Chance and Choice:

Self Creation in the Social Lives of Adolescent Girls

Elaine Batcher

ABSTRACT

The adolescent social hierarchy, a parallel universe, is created, confirmed and advanced within a very few years. Chance, in the form of appearance and speed of maturation, is important here, but personal construction of reality—choice—can also be powerful. The paper looks at the dilemmas facing adolescent girls as they confront the disparate requirements of social popularity and individual achievement, with a view to understanding creation of self as model, process and attempt at conflict resolution. A simple schema for the conceptualization of self creation is proposed.

Choose equality.
(Matthew Arnold)

Introduction

The adolescent social hierarchy, essentially a parallel universe, is created, confirmed and advanced within the few years separating adulthood from childhood. Chance, in the form of appearance or speed of maturation, may figure largely in the social setting, of itself and through the consciousness of individuals. As powerful, however, is personal construction of reality and the potential for choice.

Today's adolescent exists in a space that is both enabling and restricting. At the branching place of infinite possibilities, her easiest paths may be those within the web of convention. While living in an era in which doors once shut against women are being kicked in one by one, girls display far less variation on the theme of femininity than would be imagined from social rhetoric. Personal aspiration for traditional roles is both denied and confirmed in unwitting ways.

A previous paper showed girls as agents of their own impoverishment in their allegiance to their social groups, within which both sexes learned the nature and extent of traditional societal expectations. Social groups were seen to be mixed-sex associations of any size, embodying selection and exclusion, at whose core were the boys, and in whose service, in a complex way, girls performed conventional functions. Answers to the questions of adolescence,

about such things as identity, friendship, knowledge and one's future, were sought through association in the group, but for girls the answers were not necessarily beneficial, because girls, in many ways, traded personal interests for group acceptance. Achievement and popularity, for individuals, were visibly at odds.[1]

Are we to assume that nothing has changed for girls in spite of the women's movement? Is there confusion over the mix of old and new values? I prefer to think of present conditions as a developmental stage toward a new way of being adolescent, a future we can guess but not predict. This future is being created now, not in any deterministic way, and not because of any special qualities inherent in the current crop of youth, but because social conditions on the whole are evolving. Financial considerations if nothing else, forcing changes in methods of child-rearing, will necessitate changes in the conventions.

The purpose of this paper is to look at the dilemmas facing adolescent girls as they confront the disparate requirements of social popularity and individual achievement, with a view to understanding creation of self as model, process and attempt at conflict resolution. The paper is an attempt to place some of the findings of my recent study in the context of a diversity of ideas, to show "the perceived social reality within which individuals make decisions,"[2] that we may better understand their experience, and to conceptualize in a simple schema the

conflicts they face and must solve in the process of self creation.

Some Background

In 1984, using the method of paricipant observation, I spent several months meeting, observing and interviewing adolescents between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five. Observations were done in and around Metropolitan Toronto, mostly in public places such as malls and fast food outlets[3] close to schools. I used a female and a male research assistant to help me meet people, get interviews, and allow entry into locations where I would not have been allowed. I made full disclosure as to my identity and purpose, and permission was obtained from parents for interviews with minors.

Interviewees represented a wide range of socio-economic and religious backgrounds, the details of which they freely discussed. No attempt was made to sample in any way, but to absorb and comprehend the details and the essence of what, despite variations in style and location, was a rather unified outlook on life. I believe there are such things as a mall culture[4] and a teenage culture, thanks to the powers of mass advertising and mass marketing, which my findings have tapped. Rather than make claim to any degree of universality, however, I would claim the reader's attention to the following as a theoretical construct based on systematic observation,[5] set in the context of various other ideas.

In the creation of grounded theory,[6] in which traditon my work follows, data collection and analysis take place simultaneously. Observation and understanding are therefore discussed together, although limitations of space force extreme shortening of the former. Feminists are not the only ones searching for new ways of knowing. A.J. Luria, the noted Soviet psychologist, reminded us all that prediction is a dream, and that "...the best we can do [is] as we do now: to understand what we can, and have inspired ideas that lead us to observe the rest with care.'"[7] Theorists in every discipline are shedding the certainties and the methodologies of nineteenth century positivism.[8] It is in the spirit of observation-based creative uncertainty that the following is offered as a help in understanding the emerging generation.

Historical Perspective on the Social Setting

In a general sense, we tend to think of girls as social creatures, outgoing and fun-loving, making things pleasant for their friends around them. This image emerges from all sides of our culture, not the least of which is advertising. Indeed, research informs us that while males describe themselves as more dominant and more powerful, females from childhood onward report higher levels of social competence.[9] What is perhaps not widely understood is that power overcomes competence in a social setting. What Charlotte Perkins Gilman said in 1911 is still true:

> Among our many naive beliefs is the current fallacy that 'society' is made by women; and that women are responsible for that peculiar social manifestation called 'fashion' ... No; in an androcentric culture 'society,' like every other social relation, is dominated by the male and arranged for his convenience. There are, of course modifications due to the presence of the other sex.[10]

Social power is the modern sense of the word "cool." A ten-year-old girl once defined cool for me by speaking of a particular boy, "When *he* says something, it goes."[11]

Margaret Mead's observations about Samoan girls, that they were given no lessons in cooperation with one another,[12] can be seen true for our girls today, who are aware of being judged individually on beauty and encouraged to compete. "Isn't it sad that girls can't be prepared to cope better with what's really ahead for them?" is the question asked in a newspaper column commenting on teenage beauty contestants' lack of both understanding and enthusiasm for feminism.[13] The routine process of separation and judgement of girls, which is the essence of beauty contests—both the formal ones and the informal ones staged in social settings—does not create individuals of them, merely contributes to their isolation and ignorance.

