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**HAILING THE HERO: CRITICAL CULTURAL STUDIES,
SUBJECTIVITY AND GIRLS IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL**

by

Nadene A. Henry-Keon

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Faculty of Education
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Abstract

Language allows us to narrate our stories. Creating ourselves as subjects is a function of language practices mobilized in complex and contradictory negotiations of the texts we engage, in the contexts in which they appear. This qualitative, interpretive study examines how seven, grade nine, female adolescent girls engage popular culture texts and practices to constitute themselves subjectively in vocational high school. The study shows that discursive representations of gender, desire, race and class critically inform and are informed by female adolescents' negotiation of their everyday lived experiences. In particular, it finds that female adolescents engage the discursive practice of anger to name their being and becoming.

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Mom and Dad

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I Introduction: Silhouette of a Moment in Time

Releasing the tightly drawn threads of my unease, I yield to Kate's delight and excitement as she juggles her back pack and bicycle, impatient to travel alone and unsupervised on her first day of vocational high school. She exudes confidence. Relishing her independence and imagining herself grown-up, she embraces this new challenge in her life, and on a sunny September morn, warmed by whisperings of hope and a gentle breeze of possibility, my daughter turns and waves good bye.....

At that precise moment I remember my own first days of high school. Memories flood my thoughts and suddenly the air turns cool.... I remember the pain of rejection, the fear of failure, the loneliness of being, and my retreat into silence. Retracing the threads of my own web I wind my way back to the sixties... I remember the rough cloth of my new gray uniform flapping against my knees. I walk alone through empty parking lots to the green manicured lawns of St. Judes. I too feel independent and grown-up. I too beam with possibility. Embracing the crisp, first days of autumn, I eagerly walk into the loop of my classmates. With shy determination I begin to tell them about my life; lazy summer days hanging around the park, babysitting my annoying little brother at the community wading pool, about my older brother leaving school to start his own band, and my mother's thumb print cookies filled with jam... And yet, by the time the leaves have lost their brilliant hold on autumn, as my joy has lost its shimmer, I realize that no one is listening. Shock...pain...silence. I hide within my silence. I hide in *my* world unable to comprehend *their* world filled with experiences unavailable to me. They describe different stories:

summers of camps and cottages, canoes and tennis, swimming lessons, baseball teams, and hated piano lessons.

Time matters little in memory. I drift back to just three years ago, to Kate's struggle that begins on her first day of vocational high school. Pigtailed and blue eyed, sporting designer jeans and Monaco "tee," she safely peddles her way to school through wildflower gardens from her new home in the suburbs. She *has* what I had not at her age, the privileges of a middle class upbringing, and the potential power that comes along with it. Lucky girl I think. Then... she tells them her stories. She tells them about biking down volcanoes in Hawaii, whale watching on the St. Lawrence, roller coasters at Disney World, plane trips, computers, hated shopping trips with her mother... and by the time the leaves have lost their brilliant hold on autumn, she discovers as I did so long ago that no one is listening! Shock...pain... fighting spirit, then... silence. She hides in *her* world unable to comprehend *their* world filled with stories of hanging around community parks and shopping centers, babysitting "twerpy (sic)" siblings, finding or fighting off boyfriends, and unnerving stories of abuse and violence.

Creating ourselves as subjects is a function of language practices mobilized in complex and contradictory negotiations of the texts we engage, in the contexts they appear, and critically informed by the social markers of gender, class and race. We all have a story to tell. There is urgency in the need to tell. We long to be heard, understood and accepted on our journey to selfhood. We ache for connection. Our quest for meaning and purpose wind their way in, through, and around the narratives we and those around us create. This struggle for being and becoming is as complex and dynamic today as it was thirty years ago. Language allows us to narrate our stories. The words flow and

communicate our thoughts, and at the same time clarify and complicate our ability to construct meaning.

Captivated by the meanings girls socially construct in and through their stories, my memories and curiosity bring me to this juncture. Recognizing the importance of language forms and practices in relation to subject formation, this study seeks to explore the particular difficulties non mainstream, female adolescents experience and negotiate in vocational high school. "Enveloped and evaluated by values and standards contrary to their culture" (Blake, 1995, p.173) these non mainstream girls brush against the grain of a privileged system of schooling, and perform in the margins of white, middle class, institutional discourses of femininity and success, discourses that often obscure how gender, desire, race and class inform female adolescents' efforts to design, and live, in a world of hope and possibility.

II. Purpose of the Study

The following study seeks to understand the complex representations at work in female adolescents' construction of subjectivity through their use of popular culture texts and practices. In particular, it focuses on how discursive representations of gender, desire, race and class, inform the shaping of social subjects through language practices. In addition, it highlights female adolescents' mobilization of the discursive practice of anger in the struggle to name their being and becoming. Finally, it addresses the importance of context to the process of understanding and constructing female subjectivity.

This study adopts as a point of entry the notion that popular culture texts mediate, and are mediated by, everyday discursive practices of meaning-making within particular cultural sites. Representing a taken-for-granted belief system about what is thought to be true, a discursive practice (Foucault, 1972) implies a dominant notion; for example, of courteous, cooperative, and common sense in relation to how female adolescents should act, and think, about success and femininity. The dominant discourse of femininity and success (based on white, middle class, socially adept, cultural practices), suggests a particular way of being woman: gentle, accommodating, self-sacrificing, and silent. Levinson (1996) concurs, "The historically specific models of the educated person [the successful person] encouraged in schools often represent the subjectivities which dominant groups endorse for others in society" (p. 240).

In this study I suggest that the dominant notion of femininity is embedded in the language of the school motto: Courtesy + Cooperation + Common sense = Success. Therefore, the school motto presents as a referent through which to examine how seven, grade nine, vocational high school girls engage dynamic language practices related to the

interplay of: (1) boy work, "getting it now," (2) body work, "getting it perfect," and (3) anger work, "getting it said and done," three sites chosen for this study because of their frequent, emotional, and animated occurrence in the girls' narratives. Anger performances in the "interpretive community"¹ of the focus group, collaboratively dubbed by the girls the "Zynami" club, is a "well stocked arsenal... potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which bring that anger into being... Anger is loaded with information and energy" (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985, p. 51), and is a *consistent* and *insistent* component of the girls' everyday experiences.

Through these three, aforementioned, compelling sites (boys, body, and anger) the girls negotiate the discourse of femininity and success as they engage a teen magazine, Reluctant Hero, within the context of the Zynami club. It is not the material text Reluctant Hero that centers my examination. Rather, I am interested in how the girls take on this text discursively in the process of constituting themselves subjectively. Hodder (1994) attests to the pivotal function of language in the process of subjectification offering that language opens up a space where words "are spoken to do things as well as say... different things in different contexts... [having] a practical and social impact" (in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 394).

To succinctly sum up, the purpose of this study then is to examine the Zynami girls' discursive representations of femininity and success within the dynamic contours of this space - the space of their vocational high school and the space of their reader engagement with a popular culture teen magazine as: (a) evidenced in their relationship with boys and their own bodies, (b) manifested through their mobilization of particular

¹ Dr. J. Robertson, personal communication, Sept., 20, 1999.

forms of anger, (c) informed by the discursive claims, demands, and norms of gender, race and class, and (d) directly and critically shaped by and through the context of the Zynami club.

Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarly work that addresses female adolescents' construction of subjectivity through the use of popular culture texts and practices (Walkerdine, 1984; Christian-Smith, 1990; McRobbie, 1991; Davies, 1993; Cherland & Edelsky, 1993; Robertson, 1997a, 1997b; Gonick, 1997; Way, 1998; Currie, 1999) and whether and how, as a result of this negotiation, female adolescents are able to construct themselves as agents of power (Davies, 1993; Cherland & Edelsky, 1993; Ussher, 1997; Proweller, 1998). In addition, it provides further insight into the process of subjectification, by examining how female adolescents' perceptions of the dominant discourse of successful femininity represented in a vocational institution inform their "hailing"² as gendered, white,³ working class,⁴ subjects (Ware, 1992; Frankenberg, 1993; Giroux, 1996; Hey, 1997; Brown, 1998).

² Hailing or interpellating refers to a process where individuals are not seen as passively shaped by others, but rather they are understood to actively taking up *as their own* the discourses through which they are shaped (Althusser, 1971).

³ *White* is understood in cultural and social terms as a socially constructed referent for race that is subject to variable meanings and uses within different contexts of time, place, and power relations. In conjunction, *race* is defined by Giroux (1997) as a set of attitudes, values, lived experiences, and affective identifications" (in Hill, p. 294). Therefore, as Frankenberg posits, attempting to understand the Zynami girls' subjectification requires acknowledgement of a "white culture" even if the girls themselves think of race as something only people of color face, unable to see the "racialness" of white experience (p. 132).

⁴ *Working class* for the purposes of this study defines those who are in an entirely subordinate role (Marshall, G., Oxford dictionary of sociology, 1998, p.707-708). According to Hartsock (1977) being working class is "a way of life based on the simple fact that we must sell our labor power to stay alive" (in Kramarae & Treichler, A feminist dictionary, 1985).

III. Review of the Literature

The literature review specifically targets academic work that addresses the relations between popular culture texts, girls' efforts to construct subjectivity through these texts, and the social markers of gender, desire, agency, race and class that guide the negotiations of these same texts. In conjunction, the literature review addresses the emerging scholarly examination of anger and its relation to female adolescent subjectification. I now provide definitions of key terms (subjectivity, popular culture texts and anger) that inform the literature review.

To begin, I will clarify what I mean by *subjectivity*. In doing so, I reflect on the work of Simone de Beauvoir (1953). One of the first feminist theorists to set the stage and challenge our singular and narrow perception of identity she posits: "One is not born, but rather one becomes, a woman" (p. 267). Becoming a subject is a socially constructed process, a "product of social relations that work upon us... through society, through language, and through psychic processes [such as conscious or unconscious desires]" adds Fiske (1987, p. 49). This understanding of subjectivity is firmly established in the work of most poststructuralist writers, and focuses on the complex nature of, and association between questions of gender, agency, desire, and language practices (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991).

I note Weedon's (1987) partial notion of subjectivity conveyed as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 288). However, this poststructuralist definition is problematic in its attempt to frame women's struggle to name and voice "*who I am and who I want to be,*" because it makes no reference to how *language forms and*

practices mark, determine, and organize the social construction of this naming. In other words, the girls construct meaning and subjectivity first, through their mobilization of language practices, and secondly through their interpretation of those practices. Engaging these social processes, representations of self emerge as girls resist, negotiate, and accommodate through language "the normative or regulative rules with which [female adolescents] confront and regulate themselves" (Hall, 1996, p. 14). In addition, I record that language practices "are not unitary but *multiple and often contradictory*, so that the constitution of subjectivity is not all of one piece, without seams and ruptures" (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 30), as well as being "*marked by gender, race, class and cultural differences*" (Robinson, 1991, p. 1).

To sum up, overlapping and sometimes ambiguous theories of subjectivity continue to be argued by many critical and cultural theorists, yet evidence of self as constructed within a network of social relations, and constituted through language, can be found in most current discussions of subject formation (McLaren, 1989; Luke & Gore, 1992; Jones, 1993; Gonick, 1997; Kelly, 1997; Proweller, 1998; Currie, 1999). Thus, three elements are seen to consistently frame the majority of theories on subjectification: (1) it is understood as a socially constructed, ongoing, "temporary" process, and "strategic" (evidenced in context), (Robinson, 1991), (2) it articulates a desire to express "agency"⁵ (Cherland & Edelsky, 1993; Hall, 1996) alluding to potentially transformative properties,

⁵ Aligned with Davies' (1991) definition, *agency* is understood as the power that "mobilizes existing discourses in new ways, inverting, inventing and breaking old patterns"(p. 51). From a sociological perspective agency implies "the capacity for willed (voluntary) action," emphasizing implicitly the undetermined nature of human action (Marshall, 1998).

and (3) it is recognized through its connection to "discourse,"⁶ and cannot be abstracted from the specificities of gender, race and class.

Discourse is more than just about language; more explicitly it is about how *knowledge is produced through language* (what one says) and *practices* (what one does) (Hall, 1997). But discourse, in allowing particular ways of speaking and acting, conversely marginalizes other ways of speaking and acting. This understanding allows me to explore how the Zynami girls come to understand who they are, as gendered, working class females, in relation to a system of domination (schooling) that functions from a position of privilege and power limiting the girls' ways of speaking and acting as they attempt to *get it right* (Robinson, 1991; Hall, 1996; Hey, 1997).

Much of the emergent research on the construction of female subjectivity examined through a Cultural Studies lens, occurs after Willis' (1977) Learning to Labor, a classic study of working class boys in England. His study relates how working class, adolescent, male identities are manipulated by the school to keep the boys in the same working class roles as their fathers, and that they passively accept this class reproduction (Heilman & Goodman, 1996). His early work drew the attention of a rapidly emerging feminist discipline and feminist scholars continue to be instrumental in drawing our attention to questions of women's subjectification.

Proweller (1998) cites early studies (Eisenstein, 1979; MacDonald, 1980; Wolpe, 1981; Arnot, 1982) which suggest that "female students... fold in and internalize roles for women" (p. 7) based on patriarchal and colonialist notions of what it is to be a

⁶ Hall (1997) endorses Foucault's notion of *discourse*: "A group of statements which provide a language for talking about (representing knowledge of) a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (p. 44).

female and an adolescent, emotionally contained, passive, subservient, sweet, innocent, and physically controlled (Hudson, 1984; Lesko, 1996). In continuing the discussion, contemporary research studies articulate how girls mobilize and negotiate this complex, contradictory process of constructing subjectivity through the mechanism of language, and more explicitly through the use of popular culture texts (Walkerdine, 1984; Moss, 1989; Christian-Smith, 1990; McRobbie, 1991; Davies, 1993; Cherland & Edelsky, 1993; Gonick, 1997; Harper, 1997, et al.; Robertson, 1997a, 1997b; Ussher, 1997; Currie, 1999; Robertson & Keon, in press). In other words, language forms and practices are mobilized and constructed through girls' negotiations of popular culture texts now defined below.

I refer to Turner's (1992) definition; popular culture texts are understood as sites where the construction of everyday life can be examined. In conjunction, Hall (1981) and Johnson (1986) claim that popular culture texts are sites of struggle where subjectivity is constituted. Willis (1990) extends this definition to argue simply, that popular culture texts are also, "the very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our most commonplace understandings... what we wear, hear, watch and eat (p.13). Accordingly, Giroux and Simon (1989) describe popular culture texts as social processes and practices through which we struggle to construct meaning and agency, "dynamic in time," and "located firmly in the world of social agency" (Connell, 1995, p.81). Therefore, popular cultural texts can include both material forms of representations, such as teen magazines, and lived social relations, such as the authentic everyday practices of an interpretive community of seven, adolescent, high school girls.

Asserting the role of language forms and practices in our critical understanding of subjectivity and the construction of meaning as related to gender, desire, agency, class and race, I next address five significant findings emerging from the literature.

1. **Subjectivity and Gender**

A review of the literature demonstrates that a link between personal lives and social practices, expressed in and through language forms, is connected to the doing of gender. Girls/adolescents/women constitute *gendered* subjectivities as they invest social practices and processes, represented through language and their engagement of popular culture texts. *Gender* is understood as a cultural interpretation of signs and symbols of femininity and sexuality, rather than a quality owned by female adolescents (Lesko, 1988). Furthermore, "doing gender" refers to the process in which femininity is constructed, shaped, and expressed in different ways across social settings (Orellana, 1995; Proweller, 1998). Thus, subject positions (i.e., girlfriend, student, daughter) made available through language and social practices are continually shaped by gendered, cultural, and political discourses (Davies & Banks, 1992). The following studies point out the relationship between language practices, popular culture texts, and the doing of gender.

Heilman & Goodman (1996) report findings that indicate how textbooks and popular culture texts fortify gender doing observed in a gender study course offered to high school girls. The girls constantly negotiate their being and becoming through these texts, judging their appearance and behavior against and within the racialized, classed representations of femininity constructed in textbooks, lamenting the fact that "there is so much pressure for girls to live up to an ideal" (p. 255). In conjunction, Davies' 1989 study with preschool children reading The Paper Bag Princess, indicates that even at an early

age dominant, gendered discourses have the power to trap children within conventional meanings of femininity, and therefore limit their ways of being or doing gender (Davies & Banks, 1992). Adding to the conversation, Walkerdine (1984) confirms that pre-adolescents construct limiting views of femininity in the reading of romantic, comic story lines, while the same powerful insistence on perfecting the body and winning a man is also noted by McRobbie (1978) in her study of working class adolescents. These girls take for granted that success as a female means, "women who are attractive to men" (Jones, 1993, p. 160). Scholars clearly illustrate: (1) that girls regardless of age, race, or class do gender in complex, contradictory ways, (2) that cultural texts inform that doing, and (3) that notions of success are wrapped up in the packaging of the ideal body and the approval of men.

In addition, the literature reveals other studies that attempt to disrupt the persuasive effects of compulsory heterosexuality,⁷ femininity, and romance. For example, Gonick (1997) offers pre-teens in her study an alternative feminist teen magazine written by girls themselves. However the girls refuse to consider the text from the beginning. Instead, they unquestioningly communicate and comply with representations of heterosexuality and femininity offered in glossy "how-to-be-thin and how-to-get-your-man" magazines. Similarly, Hey (1997) points out that girls "know that heterosexual appeal has to be worked for and that her desirable body requires working upon to maximize her chances of attracting a man" (p. 93). These are but a few examples that

⁷Represented through discourse and social practice *heterosexuality* basically means men first, where, according to Rich (1980), "women are pressured into believing that marriage and sexual orientation toward men is inevitable, even if they are unsatisfying or oppressive" (in Kramarae & Treichler, 1985, p. 191).

illustrate the power of cultural images of gender to sway girls into “folding in” to dominant discourses of femininity even as they offer the potential to stage and engage an alternative production of who they are.

An interesting note here, McRobbie’s 1991 study of female adolescents’ reading of a teen magazine Jackie, suggests that girls readily succumb to traditional representations of femininity glamorized in popular culture texts. However, in 1994 McRobbie revisits her analysis and concludes first, that these same texts also make available *alternative* subject positions through omission and silence, and secondly that girls *actively* engage gendered, classed language codes to negotiate traditional and alternative discourses of femininity. McRobbie as well as a host of critical, feminist writers observe female adolescents clinging to traditional gendered practices, where patterns of desire that tie them to these practices become difficult to undo (Davies & Banks, 1992).

Essentially then, the first significant finding in the literature makes a clear argument for subjectivity to be understood as a *gendered* process, organized in and through language forms and practices, to facilitate the construction of meaning. But as these same studies illustrate *desire* is connected to the doing of gender.

2. Subjectivity and Desire

An increasing body of research demonstrates how popular culture texts are connected to girls’ conscious and unconscious *desires*.⁸ A salient link exists between subjectivity, language, cultural texts, and desire in the construction of meaning.

⁸ I defer to Lacan’s claim that desire is primarily a site for constructing meaning (Marshall, 1998). Desire stems from and signals who we are and is affected by cultural norms and practices (Davies & Banks, 1992).

The following studies emphasize how desire is invested through language and texts in the naming of self. Desire takes many forms. For example, the notion of women's desire for emotional nurturance as experienced through the reading of romance fiction surfaces in Radway's 1984 study of romance readers. Aligned with these findings Walkerdine (1984) points out that young girls fantasize about the texts they read in order to fulfill their desire for agency. Similarly, Cherland & Edelsky (1993) observe that even pre-adolescents' reading of series fiction and horror fiction, two very different genres, affirms their desire to encounter agency for themselves even as they delight in the story character's demonstration of agency: "That was an excellent book... She did it" (p. 35).

Not only children and adolescents, but adult women's engagement with cultural texts are informed by desire. Bogdan, Davis & Robertson (1997c) examine the investments of desire that organize white women teachers' choices of classroom texts in education classes. Through discourse girls and women of all ages engage a multitude of subject positionings framed by the fantasies and desires they bring to, and receive from, the reading of popular culture texts.

Contemporary writers continue to highlight female adolescents' investments of desire. Hey (1997) observes that working class girls have trouble appropriating academic success and therefore focus their desires on winning boyfriends and perfecting their bodies while condemning girls not engaged openly in boy work or body work. In contrast, Christian-Smith's 1991 study demonstrates how desire for academic success is illustrated by girls aged twelve through fifteen, identified as reluctant readers in school, as they fulfill their wish to be understood as capable readers through their engagement with romance novels.

Therefore, research reveals how girls give meaning and expression to their desires; but more importantly perhaps, these scholarly studies illustrate a movement toward an understanding of both the limits *and* possibilities that arise from the naming of desire through language practices. Giroux (1988) argues that "language... [is] the terrain upon which radical desires, aspirations, dreams, and hopes are given meaning through a merging of the discourse of ...possibility" (p. 65).

The important role played by the practices of story telling and writing in helping individuals to imagine a future of hope and possibility is also explored by many philosophers of literature. Greene (1991) speaks of "communities of the wide-awake" adventurously engaging art, and I suggest that art includes poetry, song, and life stories, to "overcome invisibility... releas[ing] the imagination," therefore creating the potential for individuals to experience their world with eyes wide open, celebrating the pull of possibility. In this same vein, Nussbaum (1995) speaks of the educative potential of literary art, and I include popular culture here, as "focusing on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves" (p. 5).

In a slightly different vein, desire emerges in Harper's 1997 study of six seventeen-year-old high school girls. Given the opportunity "to let wildness into their words [and writing] using feminist avant-garde literature," (p.141) the author illuminates just how deeply "female desire is constantly lured by discourses which sustain male privilege" (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991, p.136). In her study, Harper exposes the girls to feminist literature devoid of a heterosexual plot. It causes incredible discomfort for the girls, so much so that they make "urgent," "intense" efforts to speak and write heterosexual desires back into their work.

To conclude then, clearly grounded in the literature is the idea that representations of desire, engaged through language practices and discourses, mobilize female adolescents' use of any text in gendered ways. Pleasures, hopes, dreams, and fantasies urge on, and materialize through particular engagements with popular culture texts. Cautious in my own work to be continuously aware of, and to respect the girls hopes and desires, I examine how, when, and why the girls engage texts in particular ways in Valley Vocational High. Conceptually I argue that even dreaming unrealistically is better than not dreaming at all.

3. Subjectivity and Agency

Examining the constitution of subjectivity is advanced when speaking of its relationship to *agency*. This third finding in the literature highlights girls as *actively* engaged in and through discourse in contradictory negotiations of meaning. Active relates to agency, for to exercise agency, "to resist the imposition of forces that work to construct [an individual's] place within society" requires action (Cherland & Edelsky, 1993, p. 30). Davies describes agency within a feminist, poststructuralist framework as the power that "mobilizes existing discourses in new ways, inverting, inventing and breaking old patterns" (1991, p. 51). Though Davies emphasizes the transformative potential of agency, active engagement without socially transformative agency is pointed out in Harper's and Gonick's research as the girls position themselves along traditional notions of what it is to be an adolescent female.

Still, the bulk of the literature substantiates the idea that girls are seen to "actively engage in counter-hegemonic moves both in accommodation of *and* resistance to... stereotyped messages" (Proweller, 1998, p. 8) in *potentially* transformative ways. At the

same time, an ever increasing amount of literature is beginning to underscore the fact that girls' intense desire for agency often eclipses their ability to recognize how their collective struggle for authenticity is wedded to and organized through differences of gender, race and class.

4. Subjectivity, Class and Race

Thus, theorizing the constitution of subjectivity must also take into account how femininity and success is identified and experienced specifically in relation to race and class. The literature illuminates that many feminist and poststructuralist scholars whose work involves white girls do not acknowledge the racial category of "whiteness"⁹ as dynamically linked to problems of class and gender. Ware (1992) argues that conflicting notions of femininity are inextricably tied to ideologies of race and class, ideologies that locate white as a dominant, privileged norm. Giroux (1997) concurs, pointing out that the relevance of focusing on the relationship between race and class must be acknowledged in order to begin to understand how social relations shape the complexities of life. Furthermore, Frankenberg (1993) posits that how individuals do racialized versions of whiteness "varies spatially and temporally," subject to the shifting currents of time and place (p. 236). Therefore, recognizing the importance of class and race to subjectification has the potential to clarify *and* problematize my efforts to understand how seven, female adolescent working class girls negotiate the bricks and mortar of their everyday experiences in vocational high school.

⁹ Giroux (1997) aligns his definition of *whiteness* with Frankenberg (1993) who maps its terrain in three ways: (a) as a location of race privilege, (b) as a site of subjective struggle, (c) as a set of unmarked and unnamed cultural practices (p. 1).

How the category of working class is represented and engaged in their everyday lives affects and complicates the construction of meaning. Giroux (1996) speaks to the importance of investigating the social referents of race and class, arguing that the intersection of these texts are rarely considered in attempts to understand and promote new ways of knowing in school.¹⁰ Jones (1993) concurs: "When we [speak] about girls' relative silence in classrooms... we [obscure] class and race oppressions and privileges through overlooking their specificity and uneven expression in girls' everyday lives" (p.157).

As well, the salience of class to subjectification is confirmed and illustrated by numerous feminist, poststructuralist scholars (McRobbie 1994, 1980, 1978; Walkerdine, 1996, 1984; Hey, 1997; Steedman, 1997; and Way, 1998). Their findings speak to the contradictory pressures teen girls face as they struggle to find and keep a steady boyfriend, and to render their body desirable but innocent. Gilbert & Taylor add that these seemingly compulsory, heterosexual pressures present themselves to the girls at a time when the school curriculum compels the girls to think of their future in terms of career development instead.

Eloquently stated, McRobbie (1980) describes how working class girls are therefore "forced to relinquish youth for the premature middle age induced by childbirth and housework. *It's not so much that girls do too much too young: rather they have the opportunity of doing too little too late*" (p. 49). Gilbert & Taylor (1991) posit that such intense engagement with romance highlights the limited subject positions available to

¹⁰ See Giroux, Henry, 1996. Fugitive cultures: Race, violence and youth, (pp. 3-23).

working class girls. McRobbie (1991) and Currie (1999) report how material representations of success (money, opportunity, and possessions), limit working class girls' selection of subject positions, while Walkerdine (1989) argues that class divisions cannot easily be crossed. To borrow from Steedman (1987), "there exists a [wealth] of experience to which they [working class girls] have no access" (p.14). Thus girls are seen to act and construct knowledge from within class relations.

It is Walkerdine (1996) who accords that researchers are just "beginning to write experientially about class, and to understand it as a significant issue for the understanding of culture, feminine subjectivity and identity" (p. 355). In support of researchers' need to include class in categorizing gendered subjectivity, Weiner, Mahony & Zmroczek (1997) posit, "Class experience is deeply rooted, retained, and carried through life rather than left behind" (p. 4). Way argues with Ehnreich (1989) and Ortner (1991) that, "the myth of classlessness is notable among Americans in general who tend to describe themselves as middle class because they see the middle class as a universal class with universal membership" (p. 36).

At the same time scholars optimistically note that in recognizing the limited availability of particular subject positions effected by class and race, a space opens up for girls to imagine what is possible, as they "design complex discursive constructions of who they are becoming on a daily basis in school" (Proweller, 1998, p.198).

5. Subjectivity and the Discursive Practice of Anger

Presented in the discussion of findings section of my paper, I detail how the discursive practice of anger occupies a commanding position in the girls' efforts to

constitute themselves subjectively and so, at this juncture, I include both a definition and scholarly review of anger as it relates to the girls' world.

Referencing A Feminist Dictionary, 1985, anger is operationalized for this study from a feminist point of view as, "a human emotion whose needed expression has been denied the feminine woman" (Lennert & Willson, 1973), "an emotion through which women respond discursively to "exclusion... unquestioned privilege... racial distortions... silence... stereotyping... defensiveness... and betrayal" (Lorde, 1981). Fury (1970) elaborates and offers that anger may be "disciplined into effective strategies," or "uncontrolled." Ungoverned anger may become unproductive and debilitating.

In order to examine how the performance of anger positions individuals as social subjects I turn to the literature and discover that there has been little research on the concept of anger as a discursive practice. Posits Fairclough (1992), discursive practices "do not just reflect or represent social relations, they construct and 'constitute' them... and position people in different ways as social subjects" (in Smyth, 1999, p.84). The following discussion summarizes key points in the literature that inform my understanding of anger as it relates to how girls constitute themselves subjectively.

