant culture are labeled deviant, abnormal, at-risk” (Adams, 1997, p. 162). These “abnormal” behaviors usually take the form of resistance to the hidden curriculum.

These forms of resistance take place in many ways and are increasingly important in society today. Webber details the ways in which students react to the hidden curriculum and highlights the seriousness of acknowledging the impacts of the hidden curriculum before students reach a breaking point. Webber describes various acts of resistance in her work, stating

Students who react violently toward the school experience the hidden curriculum to the point of saturation...Some students who get there commit suicide...Some students are already so deprived by American society that they really do not expect much from school and they are, unfortunately, never disappointed. Some are complimentary to the hidden curriculum...because they are told by the hidden curriculum that they are never real

contenders...The ones that do reach saturation do not live up to the demands of the hidden curriculum. They experience total deprivation and lack in relation to its ideals...(2003, p. 5-6).

The messages of the hidden curriculum are so strong that many students, including girls, are forced out of the curriculum and school itself due to their lack of compliance with expected behaviors. Even for those students who physically remain a part of the school, the voice and power they experience is limited. By constantly limiting and pushing students to the margins of the school environment, many students take part in acts of resistance in which they feel gives them power.

For girls, this resistance to the hidden curriculum is often limited to the very means which only oppress them further within the system of the school. In her study of female adolescents in Las Vegas, Audrey Dentith (2004) notes how girls use their forms of “rebellious dress” as acts of resistance to the sexualized context of woman’s body, but while acting out “in defiance of gendered codes in a localized way, they are unable, or course, through these acts to affect any sort of larger gender revolt” (p. 464). In Dentith’s particular study, she found that the particular form of resistance chosen by the majority of the girls in the study was the self described image of a “stoner” (2004, p. 466) which consisted of tattoos, piercings, black, heavy makeup, and dress and attire not shown as acceptable in prominent areas of the city. Dentith suggests, “Becoming a ‘stoner’ then has specific significance in this setting...as resistance to the dominant notions of female beauty and the penetrating male gaze of the city” (2004, p. 466).

Harris and Fine (2004) support Dentith’s suggestions by recognizing three important assumptions regarding clothes of adolescent girls and their sexual significance in their work

examining the lives and resistance of adolescent girls, *All About the Girl*. These assumptions are “(1) the distancing from “pink” clothing, which was seen to represent immature, asexual femininity; (2) the use of sexualized descriptions of items of clothing; and (3) the use of clothing to attract the heterosexual male gaze” (Harris & Fine, 2004, p. 104). Clothing choices for many young women express significant personal and cultural messages they wish to send. By sending messages with the clothes they choose to wear, many young adolescent girls are expressing distaste and rebellion against the cultural norms into which they are expected to fit but are established by society and the hidden curriculum. On the surface level, regulating dress is a simple exercise of power on behalf of the school. However, upon closer examination, regulating dress in schools is a way in which the hidden curriculum successfully limits the control students have over their lives. By using their physical bodies as modes of opposition, girls feel they are empowering themselves against their expected roles. Yet, “without a particular politics of an accompanying deconstruction of everyday practices and related discourse, these acts are attributed to them as ‘youth fashion’ or ‘teen antics’ and the initial intent is lost” (Dentith, 2004, p. 466). Dress is only one of many modes that girls use in order to resist power and cultural identities forced through powerful institutions such as the school.

The problem arises in the forms of resistance used by adolescent girls in order to resist the hidden curriculum. By rejecting the hidden curriculum in the form of sexual activity, dress, aggression, and other acts of resistance, many girls are leading themselves to perpetuate the roles they are resisting. Dentith (2004) states, “In some ways, it seems that these girls (and women everywhere) remain enmeshed within the very system they *think* is transforming women beyond discrimination and oppression” (p. 462). However, girls believe that through their “nonconformity to the dominant normative understandings of femininity that gives... a sense of



power” (Adams, 1997, p. 155). By using their bodies, dress, and emotional blackmail, girls act out in ways that serve to perpetuate the sex roles designated for them in society. While trying to rebel and resist against positions which they do not welcome, their self “liberation actually reinforces public practices and ideologies of patriarchy that sustain women’s subordination” (Dentith, 2004, p. 460). The methods in which girls act out are actually socially expected and while discouraged, are actually accepted as means of female rebellion. The resistance of adolescent girls is rarely recognized within the school environment. As Pipher explains,

Generally girls are inarticulate about the trauma at the time it happens. The issues that adolescent girls struggle with are barely discussed in the culture. Language doesn’t fit their experiences. Protest is called delinquency, frustration is called bitchiness, withdrawal is called depression and despair is labeled hormonal. Many battles for the self are won and lost without reports from the front lines (1994, p. 40).

The resistance acts that girls choose to use are often dismissed within the school and attributed to stereotypical female adolescent behavior. By constantly dismissing the ways in which adolescent girls attempt to resist the demands of the hidden curriculum, schools and curriculum workers further oppress adolescent girls.

Eventually, “the girls learn to assimilate their resistive acts into certain forms of compliance since their actions fail to permeate beyond the surface” (Dentith, 2004, p. 466). Girls are allowed a certain space for resistance and the resistances that ensue in these spaces, including use of their bodies, dress, and limited aggression, are only seen as surface acts and do not penetrate the surface of sexual reproductionist roles created by the hidden curriculum. Without a powerful counter-discourse or true understanding of their desire for resistance, many girls are left

voiceless in a world dominated by sexual oppression and gender roles. Until the need for a true discourse for girls and all other oppressed individuals is recognized, many of my girls will suffer in silence. This silence only serves to perpetuate the roles and expectations of a patriarchal society. The modes of resistance that are embraced by these girls are modes that push the limits of the formal curriculum through the threat of disruption of the classroom, but have little lasting impact on the hidden curriculum and ideologies and values expected or taught to girls. However, it must be seen that

bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialization is impelled. Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic forces of that very regulatory law (Butler, 1993, p. 2).

Through the very acts of resistance female adolescent girls choose to use there is the opportunity to find powerful ways in which to counteract the hidden curriculum in school. By allowing girls powerful and meaningful spaces in which to resist, the position of adolescent girls can be strengthened in a way that begins to weaken the dominant gender roles and messages of the hidden curriculum. And so, it is through the body itself and the way in which the school seeks to regulate it, that girls can begin to understand and create powerful ways of being disrupting the flow of gendered norms and expectations set in place by the school and those in power.

### ***Southern Belles***

All people are influenced by the geographical location they refer to as home. No matter what geographical location in the United States one comes from, there are unique and different mindsets, traditions, and ideas associated with this place. For the South, these value systems

often represent that of an untold story, the stories of those who have been excluded based on gender, race, or class. It is these stories that have not been included and passed down in family traditions. However, what an individual does not know has as much or more influence in one's life as what they do know. As a whole, it has been argued that "Americans are also what they do not know. If what Americans know about themselves-American history, American culture, the American national identity-is deformed by absences, denials, and incompleteness, then the American identity-both as individuals and as Americans-is fragmented" (Pinar et al., 2002, p. 328). Nowhere is this idea more manifested than in the South. While many stereotypes exist about the South and the roles of gender and race, from my personal experience of growing up in a Southern Baptist family and community, I found many of these stereotypes were reality. The role of the Southern Baptist church set expectations for women as demure, modest, and as always standing behind a male figure of authority or power. Also, strict limitations were set for drinking, smoking, and experimenting with sex and the ever changing adolescent body was not even open for discussion. While many of these stereotypes have been interpreted and handled differently as an adult woman in the South, they have also served as boundaries to be broken as an adolescent within the South.

My experience growing up within the South is not new or novel. It seems as if the South historically has "a fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern – a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and associations of ideas" (Cash, 1941, p. xlvi). These influential patterns of ideas and relationships throughout the South have, since its formation, historically created unique and rigid gender and racial roles for all members of Southern society, particularly women. For example,

The roles of upper-class men and women in the Old South were generally reinforced and given specific form by Victorian concepts of the family... It was the function of the wife to be submissive to her husband and to make the home morally strong and physically comfortable... Most of all, women were to be the conservators of piety (Williamson, 1984, p. 25).

Furthermore, the Victorian era identity of a Southern woman was found through the idea that “sweet ephemeral beauty and lasting truth was the Southern woman. All else were but aspiring shadows, and all found life through her. Put on a pedestal, enshrined like a holy object, woman was to be approached only through a set ritual” (Williamson, 1984, p. 25). Throughout the history of the Southern portion of the United States, girls and women have faced prescribed gender roles into which they were and are expected to mold. As Judith Butler (1999) explains,

Because there is neither an ‘essence’ that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender created the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender, is thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis...the construction ‘compels’ our belief in its necessity and naturalness (p. 178).

Within my own personal experience there is nowhere that this gender construction has been more prevalent both historically and currently than in the South. Beginning at an early age, girls, including myself, are exposed to these gender roles that they are expected to fulfill in multiple ways and places.

When examining girlhood, it is important to “understand that girlhood is a construction made and remade through the material realities and discursive practices of the society” (Bettis &

Adams, 2005, p.9). For girls, this process is one that happens many times and in many ways as they become young women for factors such as race, class, and gender all combine to form boundaries within which girls are encouraged to develop, and “although there are a variety of femininities, only a few versions are deemed appropriate in the larger society, and all girls feel the pressure to conform to these appropriate gender roles” (Bettis, Jordan, & Montgomery, 2005, p. 70). While the realities and practices of the South have shifted, “the shifting landscape of ideal girlhood still mandates an adherence to certain nonnegotiable markers of ideal femininity. One such marker is that of attractiveness” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 10). Enmeshed within these ideas of ideal girlhood and prescribed gender roles, is the notion of beauty and the way in which it contributes to identity development in young adolescent girls, particularly in the South.

Girls receive these messages regarding beauty from a variety of cultural influences, for according to Kuczynski (2006), a writer for the New York Times focusing on beauty issues in American, “the American way is to couple a woman’s beauty with her identity...our culture openly devalues people if their looks stray too far from the accepted standards of beauty or youth” (p. 86). This can be a particularly complex problem in the South due to the fact that the South has developed over time “a suspicious inhospitality toward the new and the foreign, a tendency to withdraw from what it felt to be a critical world” (Woodward, 1993, p. 201). Southern tradition mandates conformity to the set norms and social customs and those who deviate are often ostracized and find themselves exiled from the place they once considered to be their home. As Carlson (1992) cautions, “Self-reflexive, dialectic thinking about social reality and identity construction is not easily taught in a society that actively discourages individuals from raising these difficult questions about purpose, identity construction, and the making of culture” (Pinar et al. 2002, p. 261). This is particularly troubling in the South when as Smith

(1972) explains, “You see...after a time, down South, there was a migration. Sex left its old habitat and moved to a woman’s face” (p. 190). Young girls are exposed to this standard of beauty, sex, and worth early on in life. Even today, “Study after study shows that girls know, in spite of the overt messages of success and achievement proffered them, that their body is their most valuable commodity” (Orenstien, 1994, p. 93-93). Even though there have been improvements made for women in terms of educational access, job opportunities, and social positions, these advances are still intertwined with aspects of the physical body. No matter one’s intelligence, work ethic, or qualifications, decisions are still made based on physical appearance. Despite the progress made in areas of women’s rights, society still sends strong messages to all girls, particularly girls in the South, that their appearance and acceptance of traditional gender roles are their strongest assets.

While these notions of beauty and identity are played out across the South and the rest of the nation today in various arenas, it is the South that sets women and girls’ “bodies as forums for public debate on who and what constitutes a ‘proper’ representative of national identity” (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 1). This proper representation still follows rigid gender lines along the South and often is drawn on the qualities of race. Goldfield (2002) states

Part of the problem lies in persisting images: of the southern belle, of delicate women far above the hurly-burly politics and business, the better to perform the role of wife and mother. There is no region in the country, for example where beauty pageants continue to play such major roles; just look at the winners of Miss America over the past thirty years. It appears that beauty and talent (the traditional female talent of music and dance, especially) are headquartered below the Mason-Dixon Line, where baton twirlers, drum majorettes, and cheerleaders are idolized and imitated (p. 184).

The South is unique in that it sets such a public stage for the judging and acceptance of physical beauty and the female body. While the American culture in general seems to use the female body as a sex symbol, the stereotypes of the Southern belle and the cultural attitudes regarding the proper role of women have spread beyond the South and have far reaching impacts for women and girls across America. Applebome explores the increasing Southern influences and traditions across the country and notes that “it’s hard to know these days where the Confederacy ends and the Republican Party begins” (1996, p. 120). However, the Southern influence extends beyond politics into areas such as identity, racial attitudes, and gender roles.

This Southern influence must be recognized due to the influence of geographical location in identity development. Who we are extends from where we come from and includes the messages, values, and practices that our particular geographical locations have set as important. As Butler (1999) states, “It would be wrong to think that the discussion of ‘identity’ ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that ‘persons’ only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (p. 22). Gender roles for both white and black women have been clearly established across the South and still invade many aspects of Southern life today. While younger black women are touted for their sexuality, “older colored women” are often remembered as women “who have spent their lives in affectionate service, in prying, wheedling, and chicanery, in short lived rebelliousness and long irony, and in secondhand clothes” (Warren, 1974, p. 463). Warren’s words support the images that are still portrayed across America today presenting a young black woman as a sexual symbol and an older black woman as a docile and obedient worker. Cash (1941) supports this idea in his work stating that the Southern black woman has been seen as one who could “be had for the taking... For she was natural, and could give herself

up to passion in a way that is impossible to wives inhibited by Puritanical training” (p. 84). This image of the Southern black woman is in direct contrast to the role prescribed for the Southern white woman. The image of the Southern belle persists in the acceptable roles of white women within the South. The Southern white woman has always been held to what Cash (1941) refers to as a cult of “gyneolatry” (p. xxii) which he describes as “the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in the face of foe. She was the lily-pure maiden...” (p. 86). These Southern women are seen as innocent, fragile, and their only real value is given in terms of physical beauty and patriarchal gender roles. Southern women are still expected to stay in their places, politically, professionally, and sexually. As a result of these expectations, a “good” Southern woman “becomes a self-sacrificing wife and mother and perpetual victim who is ‘incapable of altering the design of her life’” (Cobb, 2005, p. 133). By becoming trapped in the very role in which she was groomed to fulfill, the Southern woman becomes caught in the cycle of acceptable female behavior and expected patriarchal gender roles.

Complicating these assigned roles and ideals and providing a stage for their display is the tradition of the beauty pageant, a tradition to which many Southern young girls are familiar with. As Thompson (2007) shares from her own Southern experience,

Southern rural beauty pageants are very much a part of Southern culture. They offer a view into the ways female identity is formed—more specifically, Southern female identity: who counts as feminine? What does it mean to be a specifically feminine member of a group? How are social concerns – such as racism, multiculturalism, economic standing, and values – mediated in and through girls’ bodies on a public stage? (p. 29).



While beauty pageants events are not exclusively Southern, when combined with the image of the Southern belle and cultural prescriptions of femininity within the South, these pageants further establish the value of the physical body and acceptable female behaviors.

Beauty pageants are more than casual events, for they are seen as a “civic ritual, a place where a particular public can ‘tell stories to themselves about themselves’” (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 3). There are various claims as to the origin of the beauty pageant ranging from May Day celebrations to Ancient Greek festivals. However, the first documented pageants in the United States were the photographic beauty contests, originated by P.T. Barnum in the 1880s (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 34). The 1920s gave birth to the pageant which gave pageantry its name and fame and the Miss America pageant was formed (*Pageant Center*, 2008). After a rocky start due to the Great Depression, underage queens, and poor financial backing, by the 1950s “pageants have achieved such popularity that parents are often heard to remark that every little girl’s dream is to grow up to be Miss America” (*Pageant Center*, 2008). By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a new host of pageants had spawned off the creation of the Miss America pageant including pageants for younger girls and including scholarship money, talent competitions, and ever increasing popularity. Currently, “In the United States there are about 3,000 annual pageants geared towards those girls under the age of 11.” (Thompson, 2007, p. 26). Also, there are at least 7,500 beauty pageants franchised yearly by the Miss America pageant and, “several thousand other beauty pageants, ranging from beach bikini pageants to Miss Budweiser and Miss Tulip, are produced on a small-scale, local level” (Banet-Weiser, 1999, p. 31). The role of the beauty pageant has only been strengthened in recent years through the creation of reality based television programs, articles, and training camps focusing on beauty pageants. While these pageants range from small, local events to larger pageants, the ideas behind both remain the

same. For girls today, pageants have “become a theatre for meanings of individual and cultural identities to be created, discussed, disputed” (Thompson, 2007, p. 20). Through the tradition of the beauty pageant many young girls are developing their identity and being taught what aspects of their life and body are most important. While pageants may seem to have loosened the prescribed roles of women on the surface level, they still embody traditional notions of what it means to be a girl or woman, particularly in the South.

While these pageants seem to be relaxing the Victorian era stranglehold on womanhood within the South, the pageants still represent both racial and gender roles typical of the South, an area whose influence has spread across the United States. As Doll reminds us, “Political and economic forces and ideological constructs are always at work shifting boundaries in ways that shape lives and labor to promote and eventually maintain the social relations preferred by the economically privileged,” notably white men (Doll, Wear, & Whitaker, 2006, p. 18). These problems extend beyond choices for talent competitions and which swimsuit to wear into areas that have historically plagued the South including race, gender, and power. For as Giroux (2005) explains,

the culture of child beauty pageants functions as a site where young girls learn about pleasure, desire, and the roles they might assume in adult society... beauty pageants, as sites of representation, identity formation, consumption, and regulation, have to be understood in terms of how they articulate and resonate with other cultural sites engaged in the production and regulation of youth, the packaging of desire, and the sexualized body (p. 135).