Gilman saw the root of female difficulty in the androcentric or man-made family, which she said acted as an extension of the male impulses of desire, combat and self-expression, rather than the female characteristics of love and nurturance. She saw perversion of the natural order in the male's display of self and competition for a female—in his choosing her rather than her choosing him. "Nature did not intend him to select; he is not good at it. Neither was the female intended to compete—she is not good at it."[14]

Whether we would hold today to the darwinism of this viewpoint, or whether we would seek explanations of behaviour in the larger social contexts, it is interesting to note that a rock star confirmed Gilman's vision of male-

female behaviour when he said, "Rock and roll is about getting girls."[15] The details of boys at their selection and girls in competition are similarly evident in rock videos, song lyrics, teen movies, window designs and wherever adolescent groups gather.

Current adolescent relationships repeat past patterns, but with some important additions. In 1937, when Willard Waller described "The Rating and Dating Complex,"[16] the old courtship standard, providing for a period or experimental associations and progressive commitments leading to permanent mating, had since the twenties been augmented by the addition of the new dating standards emphasizing thrills, exploitation and the commercialization of relationships. Standards in the 1980s demonstrate a lowering of the age at which all this can begin, and a broadening of the meaning and nature of "thrills." Educators and social theorists, among them Postman,[17] Winn,[18] Elkind,[19] and Meyrowitz,[20] have commented on the loss of childhood that has occurred in current times as a result of the lowering of barriers between what is and is not permitted to children. Alcohol- and drug-use and sexuality among young teenagers are the most obvious expressions of such changes in childhood experience.

The loss of protected childhood may be seen as no advantage to girls, nor is the sexual activity of very young women an improvement over the past. Because of the structure and functioning of the social group wheel, whose hub is the group of boys and whose spokes are the individual girls—kept apart and easily replaced—girls do not entirely control their own sexuality, but are monitored by the patriarchy, as they are within a family. In fact, "family" is exactly what the boys consider their closest friends, other boys, to be.[21]

In many ways, it would seem that the girls are at a further disadvantage, having lost the capacity to draw an expected, respected line, and having now to furnish supplicants with rational explanations as to why they have drawn the line as they have. Not to draw any line is to fall prey—still—to the general classification of "slut," a person of few choices in a culture prizing choice.[22] Social competence is of little use to someone who is excluded from the group and visited in private.

At the same time, anything that enlarges the world of girls beyond the expected sphere of domesticity[23] enhances their experience and must therefore be seen as an advancement over the past. Perhaps any relationship between the sexes under the patriarchy might be seen as exploitive of

females, but freedom of association and the cameraderie of the group, and the resulting normalization of friendship between the sexes, are among the real gains for girls in our time. Observations here, and the advent of feminist scholarship, are redefining the idea of adolescence to incorporate "girls" as subject matter, not "the problem of girls" as was the case less than a generation ago.[24]

There is a touching description of female adolescence in Fraser's authoritative discussion of women in the seventeenth century:

> Sisters, watching the world through their brothers' eyes, often developed passionate attachments to these young gods who could roam freely while they were kept confined at home.[25]

Vary the meaning of the word "confined" by degrees and one can see the truth of this well into the twentieth century. A cynic might still claim its truth by transfering girls' worship to rock stars or boyfriends in the social group, but even a cynic would have to recognize greater freedom in the greater choice of love objects.

Similarly, freedom from the certainty and suffocation of past prescriptions, even those given by advocates of women's rights, is a phenomenon of our times. It is hard to imagine a modern feminist saying, as Wollstonecraft did, "The main business of our lives is to learn to be virtuous."[26] No one today has that much certainty about anything, and while this results in a definite loss of direction in life, in the latitudes of uncertainty there is opportunity for self-definition and individual fulfillment. Choice, however, does not exist for everyone,—only for those who exercise it.

Making choices and taking risks have long been recognized as the tasks of an adolescent stage in human development, but it was always described in variations on the theme of "Boys will be boys!" Within limits today, girls too are allowed their adolescence. Women may not keep the gains we have made in this century (and this is one of the points Fraser makes about the seventeenth century[27]) but the very fact of lip service given to educational, political and employment equity for girls allows them a vision of the web of choices. After the vision, steps are a real possibility. Even while running housekeeping errands for the guys in the group,[28] girls are better off now than at any time in the past.

Theoretical Understanding of Group Life

In social construction theory,[29] the social world is seen as the creation of its participants—built through belief, shared experience and intersubjectively shared meanings over time. This theory receives confirmation from observable phenomena in life nowhere more obviously than among adolescents. In public places, the clustering of people with a similar "look" (derived from clothing, make-up, hair style, bodily posture and facial expression), and the separations between groups of different appearances, the constant flow of conversation among members of a group and the drawing in of particular passers-by, the spiritedness of the exchange—all evince active creation.[30] At the same time, there is a deliberate moulding of self to fit with the perceived requirements of an existing group, a creation of self along group-preferred lines, fully in evidence.