First, the literature reveals the restrictive focus of research that relegates the examination of anger to "girls of color" (Way, 1998, p.107). Pastor (1996) focuses on urban girls of color who must learn how to assertively negotiate the racialized terrain of whiteness. Yet another study, Torres (1992) illustrates how "Puerto Rican girls are less passive and more outspoken" (in Way, p.106) as the social practice of anger in the form of outspokenness is promoted and made available to them in their culture. More recent

research in contrast, details how white, middle-upper class girls strive to *avoid* anger in their negotiations of subjectivity (Currie, 1999; Brown, 1998; Way, 1999; Hey, 1997).

Secondly, the literature reveals that work on anger in white, working class cultures is just beginning to emerge but is sorely lacking in any attempt to understand this "well stocked arsenal" as a social/cultural practice. Way (1998) details anger, often referred to as "outspoken voices" through the eyes of multiethnic, multicultural urban teenagers in her extensive ethnography. She conceptualizes these "feelings" and expressions of anger through the lens of psychology. Adding to the discussion, Brown (1998) devotes an entire book to girls' anger focusing on gender, culture, and class variations in her psychological interpretation. In yet another study, Currie's Girl Talk (1999), the girls' voices are theorized from a feminist poststructuralist and Critical Cultural Studies perspective. Currie's study makes for a fascinating read and suggests that the performance of anger "is valued in girls from low-income, white communities" (p.16), but I am perplexed that anger appears non-existent in the girls' engagement of teen magazines in her work. From whatever discipline anger is engaged by scholars, a central vision emerges, that anger's contradictory articulations and complex performances expose girls' desires and demands for authentic, meaningful life experiences.

To conclude, though I have divided the significant findings of contemporary research as it relates to the constitution of subjectivity into five elements, it is not my intention to suggest that they are, or can be separated from one another. On the contrary, it is clear to me that questions of creating female subjectivities are interconnected to contextualized issues of gender, desire, agency, anger, class and race; a complex process organized and engaged through language forms and practices. The enormity of trying to

make sense of this process is underscored by Kincheloe & McLaren (1994): "This chaotic knot of intertwined articulations" can never be completely unraveled (p.146).

Entering the ongoing discussion that seeks to understand the threads of daily life experiences, I try to follow in the footsteps of two specific studies of adolescent females living in Ontario: (1) Gonick's 1997 study that encompasses pre-adolescent, racially diverse, working class girls' engagement with a feminist teen magazine, New Moon, and (2) Harper's 1997 study of a grade twelve, creative writing class involving six, sixteen year old adolescents' engagement with feminist "avant-garde" writing. The goal in both studies is to empower the girls by promoting their critical reflection and active taking-up of alternative subject positions offered to them through their experience of these texts. The hope is to steer them away from texts that, "reinforce power relationships, stereotypes, and the objectification of women" (Gonick, p.70). However, to the scholars' surprise and dismay, they find that offering feminist writing and practices does not readily mobilize girls' desire to *do gender* in new, creative ways. Matter of fact, not offering traditional, gendered texts reinforces the girls' desire for stereotypical images of femininity. This is exactly what Walkerdine alerts us to when she cautions against our use of alternative texts, "stressing the one as an alternative to the other [may] feed or fuel resistance to the feminist alternative" (in Gilbert & Taylor, 1993, p.38). Both Gonick's and Harper's studies highlight how the introduction of alternative texts can be counterproductive.

Gonick relates that the scarcity of timeworn, gendered discourses in New Moon, denies the girls their wish for a heterosexual connection and impedes their sense of agency. In response to her students' desire to discuss fashion and make-up tips, Gonick

decides instead to look at teen magazines the girls already read, making a case for focusing attention on "old story lines through which discourses are lived out" and how this might contribute to girls' mobilization of new discourses (p.158). Harper, on the other hand, persists in her six week project concluding that further research needs to work within the unsettled framework of girls' conflicting desires, engaged through language, and informed by constructions of gender, race, and class. This brief summary is not intended to do justice to their exemplary work but to provide a context for my own work.

Therefore, in tracing "ordinary life threads" through "old story lines," my study attempts to understand how seven, adolescent females in vocational high school make room for, or resist story lines, as they engage with another feminist text, a teen magazine, Reluctant Hero, written and produced *by* adolescent girls, *for* adolescent girls. It is similar to the other two texts in that it offers the possibility of oppositional readings, but it differs in that it does not deny female adolescents the opportunity to explore traditional heterosexual discourses exemplified in the methodology section of this paper. In other words, it *attempts* to take Walkerdine's argument to heart by *not* stressing one set of representations as more rational or acceptable than another, though the fact remains that editorial working determines what gets published and what does not. Yet Reluctant Hero still exists as a culturally, non-dominant site through which the Zynami girls communicate multiple desires as they struggle to "get it right," and create a space of potential power and authenticity in their world.

Secondly, in relation to the intertextual thread of anger that surfaces in my study, both surprising me and confusing my efforts to understand the girls' stories, it needs to be

highlighted that neither Gonick nor Harper mention the discursive practice of anger in their work, though it is alluded to in the girls' resistance of alternative literature.

Therefore, intending to add to the ongoing discussion of how female adolescents, immersed in the language, discursive practices, and dominant discourses of vocational high school construct their being and becoming, I pose the following research questions.

1. How do female adolescents engage popular culture texts through language forms and practices to construct and organize subjectivity and agency in vocational high school? How do they find hope and possibility in their mobilization of texts? Whether and how do they construct themselves as agents of power?
2. How do female adolescents' perceived notions of the discursive practices and dominant discourses of vocational high school inform and regulate the complex representations at work in their constitution of subjectivity?

IV. Theoretical Framework

1. Critical Cultural Studies

The multidisciplinary field of Cultural Studies represents a process for producing useful knowledge whose end goal is the possible social transformation of all participants (Johnson, 1986). Through gendered, classed, and racialized practices enmeshed in language forms and practices, human beings live, become conscious, and sustain themselves subjectively. Therefore, Cultural Studies is well suited to address the complex struggle of how seven, female adolescents constitute themselves subjectively through language as they negotiate their past story lines, present experiences, and future dreams.

A Critical Cultural Studies theoretical framework allows me "to portray and interpret the way girls actively confront ideological conditions of schooling" (Levinson et al., 1996, p.14). More explicitly, Critical Cultural Studies offers a lens through which I analyze how the discourse of vocational high school is interpellated by the Zynami girls. At the same time, Critical Cultural Studies is committed to producing knowledge that "enables people to act more strategically in ways that may change their context for the better" (Grossberg, 1997, p. 261). In addition, it has a moral obligation maintains Hytten (1998), to help society recognize that "the world is changeable" if one embraces the struggle against powerful, hegemonic discourses that manipulate, exploit, reproduce, and oppress "marginal societal groups" (p.132).

Secondly, Casella (1999) asserts that Critical Cultural Studies "*becomes a manner of social research* - a framework through which [I] in education *do* ...research" (p.107). Thus, in *doing* Critical Cultural Studies I become part of the dialectic relationship between "human beings... language, and transformative agency" (Giroux, 1988, p. 64); I become

connected to a process that holds the potential to modify, alter, or reproduce dominant discourses, and perhaps change them (Hull, 1993; Proweller, 1998; Pignatelli, 1998).

Therefore, I too am part of the story. Critical Cultural Studies recognizes all individuals as collaboratively involved, consciously or unconsciously, in the construction of society and its institutions, accommodating and/or resisting, in effect challenging systems of domination, power, and privilege... through language.

Representations of "truth" and beliefs about how people situate themselves in the world take into account "how language shapes social relations" (Casella, 1999, p. 113). That is to say, in the naming of the world through representation the process of subjectification is mobilized. Mobilization requires activity, and so in doing Critical Cultural Studies there is continual movement between the language of texts, readers, researchers, and the places where they come together to "give form and shape to the development of a more critical self" (Giroux, 1989, p. 235). Representations of self are given form and shape in this study particularly in and through the text of the Zynami club, the place where I and the girls come together. Subjectivity work is a shared struggle.

Three key components of Critical Cultural Studies encompass the analysis of any text as outlined by Johnson (1983): (1) the production and circulation of the texts themselves, (2) the interpretation of the signs and representations within the texts, and (3) how the texts are mobilized by readers. The locus of my study, as it relates to the Zynami club and Reluctant Hero, encompasses any one of the three elements but primarily focuses on the third element, how the Zynami girls construct meaning in school through the utilization of these texts. Therefore, Valley Vocational High School's role of initiating students into its culture is secondary to my investigation of the girls' "critical, cultural

interpretation" and mobilization of discursive texts that frame the institution of schooling (Smyth et. al., 1999, p. 73). I am interested in how the girls create themselves as social subjects from within social relations that situate and often hold them to particular ways of doing and saying in school.

A Critical Cultural Studies framework, in drawing attention to the social construction of texts, encourages individuals to begin to critically contemplate moral and political issues related to their lived experiences, and to take a stand in shaping their world. This critical stance is adopted by contemporary, cultural, and educational researchers (Giroux, 1990, 1992; Grossberg, 1992; Hall, 1990; McLaren & Giroux, 1997; Simon, 1992; Davies & Banks, 1992; Proweller, 1998; Cherland & Edelsky, 1993). A critical approach views knowledge as not what is offered, but what is understood (Lusted, 1986), a central notion in constituting subjectivities that takes seriously "issues of quality, justice, freedom, and difference" (Giroux, 1992, p. 154).

To conclude, a Critical Cultural Studies perspective highlights "all those processes which accompany the production of meaning in culture... from where it is socially constructed to where it is socially deconstructed and contested, in the institutions, practices, and relationships of everyday life" (McRobbie, 1994, p. 41), and is therefore suited to investigating complex, contradictory discursive practices that constitute and are constituted by the Zynami girls, the cultural workers of this study, as they actively become users and makers of meaning.

2. Feminist Post-Structuralism

In addition to Critical Cultural Studies, feminist post-structuralism is adopted to define concepts, clarify methodology, and validate interpretive analysis strategies. Feminist poststructuralism continues to be used by an ever growing number of researchers to both conduct research and analyze data (Walkerdine, 1984; Weeden, 1987; Gilbert, 1989 b; Luke, 1991; Davies & Banks, 1992). Conceptually, this framework emphasizes the "insertion of the personal and the questioning of discursive productions of gender" in examining subjectivity (Redding-Jones, 1995, p. 491). It accentuates doing gender as a function of how girls use and take up signs, symbols, and representations. As well, feminist poststructuralism acknowledges that language is the medium through which girls construct and exchange meaning. Not only does feminist poststructuralism inform how we think about the gendered ways in which girls "give meaning to themselves and others in the world" (Davies & Banks, 1992, p. 2), but it frames power, patriarchy, race and class as critical forces with which the girls must contend. To conclude, a feminist poststructuralist framework enhances my analysis of a group of teenage girls, as it locates and privileges, gender, race and class relations as significant markers that shape and inform their lives.

In summary, I draw the reader's attention to the strength of a *combined* framework of Critical Cultural Studies and feminist poststructuralism that makes possible the examination of: (1) discursive forms of language through which individuals contextually create themselves as subjects, (2) the intertextuality of gender, race and class, as social relations connected to meaning-making practices, and (3) whether and how individuals exercise agency in potentially transformative ways in the dynamic process of subjectification. And, having elaborated on the appropriateness of connecting Critical

Cultural Studies and feminist poststructuralism in theory and practice, as a way of doing research, I now introduce the following research methodology that encourages the emergence of vivid narratives detailing the Zynami girls' struggles to understand and create meaning in their world.

V. Methodology

A multi-method, interpretive, qualitative research design supports questions of how individuals socially construct their world, and of how gender, desire, race and class inform this construction. Reinharz (1992) posits that multi-method research¹¹ is "committed to thoroughness, the desire to be open-ended, and to take risks...reflecting the desire to be responsive to the people studied" (p.197). In alliance, Greene (1994) argues that "interpretivism is about contextualized meaning [where] social reality is viewed as socially constructed, based on a constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation of the intentional, meaningful behavior of people" (in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 536). Hytten (1998) emphasizes the importance of "the researched participating along with the researcher in all aspects of the inquiry process" (p. 202). Yet another scholar, Pignatelli (1998) upholds the idea of employing a variety of data collection strategies in an interpretive research design asserting that "we need to employ a range of means by which to blur the border between researcher as actively constructing knowledge, and researched as merely providers of information" (p. 420).

Therefore, a multi-method approach framed by Critical Cultural Studies and feminist poststructuralism allows me to adapt methods of data collection as we go along (individual interviews, focus groups, girls' written work), enabling rich, thick data to emerge while capturing unrestricted, passionate stories of the girls' lived experiences. Though my initial plan is to keep two of my data collection methods separate (writing and

¹¹I use the notion of multi-method in accordance with Reinharz, 1992, Feminist methods in social research. The author argues that, "feminist research often draws on... multiple rather than one data type method of analysis [and] that the use of multi-methods has earned its own name - triangulation (p. 197).

focus groups), I discover by the third focus group session the richness of data that emerges by allowing the two strategies to intersect. The process of meaning making flows from one method to another as the girls deem necessary. In so doing, the dynamic of a combined strategy allows the girls to self regulate what and when to speak and write. Relaxed, the girls find the task of speaking and writing to their liking as their stories effortlessly feed from, and flow between, particular language forms. Reinharz, (1992) concurs; "each component of a multi-method design has the potential to flesh out the other, enhancing understanding by adding layers of information and by using one type of data to validate or refine another" (p. 201).

The seven girls and I meet as a group two times a week. Each session is conducted over a period of six weeks. The sessions, generally fifty minutes long in keeping with the school's regular allotted time for each class, are extended on three occasions. In addition to these gatherings, there are two, scheduled, individual, open-ended interviews, one conducted the week before the study begins and one at the end of the study. The school is extremely supportive of my time with the girls allowing me the flexibility to adapt and adopt as we go along. Therefore two of the sessions extend to seventy minutes and two of them occur on back to back days instead of three days apart. The end result is a collection of data composed of, (a) twelve audio-taped, transcribed focus group sessions, (b) a collection of written texts (produced on bits and pieces of paper), finally compiled into a magazine produced by the girls, and (c) fourteen taped, transcribed individual interviews. All transcriptions are completed by me. All transcriptions are numbered by line, dated, and

color coded by category and theme. I now draw the reader to a detailed description of the setting and participants, the popular culture text Reluctant Hero, the data collection strategies and the data analysis strategies.

1. Description of Setting, Participants, and Popular Culture Text

"Please Miss, will you come back and be our teacher next year?" ... "No, not our teacher, just like this." ... "Can we do a Zynami Club next year?" ... "You could come back as our counselor or something. We could come to you when we have problems, um...or need to talk about our boyfriends... or stuff like that." "We could meet for pizza lunch."

A warm breeze scatters their voices as both words and girls whirl around me that Thursday afternoon we say "Good-bye." Summer has arrived early, and to take advantage of the moment we gather our pictures and Zynami magazines heading for the shade of the maple on the edge of the school property. We have been together twice a week for three months, but now the school year is drawing to a close, exams loom, and freedom is within their grasp. It is time for the Zynami Club to weave a new thread....

We continue to laze on the lawn and let thoughts drift in as our gaze falls back on the sprawling, red, brick building of the vocational high school. The bell rings, for the second time. The girls jostle, giggle, and tumble off to class. SM, as always, is the last to leave. I continue to sit under the tree. In the quiet now I can hear the buzz of my own thoughts echoing Skeggs's (1995), "I was completely unprepared for the emotional intensity of these relationships" (p. 198). I move out into the sun and my thoughts drift to where, when, how, and why this study began.

a) Valley Vocational High School

Valley Vocational High School¹² is a regional school situated on the margins, on the periphery, of a major city. So too, are the students from across the region situated, on the periphery of the ruling classes, dominant discourses, and ideologies that position them, but at the same time are contested by them, in their struggle to negotiate relations of power to constitute themselves as subjects. The school's motto is "Courtesy + Co-Operation + Common Sense = Success." A gulf of meaning exists between the Zynami girls' coding of "success," and the school's notion articulated from a position of power. The Zynami girls' understanding of what it means to be a courteous and common-sensed female adolescent in vocational high school is part of the story they want to tell.

Work experience weeks, co-op education, and career exploration are key components of the school program. The ratio of boys to girls in this multiracial, multiethnic institution, with a current enrollment of just over 500 students, is close to 50/50. When you walk through the double glass doors a feeling more of home than institution assaults the senses. Your eyes and ears are drawn instantly to the indoor fountain and water garden that the horticultural students built and maintain. The walls are completely ringed with laminated picture plaques of smiling, active students and staff. A red neon billboard celebrates the name of the birthday students that day, and wafting through this entrance is the enticing aroma of homemade soups and chocolate chip cookies being baked by the students in hospitality. It is a sensory experience that invites,

¹² Pseudonyms for the institution, students and staff have been established to ensure the confidentiality of the participating school in accordance with the University of Ottawa's and the School Board's Ethics Committee regulations.

calms, and welcomes anyone who walks through the door. Now add staff who are always in sight, waiting with a warm welcome, and students jostling, juggling and jockeying for position as they hustle off to their respective classrooms, where "late" is one second after the final bell. This then is Valley Vocational High School... from my point of view as I begin my study. In retrospect, I would like to have asked the girls what they thought of the building itself, and yet so self absorbed do the girls seem, and their thoughts so inner directed that I it does not occur to me to ask them what they think about the aesthetics of their surroundings. Yet all seven female adolescent participants articulate in my first individual interview with them that they like this school better than any other they have attended before. They speak of feeling safer here than in previous schools and four agree that at this juncture (the end of their first year in vocational high school) "the teachers really care."

From multiple conversations with the principal and staff outside the parameters of the research project over the course of the last two years, I remark that in all likelihood Valley Vocational High recognizes the historical marginalization of their students, and that this recognition prompts their adoption of non traditional strategies to enhance the students' struggle for success. One of these strategies is the school's use of popular culture texts in the classroom (movies and magazines are used routinely in curriculum planning).¹³ Perhaps this indicates the vocational school's recognition of, in John Dewey's (1916) words, "the connection between the subject matter of the lesson and the wider and more direct experiences of everyday life" (in Casella, 1999, p. 117).

¹³ The vice-principal has a broad background and interest in media studies as they relate to curriculum planning and practices.

The Zynami club meets in one of three rooms over the ten weeks that encompass the research project, but mostly in a small boardroom dominated by a dark, polished, mahogany table and sixteen cushioned armchairs. The carpeted floor does little to dull the girls' rambunctiousness as they bound into the room each session. The walls do little to deaden the outside, hallway sounds of slamming lockers, raucous student laughter, or censored cacophony when someone invades another's space. The room quickly becomes "their" room. The noises outside present themselves to us as if in a distant dream. Once the door closes the girls tolerate no interruptions. A teacher knocking is met with, "You're not a girl Sir. You can't come in!" Other students, even boyfriends, are met with, "Later OK!" or "Get out!"

b) Participants

I refer to the girls in the title of my paper as heroes and now offer the reader my definition of hero for the purpose of this study. Sharlene Azam, publisher and editor-in-chief of the teen magazine Reluctant Hero (1999) posits that heroes are "unstoppable, in control, out of control" (p.1). Traditionally a hero is described as courageous, daring, powerful, audacious, spirited, and indifferent to danger or hardship. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (1970) defines one aspect of hero as "... the central figure in an event or period." Thesaurus synonyms for hero include both model and martyr.

Whether "in control or out of control" the "central figures" of this research project are the Zynami girls, but I must express a caution here. My intention is not to portray the girls as exemplary individuals who will find a place in history for their unselfish and sacrificing acts of kindness. Rather, their mark of daring and courage is exposed in their everyday attempts to survive a society that alienates, distorts, and silences their stories and

experiences. In effect, as their narratives reveal, they are for the most part, self-centered, self-serving young teens. They are not necessarily invincible or expressly remarkable. They are quite ordinary...but they have a lot to say. As *models* of a particular culture within the context of a vocational school, the Zynami girls are, at the same time, *martyrs* of this system whose unconscious goal reinforces the school's authority to mold the girls into a traditional discourse of successful femininity.

Seven out of twenty-four, fourteen year old, grade nine girls¹⁴ sign up during my information session held in the school auditorium. Six are enthusiastic and *insist* on being part of the study, the seventh waits to review the list of girls who have volunteered before committing herself to the project. There is a tentativeness about their articulations of being "friends." Perhaps this is because they have just discovered one another this year and geographical distance keeps them from forging relationships outside of school. It is not until I complete my first set of interviews that I appreciate Mr. Barnes' (pseudonym), head of student services, apprehension about structuring a working group with such a disparate lot of personalities. Yet I am excited and eager the day of our first focus group meeting. I perch on the table's edge keenly observant of the girls' boisterous entrance. "Wow, look at this room!" "You mean we're *allowed* to be in here!?" They begin scheming with each other, "No, over here Jenn, over here," and manipulating their bodies and belongings into strategic positions. SM chooses the chair on the edge of the group but would not have much choice anyway as Kyra and Raz are clearly "in charge" of where everyone will sit.

¹⁴ I use the word "girls" in reference to the participants as this is how they name themselves.

Tumultuousness gives way to a questioning gaze in my direction mixed with their flipping the pages of Reluctant Hero.

Perhaps they are a "disparate bunch of girls," but I am anxious to hear their stories. All seven girls, the cultural workers of this study, are white and working class. A host of scholars claim that representations of whiteness and working class fashion girls' subjectification (Walkerline, 1984; Frankenberg, 1993; Ware, 1992; Hey, 1997; Steedman, 1998). I am mindful of providing the reader with three different sources of evidence that support my naming of the girls as working class. First, my journal reflections indicate that much of the informal banter I am privileged to hear as the girls come and go from our sessions revolve around their recounting of after school and weekend activities that they are not able to participate in because of insufficient pocket money. They speak mostly of window shopping in malls, as they have no money to buy material items such as CD's and fashion clothes. Movie theatres are rarely accessed, but constantly wished for. The girls speak of waiting for money gifts from relatives (often grandparents). Secondly, at many points during our sessions together the girls make statements about economic conditions (single moms living from pay check to pay check from low paying, bottom end jobs, or welfare). Thirdly, in my discussions with the guidance counselor, I am informed that only one of the girls lives in a stable, two parent family and that the rest are either in homes with single moms or with single moms and their often transient, live in boyfriends. One girl lives in a group home. In conjunction with this knowledge, statistics show that single parent families (where mom is the parent) live on or below the poverty line in Canada.¹⁵

¹⁵ Child and Family Health Status Report, Regional Municipality of Ottawa-Carleton, 1997.

Therefore, I deduce from this evidence that the female adolescents participating in my study live in homes gripped by minimum-wage where they remain in subordinate roles.

Over the course of a weekend the girls think about "nick-names" to be used during the project. On our first meeting as a group they are eager to have their new names recorded. Taylor and SM (Silver Moon) choose television character names as represented in a soap opera and cartoon feature respectively, escaping the troubles of their daily lives through fantasy, imagining a life of harmony and power and success. Jenn chooses her soon-to-be, officially legalized new name strategically signaling her attempts to free herself from the invasive presence of her estranged father's family. Raz embraces a childhood name, connecting I imagine to a nostalgic longing for a loving mother. At present Raz lives in a group home in hopes of finding a way to rectify a mutually abusive relationship with her mother. Dawn attempts to stay rooted to a renewed, healthy image of herself having survived bouts of debilitating depression. Therefore, she chooses her middle name. Squeeky, who always tries to please the boys in her life (consistently articulated throughout our time together), chooses a name the boys like to call her, once again imagining herself fulfilling their needs. Kyra is the only one who finds it difficult to settle with her choice. She tries out possibilities discarded by her peers, "Excuse me can I take your nick name, please, PLEASE?" but reluctantly lets "Kyra" stand.

The girls wear no designer outfits. Jeans, side button pants, T-shirts and sweat shirts organize the peer approved look. I suggest that this look also represents a strategy employed by the girls to conceal an imperfect body, though I do not imagine that they would ever openly own up to this theory. But this notion carries weight when any one girl arrives feeling rejected and lonely, and hides within her biggest, oldest sweater, chin

hunched down into the collar and hands reaching up into the sleeves. Make-up and multiple string bracelets and necklaces complete the look. Characteristically Kyra, the tiniest one of the group, has to be different. She chooses to flaunt her thinness in front of the group by wearing tight, hip hugger pants and cropped tank tops. On the days I imagine she feels invisible (when no one wants to let her be boss), she uses her body to gain attention by dancing on the chairs and table. She does this on two occasions before leaving the research project and never returning. Pseudonyms chosen, chairs arranged, introductions complete, the Zynami girls now turn their attention to Reluctant Hero.

c) Popular Culture Text - Reluctant Hero

Reluctant Hero, a teen magazine, is written by adolescent girls for their female peers. First presented to the girls during my initial recruitment session as a catalyst to provoke and stimulate conversation among the girls, I am hopeful that it will be of relevance to the girls negotiation of their world during our focus group sessions. Following are the key operative elements that justify its selection for this study. An example from past editions (Spring, 1998; Fall, 1998) support each claim.

Reluctant Hero: (1) Is written and produced by female adolescents across North America, (2) accepts for publication the language teens speak and write (“How big are your boobs?”), (3) allows female voices to be heard with no discernible attempt to moralize, police or censor adolescent reality (“I am gay”), (Hade, 1993), (4) offers multiple ways to engage readers discursively (content includes poetry, fiction, fashion, life issues, comics, opinions, art etc.), (5) invites active, creative participation from readers (“Be a reporter... artist... fiction writer... poet... critic”), (6) encourages transformative readings and practices (“We will not hesitate to shape our lives for adventure”), (7) anticipates

contradictory readings (“Female or not: What’s the difference”); (8) articulates the truth-value and dignity of subjective experience, (“This summer I got pregnant”),(Greene, 1991), and (9) acknowledges the role of emotion in reason, (A daughter shares her experience of dealing with her mother's cancer), (Nussbaum, 1995).

I have no idea whether the girls will take up or resist Reluctant Hero. During the introductory session in the school gym with all grade nine girls present, I pass out copies of the magazine. Instantly those who choose to look at Reluctant Hero and not one of the other teen magazines (YM, Seventeen, Teen People, Prom Special) I have brought in, begin to fashion comments about this alternative teen magazine. "It's in black and white!" "Oh, at *least* it has a horoscope!" "*Plain*... um... the cover's plain, like... no flowers or anything." These disapproving exclamations immediately have me speculating about the relevance of print technology in the girls' lives. They appear to be searching for color, visual images, narratives of advice, and romantic story lines, texts more prominently highlighted in technologies of film, television, and media advertising. By the time the bell rings only Jenn and Dawn are still looking at Reluctant Hero.

Enlisting this material text to facilitate discussion proves extremely effective in the first three focus group sessions before the social text of the Zynami club itself overrides the text of Reluctant Hero in its ability to stimulate and fortify the girls use of discursive practices. Eventually, from the fourth session on, it is only at my bidding that I can interest the girls in the magazine through horoscopes, poetry, and tales of despair submitted by other teen writers. For the most part they 'diss' (make fun of) this teen magazine. On the other hand, the social text of the Zynami club is readily embraced and valued by the girls. Here, within the newly formed interpretive community of the Zynami club, trust, privacy

and respect embrace this small group of adolescent girls as they tell their stories. Here, imaginations unfold, shape, rearrange and create puzzling, painful, and potentially transformative story lines. Here, amidst their negotiation of subject positions, through the language of story telling, there is always room to dream, imagine, and create.

The fact that I am interested in hearing their stories intrigues the girls. They appear excited, aware that someone might even publish their stories, asking questions about when and how this might happen. Knowing they are not to be "marked" or "judged" heightens their profound need to tell it like it is. The following data collection strategies are carefully chosen to facilitate and authenticate what has to date been a silent, internal activity, the telling of tales.