Pageants and the messages they send must be seriously explored and considered in order to understand the influences they have on girls and their identity development. By attaching worth solely to the idea of physical beauty, many pageants are perpetuating the stereotypical roles of women. For as Banet-Weiser (1999) states, “Pageant rules and regulations also reinforce a definition of American women as moral, self-sacrificing, noncompetitive, and unambitious” (p. 51). While many Southern women received messages of the appropriate female behavior, these messages are strengthened through cultural practices such as pageantry in a way that often further oppresses girls and women. Despite the messages sent and received through cultural practices and geographical locations, it is up to all women to stand together and make a positive call for change regarding their bodies, their beauty, and these messages passed to young Southern girls. For one must consider the burdens of the past in the quest for a better future. As Warren asks “how if you could not accept the burden of the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other, and how if you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future” (1974, p. 656). In order to provide true understanding and new lines of resistance for women and girls, identity development must be examined along the lines of place and the role it plays in the identity development process. Through examining the past of the South and the role of women within it, both women and girls can become liberated and determined to break cycles of oppression.

### ***The Body***

Throughout history and cultural practices, all students, particularly girls, have been taught the value of their physical body. Girls often view their bodies as needing to be changed and modified in order to fit within realms of cultural, social, and gendered expectations.

Additionally, this importance of the body in students’ lives is one that has been recognized by

institutions as one of the most valuable tools for regulating and controlling behaviors. The current cultural preoccupation with the physical aspects of the body traces its roots to the early 1950's, a period of school reform heavily influenced by the government. During this time, "the fear of imminent attack, escalating military defense, fitness crusades to 'shape up' Americans to ensure national security, and to reinforce a gendered politics of the body, were central themes in social and political discourses" (Azzarito, 2007, p.4). Due to these outside factors, physical fitness became a main goal of public schooling. Along with the implementation of fitness programs in public schools came the ideological "myth of slenderness" which "constructed the fat body as an abnormal body, and linked it to the transgression of gendered ideals" (Azzarito, 2007, p. 5). Beginning at an early age, children were exposed to the expected ideals for their bodies. For boys, this consisted of "developing physical force, forceful actions, and toughness", while for girls, "physical fitness meant enhancing appearance and physical attraction" (Azzarito, 2007, p. 6). The physical fitness campaign of this era served as a means to perpetuate gender roles and socially acceptable body images in children. Both "inside and outside of schools students encounter more or less implicit theories of bodies in which their bodies are marked as diseased, ugly, oppressed, and in desperate need of repair" (Springgay & Freedman, 2007, p. xix). From a very early age, children are receiving the message that there is something wrong with their bodies and that they must participate in programs of diet and exercise in order to change their body to that of the ideal American boy or girl.

Along with the fitness campaign came recommendations for diet in order to reduce obesity. While these goals may seem innocent and equal for all disguised behind the public school, the "popular diet was racialized in the sense that, not only was it fashionable among the white upper class, but it functioned to assimilate minorities to white America" (Azzarito, 2007,

p. 8). Not only did the idea of fatness and fitness directly correlate to the strength of the American nation in a time of threat, it also “signified promises of Americanization” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 9). Through standards of diet and exercise the school served as means to perpetuate the accepted body image and diet practices of all citizens, with unequal access going to those of poor or minority status. The standards of diet advocated at this time “centered on vegetable, fruit, and low-fat milk products,” products which were “fashionable among the educated upper class in this particular period of time” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 8). Through powerful discourses on body image and diet, many people were forced to assimilate to the ideal of the perfect body through the institution of the public school. Through the implementation of diet and exercise programs, those in power have created the value of a fit and thin body, an idea that is promoted through the institution and the cultural practices of the school.

In order to fully understand the role and the importance of the body within the school environment one “must recognize the ways we act on, in, and through the body” (Maudlin, 2006, p. 13). From experiences ranging from diets, menstruation, pregnancy, and physical education, experiences with one’s body shape reality within and without of the school environment. While many of these experiences have typically been left out of the traditional school discourse, the body itself has been a topic of great discussion. These discussions have only increased and grown more complex with technological changes in the postmodern world along with the prevalence of mass media in our daily lives. Now, more than ever, the discussion of obesity and health is at the forefront of national debate. Again, “Fatness has become a central issue in the school curriculum as schools are being held accountable for obesity among children” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 1). In the age of accountability in schools through government programs such as No Child Left Behind, even physical fitness has not been left untested. The current times in our

society greatly resemble the era of the birth of physical fitness campaigns due to the “contemporary medical concern with fatness...characterized by the ‘war on terror’, business-minded initiatives in schools, the marketing of images of the ideal body, and the political pressure to establish policies for the deportation or conviction of ‘non-Americans’” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 13). It is these publicized “discourses of risk” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 15) that give the physical fitness campaign, and the resulting idea of an acceptable body image, its power. As Giroux (2006) points out, “The dangerous confluence of the war on terrorism, the culture of fear, and the pervasive influence of a growing militarism has ‘injected a constant military presence into our lives.’ Militaristic values and military solution are profoundly influencing every aspect of American life, ranging from...the shaping of popular culture” to the “organizations of public schools” (p.26). Through the constant repetition in the media and government of the risk associated with the current time of terror in which we live, we are constantly bombarded with the importance of the physical body.

This risk discourse greatly contributes to the idea that, “In Western technologically advanced societies, through self-surveillance and self-policing, practices of dieting, obsessive exercise, and plastic surgery function as technologies of the self to regulate the fat body and achieve the ideal body” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 15-16). This self surveillance stems from “the claim to authoritative knowledge of the clinical gaze that defines fat/fit, normal/abnormal bodies” and in turn “hinders our ability to understand the complexity of young people’s educational experience of the body, as school physical education and educational research are increasingly driven by public health initiatives and policies, and government incentives to fund cures for a ‘society at risk’” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 13). These new initiatives disguise the powerful and oppressive role of the school and the government in identity formation in students regarding their

bodies. It is through these programs that “individuals begin to monitor themselves, so that the standardized and codified educational dispositions advocated in the discourse” are the dispositions regarding the body that students and others come to believe (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 9). Through the rhetoric of physical fitness in schools, students are being taught that they can obtain the perfect, ideal American body through exercise and diet. Repeated practices of the school environment regarding the body, including physical fitness testing, school lunch choices, and dialogue and media campaigns concerning obesity in children, are teaching students to self monitor and regulate their own bodies within the institution of the school. As Giroux (2006) explains, in our current times, “Subjects are now inscribed in orders of power and knowledge in which various technologies-extending from surveillance and population control to genetic manipulation-work not only on the individual body, but also through ‘modes of subjectification through which individuals work on themselves’” (p. 16). While students are first directly taught to modify their own bodies within the institution of the school, they eventually begin to self regulate their bodies in accordance with those in power.

While the bodily transformation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on diet and exercise many media outlets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century tend to go one step further replacing what was once promised by physical fitness and diet with the consumer mentality that, “by tackling the fat, ‘bad body,’ with plastic surgery, fitness and cosmetics, the body can be transformed, re-constructed, and purchased as a perfect fit body” (Azzarito, 2007, p. 16). Even more than regimes of diet and exercise, the beauty industry has gained increasing power in the quest for the ideal body.

In the increasingly medically advanced and technologically filled procedures designed to create so called beautiful women, the conception of womanhood and identity formation is being reshaped for young girls today. In today’s society,

There is no 'human' body anymore: there is the gendered body, the desiring body, the racialized body, the medical body, the sculpted body, the techno-body, the body in pain or pleasure. The human body has come to seem like an infinitely malleable assemblage of prostheses and spare parts, an expression of a "'posthuman' sensibility and a 'cyborg' consciousness (Mitchell, 2005, p. 525).

Through the examination of these types of bodies we are able to see the resulting effects on identity formation, culture, and value. The valuation of these types of bodies can be seen through cultural representations, including toys, female characters in books and movies, and the role of the media and television, of the type of women that young girls are to become.

One of the most glamorized versions of womanhood and femininity can be found in the cultural icon that is Barbie. Today, "Barbie is touted as the most financially lucrative and culturally pervasive doll-or-toy ever sold" with "the average American girls between the ages of three and eleven own(ing) ten Barbie dolls" (Bell 2004, p. 53). More than just a simple passing fad, Barbie has become a cultural icon and a staple ingredient for many little girls' toy boxes across America. While Barbie can be easily dismissed by many as a doll or toy, it is necessary to examine the cultural implications implied by a white, blond haired, blue eyed doll, with extremely long legs and large breasts. It is important to realize that while "Barbie is certainly desired by girls as a toy and role model, and by women who emulate her form, and by others for various purposes, she also functions as an ideal within the male libidinal economy" (Bell, 2004, p. 55). The Barbie doll not only represents female perceptions of the ideal body, but also male fantasies regarding the female body. In Western society, the "heterosexual male desire is constructed through the fantasy of the ideal woman" (Bell, 2004, p. 56). The problem arises due to the fact that the male fantasy is based off the unattainable physical body of Barbie and the



implications this has on identity construction in females. Through the body of Barbie, American society is

Creating a plasticized boundary and container for Barbie's reflection of hetero-femininity. Once contained in this eleven inch plastic mold, femininity can be packaged and sold in its inverse exaggerated form, palatable precisely because its exaggeration is not real (Bell, 2004, p. 63).

Not only do these altered bodies serve as ideal models of the female body, they also serve as acceptable standards of beauty along cultural and racial lines. In *Flesh Wounds* (2003), an examination of the culture of plastic surgery, the author explores the autobiographical roots of her study through an account of her own assimilation to the dominant idea of beauty through a nose job, greatly encouraged by her mother, to rid herself of her Jewish looks. She states, "Certain kinds of noses speak Jewishness...Jews assimilating into a largely gentile culture thus strip from our features the traces of our ethnicity" (Blum, 2003, p. 3). The desire to assimilate to dominant cultures of beauty extend beyond plastic surgery procedures to include the straightening and dying of hair to weight loss programs in an attempt to modify the "features that are culturally selected as...distinguishing physical traits" (Blum, 2003, p. 3). Through these various types of procedures, the conception of womanhood and the entailing identity formation for young girls is constantly being reshaped becoming increasingly more complex and complicated.

Additionally, in a world that is becoming increasingly more modified and technologically advanced, the focus on the body has grown as the idea of aging gracefully is one that has been long forgotten. Transformation, modifications, and so-called body makeovers have paved the

way for many Americans, particularly women, to move into later stages in life while retaining the looks in which they find their identity. In the words of Oscar Wilde, “When your youth goes, your beauty will go with it, and then you will suddenly discover that there are no triumphs left for you, or have to content yourself with those mean triumphs that the memory of your past will make more bitter than defeats” (2003, p. 24). The valuation of the ideas of youth and beauty others those that find themselves aging or not meeting the stereotypical versions of beauty presented today.

Exaggerating these values, language has increasingly given way to visual representations in this era in which we live. It is in this work in which “images hold more power than words and language has been replaced with symbols and sound bites” that the idea of the visual aesthetics of the body has become increasingly more important (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 5). Drawing his ideas and work from images presented in pictures, Mitchell (2005) further explores the idea of the image and the importance it holds in our lives. For example, “Consider the anxiety over image-making and image-smashing in our time. Consider the two images that so clearly define our historical moment...Dolly the sheep and the World Trade Centers” (Mitchell, 2005, p. 12). Unfortunately for girls, these images represent a narrow margin of acceptance, particularly within the South. These images which hold so much power are also the same images that force us to feel the need to change ourselves based in the image of beauty.

The identity of a picture itself can also represent the relationship that many girls and women have with images that promote “beauty.” Mitchell (2005) states, “If pictures are persons, then, they are colored or marked persons...As for the gender of pictures, it’s clear that the ‘default’ position of images is feminine, ‘constructing spectatorship...around an opposition between women as image and man as the bearer of the look’ – not images of women, but images

as women” (p. 34). We live in a world in which the “global beauty business – an industry that includes products for skin and hair- is growing at a rate of 7 percent a year, double the rate of the developed world’s gross domestic product,” (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 7). Some have gone so far as to claim that “looks are the new feminism” (p. 5). This is an unsettling claim based on the idea that many of the images that are presented to young girls and women of beauty are not realistic, nor real. “Full lips, large breasts, a nipped-in waist, lean thighs...” (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 108) are just some of the key features that define today’s standard of beauty and often are only attainable through cosmetic surgery. Today, the “significance of popular cultures is ‘specular’ because it affords an (almost) guiltless gaze not only at the indelible images of the impossibly thin, seductive women and sinewy men that shaped dreams” but also at the bodies of those that are different, bodies that do not meet cultural and societal expectations (Maudlin, 2007, p. 114). As one critic asks, “Are we now all going to have the same face – one that looks like whoever is on the cover of *Us* magazine?” (Kuczynski, 2006, p. 109). According to a current issue of *Us*, the popular magazine for girls and women, the answer is a resounding yes. Quickly highlighted near the beginning of the magazine is a large quote “I’d go under the knife” followed by female celebrities’ predictions and views of cosmetic surgery (*Us*, July 9, 2007, p. 10). Liv Tyler, daughter of Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler, once very vocal about plans not to have cosmetic surgery declares, “I’m definitely going to have some” (*Us*, 2007, p. 10). Most notable is the blond haired, slender nosed, plumped lip twenty two year old actress, Scarlett Johansson, stating, “I definitely believe in plastic surgery. I don’t want to become an old hag” (*Us*, 2007, p. 10). It is these declarations and resulting media publications of these ideas that partly attribute to many women and young girls flocking to cosmetic surgery in order to become beautiful or attempt to stay young in order that they will not become the “old hag” of which celebrities speak.

Magazines and media outlets “naturalize(s) cultural prescriptions of femininity, and therefore obscure the patriarchal relations of domination and subordination on the basis of gender, but also race and class” (Currie, 1999, p. 4). It is from popular media outlets such as these that young girls and women are receiving their messages about the acceptable female body in today’s society. It is through the study of popular culture including many media outlets and the celebrity culture that many students are developing their ideas regarding body image, In today’s society, “The subtle but pervasive cultural commentary on the female body makes it difficult-if not impossible-for any woman to have a positive encounter with her body, and leads us all to believe that women’s bodies don’t work without intervention” (Jolly, 2007, p. 176). The resulting effects of media images such as the ones represented above on young girls combined with the Southern influence on gender roles and expected patriarchal norms provide a narrow window of acceptance in which many young Southern girls must attempt to fit.

However, regardless of attempts to fit patriarchal and societal norms of youth and beauty, there are always those that will be left out. As Giroux (2006) examines in his work *Stormy Weather*, there are now entire groups of human beings labeled as waste, including those “who are no longer capable of making a living, who are unable to consume goods, and who depend upon others for the most basic needs” (p. 27). I would add to the category of waste those that do not fit the dominant standards of beauty and looks in today’s society. Many of these preoccupations with the value of the physical body stem from an “MTV super-model culture that touts the apparent inherent purity and superiority of able-bodied people who have full cognitive functioning and are considered ‘attractive’” (Maudlin, 2007, p. 114). This is increasingly dangerous when it is realized that “young children and adolescents receive their body images

wholly from the outside” (Blum, 2003, p. 2). The messages that society is sending to young girls is that their bodies are their number one resource.

As adolescents are receiving and constantly dealing with the messages they receive about their body, it seems as if the school environment would recognize the role of the body within the classroom. However, schools and the school curriculum dismiss the idea of the body from the formal curriculum of the school. From this perspective on the body, Maudlin (2006) views the public school curriculum as “disembodied” in the way that it distances itself from the physical body (p. 35). It is within these schools that it “seems that in many ways, the body becomes unimportant, if not invisible, in the traditional classroom” (Maudlin, 2006, p.1). This disembodiment, or disregard of the body, occurs in multiple ways within the school environment, including, but not limited to, “standardized testing, the overuse of textbooks, and popular culture” (Maudlin, 2006, p. 13). It is within the school environment that many students began to first receive and have reinforced cultural norms and traditions regarding bodies. Like Maudlin points out, many students learn that “issues of the body, of the flesh, whether of loathing or desire, were not something to be discussed” (Maudlin, 2006, p. 17). However, this lack of recognition is sends harmful messages to students about their body and its importance within the classroom.

Limited by this lack of discussion, social status, and patriarchal norms, girls often choose to use their physical bodies as modes of opposition, feeling as if they are empowering themselves against their expected roles. The issue of using the body as opposition and as a means of empowerment is a theme that can also be found in many women’s defenses of cosmetic surgery. However, “While such options may seem liberatory, critics observe, they are deeply conventional...many self proclaimed, postmodern, body –liberating strategies are deeply

disciplinary, oppressive, and narrow” (Blum, 2003, p. 57). Also, the use of the body through the rise of sexual explicitness and sexual activity is another form of rebellion involving the body. Many studies have found that the “girls understand their bodies primarily as collateral for attracting and maintaining attention...(and) by their active and strategic efforts to monitor, restrict and control their bodies to achieve their social goals” (Lalik & Oliver, 2004, p. 556). The commoditization of women’s bodies are easily found throughout society and presented to young girls as an option for rebellion. However, schools “remain one of the cultural spaces within which girls’ concern, anxiety, and experiences around their bodies are generally dismissed by adults” (Lalik & Oliver, 2004, p. 556). The growing replacement of sexual education programs with programs that only promote abstinence only assists in the proliferation of the dominant ideology of those in power. Girls “are constantly reminded of the fragility of their success. Dipping into the waters of sexual desire, they are repeatedly warned, will only lead them off-track and into disaster. Abstinence-only programs exploit these feelings of anxious achievement by capitalizing on the danger and extreme consequences of sexual desire” (Burns and Torre, 2004, p. 130-131). Limiting knowledge and resources of sexual education only serves to make sexual acts seem devious or rebellious to the expected norms. Some researchers have suggested that many teens have been sexually active and “welcome pregnancy as a means of escaping bad school experiences and saw motherhood as a means to adult success” (Zachry, 2005, p. 2572). Again, schools do not deal with the causes or effects of the results of limited sexual education, including sexually transmitted diseases, teen pregnancy, and emotional trauma. While many of the practices that serve as modes of resistance for young girls prove futile, it is necessary to strengthen these acts thorough dialogue and feminist intervention into the classroom in order to

provide girls with meaningful and powerful modes of resistance to the standards of femininity and beauty.