We can see the ideological basis for the groupings in keeping with Feuer's definition of a revolutionary myth, an alternating left and right set of philosophic tenets and an historically determined chosen group.[31] Youth, the chosen group, sees itself as messianic, especially in its music. The alternating wings of philosophy are apparent in the hard-line lyrics of current rock, an expression completely opposite from the love-peace-flowers lyrics of music of the sixties and seventies, which were different again from the provocative and lively rock and roll of the fifties. While Feuer ascribes the alternation to the emergence in the new ideology of emotional longings that were repressed in the old,[32] we need not dig into psychoanalytic theory, with its "repression" and "unconscious" to see the effects of a pendulum at work, especially in an era when a consumerist taste for the new is valued in itself. All teen-aged groups today are new and must be seen as new, and each displays a configuration that was not apparent in the immediate past but is reminiscent of images we have seen in earlier times. The most obvious manifestation of this is fashion. Black leather jackets, shirts with visible designer insignia and very short hair for both sexes have all had previous incarnations but hold different meanings for today's youth.[33]

All groups are attractive from a messianic point of view, "...so you won't be like just an average person...."[34] but because of the proliferation of groups, choice presents itself to individuals as both desirable and necessary. Some initial identification is necessary, (some reason for going one way or another) and may centre on music preference, membership on a team, family background, religion, or a love of clothes.

It is a commonplace that adolescents seek extremes because rebellion is part of their development. Regardless of how close to nature is this "need," the individual must nevertheless choose from many options, and then create and be created by the direction of her rebellion in conjuction with others, or be seen as a friendless eccentric. Rebellion, where there are many possibilities, is not a simple thing—far more complex for the youths at the mall, for example, than for the "Smash Street Kids" whom Corrigan observed in Britain. Those youths apparently had only two choices: to identify with adults "that were trying to mould their behaviour into more acceptable forms" or to lapse into truancy, class muck-up and dead-end jobs, the identity for which was football and pop music.[35]

Two more points must be made about the formation of teenage groups, and these emerge, as does the rest, from observation and interviews. First, as Feuer has described, there is a sense of moral rectitude about one's choice,—a logical statement of the superiority of one's group over those of others.[36] The production of such statements continues but is redirected as the individual changes groups, as many of them do. Second, the observed expectations for male-female behaviour within every group are those of conventional gender roles.[37] Brake, studying rebellious subcultures in Britain, found girls to be invisible, joining in the celebration of masculinity, and choosing romance, love and marriage in very class- and gender-based ways.[38] In middle-class Canadian culture, in the broad sense of television or mall culture, girls are far from invisible and there is quite a lot of rhetoric about equality. If the identities of people could be completely disguised, the sex of each could be determined with complete accuracy by obervation of behaviour in a group setting.

The Meaning of Chance

When we speak of chance, it is in the sense of "given" or "luck," or that which cannot be changed, as an adolescent would see it. We do this for two main reasons. First, we might like to know chance as "nature" in the sense of physiological development or intellectual capacity, but as far as actual research goes, there is little known about the relationship between the biological process of puberty and psycho-social development.[39] Discussions in every field, if girls are mentioned, stand in awe of their physiology and demonstrate conventional patriarchal views under the guise of disinterested science. Freud, as Steiner points out, gave us not science but religion, the acceptance of which is simply our "nostalgia for the absolute."[40] Developmentalists, like Piaget and Kohlberg, studied boys as real people, girls as "other." The personality theory of Erikson seems

more at home in a previous century when science sought the firm and fixed, outside of any context. Newer theorists, such as Gilligan, are going to change our views here, but their impact is just beginning.[41] The relative importance of nature and nurture, while always of interest, will probably never be settled satisfactorily.[42]

Second and more to the point, there is a true grasp within adolescent experience of the chance yet real significance of blessings in the areas of physical appearance and family background, blessings which may be appreciated or bemoaned but must ultimately be accepted as given. The details of this understanding are public and figure large in every day life. Sizer, exploring high schools across the U.S., found that the socio-economic status of students' families was the best single predictor of the experience offered by each of them. He found that respondents, while embarrassed by the concept of class, nevertheless demonstrated thorough knowledge of classmates' backgrounds, including housing standards, family wealth, their cars, clothes and expectations for future employment. The social groupings in school generally revolved around this information.[43]

Similarly, adolescents interviewed for the mall project were very much aware of such details as typifying people. Information on social standing, country of origin if not Canadian-born, parents' occupations, religious affiliation and so on was given freely about themselves and others as important in the sense of, "This is what everyone knows that you ought to know." Teenagers were seen to share the attributes of their parents, unless they had taken public steps to show themselves in a different light, in which case their new identity would be seen in terms of their new group.

Appearance, including degree of physical maturation, physique, the current fashionability of one's birth features (hair, eyes, skin and so on) must be seen as another major aspect of chance. To say that teenagers are obsessed with their appearance—their "image"—is of course, an understatement. Lunchtime conversations were peppered with references to height, build, skin, eyes, hair and so one, and what might be done to change these, including the uses of chemicals and surgery. Usually, however, respondents displayed a certain resignation in being stuck with themselves as they were.

It would be so easy to dismiss the trivia of appearance when compared to attributes such as energy, wit, health and intelligence, if it were not for their importance to others in the world. As we have always known, appearance in a woman is of critical importance. The following, for example, is a comment from a member of an elite intellectual circle in New York about his first meeting with Mary McCarthy:

> She was not quite beautiful, and too good-looking to be called pretty; and 'handsome woman' sounds to stiff and complacent for her vivid good looks. She was much younger then, of course, and somehow darker; although there was something wayward and even gamine about her. She did not seem to worry about her clothes or appearance generally, and I noticed—an odd detail to remember now!—that her legs were unshaved...nobody seeing her for the first time would have surmised that this striking and vivid girl would prove to be one of the most brilliant and formidable intellectuals of her time.[44]

Of all the brilliant minds philosopher William Barrett recalls for the reader, McCarthy's is probably the best-known today, and half a century later, he remembers not what she said that evening, but how she looked and the hair on her legs. It is as if someone meeting Einstein were to recall only that his hair was untidy, and say it without fear of being thought shallow.