2. Data Collection Strategies

Through the process of qualitative research, the terrain of female adolescent subjectification is examined. The complexity of this cultural production of self is documented in the girls' stories. Therefore, in attempting to capture the depth and richness of the telling and doing, and to validate the interpretive process, I utilize the following data collection strategies: (a) focus groups, (b) informal, individual, open-ended interviews, and (c) content analysis of the girls' own spontaneous bits and pieces of writing. In conjunction, a personal, reflective, daily journal incorporated as a separate section in the transcribed notes, or opening the transcription for a particular day keep me constantly aware of my personal biases and subject positionings.

a) Informal, Individual, Open-ended Interviews

Two, individual, fifty minute interviews are conducted, one at the beginning of the project and one at the end. Although each interview begins with a set of initial questions

they are used strictly as a guide to organize and engage the girls' individual articulations of their world. Open ended interviews encourage listening carefully, asking for clarification where necessary, and letting go of the plan when the situation presents itself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The first interview informs my second research question that seeks to understand female adolescents' perceived notions of what their new school, Valley Vocational High, expects of them as adolescent students. Following Fraenkel & Wallen's (1996) advice I start off with non-threatening questions to put the girls at ease, but soon find that they openly gravitate to more personal articulations before I even pose a sensitive question; evidence that open-ended questions allow the girls' own categories and assumptions to emerge and offer "the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.94). Opinion questions, "What do you think?" and feeling questions, "How does that make you feel?" largely frame this conversation.

I am excited about conducting the second set of interviews at the end of the study, looking forward to meeting with the girls again on an individual basis, (Kyra does not come to this final interview), excited because we know so much more about each other. This interview becomes "like a conversation between friends" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 94). Fraenkel & Wallen argue that open-ended, informal interviews are ethically the most difficult to do. The authors speak of the in/appropriateness of digging deeper or selecting questions of a too personal nature. I choose not to include transcriptions of Jenn's story, deleting as well a few other stories from our focus group sessions in an effort to protect the girls' privacy.

At the same time, these final interviews serve to check the accuracy of my interpretations of our focus group sessions and of the girls' writing (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). As each girl bounces into the room I hand over a final copy of their magazine, *Zynami*, produced according to their specifications. It clearly shifts their focus from any conversation I may have wished for, to talk of the magazine itself. With *all* of the girls I spend the major portion of our interview time discussing the magazine and the process of having seen it evolve. At this moment, it is the *Zynami* club group photos that more powerfully reference the girls' construction of meaning than does the written language of their poems and stories. They continually flip through the magazine as we speak, looking at the two pages of party photos over and over, only occasionally re-reading their own work and sometimes inquiring about who produced other entries. These photo reminders of smiling, socially connected selves conceivably symbolize the success, power, and hope they encounter in the creation of their magazine. Most of the girls talk about how the group could evolve and continue. In the end I receive their permission to give a copy to the principal, and send one to the publisher of Reluctant Hero.¹⁶

An eclectic mix of feelings charge the atmosphere of each final interview. On first entering the room I sense each girl's feeling of exposure. Having often voiced their fears, failures, and frustrations in the past weeks in the solidarity of the group, I imagine they are

¹⁶ As a result of this submission, the girls are invited to be part of a four week-end workshop, sponsored by Reluctant Hero. Here the girls would work with a professional journalist, poet, graphic artist and media expert to produce a cross country exhibit on "bullying" written and produced by the girls themselves. For legal and logistical reasons the girls do not attend. In support of the publisher's acknowledgement of the girls' work, the school has invited this team of professionals to travel to the girls instead, at a future date.

now wondering what I am thinking about them, perhaps waiting for an evaluation of their performance that is part and parcel of every other school project they are involved with. At the same time, I notice a sense of inertia, a lazy, congenial, mutual passivity enfolding us. Then suddenly the air splits with their laughter, exclaiming their delight as they proudly savor a job well done, repeatedly thumbing through their magazine clearly excited, "Oh my God!" "Wow!" "Look at me!" Tasting success, the girls' speak of being inspired now to continue writing. Comfort and tranquility enfold us as we sit together, huddled over the magazine on our lap, oblivious to the hum of the world outside the door.

Yet one more element defines the process of this final interview. I am conscious of my own desire to give advice, to try and steer them into what I think is the right direction. I still struggle with the need to counsel them, to try and influence them with my own reasoning. I want to hear that somehow the Zynami club *has* transformed their lives. I am uncomfortable with the notion that it may not have contributed one iota to their ability to reflect on their life and their world. I am anxious to hear that they are at least entertaining new ideas reflected by the particularities of their lived experiences. And to conclude, I am aware that this reflective position I acknowledge will influence my interpretations, mindful of Fontana & Frey's claim that qualitative researchers "have [to] come to grips with the reflexive, problematic, and at times contradictory nature of data, and with the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as its author" (in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 372).

In the end though, I just want to relax this one last time and say, "Thank-you."

b) Focus Groups

Continuing to investigate the complex representations at work in the construction of subjectivity is further advanced by adopting focus group sessions as part of the research

methodology. The focus group, dubbed the Zynami club by the end of our first session, has the advantage according to Fontana & Frey (1994), "of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents... cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses" (in Denzin & Lincoln, p. 365). Within this interpretive community of seven girls meaning is *socially* constructed.

Most sessions begin with the group's selection of an article from Reluctant Hero, but this process is routinely disrupted as new topics arise from the roots of the original story lines. In our initial sessions, articles from the magazine are read out loud, the girls being most comfortable when I read the longer passages myself. Short ones, like horoscopes, are eagerly read by five of the girls. Raz and Squeeky, the most reluctant readers of the group, quietly pass on reading out loud unable to overcome their sense of inadequacy as readers, and perhaps fearful of the ridicule I assume they have so often experienced in the classroom from their peers. The other five girls feel courageous and successful each time they read out loud within the context of the Zynami club. By the fourth focus group session, the magazine is rarely referenced by the girls though all of them continue to take the magazine out of its folder at the beginning of the session, perhaps to simply signal that they are ready to begin.

Eventually an unorganized agenda directed by the girls themselves emerges and rankles my ingrained desire to be in charge of arranging events. As the girls become adept and comfortable with guiding the sessions on their own, my directive role is effectively weighed and balanced against my role as observer. Consequently, what circulates is what the girls want to say and not what I wish they would say, authenticating their worldview.

During our focus group sessions we begin to think about a written project for the next session. But by the third week my plan to keep the focus group sessions and writing sessions separate falls aside as the focus group and writing session evolve into one. This unorchestrated design revision occurs as the Zynami girls begin to think about what they want to write, "reflecting together on some topic... stimulating each other to talk about topics" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.100). But their delight and need to express their stories is difficult to contain until "next time." There is an urgency in getting their view of the world out through speech or getting it down through writing. Perhaps they are afraid that moments of acceptance will disappear, and that they will once again be silenced.

Expressing their struggle freely, without strings of judgement attached, appears to be a rare occurrence in their school experience. Brown (1998) argues that accommodating the passionate articulation of the girls' own narratives allows them to not only "share the realities of their lives with one another [but perhaps] to consider the sources as well as the political implications of their strong feelings [and acts]" (p. 33). Allowing the flexibility of language forms and practices potentially increases the possibility for new ideas to emerge.

All of the focus group sessions are audio-tape recorded. None of the girls object to this procedure. Matter of fact, Jenn or Dawn or Raz are the first ones to tell me that the tape has stopped and they wait for me to turn it over, insisting that we repeat the last moments of our conversation so we do not miss anything. It is as if their intense desire to record as well as narrate their stories speaks of a desperate need to overcome the helpless feeling that no one is really listening. They make sure the green light flashes, and that the mini speaker remains upright in the middle of the table. The tape recorder ensures that the words of their worlds are not scattered to the wind.

The third means of capturing the zynami girls' stories is through the discursive practice of writing.

c) Girls' Writing

The inclusion of the girls' written texts, "first person narratives that describe the [girls'] actions, experiences, and beliefs (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.134), offer a third site to explore language practices that catalogue the ongoing process of mobilizing and constructing meaning. My intent is to keep track of the girls' writing on lined pads of paper inserted into their individual folders. The girls personalize these folders with stickers and colored pencils on the first day of the project. But somehow, as the weeks of the study progress, much of their writing ends up on bits and pieces of paper, some torn from the folder notepad but often dug out of their own school bag. It appears to be a matter of what is the most expedient way to get a piece of paper when the urge to write overtakes them. At the end of the session I make sure their written work ends up, crumpled or tucked neatly, into their folder. In conjunction with the interviews and focus group sessions, this multi-sensory, tangible reality of written and illustrated story lines, potentially fills in empty spaces and fleshes out details of the girls' narratives. Therefore, the possibility for new story lines to emerge through re-reading is an encouraging thought for me even if the Zynami girls remain unaware of its potential.

Highlighting their own particular representations of femininity and success in their writing affords the girls a sense of agency, and presents them with a way to undermine the institutional notion of successful femininity. At the same time, their writing confirms their *conformity* as much as their *resistance* to handed down notions of femininity. For example, clearly evidenced in their poetry, advice columns, confessions, dreams, and

fantasies, the girls passionately struggle to create an ideal body pleasing to the male gaze. Such an achievement, if and when it materializes, I propose would signal to the girls that they are normal, successful, and therefore equipped with power. Yet no matter how the girls choose to position themselves subjectively at any given moment their voices are as straightforward, bold, and immediate in written language forms as they are in the language of the spoken and unspoken word.

According to Hodder written texts are, "a form of artifact produced under certain material conditions (not everyone can write, or write in a certain way, or have access to relevant technologies) embedded within social and ideological systems... Text and context are in a continual state of tension" (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 401). The girls' own magazine, Zynami, materializes as a natural extension of their written bits and pieces collected each session. As the girls come to respect and champion each others' efforts, they begin to envision themselves as competent writers for the first time in their lives. More than likely alienated from, and ridiculed by, peers and teachers throughout elementary school, the girls appear anxious when they think of attempting to write. Raz and Taylor talk of writing privately in their room but say they rarely share their work with peers. Dawn sums up her reluctance to write, "One of my grade six teachers told me that I... like 'cause, 'cause I... didn't know about commas and stuff and she kept telling me, "This is wrong. Do it all over!"... and I just stopped writing." Personal memories of similar experiences are evident in the silent nods of understanding from the rest of the girls during this focus group discussion.

But any worry I have that the girls will refuse to write are fleeting as within the social context of the Zynami club they soon muster the courage to utilize written language

forms to review old landscapes and create new scenes. Unsolicited, unedited, and previously untold narratives of their everyday lives symbolically evolve, and in turn are engaged through the power of language to give meaning to their world.

Therefore, given the girls' brave attempts to embrace writing I leave them to decide when, and how, and what to write. I encourage the girls to take ownership of this data collection strategy, and to this end the girls align the writing process consecutively with the focus group sessions. I am mindful of the wisdom of their approach and cautioned to remember that, "written texts pose a challenge for interpretive approaches that often stress the importance of dialogue with, and spoken critical comment from participants" (Hodder, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 401). Clearly the freedom to organize speaking and writing practices enhances the girls' intertextual mobilization of these texts. In other words, the girls find it easier to tell the whole story when they can move freely between the spoken and written word. As a consequence, this combination may also fortify the girls' understanding of the power of language to reflect new ideas.

As belief in their ability to express alternative and previously muted narratives expand, so to does their ability to take charge of their writing. I am greeted at the beginning of one session with, "Miss can we write today?" Conceivably, the girls' preference to write signals the sheer pleasure and power that they experience as their untold stories take on a tangible reality. Then again, maybe it is the success of producing their own magazine that unwraps their resistance to writing and fuels their desire to be "writers." In each final interview the girls bring up the process of writing. "Yeah, I liked the writing. It was really fun" (Squeeky). "Oh my God!! That is like SO cool... what happens if I want to send her [editor of Reluctant Hero] more?" (Raz). "Holy cow!" (SM).

"It makes me speak out more for what I think, like write down things, I wouldn't have opened up big time like I am" (Taylor). "AGGH, that's what I forgot! I wrote this poem about a girl, it's like me..." (Jenn). "Do you know if there's gonna be one next year... like writing and talking and... because... writing's good" (Dawn). Imagining themselves as successful writers they appropriate notions of success even if, at the same time, their stories identify their resistance to a dominant form of gendered subjectivity.

To conclude, it is important to remember that the girls are both subjects of and subjected to the bits and pieces of their stories and those of the other members of the club. Through the dynamic data collection strategies of individual writings, social focus groups, and intimate, individual interviews, the cultural workers of this study mobilize language to make things happen, conceive of new possibilities, shape dreams, and construct meaning.

3. Description and Justification of Analysis Used

My deliberate choice of a small group of participants enables me to describe in as much detail as possible how it is that seven, female adolescents, the Zynami girls, engage and negotiate racialized, classed, and gendered representations of success and femininity through popular culture texts. This complex and often contradictory struggle is referenced by the girls through language forms and discursive social practices to weave patterns of meaning and hope within the context of their schooling and daily lives. Responding to questions of how adolescents use texts to construct subjectivities, and how subjectification is shaped by gender, race and class differences requires a comprehensive method of analysis to avoid an "overly simplistic generalization" of lived experience (Brown, 1998, p. 33). Therefore, in support of a method that "underscores and draws out the complexity of voice and relationships by paying close attention to the language used by the [girls]," I

adapt Gilligan and Brown's "Listening Guide"¹⁷ method of analysis as described by Way (1998, p. 35). Stressing the relational nature of interviewing, analyzing, and interpreting narratives this inductive analysis approach maintains that "you are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts"(Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 6-7). The "Listening Guide" method, adapted for the purpose of this study, involves four readings of approximately six hundred pages of transcribed data.

The first reading focuses on two main details of the transcribed notes. First, I seek to understand the personal accounts of the girls' experiences by capturing an overview of the who, what, when and where of the story that unfolds in the study, and secondly, I investigate how my own subjectification, shaped by gender, class and race, inform that understanding. I try to reflect on the essence of the experience for the girls and then my own place in it. The relevance of this reading becomes manifest to me in the middle of the study as my own economic position plummets unexpectedly overnight. As working class is where I had "come from" in my youth I am painfully conscious of my present economic struggle in relation to the girls' struggle. Endorsing interpretation by connecting both participants' and researchers' language, Bogdan & Biklen (1998) argue that, "when we [researchers] do analysis we are usually part of the dialogue about the topic we consider" (p.177). In other words, as researchers we are inherently part of the narrative tales we are trying to understand. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge our own shifting subject positions in trying to interpret the dynamic processes at work as female adolescents

¹⁷ For a detailed description of the Listening Guide see Brown, L., et. al (1988). A guide to reading narratives of moral conflict and choice for self and moral voice. Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of Gender, Education, and Human Development, Harvard University, Monograph # 2.

mobilize language to construct meaning. In this first reading then, I am careful to make note of the ways I respond to the words and images wedded to the girls' transcribed narratives.

On second reading, I pay attention to categories that surface through patterns of frequency and adopt a color coded system of marking, noting sub-codes that emerge as the reading progresses. Sub-codes are designated with a number beneath their color-coded category. Approaching the data from the girls' perspectives thus "inviting the reader to listen to the narrators on their own terms" I focus on locating references the girls make to themselves and their world (Way, 1998, p. 35). In so doing, the following categories emerge: (a) what the girls *think* about/believe about themselves and their world, (b) how the girls *feel* about themselves and their world, (c) what they *dream* about/ fantasize about/wish for, (d) what *strategies* they adopt to get/say/do what they want, (e) what popular culture (material) *texts* they engage, (f) what popular cultural *practices* (social texts) they mobilize and, (g) what they say/think/feel/do about the research methodology this study utilizes. Together these first two readings enable me to localize and code the Zynami girls' stories.

In referencing these main categories, four common themes regularly surface and are insistently engaged by the girls: (a) memories that speak of painful, alienating experiences, (b) dreams of ideal bodies, romantic relationships, and success, (c) strategic mobilizations of cultural texts and practices, and (d) racialized, classed representations of "doing" gender. Within *and* across all aforementioned categories, these themes command my attention through sheer frequency of appearance in the girls' story lines. The complex

representations of who they are in relation to their families, school, and friendships are located in this shifting terrain of their lives made available to me through this third reading.

My next task is to try and uncover just exactly what pressing story is entangled within, and connected to, these themes. What is it that may not be explicitly articulated but nonetheless is predominately exposed in the girls' telling? What is it I am trying to understand? "Listen!...listen!" cries Raz. What is it the *girls* want me to hear and authenticate? With these questions in mind I read the data for the fourth time until one undeniable element needles its way into my consciousness; predominant discursive practices of *anger* ebb, flow and wash over the Zynami girls' negotiations of body-work and boy-work.

In conclusion, this adapted version of the Listeners' Guide facilitates my investigation of the girls' work as they struggle to constitute themselves subjectively by keeping me close to the girls' experiences, urging me to listen closely to their words, encouraging me to be sensitive to differences and my own biases, and clarifying what and how I will reveal the girls' story in the following presentation and discussion of findings.

VI. Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The findings¹⁸ show how particular discursive practices, penetrating in their silence or punctuating in their intensity, make it possible for seven, grade nine, vocational high school, female adolescents to constitute themselves subjectively. Amidst representations of success and femininity operating in the Zynami girls' world, I invite the reader to explore how these young women construct meaning, organized, produced, and circulated within and around intertwining material (Reluctant Hero) and social (Zynami club) texts and practices. I emphasize the connections between the data I analyze and the ongoing discussion in the literature. I draw the reader's attention to the three key sites of subjectivity work that mark this research project: body-work, boy-work, and anger-work. In addition to highlighting a particular group of girls, at a particular time and place in history, the findings connect to scholarly work that addresses as well, how discourses of gender, class and race regulate the ongoing construction of female adolescent subjectivity, agency, hope and possibility. Each of the three sites are examined in turn contextually, though by no means is any one of them meant to stand alone. First a look at the importance of text and context as it relates to the girls' work on subjectivity.

¹⁸ In presenting data the format code I use is: (1) pseudonym of female respondents, (2) data source (i.e., focus group utterance -FC, girls' writing -W, interview articulation (I-1, I-2), (3) line number plus session number (2361, 3).

Text and Context: Reluctant Hero and The Zynami Club

The texts of Reluctant Hero and the Zynami club are central to my understanding of how the Zynami girls go about constituting themselves subjectively in relation to boys, bodies and the discursive practice of anger. These texts impact the girls' negotiations of conflicting expressions and contradictory representations of femininity and success. Intersubjectively,¹⁹ and intertextually,²⁰ I examine how female adolescents negotiate this terrain, often demanding, holding on to, and folding in to story lines that privilege male authority. As presented in the literature review section of this paper, scholars such as Gilbert and Taylor (1991), McRobbie (1991), and more recently Harper (1997), attest to girls' positioning of themselves in marginalized ways. Through the girls' use of Reluctant Hero early in the study this "folding in" is unmistakably manifested. Resistance, as a result of the Zynami girls' desire for representations of femininity referenced through skinny bodies and available boys, firmly interrupts and eventually inhibits my incorporation of Reluctant Hero into the study. Before the girls even turn the first page, they display their opposition to the front cover. The girls vehemently direct anger at the cover's image of a white, unruly, dark-haired, not-so-skinny girl (FC, 112-119, 2). "If it [RH] was on a magazine rack, I wouldn't pick it up!" (Dawn). "The strap on her dress is even twisted!" (Taylor). "It looks like something our grandmother would pick up!" (Jenn). "Excuse me,

¹⁹ Intersubjectivity refers to the mutual constitution of social relationships. It suggests that people can reach consensus about what they have experienced (Marshall, 1998) This is a difficult concept for the girls to work with in this study given their past history of difficulty in cooperating effectively in group situations and subsequently their exclusion from collaborative interaction in light of these difficulties in school.

²⁰ Intertextuality draws on Bakhtin's notion of dialogism or "the necessary relation of any utterance to other utterances" (Payne, 1997, p. 259). To extend this notion, a dynamic connection organized through language ties the girls' perceptions of the Zynami club with all other familiar texts (e.g., school), and social categories (e.g., gender, class and race), that are mobilized to construct meaning.

no offense, but you're ugly!" Kyra throws out. Slamming the magazine upside down, flinging it across the table out of arms reach, and replacing it with YM magazine speaks volumes to the girls intense dislike of this representation of femininity that promotes an image they consider would be rejected by potential boyfriends. The magazine is 'not right.' The girl is 'not right.' By the fourth focus group session the text of Reluctant Hero is used primarily by the girls to remind them of their newfound desire to create their own magazine. It does not disappear physically from the focus group sessions but the narratives within are rarely referenced from this point on. In contrast, while the girls resist the text of Reluctant Hero, they readily accommodate the newly constructed text of the Zynami club.

The Zynami club functions as a safe haven where the girls freely, with passion and with caution, voice their fears, angers, hopes and dreams. Within the Zynami club the girls create and take-up the discourse of femininity in ways they feel are unavailable to them in school hallways where: (1) writing is laughed at by peers and judged by their teachers, (2) peer ridicule is guaranteed if you are unattached romantically, and (3) no boyfriend is a sure sign that you are lacking in looks, sexuality, and personality. Two separate worlds of desire materialize, one inside the club, and one outside in the hall. The texts of Reluctant Hero, the hallway, and the Zynami club are all taken up as sites of pleasure and as sites of possibility in which to imagine other ways of being and becoming (De Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989; Hall, 1996; Proweller, 1998). However, I want to emphasize the centrality of the Zynami club itself that "urges on or materializes" the girls' desires to create their image of a perfect body and heterosexual relationship.

I make reference to *hallways* as opposed to *classrooms* for the following reason; for the most part, the girls appear to be uninterested in what goes on in the classroom.

Though some of the girls express a desire to be successful academically, they make little reference to what their everyday life is like in this space. Given the girls' constant talk of boys and bodies, and negligible mention of academic learning, I infer that school serves mainly as a site to meet and make friends. Textbook learning just happens to be part of the price they have to pay in order to be with their peers. Overridingly, their world is engaged through representations availed in the hallways, locker rooms, washrooms, stairways, lunchroom, secluded corners of school property, and during my research project within the dynamics of the Zynami club.

The following conversation²¹ takes place the morning of our first focus group session as the girls set about to create the yet unnamed textual site of, the Zynami club.

- I: You said you want it to be a club, has any one thought of a name?
 Kyra: I had one but I forget it now.... It was on the recorded thing.
 I: Yeah... something to do with heroes.... Valley Vocational her...
 Kyra: (rolling her eyes) Something like that I guess.... (all laugh)
 Raz: No! No, no, no, no!
 Dawn: ...Seeing it's got Valley Vocational, NO! (all in agreement that they want no part of the school name)
 Raz: ...Just call it the "Bubbles" group.
 OC: *(Everyone starts making suggestion... Party of Five.... The Friends... Girl Power)*
 Kyra: ...Girls Only. I think that's what it should be called. The Girls Only group...
 Raz: ...Girls rule, boys drool. (all laugh). Can we call it Pee Wee Hermann?
 OC *At this point I give them their individual folders to personalize with their new names while we continue to brainstorm. Colored pencils and stickers are provided. All, except SM (who quickly writes her name then adds 6 happy face stickers), readily engage in this activity... Taylor comments,*
 Taylor: Wow, it's quiet in here!
 Raz: Yeah baby!
 ...How many are we allowed?
 ...Hey, I want a dragonfly.
 Jenn: I want a grasshopper!!! ...

²¹ (...) at the beginning of an articulation indicates that many voices are talking at the same time and interrupting each other.

- ...Hold on!... here's a grasshopper
 ...Now, shut up (all good natured bantering)
 ...Oh these are so cute!
- Raz: ...Pass the happy faces! (like NOW)
- Taylor: ...You've got three there [dragonflies] Squeeky! (giggles but indicates she wants one too)
- OC *Chatter for another minute, then talk returns to thoughts of a name...*
- Taylor: We should come up with like The Specials or something... or the Super Specials.
- OC *Raz quietly making fun of the LLP (special learning program in school but no one appears to notice or cares to comment)*
- Raz: ...Call us the "LA LA's" the LLP's.
 ... or the cool group
- Kyra: ...No, can't make it the cool group because...
- Raz: ...Call it ELMO...
- Kyra: ...Can we do ELMO? Just use the E-L-M-O.
- Raz: Try E-L-M-O with our nicknames.
- Kyra: No, it wouldn't work 'cause I have K-Y-R-A.
- Jenn: Um.... Whose got E... If we take our real names and we put it together, like ELMO, like who has an E in...
- Kyra: I don't think we should do it, know what I mean? I think we should make up our own.
- OC *Raz and Kyra vying for the floor, both talking at same time, both appear to want to be the one who decides how to choose a name.*
- I: I think it's great that you're trying to come up with a name of your own in some way.
- Kyra: ...Instead of like taking someone's else, or something else you know.
- OC *Raz, jumps up to the board and fools around with the marker and comes up with ZYNAMNL... others throw out suggestions while they are decorating their folders... we play with the letters... End up with ZYNAMI... Check to see that there is a letter from everyone's nickname... there is talk of using "The", and "Club", but they all agreed on just calling it "ZYNAMI".*
- I: OK! (I move to the board and write) WELCOME TO...
- Raz and others: ZYNAMI!! (All, FC, 1261-1318,1)

The congenial creation of a group name complete, I ask the girls what Zynami means to them. There are blank stares from all except Jenn who tosses out (in an effort to please me I imagine), "It could be...like the word could be like a secret code" (Jenn, FC, 1323, 1). But the girls have no idea what that code is as we begin the project. Initially the girls are unaware of its power as a site through which to both confirm and contest who they are. Eventually, awareness of the Zynami club's potential surfaces and new

possibilities emerge in this space allowing the girls to articulate a multitude of ideas related to authenticity, power, success, femininity, and dreams. By the end of the study the Zynami girls have no trouble articulating their mobilizations of this text to unfold layers of meaning that locate themselves in their world. They share random thoughts in their final writings and in our final interview together:

Squeeky: I think Zynami is really cool. One reason is that it makes me want to get a job. Also it makes me happy never sad. Only sometimes am I sad when I hear something like your boyfriend's going to jail. It is hard to hear things like that. Zynami makes me feel like all the people in it are so nice to me. They are never mean. They never say, "Shut up!". They are my friends (Squeeky, W, 169, 11).

There is intimacy expressed in Squeeky's feelings of being accepted by her Zynami peers, the same peers who ostracize her in the hallways. In the contours of the club she feels she has friends. A dream of power and success is also referenced through Squeeky's articulated determination to become financially independent. Raz on the other hand, utilizes the club to confirm her adopted self-reliance as she frankly proclaims:

Raz: This is who I am...in a way I think it's good for people to get to know one another... I hate my life and to me I think this group Zynami helps me a lot... Well, I know who my real friends are. If you're going to be friends with somebody I think they should know what your life's about, what you are about (Raz, I-2, 2820-2828).

She makes no apologies for her inadequacies or mistakes.

Drawing strength and license from the social camaraderie within the club, Dawn imagines herself as a future director of Zynami. At the same time she revels in the unwritten code of secrecy adopted by the girls; what is said in the club, stays in the club:

Dawn: I like how people keep things to themselves and don't share anything with people outside the group...it would be awesome to have the same group next year and maybe add a few more people... like grade nines

and we'd be in grade ten... writing's good but also talking is good so...
(Dawn,I-2,3347-3355).

But for others, such as SM and Taylor, the Zynami club permits their construction of self as authenticated girls. Articulations of "I got to eat pizza!" and "We got to party!" (Taylor,I-2,2997), or "[There were] no guys around to make fun of us" (SM,I-2,2930) as well as their joyous laughter that frame the pizza lunches once a week, effect a sense of privilege in contrast to the general commonplaceness of their lives. Exerting authority over their bodies through eating and partying is routinely endorsed in their lives. Their body is one site they can control, and they do so in self-destructive ways at times. On the other hand, engaging the body through food appears to be a readily available social practice. But being treated to "free" food and small gifts is a rare occurrence in their lives that perhaps heightens their sense of importance.

Jenn reveals through her explicit articulations below, a willingness to acknowledge representations of herself as fat and ugly that she struggled with in silence before joining the research project.

Jenn: Before I came to this group I hated myself. Like I was sad and all this. And then when we had a talk with the group and then everybody says how you should love yourself and that. It kind of helped me a bit, 'cause I used to come to school in bad moods 'cause I used to think myself fat and ugly... but since the group I've been happier 'cause I think positive instead of saying bad stuff about myself (Jenn,I-2,3184).

Jenn is surprised and strengthened by the notion of the Zynami community struggle. As Davies and Banks (1992) and Jones (1993), an individual's engagement of group support is better understood if we remember that the discursive practice of working class tends to locate an individual's struggle in isolation from others. The Zynami girls are taught early in life to rely on themselves.