### *Exploring Autobiography*

Current literature regarding adolescents tends to group and categorize girls and teenage mothers in terms of race, class, and gender. However, these labels are not always fitting to one's individual experiences which provide the basis of how curriculum both within and outside of school is experienced. When I began to ponder, conceptualize, and debate my dissertation topic, I began to search for my own personal space as a scholar. As I continued my journey into the curriculum studies program, I began to realize that there was not a space already created within which my research was going to neatly fit. In order for my research to become meaningful for others, I realized that my research must first become meaningful to myself. Pinar supports this idea by stating "curriculum research must emancipate the researcher if it is to authentically offer such a possibility to others" (1994, p. 90). It is from this perspective that I realized that my research on adolescent girls within the South must first start with research on myself.

The autobiographical nature of this type of research creates opportunities for new perspectives of viewing and discussing girls in schools. Adding an autobiographical element to the research allows for the conversation to move past basic elements of schooling and move into the daily experiences of girls. When examining the previous research on the hidden curriculum and the impact that it holds for identity development for adolescent girls, it is important to realize that

we have gone just about as far as we can go in understanding the nature of education by focusing on the externals. It is not that the public world – curriculum materials, instructional techniques, policy directives- has become unimportant; it is that to further

comprehend their roles in the educational process we must take our eyes off them for a time, and begin a lengthy, systematic search of our inner experience. (Pinar, 1994, p. 16-17).

The reconceptualization in the field of curriculum studies in the 1970s brought about the idea that curriculum is more than the external tenets of school and curriculum issues. Pinar and Grumet (1976) introduced the idea of curriculum as an autobiographical text, an idea that came to be known as *currere*, “meaning to run the course, or the running of the course” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 2002, p. 515). As Pinar, et al. (2002) further declares, “Simply stated, *currere* seeks to understand the contribution academic studies makes to one’s understanding of his or her life” (p. 520). With this understanding, I realized that in order to contribute new knowledge to the field of education, I must first incorporate my own autobiographical understanding of what it means to be an adolescent girl within the South.

While each person’s autobiography is uniquely different, Pinar offers four steps as a guide for exploring one’s own autobiography in conjunction with education research in the field of curriculum theory. Richardson (2003) supports the idea of including the self in the writing and research process stating, “By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable” (p. 499). Since the purpose of my own autobiographical work is to expand the educational field in the area of curriculum theory, this method focuses on the educational experiences in each phase of the process. Pinar states, “One returns to the past, to capture it as it was, and as it hovers over the present” (1994, p. 21). Since the purpose of this autobiographical work is to examine the educational experience, Pinar suggests returning to the site of the classroom, the lived experiences within the school building. By examining the past, one is able to revisit the site of old experiences that are not gone, but



hover under the surface in the present and have shaped who one has become as a student, researcher, and teacher. For me, these experiences took me back to my early experiences in school where I learned that good grades, good behavior, and social conformity were the ticket to praise and success within the school environment. Later reflections brought up memories, sometimes painful, of the way in which I began to become disjointed from the formal school curriculum and eventually began to live outside it as a new mother in the homebound program, a program in which one no longer actually attends the school campus. I began to understand the resistance that Pinar (1994) often refers to in his discussion of self autobiography when again and again my committee had to ask for more examples, more about me and my experiences. While initially open, I had to force myself to include those experiences which were not pleasant in order to embrace my own history so that I could create a new future.

The second phase of the autobiographical process is the “progressive,” consisting of “meditating on what may come, on what one wishes to come” (Pinar, 2004, p. 59). It is in this phase that one thinks about where the future, research interests, and teaching may lead. Both the combination of the past and the future make up one half of the autobiographical process for, “to recognize that one cannot escape oneself, and that one must confront one’s own past in order to hope to grasp the present and influence the future, one engages in autobiographical work” (Pinar, 1994, p. 57). It is through these two initial phases that I began to piece together the educational experiences I once had and the role in education that I wish to have. As I reflected upon the type of educator I hope to be, I realized that I must indeed address the needs of girls in schools today. As an adolescent in school, I experienced firsthand the dismissal of the female body from the school environment. Also, when I began to think about the type of education that I would like my own daughter and the girls I teach to have, I realized that the body must be an integral part of

it. I want their experiences in school to be positive experiences within which they are able to develop healthy and positive feelings regarding their body and identity development.

Additionally, in my work as a scholar, I came to understand the research area in which I was most passionate about and knew this passion must become the basis for my current work and future studies. By reflecting on what I wish to be and to become, I was able to open up new avenues of exploration regarding my practice, my research, and my future.

The third phase of the process is the “analytical” (Pinar, 1994, p. 25) describing the process in which thematic connections emerge from the past, present, and future. From the analysis of personal experiences, my own autobiographical exercises have led to my research interests in the form of the ways in which adolescent girls in the South resist the hidden curriculum. Closely following is the last phase of the autobiographical process consisting of synthesis which really occurs throughout the process by recognizing the past, visualizing the future, and becoming one with the present. This synthesis is a beautiful moment in which one is reconciled with their past while having created something that can change the future. As a researcher and student, I have begun to experience this reawakening in all areas of my life through the reconciliation of my past experiences in schools, my current position as an educator of adolescent girls, and my research regarding girls in schools. As I experienced this feeling, I knew it was one that I wanted all girls to feel. However, my synthesis did not really occur until after leaving the confines of the school environment. In order to change this for my girls, I immediately became aware that what I do on an everyday basis in the classroom directly influences the experiences girls have in schools. Throughout this research process, I have become more and more aware of the ways in which I include or dismiss the body, relationship issues, and feelings of emotional distress within the classroom. While in no way have I created

the perfect environment for my girls, I feel that my own experiences in schools combined with my research have allowed me to begin to make changes that make school a more welcoming and including place for girls.

In order for educational research to move forward, Pinar (1994) offers the “regressive-progressive-analytic-synthetic method (as) an autobiographical strategy by means of which one may understand the nature of one’s life in schools, and the functions of school in one’s life” (p. 60). It is from this view which I began my own autobiographical journey and hope to inspire others to do the same. For it is through the past that we create something new, and by revisiting the past we have once again initiated new thoughts, new conversations, new research. As Morris elaborates in her own autobiographical work, “Doing curriculum theory...is most fundamentally an autobiographical act. Academic work, if it is to progress, must have something to do with one’s own lifework. Thus, it is through curriculum theory that I have been able to return to myself” (2001, p. 3). Through the autobiographical exploration in my own work, I have come to understand “the contribution (that) my formal academic studies make to my understanding of my life (Pinar, 1994, p. 19).

Through the combination of curriculum studies and understanding my own autobiographical journey, I am better able to understand and contribute to the experiences of girls in schools. While initially not wide read or totally accepted amongst research circles, “the effort to understand curriculum as autobiographical and biographical text has emerged as a major contemporary curriculum discourse” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 2002, p. 516). Today, many educators, researchers, and theorists have embraced the idea of autobiography in order to situate their work within a broader sphere and initiate new conversations within the field of curriculum studies.

### ***Further Research***

Without a powerful discourse or true understanding of their desire for resistance, many girls are left voiceless in a world dominated by sexual oppression and gender roles. Until the need for a true discourse for girls and all other oppressed individuals is recognized, many of my girls will suffer in silence. This silence only serves to perpetuate the roles and expectations of a society that is dominated by wealthy, white men. The modes of resistance that are embraced by these girls are modes that push the limits of the formal curriculum through the threat of disruption of the classroom, but have little lasting impact on the hidden curriculum and ideologies and values expected or taught to girls. We must turn our attention away from a curriculum focus of those at risk by “unlearning the truth about gender, race, and adolescence” and “envision a curriculum for resiliency” (Adams, 1997, p. 162). A curriculum of resiliency would “acknowledge that students come to school as raced, gendered, and classed individuals who have acquired a way of seeing the world that may differ from that of the dominant culture” (Adams, 1997, p. 162). While there is no one size fits all curriculum package designed to incorporate the needs of girls, a curriculum of resiliency would include opportunities for girls to discuss and share their feelings and opinions about events in their daily lives. Time for these conversations should be built into the daily schedule of the school. Also, this type of curriculum would also include strong female role models, a thorough sexual education program, and a daily acknowledgement by those in power of the real experiences that girls face. This curriculum would provide that much needed voice for girls to resist and reject the hidden curriculum forced on them by schools and society. This curriculum would give hope, when there seems to be little, give light at the end of a tunnel, would redress our bare and naked souls, and offer true understanding and dialogue in order for girls of all types to move towards a better future.

As Bettis & Adams point out, the voices of girls and young women “point to the need to understand the socialization of girls or the ‘production of girlhood’ differently” (2005, p. 275). This different approach would encompass the areas once previously neglected by researchers, educators, and parents alike. This different approach includes the idea of place, gender, popular culture, the role of the school, but also includes attempting to answer the charge of creating a “curriculum that honors the concrete places as well discursive places that are important to girls and young women...to be full of the kind of identity work...that of figuring our ‘who we are.’ ...” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 278). It is time the literature turns from a simple social reproductionist view of girlhood and embraces the everyday events of the world at large as well as the everyday events of individual students in order to create dialogue for change. As Pipher states, “Once girls understand the effects of the culture of their lives, they can fight back. They learn that they have conscious choices to make and ultimate responsibility for those choices” (1994, p. 44). By examining the lives of adolescent girls differently we are able to create new spaces for critical dialogue and new places within the field of curriculum studies and the school for girls. For it is my hope that “we all rethink the purpose of schooling and reconnect it to the important discussion of identity. Girls and young women desire to be engaged in identity work, work that allows them the opportunity to articulate who they are and who they want to become” (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 279). This work is my identity work as well as my attempt to find a space for my own girlhood in the field of education today.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### *Theoretical Framework*

My research on the hidden curriculum and the resulting effect on girls is based on critical theory and research showing the power relations and resistance in education. This framework finds its roots in “a stream of Marxian scholarship and theory associated with the Frankfurt School” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Tubman, 2002, p. 247). According to Wiggershaus (1998), “The term ‘Frankfurt School’ was a label first applied by outsiders in the 1960s...it described a critical sociology which saw society as an antagonistic totality” (p. 1). Pinar, et al (2002) supports this explanation of the Frankfurt school, describing the goals of the school as to “establish a critical consciousness able to penetrate existing ideology, support independent judgment and be capable of...maintaining the freedom to envision alternatives” (p. 248). This critical view is relevant due to the ways that the hidden curriculum serves as reproduction site in the lives of girls. Wexler (1987) supports this idea by stating that, “The Frankfurt School analysis of culture was also used to establish the view of education as a site for reproduction” (Wexler, 1987, p. 40). The Frankfurt School reflected the teachings and ideas of a Marxist background while establishing the role of education as a site of reproduction and its potential for change.

The ideas of Karl Marx have been broken down into two distinct categories that can be categorized as “early” Hegelian Marx and the latter “enlightenment” Marx (Derrida, 1994). Early Marxism, or orthodox Marxism, is based upon the premise that we must choose between labor and capital. This premise critiques the capitalistic society and seeks a cultural revolution

involving ongoing dialogue in the quest for freedom, as opposed to the domination of a capitalistic society (Freire, 2000).

“Enlightenment” Marxism extends beyond the class designation of early Marxist thought and redefines the discourse of capital and labor as the binaries that Hegel refers to in his works. These binaries oppose each other and come together to form something new, which will eventually split into opposition again. Enlightenment Marxism encourages us to find the faults of the current system and use these faults as a way to a revolution back to a use-value economy (Derrida, 1994). In contradiction with commonly held beliefs, deconstruction is not complete deconstruction or destruction of commonly held beliefs and values. It is not the absolute disregard of societal and institutional norms.

Deconstruction is however, a respect of the tension, the difference, which exists between and in institutions. The “very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things-texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need-do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more...” (Derrida, 1997, p. 31). Knowledge, in institutions and out, has changed. Knowledge, rather than exist as a meaning, a purpose, unto itself is assuming “the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and consume-that is, the form of value...Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 5). In today’s society, the producer-consumer relationship has invaded every aspect of living, including education and the exchange of knowledge. Further emphasizing this change, this role that knowledge is taking, is the use of technology to change knowledge into an “informational commodity” becoming the major shareholder in the “worldwide competition for power” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 5). *Knowledge is power*. Never before has this statement had so much truth

contained within it. Once taken to mean that knowledge is individual power or empowerment, knowledge has now become a societal and even global form of power. Who controls the knowledge? Who has access to the knowledge? Who can change the knowledge? This new knowledge requires extreme elements of trust and faith in Derrida's messianic future coming. For example, "Everyone who is involved in banking, the stock market, in buying options and 'futures,' ... must simply believe, trust. When the big players and high rollers start to lose confidence... the market contracts.... Then the big players, big as they are, sink to their knees and start praying like hell" (Derrida, 1997, p. 168). By placing control of knowledge into the hands of the most powerful, individuals are giving up their own control and power. When cracks begin to form in the structures of power, it shakes the very foundation on which institutions have been built.

In addition, Freire's method is also consistent with Hegel's philosophy of the dialectic, which reflects the Marxism base for critical theory. In Hegel's philosophy of the dialectic, the binaries are known as the subjective and the objective. The subjective, or thesis, is what we think is happening and is opposed by objectivity, or the antitheses, which is what we are always learning from reality about the flaws of our previous explanation. The clash between the subjective and the objective produces a synthesis, or a new reality. Hegel believes that this cycle will constantly repeat itself until eventually we arrive at truth (McGowan, 1993). Reflecting Hegel and enlightenment Marxism, Freire believes that this process must happen in education. We must use education to subvert the present thesis that all children learn the same and punishment works by finding the faults of the present educational system and use it as the base for social reconstruction (Freire, 1998).



This theoretical view holds the underlying belief and purpose for the selection and viewing of my research interests. Because of these dominant norms that all students are expected to accommodate to, especially girls, the ways in which these views are passed, accepted, and resisted must be examined. As Swanson (2007) asks, “Whose voices, whose bodies are silenced in this process and how is this achieved?” (p. 67). The structure in school is such that discussions of race, class, and gender do not have the opportunity to take place. However, by ignoring race, class, and gender in the classroom, the oppression and denial of lived experiences is continuing to take place. This denial of lived experience and true essence of being can have devastating consequences on girls.

Extending critical theory from the Marxist influences of labor and capital, Paulo Freire (1998) expresses critical theory in his works stating that power lies in race, class, and gender. In his own words, Freire states, “My point of view is that of the ‘wretched of the earth,’ of the excluded” (Freire, 1998, p. 22). Freire believes that few create policies for their own benefit and if you are not among the elite, or powerful class, then you are oppressed. All of these influences are felt in the critical research of today, for in the modern form of elitism, few control many through the institutions, including the education of the world’s children. As Dye (2002) explains,

Public policy may also be viewed as the preferences and values of a governing elite.

Although it is often asserted that public policy reflects the demands of ‘the people,’ this may express the myth rather than the reality of American democracy. Elite theory suggests that...elites actually shape mass opinion...more than masses shape elite opinion...Elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socioeconomic strata of society. The movement of nonelites to elite positions must be slow and continuous to

maintain stability and avoid revolution. Only nonelites who have accepted the basic elite consensus can be admitted to governing circles (p. 23).

While many believe that those in power represent the views of the people, in actuality, those in power support the views of a narrow margin of wealthy and powerful people. The powerful are drawn from a very small group who agree with and practices the belief systems already in place. This can be seen through the research in the area of the hidden curriculum examining ways in which knowledge and behaviors within the school environment are conducted in order to keep the dominant power structures in place. Bowles and Gintis (2005) state, “Sometimes conscious and explicit, and at other times a natural emanation from the conditions of dominance and subordinacy prevalent in the economic sphere, the theme of social control pervades educational thought and policy” (p. 197). The educational discourse is controlled by a few select leaders far outside the actual classroom, yet affects many students and teachers, but has particularly devastating effects on girls. For educators, “Prompt and obedient response to bureaucratically sanctioned authority is, of course, a must. But sheer coercion is out of keeping with...the larger social needs for a self-controlled-not just controlled-citizenry and workforce” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 197). While educators are expected to comply with top down authority and direction, “students are rewarded for exhibiting discipline, subordinacy, intellectually as opposed to emotionally oriented behavior” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 198). The powerful are an exclusive club, in which the only criteria are that one must have the same beliefs and preserve the system of the powerful. While all students are subjected to the expected conformity within the school, it must be pointed out that “boys and girls, blacks and whites, rich and poor are treated differently” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 198). The dominant ideas, beliefs, and values are taught to girls in schools and many girls are oppressed further due to issues of race and class.