Girls' concern for the shape of a nose or the curl of their hair can therefore be understood as adequate grasp of the significance of these "givens" in their lives.

Group Life as "Given"

Another area of givens exists in adolescent life, and this is what is usually termed the peer group, but which I call the social group.[45] Among the adolescents I observed, there was not a single person who could not describe the various groups within her or his acquaintance and explain the rules, or "how things work," for acceptance or rejection by people in each of these. Gathering spots for each were known and important.

Popularity, as opposed to single friendships, was seen as a lure for both boys and girls and was achieved within distinct groups, the members of which might mix on occasion but who preferred others of their own sort.[46] The group's selection mechanism might revolve around preferred music, clothing style, a sport or leisure activity. The group was seen as fun in itself and in the creation of future fun. Achievement, on the other hand, was considered a lonely enterprise, as studying or practising kept one from one's friends in the group.

Future success was appealing, although the way to the future was uncertain. For now, the search was for something that one liked and that one did well. What constituted personal knowledge or personal skill did not necessarily make one important within the group, especially for girls. As Edith Wharton said, "Genius is of small use to a woman who does not know how to do her hair."[47]

An outsider, envious of the fun others had, could take steps to be recognized and invited in by observing the others and copying them. For one boy, all it took, after a year and a half of worship at a distance, was the right haircut and the right shirt. One girl tried to play her beloved Bach and Brahms piano pieces for friends, but found they appreciated her much more when she played popular music. Grouping was so important that changing schools to be with certain people and to get away from others was not uncommon.

Dissatisfaction with the group structure of social life might lead one to seek single friendships, but it might also lead some on a parade through a number of groups, starting at an early age, when the fact of group life had first been noticed, and continuing on, in an exploratory way, sampling and experimenting through all available avenues, such as sexuality, mind- and mood-alteration, and risk-taking. For some, this led to settling finally within a group where one felt comfortable. For others, this led them out of the group scene entirely. As one boy put it, "I had done all that and gotten out, and I couldn't see starting into it all over again."

Girls tended to be brought into a group as someone's girlfriend and might later stay as someone else's girlfriend or as a very good platonic friend of one of the boys, but if the group were small, breaking up would put her out. A girl's friendships within the group were with her boyfriend and with other individual girls, occasionally with one or two of the guys. Boys' friendships were within the bunch of guys who constituted the group core, and naturally continued through changes in girlfriends. Girls who ended relationships could lose access to all the people they had considered friends and have to start all over with a new group. To remain outside of groups, for any reason, was seen as eccentric.

A clue to the fixed existence of group life in adolescence is provided by Alice Miller, the Swiss psychoanalyst who has broken with the Freudian drive theory to affirm the origins of trauma in early childhood abuse. She sees the group as a mother, giving comfort but demanding dependency.

When a group takes over this ersatz role [of mother] although it gives the illusion of being an ideal mother, it mercilessly requires the same adaptation to its demands that the real mother once did.[48]

At the mall, then, this was girls' experience: they could see the scene and they could understand it. The more socially aware the girl, the sooner and the more she understood. She did not see that she could change what was. She could stay out, have a few friendships and be seen as a friendless eccentric, or she could seek a comfortable group. Groups were seen as a fact of life.

Chance, therefore, fixed one as a particular person in a particular body from a particular background—a bug on a pin, whose status in the world could be understood by observation of her "image," inspection of her friends, and a few questions asked around.

On the Nature of Choice

History shows us that women's choices have been limited to the inside of a very small circle, known in Victorian times as "women's sphere" and later, with the coming of the "new woman" as "her broadening sphere."[49] Never, not even today, has this circle been congruent with the sphere of human existence; it has always occupied part of the whole. While it is equally true that "men's sphere" has been part of the whole, in our culture it has always been the prerogative of men to appropriate for themselves whatever aspects they selected, and further, to ensure the continuation of the others by delegating them onto the other sex. Greater choice, in other words, has been allowed men.

Given this historical fact, then, plus the givens previously described—the importance in adolescent society of one's birth features and family background, the fixed nature of group life and its appeal for those growing up and away from family—what place in all this structure has choice? What is choice when so much is already established? I wish to quote William Barrett on the subject of Mary McCarthy, once again:

She has taken as her motto the saying of Chaucer's woman, 'I am mine own woman well at ease.' ...she has entered a man's world and, faithful to her motto, she intends to hold her own with men—both intellectually and sexually.[50]

I use this observation of Barrett's because McCarthy, as much as any woman in current times, has demonstrated

independence and achievement in settings that have traditionally favoured neither in women. As Barrett implies, choice is the action of an individual, based on a very serious (even if at times lighthearted) approach to the person she is and wants to be—toward the creation of a self amidst all the many forms of input in her surroundings, amidst all the conventional expectations.

I see choice as operating in that realm of potential within which decisions can be made, but where there will be risks and penalties for each. Choice includes acts of resistance and acts of delineation in the sense of separating out *this* from *that*. It is not a simple No statement, but an act based on principles and determination.