Within each session of the Zynami club the girls talk about how through personal, individual strategies (such as dieting, giving in to boys demands, using make-up) they try to fix their bodies and find boyfriends. I deduce from these discussions that all the girls lean heavily on self regulation in their attempt to be somebody. Jenn, for instance, holds tight to a notion of individual freedom and self regulation, stating often in successive group discussions, "You can do anything you want." "If you put your mind to it you can be anything you want, anything in the world...if you keep on working on it, you can be it" (Jenn, I-1, 829). In Jenn's and the rest of the girls' essentialist view of the world they feel they *should* be able to solve their own problems in social isolation. And yet, I hear hope and possibility reflected in their words and practices, whether their wish for autonomy is actualized or not. The other side of hope and possibility though is the despair that often surfaces by way of self inflicted injurious behavior (i.e., bulimia, depression) as the Zynami girls blame themselves for their inadequacies, unable to perceive or reflect on their selfhood as being influenced by other people and events in their lives.

The above examples confirm how the Zynami club functions as a vital site through which multiple layers of meaning are marked, moderated, and mobilized by the girls through forms of language. At the same time, the presentation of the girls' articulations affirm the dynamic relationship that exists between subjectivity and context drawing attention to Morrison's (1996) caution, highlighted by other scholars in the methodology section of this paper; "there is a real risk in handling research data that the contents of the data become the sole focus of the research to the neglect of the way in which content might be mediated by the context of the data collection enterprise" (p.1).

To address this point, and further my positioning of the context of the Zynami club as imperative to an authentic interpretation of the girls' stories, I relate the moment I realize the potential impact of its situatedness in the girls' lives. My reflective stance surfaces following two, diametrically opposed articulations of common sense and cooperation, evidenced through the girls' speech and body language. Raz enters the club and with empathy in her voice warns SM of the threatening peers in the hallway and emphasizes the fact that she had better come up with a strategy to ward of the bullies waiting for her outside:

- Raz: You better watch out, they're right outside eh... they're waiting for you sooooo bad! ... watch out man.
 Squeeky: Do they want to kick my ass?
 SM: No mine. (little smile)
 ALL: Why? What did you do? What for?
 SM: I asked this girl to move, move 'cause she was like taking twenty minutes like to have a small drink of water.
 Raz: They wanna get you... look out! (Raz & SM, FC, 268, 6)

The tone of the conversation convinces me that Raz will support SM in the hallway as she does in the club. I assume that the dynamics of the Zynami club have fostered a nurturing streak in Raz. I am shocked when Raz, elbows out and eyes afire, hurls obscenities at SM and flees in the opposite direction. My nebulous awareness of female friendship dynamics is brought sharply to focus by Raz's refusal of help and SM's acceptance of this refusal as "normal," "expected" behavior from a classmate. Aligned with the dominant notion of femininity, I have unconsciously imagined that girls will take care of one another in gentle, reasonable, talk-out-your-problem kinds of ways. This is actually the discourse Raz embraces in the club, but within the context of the hallways is referenced through her mother's words, "Look out for yourself 'cause no one else will." And so SM does not contest but respects Raz's open refusal to help her. As she sits later with an ice pack on

her head (having been physically attacked by two girls in the hallway) SM explains her common sense approach to the scenario just acted out in the hallway. "If they come back at me when I walk away...I just turn around and do it back to them, then they'll feel what I feel" (SM,I-1,409). Yet within the Zynami club all the girls conform to a notion of femininity (sweet and polite, caring, respectful) that directs girls to talk their problems out, and *not* punch and hit as they might expect a boy to act, to make a point.

This example illustrates how important it is to connect context to the function of constructing meaning. In this particular case, the context of two contradictory sites, the hallway and the club, each offer conflicting representations of femininity. In addition to the above example, Jenn contributes yet another example of the effect of context on meaning making: "But people like in the group, Raz, she's nice in the group but Raz out of the group forget it. Like she'll yell at you or something so (shrug of shoulders) people act different ways" (Jenn,I-2,3192). Context clearly marks the girls' struggle and shapes my analysis of this struggle.

The girls employ language in a candid effort to secure a welcoming means to voice and validate representations of their own stories and practices. However, I note that differences of how one should act in each context results in conflict even as subjectivity work engaged in both contexts potentially opens up a space for the girls to critically reflect on the multitude of subject positions available to them. My open invitation to all the girls, to examine freely and without judgement the contradictory ways they are represented, and ways they represent themselves, possibly enhances their ability to think critically in both the hallways and the club. Welcoming the invitation, even SM who rarely speaks unless spoken to, responds:

I: It's different in the group from outside in the hallways?

SM: Yeah. In the group it's like outer space or something... you don't have to talk to anybody if we're in the group but when you're outside there's a whole bunch of people saying mean things to you, saying you have to do this... if you don't do this you're going to be in trouble

I: Do you mean in class and teachers?

SM: Yeah and like outside the class, there's a whole bunch of people in the halls and stuff, and if you don't do this you get beat up (SM,I-2,2911).

SM's musing signals one of the first steps in mobilizing critical reflection;

acknowledgement that a difference even exists. Difference is marked and referenced through a variety of forms of language, whether that language appears as song or silence, in the hallways or club, or articulated in the pages of the girls' own magazine.

As the girls' stories are nourished and enriched by the ongoing adaptation of data collection strategies detailed previously in this paper, I discover the girls' growing respect for each other as individual differences surface. Squeeky's pollyanna, written snippets of life, (her "i's" are dotted with hearts in her writing), contrast sharply with Kyra's angry, bold strokes, and Raz's written articulations of self loathing scribbled out on torn pieces of paper. I return the reader to Reinharz's argument that credits a multiple methods approach as being essential to our understanding of individual differences. Some days the girls only want to "talk about what happened." On other occasions, the focus group session is substituted with the girls desire to write. Jenn enters our eleventh session with, "Miss can we write?" Often one girl can be seen immersed in her writing while another girl's story whirls around us. Raz, the one most likely to demand attention with her loud burps and sighs and verbal demands for attention, "Listen...listen do you know what... listen," retreats into the silence of her writing one day. She taps my arm lightly and whispers in my ear, "Miss do you know what this is?... It's the story of my life" (Raz,FC,1633,3).

By the fifth focus group session the girls concentrate on writing for the express purpose of seeing their work published in their own magazine. From this point on, they actively engage in deciding what pieces of their writing they want to submit either anonymously or as signed pieces. Some of their work they choose to delete completely from publication. I bring in examples of print type and art decals. They make decisions on style and personalize their work. Though I do the technical editing, the end product, the magazine *Zynami*, is their own creation.

With its production the girls are able to create themselves as successful writers and story tellers, thus expanding each girl's own vision of possibility. Drawing on my professional experience as a teacher and public health nurse, I suggest that there is a tendency for schools to lower literacy expectations of academically weak students, and in so doing limit female adolescents' ability to think beyond this labeling. Thinking beyond this "weak" subject position is also obscured by their parents who often place little value on formal education. But within the club and the magazine, the *Zynami* girls, heady with power advanced by their ability to tell a story through writing, sometimes use this power to imagine themselves as "normal," where normal means taking up notions of success referenced through effective engagement of literacy skills. In alignment with Christian-Smith's (1991) findings, I must confess my excitement as I witness the *Zynami* girls' distaste of writing soften as they sample success as writers within the interpretive community of the *Zynami* club. Not only is their desire for academic success fulfilled through the subsequent completion of their own magazine, but constructing themselves as writers also "plays upon [their] desires and yearnings for a different present and future"

(p. 204). Writes Raz, "Maybe I should write a book about my life or something that I like doing a lot" (W,194,11).

The Zynami girls physically hold on to the pages of their lives, that signal who they are, through their own teen magazine. In conjunction, outspoken in speech, the girls collectively pool their struggles adopting strategies to engage these struggles in legitimizing ways within the Zynami club. Through, in, and around these socially constructed texts the girls begin to articulate and critically contemplate what is going on in their lives at the intersection of school and teen culture.

But, what exactly are the girls articulating? How are they articulating it and what does it mean? The next section emphasizes two prominent "problems" that conspicuously invade *every* conversation I have with the Zynami girls, in their club, in their writing, and in their individual interviews. I use the word "problem" as this is how the girls characterize their relationships with their "imperfect" bodies and the guys in, or desired in, their lives.

1. Boy-Work: Fantasy and Drama of Heterosexual Relationships

In connecting subjectivity to romance and the sculpting of the body, I remind the reader of the many authors cited in the literature review section of this paper (Walkerdine,1984; Christian-Smith,1990; McRobbie,1991; Davies,1993; Cherland & Edelsky,1993; Gonick,1997; Harper,1997)) who demonstrate how representations of femininity come to be referenced and negotiated through the discursive practices of boy-work and body-work.

Similarly in my study, I highlight the Zynami girls' struggle to find, keep, please and/or get rid of, "guys." "Getting it now," sums up the importance of romantic

relationships in their lives, where a heterosexual relationship appears to be a sign of success, and beauty a sign that you will gain entrance to the world of romance.

And secondly, following a description of how the girls constitute themselves subjectively through boy-work, I examine the power, politics, and perfection of the body, inextricably linked to the strategic process of body-work or "getting it perfect." There are many instances throughout the course of this project when the girls speak about their imperfect bodies. This leads to my speculation that there is an inherent belief by all the girls that their bodies *need fixing*. Fixing the body involves three sets of dynamics: (1) how the Zynami girls treat the social constructs of their bodies, (2) how they work with what they have and what they wish for in terms of the perfect body, and (3) how they think about what to wear, what to look like, how to walk, talk, and act in their efforts to actualize this myth of perfect femininity.

The next section then focuses on describing how the Zynami girls attempt to work through competing discourses and practices of femininity as they relate to boy-work and body-work; discourses that position, or as Walkerdine (1990) claims, "designate the subject."

a) Romance: "She's got a guy and I don't!"

Romance is synonymous with heterosexual desire in the lives of the Zynami girls. Hinting at sexual desire as involving anyone but a guy and a girl is condemned by the Zynami girls. Matter of fact one of the worst insults a girl can receive or give is to call or be called a "les" (lesbian). Exchanging stories and experiences in the club, the Zynami girls challenge each other's ideas about what constitutes normal heterosexuality. Heterosexual practices of respect, courtesy, and common sense often send the girls into an emotional

turmoil, for courtesy, cooperation and common sense do not necessarily mean passive, silent, subordinate, and selfless. More times than not, these discursive practices in relation to finding a guy, requires girls to be bossy, brassy, watchful, shrewd, and calculating. Exploring how the Zynami girls simultaneously resist and accommodate the complexities of heterosexual relationships is a fascinating process to examine. This complexity is highlighted in the following exchange between the girls:

- Kyra: (Jumps in)... That's one thing I don't like to be is pampered, like if I'm going out with someone, don't give me all these gifts...
- Raz: No, I don't, I don't like that either. ...
- Kyra: Cause after awhile you sort of feel guilty, you know, if like...
- Raz: Do you know what I really hate, going out with a guy and they friggin like maul all over you and it's just like, "Give me my space!"
- Kyra: Seriously, yeah!
- Raz: Like after two weeks this guy's like all over you it's like, "Hey, I'm getting sick and tired of you, I don't want to go out with you anymore."
- Dawn: Yeah, but I like that though! (a few girls laugh)
- Taylor: Isn't it romantic!?
- Dawn: (very serious, trying to defend her position) And I think that they care for you then and... well I think it's romantic if they're like... it shows that they care about you but I don't know... it's like if a guy's more distant, then I feel insecure... I don't know about anybody else.... I think it's romantic and sweet and...
- Jenn: It means they wanna be with you and that they really care about you and that they're just not saying that because of your looks or something, that they really wanna be with you (FC,1420-1444,1).

Raz and Kyra position themselves through their emphatic pleading, as bossy, calculating, manipulators of their relationships, a far cry from the traditional notion of girls sitting at home waiting for "the call." In another discussion Raz speaks of her love/hate relationship with sex but is very clear that she is in control of when, and with whom she has "sex" (Raz,I-2,2829). Kyra as outspoken in her relationship with boys as Raz, differs in that she resists what she believes everyone else to be doing, where in actual fact only three of the girls (if I am to believe what they tell me) are sexually active yet. She chooses not to have sexual intercourse or to be treated like a sexual object:

Kyra: I find guys are always very, very pushy you know. The whole sex thing comes into orbit you know. "Oh good you're going out with me, my bed's up here" ... "Excuse me! You know, 15 years old and I don't want to have it... if you don't want to see me up here (indicates her body from the neck up)... no!" (Kyra, FC, 129, 1)

Kyra still wants to please her boyfriend though, and using explanatory hand gestures she relates how she accommodates him without intercourse. This articulation signals Kyra's struggle to negotiate the boundaries of sex in ways that allow her to actively control her subjectivity in relation to what is expected from her as "girlfriend." In addition, for Raz and Kyra, the terrain of heterosexuality appears to function as a site of power that arouses their sense of agency. As "weak" students, and working class females, representations of power are limited. They do not have many choices in what they can do, or buy, or say, given their limited material and cultural resources. Therefore, agency being hard to access in other areas of their lives is accessed through their relationship with the guys in their lives.

I return the reader to Hey's (1997) study foregrounded in the review of the literature section of this paper. The author maintains that because working class girls (though not limited to working class girls) have trouble achieving academic success they spend an inordinate amount of time on boy-work just as the Zynami girls are seen to do. The girls redirect their desires in a passionate rhythm and ritual of winning friendship and courting romance, while resisting connections with anyone not engaged in such ordered practices. Constructing peers as undesirable opens up a space for the Zynami girls to construct themselves as privileged and attractive. Feeling powerful in their negation of those girls outside the circle of acceptable boy-work, the girls feel justified in their bullying and teasing of these peers as they, "working class truants ... position other girls as

marginal to what they themselves construct as more important regimes of desire"

(Hey, 1997, p.127).

Raz is fully engaged in boy-work and does not take "no" for an answer in her attempts to get a guy. She relies on the imagined power of her fantasies to get what she wants:

Raz: The thing that I do though is that when I like a guy and they don't like me... I make them fall in love with me, so they like me... for *me* you know... the great thing about me is that I write things (wishes) on a piece of paper and then I make, I make it, I try to make it come to reality (Raz, FC,2678-2680,9).

Ussher would recognize Raz's attempts to win a guy's affection through fantasy or wish fulfillment.²² "It is in her power to make it succeed, to make him into what she wants him to be... the taming of the beast by the love of a good woman and the redemption or transformation of the beautiful (yet suffering) woman by the love of the right man" (p.9).

Not only Raz, but all the girls consider men's desiring of them to be the key to their identity, and they employ a multitude of strategies to secure the male gaze.

Raz and Taylor's position of "resisting girl" support their own ideology of romancing where "they are not passive, waiting victims... they can make the first move... [and] they can ask for what they want"(Ussher, p.364). Dawn on the other hand, who has yet to "get" a boyfriend, embraces representations of "gifts," "mauling over you," and "cramping her space," as signs of love and affection (Dawn,FC,1443,1). A romantic relationship invested as such represents "security," and worth as a woman. Jenn and Taylor adopt this discursive consciousness of romancing with Dawn, described by Ussher

²² Ussher, a feminist scholar, is referring to Freud's analysis of the working of the unconscious as it relates to dreams as wish fulfillments, a fantasy satisfaction of desires repressed into the unconscious. See Freud (1900), The Interpretation of Dreams.

as, "being girl ... wanting to live out the role of the romantic heroine" (p. 356). This representation of "being girl" suggests that belonging to a gift-giving-mauling-controlling-boy signals the girls' willingness to embrace a notion of femininity that privileges authority, domination, and control. But, if you are not romantically attached, it signals chaos, alienation, and loss of identity.

I draw your attention to these stories of heterosexual desire that mark the process of desiring through the unequivocal connection of body and boys as this connection constantly frames nearly all expressions of the girls' selves. I want to underscore early the importance of this intertextuality to the structure of the girls' struggle for meaning and authentic subjectification.

b) Rejected in romance: "You never know if you want to live or die"

Five of the seven girls show varying intensities of depression, attempted suicide, cutting or burning themselves, anorexia and/or bulimia in response to loss of, rejection by, or inability to attract... a guy. Jenn explains how some of her friends treat their bodies as undesirable objects when they fail to attract or satisfy the male gaze:

Jenn: If a guy doesn't want to go out with them ... 'cause most of my friends last year if a guy doesn't go out with them they'll kill themselves...

I: They tried to commit suicide?!

Jenn: Yeah! They'll like slice their wrists or something like that which is like really stupid... I told them that no guys would kill themselves over ... which is really stupid to kill themselves... because the way I look at it if you kill yourself then... you, the boy's just going to move on and you're dead...so you can't live your life so... (Jenn,I-1,767).

Jenn excludes herself from this destructive positioning throughout the entire research project until our final interview. Without warning, her story splinters the air in a rush of words as she describes her own disturbing battle to hold on to her world in the face of loss and longing to be loved by a guy.

Similarly, Dawn speaks of deep depressions and bouts of anorexia in the face of male rejection. Kyra cuts herself with razors showing us scars on her arms from self inflicted wounds when her boyfriend "dumped her." She spends time in the hospital for attempted suicide. These stories are presented in the upcoming section on anger. In addition, SM's day continues to be taken up with thoughts of her boyfriend who died, "They said it was his heart," almost a year ago. As she writes in her folder:

SM: It helps me get through my day thinking of him every time, but every time I think of him I cry and get stomach aches and it hurts just to be alive without him... you never know if you want to live or die (SM,W,11,7).

The story line is linear in the girls' eyes... if they fail to win a boyfriend, they fail to fix their bodies, and consequently, they imagine themselves as failed objects. These girls feel individually responsible for the success or failure of their bodies and their relationships. From my years of working in schools as a teacher and as a nurse, it is my sense that students are told routinely by teachers and counselors that poor marks, disruptive behavior, feuding friendships, and imperfect bodies, are "their problem" and their "responsibility" to fix. When female adolescents believe this well-intended counsel, it is easier to imagine how the Zynami girls' vicious cycle of subservient posturing in relation to boys fortifies their desire to accommodate, with little resistance, the male dominated norm of order, decency, and passivity to achieve success. In conjunction, the girls learn early that if you cross the border into that male dominated culture (i.e., remain passive and pretty by accepting that men are superior, and remember that their interests come first), they will reward you with affection.

c) Decoding romantic desire: "Why do you want one?"

The girls are candid in their articulations of why they need guys. Having limited social/cultural/economic capital and therefore limited power to access what they need to survive in a middle class culture, the girls find that they have time on their hands to pursue the why-do-I-want-a-boy question as working class girls. The energy and time spent in thinking about and trying to get a boyfriend is intensely focused by the Zynami girls. The degree of investment by the girls is directly related to the Zynami girls' working class "membership" that reveals layers of marginalization, and the girls' alienation from subject positions other than those associated with guys. Based on the amount of time the girls speak of hanging around malls, meeting friends at bus stations, hanging out at home listening to music, talking with friends about family break-ups, "Most all people here their parents are divorced, so they know how I feel so which is like good" (Jenn,FC,769,2), I surmise that the Zynami girls' membership in working class culture is firmly entrenched. These girls do not excel at school or sports. Kyra is the only one who speaks of sports activities she is involved with in school, "My sports mean so much to me because I feel I can do whatever I want to do" (Kyra,W,135,9). They have no money for leisure activities. The girls frequently talk of wanting money to go to concerts and movies. They dream of travel and getting to "Toronto," "Florida," or "Calgary" one day to visit with extended family members. Added to their material, social, and cultural marginalization, the girls feel that they are poor readers and writers and so largely refuse to employ academic learning to construct authentic meaning.

I: What does it mean to you to be successful?

Raz: I don't know?

I: Does it mean...um... getting "A's" or does...

Raz: Oh God, don't even go there! Are you serious?!!!! (Raz,I-1,1063)

Therefore, opportunities for the Zynami girls to find pleasure and success through avenues such as leisure, education or material commodities are limited and limiting.

Given this bleak perspective, having a boyfriend then becomes the girls' ticket to escaping the ordinariness of their working class lives. Getting a mate is possible and a legitimate activity. Through "boyfriend," images of "popular," "normal," and "successful," are possible. Access to a boyfriend also signals that you are needed and therefore worthy, that you are touched and kissed, and therefore pretty, that you are happy (initially anyway), and therefore must be following the unwritten rule that intones "normal" as, "Now you have your man." You become the envy of girls without a boyfriend. You know you are "right" because the girls without a boyfriend are "wrong." But it does not last. Confusion and frustration soon begin to penetrate the utopian code of "boyfriend." Following is Squeeky's interpretation of the complex negotiations she enters into now that she has boyfriends coming and going:

- I: Why do you want one?
 S: I don't know... I just feel like having one.... Just to... it keeps me company and stuff... It's... it's better than just having... like... when your not there with a guy you're like, "Oh... you know... it's not the same. She's got a guy and I don't."
 I: Right. Do you feel different about yourself when you've got a boyfriend and when you don't?
 S: A little bit... like ...kind of a weird way... mad way and stuff.
 I: Weird and mad when you don't have a boyfriend?
 S: Yeah. It's just like, "OK (sad)". Sometimes you like being single and stuff... (pause)
 I: You like being single...
 S: A little bit, not that very much... not that very fun...
 I: Is it boring when you don't have a boyfriend?
 S: Yeah a little bit, not always...
 I: You've got girlfriends in your life.
 S: Yeah.... Like you don't need guys in your life.
 I: Who tells you that?
 S: Oh a lot of people.... Most of my friends.
 I: Is life easier when you have a boyfriend or harder?
 S: Harder.... They never give you your space time. I'm like, "I want my space time!"

- I: But you still want one.
 S: A little bit...but like once you do they cheat behind your back... I've had this happen to me ... it's a long story (Squeeky,I-2,2718-2736).

Squeeky's matter-of-fact tone of voice delivered in short, snappy comments articulates her ambivalence and disillusionment even as she longs to keep a boyfriend. She articulates that working a relationship does not come without its costs. According to Squeeky, acknowledging her own need for "space time" must constantly be measured against her desire to feel needed by a guy. Subject to the guy's eventual betrayal and dishonesty, Squeeky still insists though that a heterosexual relationship is worth the trouble. Possibly investing in a "boyfriend" is for Squeeky and her girlfriends, the only legitimate way they feel they can create themselves as girls.

The girls' stories suggest that there is an "unnaturalness" about being without a boyfriend and that this state of being unattached should be avoided at all costs. In all likelihood the girls' thinking proceeds as follows; if unattached is deemed unnatural, then unattached is not normal, and therefore something is wrong and needs fixing (inevitably the body from the girls' perspectives). The girls' impassioned mutterings about the importance of being "yourself," quickly lose credibility when being yourself does not include a guy. In an unattached state, self then becomes encircled by a paralyzing fear of isolation and vulnerability, alienating processes that shape the girls' often damaging strategies to disrupt the fear and restore calm. Inevitably this problem is referenced through their marking of the body as a site of displeasure and weakness. SM routinely informs me, just before or just after focus group (she is the girl most likely to linger behind) of her fear of the dark, her knee problems, and sleep problems. She displays many

physical symptoms of this fear such as headaches, stomach aches, sore knees, and dizzy spells. She recounts the doctors visits and physiotherapy sessions she attends regularly.

The following exchange highlights the Zynami girls' fear of seclusion and vulnerability. I asked SM why it is important to have a boyfriend:

- SM: If you have any problems you can go to him and get help... instead of going up to school which they don't kinda really do anything... if like he's in your class or something and you're away for a few weeks or something and he's in there every day you can ask him for help instead of going to your teachers.
- I: Does a boyfriend make you feel differently about yourself when you have one and don't have one?
- SM: Well... if you don't ... well most people think if you don't have a boyfriend you feel... you feel empty, you feel nothing... you feel like there's nothing to live for, for some people. If you do have a boyfriend... you... you have great times, you have some bad times, but you get over it... Um..... Some people actually get out of their house chores.
- I: They get out of chores if they have a boyfriend?
- SM: Yea! They go on a date or something they like say, "I have to get ready or I have to do this, do this to get ready" or "I'm leaving. I can't do this right now. I'll do it in two weeks or whatever". They have lots of excuses if you're with a boyfriend. And if you don't have one you have to do everything by yourself and it's kinda like getting like really scary not having one... like... if you get beat up by someone, there's not... no one to back you up... (SM,I-2,2871-2875).

This exchange also hints at a third notion particularly prevalent in a working class discourse of femininity; parents condone the notion that a woman's most important role is to please her man even at the expense of family responsibility. According to SM "getting out of chores" is not a problem when you have a boyfriend. She alludes to parental support that validates and normalizes the discourse of girlfriend that locates women in a subservient, compliant role.

Then there is the issue of vulnerability. As endorsed by SM's revelation above, boys offer protection to physically weaker girls, "to back you up, if you get beat up or something." Being tiny, Kyra is particularly concerned about her physical safety and

speaks of her fear of getting "squashed by kooks" at the back of the crowded bus each day (Kyra,I-1,90). She hates being asked to "move on back" by the bus driver. She wishes her boyfriend took the same bus. The practicality of having a boyfriend to offer you protection is understood as common sense practice, one sanctioned by the rest of the girls. The female adolescents of this study come to many sessions complaining because they do not have access to car "rides," parents are unavailable to chauffeur them, and as a result of having to take public transportation they must wait for buses in mall enclaves and on street corners. Therefore, exposed to potentially dangerous locations the Zynami girls feel a need for protection where their more affluent peers perhaps do not, given their access to rides and the availability of their parents.

I cannot help but note though, that the Zynami girls' envisioning of "men as protectors" far outweighs their contradictory vision of "men as attackers." Yet four of the girls in the study speak of a central male authority figure in their lives as having been physically and/or psychologically abusive at one time or another.²³ The Zynami girls' suppression of viewing men as attackers cannot be abstracted from the girls' reasoning that they, themselves, are somehow to blame for male abuse; perhaps they are not trying hard enough to please they reason, perhaps they are being selfish in their demands. The dynamics of this reasoning erupt in the following story.

Taylor, busy punishing herself with guilt (FC,2320-2410,8), mumbles and whimpers her version of an incident that occurs when she skips school. She details sexual

²³ I am fully aware of the legislation that requires me as a researcher to report ethical concerns such as revelations of abuse. The school and the students are aware of my obligation as well. The reader needs to be aware that the discourses of harassment and abuse that unfold in the girls' stories have been previously documented by the school. I have met all obligations of the ethics committee of the University of Ottawa.

advances from a guy she chances to meet at a bus terminal. She tries to win support from the Zynami girls by creating a story that paints her as a helpless, passive victim, a martyr of male domination. After all she reasons, is this not the unwritten role she has been taught to assume. At the same time, what Taylor appears to be having trouble with in relation to this sexual harassment, what positions her guilt, is her belief that she is somehow *not* a normal girl because normal entails she "play hard to get." And as she frankly admits, "I told him, 'No!'" hardly seems a convincing "hard to get" strategy even in her estimation of the situation. The crux of her tearful account centers around the guilt she feels for behaving as a "bad" girl, and therefore she cannot avoid the obligatory act of self-blame. As a result, the girls, all in agreement with Taylor, undercut any notion of male responsibility in an attack on females by positioning themselves as causing the problem in the first place.

After this heated discussion of who is to blame, I ask the girls about the times they have found themselves in similar situations:

- I: Do you all feel helpless in situations like this?
 Raz: Incompetent... Les incompetents!
 Jenn: Yes... helpless. It feels like it's my fault.
 All: Yeah! (ALL,FC,2406,8)

Though the girls admit to feeling helpless and incompetent they still submit and accommodate patriarchal norms that include removing men's responsibility as nurturers and workers in a relationship. Instead, the girls create themselves as saviors of broken story lines. The Zynami girls' interpellation into gendered relations in patriarchy, where being female equals subservience, articulates their "acceptance of the law of the father, never challenging or threatening male authority, power or control" (Ussher, 1997, p.356).

d) Girls perceptions of guys: "Hellooo! This is a guy you're talking about!"

Beyond these few examples of how the Zynami girls fold into patriarchy as a dominant form of subjectification, there are as many contradictory examples of how the girls attempt to resist this patriarchal notion of femininity illustrated above. This too, is evidenced through the girls' perpetual struggle to work out a romantic relationship with that special guy, if they can only find him.