While many may simply accept the ideas and practices of the public school without thought, it must be pointed out that these powers and practices are so deeply embedded within the institution of the public school due to the fact that “the structure of the educational experience is admirably suited to nurturing attitudes and behavior consonant with participation in the labor force” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 199). It is no mere coincidence that the behaviors that are most rewarded within the institution of the school are also the behaviors that are most valuable within the workforce. There are many ways in which the educational system perpetuates the behaviors needed or desired within the workplace. The school can be thought of as an institution “which serves to perpetuate the social relationships of economic life through which these patterns are set, by facilitating a smooth integration of youth into the labor force” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 200). This perpetuation also reflects the influences of race, class, and gender in that “Schools legitimate inequality...They create and reinforce patterns of social class and racial and sexual identification among students which allow them to relate ‘properly’ to their eventual standing in the hierarchy of authority and status in the production process” (Bowles & Gintis, 2005, p. 200). However, “Preconceptions of race, class, or sex offend the essence of human dignity and constitute a radical negation of democracy” (Freire, 1998, p. 41). In order to combat these preconceptions, “one of the most important tasks of critical educational practice is to make possible the conditions in which the learners...engage in the experience of assuming themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons; dreamers of possible utopias, capable of being angry because of a capacity to love” (Freire, 1998, p. 45).

The oppression to which Freire refers is also found in the fact that elites are colonizers who do not trust the intelligence of the masses. For elitism to take hold there must always be a

colonization of the minds. Freire refers to the way of current education as the banking model. This model supports the colonization because the information that the elites want to be passed on is deposited in young minds. But, as Freire reminds us, “What is essential is that learners, though subjected to the praxis of the ‘banking system,’ maintain alive the flame of resistance that sharpens their curiosity and stimulates their capacity for risk, for adventure, so as to immunize themselves against the banking system” (Freire, 1998, p. 32). This lack of trust is also seen through the implementation of teacher proof curriculum packages. It is our job as educators to lead students to grasp social problems and engage them in analysis and questioning to create knowledge. We must lead children through a process of transformation so that they come out thinking differently. Both teachers and students must grasp their unfinishedness and promote changes for freedom (Freire, 1998).

Through the rewards and acceptance offered by the elite class, many children are drawn into the cycle of dominant ideologies and are ultimately indoctrinated into the system of elitism through accepting traditional roles and forms of power (Livingston, 2001). It must also be recognized that the rewards and acceptance offered for students by the elite class depends on race, class, and gender. Particularly, it must be recognized that girls are subjected to different types of oppression not only due to their gender, but also their geographical location, race, class, age, and more. It is this critical view that influences the collection of research in this study. As this research is analyzed and further questions are raised, it is necessary to remember the place one holds in society and the position from which one is speaking. In my role as a researcher it is important to remember that “understanding involves getting at participants’ perspectives, but it is more than that. It is reaching some collective understanding that includes self, the researcher, and those researched” (Glesne, 2006, p. 212).

It must be noted within the field of critical theory that “feminist theory has criticized Marxism, arguing that sexism was historically prior to capitalism and class struggle and exploitations, and is thereby more fundamental” (Pinar, et al, 2002, p. 304). The feminist critique of Marxist theory was summarized by Aronowitz (1990) who states, “The feminist critique of Marxism is fundamentally oriented to the issue of women as the otherness of civilization” (p. 92) without examining further aspects beyond economics. As Allen (2005) details,

According to the traditional Marxist account of power, domination is understood on the model of class exploitation; domination results from the capitalist appropriation of the surplus value that is produced by the workers. As many second wave feminist critics of Marx have pointed out, however, Marx's categories are gender-blind...Marx ignores the ways in which class exploitation and gender subordination are intertwined; because he focuses solely on economic production, Marx overlooks women's reproductive labor in the home and the exploitation of this labor in capitalist modes of production (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Many feminists have criticized Marxist theory in that it does not take into account the roles of gender, particularly the role of women. Some feminists feel that this cannot be ignored due to the ways in which gender is inherently tied with the roles women play within the home and work environment. This criticism has been both recognized and addressed by members of the field with both Hammer and McLaren (1991, p. 45) warning that

one [must be] attentive to the dangers inherent in vulgar Hegelianism which universalizes the concept of liberation through a conception of an androcentric, autonomous, Cartesian subject. We argue that critical pedagogy needs to appropriate a reading of the dialectic

which avoids a masculinist conception of the self and Eurocentric and patriarchal narratives of emancipation based upon a vulgar Hegelian confrontation with and negation of the Other.

Many critics have recognized the need to broaden the understanding and interpretation of Marxist theory in a way that includes all viewpoints, not just those of powerful white men. Freire himself, in a conversation with bell hooks, acknowledges that “he occupies the location of white maleness, particularly in this country,” as much of the conversation within the field of critical pedagogy “continues to be primarily a discourse engaged by white women and men” (hooks, 1994, p. 9). However, many scholars have “in recent years truly included a recognition of differences—those determined by class, race, sexual practice, nationality, and so on” (hooks, 1994, p. 9). For this research to remain critical, it must “be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within the society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavor unembarrassed by the label *political* and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipator consciousness” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 453). It is this remembrance that I must include as I partake upon the research findings. For as McLaren and Hammer (1989) encourage, “To respond to the challenge of the colonization of women in the present historical juncture, and in the North American context in particular, educators must find a way of making female voices heard in classrooms” (p. 46). Rather than simply contribute to a body of literature focusing on identity development in adolescent girls, it is my goal for this research to follow an emancipatory path creating dialogue, new curriculum and new avenues of resistance.

## *Inquiry*

While there seems to be ample research involving identity, gender, place, and the hidden curriculum, there are still gaps involving the everyday lives of girls and the ways in which their identity is developed and influenced both within and without of the school. The growing field of Girls Studies represents the urgency and necessity for examining the lives of girls and ways in which their lives can be brought into the forefront of education and society. Diedrick F. Janssen (2006) defines the field as “‘established’ (from) panoramic frames of endeavor such as ‘feminist studies,’ feminist pedagogy, queer pedagogy, and ‘gender studies in general’” (p. 3-4). The field of Girl Studies is a field that draws from the many others, combining their influences, practices, and thoughts in a way to focus specifically on girls. For as Janssen notes, within this field researchers examine “how girl’hoods are modeled, reproduced, reinvented, managed, negotiated, and articulated in terms of racialization, authenticity, multiplicity, hierarchies and hegemonies, transgression, and ritual” (2006, p. 3-4). Girl Studies is a field that includes the lives and everyday experiences of girls in ways that recognize and discuss the influences of gender, race, class, identity, and power. It is from this field that the passion for this dissertation was born. It is also from this field that I choose to situate and support this work as a theoretical work from the field of curriculum studies for “given their desire to analyze culture and discourses as they work to create meaning, identity, and power, they adhere to the mantra of the reconceptualized field which focuses more at understanding than development” (Thompson, 2007, p. 138). Richardson (2003) provides support for this type of inquiry by stating, “Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science” (p. 500). This theoretical approach attempts to encompass the goal of

critical research for “in critical research, the concern is with social inequalities and the focus is on positive social change” (Thompson, 2007, p. 97). The critical theoretical approach allows one to view the events in girls’ lives through a critical approach reflecting the struggle for power and emancipation in the need for greater social change in order to create conversation for an oppressed group and a better understanding of the power relations that circulate for young girls.

### *Inquiry Methods*

The growing field of research offers a vast and open space for critical dialogue, discovery, and growth. As the research field has progressed, it has become increasingly necessary to offer varied alternatives to the strict quantitative research performed in the past. It has become necessary and vital to recognize research that deals with more than an adherence to quantitative data, focusing on numbers and statistics. Quantitative data has many limitations, including the common “attempt to determine the ‘direction’ of communication” (Kracauer, 1952-53, p. 631), which runs the risk of dismissing data that does not fit the directionality of the research. As my own experiences within school come from the standpoint of a girl marginalized and not fitting the common stereotypes, this research takes the form of a theoretical inquiry seeking to combine the autobiographical elements of my own story with the research, literature, and theory of curriculum studies.

The inquiry methods in this work consist of the gathering of information and understanding through the literature review, clarity, complexity, and understanding gained through my own personal autobiographical roots in this study, and the ways in which the curriculum can be revised in order to incorporate the needs of girls into the educational agenda. The critical nature of this work is reflected from the perspective of



a researcher or theorist who attempts to use her or his work as a form of social or cultural criticism and who accepts certain basic assumptions: that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are social and historically constituted;...that the relationship between concept and object and between signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and its often mediated by social relations of capitalist production and consumption;...that certain groups in any society are privileged over others and, although the reasons for this privileging may vary widely; the oppression that characterizes contemporary society is most forcefully reproduced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable;...and finally, that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 452).

Through this perspective as a researcher, I find my purpose that guides this study and the implications of this study can become reflected in a way that serves to dig deeper into the everyday lives of girls in order to create critical conversations surrounding these events.

The primary inquiry method for this work is combining the current literature within the field of curriculum and Girl Studies with my own personal autobiographical experiences in a way that creates new spaces for meaning, resistance, and conversation for girls. In this design, it is important to understand that, “First, a clear values perspective dominates” (Glesne, 2006, p. 16). From my research questions and the supporting literature, the values reflected in this research include the belief that as a group, young adolescent girls are a group oppressed by their social status, race, gender, place, age, class, and sexuality. As Orenstein (1994) explores, “regardless of race and class”...girls often take on “a second-class, accommodating status” (p. xxviii). Through the role of the school, the home, the church, media, and cultural traditions, girls

receive constant reminders of their second class citizenship and the ways in which they are expected to fit this role.

In this review, I plan to first explore the role of the hidden curriculum and the ideologies it holds girls and women, including research on the ways in which girls resist the hidden curriculum. From this place, I plan to use literature to examine the role of place in the identity development of young girls to narrow the focus to Southern young girls. Upon closer examination of the cultural traditions of the south, I will examine the ways in which these Southern cultural traditions serve to reinforce prescribed notions of beauty and acceptance. Using both current and past media sources as well as research on this topic, I will examine the ways in which young girls receive messages regarding their bodies and womanhood. Finally, I plan to examine ways, including the role of leadership, in which using the body as a site of rebellion can lead to an embodied and revolutionary curriculum approach for girls in schools. All of these research areas will be both contributed to and influenced by my own personal experiences as a marginalized, yet successfully resistant, young Southern girl now serving as an educator to other Southern young women. The ideas for a revised and revolutionary curriculum stem from the insights and understandings gained both as a student, a researcher, an educator, a woman/girl/mother in the South, as well as from leadership studies.

### ***Methodological Justifications***

Annette Gough (2003) wrote a powerful article titled “Embodying a Mine Site: Enacting a Cyborg Curriculum,” in which she recounts her struggle with a rare disease invading her breast. It is through Gough’s struggle that I began to understand the field of curriculum studies

and through this work that I would like to justify the critical theoretical approach in which I situate my work.

Gough's account followed her journey through the various stages of a disease in which Gough identified with her body as a center of surveillance, a site of exploration, and ultimately, a cyborg being created through breast reconstruction surgery. Resulting from her experiences, Gough has found herself able to "better understand the fluidity of boundaries whether they be health or environmental ones" (2003, p. 45) From putting herself in the position from which she writes, she can now truly express the feelings and experiences of the land as it is transformed and the blurring of boundaries that occur in this process. As I have begun the journey of becoming and continuing to be a student and an educator, I too have come to accept the empowerment of my personal form of a modified cyborg. My cyborg reality came through the struggles of classroom practice for a critical democracy. Like Gough, I had strong feminist, critical views when I entered into the field of education. However, theory is sometimes challenged by practice and as my initial year of teaching began, many of my own personal realities and boundaries were shattered or blurred. As I became to know children from poverty, single parent homes, products of country clubs, and future politicians, my views of education began to change. As I begin to see the lives of girls continuously and persistently marginalized within the school, I began to find my own connections with my work. As I have furthered my education, the power that lies in race, class, and gender and the need to blur boundaries has become readily apparent. Through experiencing my first initial years of teaching, my own personal minefield, from which many of my own valuable resources were mined, such as time, love, and nourishments, I seem to also have become part human, part machine. The human part of me, like Gough, is finding empowerment through my work and education and using my work and experience to empower

others, especially girls, to involve them in the discourses on power. Yet, there is a part of me that is on auto-pilot, my own personal cyborg, completing rote, memorized tasks that challenge this notion of empowerment I am seeking to embody. Is it me or the machine like aspects that follow a script, a prescribed time allotment for certain activities, mind numbing drills and exercises? Are these machine-like activities increasing my quality of life or quantity of time? The decision has not yet been made in which ways we can seek to use the notion of cyborg identity to effect identity development. Certainly from a capitalistic aspect many of the features of the standardized curriculum can benefit from these efficient machine like methods. However, in my role as an educator I seek more. As Aristotle informs, "Hence the good judge in a given area is the person educated in that area, and the unqualifiedly good judge is the person educated in every area" (1999, p. 2-3). I find it is necessary that we teach more than rote, standardized curriculum to our girls in schools. We must instruct and lead our female students in explorations of every area in order that they are prepared to be a member of a critical democracy. Beyond this curriculum, is my desire to make a difference in how my female students see themselves and the world around them.

While furthering my research within the doctoral program, I have at times come across articles, books, and studies that immediately spoke to me and seemed to be a kindred spirit with my own research interest. While writing my first paper concerning adolescent girls and the hidden curriculum, I cited Adams (1997) within the work. It was only much later, when I revisited the work as a dissertation candidate that I truly understood and realized the full implications of this work and the contributions it had made in my own work.

Adams' work is based on the results of an ethnographic study situated within a middle school in the Deep South. Sixty percent of the middle school population was Black and most

came from working to lower middle class families. The purpose of this study was to “analyze how the multiple discourses of femininity, adolescence, and Whiteness manifest themselves in the policies and practices of schools” (Adams, 1997, p. 153). While the purpose of Adams’ study was an excellent literature source for my work, it was with Sharon, the main participant of Adams’ study, that I found companionship. Sharon, the anti-thesis to the “ideal” notion of girlhood, is perfectly aware that she does not fit the dominant norms of acceptable feminine behavior in school and often shouts in class, verbally challenges teachers, and engages in physical confrontations with other students. While Sharon chose to act out in different ways, I immediately recalled my own distinct awareness of no longer fitting into the appropriate role in school. While viewed on the surface, many of Sharon’s behaviors would seem to qualify her as a “good, heterosexual girl” (Adams, 1997, p. 157), much as my own public life as a teenager. However, once Sharon began speaking out against perceived and experienced injustices toward herself and others, she “learned a lesson about her identity that is implicitly taught to girls all over-being silent and disconnected has its rewards from the dominant culture” (Adams, 1997, p. 158), a lesson I also learned very quickly once my status changed to that as a teenage mother. Both Sharon’s experiences and my personal experiences within school force one to examine the ways in which society constructs “truths about femininity, adolescence, and Whiteness” (p. 158).

Both Sharon’s and my own personal experiences have broad implications for schools today. It is experiences such as these that must force schools to discontinue viewing gender as binary constructs of either feminine or masculine, but rather as “a continuum, always in flux” (Adams, 1997, p. 158). Also, these experiences are perfect examples of the multiplicities that make up one’s identity. No longer are students able to be viewed as White, OR female, OR poor. Rather, “By acknowledging that our identities are multiple, shifting, and always discursively

positioned in relation to race, gender, class, and other salient features of personal life, school would be forced to interrogate” the myth of public education (Adams, 1997, p. 160). Lastly, by examining the construct of adolescence itself and how it is viewed and carried out within schools, a powerful discourse can emerge. It is through Sharon’s experiences and these multiple lenses that Adam visualizes a “curriculum of resiliency” (Adams, 1997, p. 162) which acknowledges that “students come to school as raced, gendered, and classed individuals who have acquired a way of seeing the world that may differ from that of the dominant culture” (Adams, 1997, p. 162). It is from this viewpoint that my research hopes to open possibilities for the future for girls like Sharon, and girls like me.

Through multiple ways of being and knowing oneself as a young female adolescent, several common themes have emerged in the work on girls and in the field of Girl Studies. One such theme resonated within my own life in that it displays that many acts that girls and women choose for resistance often actually only serve to further oppress them. Dentith (2004) explores this theme through her ethnographic study of adolescent girls growing up in the city of Las Vegas conducted in order to “further our understanding of the role of mediated sex and consumer culture in relationship to emerging adolescent female identities” (p. 455). For Dentith, these choices were seen in the roles of sex workers, jobs that used female bodies as forms of capital. For myself, these choices were seen in exploring sexuality, eventually ending with my status in society changing to that of a teenage mother.

From many of the emerging themes of this study, including sex, commodification of the female body, and acts of resistance, curriculum implications can be gleamed. When these topics are consciously shaped by teachers, these efforts can result in “new sorts of imagination” (Dentith, p. 2004, p. 468). It is these new sorts of imagination that are vital today in order to

incorporate the role of the body into the curriculum and address the overwhelming images of the body presented to young people by the media. For as Adams (2004) states

Feminist postmodern concepts of identities acknowledge the multiplicity of such processes to include their shifting nature, situational relevance, and ever-revolving fluidity...Identities, in postmodern theories, are shaped out of particular locations and result from one's own interpretations and construction of self, in interaction with experience, culture and discourses (Adams, 2004, p. 458).