As a child grows, she (or he, but I will speak of she) creates models for herself of "how you're supposed to be" based on what she has learned from all sources. Much of what she decides for herself imitates current trends in thinking, a fact of which she may later be cognizant but does not see initially (thinking "No one is like me; I am different") but with which she must eventually come to grips. If along the way, however, she can find something about herself that is special, then this feature may become the basis of a self that confirms earlier beliefs of being unique. There are two related features here—model and process.

Northrop Frye, in *The Educated Imagination*, has called such a model one's "vision of society," which allows us to select what we want out of all that is offered and let the rest go—to resist action by reflex, which is the very opposite of thought. "The essential thing is the power of choice."[51] In the past, however, politics and custom always ensured that vision was not enough to ensure choice for a woman. Kettle informs us that to the Big Generaton, and presumably to those born later, "women's liberation" is a reality.[52] This belief alone presents young women with more options, if we think of options as possible models.

The new models for girls are those previously allowed only to boys, such as better and longer education, entrance to the professions and to higher levels of trade and commerce, and to politics. The long-run world of adult life appears open to women, as it has been to men. I have spoken elsewhere of the need for better models for girls' lives.[53] Further consideration, however, leads me to believe that models are not enough. There must be ways of pursuing the models, and this would mean process. Process is not the pattern but the way of travelling through patterns, the charting of courses on the web of possibilites, if each possibility is a potential model. It is a way through the web that must be taken or created or fought for by each of us or else models and potentials come to nothing. A woman's way of attaining her vision is much less obvious, these days, than the vision itself.

When we are speaking of the short-run, however, the opposite appears true: while the processes are many and well-known to adolescents, the models do not allow true choice. I will summarize this in a simple chart, and then illustrate the chart with observations from the mall project.

	Short Term (Adolescence)	Long Term (Adult Life)
Models for Choice	Not Readily Available	Readily Available
Process for Choice	Readily Available	Not Readily Available

As I hope to show, there is tremendous conflict within each of the short term and long term because of the disparities between what is needed and what is available. There are also conflicts for models and processes developed immediately in adolescence, and over time, anticipating the adult woman. For choice to exist, individuals must solve at least some of these conflicts for themselves. In the process of choosing, conflicts are resolved. Choice thus creates itself, and choices create the individual.

Conflicts and Choices

In the short term of adolescence, girls talk about making choices in life and about the need to make choices, and do in fact make choices. The general culture, of which school and mall are both parts, encourages an impressive freedom for the individual girl within the everyday expectations of home, school and family life. A girl's life is full of daily decisions on such matters as how her time will be spent and with whom, what she will read or study, where she will look for a part-time job, what sports or activities she will try, and of course how she will look. I am not making light of these choice-making activities. They give her far more scope in life than her grandmother had. This diversity is not celebration in itself. Much activity is focussed on social popularity—group acceptance—love. Who refuses love?

Everything in girls' experience encourages belonging, and this means groups and the acquisition of boy friends

within the groups. As mentioned, groups are male-directed and pair-oriented.[54] Having a boyfriend is implied by popularity: a popular and successful girl will have a boyfriend. Girls speak in an adult voice about the difference between "friendships" and "relationships" with boys.

Dworkin, in *Our Blood*, exhorts women "to refuse to participate in a dating system which sets up every woman as a potential rape victim."[55] Dating, in the sense of seeing several fellows for various activities such as movies, bowling, skating, dancing and so on, did not exist for the girls at the mall. Instead, they paired within the auspices of the group, and had friendships with other guys. Progressive sex with one's long-term boyfriend was understood, hence girls would see only one boy at a time, and like the thirteen to fifteen year old girls studied by Wilson in England, would keep visible the caring connection, lest they be labelled "slut."[56] Here, as for Wilson's girls, sex was seen as permissible if the girl acknowledged love, and the relationship was considered a steady one. Even if there was no such agreement, the statement, "She loves the guy," was accepted as a rational explanation of a girl's sexual behaviour. Labels like "the clamp" were given those who liked sex for its own sake and slept with whomever they chose. Gossip about the behaviour of girls was constant and there was no corresponding derogation of boys. The discovery of two of the boys that, "Hey, we're sluts, man!" was seen as a knowing joke not a slur but a compliment to their manhood. The conventionality of group life is of course understood.

General culture, which is the mall culture, seems to hold out endless possibilities for individual selection, but if many people begin to describe the ideal girl, they will soon converge on a description of marked familiarity. She is young, pretty/attractive/good-looking, with a slim but busty body, good teeth and luxurious hair, peppy, outgoing and interested in people. She may not be brilliant but she is not stupid either. She may be very good at some one or two things, but she does not intimidate people with her talent. She is everyone's ideal, dressed for the twenties or eighties.

With very few exceptions (one of these the "punks," who dressed in deliberate opposition to this image, but who were supported in their opposition by the values of their group), girls at the mall dressed, made-up, and conducted themselves with this ideal in mind. Those girls, (including the punks), who were obviously different, attracted no interest, only the odd derisive comment.

While there was singularity of vision in the ideal girl, the ways and means of achieving or becoming this ideal were many. Visit any newsstand, listen to the radio or watch television for an hour, glance through the titles or paperbacks in the psychology or health sections of chain bookstores and one is immediately impressed with the vast resources at work advising young women on "how to make the most of themselves." Thus, while there is no great range of girlhood ideals—no great choice as to how one should "be," there are countless ways a girl can follow to be the ideal girl.