Within the context of the girls' narratives it is possible to view their struggle to create the perfect match. But matchmaking is viewed with skepticism by Raz, Taylor, Jenn, Kyra and Squeeky, all girls who have experienced romantic, heterosexual relationships. Though the reality of failed relationships does not stop them from questing for a life-long love, they also whine and wail to each other about the impossibility of its unfolding as imagined in their dreams. They grumble that the problem of perfecting love lies not in their own bodies *at this particular moment* in time, but in the faulted boys upon whom they gaze. Expressively Raz bemoans, "Guys like... in the 90's now are like stuck up guysssss you know and they play girls like you don't know. They don't know what they want" (Raz,I-1,946). She finds this frustrating, perhaps wondering how she can play her role as a please-your-man-girlfriend if she does not know what he wants. And if, as she sighs, "Guys are stubborn... really, really stubborn!" (Raz,I-1,924), how will she ever figure out what he wants if he does not tell her.

It could be that this frustration of not having a clear definition of what guys want prompts the following statements imbued with anger, each articulation fueling the next. Taylor starts it off, "There's one thing I *really* hate like, for guys, they lie... *all* the time" (Taylor,FC,(228),4). Kyra dances on her chair, " You can't believe them" (Kyra,

FC,(230),4). And now I am concerned as Raz is very upset, crying out despairingly as she explodes, "They tell you, "'Ya, you're pretty and they know'... like, they call you 'fat ass fucking bitch!'" (Raz,FC,(229),4).

Perhaps these resounding condemnations of guys announce the girls' almost frantic desire for potential boyfriends to play the normal, natural role of the superior, dominant male if they, the girls, are to play a subservient role that at least positions them as normal. As mentioned earlier in this paper there are few opportunities for the Zynami girls to engage positions of power. The subject position of "girlfriend," even if it means passive, dependent, and weak, offers them a privileged space from which to view and construct their world.

Later, Raz and Kyra resist a subject positioning of weak, (being at the mercy of guys' whims), and choose instead a position of alliance with guys' power. Raz makes it very clear that, "Guys are a lot easier to handle [than girls]." In a somewhat similar vein Kyra adds, "...It's hard to get along with girls... Boys [on the other hand], know what they are doing... it's like, 'Wow! Can I come and live with you to learn this?'" (Kyra, FC,(209),4 & I-1,188).

There are two discursive practices at work here. First, Raz is seen to use her subtle, womanly charms (i.e., her body) to get what she wants. Of course what she wants is usually to make her guy happy. Therein lies the heart of most girls' dilemma and confusion. As the working class girls of this study design gendered practices in alignment with traditional representations of femininity, they open up the potential to position themselves as privileged and normal. On the other hand, silenced and misread as weak academic students by the institution of schooling, the Zynami girls have a great need to

resist any discourse that tries to hold them to practices that keep them contained as physically and emotionally dependent women.

Secondly, Kyra's comment has an engaging twist. First, she indirectly alludes to the competitive nature of girlfriend work by stating that girls are hard to work with. I argue that because she does not perceive boys to be in direct competition with girls, getting along with boys is much easier than getting along with girls. But interesting to note is what sustains Kyra's comfort around boys. The guys' need to show off their superior technical knowledge, stabilizes Kyra's need to fulfill her duty as cheer leader of the male ego. A balance is readily struck and a collaborative work experience results in shop class.

Another example of this conflicting struggle to resist and accommodate dominant forms of patriarchy is referenced through SM's inconsistent statements as they relate to guys. Flatly intoning her perception and experience of guys, SM comments: "Most men abuse women" (SM,FC,1379,6). At the same time she dreams about living with "...a new boyfriend [in] a three floor house," wishing that her "Dad [who abandoned her] would come and visit" (SM,W,6,4). Through fantasies of material culture, unconditional love, and the return of a father, SM escapes the pain of a father she has seen but twice in her life, the loneliness of not having a boyfriend, and the rigid, stingy rules she is forced to endure now at home under the thumb of her step-father. If she can dream of another world, who is to tell her that it cannot happen. In her dreams she finds pleasure and possibility. In SM's opinion, the love of a man, whether father or boyfriend is necessary to a woman's sense of fulfillment.

As SM slips into reverie, Jenn too sighs dreamily as she expresses her hopes for the future:

Jenn: We [she and her boyfriend] were imagining like before we move in together we were just imagining how it would be like, us together and ... having farm animals or something. He wants to move to the farm and I'm like, "OK!"... I don't know... but just like we were in a nice place and it was so nice (Jenn,FC,2516,9).

Underscoring her imagined pleasure of romance, and the yearning to be found desirable, Jenn's wish also hints at her willingness to please her boyfriend at the expense of her own desires. "OK...I don't know," is explained by Jenn as, "I don't want to live in the country...yuk! But I will go if it makes *you* happy" (Jenn,FC,2517,9). The privilege of being loved, the power of being seen as a natural woman because you know how to keep a man is worth sacrificing her own needs for. But there is a part of Jenn that acknowledges how difficult constructing self-sacrificing girlfriend actually is, "Guys don't have to do nothin' much, all they have to do is contributing which is not that bad for them" (Jenn,FC,1381,1). In other words, girls are responsible for nurturing, fixing, and giving in when the need arises.

To sum up, though the Zynami girls perceive guys to be unreasonable they simultaneously applaud men as the primary means through which girls construct themselves as normal and natural subjects, assuming their rightful place in society as nurturing, self-sacrificing women.

e) Selfless and sacrificing: "You gotta show him that you care just for him"

Adopting traditional notions of being a courteous (smile sweetly and look pretty), cooperative (give him what he wants), common sensed (passive and dependent) female is no easy task. Penetrating the girls' stories are illustrations of selfless and sacrificing girlfriends, out to please their boyfriends, that announce the girls' struggles to at least try to balance giving the guys what they want and keeping their reputation in tact. It is a

precarious line to walk as the girls risk losing their status as a girlfriend, and possibly gaining a label of "ugly" or "slut." Raz carefully calculates this risk in the timing of her break-ups to avoid the label of slut. She does not want to hear a guy say, "Oh yeah, I slept with her and she dumped me on my ass for no reason" (Raz,I-1,1076), perhaps ruining her chance of getting another boyfriend.

Fear of being alone accounts for Squeeky's and Taylor's accommodation of the selfless and sacrificing woman role. Squeeky even continues to do the bidding of her ex boyfriend much to the disgust of SM who interprets the dilemma this way:

SM: ... He (her ex boyfriend) has been using her for cigarettes and drinks and some other stuff ever since the beginning of the year and she won't tell him "No". ... the way he does it just makes fun of her (SM,I-2,2903).

Perhaps one of two things, or both, are going on here. First, SM may be envious of Squeeky, at least she is receiving male attention, and negative attention is better than no attention at all. Secondly, as SM considers herself to be Squeeky's friend she may feel threatened as Squeeky turns away from her role as girlfriend, choosing instead to spend all her time catering to her ex-boyfriend. Squeeky articulates her attempts to stay connected with this ex-boyfriend:

S: Like we're friends... 'cause ah, he set me up with one of his friends named Rob. We broke up like yesterday... so now I'm like... I'm trying to get ... I don't know, he's going out like with another girl... I was like so mad and stuff
 I: That must be hard.
 S: Yeah! (giggle)... Well we're not really talking to each other. I'm trying to get him to talk to me (S,FC,(283),6).

Believing that her identity depends on male approval, and fearful that she will disappear if even her *ex-boyfriend* pays her no attention, Squeeky desperately plans a birthday party for him, tearfully anxious that he will not show up. Two boyfriends have now "cheated" and "dumped" her, yet she continues to play the martyr role by hanging around them,

meeting their demands for "smokes," and trying to find the right words to make them notice her efforts to please them. Of course Squeeky does not consider herself a martyr. Instead, she conceives herself to be acting as a normal female. As a girl with limited material and social resources Squeeky has a lot of time to focus on her task of "ex-girlfriend." Whether attached or single, working class girls are still seen to readily buy into the suffering victim role of femininity... and feel privileged in the enactment.

In the same vein, Taylor gives up trying to end her relationship with her boyfriend, choosing instead to believe that he loves her even after all the shouting and arguing:

Taylor: ... and then I realized... like my boyfriend there realized that he didn't want, he couldn't stand being away from me so he ah... like... he asked me out and asked me out and I told ah... *I gave up*... I'm like... well this guy does really love me and all this... (Taylor, FC,(1),2).

Once again, I suggest that Taylor and Squeeky in "giving up," interpret this to mean that they are "getting it right." Taylor equates submission with devotion to her man, to her natural role as the one who gives in to meet his needs. These stories exemplify what many writers observe, that often "girls fold in to expectations about their bodies, their minds, and their future roles from a recipe of cultural forms that signify and position them as girls" (Proweller, 1998, p.207).

2. Body-Work: Sculpting Femininity

I now focus on the notion of femininity entrenched in the myth of the perfect body and substantiated by the Zynami girls' reading of cultural texts and practices. Referring back to the review of literature the reader is prompted once again to examine how a host

of scholars²⁴ illustrate female adolescents' negotiation of self through body-work. The Zynami girls, both in their writing and often when hanging around after a group session, articulate dreams of becoming models, or singers, or writers, or wives, and negotiate the possibility of this reality by working on their imperfect bodies. Cherland and Edelsky (1993), and Bogdan, Davis and Robertson (1997c) remind the reader of just how important investments of desire are to women's negotiation of their world, while Hey (1997) concurs, pointing out that girls' bodies require work in order to effect their creation as desirable and increase girls' chances of winning a boyfriend. Comparably, the body is referenced as the ultimate terrain of cultural production in the Zynami girls' world, and the girls invest and organize their desire to construct the perfect body through the mobilization of an array of popular culture texts (i.e., movies, models, magazines, rock groups, and the occult).

In our third focus group session, The Zynami girls' struggle for the perfect body is evidenced in their reading of an article, *Pieces of Me* (Reluctant Hero, Spring, 1999). On this occasion the girls gaze at their objectified bodies "like pieces of laundry hung out to dry," believing that if they can mend the holes and reshape the material and hide the seams, the guys will find them and love them. As Jenn writes in her folder one day: "If I had a perfect life I would marry Ryan and have... a nice wedding, nice clothes... and I would be tall and skinny" (Jenn, W,(147),6). Summing up the discourse of female beauty and its relation to body and boys, Roman (1988) affirms, "The distance between herself as

²⁴ See Walkerdine,1984; Gilbert & Taylor,1991; Davies & Banks,1992; McRobbie,1996; Harper,1997; Ussher,1997; Walkerdine,1997; Currie,1999.

subject, and her body which becomes the object of her work, is created by the textual image through which she becomes conscious of its defects" (p.50).

I digress for a moment to expand briefly on Roman's idea of constructing objectified bodies through textual imagery. Through the text of Reluctant Hero representations of femininity surface in the girls' reading of *Pieces of Me* in conjunction with the marker of whiteness that avails itself to the girls. The girls' conversation turns to the meaning of blond hair. Blond equates with beauty and romance in the girls' eyes. Jenn explains, "Like you say you like Nick Carter [of Back Street Boys band] and find out what kind of girl he likes...he has someone who like has blond hair...then you try and impress him by doing your hair blond" (Jenn,FC,1620,3), but it also equates with white, as blond is predominantly reserved for tall, skinny, white girls in magazines. I remind the reader of the girls' distaste for the not-so-white and brunette girl featured on the cover of Reluctant Hero. Though Jenn appears to fold into the notion of blond as "perfect" she is also confused by the contentious message she receives as a blond. "People think 'cause if you're blond you're stupid. Because when I was a blond everybody was like, 'You're a dumb blond'" (Jenn,FC,1542,3). Therefore, conflict results as the girls on the one hand, *alienate* themselves from the dominant discourse of whiteness (i.e., by sanctioning romantic encounters with boys other than white, evidenced in the upcoming section); while on the other hand, *aligning* their discursive practices within a location of potential white privilege (i.e., by resisting the image of a not so white girl on the cover of Reluctant Hero). Kyra much prefers magazines such as YM that cultivate white, blond and skinny. She argues her point, "Like YM, its got fashion in it, it has make-up tips, its got guys...to be honest, YM gives me what I want...what I need to know" (Kyra,FC,1629,3).

As an extension, in the three months I observe the girls, both in the project and in the hallways of Valley Vocational High, I never once see any of the participants with a friend other than white. On only one occasion in the study does white as a racial category come up and this is when the girls are once again discussing boyfriends having read, *The Dating Game*, in *Reluctant Hero* (p.31, Spring 1999). The issue of interracial dating appears outwardly of little interest to the girls. Only Raz and Kyra respond to the article relating their "dating" of Kevin (pseudonym), a black male friend. Raz supports her decision, "I went out with him and I don't regret it either" (Raz,FC,1857,5). Kyra continues:

- Kyra: He's tan...my parents have no problem with it...but I don't want to go out with him, not because of his race but because of...he's so tall and I'm so short.
 I: People wouldn't think it was right because he's so tall and you're so short?
 Kyra: And I'm so white and he, he's tanned you know. Like, I don't know, I'll probably end up going out with him. I know I will (Kyra,FC,1861,5).

At this point the conversation ends. SM, completely off topic, breaks the silence, "I was just reading last night about the bathroom girl article" (SM,FC,1864,5). This new topic of writing on washroom stalls precipitates an animated conversation and the issue of interracial dating falls by the wayside. Nevertheless, though the girls in my study rarely mention the racial marker of whiteness as having any bearing on their life experiences and practices, I am left wondering how the Zynami club would function if some of the girls participating were other than white. Only white girls sign up for the research project and all of the participants appear to choose white girlfriends only. The girls who choose a black boyfriend give the impression that they enjoy disrupting the norm by dating across racial lines. The girls conceivably feel empowered by resisting the accepted norm of a white boyfriend. This contradictory desire to reside within *and* resist dominant notions of

femininity is reinforced through most teen magazines.

As the Zynami girls struggle to accommodate the dominant discourse of femininity as a potential source of power and privilege, they in turn seek to resist it for imposing so many limitations on their search for self. In examining the Zynami girls' particularities of subjectification in relation to their bodies, I ask the girls where and how they think textual imagery of "women", "girlfriend", and "lover" is created?

- I: Who is society? What makes up society? Where does it come from?
 Kyra: We do and... we get our reputation from others that is not always the same. Yet like teenagers have a reputation of like... gangs, and breaks and entries and all that... I don't think it's right. I don't do that. I don't know about you guys but ... I don't.
 Raz: I stole a car once.
 SM: Us.... Society is us... and old people...
 Squeeky: Teachers... parents
 Dawn: Um... I find that like... most people that are older than teenagers they all think that we're going to steal something or we're going to break something and they don't trust us ... that REALLY bothers me cause I'm nothing like that. I'm mature and ... it's not fair. Don't judge me, I don't judge you... (ALL,FC,1476,3).

The girls choose this occasion to snap at the injustice they feel they receive from the older citizens of society. They lump adults as a collective force whose purpose is to label teens, "trouble" and "untrustworthy," and therefore in need of a more mature, intelligent adult to supervise and control them. The tangibility of skipping school, smoking in unauthorized places, damaging lockers, "stealing cars" (Raz,FC,1468,3), bullying and beating up other girls (all the girls relate stories of this behavior throughout the study), justifies the label of untrustworthy (the girls do not exactly deny this behavior exists) at times, but they are still extremely agitated by the labeling. Perhaps this textual image of themselves as "troubled," hits too close to their own self image of "defective." It represents the tangible reality of the defects they see every time they look in the mirror.

At this point there is a lull in the conversation as the girls cannot imagine other textual sources of production other than "old people," but there is an immediate, animated response to my next suggestions:

- I: What about the media? Is that part of society?
 Chorus: Yes! Yeah!
 I: What about the TV commercials... Ads... Magazines.. sitcoms? How has the media, teachers, adults, old people, whoever... how do these people represent you, how do they see you, what do they think you are like or should be like?
 Jenn: You mean what we look like?
 I: By what you look like... right...
 Jenn: Because girls don't look like ..just exactly like when they're in magazines or something... they make you look smaller.
 Raz: They make you feel bad...
 I: So girls are always represented ...
 Dawn: Skinny!
 Kyra: They represent you as sexy. You have to be a perfect image
 (ALL,FC,1480-1493,3).

Once they acknowledge television and magazines as sources of representations, they immediately turn their attention to how their body, "what we look like," is represented in these texts. They understand that the code of beauty laid out in advertising and the media defines that code through the markers of "skinny," "sexy," and "smaller." As mentioned above, there appears to be no critical reflection by the girls as to how these discursive representations are connected to the specificities of gender, race and class. In their attempts to incorporate the discourse of beauty, the girls seem unaware, as Radway (1984) accords, "that the world they inhabit is in part a creation of the codes used to articulate it ... [and] they freely assimilate the fictional world as their own..." (p.191). Interpellated by this fictional world they may be, but there is little agency evidenced here.

Jenn notes skeptically that perhaps they use "trickery" to make you "look smaller." She is the only one of the Zynami girls who begins to question the truth and value of representations encircling their lives. And so she does not join as openly in her rejection of

Reluctant Hero. She turns the page. In the girls' eyes the other magazines (YM, Seventeen) are "right" and Reluctant Hero is "wrong." To portray beauty and desirability as, not-so-white-curly-overweight-and-untidy is "wrong." Though the girl on the cover is closer to the Zynami girls' white, working class reality, it is not the stuff that the girls' dreams are made of. The textual image on the cover of Reluctant Hero is what the girls may see in the mirror every day, but it does not get them what they want... a boyfriend, and therefore access to a privileged position of "normal" and "beautiful," rooted in the social relations of whiteness and middle class. The magazine cover needs fixing just like their bodies.

The girls believe that beauty truths can be deciphered from media constructed texts, and so they engage this myth of beauty in their reading of teen magazines. The girls search the pages and pictures looking for the best tools to recreate themselves in the images presented in these texts without being aware of how dominant forms of femininity are connected to issues of gender, race and class. I ask the Zynami girls what else is important to them when they open a magazine:

I: OK... What else do you look at in magazines?

Taylor: Make-up.

SM: Clothes.

Taylor: Image.

I: What do you mean by image Taylor?

Taylor: Like how they look, their hair, their clothes...

Squeeky: Hair color...

Jenn: A lot of people want blond hair models now

I: Does what you see in the magazine describe who you are, who you want to be?

Kyra: In a way...if... I look at it...to be honest... yes!...

Raz: I would LOVE to be skinny... just like Kyra (sweet, longing voice), (ALL,FC,1500-1516,3).

Within this narrative, the girls lay out clothes, make-up, hair color, and shape as the material culture of the body they employ as strategies to produce a perfect girl-form ready for the boy-hunt. Anxiety and struggle surface at the intersection of the ordinary girl image in the mirror and the desired girl image in their dreams.

Taylor is mystified by the enormity of this struggle and chooses to give up the fight to create herself in representations of beauty authorized by current trend discourses of femininity. "Well... sometimes I do feel I wanna look like them and sometimes I don't want to. Um... it's just that... I don't really care as long as I like... It's easier to do your own thing" (Taylor,FC,1523,1579,3). Taylor appears to be the one in the group most comfortable with her appearance, even laughing at her efforts to cut her own hair... with disastrous results (Taylor,FC,1650,3). Then again, she *does have* a boyfriend! So perhaps she feels she exemplifies the social code of natural beauty. Though earlier Jenn questions how beauty gets represented in magazines, nonetheless, she believes that the way to natural, normal beauty is secreted away somewhere in the text. She just has to decipher the code.

In conjunction, if forms of language in magazines convey the truth about the social self, then mirrors convey the truth about one's physical self... at least in Jenn's thoughts. Jenn is determined to work on the image in the mirror, "OK!... I wanna be like, *I wanna be like her!* [Brittany Spears model in magazine]" (Jenn,FC,(221),1). Though saddened and disappointed by the distance that exists between the boundaries of both images of herself, Jenn's belief in her ability to close the distance is strengthened by the support of the Zynami girls. Jenn acts within her working class position, seeking to leave it behind and cross border lines through the process of beautification marked by a middle class system

of domination. Common sense tells her that if she wants to move easily across class borders, she must invest in a boyfriend suggesting that to succeed working class girls need the tools and material circumstances of middle class culture.

Kyra too believes that truth is embedded in texts. "OK! If you're reading a magazine, you *do see how* you should apply make-up..." (Kyra,FC,1556,3). Therefore, Kyra condones Jenn's effort to construct a please-your-man discourse of beauty knowing how difficult it can be. "I think we could all be, all of those [look like models in magazines]...if we tried. Just the fact that ...we have to like...go out...and get it...it's hard" (Kyra,FC,1521,3). Relevant to Kyra's theory but left unspoken, is the suggestion that the difficulty in "getting it" as working class girls is connected to the limitations placed on them by a dominant system whose goal is to maintain its own structure of power. What tools other than their own body do the girls have to invest in this struggle to find and keep a boyfriend and feel privileged?

Organized through the above story lines, the girls illustrate how being a girl is wrapped up in the material culture of the body. Constructing themselves as subjects around and through how the body looks, in truth focuses more around what the body does not look like and how they are going to fix it. One strategy the Zynami girls employ to unproblematize the body is clothes, but in contrast to other studies, (McRobbie,1980; Roman & Christian-Smith,1988; Walkerdine,1990; Way,1998), clothes are not taken up as the most significant tool to be mobilized in the Zynami club. Clothes are primarily invested to express individuality. Kyra expresses her individuality in her dress by stitching a stripe down her pants, and refuses to wear mini skirts even if they were to come back in style (Kyra,FC,53,1). Jenn is visibly upset in our last interview when her individuality is

threatened by Raz. "Did you *see* Raz today?...I don't know if she's still wearing it but she has her hair up just like mine. She has black pants like me ...everything!...aw... really embarrassing" (Jenn,I-2,3220). As Currie (1999) finds in her study, the Zynami girls show no evidence of investing wear to resist authority, except for Raz's effort to hide a forbidden tight, spaghetti strap, tank top under her sweater one day.

Clothes are rarely used in the beautification process. In contrast, make-up is routinely used in the process of body work. The Zynami girls manipulate, mold, and model make-up to compare themselves to one another.

a) Masquerading with make-up

All the girls wear make-up, except SM, "I don't wear make-up...I'm not really sexy or anything" (SM,FC,1525,3), and Dawn, "Guys want you to wear make-up... I'm not pretty so [I don't wear make-up]" (Dawn,FC,1448,1 & FC,2261,8). How much, what kind, where to put it, who you want to notice it, why you do not wear it, and what it represents, varies from girl to girl. Make-up measures who you are in comparison to other girls. Complicated meanings are ascribed to its particular mobilizations. For example, too much black eye liner may label you a "slut" *or* as a girl who has the courage to freely express herself. Ussher (1997) asserts that "women who act out these regimes of beauty are not simply indoctrinated or brainwashed, but position themselves as expert performers of this complicated masquerade" (p. 55).

Make-up enters the Zynami girls conversations every time we are together. They are either commenting on how much or what kind someone is wearing. They assume their friends are wearing it even when they cannot see it. It appears inconceivable that any girl would go to school without wearing make-up. They worry that something *serious* (sudden

loss of boyfriend, depression as a result of losing a boyfriend, giving up on efforts to get a boyfriend) must be wrong if someone shows up with no hint of lipstick. After all, working on beauty-for-the-boy-hunt requires make-up. Pocket mirrors routinely come out in the club to check if mascara is running as much as to symbolize that the Zynami girls have not given up the fight to employ performative strategies of beauty.

As I mentioned above, beauty work referenced through make-up overshadows any emphasis on what clothes each other is wearing. Given the prevalence teenage girls usually attach to clothing, I am intrigued by its marginalization in this study. Perhaps Jenn sums it up for all the girls when she notes, during my first interview with her, one difference she has noticed between her old school and Valley Vocational High, "they [peers and teachers] don't care what you look like, or how you dress" (Jenn,I-1,759). The pressure to compete in the material world of their middle class peers is lifted in this vocational high school that is predominantly working class. Brand name clothes are expensive. The Zynami girls cannot afford them. Here few wear them because few can afford them.

Conversely, it is nigh impossible to visually tell the difference between cheap or expensive make-up. Therefore, cheap make-up avails the girls of a strategy to construct beauty to please potential boyfriends. Mobilizing make-up commodities, the girls imagine themselves positioned on a level playing field in the boy-hunt as their middle class peers. I suggest that engaging forms of femininity through make-up narrows (in the girls minds) the gulf between the classes and therefore increases their chances of coming out ahead in claiming romance. What possible success they encounter cannot be determined. Still, it must be noted that "forms of femininity taken up... cannot be sequestered from how girls experience boys" (Hey,1997, p.72), as the following observations illuminate.

The conversation in the club this particular day turns to the Zynami girls' morning ritual of, "Gotta do my make-up." Taylor wants to write and is asking for suggestions from her friends in the group. Jenn suggests, "I know what you could write about Taylor, you could write about how long it takes you to get ready in the morning, 'cause a lot of girls it takes them hours and hours" (Jenn,FC,(38),2).

Taylor: Me, only five, ten minutes, I'm out the door.

Jenn: Me (giggling) it takes two hours 'cause to do my hair, my hair takes me half an hour, my make-up twenty minutes...

Taylor: I'd rather sleep... I wake up and I'm like, "I don't wanna go to school, I don't wanna wake up.... Then aaaagh it's 5 after 8!"
(Taylor,FC,(40),2)

Jenn appears to think that all girls spend as much time on applying make-up as she does. There is a suggestion here that a normal I-want-a-man girl wears make-up, and that it is required to spend hours getting the technique down pat.

Contradictory readings of make-up strategies are endorsed by Raz who reminds us that it can also be a source of family conflict... in her home a significant conflict:

Raz: My mother tells me "Oh, you don't put your eye liner there." I'm like, "What are you talking about! I know tons of girls wear, who wear their make-up like that." Well she's like, "You wear too much make-up." I hope you... I go, "Look at her [you ?] and I'm hardly wearing any make-up!" She'll go, "Oh yeah you're wearing too much make-up." I'm like, "I'm not wearing any make-up" (Raz,FC,1568,3).

The day Raz arrives in class crying and wearing no make-up validates the Zynami girls posturing that something serious must be wrong. "Look at yourself Raz... your face is really pretty, you know how to put your make-up on, you're not some person who goes and slaps her make-up on her face like just anything. Change back" (Kyra,FC,(198),4). This day is an extremely difficult one for Raz. Appearing vulnerable, defeated and powerless, Raz suddenly erupts in a language of rage and fear, divulging stories of

teachers who do not understand, a boyfriend who calls her "bitch," and a mother who calls her, "a fuckin' retard," (Raz,FC,(233),4) when they fight over the appropriate use of make-up. Defiant words fracture the air then dissipate into tears of longing. Today Raz does not wear make-up. Masquerading with make-up does not get her what she wants. She is unable to please her boyfriend. Adding to her confusion of who she is and where she belongs, is the rejection by her girlfriends. Raz gives up... for a moment only, the struggle to find success through the eyes of the males in her life. By the next session her eyes once again, are outlined in vivid black symbolizing her courage to yet again take up the struggle to get it right.

Not all the girls socially appropriate this textual strategy of make-up work in the same way as the following account illustrates:

Dawn: Guys want you to wear make-up (FC,1448,1).

Jenn: Yeah and it may not look good on you either.... If you see a model in a picture or something you might wanna look like her 'cause she's pretty so you go and try and find out the cosmetics might not look good on you then you'll look like a real idiot. So... what I say is be yourself and if people [can't] accept you for who you are then too bad (FC,1560,3).

Dawn: Make-up can be negative too! You can't just say it's positive because um... most girls wear make-up because they think they don't think they look pretty enough so that a negative! (FC,2257,8)

Four contradictory notions arise from the Zynami girls' discursive practices articulated above that shape the meaning of make-up use in the girls' lives: (1) Girls wear make-up because guys want them to, (2) girls wear make-up to fix their bodies, (3) girls rely on popular culture texts to convey the truth about make-up application, and (4) ugly girls do not wear make-up.

The girls' discourse on the meaning of make-up is rooted and informed by a notion of femininity that equates success with beauty and boys. The girls inevitably seek to

connect with, and resist at the same time, this system of power. Still the girls envision a time when they will overcome this struggle through their successful engagement of beauty-work-for-the-boy-hunt process. Make-up offers beauty, beauty frames the boy-hunt, and boyfriends are a potential source of power. Argues Ussher (1997), "women are divided by appearance; we are told that beauty is power. To be ugly (or even plain) is the thing to be most feared" (p.8). Feared say the girls, because the "wrong" appearance subjects them to alienation and non-representation in the social framework of success.