Each of these studies, coupled with my own personal experiences, strengthens my understanding of the everyday lives of adolescent girls. The voices, actions, and thoughts have been recorded. It is now time to transform them into something new. Like Gough, I seek to use my experience to further myself while teaching others in order for them to find their own empowerment. My own cyborg has become my way of dealing with realities inflicted upon me or others. Like Sharon, I quickly learned what it was like living outside the realm of accepted female position and like the girls in Dentith's study, I have experienced the power in using one's body as a means of resistance while at the same time becoming enmeshed with new body realities. It is for these reasons that I choose a theoretical approach for my research. Work has been done describing the experiences of girls in schools and ways in which they are marginalized through the curriculum. However, this work has not been brought to the forefront of educational discussion, theory, or practice. This work has not been connected to, analyzed, or synthesized on a personal level of being that brings a passion, excitement, and focus to such work that it truly becomes meaningful in the world in which we live. For as Webbert (2007) states, "It is impossible to theorize in a vacuum, ideas build and generate from theory preceding us in the same manner that our ideas will shape the theoretical models of the classrooms of tomorrow" (p.

135). Through my own experiences, I too have become a better educator, researcher, teacher, student by “embodying my own mine site...I can write a better... education curriculum” (Gough, 2003, p. 46).



## Chapter 4

### **Making Schools a Better Place for Our Girls**

When I began to embark on my educational journey, my personal hopes were to become a better educator so that I could make the school a more open place for the female students I teach. As the educational journey progressed, I found myself continuously searching for the class, the book, or the article that would offer me insight into positive ways in which to create an environment that was empowering to all students, especially girls. As I neared the time to choose an emphasis area for my doctoral coursework, I thought that I might find the answers I was seeking within the field of educational leadership. For, educational leaders face an increasingly challenging and complex role as they become leaders of schools today. Not only is curriculum and accountability becoming more demanding, but students are bringing increasingly more diverse backgrounds and needs to the school setting and educational leaders must be abreast of changes in developing research in order to best meet these demands. As I firmly believe in my research, schools are the place in which many of our students receive many of the messages that shape them into the adults they will become. With this in mind it is important to realize that

As we look into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are many challenges to be faced in the field of education, both internal and external to schools, that will determine both what children learn and how they learn. In the absence of large scale improvements in schooling in this country, we will continue to be concerned with improving instruction and learning, ensuring effectiveness of teachers, strengthening schools as institutions, preparing diverse populations for the future, and gaining a better

understanding of the changing social context and what that means for individuals and the nation (Jones, 2000, p. ix).

Not only must educational leaders realize the important role they hold in the school in the traditional sense, they must also examine the ways in which school influences and develops students. Particularly, schools must evaluate and discuss the ways in which they contribute to the identity development of youths, specifically girls. While traditional views of schools and school improvement on the part of educational leaders have focused on issues of stated curriculum, teaching practices, discipline, etc., new demands by students and increasing needs for a more diverse society have widened this perspective. As Harris (2002) states, “Over the past thirty years the school improvement research field has become a powerful influence in both education policy and practice. The message that *schools make a difference* has provided the rationale for various school improvement programmes and reform efforts” (p. 6). These reforms have varied tremendously, but most tend to focus on improvement of student performance. Embedded within these reforms are the ways in which they effect the identity development of America’s youth, including girls. It is from this perspective that I began to examine the dominant trends in educational leadership in the form of school improvement in order to find spaces within educational leadership to strengthen the position of girls in schools in order to combat the messages of the hidden curriculum through positive resistance actions.

### ***A Standards Based Approach to School Improvement***

One cannot begin to examine school improvement efforts without first examining the largest push in educational reform in this century, the standards based approach to school improvement. As both a researcher and as a student, this is where my efforts were initially

directed when I began to examine what it was exactly that schools were (or were not) doing to create an equitable and liberatory education for girls. For, it must be noted that the standards and the formal curriculum of the school is inherently linked with the hidden curriculum and the messages that it sends. In order to understand one, you must also understand the other. So, in order to begin to understand this reform movement, I first had to begin to understand the dominant view of school leadership through which much of educational research has been conducted. Miles, Elkholtz, and Vandenberghe (1987) define school improvement “as a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively” (p. 10). Many of the educational goals present in America today, particularly in the South where test scores continue to remain among some of the worst in the nation, are focused on the rigorous demands to meet both state and national curriculum standards.

Dating back to the Sputnik era of the late 1950s, brought into increasing prominence with the *A Nation at Risk* report in the 1980s, and most recently reemphasized with the passing of *No Child Left Behind* in 2001, schools are increasingly being pressured to show performance. On a national level, President George W. Bush implemented his *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) plan shortly after entering into office in 2001. This plan was built on the idea that “too many of our neediest children are being left behind” and calls for increased accountability, more choices for parents and students, especially those in low performing schools, greater flexibility for states, school districts and schools, and putting reading first (<http://www.ed.gov/nclb>, 2001). The four official pillars of the *No Child Left Behind* plan are similar, calling for “stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven educational methods, and more choices for parents” (NCLB, 2001). NCLB centers on assessment and accountability and

requires annual testing in grades three through eight in reading and mathematics. The plan requires that schools and/or school systems that do not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) offer the option to parents and students to transfer to a better performing school. Those schools that persistently fail must “permit low-income students to use Title I funds to obtain supplemental educational services from the public- or private- sector provider selected by students and their parents” (NCLB, 2001). All students are expected to reach 100% proficiency by 2013-2014. Currently being a teacher within a critical benchmark year under NCLB, I was very aware of the ways in which these standards and standardized testing dictated the experiences one has in schools. While the plan seems to be presented in a positive way to both the public and educators alike, personal experience and research has shown that this plan is not as innocent nor as productive as it is presented.

Proponents of standardized testing argue that standards and standardized tests have many benefits for students and for education. First, proponents argue that the information gained from standardized testing is useful in the diagnosis of students’ strengths or weaknesses. Also, proponents believe that valuable inferences can be made and student growth over time can be measured by standardized achievement tests. Standardized tests are tests that are either “designed to yield norm-referenced or criterion-referenced inferences, (and are) administered, scored, and interpreted in a standardized manner” (Popham, 2005, p. 282). Proponents of standardized testing believe that these tests offer a measure of objectivity to measure student achievement. They believe that standardized tests offer a standard way to compare students and many people base their judgments on students and schools solely on these tests. However, in doing so, the emphasis on standardized testing is having negative effects on students and schools. While standards and standardized test may provide a rough picture of what students know, these tests

cannot “reliably measure what an individual child actually knows because children are not consistent test takers. Even if the test was administered several times, the problem remains: snapshots cannot show a child's full range of capabilities” (Livingston & Livingston, 2002, p. 9). Children need to be observed and assessed over time and in a variety of forms in order to truly identify student knowledge and understanding. The impact of one pass/fail test implemented by the state can have dire effects on students. By relying on one measure of student and teacher achievement and tying this measure with the threat of public humiliation through the publication of test scores and more damaging, the retention of students, we are sending dangerous messages within our schools. Meier points out, “Every time we hold a child over, we are substantially reducing the odds of that child graduating anytime in the future – and once we hold a child over twice, the odds go down to less than one percent” (2002, p. 131). Being aware of this research and data, which has been echoed by many educators and researchers over recent years, I felt it necessary to examine the ways in which these standardized testing practices are being reflected in my own geographical location and those in which surround it.

I found that this legislation had powerful implications for all states, but especially many Southern states which were already underperforming and suffering from poverty. Georgia, a state in which there are thirty-nine counties categorized as “declining rural counties,” was especially hard hit (Livingston, 2002). For these “thirty-nine counties form a constellation of poverty that slash through the southern region of the state of Georgia. Forming contiguous pockets of counties in rural decline, the constellation extends in a chain from the far southwest corner to the eastern part of the state” (Livingston, 2002). Data from these counties show that, “Because school children here are likely to be impoverished, living in a household run by an unwed mother who dropped out of school, the prospect for academic success is bleak” (Livingston, 2002). Not

only are these results alarming due to standards based performance indicators, these results portray the picture of many young adolescent girls within the South. In the report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls*, researchers found

Neither the *National Education Goals* issued by the National Governors Association in 1990 nor *America 2000*, the 1991 plan of the President and the U.S. Department of Education...makes any mention of providing girls with equitable opportunities in the nation's public schools. Girls continue to be left out of the debate- despite the fact that for more than two decades researchers have identified gender bias as a major problem at all levels of schooling (AAUW, 1992, p. 1).

Research in this report details various ways in which girls are shortchanged in schools including the fact that girls tend to receive much less attention in the classroom than boys. In the subjects of math and science, two areas increasingly focused on for educational improvement since the Sputnik era, teaching strategies and subject interest were often selected that are more appealing to boys in the classroom. Additionally, the report found that "African American girls have fewer interactions with teachers than do white girls" and "Sexual harassment of girls by boys...in our nation's schools is increasing" (AAUW, 1992, p. 2). Additionally, the curriculum plays an important role in that it delivers both the informal and formal messages of the hidden curriculum. Through the curriculum, students come to develop motivation, attitudes, and images of themselves and the world around them. The image that the school presents to girls in particular is a rather negative one. Furthermore, schools are designed around the dominant ideologies of a particular class, making it difficult for students of various races, social classes, genders, and socioeconomic statuses to assimilate to the expected norms. The curriculum and the role it plays in social and economic success is a vital aspect of schooling. This effect can be particularly

devastating for girls due to the fact that “girls are systematically discouraged from courses of study essential to their future employability and economic well-being” (AAUW, 1992, p. i). A recent article in the Los Angeles Times supports this assumption detailing a study of female math teachers passing on their math anxiety to their students. While the study shows that ability levels between boys and girls in math are equal, the stereotypes that persist about girls underperforming in the area of mathematics leads to long term consequences because, “if girls don’t take advanced math and science classes, they’re effectively shutting themselves out of certain college majors and, thus, many career options” (Kaplan, 2010). It is for this reason that we must examine the dominant trends in educational leadership and reform in order to find a place to strengthen the role of female students from a young age.

Many theorists have begun to recognize and publicly acknowledge the ways in which the standards based movement has negative consequences for students and teachers in schools. In *Many Children Left Behind* (2004) educational theorists, including Alfie Kohn, Linda Darling-Hammond, and George Wood, join together to give their views on NCLB and the impact it is having on public schooling. Among the most common noted problems of the NCLB plan are underfunding, testing, and affects on schools. The NCLB plan ignores the inequalities of today’s schools and instead focuses on making all students equal by means of standards and testing. Linda Darling-Hammond states that it seems that, “In lieu of resources, the state offers tests, which are used to hold students back if they do not reach benchmarks...and to deny them diplomas, which in today’s economy is the equivalent of denying access to the economy and to a productive life” (2004, p.22). By placing all of a child’s value on a test and limiting their future based on the results of this test, the formal curriculum is aiding and carrying out the role of the hidden curriculum by keeping class structures in place. To further exaggerate this problem, it

seems that NCLB punishes those schools that serve the largest numbers of low-income students and the greatest variety of demographics by setting AYP goals for each specific sub group.

Ninety five percent of students in each subgroup must take the test and all must meet the AYP target. If one subgroup does not meet these guidelines for two consecutive years, then the entire school is placed on a “needs improvement” list (NCLB, 2001). Therefore, schools with a group of homogeneous students have a better chance at meeting AYP than those schools who serve a diverse population.

Supporting the idea that NCLB actually punishes those schools that have diverse and low income populations is the fact that the pressure to meet standards and AYP may actually push students out of schools in order to meet these goals. George Wood supports this theory stating, “When schools are judged on how well students test, students not likely to succeed are encouraged not to test or are simply asked to leave school” (2004, p. 38). This was my own personal experience when I became a student who was not longer a valuable test score. Becoming a teenage mother automatically moved me into the group of students who are viewed as a threat to the success of the school. By providing minimal, if any, homebound assistance in order to meet graduation requirements, I was pushed from the school environment in order not to hurt the overall scores of the school. My experience is one that is not unique. In fact, many students feel this same pressure that they are not wanted within the school environment at a much earlier age than I experienced it and this only serves to exacerbate the issues that these students are already dealing with. The stress to meet the pressures and sanctions imposed by NCLB are forcing schools to take extreme measures, including eliminating nap time in the early grades, taking away recess, field trips, and spending very little to no time on subjects that are not tested, including the subject of the everyday lives of students and the experiences they have both



within and without of the school environment. The kinds of education that we are providing for all students, particularly those that are marginalized along the lines of gender and class, is one that not only does not meet their needs or acknowledge their everyday experiences, but one that is actually harmful in both their school career and identity development. Through telling students that they are not welcome or worth the effort within the school environment, schools are serving to shut out those students who could benefit from education the most. It is these extreme conditions under which public school educators are asked to teach and students are asked to perform. Whether these government measures are being implemented innocently or with a calculated end in mind, government intervention is, now more than ever, taking away the freedom to teach in order to meet the needs of students. Only when the performance mandates and a one size fits all education package is removed from our society and government mandates may we truly reach our goal of leaving no children behind.

While much of the research regarding marginalized students and girls' performance in this standards based era in which we live is disheartening, O'Reilly reminds us of the ways in which we can use the capacities in which we teach and lead to reach all students, especially girls, O' Reilly states, "Although there are not simple answers to helping girls have the chance they deserve to develop into fully functioning human beings, teachers can take the lead in modeling agency and voice for girls as they provide important role models of strong adult women" (2001, p. 25-26). While the essence of the standards based movement may actually be the problem in schools today, it is necessary that teachers begin to use strategies that can subvert the present practices of schools in order to create a better environment for our students. William Ayers (2004), author of *Teaching Toward Freedom*, supports this idea of recognizing one's own practice within the role of the school and takes it one step closer to involve the moral and ethical

aspects of education. Ayers (2004) believes that, “Teachers can teach toward freedom, and teachers can conversely represent and practice a kind of ‘unfreedom’- subjugation, repression, agents of dependents and subservience” (p. x). While it can be seen that the oppression and repression created through the institution of the school and the standards based movement serves to cause a notable drop in self esteem and achievement of adolescent girls (Digiovanni & Liston, 2005), the role of the teacher in combating these negative trends is often overlooked. These drops have many factors, “but most certainly schooling that is male centered and the simultaneous socialization of young girls into traditional feminine roles contribute to these decreases in achievement” (Digiovanni & Liston, 2005, p. 124). While being a fifth grade math teacher, this was a role that I myself initially overlooked due to my own inexperience and the pressure to conform to standardized teaching and testing practices. While I have not yet created an ideal classroom in terms of opportunities for all students, I have begun to change my practices in positive ways including recognizing the need to stop the formal curriculum at times when it is in extreme conflict with the students experiencing it and opening conversations for students to express the experiences they are having in schools. Ayers supports this type of teaching that helps students reach their full humanity and develop their greatest potential possible. It is more than doing well on an end of the year test or national assessment; it is about educating the whole child in order for students to become liberated individuals. It must be realized that type of “education cannot be neutral- it is always in favor of something and in opposition of something else” (Ayers, 2004, p. 31). This realization of the myth of neutrality in schools allows one to examine the role of the standards based movement and the resulting effects on girls in school today. These shifts in ways of thinking about teachers and leaders in education today begins to shift school leadership from the theories and practices of scientific management to those of the

human relations movement first advocated by Mary Follet and promoting the importance of the “human factors of an organization” including the idea that, “Staff improvement was considered to be a system goal, whereby each unit was viewed as having influence on the success of other units and on the system as a whole” (Webb & Norton, 2003, p. 11, 13). It is integral to realize that the people that make up schools are the true means for change, success, and power. It is through changes in the people in power that change can come about in schools today.

More recent research results, performed in the wake of the standards based movement and the increasing drive to increase student performance, show some improvement over recent areas of concern noted in the 1992 report of *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (AAUW). For instance, new research reveals that, “Girls have made great strides in education and probably receive a fairer education today than in 1992...(and) gender gaps in areas such as math and science have narrowed” (AAUW, 1998, p. 1). Furthermore, there are increasingly more researchers bringing attention to the focus of girls and their performance in schools and the ways in which both the curriculum and the teacher effects this performance. In Erchick’s (2001) study of adolescent girls and their mathematics performance she notes, “As mathematics educators seek reasons for underrepresentation of women in mathematics and mathematics-related fields, some choose to pay particular attention to girls’ experiences in mathematics during adolescence” (p. 151). Erchick (2001) chooses to focus on the importance of voice in the mathematics classroom and feels that while many initially feel “unheard” (p. 155) in the classroom, “the voices can strengthen and develop and the more they do, the more willing the speaker to be heard, and the more allowing and hearing the environment, the more likely that the voice will make a contribution” (p. 155). Within my own role in the mathematics classroom, I have recognized the power my own voice holds in the experiences of adolescent girls within my class.

By showing that I have power, agency, and control over my own life, I am in turn modeling that for my students. In order to strengthen girls' voices within the classroom, Erchich (2001) encourages educators, particularly women, to "learn from each other and themselves how to identify their voices and how to use them" (p. 168) through the process of revisiting their own past experiences, examining their voice within the classroom setting today, and setting an example for female students in mathematics of powerful and rich voices that can be strengthened and developed. By sharing my own educational journey with my students and fellow educators I hope that I have opened conversations and ideas regarding the experiences of girls in schools and the ways in which these experiences can be strengthened. This research has particular relevance and importance for myself as well as other school leaders and the school improvement movement today in that it provides ideas, strategies, and dialogue concerning ways to strengthen the academic performance of girls in schools under the standards based movement, while also developing a way in which girls can "hear the voice they did have" and "ways they used and can continue to use that voice" (Erchich, 2001, p. 158) in order to strengthen not only their academic role, but also their role in society. For, as Shields (2006) states, this suggests

that the role of the educational leader is no longer confined to ensuring that curriculum guides are used, objectives met, topics covered, or tests taken. Indeed, leadership of teaching and learning becomes a matter of facilitating conversations that make sense of things and modeling for teachers how to create spaces in which truths may be explored (p. 72).