Toward the long term of adulthood, the opposite is true. Public belief in the equality of women has opened many doors and it is now possible for a young girl to speak of becoming a physician without being scolded, patronized or ridiculed. There is still an imbalance of males in the science and mathematics courses and of females in the languages and social sciences, but on the whole, there is enough rhetoric to allow strong-minded individuals their life choices. In addition to what used to be seen as male professions, there are still all the old "female" occupations and professions, and all these add up to a significant number of choices. Girls can and do speak of the future with a certain belief in their ability to get what they want. Many are the models from which they may choose.

What is much less clear is the way they will accomplish these goals. Interviews indicate a less than enthusiastic approach to feminism, which they interpret as forcing women to be all things to all people all the time—on the go at work and at home at every moment of the day. They look at working mothers and see the lack of supports for child-rearing in males' reluctance to take on house-hold tasks, and in the scarcity of day care. They have ambivalence about being "selfish" enough to pursue their own goals while their children are brought up by others. Yes, they see that they can be a lawyer, but *how* are they going to be a lawyer?

I want to look now at some of the kinds of dilemmas girls confront as they grow to maturity within this choice matrix. I see the possible conflicts as being of four types. I turn now to a discussion of each, and an example from the mall project of each.

Examples of Conflicts

The first type of conflict is that between process in the short term and process in the long term. What works in adolescence does not advance one toward adulthood. The way to being a popular girl, the way to getting a boyfriend

is not the way toward being an adult woman with a job or family or both. The plans for each stage are very different, and learning one set will not neccessarily help an individual learn the other, nor does one set develop into the other.

Two examples of this from the same group of friends both involve pregnancy. The girls, both seen by friends as pretty and popular and "having everything in the world going for her," both became pregnant by popular, good-looking boys in their group. Each had been a success as a teenager and was now thrust into adulthood, where knowing how to dress and how to party was not going to be useful. In one case, the young couple married and were supported by their parents while he finished high school and she cared for the infant. In the other case, the boy denied paternity and moved away from home to live with a friend while he finished school. The girl dropped out of school to wait out the birth at home.

In addition to choosing models for their future, of which each must include motherhood, choice for these new adult women would involve unlearning old processes and finding or creating new ones.

Another type of conflict is that between the short term model and models in the long term. The group girl is not a career professional or a mother or any version of adult woman. The objective of the girls Wilson studied was to pair with "a nice boy," who treated you nice, didn't tell on you, and later married you. Wilson calls the link between love, sexuality and marriage "the repressive triangle," from which there is no escape once entered upon.[57] This pattern is the model of a group girl who seeks and finds the foreverness of love, and it is very dear to our hearts in North America. Now there are also the newer expectations for a girl's achievement in school, leading to job or career—the goals of a mature individual, not an adolescent pair.

To get an idea of how adolescents might see the conflicts between older and newer models, picture a line segment at the base of the triangle, beginning at one vertex, *love*, proceeding to the next, *sexuality*, and then instead of heading up to the apex of the triangle, *marriage*, driving a line in any chosen direction straight into a future *career*. Conflict between the models is inevitable.

An example of this was the girl who had been accepted into a good university and was basking in the admiration of her family. Her future was bright, she had career goals in mind, but her boyfriend of two years was a major concern to her because he had no plans for further educa-

tion nor a job. She felt responsible for him because she had seen his potential and had turned him around from being the jerk of his reputation to the nice guy he was now. She said of him:

> He reached almost a peak of growing and changing and then...to me it seemed like he got frightened because he thought he had that much in him to get him that far and to even get him on the honour roll in high school but he didn't see himself going where I was going.

He saw an adult version of their youthful love relationship, but she saw only difficulty in her ambition and his lack of direction. She exercised choice by giving him up.

A third type of conflict is that between models and process in the long term. Here, models for adult women exist in abundance. They are all the ones previously enjoyed by men, and all the ones previously displayed by women, and any number of new possibilities created by combining old and new in any way. The problem lies in actually living the crowded and conflicted lives these models would entail, hence the difficulties with process. How do working partners raise children? When work and family responsibilities take up most of the week, where is the time for amusements or dreaming? How much "self" can a working mother really have? Whose job really comes first—his or hers? Is marriage really necessary?

Adolescents do not live these contradictions but they see them in their parents and in the adults around them. Adolescent interviewees usually considered their mothers' lives as centred around family, even when they held jobs outside the home. Girls as well as boys gave descriptions such as, "She works in an office, but she's home before we get there to do the laundry and make dinner and stuff;" "She was working for the mortgage, now she's working to pay off the boat my dad bought;" "She raised us and when we were older and in school all day she got a job in an office."

The adult women at the centre of so many circles of endeavor are visibly working through processes of accomplishment, as each of the girls will have to do.

The fourth type of conflict is that between model and processes in the short term. Here, processes exist for becoming a teenager in our culture if "teenager" is a sexless creature of a certain age that was once a boy but now can be either male or female. In other words, there are ways of being a student, a part-time employee, a sports

enthusiast, a team-player, a computer-whiz, and so on, but gender expectations impinge in conventional ways on the models. While a boy can lose himself in any one of the possibilities, whatever else a girl does, the standard model "girl" is still held up to her as an ideal. It is easy to fall into convention, since all paths lead back to the ideal.