I refer the reader back to the literature that illustrates the competitive nature of girls body work (Roman & Christian-Smith, 1988; Hey, 1997; Currie, 1999). The varying subject positions the Zynami girls engage around issues of beauty work hint at the competitive elements that relate to girls' negotiation of body and friendship. Conflicts between the Zynami girls arise daily as they try to outdo the other as in, I'm-ahead-of-you-in-the-boy-hunt department because of how I have fixed my body today. Contributes Roman & Christian Smith (1988), a girl's position "among peers is strongly influenced by how they control or fail to control their bodies" (p.139). How the Zynami girls position themselves competitively in relation to other girls is referenced through make-up strategies as indicated above but also, significantly, through the physical shape of their body, and most specifically through body weight.

b) Sizing up skinny

Exactly what skinny represents in the struggle for subjectivity differs in each of the girls' discursive practices of body-work. Notably, there are only five occasions when the word skinny actually appears in the Zynami girls' narratives. Nevertheless, there is no question, as the following stories illustrate, that skinny is central to the girls' struggle to

construct their image in the likeness of the super models they encounter in the media. The girls' silences often reveal and mobilize the process of pursuing and coding skinny.²⁵ The covert existence of skinny, referenced in the context of the girls' stories, locates this cultural space of struggle marked by gender, race and class. Once again, as does wearing make-up, being thin represents the truth of how one should look. Thin represents normalcy and desirability. Boys want skinny. Boys are the girls' ticket (they believe) to their potential mark of success as women. But why the silence about thin-as-skinny in the club? Why is it I need to read between the story lines to understand?

Perhaps it is the taken-for-granted notion of being skinny that frames the Zynami girls' images of their bodies, so that skinny presents as a non-issue in their reasoning. In other words, in terms of rightness or wrongness there is nothing to debate. Skinny is simply right and the normal way to be, as desiring and desired women. Therefore, this natural longing to be normal requires little discussion from the Zynami girls' perspective and effects their silence in the midst of the storm.

I am curious about this silence that clearly speaks when I ask the girls one day if being skinny relates to their own image of themselves. I am surprised by the girls' seemingly simple, inconsequential replies:

Kyra: Skinny... OK, I am skinny OK, you know, like 80 pounds I'm, I'm... I really hate it.

Raz: Skinny, yes I would LOVE to be skinny... just like Kyra (sweet, longing voice).

Squeeky: Skinny yes, I like being skinny.

Jenn: Skinny... no.

Taylor: Um... Skinny?... I want to be like Kyra (laughing).

SM: I'm not skinny (ALL,FC,1514-1525,3).

²⁵ Macherey (1978) posits that we need to read girls' silent language as much as their speech. Both inform each other. "Silence reveals the speech, unless it is the speech that reveals the silence" (p. 86).

This passage appears to say nothing much on the surface. But in our weeks together I hear the girls strategize ways of creating themselves as skinny. Self abuse strategies, such as bulimia, anorexia, depression, and attempted suicides are engaged in two ways; first, as punishment for not being able to construct themselves as skinny, and second, as strategies mobilized in their efforts to become skinny. Therefore, far from empty, the above narrative signals a depth of meaning. The power of silence as it relates to body-work is evidenced in the following pieces of the girls' stories.

Kyra addresses size more often than any of the girls, pretending to hate being so small. She wears a masquerade of dismay at her size but never hesitates to speak of her pleasure in her body. This pleasure is evidenced by the confident, almost provocative way she enters a room, hands on hips, shoulders back, a laugh that intones, "Look at me." Even on her angry days there is still a need to revel in the rightness of her body. She stands on chairs, shows off her bellybutton, and wears tight, cropped shirts. Kyra, closely representing dominant forms of skinny with her slim hips, flat stomach, tiny waist, small chest, and protruding collar bones, render the rest of the Zynami girls incredulous, envious, and... unconvinced by the hate she espouses for her own body. Kyra snaps, "I'm skinny.... OK! OK... if we were all the same size wouldn't it suck!.... Correction! No! I'm sorry. 80 lbs. I'm 15 OK! I hate being skinny" (Kyra,FC,1514,3). The girls recognize the power she holds onto as a skinny girl. They resent her lording this power over them, and are not fooled with her attempts to make them feel better as evidenced by Dawn's frustrating rebuttal on yet another occasion when Kyra was complaining about being skinny:

Dawn: Don't even bring up the word fat!
 Kyra: I'm skinny!
 Dawn: I know and I hate you for it!
 Kyra: OK! OK! If we were all the same size wouldn't it suck!
 Dawn: Well it depends. If we were like your size it wouldn't suck!!!
 (Dawn,Kyra,FC,2265,8)

Kyra is not silent because she already is skinny and knows the privileged edge this gives her over the others. The rest of the girls are in agreement with Dawn, but retreat in silence at the seemingly immense problematic of their own bodies they are forced to work with.

I need to be clear here. What is not said but revealed through the Zynami girls' daily, repetitive articulations of, "I am fat!", is a silent discourse of beauty distinctly grounded in their dreams that cry out, "I want to be skinny." But only once, and that in the example above, do they overtly voice this *thin* dream that is thick with longing, crammed with complex meaning, and packed with agonizing problems.

What the Zynami girls long for is a measure of power, privilege, and authenticity. They believe this to be possible through their attainment of beauty, and a heterosexual relationship. Second, what thin or skinny means to the girls' is referenced largely through their strategies of comparing their bodies to each other and to fashion magazines, complicating their definition of skinny characteristics. Raz seethes at the body comparisons, the measuring and testing that causes conflict and alienation between girls as they compete for the power to be named the skinniest of the bunch:

Raz: Like even at my group home you know, it's so hard ... somebody else is comparing to you and somebody else is bigger than you and they're saying, "Yeah you're fatter than me" and all this crap! (Raz,FC,(239),2)

Whereas, Dawn and Jenn attempt to strike a balance between what they perceive to be the truth about skinny, and the unique adjustments they make to this imagined truth.

By trying to find a middle ground for appropriating skinny, they narrow the distance between what is and what is supposed to be from their common sense perspective. I suggest that their find-a-middle-ground approach to coding skinny eases the burden of their own inadequacies, and more importantly, allows room for them to hope that narrowing the gap will increase their chance of being able to perfect their bodies. The following story illustrates this balancing act:

- Dawn: Right now I don't think skinny is in, no offense (looking at Squeaky) but I think its more skinny but not skinny, skinny, skinny... like [don't] starve yourself to death but... and just a little bit of weight
- Jenn: Yeah, like my cousin Shawn... mostly now all guys go for girls who are not fat but not skinny.... If there's a little fat on them, they don't care because a lot of guys are losing girlfriends because they're anorexic... guys like girls who have a little bit of fat on them because they have something to hold on to (Dawn,Jenn,FC,2279,2282,8).

Though the girls are trying to justify the rightness of their own not-so-skinny bodies through this exchange, they also hint at the agonizing problems that mark body-work. Dawn clarifies this notion, "Last year I went through this big depression 'cause I was like calling myself fat" (Dawn,FC,(213),2). There are other physically violent practices of self abuse located in the Zynami girls' narratives. The Zynami girls' stories of attempted suicides, anorexia, bulimia, and depressions, highlighted in a later section of this paper on anger-work, attest to the intensity with which the girls search for strategies and experiences that offer the possibility of creating subject positions of beauty-as-skinny-and-desired-by-boys.

To sum up, and move on, in the open places and silent spaces of the Zynami club, the girls' tell their stories as they sift through the complex representations at work in the construction of their being and becoming. In the context of their narratives it is possible to observe the subjective terrain that marks the body as the primary site of the Zynami girls'

struggle. Tales of longing for beauty and boyfriends, tales of enduring misery while dreaming impossible dreams of perfect love and perfect bodies, tales of passive, subservient, self-sacrificing girls hoping to be rewarded with the love of a man, and through it all a story of struggle for order, power, legitimacy, and a solution to life's problems.

3. Anger-Work: The Discursive Practice of Anger

But this is not the whole story. I ask the reader now to consider as I do, the performances of anger that surface throughout the Zynami girls' negotiations of texts. The Zynami girls' discursive practices of anger represent a somewhat paralyzing fear that envelops them in the face of the regulatory powers of a middle class discourse of femininity and success in vocational high school. The resulting conflict is particularly prevalent and focused in my study where vocational girls are urged to choose career paths and survive in the world of work by the age of seventeen or eighteen. This is in contrast to most academic teens of this age who are spared the *urgency* of this pressure, continuing to be financially and emotionally supported by their parents into college or university for at *least* three more years. Pressured by time, the Zynami girls compelled to compress their dreams of attaining beauty, husband, *and* a career by the time they reach seventeen. Though they seem consciously unaware of this urgency, a significant part of the girls' story revolves around the discursive practice of anger, used as a strategy in the enormous task of sorting out conflicting, time compressed notions of femininity to construct rules, world views, and notions of self.

I call the reader's attention to one important point as I highlight anger practices in the upcoming section; I am not convinced that the Zynami girls are *essentially* angry girls.

Most times the girls, except for SM's hunched shuffle, stumble into our sessions laughing and shrieking, shoving and teasing one another, passing on secret knowledge about other girls or boyfriends, even planning surprise birthday parties. Still, I cannot ignore the performance of anger in the girls' lives. The girls insist on its presence. To do anger seems as natural and common sensed to them as breathing. I argue that it is a discursive practice readily adopted and adapted by them in the doing of femininity. Representations of anger, articulated in speech, journal entries, and social practices, at varying times surprise me, worry me, confuse me, move me, and sustain me. I am aware that these moments name my own contradictory subject positioning as I find myself "uncomfortably at the nexus of authority and knowledge" (Levinson et.al.,1996, p.23). I invite the reader to yield to these tellers of tales, to their haunting tales, riveting tales, tales of longing and despair, hope and possibility, all occupying a commanding position in the Zynami girls' mobilization of anger.

The seven, female adolescents of my study mobilize the discursive practice of anger as a site of struggle in four strategic ways: (1) as undoing, (2) as friendship work, (3) as silence, and (4) as a terrain of potential power and possibility. I claim that anger, understood through the lens of Critical Cultural Studies as a discursive practice, is utilized in limiting, isolating, determining, liberating, and silencing ways by the Zynami girls to negotiate their world. Within the interpretive community of the Zynami club, anger becomes "a well stocked arsenal... potentially useful against those oppressions, personal and institutional, which bring that anger into being... anger is loaded with information and energy" (Kramarae & Treichler,1985, p.51). In one session Jenn alludes to the simple appropriation of anger (also named "attitude" by the girls) in their lives, "It can be a good thing. It can be a bad thing" (Jenn,FC,1596,3). Regardless of how it is judged or

evaluated, it is a *consistent* and *insistent* component of the girls' everyday experiences.

The Zynami girls' ways of practicing anger often rub against the grain of my lived experiences and frequently cause me discomfort. The girls disrupt my taken-for-granted assessment of femininity and force me to think about how my own beliefs are unconsciously aligned with a traditional notion of female adolescence. Described by Lesko (1996), this notion includes viewing "adolescents' status as raw material [and] adults as engineers who know how to utilize raw material to the best advantage, who will transform those unfinished materials into productions of their own image" (p. 469). But discursive practices of anger emerge that contest this image of girls as needing to be saved by such values and norms. Unfinished material, as perhaps we all are, but the Zynami girls do not want to be saved, they want to be heard. They toss performances of anger about, casually and indiscriminately. They posture anger. They frown, clench their fists, grit their teeth in thin-lipped smiles, and shout obscenities at the least provocation from peers or teachers. "Well like if you're mad...you HAVE to swear, it's...it's...it's saying, you just don't think of what you're saying" (Taylor,FC,(73),2). They break the rules, shove, kick, and punch. "Girls that are hitting me, kicking me whatever during lunch time...I just run back after that girl and *deal* with it" (SM,I-1,399). They physically strike out at girlfriends who call themselves "dumb" or "fat." They strike out against their own bodies, attempt suicide, burn themselves, starve themselves, in an effort to control and punish the object of their misery. Offered right out of the blue, Kyra relates an incident of "accidentally" burning herself, but there is something in her body language that makes me shiver at the telling, "Know what I hate... when I burn myself...I burnt my skin this weekend on a toaster oven, look...it started to sizzle, you know what I mean. It was neat when it happened but

then afterwards it hurt" (Kyra,FC,1662,3).

Interestingly enough the girls do not often call themselves angry girls, but the discursive practice of anger daily vibrates with a discordant rhythm throughout their stories. Pursuing the pulse of this rhythm requires more than a simple acknowledgement of its presence in the girls' lives. Therefore, I investigate how the girls orchestrate the language of anger to compose meaningful representations of their world. I will show how anger informs the process of meaning-making in relation to their experiences in school. In conjunction, I also pay close attention to my own biased reaction to anger's passionate presence in the girls' lives.

There is an unspoken understanding in Valley Vocational High (as I believe in most academic institutions) that through the powers of their intelligence and privilege of experience, teachers will dutifully coach their girls to adopt practices of femininity in alignment with the academy's claims and norms. Therefore, I imagine that as the Zynami girls enter the doors of their new school, the power inequities referenced through the school motto (one that I argue articulates successful woman as gentle, self-sacrificing, helpful, passive, domesticated, dependent, polite, nurturing and intuitive) endanger and shape the roles their working class world assigns to them as female adolescents. Indeed, how the Zynami girls think about the practices of courtesy, cooperation and common sense often disrupt my own beliefs as the three "C's" are engaged by the girls as natural and normal ways of knowledge according to their own hegemony. And in so doing, the repressive role of a seemingly liberating discourse of femininity are challenged by the girls.

Much of the scholarly literature (Currie,1999; Brown,1998; Way,1999) details how middle class girls seek to *avoid* anger, and I remind the reader of how little work has

been done related to anger as a discursive practice in working class girls' lives. The practice of anger is not what I expected to find in my study either, but I could not deny, ignore, or silence the presence and prevalence of its discursive form. Therefore, this study examines and attempts to understand how the Zynami girls as a community accept and make use of the discourse of anger in their lives. I will illuminate how coded images of anger are constituted and mobilized in complex, contradictory ways by the community of Zynami girls as they constitute themselves subjectively.

This study departs from the traditional notion of anger as an emotion that needs to be controlled, eradicated, or redirected. The predominant dynamic of the vocational classroom today illustrates that the first focus on angry outbursts continues to be about control. Girls in particular are perceived as "bad," "irrational," or "at risk," if they openly exhibit their anger. Boys, I suggest, often receive preferential treatment when angry outbursts disrupt the class, the rationale being, "because he can speak his mind he could be a leader in the future" (Way, 1999, p.103), whereas girls who speak their minds are often seen as having an "attitude," a notion confirmed by the girls themselves in my study. I am not proposing that anger go unchecked in an unruly classroom, but I am suggesting that examining how it comes to be a unique hegemonic discourse in female adolescents' lives will better equip educators and those working with youth to understand their world. And so, at the juncture of the girls' and my alternative notions of anger, I now present how the performance of anger is used by the Zynami girls in multiple, complex ways to tell their stories.

The Zynami girls' memories lay bare experiences that speak of loss, abuse, rejection, fear, and labeling. The girls, in the unabashed telling of their daily struggles, celebrate a forthrightness of spirit, a spirit that rarely hides its power to facilitate meaning-making practices. Clearly visible and connected to this spirit is the doing of anger. The girls' frank and open proclamations of anger are hailed in their lives in both speech, composition, and acts. Anger's presence is licensed and sustained over time, intense to varying degrees, and sometimes physically engaged. Most notably, the discursive mobilization of anger hinges on aspirations of, longing for, and anxiety about social relationships, and the sculpting of imperfect bodies (as the Zynami girls understand them to be).

But the hailing of anger cannot be abstracted from its connection to race and class. Specifically, racially and classed codes of anger fortify and frustrate white, working class girls' negotiation of subjectivity when particular means of anger conflict with white, middle class systems of power and privilege. The gulf of difference in relation to anger is apparent at the juncture of class systems, and surfaces in Raz's common sense articulation of personal accountability:

Raz: If a guy is gonna call you that [bitch] I think that we should stand up for ourselves, 'cause it's only fair because... see... like if I called a guy a friggin' retard you know and he just stands there and takes it, he shouldn't do that, he should tell me off you know (Raz,I-1,920).

I suggest that Raz is candidly resisting school authority, which acting from a position of power, and in all good faith wanting to help the situation, orders the students to not fight back...walk away...and look to teachers to help redirect anger. At the same time, Raz readily interpellates anger as a strategy to force people to listen. Way (1998) would agree and posits, "While it may be considered inappropriate, ineffective, or rude at times, such

confident articulations of anger force people to listen and take their thoughts and feelings seriously" (p. 89). Simply translated, in Raz's world, where getting one's ribs broken is "no big deal and better than getting killed" (Raz,I-1,1009), walking away from confrontation is a sign of weakness, not power, and she is openly repulsed by a "guy" or girl who will not fight to be heard.

Brown (1998) describes in her comparative study of adolescent girls, that "femininity for [working class] girls, includes toughness, a self-protective invulnerability to sadness and fear, and an often direct and unapologetic expression of anger" (p. 69). As Raz implies in her refusal to accommodate a subjective position of passivity in the face of unjust treatment, so too, the discursive practice of anger for the Zynami girls is a function of toughness, a trait of self protection, and perhaps a mask for sadness and fear.

These girls need to be tough, need to survive, and so they learn early to be bold and brash. But this subjective position of assertive and independent girl belies the presence of an underlying dilemma referenced through the Zynami girls' narratives that are often organized around a love-hate relationship with discursive forms of anger. In other words, even though anger-as-working-class is condoned and considered a normal practice from their world view, it is *not* what anger-as-middle-class-experience appropriates, where anger in any form is considered detrimental to girls' attainment of beauty and boys. Therefore, the Zynami girls' struggle to represent anger as a legitimate practice toward positioning themselves as successful (i.e., beautiful and in a heterosexual relationship), engulfs an accommodation of both "the boundaries of appropriate femininity proselytized in school" (Brown, 1998, p. 203), and their own hegemonic admiration for resisting this system of power that curtails their working class practices of anger. Once again Raz, who

is the most vocal in her resistance, articulates her desire to accommodate both racialized, classed notions of anger.

Raz: Like I swear at my teachers, you know, you may think I'm a goody-goody girl but I'm not OK.... I even punch[ed] one of the teachers right in the face (Raz,FC,(86),2).

Regardless of the moral implications of this incident, it is clear that Raz wants to be seen by me, a woman with power and privilege (in her eyes), as a girl who generally conforms to a discursive practice of repressed anger (You may think I'm a good girl). Matter of fact, Raz does repress her performance of anger in the community of the club by curtailing her swearing, trying to patiently wait her turn, treating peers she usually bullies with respect, and expressing her anger through writing. On the other hand, she is making it very clear that she does not back down in the face of what she considers unfair treatment, using physical violence if needs be to make her point, even if the source of injustice happens to be an authority figure. Therefore, Raz struggles to simultaneously maintain respect in her working class culture that fully understands her violent attack, while desiring to invest the middle class culture that holds the potential answers to her success as a woman.

I want to make clear at this time that repressed anger as referenced by middle class practices does not imply that anger is non existent. What many scholars demonstrate is that repressed anger represents a site where differences between working class and middle class discursive forms of anger can be examined. To this point, one such author, Brown (1998) identifies three key areas of difference as it relates to anger and class: (1) the intensity, (2) the issues that surround the intense feelings, and (3) the manner in which these feeling are expressed.

In relation to the first noted difference (intensity), Raz has already provided provocative examples of an intense use of anger that is rarely referenced in middle class experiences of anger. In reference to the second noted difference (issues that prompt anger to surface), it has not been my experience in professional practice or in this study that a negligible difference exists between issues that shape feelings of anger in either middle class or working class girls. Matter of fact, I argue the opposite, that boy-work and body-work top the list of concerns in both working and middle class female practices of anger. Taylor's narrative illustrates the third area of difference (the manner in which anger is expressed).

When Taylor is "mad" she becomes the class clown which inevitably effects her removal from the room. She refers to "being the funny girl in there to 'diss' (make fun of) people," as her "bad side," but admits that she likes it better than her "good side," her good side reflecting the taking up of passive and obedient behavior desired by her teachers (Taylor,I-1,1116). Perhaps Taylor's referencing of "funny girl" is interpreted within the power structures of vocational high school as a non productive strategy for success, and therefore is labeled "bad." Conversely, Taylor's welcome embrace of her "badness" as "goodness" represents her working class acceptance of teasing other students as run of the mill behavior. Reasons Taylor, "they [the students] always forgive me... they don't get mad afterwards" (Taylor,I-1,1126). Taylor's description of anger-as-funny-girl employed as a coping mechanism, highlights the school system's inability to understand this particular form of anger through which some girls create themselves as subjects in school. bell hook's (1994) acknowledges, "They're [the girls'] laughter, playfulness, and anger

disturb the 'bourgeois class biases' that determine proper behavior and that shape and inform 'pedagogical process' in the classroom" (p.103).

I pause to reflect here on the many historical accounts the Zynami girls elaborate about former grade schools and "old" friends. Most of these stories surface in the initial interviews though others are sprinkled throughout the focus group sessions. Very early in their lives the Zynami girls' anxiety and anger about their inadequate performance in school in relation to institutional evaluations of their worth, began to rouse the girls to performances of anger as a common sense response to the pain of their isolation. A necessary, inevitable component of their daily life outside of school, but a culturally, inappropriate practice and emotion in school, nevertheless anger roused them to action and protected them I imagine from hurt and injustice.

In the following articulation Kyra expresses her fury as she recollects the frustration of trying to fit into a mold with such limited resources and strategies to work with in her marginalized world as a weak student:

Kyra: I would literally go home and I would get so frustrated, I would cry like for hours! 'Cause the spelling... I would do this essay. To me it looked good. It was perfect. It would come back and I'd only have like 10, 9. The teachers didn't understand. They'd say, "Agh you don't know this!"
(Kyra,I-1,86)

Teachers, according to Kyra, invalidate her efforts to be a part of their success story, and she wonders why no one will listen to her version of the story. A sense of alienation results as she realizes that she will never become subject to their discourse of success given the way she performs in school.

Taylor, Dawn, Raz, and Jenn have similar stories to tell; of being sent to the corner to do puzzles instead of receiving help (Jenn,I-1,739), of getting suspended for fighting

with peers who teased all the time, "I was always getting made fun of and I learned to stick up for myself by grade eight...I got suspended a lot" (Raz,I-1,916), and of failing classes, and getting into fights, "I failed most of my classes last year...I usually had fights with my friends" (Taylor,I-1,1084,1197). The harsh construction of themselves as "stupid" represents yet another limitation they feel is bestowed on them by schooling. By the time they reach adolescence and high school the Zynami girls' have woven a complicated web of silence, fear, desire, anger, and despair, as well as a persistent hope and a tenacious belief in the possibility of their attaining everlasting love and a perfect body.

The following presentation of findings now details the four key uses of anger in the Zynami girls' lives mentioned in the introduction of anger-work: (1) Anger as undoing: anger is utilized in self-destructive ways (2) Anger as friendship work: anger is taken-up as a social practice to connect with other girls, (3) Anger as silence: anger is strategically employed to win the love of a man, and (4) Anger as power and possibility: anger as outspokenness to confront injustice, and to construct subjectivity through the discursive language of agency, hope, and possibility.

a) Anger as "undoing"

Sometimes the girls' stories weave threads of despair that render them unable to unravel the knot of their marginalization and the subject positions they seek to change. Sometimes this despair leads to their undoing as the girls' anger is directed in damning ways at the object of their despair... their bodies. First, I illuminate the ruinous and shattering side of anger (anger as undoing), and I remind the reader that I make no attempt to detail, condone, or condemn how the girls employ self-destructive anger practices. Instead the express purpose of offering the reader a brief portrait of individual

body violations is to balance the telling of my next three accounts of anger strategies (anger as friendship work, silence, and power and possibility), and how the Zynami girls find creative ways to construct and fashion their desires and confirm the authenticity of their being through the mobilization of this text.

The Zynami girls' heart wrenching stories of "undoing" lay bear the extent of their anger at their inability to "fix" their bodies and relationships, and their belief that successful femininity relies on perfecting objectified bodies through the use of commercial commodities (i.e., make-up, clothes, hair products) exemplified in the media. In conjunction the girls are very aware, again through media texts, of a multitude of destructive strategies individuals use to attempt righting, or punishing their bodies. The three examples presented below are articulated again and again throughout the length of the project surfacing whenever the discussion, as it inevitably does, turns to boys and bodies and media texts.

Jenn: Like, we look in the magazine and say, "I wanna be like her, I wanna be like her, like last year OK ... when Brittany Spears first came out I wanted to be like her... I like actually killed myself, *almost* killed myself, I stabbed myself on my wrist, tried to stab knives to my heart ... because I wanted to be like her and my Mom found out ... My Mom's like really upset because I was going through a depression, I was crying, stabbing myself. I was like shoving my finger down my throat to make me sick... everything. And then my Mom finally told me I was pretty and that and I told her, "No!"

I: So do you believe her now?

Jenn: NO! (Jenn,FC,(221),4)

Raz: Why does it have to happen to me?... it's April 7th and I did drugs again because that's my life fucked up and all I am is just a pot head. But sometimes I don't do pot I just do alcohol and get fucked that's what I do and I don't like it (Raz,W,123).

Kyra: Alright, I was teased from grade three to grade eight straight. I changed schools this year and this is the only year I haven't been teased. Like, I went to this place where I tried to commit suicide. I actually got to the point that I was in the hospital for a month because I almost killed myself.

I have scars to prove it and everything [shows scars on her wrists].
I look back on it now and I am disgusted with myself (Kyra,FC,149,4).

Dawn: Last year I went through this big depression 'cause I was like calling myself fat and I was like, stabbing myself with, like hurting my wrists because I was fat and then my Mom turned around and she told me to look in the mirror and that. And she told me that I was pretty, and that and when someone tries to tell you that you're pretty you don't believe them, like my friend tells me I'm pretty an' I tell her to "shut up!"
(Dawn,FC,(213),4)

Throughout our time together the girls' focus in life is rarely far from their bodies and the immensity of the struggle to fix it to find a boy. The point here is that as long as the girls are engaged in strategies that effect femininity as it is spread out in the pages of fashion magazines, self injurious anger is in check. Only when fashionable measures fail (a variety of diets, not eating, smoking) to unfold the mythical reality of girl, do the Zynami girls resort to intensified measures to fix (bulimia and anorexia) or destructive measures to punish (suicide attempts, depressions, hard drugs) their bodies when they feel helpless and hopeless. This is anger that professionals working with youth need to address, but it is far removed from anger as friendship work.

b) Anger as friendship work

The Zynami girls engage anger as a social practice to connect with other girls. Two prominent themes frame the practice of friendship work, organized through the discursive forms of "comparing" and "being there." Jenn highlights these themes in her explanation of a "good friend."

Jenn: Um... someone that you can talk to, is there for you, ... and you know they won't laugh...someone whose honest and...yeah...someone who won't like if you tell them a secret they won't tell anybody else and they won't talk behind your back...mostly... (Jenn,I-1,767).

Jenn's reliance on an unrestrained code of girl friendship is evidenced in her above definition of girlfriend. More importantly though, her nurturing intonation of friendship practices perceivably outlines a hidden knowledge about girls' friendships; girls are not always there to support each other. Feeling alone and isolated in friendship involves: friends who sometimes talk behind each others' back, friends who can be dishonest, friends who laugh in your face, and friends who tell your secrets to other girls. Any and most of these alienating practices encompass acts of comparison. More explicitly, the Zynami girls are at a crucial stage in learning to be a woman, and much time is taken up in the doing of girl. Through judging other girls' strategies of doing gender behind their backs, the girls measure their own attempts at constructing successful femininity. Comparison work is sneaky and often mean spirited, resulting in language practices organized around mistrust and anger.