Educational leaders must realize that the key for student success in school is not to be found in a test score or meeting school improvement goals. True student success will only come from a reconfigured understanding of what it means to be successful in school and changes in the ways

that school leaders carry out their jobs. School leaders must go beyond monitoring curriculum and test score issues and include the presence of students and their lives when making decisions on behalf of the school. In addition, these leaders should serve as examples in creating the conversations needed for students to become part of the school environment.

### ***A Technological Approach to School Improvement***

While conducting my research and taking classes within the field of Educational Leadership I did not find any magic solutions regarding girls in the classroom and specifically the role of the formal curriculum package and how to make it better reach my girls. Rather, I found what I had already begun to experience as a teacher in public school, that the school environment and educational leaders within it were effectively shutting out the voices and lives of students within the school environment. It was as if the role of the school did not fit within the lives of students. However, I did begin to see that the issue was being discussed among the fringes of research circles and briefly in popular media. While I immediately took heart in both of these areas, I sought more. In no way had my formal and informal research within the confines of the Educational Leadership program provided me with more than beginnings of ideas, solutions, concerns, and challenges regarding girls in schools. As a final paper for a law course within the Educational Leadership program, I chose to examine the complex legalities of educators and the increasingly advanced world of technology, including various social interfaces. While not specifically focused on girls, I began to think about the ways in which technology influences not only teachers, but students on a daily basis. Could technology be the way in which to strengthen female voices within the classroom? With this in mind I began to think about ways in which the media enhanced culture in which we live could make a difference for girls in schools.

While the standards based movement has driven changes in school improvement for the past several decades, “Over the last 20 years, computer technology has assumed an increasingly prominent role, and schools have gradually responded by helping children develop the computer technology skills needed in the global workplace” (Dooling, 2000, p. 21). As new technological inventions and the computer age reigns supreme with products ranging from personal computers on cellular phones, digital video and still cameras, to portable music devices, computers are of vital importance and necessity in every aspect of present life. In fact, preparing children to become digital users and consumers has become one of the major focuses today. Jenkins (2006) suggests that

Children are being prepared to contribute to a more sophisticated knowledge culture. So far, our schools are still focused on generating autonomous learners; to seek information from others is still classified as cheating. Yet, in our adult lives, we are depending more and more on others to provide information we cannot process ourselves. Our workplaces have become more collaborative; our political process has become more decentered; we are living more and more within knowledge culture based on collective intelligence. Our schools are not teaching what it means to live and work in such knowledge communities, but popular culture may be doing so (p. 129).

In order for the school curriculum to incorporate the increasingly necessary and complex technological skills, technological training must delve deeper than word processing or computer programs in education and be examined in ways in which technology contributes to the revelation of oneself. We must realize that the technology education we are currently providing is an education that is barely adequate, if at all, to meet the demands of today’s children.

Reflecting on my own practice within the classroom and as a former student within school, I

began to examine the use of technology (or lack thereof) in my educational experience. First, when reflecting upon my life as a student, technology within the realm of the classroom was rarely used or utilized. While the social aspect of my life was essentially exploding in terms of technology as cell phones became a necessity, the internet became an interface used daily, and computer technology was advancing at a rapid rate, the school acknowledged little of these phenomenons. This seems to also be the case today in which much of the information that our students are finding relevant in their lives is that which is self taught. In an age of ipods, X-boxes, mp3s, laptops, and more, rote memorization and isolated learning tasks do not meet the needs of our students, our culture, or our lives. As Idhe (2002) points out, “both RL (real life) and VR (virtual reality) are part of the lifeworld, the VR is thus both ‘real’ as a positive presence and a part of RL” (p. 13). We must learn to realize and utilize the role of technology in the reconciliation of the self and the identity formation in children, especially girls. Reflecting on the ways in which technology was not used in my educational experience, I now recognize the huge role it could have played with me staying connected as a student within the school. After leaving the school as a teenage mother, I became essentially disconnected from the school environment. Had my educational experience involved the use of the internet or social interfaces in which I could interact with other students, this disconnection might not have been as acute and extreme. Also, if there was a means for interaction through the use of technology, I feel that I could have better expressed my voice as a student even from outside the physical boundaries of the school. While thinking of the ways in which I have been encouraged to use technology within the classroom today, most of it seems to center around increasing test scores and better meeting standards. Computers are used to the extent of having students participate in standards based computer programs designed to increase their performance in math and reading. New

technology, such as Promethean or Smart boards are touted only for their novelty in ways of presenting standards based information. Nowhere in my experiences as a student nor in my current experiences as an educator has the school provided encouragement of ways in which to use technology in order to help students, especially girls, become a more integral part of the life of the classroom. The more I explored the importance of technology in schools, the more hope I had that it could serve as the “voice” for my girls in the classroom and provide insight into the ways in which I could use technology within my own teaching practice in an empowering way for my female students.

While still not meeting all the needs of students today, technology growth within education has shown some promising growth. In schools today, “Access to the Internet and computer usage has grown at an exponential rate in recent years” (Cone, 2001, p. 173). Statistics show that

- Three out of every four U.S. public school classrooms have at least one computer designated for instructional use.
- Eighty five percent of schools are connected to the internet.
- Girls make up nearly half of the online population under the age of 18 and use the Internet slightly more than boys (Cone, 2001, p. 173-174).

While the statistics look hopeful, especially regarding the percentage of girls being represented, “Much of the literature suggests a technological gender gap that is leaving females behind, unprepared for the future” (Cone, 2001, p. 174). Research performed in 1998 by the American Association of University Women measuring the progress of girls in schools supports this claim. At that time, girls made up only a small percentage of technology based classes such as computer



science and design classes, experienced fewer female roles in computer games and software, used the computer less in schools, and generally did not feel the same feelings of self confidence using technology as boys (AAUW, 1998, p. 4). Within computer based courses themselves in schools “girls are more likely to enroll in word processing and clerical courses, whereas boys are more likely to enroll in advanced computer science and computer design classes” (Sadker, 1999, p. 25). While the statistics may seem discriminating in the technological field towards girls, the importance of technology in the classroom cannot be overlooked. The U.S. Department of Education encourages the role of technology in schools stating

Technology helps people learn, be creative, and become players and communicators in a global village. Technology, tied to the internet, allows students of all ages to engage in knowledge building on a worldwide scale as never before possible...educators, family members, supportive human service providers, and other community members are considering how technology can assist in implementing schoolwide improvement plans. Across the nation, these improvement efforts set high standards for all students, draw on challenging content, and require engaging instructional strategies. Technology can be used to individualize instruction and provide a range of learning experiences from remediation to enrichment (McNabb, Valdez, Nowakowski, & Hawkes, 1999, p. 9).

It is for these many reasons that educational leaders of today must find ways in which to incorporate technology into both schools and school improvement in a way that reaches all students. As the AAUW pointed out in their research, “we need to assess the role of computer technology in schools to ensure that it promotes equity and collaborations among all students” (1998, p. 4). School leaders and teachers must examine the role that technology plays within

their classroom and also ways in which they can use this technology in truly meaningful ways in the lives of all students, particularly girls.

Relying on the overwhelming body of literature supporting the use of technology in schools and the ways in which it improves performance, it is necessary that we examine technology in ways in which it can be equitable for all students, especially girls. How can we transfer the large numbers of female adolescents present in online communities to being present in education based technological advances? As educators and school leaders, we must examine the roles we play in preparing the technology program of the school and preparing the teachers within the schools to use technology in ways that are both equitable and gender conscious.

Much of the research focusing on equity concerning technology and gender focuses on the role of the teacher in the classroom. Part of the school improvement effort must focus on the role of the teacher and ways in which they can promote equity through the use of technology. Dooling (2000) encourages the redefinition of the role of the teacher through the use of technology. She advocates the teacher moving to the “role of facilitator” while inviting “others into the classroom to share in instruction” (p. 23). Others may and should include students themselves. By offering students, especially girls, the role of leader in technology classrooms, they begin to see themselves in powerful positions involving technology and can be encouraged to find their own empowerment through the use of technology. Personally, I have found myself able to do this through the use of a Promethean board or Smart board within the classroom. By allowing female students to take on the role of the teacher as they show how they solve problems or demonstrate their thinking, they are experiencing power within the classroom and slowly finding a voice to express themselves. While this is a promising start within my own practice, I

am constantly seeking training and more examples in order to be able to use the board and the associated technology more effectively within my own teaching practice.

Another way in which to offer girls this role is to allow and encourage the use of the computer as a tool for self expression and communication. Cone (2001) points out that, “The computer as a tool to express themselves seems to be a primary motivator in girls claiming technology for themselves” (p. 179). Ways in which computers can be used as tools for self expression include the use of computer based communities, personal web pages, digital software, and presentations involving computer based programs. For as Williams (2007) points out, “The power of culture to shape gender identities becomes particularly crucial for adolescents...As young people build their adult identities they look constantly to the culture around them (p. 300-301). This culture almost always includes technology. These technological cultures can provide a space for adolescents to develop their own identity in a healthy way, especially for girls. While typical school curriculum has refused to acknowledge the changing female adolescent body and the experiences girls have regarding acceptable female images to which they are expected to conform, technology has filled this gap. Through online communities, social networking sites, instant messaging, and various other technological means, girls are developing their identities. As Williams (2007) notes, “There are many examples of teachers and scholars exploring ways to help girls explore more complex and empowering literary practices, particularly in online situations” (p. 305). It is practices such as these that will and can lead to healthy identity formations in young girls, identities in which girls do not feel pressured to meet certain requirements of beauty or modify their bodies to fit dominant norms.

A promising approach of the use of technology within the classroom in order for students to experience an embodied curriculum is research and practices associated with using the

physical body in combination with technology. Researchers examining the idea of the incorporating the physical body with the use of technology describe the idea of embodiment as “using the physical world as a medium for interacting with digital technology” and explain this idea as a “new form of naturalistic, multi-modal interface” (Romero, Good, Robertson, Boulay, Reid, Howland, 2007, p. 1). In this particular study, researchers used a technological device referred to by students as the “magic mirror” in which students view themselves not only as themselves, but as they choose to see themselves as students in costumes, non human objects, and bodies in motion (Romero et.al, 2007, p. 1). The purpose of this research design is to involve children in the authoring process while also exposing them to new technology in a way that allows for “discussion and collaborative, imaginative play” (Romero et al, 2007, p. 2). While the initial purposes of this type of research design do not formally address identity development, I view this type of design as a way in which both students and educators can begin to recognize the role of the female physical body through technology interfaces while also exploring and theorizing about their bodies through the use of technology. Additionally, through these types of interactions students are able to view their bodies differently and try on different roles for imaginative play. By offering the role of author to female students, they are not only able to express their voice in the design process, but try out different body realities through technology. From these experiences, powerful conversations can proceed about the ways in which girls choose to view their bodies and ways in which these views reflect social, cultural, and gender expectations.

It is these types of situations that we as adults, educators, and scholars must look to in the world in which we live. It is through these types of technological and curricular changes that we can seek to create meaningful and healthy relationships with technology, relationships that allow

us to embrace the technologies of our time while using them for beneficial and healthy purposes. By changing the way in which students, particularly girls, interact with technology, we can change the way in which girls perceive their worth, their beauty, and their role in schools today.

When computers and technology are used in authentic ways for meaningful purposes, “students appreciate learning experiences that are authentic and relevant...(and) can apply and reinforce their new knowledge immediately” (Dooling, 2000, p. 23). By acknowledging ways in which technology use in the classroom may currently be inequitable and implementing strategies to train and incorporate a variety of methods to include all students in the technology wave, school leaders can play an important role in the success of gender equitable technology programs. By promoting an observant, safe, and caring environment within schools, school leaders can “offer a climate that is equitable for both boys and girls and provide for a variety of learning styles, abilities, and individual needs” (Cone, 2010, p. 186). Additionally, school leaders must look past traditional uses of technology to uses of technology that can truly incorporate both the bodies and lives of students in schools today. These methods of school improvement embody the theories of the postmodern deconstructionist movement which advocate empowerment within the school setting. As Webb and Norton (2003) point out, “For a culture of empowerment to work, it will necessitate leader-managers to clearly define their expectations and outcomes and the behaviors that will achieve these outcomes” (p. 23). As a school leader, one holds the responsibility of defining the expectation that the school environment will be equitable for all students through the use of various means, including technology, and establishing practices and professional development in order to assist all members of the school community in achieving these means.

### *Single Gender Approaches to School Improvement*

While there are a variety of ways in which to make technology use equitable within the classroom today, some schools and school leaders are looking to more dramatic changes within the school environment. As Cone (2001) points out, “To balance the playing field, many promote the advantage of single-gender settings for girls to connect with technology” (p. 180). This idea of single gender settings extends beyond the concerns for equity in technology and reaches into all areas of school life. Reasons for choosing single sex classrooms range from equity to performance on standardized tests to promoting feelings of empowerment within the classroom. Single sex environments for girls are claiming to offer a variety of advantages. In a world in which students are receiving pressure from all angles to conform, single sex classrooms can possibly offer a relief to these pressures. As a teacher of young female students, I find this to oftentimes be true. Quite often do I see girls personalities and willingness to take risks vary within the classroom as the classroom makeup shifts between certain groups of students, particularly boys. Reflecting on my own experiences in school I also remember being acutely aware of the ways in which even simple answers to questions would be viewed by the opposite sex. My experiences are experiences that have been recognized by some for there are currently at least 540 schools offering single-sex classes for all or part of instruction across the nation. The majority of these schools are designed for students in the middle school years. Specifically within Georgia, there are 18 schools listed with the NASSPE as offering single-sex environments (National Association for Single Sex Public Education, 2008). As Bailey (1996) points out,

Pressures on students from peers, from popular culture, and even from many adults around them all define gender stereotypic behavior as normal, expected, and successful...In a world where being labeled as a ‘girl’ is the classic insult for boys,

single-sex environments for girls can provide a refuge from put-downs and stereotypes (p. 76).

As research from the National Association for Single Sex Public Education (NASSPE) shows, the interest and practice of single sex classrooms within public education has grown significantly in the past decade. The NASSPE supports the use of single sex classrooms for both boys and girls and states that the “gender-separate format can boost grades and test scores for BOTH girls and boys” (2008). Additionally, the format of single sex classrooms can serve to “break down gender stereotypes” with girls in single sex classrooms “more likely to take classes in math, science, and information technology” and boys in single sex classrooms “more likely to pursue interests in art, music, drama, and foreign languages” (NASSPE, 2008). However, this claim does not come without caution. The NASSPE warns educators that the benefits of single sex classrooms do not come simply from separating boys and girls in separate classes or schools, but comes from adequate preparation and research behind the idea of single sex schooling. Part of this preparation includes understandings of how all children learn in school, including brain based learning and developmental differences between boys and girls (NASSPE, 2008). The NASSPE is not alone in heralding the benefits of single sex classrooms. In *Educating Young Adolescent Girls* (2001), O’Reilly points out

Hot topics in educational circles focus on single-gender schools of classrooms for girls.

Young women who have attended single-gender high schools are often enthusiastic about the opportunities for ‘voice’ and leadership they experienced that many of them believe would not have existed for them in a co-educational high school (p. 19).

The setting and design of single sex classroom models have several considerations in order to be effective. While studies show that “single-sex classes can clearly contribute to a comfortable yet intellectually challenging middle school experience. Such arrangements work as long as students can choose whether or not to participate” (Spielhagen, 2006, p. 72). Student choice is a powerful factor for motivation within both single gender and mixed gender settings. By allowing students to feel in control of some aspect of their school environment, school leaders and parents are opening doors for more democratic classrooms and practices. One way in which single sex classrooms are offering more choices for students is through a flexible single sex environment. Many schools that have tried single sex classrooms report limiting single sex classes to core academic subject areas and having coeducational classes in other areas. Additionally, “Offering subject-specific single-sex classes in each grade might provide for even more flexibility, as long as the curriculum remains identical for both genders” (Spielhagen, 2006, p. 72).

Also, when examining experiences within single sex classrooms, “Students in all grades reinforced the importance of emotional, intellectual, and physical safety” (Speihagen, 2006, p. 72) directly correlating with Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow “proposed a different type of motivation model that encompassed a hierarchy of five fundamental needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization” (Webb & Norton, 2003, p. 16). When examining my own personal school experiences, I can only relate the first two needs being met. Perhaps through an alternate school setting, such as a single gender classroom, I would have been able to reach the level of self-actualization, which for me only happened after I left the realm of the public school classroom. These five basic needs must be met before any learning takes place, with a single sex classroom environment being no different. For some researchers



and students, a single sex classroom is where students have felt these needs met and are able to explore their own voice and ideas for the first time within a school environment.

The increasing move to single sex classes has not come without controversy. Title IX of 1982, a law against sex discrimination in education, “effectively prohibited single-sex classrooms except in a few special cases” (Green, 2006). However, the renewal of *No Child Left Behind* called for more flexible measures under Title IX and led to an eventual reinterpretation of the law in 2006 that allows “any class or school that can show gender separation leads to an improved student achievement” (Green, 2006) permission to create single sex classes. In an era where school leaders are constantly seeking new means of school improvement and increasingly willing to take risks regarding new ways of thinking about schooling, this comes as no surprise. Reactions to this legislation have been mixed within the educational setting. While seeming to have many benefits, single sex classrooms were initially supported by several strong women’s groups, including the American Association of University Women. However, “Within a few years...the AAUW reversed its stance and concluded that single-sex classes could lead to programming decisions that discriminated against girls” (Spielhagen, 2006, p. 69). Single sex classes have also been supported by such groups as the Young Women’s Leadership School, “founded in 1996 by Ann Rubenstein Tisch” (Green, 2006) and recognized nationally and politically by Hillary Clinton for the positive results of their single sex classrooms within Harlem.