An example of this was the young woman who had gone with the same fellow for over a year, in an escalating abusive relationship. She was lovely to look at, a good student, talented swimmer and very mature. As his behaviour worsened, she was sure he was just going through a bad time and gave him more and more understanding. She ignored the shocked responses from family and friends, thinking, "They don't see what I see in him." She said of him:

> He wanted me to be crazy, be a punk rocker like him, and do exactly what he wanted. And for a while I fell for that because I wanted him to stick around. I thought if I didn't do that, then he would take off and leave me. So I did what he wanted. Everything.

She stopped seeing him only after pregnancy ended in an abortion she had to undergo alone.

Because social popularity, "success," merges with having a boyfriend, the other considerations of boyfriends also become problematic. Since these are similar to those of having a husband, but happen much earlier in life, adolescent girls must cope not only with the males and the problems they present, but with the considerations of their own development. The interactional effects possible between two people growing and changing physiologically, intellectually, emotionally and socially are obvious. Further, the ideal of unselfishness is still one our culture holds out before girls. For a young woman to put the demands and concerns of another before her own, at this time of her life—especially a boy whose ideal is *not* unselfishness, quite the contrary—is for her to risk the sacrifice of present self and future potential self. Each girl risks the tying of her life to that of another while both are developing and changing, with all that this can entail over the long run.

Choice must therefore entail coming to terms with the single model itself.

Self Creation

Everyday living provides conflicts. It also provides experience and knowledge and the potential for growth through conflict resolution. Choices made expand all the possibilities, and they take a great deal of courage. Teenage girls are justly fearful about what will happen to them if they step out of line, if they show originality of thought or deed, if they display eccentricity of any sort. The time when singularities must first appear is the time of greatest control by others, hence the most demanding of personal strength. Real choice, that which selects one thing and discards others, is never easy, but it does allow the achievement of an individual self, something that is worth the struggle. The great paradox here, of course, is that the self is a lonely singularity that can only be gained in the social setting.

It cannot be taught. It cannot even be urged. It must be dreamed and accomplished by each girl herself. It is scary to have to do, and scarier still to watch in those for whom we care deeply.

Caring adults might be tempted to seek a turning back of the clock to a time when girls were more protected, less vulnerable—even in the extreme to a time when freedom of association was not expected. Even if it were possible, it would not be wise. Teenagers are social, not solitary creatures. Female adolescents, like male adolescents must find themselves from within a circle of friendship.

In seeking others, each girl must proceed from a model of self—not of "girl"—of whom one is and wishes to be; and each must have the courage to try process after process, if the first ones fail, as they may well do.

From an image of self can come an idea of a mate, if she chooses, but self must be chosen over others, at least at this age. One's model may not win praise, or even be understood. In speaking of Mary McCarthy, Barrett credited "the incredible energy of her career" to a "childlike" side of her: "Perhaps a certain adult ballast never weighed her down."[58] I prefer to seek the roots of her success in the intelligence, talent and idea of self from which proceed all else.

There are those who would see egocentrism and the threatened demise of Western Culture in all this individuality, all this girlish choice, all this talk of self. Many of us see in these the efforts of the previously disenfranchised to enter into the current of accomplishment that has been Western progress. Feminists especially might consider much of past culture as the headlines of the privileged minority.[59]

Steiner, looking at the nineteenth century, shows how mistaken is the romance many people have with the past, for even in a humanistic culture we can see "express solicitations of authoritarian rule and cruelty."[60] He is speaking about the seeds of twentieth century destruction apparent in nineteenth century German Romanticism, but we can find an easy parallel in people's fondness, whether it is expressed openly or subtly, for the partriarchal family, and see in it simply nostalgia for the repression of women and the bending of their talents to men's personal service. We must see, with that polymath Steiner, that we cannot stop progress, that knowledge is dead without progress to a future, and that the true equalization of human rights is one critical feature of such progress.

We look to the current generation of young people to create the future, to create of themselves *really* new women: women who know the past, understand their debt to the past, but who do not feel the need to re-create it. They will be women, not girls-for-life, and not surrogate boys, and they will have the new pride that Gilman wished for and predicted in 1911: "a womanhood which will recognize its pre-eminent responsibility to the human race, and live up to it."[61]