(i) "Comparison" work

Expanding on this theme of comparison work reveals that comparing is a daily ritual engaged by the Zynami girls through a "well rehearsed verbal game" of anger (Hey, 1997, p. 74). Exclamations such as Jenn's, "Did you *see* what she was wearing. Aghh!" (Jenn,I-2,3221), and Dawn's, "Well, if we were all as skinny as you it wouldn't be a problem!" (Dawn,FC,2275,8) illustrate the language that frames how the girls play this verbal game of comparison while tearing them away from the pleasure of each other's friendship. Effective distancing from this feminine, social discourse causes anxiety because one compelling function of "girlfriend" is to facilitate the production of gendered subjectivities. Steedman (1986) acknowledges that "it is women who tell you about the public world, of work, of politics, the details of social distinction" (p. 33). If the girls are

alienating each other through acts of comparison, they lose the means of friendship as a collective strategy in the naming of their world.

Thus, one undesirable component of comparison work is that it constructs individuals in isolation. Forced inward by isolation the girls feel angry, frightened, alone and cornered. The girls are very aware that practices of comparison complicate their efforts to get along with each other. Kyra illustrates:

Kyra: You know we're more hard on ourselves because it's hard to get along with females... OK we've got all this peer pressure and everything... and girls are always comparing... always comparing each other... it's so friggin' annoying!" (Kyra,FC,(217-237),4)

Perhaps the intensity of Kyra's annoyance stems from her understanding that the social dimensions of girls' experiences as they relate to friendship work, inevitably create distances from one another through performative acts of comparison. Kyra much prefers working with boys because this alienating dimension of friendship does not surface.

The relevance of this comparison work is that it situates girls' bodies as a site of disruption in relation to the social process of friendship work. Defensive of their own efforts to construct the ideal, girls often separate themselves from friends they consider to be threatening (friends who appear more beautiful than they) in their attempts to achieve this ideal image of woman. Brown (1998) refers to this self alienation as "the ideal girl isolated in her perfection" (p.140). Raz experiences the crushing loneliness of the well rehearsed verbal game of comparison as she cries out in anger:

Raz: Like... fuck... even at my group home you know, it's so hard... somebody else is comparing to you and somebody else is bigger than you and they're saying, 'Yeah you're fatter than me' and all this crap! (Kyra,FC,(239),4)

Just when Raz needs connection and support the most, having been told she cannot move back with her mother for another three months, being hit with "You're fatter than me!" only heightens her sense of detachment from the social capital of girls' friendship that she could mobilize to find meaning at this crucial moment in her life.

Dawn tends to wrap herself up in isolation, not as an ideal girl trying to protect her image of beauty, but as a deficient girl trying to hide her inadequate body lest someone use her imagined faults to fortify their own image of ideal girl. She writes in her folder:

Dawn: It drives me crazy! It's not fare [fair] why some girl[s] [are] so popular and I'm not!... ALL my friends have boyfriends... I FEEL SO UGLY!
(Dawn,W,154)

Dawn compares herself negatively to her friends, and equates beauty with being able to claim a boyfriend. Perhaps feeling that a social relationship with her friends will only highlight her sense of "ugliness" and "powerlessness," she alienates herself from accessing this strategy to negotiate her positioning as girl.

At the end of the day, regardless of the comparison game played out through the performance of anger, the Zynami girls still yearn to connect on an intimate level with girlfriends. Perhaps they sense the futility of their verbal blasts on one another, or perhaps out of a true need to find a place to dream and hope, they are able to let go of mistrust for a moment and embrace the pleasures of camaraderie. At this juncture, the Zynami girls' heartfelt apologies are met with, "Oh, it doesn't matter." Comparison work has yet to destroy the girls' need to be there for each other.

(ii) "Being there" work

"Being there" work is comprised of a complex, contradictory set of anger strategies mobilized by the Zynami girls in their struggle for subjectivity. I identify four

strategies, and demonstrate how they are taken up in varying ways by the girls to effect and affect subject positioning. The four strategies of "being there" include; (1) Physical rubdown: "hitting," "smacking," "punching," "slapping across the face," and "flicking her ear hard," (2) Vanishing: purposely retreating from another girl's conflict, (3) Taking charge: the listen-to-me-I-know-what-to-do approach, and (4) Ganging up: solidarity in the art of condemning boys. Each of these strategies are referenced by the Zynami girls sometimes as sites of power, sometimes to resist dominant social positions, and sometimes to engage hope and possibility.

The first strategy of being there, what I call a physical rubdown, permeates the entire research project. The girls often demonstrate their caring by swift and not so gentle swats across the head. It is such a common practice that the girls sometimes argue about who received this courteous back-handed therapy, "Do you mean me?" "No! She's talking about me" (Jenn, Taylor, (143),4). This is a working class understanding of being there, and would be considered violent, angry behavior from a middle class perspective. I know I cringe when a sudden burst of "Shut up!" followed by a punch in the ribs, materializes the first time I meet the girls. Therefore, I can understand why teachers, from their position of power, try and curb what they consider "bad" behavior. That is, understood from their intellectually privileged position, it is only natural for them to imagine being there for a friend to include physical control, emotional containment, and politeness in the midst of hugs and tears. But the notion of crumbling into each others arms is foreign to the Zynami girls. Girls learn early, as Walkerdine (1989) claims, "that working class mothers tend to expect physical self-reliance from their daughters" (p.50). And as such, the Zynami girls argue, "Yeah, it [physical therapy] is part of life"... "Everybody does it" (All,FC,(105),2).

Physical therapy is usually employed when a girl is depressed or convinced that her body needs fixing, that she is "ugly," or "fat." Jenn's rationale, articulated in the following example, describes what girls are upset about and how their friends are there for them:

Jenn: My friends will come up to me and I'll say, 'I'm fat,' or 'ugly or something and they'll get mad and turn around and say, "You're not!" and then I'll get so upset because I know they are lying to me (Jenn,FC, (250),4).

Please note, that though Jenn appreciates her friends' support, she has no intention of believing them. She is angry that they are lying to her, but comforted by the idea that they care how she feels, and Jenn shows no hesitation in returning the support to her friends as she claims below:

Jenn: My friend said that ... I gotta tell you. One of my friends told me that she's ugly... so I walked up to her and I hit her like *really, really, really* hard. Now she doesn't say it anymore (Jenn,FC,2263,8).

Contradiction is evident in these two conflicting articulations. On the one hand, Jenn is condoning the acceptability of how her friend's body appears to the world, while simultaneously condemning her own socially constructed image of self.

But what potential does this physical therapy have on structuring the Zynami girls' struggle to create the ideal self? First, the physicalness of being there perhaps functions as a discourse of hope and possibility. It seems to say: "If she says I'm pretty and not fat, then maybe I'm not too ugly, and if I try real hard I can fix it." Fixing generally relates to tall, blond, beautiful skin, and skinny. Secondly, an emphatic, "YOU ARE NOT FAT!" suggests that the girls may potentially adopt a reflective stance to social customs that circuit their lives and ask the question: "If I'm not fat, then what am I and in relation to whom?" And thirdly, representations of physical therapy have the potential to negatively affect the girls' efforts to construct meaningful selves by silencing their desire to tell the

truth as they imagine it to be. Dawn in particular disappears within herself when friends attack her with such censoring physical displays of support.

Fourthly, one last thought on the use of physical therapy to aid the doing of friendship work; I suggest that the girls' violent resistance to negative body posturing reflects their own immense discomfort with what they perceive to be the reality of their own coded image of themselves. When one of the girls erupts with, "Shut up! You are not ugly!" perhaps what she really wants us to hear is, "Stop trying to tell me what I don't want to hear about myself!" Perhaps, in yet another way, "shut up" represents a folding in to a dominant discourse of femininity that suggests that *ordinary, non-perfect girls do not exist*; certainly not in magazines, advertisements, and schools often evaluated by how many *extraordinary* people they turn out upon graduation.

As physical therapy is the prominent anger strategy utilized in friendship work, I just briefly address and demonstrate how the remaining three strategies (vanishing, taking charge, and ganging up), are employed by some of the Zynami girls.

Raz exemplifies the use of vanishing as a strategy of friendship work in the following situation. Though often the girls stick up for their friends confronted by another peer, "Um... I'll go up to that person and just stand up to that person and maybe like hit them or something and make them leave that person (her friend) alone" (SM,I-1,475), Raz's philosophy is more in line with what she has been taught by her working class culture; that weakness is not allowed, and that "we should stand up for ourselves you know" (Raz,I-1,920). She illustrates this belief by elbowing SM; roaring at the same time, "Get the fuck outta my way!" and signaling that she has no intention of being there for SM even though she knows of the bullies' presence just outside the door. Raz feels she has

done the common sense thing by warning SM, and encouraging her to be prepared for the bullies, but she expects SM to be self-reliant and physically resourceful, even if it goes against the grain of school authority.

Taking charge describes Kyra's need to engage friendship work through her imagined superior intellect, and therefore her constructed ability to solve problems rationally. She informs me of this role in our first interview: "They (her parents) took me to the doctor's ... my brain's older than what I'm supposed to be... I always found that I was way maturer (sic) than other" (Kyra,I-1,140-144). This strategy is Kyra's ticket to positioning herself according to a discourse that favors intelligence and sway over others. Through Kyra's representation of herself as superior she is able to access a position of power. This is clearly evident as she tries to explain how she feels she will contribute to the group: "With this group... the input that I am probably gonna give is gonna be... in consideration a lot... I find that when I'm with girls they [say]... 'You know she's right!'" (Kyra,I-1,203). The sense of agency afforded her in this position of power is intoxicating as she is aware of its limited presence in her working class world. As intoxicating as it is when it is available, it is as equally devastating when it appears to be taken away from her. Therefore, Kyra leaves the club in the last two weeks, sullen and angry, as the rest of the Zynami girls begin to construct themselves as capable, creators of knowledge who begin to resist and challenge some of Kyra's postulations.

Last, but not least, ganging up as a strategy is utilized in being there work. It references the Zynami girls' struggle to build bonds of girl friendship by creating a united front against any boy who asserts his power over a girlfriend, and demands to be pleased. Taylor lays out the plan: "Cause I'll be slapping him silly.... We'll take your boyfriend and

we'll shove him up against a locker and we'll tell him listen..." (Taylor,FC, (I-1),14). I propose that this verbal posturing of anger fortifies the girls' belief that natural femininity requires giving in to boys demands, placing boys' wishes above your own, not complaining when they cheat on you, and embracing a passive, subservient role in the face of all these situations. More explicitly, the fortification of passive female is accepted as natural "girlfriend" behavior by all the girls, evidenced in their banding together to complain about the difficulties they encounter in producing normal girl, to meet boys' demands. At the same time, ganging up suggests a contradictory notion, that the Zynami girls' resist their exclusion from power in their heterosexual relationship, crying at the injustice of this subject positioning, and subsequently turning to each other to work on strategies that may gain them a measure of power in their relationships with the men in their lives.

In conclusion, no matter whether anger as friendship work is engaged through the two themes of comparison work or being there work, the inevitable disruption of friendship lasts but a short time. Taylor confirms its brevity:

Taylor: During September.. one of my friends Claire thought I called her a bitch which I didn't. I'm like, " you know I wouldn't dare call my friend a bitch or anything unless I was fooling around or something like that. So... I gave it time for her to think it out and ...stuff so... we became friends three weeks later (Taylor,I-1,1197).

In my time with the girls, there seems no doubt that friction and anger is fleeting ("We became friends three weeks later"), and gives way, sometimes in minutes, to shrieks of "Oh I'm sorry. I'm sorry! I didn't mean it! Sit here! Sit here!" (Jenn,FC,2496,9). At all times, in fellowship or falling out, the Zynami girls articulate "a relevant language filled with vulnerability and passion" (Way,1998, p.114). This common thread of friendship work weaves narratives of girls on the margins of life. As a social space, friendship work

organized through language, lays out a terrain upon which subjectivities are produced and circulated in complicated and often angry ways.

c) Anger as silence

Anger also seethed below the surface of the Zynami girls' experiences, most particularly when connected to their relationship with the men in their lives. At the edge of adolescence girls "come up against a relational impasse that constrains possibilities and shuts down their loud voices" (Brown, 1998, p.109). But I suggest that the girls' voices are not so much shut down by some external force, instead that the girls read external narratives of how-to-please-your-man, and *choose* to shut down their voices of anger as a strategy to get it right. Brown speaks of walls of "shoulds" where girls are socialized into silence particularly in their relationships with boys, where doing a historical rendition of girlfriend correctly, requires female subordination and lack of conflict. In further rooting girl practices connected to men as privileging anger's silence, Hey (1997) claims that girls "in their relationship with boys locate the only possible place for themselves... as its objects, rather than its subjects." In alignment, the Zynami girls struggle to construct representations of themselves as innocent, attentive, and self-sacrificing women and so they remain silent. Consequently adopting anger as a site of this struggle is rarely an option.

Taylor speaks to her performance of silent anger that positions her as complying to her boyfriends whims: "This guy just drives me up the wall... and I just want to say, 'Shut up!' and then um... I don't know...I just let it go" (Taylor, I-2,3033-3035). Clearly this option of silent anger is reserved for guys, because in the next breath Taylor comments on reacting to disputes with her girlfriends in a contrasting way: "Yeah [giggle], I usually

have fights with my friends [girlfriends]" (Taylor,I-1,1196). Perhaps this repression of anger is possible to execute as the girls create fairy-tale myths about their boyfriends. Taylor speaks of Sean (pseudonym) at varying times in the study as "so sweet," and the kind of guy who "opens doors for me." Giving up her own movie to talk with him, "He called me last night and we talked for two hours," Taylor believes that what her boyfriend wants should come first, "I should be seeing him first [instead of coming to the Zynami club first]" (Taylor,FC,(38),2). Taylor chooses to ignore the hurt her boyfriend induces in her, (he lies to her, leaves her, does not believe her, accuses her of cheating). When I ask her why she forgives him she replies, "He told me that he loves me and [so] I went back out with him" (Taylor,FC,(2),2).

Another poignant example of the construction of anger as a silent act or strategy to negotiate gendered subjectification is provided by Jenn. A chilling narrative of pain, abuse, and longing emerges through Jenn's story. I am still haunted when I imagine the horror of her relationship with her father. Through her father's representations of her as "loser," "idiot," "whore," "dog," and "wish you were dead" (Jenn,I-2,3240-3315), Jenn somehow finds an opening to dream and hope, and in this space a measure of power to resist her father's attempts to crush her. Interestingly enough she credits her brother for helping her be "nice," even faced with her father's hate. She claims that it is her brother who taught her that "if you treat somebody nice, they'll treat you nice." Note how her brother advocates "being nice" as expected feminine behavior; a subject position Jenn readily takes up as her own. Jenn holds out hope that if she constructs nice (does not get angry) her father may one day come back to love her:

Jenn: OK, I get a letter saying my name on it like it is from Wes (her Dad, pseudonym) like I'm, "OK should I read it or not?" and I'm like, "OK maybe I'll take the chance and he'll be nice." Then I read it and I'm like "OK, forget it!! (Jenn,I-2,3262)

She does not retaliate with anger, for there is still the fear, and hope, that one day he may return to love her. Constructing hope from despair requires Jenn to keep her anger in check to increase her chances of winning her father's affection.

SM has the most difficulty with the contradictory messages she receives from her step-father and church minister about mobilizing the performance of anger. These two key figures in her life insist that a girl's anger is to be physically controlled and emotionally contained. SM's experiences articulate this frightening impasse in her negotiations. It begins when SM is in "grade three or four," where she is coached "to count to ten, walk away, tell the teacher... [and] talk it out" (SM,I-1,407), when she feels angry. But her step-father now coaches her with, "If they do something to you just turn around and do it back to them... then they'll know what you feel" (SM,I-1,409). But doing anger is a highly gendered practice in her home where, once again, with her step-father's enforced orders, she must not "swear... or I get into trouble" (SM,FC,(107),2), and is punished if she fights with her brother. SM clarifies this situation at home as she understands it:

I: Is it (anger) easier to handle here at school or at home?

SM: It's easier for... it's easier here at school, at school I hit them back. *I can't really do that at home to my brother but he can do it over to me.*

I: He's allowed to hit you and get away with it?

SM Yeah! Um... he doesn't get caught but I do. So... whenever I try to tell something to my parents they don't listen. They just say, "I just saw you, I didn't see your brother so you're in trouble." That's about it (SM,I-1,392-395).

SM is perplexed and angry at the injustice of being grounded and having to do extra chores for her outbursts, while her brother gets off without penalty. Once again, as

evidenced in SM's narrative, there is an underlying belief that girls are the ones who are to keep the peace, and who are to claim full responsibility for failing to maintain the stability of a relationship.

What crops up as crucial to SM's negotiation of anger can be framed from a psychological perspective. Presently, having no place to go, SM's anger often surfaces through her body in the form of headaches, stomach aches, nightmares, sore joints and fears of the dark. She worries about the consequences of repressing all this pent up rage and tries to make a case for mobilizing the discursive practice of anger. SM explains her concern:

SM: Um... lets say you get really mad... you get so mad that you get inside you sometimes... and when you grow up they say that when you grow up you wanna get them back really badly and kill them... so... we should get rid of it (SM,FC,1609,3).

On the contrary there is no such struggle apparent for Squeeky. She succinctly sums up her subject position on the discourse of anger as it relates to boys or girls:

I: Squeeky what do you think of anger? Does it help you at all?
Squeeky: No... it just makes the problem worse... it's a bad thing
(Squeeky,FC,1595,3).

She continues to dot her "i's" with little hearts, and to cater to her ex-boyfriends who demands cigarettes, change, and alcohol from her. Still, Squeeky is busy trying to plan a birthday party for him, "This week-end I was going to have a birthday party for my ex-boyfriend. I was going to have it this weekend and now I can't because he's not going to make it... I hope he can. I don't know what I'll do" (Squeeky,W,165). I have seen her enter the room "pissed" at her boyfriend (new one every week), but dissolve in tears at her inability to fix the problems that arise. She accepts "feeling down" as her lot as a woman. Squeeky turns to the girls for support and lets them gang up on her boyfriend through

their verbal posturing of retaliation for the pain he inflicts on one of their own. Way (1998) describes Squeeky's engagement of silent anger, "[Their] relationship with boys inhibits [them] from communicating [their] anger even when they [boys] do something really bad" (p. 91). Yet somehow there is a measure of comfort and hope in the possibility that if they can figure out what boys want on a daily basis, and be patient with them, that someday they may get it right as a woman.

I have thus far drawn attention to the way the Zynami girls use outspoken, physical anger as a function of girls' friendship work. In contrast I have highlighted how the girls appropriate anger as silence in relation to boy-work in ways that conform to a historical, traditional understanding of ideal femininity. The pull and tug between gendered class relations complicates and often confuses the girls' struggle for an authentic self.

d) Anger as power and possibility

Three strategies frame the Zynami girls' coding of the practice of anger as power and possibility: (1) profanity, (2) retaliation, and (3) declaring intent. Through these strategies, the Zynami girls articulate the daily injustices, repression, and subject positions they feel lead to, and at the same time imagine themselves retreating from, to construct a space of privilege and agency. Brown (1998) finds in her study, as I do in mine, that openly doing anger "gives them [the girls] an air of authority and authenticity" (p.11). Unlike a white, middle class discourse that dismisses girls' engagement of anger as counterproductive, the Zynami girls understand and employ anger as a "natural," "normal" social practice with the potential to fortify power and possibility. As Currie (1999) claims, the discursive practices of anger as "venues of signification," are capable of being mobilized as "sites for the operation of power" (p. 288).

In reference to the first strategy, the use of moderately aggressive profanity is a regular, daily practice in vocational high school, contracted to effect a sense of power, even as the school attempts to ban its use in the hallways and classrooms. From a schooling perspective, profanity in any form is understood as uncooperative behavior that weakens ones' chances for success. Recognizing that releasing a volley of expletives rubs against the grain of institutional perceptions, the Zynami girls nonetheless resist localizing profanity as undermining their power. Instead they are empowered by its strategic presence in their social negotiations. The Zynami girls argue the commonness and usefulness of the practice of anger in the following discussion:

- T: Well like, if you're like mad or like or MAD... you HAVE to swear...it's... it's ... it's saying... you just don't think at all what you're saying!
- SM: It works to get all your anger out.
- T: Yeah!
- Raz: I go to rave parties and I listen to the radio and Marilyn Manson (hard rock group). It's just they express how they feel and... life... what life is to them and stuff like that so... pretty much yeah people do swear...
- Jem: One of our teachers swears all the time. Like when we get mad or if when the teacher is mad she uses swear words as well so... it helps us deal with our anger..... I only use it when I'm like really mad or something.
- T: Yeah, same here... I usually swear if I'm angry or if I want to make people laugh or something.
- I: Does it matter where you swear or who you are with?
- Raz: No, not really.... We do it anyways.
- T: Excuse me! It's just words, words that come from out of our mouths, from somewhere... who knows... they're just words, what the hell were you thinking!
- Raz: It's good for me 'cause um... I swear constantly and everybody knows that and... like when I get mad, I get really mad (giggle) like today you know... but even when I'm not mad... I swear anyways too... (All,FC,(73-86),2).

All the girls agree that "swearing" is no big deal. Feeling angry is not necessarily a prerequisite of its use. Expletives in articulations are as common for some of the girls as "Hello" and "Good bye." They are annoyed by all the fuss teachers make over swearing, though in this particular school they feel expressing obscene language is perhaps minimally

tolerated as one of their teachers swears in class, "When the teacher is mad she uses swear words as well... so" (Jenn,FC,(77),2).

Swearing gives authenticity to what the girls say and feel. Discursive practices of anger are a form of "talking things out," a practice the girls assimilate whenever possible to resolve conflict:

Kyra: I think we should talk it out if we can.
 Jenn: Instead of like bottling it up inside.
 Taylor: ... Talk to people like the councilor or best friends
 Dawn: ... people that you can trust
 Jenn: ... or like really nice teachers that you can talk to...
 (All,FC,1610-1614,3).

In this case the girls appear to privilege both their own and traditional practices of feminine anger, arguing that anger is an appropriate strategy to attend to the hurts and fears they identify within their own working class culture, and by sanctioning non physical means of arbitration.

In the following passage Raz isolates a particularly gendered aspect to the doing of profanity:

Raz: If a girl called me a "skink ass" or "Ho" (whore), I wouldn't care. I'd just say "Hey, don't talk about yourself" you know. "Look in the mirror." I wouldn't care, but... I think that it's... rude for a guy to call a girl a "Biotch" you know and... if a girl says it, it's not so bad but if a guy says it it's like... "Who brought you up like that? You have no morals" and stuff like that you know.... And just some of the guys in this school are sooo unbelievable with their language (Raz,I-1,926).

Raz makes it clear that girls in her world are socially entitled to construct meaning through anger practices, but boys are exempted from this privilege, somehow boys who shout out curses are "rude" and show no respect for girls if obscene words invade the social relations of boy-girl work.

Secondly, anger as power and possibility is referenced through retaliation. The Zynami girls engage retaliation or "getting even" from what they consider to be a subject position of power. SM and Raz clearly attempt to justify the use of retaliation to construct themselves as strong, assertive, and independent. Having grown up on her grandfather's sermons Raz has adopted a stance of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. The following conversation ensues:

- I: Do you think you do that, do unto others as you would have them do to you?
 R: Like if someone was respecting me, yeah I would give them space, and respect them... but if someone turned on me... I don't know...I mean I'm not gonna kill them or nothin...and I may get my butt kicked back but...
 I: If you hit me I'll hit you kind of thing...
 R: Yeah (Raz,I-1,1012)

SM: Well, if they been mean to me I actually get them back for that so...I'm not, I'm not gonna like take a knife or a gun to their head or anything. But I'll talk to them, if they, they don't listen I'll maybe like, flick them over the head or wack them on the back and make them listen...
 (SM,I-2,2893).

While embracing physically, uncontrolled, retaliative techniques to create a feeling of confidence and agency, I also sense that the Zynami girls fear losing control of how they use anger. An extreme result of going too far is articulated by Raz: "but still you gotta be not dumb you know... I think it's [restrained violence as smart practice] better than getting killed and die...and never see your family again...you know" (Raz,I-1,1013). Kyra too, imagines the danger of "beating up that person s-o-o-o-o bad" (Kyra,FC,1584,3), and warns the girls to be careful of intense, violent rage, "because you don't know what... exactly what could happen. You know yeah, you could get really, really badly hurt" (Kyra,FC,1585,3).

With a not quite so dramatically articulated sense of doom, the girls know generally that there is a limit to how far they can retaliate before it isolates them instead

from that space of power and agency. Therefore they struggle to balance and mediate their use of retaliation at all levels of engagement. Though I present them briefly as individually isolated techniques, the girls demonstrate their reliance on a combination of these techniques to survive the injustices of their world; injustices coded as exclusion from power, privilege, and authenticity. Given the limited resources at their disposal to construct meaningful lives, they appear to struggle more often and more intensely with the discourse of retaliation than do their academically and economically accomplished peers.

The girls embrace the following strategies to check their anger in an attempt to balance the pain with the potential of retaliation to ease that pain. Jenn tells her story first:

Jenn: If I'm mad or something, too much going through my head, I'll write it down... then I'll know it's out and I'll feel better... and like if I'm really, really, really, really upset or mad I'll go in my room and turn my stereo on and in five minutes I'll be calmed down... Sometimes I'll punch the wall and just think of the person's head (Jenn,I-1,851).

Music and writing top Jenn's list of strategies to calm down, and when that does not work she physically attacks objects instead of people. She remembers her regret having "punched out" a girlfriend only to find out that the girlfriend was not at fault. Therefore Jenn claims that she now thinks first before acting out.

Kyra, on the other hand, isolates herself from her friends, afraid of her own potential for uncontrolled fury to materialize:

Kyra: To me, I don't want anyone around me, if you come near me, ok... you're liable to get hit hard.....like I was so wanted to like lie someone down flat and step on their two like hip bones and like crack their butt right in half. I was so wanted to do that to some person!!! (Kyra,FC,1589,3)

Perhaps knowing her limitations as a tiny, skinny girl with no physical strength, she considers it wise not to retaliate physically. Throughout the course of the study Kyra articulates her frustration at feeling powerless.

Taylor rarely retaliates physically now that she is "growing stronger," and instead tries to "talk [her] mind out" (Taylor,I-2,2995). Outspokenness for Taylor is often referenced through verbal bullying and teasing to get even, though in this example she also includes walking away and slugging doors to calm down:

Taylor: Um... at times when ah... when I was angry I just liked punched the door... or I just like get that I walk away... and I just sit there quietly calming down and I usually do that... a lot of times and...some people have noticed... (Taylor,FC,1605,3).

The only occasion Taylor admits to uncontrollable physical retaliation is when she is with her mother. To protect herself from "becoming like [her] mother" (Taylor,I-2,1607,3) she has opted to live with her father.

Dawn adds an other dimension to keeping negative effects of anger in check. She uses Reiki (hands on healing relaxation technique) (Dawn,FC,2556,9). But I notice that though she feels she is in control, anger and frustration at her inability to create a beautiful body and win a boyfriend surface in her interjections of irritation during many group sessions, "Not all guys just want that [sex]! You can't say all guys!" (Dawn,FC,2242,7). Or on another occasion, "Make-up can be negative too though! You can't just say it's positive..." (Dawn,FC,2257,7), and "Well if we were like your size it wouldn't suck!" (Dawn,FC,2272,7). As Dawn connects her power to her body, the suppressed anger she feels becomes inwardly, directed at herself. As Ussher (1997) posits, "to be ugly (or even plain) is the thing to be most feared" (p.8). Perhaps Dawn's inability to unfold anger has something to do with her folding in to severe depressions.

Anger as power and agency has so far been examined through the Zynami girls' mobilization of profanity and retaliation as perplexing strategies in their construction of meaning. Perhaps the overwhelming potential of these strategies is that their mobilization,

as Brown (1998) so eloquently writes, "gives back to the girls the power of their response... and the potential for a different outcome that is rightfully theirs" (p.127). This is precisely what the Zynami girls believe, that life has just got to be better than this. With a fighting spirit they embrace a third strategy relating to the practice of anger.

I refer to this last strategy as the Zynami girls' declaring of intent, a declaration of dreams that connect them to the possibility of a different outcome. In so doing, the girls' narratives of dreams and future plans takes on a sharp edge in their articulation, an almost angry, determined edge as if they want to make sure that someone is listening, or perhaps to convince themselves of their courage to work toward an unknown future. Taylor speaks to this courage:

Taylor: I'm... I'm growing strong... to be tough... to face... what... I know and... I'll tell people what's on my mind. When I was younger I would never do that. I was scared of what would happen.... But I've done that to my Mom and I'm not scared to do that again. ...It's a way to protect myself and be strong (Taylor,I-2,3039).