While these single sex environments have experienced increasing popularity and some success, it is also important to examine the viewpoint that

these environments may also send messages that can perpetuate rather than eliminate negative gender stereotyping. Removing girls from classes in order to provide better learning opportunities for them can imply that girls and boys are so different that they must be taught in radically different ways (Bailey, 1996, p. 76).

This concern is echoed by both NOW and the ACLU stating, “Separation may not only be unnecessary, they say, but it could have adverse effects such as increasing gender inequality over the long term or perpetuating stereotypes” (Green, 1996). While both camps raise valid and important issues regarding the public education of all students, specifically girls, much can be learned from this argument. As Bailey (1996) explains,

Rather than assuming that we must isolate girls in order to protect them from boys’ boisterous, competitive behavior- or that boys will be unduly feminized in settings where girls are valued and comfortable- we must look carefully at why some students and teachers prefer single-sex settings for girls. We must understand the positive aspects of these classrooms in order to begin the difficult task of bringing these positive factors into mixed-sex classes (p. 76).

### ***School Leaders Creating Gender Equitable Environments***

As the AAUW states, “New reforms seek to establish high standards of achievement for students and create rigorous learning environments. From charter schools and home schooling to school vouchers, alternate forms of education have made the educational landscape more complex and diverse” (1998, p. 1). While the research has shown improvements in many areas for girls, which may or may not be attributed to various school improvement efforts, this new research also raises new concerns regarding educational equity. As Bailey (1996) states, “Gender

equitable education is about eliminating the barriers and stereotypes that limit the options of *both* sexes” (p. 76). In order to do this, we must examine and utilize the progress made in school improvement efforts and research to better meet the needs of all students, particularly girls. In the era in which we live, it is imperative that we examine the curriculum and school reform efforts in ways that lead to better understandings of the specific needs of all students, specifically females. In order to do this, we must first “acknowledge the gendered nature of schooling” (Bailey, 1996, p. 76-77). By examining research such as the studies conducted by the American Association of University Women and similar research groups and the efforts and research behind school improvement, we are able to examine these efforts in terms of gender. By creating dialogue among educators and students both within and outside the classroom about issues of gender and ways in which gender impacts schooling experiences, we can create new lines of discourse and awareness to lead to a more gender cognizant curriculum.

Secondly, as educators, we “must take a careful look at our own practice” (Bailey, 1996, p. 77). As a result from the conversations about gender, we must examine our own practices within educational settings to see how our practices conform to and/or contribute to the gender roles and dominant ideologies created in schools today. As educators, it is our role to initiate these conversations and following reflections on practice within the classroom and the school environment.

Lastly, we must learn from the research presented in a multitude of areas, including, but not limited to, the standards based movement, technology initiatives and practices, and single gender classes and schools in order to determine “teaching techniques and curricular perspectives that have particular appeal to girls and determine how to use these approaches successfully in mixed-sex classes” (Bailey, 1996, p. 77). There is no one magic bullet or simple solution in

educational reform for school improvement that will easily change schools to be more welcome environments for adolescent girls. However, research is showing an increasing trend in highlighting areas of gender concern and school leaders are becoming more aware of these conversations. As school leaders, most

can perform the more technical and rationale management activities with relative ease. But to succeed, they must not divorce these activities from important underlying questions about social justice. Leaders must learn to ask who and what is being taught before they ask how to engage in instructional supervision...Educational leadership becomes more viable, robust, and credible when we break the silences that constrain use, broaden the base of our reflections and interventions, and when we become 'wide-awake' to the people with whom we live and work in schools...involving them in value-based conversations about the purposes of education, the kind of society they want to live in, and their role in its creation (Shields, 2006, p. 79).

While the traditional structures of school today may be contributing to the issues of adolescent girls in schools, there are ways in which researchers, educators, and students alike have begun to subvert the present thesis of accountability in education in order to create new and powerful changes within the realm of standards based education, technology, and single sex classrooms. By working within the system while simultaneously working to create changes in the fundamental ways that school is conducted, I have begun to find ways to make changes in the lives of girls and the experiences they have within the classroom. It is in through finding ways to strengthen my position as an educator that in turn strengthens the positions of the adolescent girls within my classroom that I have begun to find create my own place within the field of Educational Leadership. For it is necessary and vital that educators find these places where they

can create change in order to create schools that are spaces for all students and specifically recognize the needs of all students, particularly girls.

## Chapter 5

### Intelligent Resistance

Every year, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are divided by gender and attend a “Growing Up” class conducted by the school nurses. This year, as I supervised the 5<sup>th</sup> grade girls in attendance at their annual class, I was once again struck by how completely the female body is removed from the school environment. After a highly technical and formal explanation of puberty, bodily changes, and menstruation, the girls were dismissed from the “Growing Up” class and returned back to class with strict instructions to keep the contents of the meeting secret and confidential from anyone else in the school, especially the boys. Handouts were to be folded and immediately placed in book bags only to be removed when girls arrived home. Time for questions during the class was eliminated from the program due to time constraints. As I watched my girls giggle nervously, whisper questions to each other, and look embarrassed during the class, I was struck by the irony of the forty-five minute class covering years worth of information regarding bodily changes and female development. While I recognize and understand the boundaries often placed upon the school, the nurses, and the topic of the changing female body in general, I was amazed and disturbed by the consolidation of the changing adolescent female body to a forty five minute class. By limiting not only the time spent on the class, but almost all discussion and questions also, the class seems to support the assumption made by Maudlin (2006) in her work that “students and teachers come to understand that their only value lies in the text, the scores they produce, and that their bodies, their physical, social, emotional experiences are not important” (p. 117). Ironically, immediately upon returning to the classroom, preparations for the CRCT were continued, the lunch schedule began, and life in school continued on with no mention or

consideration of the changing bodies within it. If this is the way in which the school deals with the changing adolescent body, how is it that girls can come to have a positive experience regarding identity development and develop positive feelings and actions regarding their bodies? Is it possible to incorporate the idea of the body and identity development within the confines of the traditional school structure and the hidden curriculum in order for girls to develop positive means of resistance and actions associated with their bodies? It must be recognized that in order for all students, particularly girls, to engage in healthy identity development and positive resistance acts against patriarchal norms and gendered identities, the body must be brought within the walls of the classroom and the school.

### ***Bodies in Curriculum Today***

It is this dismissal of the body from the classroom that makes it urgent that the body become a part of the curriculum within the place of the school. In Pinar's work, *The Synoptic Text Today* (2006), he encourages us to ask the question, "What knowledge is of most worth?" (p. 92). This is a question worth repeating as we examine the role of the school in identity development of adolescent girls. What knowledge are we creating in our students by carrying out both formal and informal curriculum packages in public schools today?

A central question for educators is "how can I speak to my students of racism, sexism, homophobia, and economic oppression in ways that remind them that these discriminatory beliefs have been exacerbated, not quelled, by the many 'advancements' of our modern, technological society" (Doll, Wear, & Whitaker, 2006, p. 20). Through this modern technological society, we are able to act out the fantasies of life, of images. Idhe (2002) tells us, "We can- in technological culture- fantasize ways in which we get beyond our physical

limitations of our social problems by means of technologies created in utopian imaginations” (p. xiii). However, even in this technological culture we see that, “The woman’s body has become increasingly common cultural property... (while) the penis has grown more, not less, culturally cloaked over time” (Idhe, 2002, p. 22). This is asserted through the fact that, “Boys do not seem to develop the same awareness of ‘the gaze,’ the feminine response to which includes crossed legs, motions to cover or hide body parts, etc. as if the gaze were a ‘penetration’ into areas of privacy” (Idhe, 2002, p. 22). Through the increasing exposure of the female body, girls are presented with an increasingly narrow realm within which to fit in order to be considered “acceptable” and “normal.” Increasingly in this media filled world, “we identify with beings whose very job in life is to be the object of the gaze” (p. 223) and the “more that celebrity bodies become the site of identification, desire, and imitation, the more ordinary people will turn to surgery, and the more aggressive we will become in our relationships to our own mirror images” (Blum, 2003, p. 229). These ideal images are often shaped upon the lines of race, class, and gender and are set as acceptable means to which to conform. Within the classroom, these norms are set to not challenge the status quo or the social reproduction taking place along the lines of race, class, and gender through the implementation of the hidden curriculum. Unfortunately, for most girls, the resistance acts that they choose to resist this type of curriculum and norms are acts that only seem to oppress them further.

The current curriculum in today’s schools often ignores the ideas of racism, sexism, homophobia, economic oppression, and perpetuates gender roles in favor of a curriculum that prioritizes trivial bits of knowledge, a curriculum designed to maintain the status quo through a reproductionist model of education. It is past time for us as educators to take up the challenge to move past this model in favor of a curriculum that encompasses the whole student. Through a



curriculum that seeks to encompass the whole, including the physical body, we can strive towards a “‘bodied curriculum’ which attends to the relational, social, and ethical implications of being-with other bodies differently and to the different knowledges such bodily encounters produce” (Springgay & Freeman, 2007, p. xxiv). It is through this type of curriculum that we can seek to create meaningful forms of resistance in which all women and girls will not fear to define their own terms of beauty and power in a way that allows them the freedom to become beautiful, to become different. For it must be recognized that

Girls and young women desire to be engaged in identity work, work that allows them the opportunity to articulate who they are and who they want to become. This type of work is done in schools, but on the margins of classrooms, in the lunchrooms, and crammed into the 4 minutes between classes. It needs to be pulled out of the playgrounds, the backseats of buses, chats on the Internet, and the hallways of schools and made central to the curriculum so that girls may more thoughtfully and critically consider how they are becoming female (Bettis & Adams, 2005, p. 279).

As Giroux encourages, education is a “crucial force in the struggle over democratic identities, spaces, and ideals” (2006, p. 69). In the quest for change, “educators across the globe must make a case for linking learning to progressive social change while struggling to pluralize and critically engage the diverse sites where public pedagogy takes place” (Giroux, 2006, p. 109-110). In order for girls to claim their own space within the curriculum, the school, and the world at large, we need to “bring the body, with all its frenzied, impulsive intricacies, fully into the curricular conversation” (Maudlin, 2006, p. 119). By engaging in conversation and inquiry with our students and fellow females we can examine how have been taught to perceive others through patriarchal norms of beauty and come to understand and resist this viewing of ourselves

and others in positive ways. Boler (2006), in *Triple Takes on Curricular Worlds*, encourages “all of us whose project is teaching to engage with our students ‘in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine...*how one has learned to perceive others*’” (Doll, Wear, & Whitaker, p. 32). As my role as an educator and a former adolescent girl in school, I feel it is necessary to take Boler’s challenge. Educators must go beyond the formal mandates of the school in order to involve students in a conversation regarding power and the ways that it has been used against them while also formulating ways to resist unwanted roles and messages assigned to them. It is through this examination of current perceptions that we can examine the boundaries placed upon individuals based on race, class, gender, and more.

A powerful way in which we can promote positive resistance against patriarchal norms and dominant stereotypes is by examining the boundaries within which we live. As Doll (2006) points out, “boundaries are necessary for the colonial enterprise...The boundary is between colonizer and colonized, wealth and (often) poor, third world and first world, them and us” (Doll, Wear, and Whitaker, p. 5). The boundaries of which I have been speaking are those of the oppressed and oppressor, the beautiful and the ugly, the poor and the rich. These boundaries are set in place by those in power and serve to reinforce the notions and ideas of the hidden curriculum. Also, in our classrooms, these boundaries exist and “tend to be strictly enforced” seeking to keep “Them from Us” and reinforcing the “stereotypes that prop up gender, class, identity, and power boundaries” (Doll, Wear, & Whitaker, 2006, p. 6). It is within these boundaries that most educators and students feel pressured to perform in the school setting. Within schools, “In the regimented system of top-down scripts and standardized objectives, we have constructed boundaries between ‘academic’ learning and all the other types of knowledge we need to experience the world within and beyond the classroom doors” (Maudlin, 2006, p.

118). It is necessary for us to examine these boundaries in ways that can lead to change. As Doll, Wear, and Whitaker (2006) encourage us to do, we must examine these boundaries, adjust commitments, work with students, create bonds (p. 26), and transgress boundaries that have been set for us both as female students and women educators. Through transgressing these boundaries we can examine the opposing viewpoints of fat/thin, abnormal/normal, beautiful/ugly, in a way in which they are deconstructed and blurred in order to recognize various types of noses, skin tones, hair styles, and ways of being so girls and women do not feel pressured to conform to dominant standards of beauty and gender roles in order to experience success.

### *Language of Critique*

Throughout my research regarding adolescent girls within the South and from my own personal experiences within school, lack of power, voices, and control, are key issues that seem to resonate throughout much of the literature and contribute to girls using their bodies as resistance sites. Also, within the classroom, my female students continually complain of being “unheard” in a multitude of social spaces. It seems as if girls are essentially silenced within the walls of the classroom. This silence forces girls to be heard in other ways, including using the body as a site of resistance. While girls are often aware of feminist movements or social change, “these views and the girls’ perceptions of themselves within this discourse ignores the complex play of power and privileges at play in the gendered social and economic reality of women” (Dentith, 2004, p. 459). It is for this reason that we must first and foremost encourage and support girls in the recognition and acknowledgement of the ways in which they are oppressed, normalized, and bound along the lines of race, class, gender, and geographical location. Lalik and Oliver refer to this type of discussion in their work as a “language of critique that included considerations of how social constructions of gender, class, and race differentially affected

participation and success” (2005, p. 99). Particularly within the South, many girls are not given the voice or the opportunity to openly acknowledge the complexities of identity development nor the challenges faced as a girl or woman within the South. While girls may be offered more choices of clothing, employment, educational opportunities, and means of self expression, these choices are often limited within the very boundaries designed to promote gender roles and keep class structures and dominant ideologies in place. As Dentith (2004) points out,

What looks like liberation actually reinforces the public practices and ideologies of patriarchy that sustain women’s subordination within a larger society. The objectification and subordination of women become invisible, so to speak, in light of the power gained through economic means and certain media popularity. Thus, a liberal feminist discourse becomes *the* feminist discourse, in general, sealing notions of gendered identity in ways that ultimately fail to disrupt power relations (p. 460).

We must first open up this conversation to include talk of these topics. As Maudlin states, “In order to create spaces for disclosure and flexibility, and thus, risk, we have to reevaluate our embedded perceptions of teaching and learning through critical dialogue. If we accept the body as inscribed in language, then embodied pedagogy must involve engaging in meaningful, personal discourse” (2006, p. 128). This discourse goes beyond a thirty minute class on the changing female body and cursory acknowledgements of puberty and the changing female body. Also, it extends beyond what is stated to that which is not discussed. The discourse in schools regarding the female body and the daily experiences of girls must be reconstructed in a way that gives educators the means to open conversations with girls and gives girls the opportunity and voice to speak about their lived experiences. It is within this context that we must create conversations with our female students within the school. As educators, we must realize the

importance of the language in which we use to carry out these conversations with girls. For girls within the South, “Language is not the result of one’s individuality; rather, language constructs the individual’s subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific. What something means to individuals is dependent on the discourses available to them” (Richardson, 2003, p. 508). These conversations must be observant of and include the influences of geographical spaces as well as socially constructed boundaries.

One of the hardest things about having a meaningful conversation with girls in schools is often how to initially start the conversation when so much of the school environment has limited or forbid these types of discussion. Personally, I feel as if many of my past educators did not initiate conversations with me as a pregnant female student due to their uncomfortableness and lack of knowledge about how to start a conversation regarding my experiences. Additionally, as an educator of pre adolescent girls, I have felt unprepared and nervous about starting these conversations with my female students. However, in order to involve girls and their bodies in schools today, we cannot continue to ignore these conversations. For, conversations that involve girls and change the ways in which educators and girls alike acknowledge and discuss the female body in the classroom is a formative step to undermining the stereotypes and dominant ideologies of the hidden curriculum regarding girls.

In order for these conversations to be effective within the school environment, we must make a time and place for these conversations to happen. Educators must recognize and acknowledge this need for conversation in order for these conversations to take place. All too often, the need for these types of conversations is dismissed due to time restraints or the potential uncomfortableness of the topic. However, “These processes, when carefully attended to by the teacher and understood as a poststructural task of multiplicity can result in certain attentiveness

to notions of identity, power and knowledge...In this way, we support our own and our students' abilities to act out from within alternative perspectives" (Dentith, 2004, p. 469). In order to offer female adolescents within the South alternative forms of resisting the hidden curriculum and cultural expectations, critical and serious conversations are required. By acknowledging the voices of girls within the classroom and allowing a forum for conversations to reflect issues regarding identity development of Southern adolescent girls, educators are allowing a space for positive resistance while still recognizing the female body within the contexts of the classroom. This conversation and reexamination is necessary for it is through this new conversation that girls can begin to claim their own space for their bodies within the curriculum in a positive manner.