NOTES

1. Elaine Batcher, "Building the Barriers: Adolescent Girls Delimit the Future," in *Women: Images and Role Models*, proceedings of CRIAW Conference, Montreal, 1984; revised for Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, *Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender*, Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1987.
2. T. B. Greenfield, "Organizations as Social Inventions: Rethinking Assumptions about Change," in *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 9 (1973): 555-74.
3. The question of whether malls and fast food outlets can really be considered public was explored in Elaine Batcher, "The Future of Adolescent Female Potential in a Shopping Mall Culture," International Conference on Girls, Montreal, 1985; presented in abbreviated form in conference proceedings.
4. Batcher, above.
5. For a full discussion of the methodology and rationale, see Elaine Batcher, *Emotion in the Classroom: A Study of Children's Experience*, New York: Praeger, 1981.
6. Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, Chicago: Aldine, 1967.
7. A. R. Luria, *The Mind of a Mnemonist.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968, 1987. From the forward by Jerome S. Bruner, p.xviii.
8. A comprehensive list here is not the point, which of course is to refer readers to any work which discusses the role of ideology in knowledge, including those disciplines known as "science." A few examples would be works by Stephen Jay Gould in geology, Steven Rose in biology, Roger S. Jones in physics, T. B. Greenfield in education, Alice Miller in psychotherapy, and so on, and of course T. S. Kuhn.
9. E. E. Maccoby and C. N. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences.* Standford: Standford University Press, 1975.
10. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Man-Made World or, Our Androcentric Culture.* New York: Johnson Reprint Company, 1971. (orig. 1911) pp. 163-4.
11. From notes for E. Batcher, *Emotion in the Classroom,* above.
12. Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa.* New York: Dell/Laurel, 1968. (orig. 1928).
13. Doris Anderson, "Why Should Girls Live a Fairy Tale?" *Toronto Star,* March 30, 1985.
14. Gilman, above, p. 30.
15. Gene Simmons, then of the rock group *Kiss,* in a newspaper interview, *Toronto Star,* 1985.
16. Willard Waller, "The Rating and Dating Complex," Reprinted in Harry Silverstein, *The Sociology of Youth—Evolution and Revolution.* New York: Macmillan, 1973.
17. Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood.* New York: Delacourt Press, 1982.
18. Marie Winn, *Children Without Childhood.* Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984.
19. David Elkind, *The Hurried Child.* Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1981.
20. Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact Of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
21. Batcher, "Building The Barriers" above.
22. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
23. Many of the girls interviewed mentioned housekeeping chores such as laundry, cleaning, tidying and cooking as family expectations.
24. Many theorists before and after Freud have considered women to be a problem, since they do not fit into the categories established to account for the real people of the world, men. Erikson speaks directly of "the problem of girls." Alice Miller and Carol Gilligan are two theorists currently re-examining female experience.
25. Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Women's Lot in Seventeenth Century England.* London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984, p. 131.
26. Mary Godwin Wollstonecraft, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters with Reflections on Female Conduct in the More Important Duties of Life,* Clifton, N. J.: Augustus M. Kelley, 1972. (orig. 1787) pp. 77-8.
27. Fraser, above.
28. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
29. See for example Herbert Blumer, "Society as Symbolic Interaction," in A.M. Rose (Ed.) *Human Behaviour and Social Processes,* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962. pp. 179-92.
30. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
31. Lewis S. Feuer, *Ideology and Ideologists,* New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
32. Feuer, above, p. 58.
33. Black leather, for example, once the signal of motorcycle toughs is now the mark of devotees of heavy metal rock music. Very short hair on men was at times marine, square or college; on women it was Dior's New Look. At the time of observation it was punk for both sexes.
34. From notes for Batcher, "Building the Barriers," above.
35. Paul Corrigan, *Schooling the Smash Street Kids,* London: Macmillan Press, 1979, p. 117.
36. For the students I interviewed, this took the form of statements like, "Us punks don't sponge off Daddy," and "She looks like she gets her hair cut by her dentist."
37. This was a chief finding of Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
38. Mike Brake, *The Sociology of Youth Culture and Youth Subcultures,* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
39. From the lead article, "Dilemmmas in Research in Female Adolescent Development," in Max Sugar (Ed.) *Female Adolescent Development,* New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1979.
40. George Steiner, *Nostalgia for the Absolute,* Toronto: CBC Publications, Hunter Rose, 1974.
41. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.
42. See Steven Rose, R. C. Lewontin and Leon J. Kamin, *Not in Our Genes,* Markham: Penguin, 1985, for a lovely discussion of the nature/nurture question.

43. Theordore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
44. William Barrett, *The Truants: Adventures Among the Intellectuals*, Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1982, p. 7.
45. I have not used this term since I discovered it has a different meaning among teenagers than among theorists.
46. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
47. Quoted from Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity*, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1984, p. 76.
48. Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, New York: Meridian, 1986, p. 85.
49. These lovely terms are rather overused, but they still carry a certain meaning, and one still finds them the subject of magazine articles.
50. Barrett, above, P. 6-7.
51. Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination*, The Massey Lectures, CBC, 1963, p. 63.
52. John Kettle, *The Big Generation*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980, p. 178. We don't necessarily believe him, but it is good to hear it.
53. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
54. Batcher, "Building the Barriers" above.
55. Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood: Prophesies & Discourses on Sexual Politics*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976. p.43.
56. Deidre Wilson, "Sexual Codes and Conduct," in Carol Smart and Barry Smart (Eds.) *Women Sexuality and Social Control*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
57. Wilson, above.
58. Barrett, above, p. 69.
59. Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New York: Basic Books, 1980.
60. Steiner, above, p. 30.
61. Gilman, above, p. 247.

To a Woman Chemist

You study separation.
You can measure the distance between atoms.
There is so much space between each of them
we should be able to slide together,
walk through closed doors.
I'd like to enter a tree.
I imagine a ship battering itself on a shore.

Once I met a psychologist named Jim.
He said, "The world is a castle of mirrors.
Wherever you look you see yourself."
He taught me not to say, "I like you,"
but "The Lauren in me
likes the Jim in me."
He made me lonely for three weeks,
then the him that was in me
went back to Philadelphia.

This is the jargon of the self.
It's been helpful.
Now I think I know why
in the dark beer bar of us
on the Wednesday night of us,
I could not always understand you.
Your thought had to pass
through all the stubborn atoms like a sperm,
through the mirrored spheres of two selves.
I guess if I could not hear you, it was because I
could not hear you.

Now I am walking on a path by the capitol.
A yellow bow bobs like a spider
tied on a shin-high wire that divides new grass
from whatever is not new grass.
In the West, two hot air balloons of me are rising.
Whoever this day is part of, it is warm.
I perceive the I of me is not always lonely.

For example,
When the you of me is not in the lab,

L. Bower Smith
Iowa