When having conversations regarding the body with girls within and without of schools, it is imperative these conversations take place before the onset of puberty and changes within the female body. By acknowledging that these changes are going to happen, educators and others that work with preadolescent girls are helping girls understand that the changes they will experience in their body are both normal and acceptable. Also, by having these conversations before girls are actually experiencing physical and emotional changes, girls are allowed time to process, understand, and question these changes. While it is necessary to have conversations regarding girls and their bodies early on, this conversation should not be a onetime event. Conversations regarding girls and their bodies should be ongoing throughout the period of adolescence framed in ways in which girls feel comfortable opening up about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For educators, these conversations can easily extend from teachable moments within the classroom. Personally, I have many girls and/or their mothers approach me telling me that they have just started to menstruate and asking to keep feminine supplies in my

desk. This serves as an opportune time to show acceptance and begin a conversation about the changing female body. Within my own classroom, I make sure I acknowledge how difficult it can be to deal with menstruation within the time constraints of the daily schedule and my girls know that they are free to use the restroom as needed. From my own initial reaction and ongoing acknowledgement of the daily experiences of girls regarding their bodies, I have seen my girls become more comfortable discussing their own femininity and their feelings about their body. While these conversations are initially difficult, the more I have had them, the easier they become. I have learned that sometimes these conversations may actually span over the course of a day, week, or entire school year. Different girls feel differently about sharing information about their bodies. Whatever the time frames of these conversations, I have made it a priority within my own practice to acknowledge the needs of girls as soon as possible, not delaying their desire for conversation in favor of formal curriculum mandates in schools. While there is no one size fits all conversation to meet the needs of girls in schools, the following conversation starters may prove helpful when starting and having conversations with adolescent girls in schools:

- Our bodies change a lot during puberty. What have you heard about the changes in your body and how do you feel about them?
- How have you changed over the last few (weeks/years/months)? What do you like the most/least about these changes?
- Do you think boys and girls are treated differently? Why do you think this is?
- At what age do you think you should be allowed to start dating? What do you feel a person needs to know before they start dating?

- Is there a certain age that you think girls are ready to have sex? How should you decide?  
(Planned Parenthood, 2010).

It is through these conversations with girls that we can create what Reynolds (2004) refers to as “lines of flight” by addressing “contingent dis/positions, not absolute positions or universal standpoints” (p. 2). Through these conversations educators can address the ways in which adolescent girls feel about their bodies within the school and ways in which they can begin to understand and use their bodies differently. One of the most powerful ways that girls and educators can begin to change the discourse in schools regarding girls is to publicly acknowledge the role of girls, their experiences, and their bodies in ways that forces others to also acknowledge and accept these experiences in their own practice. Through these vital and necessary conversations with girls we can help them develop “lines of flight” and resistance paths and create the “in-between” because “new ways of thinking always proceed from the ‘in-between.’ This is where lines of flight take shape. The possibilities for creative curriculum thought lie in those multiplicities, which emerge in the ‘in-between’” (Reynolds, 2004, p. 4). It is no longer about examining the idea of girlhood and identity development through socially constructed binaries and norms, it is about finding this in between space in curriculum and education that serves to create new ways to be considered as a powerful AND strong AND beautiful AND successful woman.

### ***Recognizing the body within the classroom***

In order to promote positive means of resistance to the hidden curriculum, we must recognize and acknowledge the female body within the context and conversations of the classroom. It must be recognized that, “The body is a gendered social phenomenon as it is



discussed, interpreted, and lived in embodied social interaction” (Fingerson, 2005, p. 131).

Through acts of resistance discussed throughout this work and witnessed on a daily basis within the context of the classroom, it can be seen that girls are beginning to “challenge the way that beauty is featured discursively as an essential and even primary goal for a girl to pursue” (Lalik & Oliver, 2005, p. 95). I would like to take this a step further and suggest that it is not only the role of beauty that girls are, and have been, resisting within the contexts of the school and society, but the larger social construct of what it means to be a girl in school, particularly within the South. Southern girls have been expected to dress, act, and carry themselves in ways that are socially acceptable based upon patriarchal norms and defined along the lines of race, class, and gender. Many girls, including myself, find these boundaries stifling and oppressive. Through my own personal story and through the stories of the girls which I teach, “We have (also) seen the importance of the bodily experience as teens experience the world through their bodies” (Fingerson, 2005, p. 131). These experiences range from dealing with menstruation and physical and emotional changes occurring during puberty to pregnant teens and breastfeeding within the confines of the school environment. As Fingerson (2005) explains,

For example, any changes in our bodies, such as menstruation, can affect how we interact with others and can produce shifting and changing identities. We can also express our identities through our bodies such as body modification, tattooing, clothes, and style. Thus, the body is a social creation dependent on the social, discursive, and physical context in which it resides (p. 131).

The concept of the female adolescent body is one that can no longer be ignored within the school. In order to reconcile the female body within the context of the school environment we must look at alternate forms of being and teaching within the classroom.

A promising approach to which we may look for this reconciliation is that of embodiment. The idea of embodiment is one that encompasses the physical body within the classroom in a way that acknowledges the uniqueness and presence of the body in all classroom activities. Fingerson explains,

Embodiment focuses on the body as the site for social experience. Our realities are indeed socially mediated, but we experience reality by living in and through our physical bodies. Additionally, our views on our own bodies may affect our interactions with others and how we understand and interpret those interactions (2005, p. 131).

This type of experience allows spaces for all types of bodies, including those of female adolescents, to define their own place within the curriculum. Maudlin (2006) further defines an embodied curriculum stating,

An embodied curriculum, then, is one that ‘sees’ the body, one that brings the body fully into the learning process to act as the vinculum drawn over social/cultural/technological interactions within and beyond the classroom. An embodied curriculum draws us into intimacy with the sensual, unruly, unpredictable, desirous body (p. 122-123).

This type of curriculum does not mean that there is no place for the formal curriculum as it now stands in schools, seeing as it is necessary to teach the standards and produce results in order for most educators to stay employed. Rather, this approach allows one to combine the ever present accountability pressure found in the form of test scores and standards, ever changing technological trends, and current issues in schools with the idea that students are more than a test score or an identification number. An embodied curriculum recognizes and realizes the needs of each learner as they uniquely bring these needs into the classroom environment. In an embodied

curriculum, “we can begin to recognize the connections, meanings, and multiplicities that even the youngest knowing-bodies always already bring to the classroom” (Maudlin, 2006, p. 124). Through bringing the idea of the body into the classroom and daily life within the school, we can begin to acknowledge the female body within the curriculum and help girls with positive identity work.

### *Sexual Agency*

When we begin to acknowledge and accept the female body within the classroom, our conversations must extend past puberty and ways in which girls feel they are viewed differently to also include the idea of the sexual body. While “we can offer girls support of their bodies and their maturity by celebrating menstruation and celebrating impending womanhood” we must realize that we must also include the sexual body in our conversations (Fingerson, 2005, p. 132). The sexual body is an integral part to an embodied curriculum approach as it is a part of the body that is often used as a resistance site to norms and ideas of the hidden curriculum and gender roles. As we seek to bring an embodied curricular approach into practice, we must make sure that girls “have the knowledge about their bodies to promote sexual agency” for, “without knowledge and language girls cannot respond to sexual situations in the safest manner (Fingerson, 2005, p. 132). An embodied curriculum must seek to incorporate the changing sexual body if it is to be instrumental in changing acts of resistance for female students. For, a powerful act of resistance for girls is oftentimes the use of their sexual body. As Liston and Moore-Rahimi (2005) explain, “Our view of ourselves as sexual ‘beings’ is a necessary component for a concept of who we are” (p. 224). In order to engage girls in true identity work, the role of the sexual body can no longer be ignored. In a study examining the sexual labeling and eventual negative reputations of young girls within the South, Liston and Moore-Rahimi (2005) state,

In popular culture, ‘good women’ were presented as ‘attractive and alluring’; and yet ‘not slutty.’ Furthermore, these fictional ‘good women’ walked this tightrope without becoming ‘a tease.’ Walking this line may be accomplished in the realm of fantasy, but the real women in this study found the route much too flimsy to traverse” (p. 216).

This fine balance is one that is often difficult to navigate and conflicted with varying messages from social, cultural, and popular media influences and oftentimes serves to shut down conversations regarding the body for adolescent girls. Particularly within the South, where Southern Baptist views reign supreme, “the sociocultural context steeped in Christianity serve(s) to reinforce the dichotomy that girls were either ‘pure’ virgins or ‘whores.’ Thus, if a girl was unable to firmly claim her innocence as entirely vaginal, the dominant discourse of ‘fallen women’ would apply” (Liston & Moore- Rahimi, 2005, p. 221). This dichotomy allows little to no room for sexual exploration for girls regarding their bodies and ultimately removes the female body and all conversations regarding sexual agency for young women from social realms.

While I am not in any way advocating for sexual activity on behalf of young women, it must be realized that the changing female body, including exploring sexuality, is part of the identity development process and an important topic in a true embodied curriculum. Approaches other than only supporting abstinence and limiting sexual education must be implemented if we are to meet the increasing needs of adolescent girls today. One seemingly obvious way of incorporating the female sexual body and acknowledging the sexual agency of young girls is through sex education programs within the public school. However, while these programs are in place in most middle and high schools, they are riddled with problems. Hirst (2008), in her study regarding school-based sexualities and relationships education (SRE), explains that in typical sex education programs in schools

input does not match young people's expressed needs or the realities of experience; sexual behaviour is the focus and is addressed in isolation from relationships and the social circumstances in which they occur; heterosexuality and vaginal penetration are privileged above other forms of sexual identity and practice; there are too few opportunities for discussion and developing communication skills; emphasis is on the risks and dangers of sexual acts with minimum attention to the place of pleasure, agency and autonomy in effecting safer sexual practices; and SRE is not discussed normatively or underscored by young people's right to healthy sexual expression (p. 405).

These problems, combined with social, cultural, and religious taboos regarding adolescents and sexual activity serve to curtail the discussion and education of sex and the changing adolescent body within the public schools. As Liston and Moore-Rahimi (2005) state, "The current discourse of abstinence and character education that have emerged in the wake of the Reagan/Bush presidencies and the AIDS crisis have served to perpetuate the traditionally hostile environment for young women coming of age in the United States" (p. 213). Lalik and Oliver (2005) support this idea, by stating that this omission is "not surprising within discussions that occur at school where the official discursive practices around sexuality, whether through instruction in physical education or through family life curriculum and pedagogy, have been marked by distortion and omission and directed toward control of the adolescent body" (p. 97). In order for adolescent girls to use their bodies in powerful ways, they must be informed and aware of sexual education and their changing bodies.

While it is a sensitive subject, particularly within the South, educators are a contributing factor in the relationships that girls form with their bodies, others, and the institution of the

school. In order for girls to come to positive and healthy understandings regarding the use of their body, it must be noted that

Educators can and should play a vital role in helping reconstruct a positive discourse of emergent female sexuality. Currently, most educators stifle the discourse of female sexual desire by chanting slogans that deny the desires of young women. Educators remain silent about female sexual desire and thereby force the next generation to find their own way through to adulthood through hostile terrain. Education can and should construct a discourse of sexuality that eliminates the sexual double standard and acknowledges the desires of young women as strong as the desires of young men, while recognizing that AIDS is a very real threat to the lives of adolescents. In this way, educators can begin to build a viable path through sexual and psychosocial development for all their students (Liston & Moore-Rahimi, 2005, p. 225).

While more research is needed regarding educating adolescent girls about sex in order for them to experience positive identity development, there are ways for educators to immediately incorporate the needs of adolescent girls within the school today. First, girls must be given a voice in order to express themselves and their thoughts regarding their bodies. As discussed previously, the language that girls are given is based upon many factors including social, cultural, racial, economic, and gender boundaries. Girls must be given both the language and the opportunity to share thoughts regarding their bodies. Additionally, “There must be an atmosphere provided where girls feel free to talk openly about their sexuality. Young women should be allowed to express and discuss their own sexual desires in an atmosphere free of violence and denigration” (Liston & Moore-Rahimi, 2005, p. 226). Through allowing girls a voice and opportunity to share their thought regarding their bodies, educators are acknowledging

the role of the female body and opening lines of communication to discuss ways in which girls view and use their bodies in daily life. Furthermore, discussion of the female body must acknowledge the daily lives and experiences of adolescents. Conversations regarding girls and their bodies cannot take place without acknowledging outside influences that come from both personal and public interactions. We must realize that, “Strategies to foster sexual competence must, of course, acknowledge the influence of peer norms, alcohol, coercion, and unequal gender relations on claims to pleasure, choice and agency” (Hirst, 2008, p. 410). While the results of such conversations are yet to be seen, educators can “facilitate effective role-modeling and the giving of emotional support that will empower young people to make decisions more consistent with achieving emotional and physical well-being” (Hirst, 2008, p. 411). It is through this emotional and physical well-being girls can come to understand the complexities of the female body and feel empowered and in control in all situations, including within the realm of the public school.

### ***Reconciliation***

While many of these ideas presented sound promising in theory, it is important to ask, “What does this really mean for my teaching practice?” and “What does this really mean for girls in schools?” First, I must recognize that while I have made many advances in acknowledging the female adolescent body within the classroom, I have in no way achieved the perfect classroom and my work is still a work in progress. I must continue to research, learn, and attempt to have these sometimes difficult conversations with girls in schools. Also, I must fight the daily battle of the pressure to meet standards and the accountability movement in order to make time to acknowledge the daily experiences of my girls in schools. For my female students, I have and continue to reflect upon my own journey of rebellion and resistance within the confines of public

education, and ask myself what do I feel could have changed things for me? What actions, conversations, and practices will be most helpful for the girls of whom I speak? I feel that the one of the most instrumental ways in which I could have stayed connected to the school environment after leaving it as a pregnant adolescent girl would have been for the school to acknowledge the changes within my body and my life in a way that was not critical or negative. While I realize that this would not have been an easy task, it must be understood that “building an embodied curriculum in the contexts of schools represents a formidable challenge, and at its core is selecting an appropriate context and determining the amount of noise required for an underlying formalism to become embodied” (Barab & Dodge, 2008, p. 99). For my own students, I can continue to acknowledge their experiences within the school and with their bodies, initiate and carry on critical conversations, and help students see the ways in which they can change power structures in positive ways. Within each of these areas it must be recognized that there are a multitude of other areas that are yet to be explored. For within this type of identity work, one must “acknowledge the multiplicity of such processes to include their shifting nature, situational relevance, and ever-evolving fluidity apparent within diverse contexts” (Dentith, 2004, p. 458). For, within the identity work of Southern adolescent girls, there must be multiple ways of being and becoming a woman within the South.

I was once one of the students of whom I now speak. I felt I had little control, power, or voice within the classroom or the larger social realms of which I was a part. In order to feel powerful, I engaged in using the body as a means to making myself heard. Life seems to be all about the journey, and while I would not change mine, I now realize that there are much more powerful means of resisting the hidden curriculum and societal norms. It is for these female students and educators of these students that I now speak. Reexamining the ways in which the



hidden curriculum is carried out in schools as well as ways in which female adolescents are using their bodies as sites of resistance is both urgent and necessary. For, many girls like myself, have now found themselves learning to deal with the results of resistance, including becoming pregnant. It is for these girls that this research is most vital. While all girls face difficult decisions regarding their bodies and their identity development, “teen mothers face these decision as older adolescents while they are struggling to construct their own identities, let alone their identities in relation to a new, young life” (Zachry, 2005, p. 2567). These girls are making decisions right now regarding their place in the educational environment as well as their place in the world at large. And, “Despite claims that pregnancy is the leading cause of teen mothers’ educational difficulties, other researchers have begun critiquing this argument, positing that teen mothers’ decisions to leave school have more to do with social policy or their previous experiences in school than with their pregnancies” (Zachry, 2005, p. 2571). It is for this reason that we must immediately examine our practice as educators and reach these girls through embodied curricular conversations before it is too late. It is also for this reason that I must find a way in which to speak to pregnant adolescent girls struggling to remain within the school environment. It has taken many years and the therapeutic writing of this work in order for me to become comfortable with my own story and now it is a story that I must share. Pregnant teens are isolated in ways that can serve to remove them from the school environment forever and it is necessary that we stop this cycle. With this knowledge, I plan to contact the local high school administrators and Pregnancy Care Center in order to share my story and be put into contact with girls who can benefit from it.

While I did not find a reconciliation between my personal life and body and the context of the school and education until reaching higher education, it is my hope that that can be

changed for other girls like me. Not only must we make immediate changes within the school environment to make schools a more open place for adolescent girls, particularly within the South, we must also advocate for further research and conversations regarding the daily life of adolescent girls and the ways in which we can incorporate identity development within the classroom. Also, as Zachry states, “educational researchers and policy makers would benefit from working toward understanding how teen mothers conceptualize themselves and their role in their own school success” (2005, p. 2595). We must continue to develop new ways of being together in schools if we are to make a place for all girls within the school environment. For through recognizing the ways in which the hidden curriculum operates, opening conversations for girls in schools, and developing an embodied curriculum approach, we “can lead to negotiation of new spaces between binary opposites that become central to one’s understanding of identity, subjectivity and position” (Dentith, 2004, p. 469). Through this reconfigured understanding of what it means to be an adolescent girl in school within the South, we can create a space for all students to find reconciliation between the school and their true self.

Throughout this work, I have found inspiration, comfort, and encouragement from the words of Pipher (1994) that seem fitting now as they will be fitting for years to come. While experiencing and experimenting with many types of resistance of my own, it is only through becoming a better mother, a better educator, a better researcher, and a confident Southern woman who has now defined her place within the curriculum that I have found my true self. For it is only “Intelligent resistance (that) keeps the true self alive” (Pipher, 1994, p. 44). It is only through changing my resistance acts from those of an adolescent girl resisting the hidden curriculum and the messages it sends through the use of the sexual body to an educated teacher,

researcher, mother, and powerful female role model that I have found the types of resistance that truly give me a reason for being and the passion to continue the fight.

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