Taylor has found a way to resist becoming like her mother, an angry, spiteful woman according to her stories.

Dawn is determined to do well in school and get out of the economic hole she has watched her mother sink into. She is "disgusted" with her friends who do not seem to realize that school and a good job, according to Dawn's reasoning, is the ticket to power and a good life. Dawn imagines what education can offer her and is the only Zynami girl who is concerned about her education to any serious degree:

I: Marks are very important to you.
 D: Yeah.... I'm afraid like if I get a really bad mark on something then, like, I won't go to college and if I don't go to college I won't get a job and then I'll be on welfare and then I'll have like tons of kids and I don't want that.
 I: What makes you think that could be a possibility?
 D: It's 'cause my Mom, she didn't go to college and like... right now she's

on disability and right now she doesn't have a job 'cause of her neck and her back ... but, but it's like pay check to pay check and I don't want to be like that! (Dawn,I-1,337-340)

Dawn is determined to learn from her mother's mistakes. She tells me two times in that one short statement, "I don't want to be like that!" In conjunction, as academic expectations are lowered in vocational schools a gulf of meaning develops between the Zynami girls' beliefs about their capabilities in relation to the evaluations of a system of domination that regulate their academic life. As Gilbert and Taylor (1991) remind us in the literature review section, lower expectations make it easier for the girls to feel "smarter," and are often told by their teachers (so the girls say in our first interviews) that they are "working hard." Yet Walkerdine (1989) cautions, this "equal but different" philosophy of vocational high schools attempts to "value working class culture as if exploitation and oppression simply do not exist"(p. 96). For in the real world of work fast approaching "equal but different" means nothing if the girls cannot do a job, a task inevitably evaluated according to middle class norms and standards.

I have left Raz's story of declaration of intent to the last as I argue that, in this study, it best exemplifies the process of meaning-making that can materialize, even if it is not a long lasting or transformative text. Raz tells me this story in her writing, the thoughts lumped together in one paragraph, but separated here to highlight the four steps in the process of moving from despair to hope and possibility:

Raz: I never liked this school because I think that it sucks hard shit. People get away with things and they don't get in shit. My life at this school is not the greatest. But I want to go to a different school and because of all the asshole[s] in this school to[sic]....

I think that we need new kids and staff. Because it's just crazy if you ask me. People take things from other people and it's not fair at all. This school sucks shit a lot.....

I really miss my Mom and I want to be a singer but I don't know
were [sic] to go about this.....

Maybe I should write a book about my life or something that I like doing a lot
and that's sing and writing stuff.... Love, Raz (Raz,W,191-194).

Given all the strikes against her as a marginalized individual, Raz is still able to mobilize a desire to get back home with her Mom, and find a dream that will take her away from a system of domination that only heightens her awareness of her alienation and inadequacies in the face of their power from which she is excluded. But Raz is also intent on finding a space to create her own power and authenticity, perhaps through singing, "People say I have a beautiful voice you know... I think I do too," or through writing the story of her life.

Through the Zynami girls' mobilization of the discursive practice of anger as undoing, as friendship work, as resistance, and as power and possibility, the girls at times withdraw from one another, themselves, and the reality of their experiences, and at other times find moments of creativity and substantial hope. But at *all* times the performance of anger is vital to the girls' struggle to tell their story. Anger signals in contradictory ways that others are to take notice of the Zynami girls' struggle for authenticity, voice, and control. These female, vocational high school students have no intention of being absent from the challenges of life.

IX. Summary and Conclusions

The institution of schooling produces and legitimizes social and cultural forms of power and privilege that are then negotiated by students to construct subjectivity. These gendered, racialized, and classed discursive practices either enable or limit agency and the possibility of transformative action. In association, evaluation systems are the expression of both the dominant ideology, and the preferred model for teaching and learning at that moment in history.

The seven girls in this study, attending a vocational, grade nine high school program are mostly disinterested in the educational content of their classes geared to career development. Given their dismissal of academic work articulated throughout the research project, all but Dawn and Jenn appear to adopt the position that formal schooling has very little to do with their current or future lives. The Zynami girls' culture, norms, and concerns are outside the classroom, evidenced instead in the hallways, where friendships are tried, tested, torn apart, and then once more invested as a site of struggle for authenticity and autonomy.

In answering the questions that have guided this project, this study explores the creation of teen girls' subjectivity as they engage cultural texts, (Reluctant Hero and the Zynami club) through gendered language forms and practices, to position themselves as subjects in vocational high school. To this purpose, I turn to the girls' narratives of their self-professed imperfect selves as they search for connection, meaning, and order in their imperfect world. As they struggle to organize their lives through narratives; they remember it like it was and is: the loss, loneliness, rejection, violence, and fear. They tell it like it is: with frankness, honesty, passion, and immediacy. They live it like it is: with

shrewdness, courage, confusion, fear, and agency. They dream of what it may be: with intensity, longing, and caution.

The findings show how this language, penetrating in its silence or punctuating in its intensity, conscious or unconscious, makes it possible for the girls to exist amidst the contradictions and differences of schooling claims and practices. This struggle is organized and produced within and around intertwining texts, and referenced through body-work, boy-work, and anger-work, to construct meaning in their lives.

This study recognizes that gender, race and class function as markers to position girls subjectively, while they are also mobilized to create relations of inequality in which the subordination of one group is the condition necessary for the power and privilege of another. The Zynami girls in opposition, complicity, or both, negotiate these boundaries of gender, race and class; and whatever the girls say or do can be interpreted in terms of their compliance or resistance to dominant norms of what it is to be a successful woman. What the findings reveal is how gender, race and class referents impact and create a diverse, complex variety of subject positions both available to, and denied the girls, within the institution of vocational school, and within the spaces of their world. At the same time, the findings illuminate the challenges the girls take on as they struggle to decide which set of power relations they wish to accommodate in order to effect their desire for agency.

The girls, when in harmony, are committed to each other, albeit in a raw sort of way. Being there for each other encompasses a physicality that involves usually anything but sweetness, gentle tears, or hugs. Rather it includes "swatting," and yelling, and rough housing embraces. Signs of affection are qualified with, "Not too close 'cause you know in this world you are really on your own and you'd better figure out how to survive." They

do not trust girl friendships to last, as fierce competition for boys and ideal bodies tear them apart. They scream out their frustration when they are ostracized for their appearance in the comparison-work game; although they shriek their delight at the sight of this same friend who may have been the first to abandon them, as disloyalties are quickly forgiven. The only time this bond of friendship is truly in jeopardy is when a boyfriend enters the social scene. Then girlfriends are put on the sidelines as this new romantic relationship becomes a prime site of struggle, one that offers the girls a sense of being "normal" (to be a true woman you need a guy), "natural" (girls define their worth through men), and "desired" (I have a guy and you don't). In addition, this heterosexual relationship is considered necessary work that needs their attention if they are to be prepared for their primary role of wife and mother. As McRobbie (1991) so succinctly states: "To achieve self respect the girl has to escape the 'bitchy,' 'catty,' atmosphere of female company and find a boyfriend as quickly as possible" (p.131).

Girls' subjectivity, in relation to boys, requires the girls to take up a subject position based on patriarchal notions of femininity. Here sweetness, gentle tears, and hugs are evidenced. ...all in an effort to please their boyfriends. The girls accept this subservient role, represented by their whole-hearted folding-in to the dominant ideology of femininity. As "loyal girlfriend" the girls are seen to turn to each other most often to: (1) to receive reinforcement that a please-your-man subject position is the right way to be a woman, and (2) to discuss strategies they can employ to right the problems of their heterosexual relationship which they assume is their responsibility. Rarely in the study do any of the girls consider choosing alternative ways to do "girlfriend."

I am amazed at how prevalent the time worn strategies of heterosexuality are engrained in the girls' positioning of themselves in relation to this discourse of romance. Scholarly evidence points to at least a heightened awareness by many females of the restrictions imposed by patriarchal notions of femininity that suggests their ability to imagine and adopt new ways of thinking. But I saw rare moments of enlightenment in the girls in my study, the practices and rituals (make-up and dieting, subservience, and conformity) were almost always engaged *solely* to attract a boy.

This leads me to question what will happen to these girls whose focus is so clearly centered on the primacy of future wife, while the vocational school focuses on career development. Further light needs to be shed on how these two seemingly conflicting subject positions, at least from the girls' perspective, impact the girls' efforts to name their being and becoming. In conjunction, how *age* is implicated in this struggle for successful self has never been addressed in the studies I have read. After all the girls will only be 17, at the most 18, when they "graduate" to the world of work or home-making.

This study also illuminates how it is impossible to talk about boy-work without talking about body-work, and visa-versa. The Zynami girls engage a circular, ongoing struggle to create themselves as desiring and desired women. The process begins and ends with the body referenced as the primary site of this struggle, and involves mainly mobilizing strategies to become skinny (eating once a day for example), and to create a beautiful face (masquerading with make-up). Beauty they believe is their ticket to a heterosexual relationship. Having a boyfriend is a sign that they are getting it right as young women. Both the literature and my finding align themselves with the notion that girls routinely and often vehemently resist alternative positions of femininity, seeking

instead to accommodate traditional notions of doing and being girl as exemplified in the popular culture texts they engage (romantic movies, fashion magazines, and music videos of their heroes).

I have also attempted to show the extent to which the girls' subjectivity is shaped by their desire for agency in their lives. Their desire for agency is seen as a confirmation of the powerful, privileged self they are trying to create. The Zynami girls' desires for agency, represented and engaged through language forms and practices, are rooted in systems of domination in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the girls struggle to find ways to cross the middle class border, conform to its particular ways of doing femininity, and therefore, perhaps become privy to its potential privileges. On the other hand, the girls look for strategies to resist relations of power that keep them marginalized and treat them unfairly. As non-mainstream, adolescent girls they are acutely aware of their alienation in a multitude of sites, and of their own powerlessness (perhaps anger as undoing signals this feeling of hopelessness) at the hands of dominant systems of control that reinforce passivity and conformity. This contradictory struggle is evident in the boy-hunt. Here the girls can wield their power by being in charge of keeping the relationship together, even if it means giving up their own dreams.

The more dreaming the girls do, the more options they have to choose from in their efforts to construct authentic and unique positions of successful selves. This study argues the importance of the context of the Zynami club to the girls' ability to dream, and to foster their understanding of how they take up particular discourses as their own informed by and informing those dreams and desires. The Zynami club is invested by the girls, (1) as a site to engage social issues in relation to power structures, (2) as a space to

tell previously untold stories, (3) as a safe haven to gain experience in articulating their views in a social group, and begin to learn how to reflect on the social constructedness of those views in relation to each other, and (4) as a pathway promoting strategies to engage new ways of thinking and meaning-making. To sum up, the interpretive community of the Zynami club is a social text mobilized by the girls to produce and engage their specific version of cultural hegemony. One glaring specificity of this hegemony that I encounter in the study, is the girls' use of the discursive practice of anger.

The girls' desire for autonomy and agency fuel their frustration and fortify performances of anger. Writing the positives about girls' struggles to construct meaningful lives at the intersection of school and their marginalized lives needs to be understood in relation to the discourse of anger that permeates every struggle. Though Brown (1999) calls anger "warrior training for social justice," I see an added dimension to the training exercise. While I cannot deny that the Zynami girls engage anger when they feel unjustly treated and alienated by relations of power, I specifically draw the reader's attention to the fact that the girls often use anger to give them the courage to engage the struggle to *belong*, to *connect* with this same system of domination. Anger is a source of knowledge and motivation even as it announces both their resistance and compliance. Their talent for fighting verbally and physically when necessary, to be tough and self-protecting, to speak the unspeakable, threatens to disrupt the boundaries of appropriate femininity. So while the practice of anger fortifies their courage, it also frustrates their efforts to effect what they consider normal, natural femininity based on a dominant norm that sanctions physical control and emotional restraint. The girls narrate themselves in a multitude of complex ways through their mobilization of anger referenced, (1) through self-isolating and self-

injurious practices, (2) through friendship work (girls practice how to stick up for themselves), (3) as silence in their relationships with boys (girls adopt traditional image of passive, compliant woman), and (4) as power and possibility (girls struggle to improve their social positioning). What is important here is a recognition of the *potential* power of anger to be transformative.

Just as the Zynami girls' use of anger imposes limitations as well as opens spaces in which to negotiate their world, there are also limitations in this study that must be acknowledged. First of these, grounded in the framework of Critical Cultural Studies, it is clear that at another time, and in another place, the issues of constituting subjectivity for non-mainstream, vocational, female adolescents may be different. Secondly, I also acknowledge that the context of the Zynami club colors, as much as clarifies, the girls' stories in varying ways, and limits my ability to describe how the girls negotiate the world of the classroom and hallways of Valley Vocational High School. Thirdly, as much as my understanding of the girls' stories is enriched by reflecting on my own biases, I must acknowledge the limiting aspects of these biases. I am constantly aware of the contradictions these sometimes produce but as Scheper-Hughes (1992) posits, "We cannot rid ourselves of the cultural self we bring with us into the field any more than we can disown the eyes, ears and skin through which we take in our intuitive perceptions about the new and strange world we have entered" (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.165). And a final note, I do not intend to present my findings as "truth" but as a "credible" interpretation within the context of the girls' lives. Any "conclusion" is understood as ideas to be shared, discussed, and investigated further.

As educators there is a need to examine ways to transform schooling as a site where knowledge is absorbed, into a space where teachers and students can create new knowledge by establishing collaborative relations of power and privilege, acting together on the social reality of everyday experiences. We need to explore critical strategies to help girls continue to dream, and imagine new ways of thinking about themselves in relation to others. I recognize that this is an extremely difficult task given the demands of institutionalized schooling and its methods of evaluating students based on their knowledge of textual facts. Student centered themes and workshops are often pre-packaged and tightly scheduled with little or no thought as to how the girls might read the text or how their racialized and classed histories affect that reading.

Therefore, centralizing Critical Cultural Studies pedagogically as theory and *practice* (Giroux, 1990 posits that culture work is a pedagogical practice) would fortify both educators' and students' recognition and understanding of the social constructedness of texts, and their relation to each other, seeking to resolve the inequalities of power, justice, and privilege. In addition, the pedagogic practice of Critical Cultural Studies would recognize the potential of students' ordinary, everyday experiences as powerful sites through which to construct meaning. Hey (1997) claims in conjunction that, "We need to recognize the rawness of the informal cultures girls' make in schools rather than rely on uncorroborated fantasies about how we would wish them to be" (p.143). A Critical Cultural Studies approach to education lays out a terrain where this "rawness" can be examined and mobilized in potentially transformative ways.

Having theorized the "rawness," I now draw the reader's attention to the practical implications of these postulations, first as they relate to teacher education programs, and

secondly, as they relate to potentially transformative classroom practices. Beginning teachers often approach literature as a sort of reality that students must be taught how to access, as if they are entering another world by jumping from one isolated reality into another. After all, this is how most of these new teachers engaged poetry, short stories, and Shakespeare as high school students themselves. But, if we are to teach our students how to be critical thinkers, we need to first educate their teachers. If beginning teachers understand that texts are sites through which individuals create their world, they may be prompted to ask, "Who made this text?" "In what context?" "In whose interest?" "To what effect?" Awareness of an individual's engagement with texts might prompt questions such as, "How does a network of representations in any given text work? How (this may certainly be a new concept) do individuals themselves work or effect particular representations? Offering continuing opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice engaging texts as a socially constructed process in their own education program will hopefully strengthen their resolve to change the face of literary practices in the classrooms they will soon enter.

But what of the students themselves? How do the Zynami girls' narratives, and my subsequent analysis, inform the way we think about curriculum and literary practices in vocational high schools? We need to help students recognize the ways in which their own situatedness affects their use of texts. Allowing the texts of their everyday experiences (i.e., music, smoking habits, friendship rules - all constructed texts) into the classroom enhances a student's potential to reflect on the connections in their lives. The students can then be asked to consider questions such as, "What would this (i.e., tobacco industry, *Lord of the Flies*) like their readers to be? What does the story assume about the reader?"

Are you going to allow the text to construct you in such a manner? What bothers you about the text? Why do you think it bothers/does not bother you? What can you do about it? Setting up curriculum practices that allow this kind of questioning demands that students think critically about themselves as subjects in relation to the text. If they are reluctant readers, bring in texts they do engage, such as teen magazines, movies, CD's, pictures, advertisements, anything that will act as a stimulus to get them talking and perhaps writing. Often times vocational schools exclude tasks that demand reading critically in an effort to protect the students from failure. To counter the anxiety that results when reluctant readers are asked to read and write, bring in the movie *Lord of the Flies*, read the story to them, tell the students you are interested in what they have to say, and not how well they can spell or how many words they can read in a minute.

Self esteem is framed in vocational school by the notion that students need to feel good about themselves. I could not agree more, but I am skeptical about programs that foster this self esteem by lowering expectations to ensure that students meet only with success. I am saddened when competitiveness is not championed but avoided to protect adolescents from struggle and conflict. Basic level students are therefore often consigned to mediocrity. I strongly argue that we need to do the opposite to build a strong sense of self worth. To do this these students need to be supported in their struggle, not have the struggle removed. They need to be encouraged to reach, stretch, compete, and then be cheered when they have honestly earned the accolades. This builds self esteem. This is what happened in the Zynami club with a group of girls who said they could not, would not, hated writing. Working together in a small group with support, allowing their everyday lives into the research project to use as texts, allowing them to compete for a

publication spot in Reluctant Hero, only propelled their desire to succeed. They took up the challenge and wrote, and struggled, and resisted, and accommodated, and negotiated, and grew as they actualized their self esteem and constructed their world. Critical Cultural Studies supports this notion of education because it does not settle for mediocrity but highlights the importance of questioning the norm, reflecting on taken for granted notions of truth, advocating new ways of thinking, encouraging the naturalness of struggle with its potential to foster hope and possibility.

Critical Cultural Studies is a theory of action and offers a methodology that would open the theoretical space to allow action research to further explore how female adolescents position themselves subjectively in their struggle to understand their world in relation to others. We need to continue our interrogation of which discourses construct and are constructed by which subject positions, and query how these positions encourage or discourage the creation of agency and the imagining of transformative possibility. Given the girls' overwhelming reliance on patriarchal notions of femininity to construct themselves as successful, more research needs to explore how and why it is that working class, vocational teen girls consent so readily to a system of gendered oppression which appears to offer little benefits to them.

Given that performances of anger are such a prevailing text in the Zynami girls' struggle for normalcy, connection, and power, further studies could explore how the structure of the classroom intersects with the girls' negotiation of social self through the discursive practice of anger. What would happen if the boundary between the dynamics of the Zynami club and the classroom were blurred? I ask this question in relation to my next

query: Why do I see the well mannered "good girls," in the interpretive community of the Zynami club most teachers look for in their classrooms every day?

In another vein, we need to find ways to examine vocational education in relation to its discourse of "good girl" and "successful" student enveloped by standards contrary to their working class culture. Jones (1993) champions the need for explicit exposure of what discourses abound in schools so that "the cultural constructedness of 'school work', 'authority' and so on is laid bare, so that teaching and learning can be seen as forms of cultural practice rather than simply 'good' (or 'bad') teaching, and 'good' (or 'inadequate') work" (p.164).

On a tangible note, the findings suggest that more work in the use of dialogue journals as a rich data collection strategy with "reluctant readers and writers," could be examined for its potential to enrich non-mainstream girls' negotiations of social relations. I suggest that it is a powerful site through which girls can relate their own life experiences and share the material pages of their lives.

The ability to tell another's story is a concrete, social practice of power, and it crystallizes for me the crucial need to stay true to the Zynami girls' stories. I feel privileged to have been allowed a glimpse of their world. I hope my analysis goes a bit of the way to complement, and extend work on the construction of female subjectivity, engaged through language practices. I hope my work clearly illuminates the complexity of the struggle marginalized, teenage girls engage in their desire for agency in vocational high school. It is also my hope that the work the Zynami girls and I collaboratively negotiated and produced will foster their embrace of a pedagogy of hope and possibility that sustains them long after the study ends. Taken from another context, Foucault's words still ring true for

researchers and girls alike: "There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all" (Foucault, 1985, p.8).

The question of knowing is a social process. As Walkerdine (1990) claims: "We are not positioned like a butterfly being pinned to the display board" (p. 98). Rather as Hall (1990) submits, subjectivity needs to be understood as " a matter of becoming as well as being. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists transcending place, time, history and culture... (p. 225). And so this narrative must not end, must not be pinned to the board, rather it must be given wings to be snatched up in places, times, histories, and cultures. And there as Carolyn Steedman (1986) compels us to do, we are to "take all of this, all these secrets and impossible stories, recognize what has been made out of the margins, and then, recognizing it, refuse to celebrate it" (p. 144). The Zynami girls, tellers of tales in search of their wings, ask us to take their secrets and impossible stories and recognize them for what they are. I leave the reader with Dawn's story as she searches for her wings.

What do you see

Look the same way you feel (NO WAY)
 So many people, yet so alone
 So many stuff to do yet so boring.
 Everything the same yet so different.
 Everything is happening yet nothing goes on.
 I'm screaming yet nobody hears.
 I'm smiling yet I'm crying.
 Need to be loved yet go away.
 Need to learn yet don't want to know.
 Alive yet dead!

Dawn, Zynami, April 1999

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Appendix I
Informed Consent Letter to Parents/Guardians

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier St.,
P.O. Box 450, Stn. A
Ottawa, Ontario

Principal Investigator: Nadene A. Henry-Keon

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants, the written consent of the participants must be obtained. This does not imply, of course, that the project in question necessarily involves a risk. In view of the respect owed the participants, the University of Ottawa and the research funding agencies have made this type of agreement mandatory.

A study concerned with female adolescents' perspectives on a teen magazine is being conducted in the spring of 1999 by a researcher from the University of Ottawa. The Ottawa-Carleton Research Advisory Committee has granted permission to the researcher to request your cooperation in this study. The purpose of the study is to use a teen magazine as a tool to understand the perspectives of six grade nine female adolescents as they question and examine their present and future social, academic, and career options.

Your teenager's participation in this study will include attending twelve small group sessions facilitated by the researcher. There will be two sessions per week. Each session will last fifty minutes and will be organized in consultation with the teachers to minimize interference in daily routines. One session will consist of a group discussion precipitated by the stories appearing in a Canadian teen magazine, Reluctant Hero. This magazine is written by teenage girls throughout Canada. All group sessions will be tape-recorded. The second session of the week will consist of a writing assignment for the student participant. Style and content will be up to the student. Your teen will have the opportunity to submit her work for possible publication in the magazine if she so desires. If your teen participates she will be interviewed twice in the spring of 1999. One interview is scheduled at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study. Each interview will last approximately forty-five minutes and will be tape-recorded.

Participation is completely voluntary and you or your teen may choose to withdraw at any point during the process and refuse to answer questions without penalty. Only students with written permission may participate. All information will be kept strictly confidential. All field notes will be transcribed into printed form, and your teen's name will not appear on any transaction, nor be associated with the study or any publication resulting from this research. No information related to this research will appear in any of your teen's school records.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee (562-5800, ext. 4057). If you have any questions you may contact me, Nadene Henry-Keon, at (829-3872).

There are two copies of the consent form for you to sign and date. Please return promptly, by mail, in the self-addressed envelope or have your teen drop it off in the school office. You should keep one copy.

Appendix II
Parent/Guardian Consent Form

The information collected for this project is confidential and protected under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1989.

I have read and understand the request for my daughter to participate in the study. I have discussed it with my daughter and...

----- I give permission for my daughter to participate.

----- I do not give permission for my daughter to participate.

Name of Student: (please print) -----

Name of Parent/Guardian: (please print) -----

Signature of Parent/Guardian: ----- Date: -----

Signature of Researcher: ----- Date: -----

If you wish to be informed of the study's findings please indicate below and provide an address where a summary of the results can be sent to you. If you do not want to leave an address, I may be reached at 829-3872 and will be happy to answer your questions.

----- I would like a copy of the study summary.

My address is:

Appendix III
Informed Consent Letter to Student

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier St.,
P.O. Box 450, Stn. A
Ottawa, Ontario

Principal Investigator: Nadene A. Henry-Keon

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants, the written consent of the participants must be obtained. This does not imply, of course, that the project in question necessarily involves a risk. In view of the respect owed the participants, the University of Ottawa and the research funding agencies have made this type of agreement mandatory.

A study concerned with female adolescents' perspectives on a teen magazine is being conducted in the spring of 1999 by a researcher from the University of Ottawa. The Ottawa-Carleton Research Advisory Committee has granted permission to the researcher to request your cooperation in this study. The purpose of the study is to use a teen magazine as a tool to understand the perspectives of six grade nine female adolescents as they question and examine their present and future social, academic, and career options.

Your participation in this study will include attending twelve small group sessions facilitated by the researcher. There will be two sessions per week. Each session will last fifty minutes and will be organized in consultation with the teachers to minimize interference in daily routines. One session will consist of a group discussion precipitated by the stories appearing in a Canadian teen magazine, Reluctant Hero. This magazine is written by teenage girls throughout Canada. All group sessions will be tape-recorded. The second session of the week will consist of a writing assignment. The style and content will be up to you. You will have the opportunity to submit your work for possible publication in the magazine if you so desire. If you participate you will be interviewed twice in the spring of 1999. One interview is scheduled at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study. Each interview will last approximately forty-five minutes and will be tape-recorded.

Participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any point during the process and refuse to answer questions without penalty. Only students with written permission may participate. All information will be kept strictly confidential. All field notes will be transcribed into printed form, and your name will not appear on any transaction, nor be associated with the study or any publication resulting from this research. No information related to this research will appear in any of your school records.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee (562-5800, ext. 4057). If you have any questions you may contact me, Nadene Henry-Keon, at (829-3872).

There are two copies of the consent form for you to sign and date. Please return a copy to me or to the school office. You should keep one copy.

Appendix IV
Student Consent Form

The information collected for this project is confidential and protected under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1989.

I have read the request to participate in the study concerning my perspectives on life in vocational high school.

----- I agree to participate.

----- I do not agree to participate.

Name of Student: (please print) -----

Signature of Student: ----- Date: -----

Signature of Researcher: ----- Date: -----

If you wish to be informed of the study's findings please indicate below and provide an address where a summary of the results can be sent to you. If you do not want to leave an address, I may be reached at 829-3872 and will be happy to answer your questions.

----- I would like a copy of the study summary.

My address is:

Appendix V
Informed Consent Letter to Principal

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Education
145 Jean-Jacques Lussier St.,
P.O. Box 450, Stn. A
Ottawa, Ontario

Principal Investigator: Nadene A. Henry-Keon

Whenever a research project is undertaken with human participants, the written consent of the participants must be obtained. This does not imply, of course, that the project in question necessarily involves a risk. In view of the respect owed the participants, the University of Ottawa and the research funding agencies have made this type of agreement mandatory.

A study concerned with female adolescents' perspectives on a teen magazine is being conducted in the spring of 1999 by a researcher from the University of Ottawa. The Ottawa-Carleton Research Advisory Committee has granted permission to the researcher to request your cooperation in this study. The purpose of the study is to use a teen magazine as a tool to understand the perspectives of six grade nine female adolescents as they question and examine their present and future social, academic, and career options.

The students' participation in this study will include attending twelve small group sessions facilitated by the researcher. There will be two sessions per week. Each session will last fifty minutes and will be organized in consultation with the school staff to minimize interference in daily routines. One session will consist of a group discussion precipitated by the stories appearing in a Canadian teen magazine, Reluctant Hero. This magazine is written by teenage girls throughout Canada. All sessions will be tape-recorded. The second session of the week will consist of a writing assignment. The style and content will be up to the students. Students will have the opportunity to submit their work for possible publication in the magazine if they so desire. If the student participates she will be interviewed twice in the spring of 1999. One interview is scheduled at the beginning of the study and one at the end of the study. Each interview will last approximately forty-five minutes and will be tape-recorded.

Participation is completely voluntary and you or the student may choose to withdraw at any point during the process and refuse to answer questions without penalty. Only students with written permission may participate. All information will be kept strictly confidential. All field notes will be transcribed into printed form, and students' names or the school name will not appear on any transaction, nor be associated with the study or any publication resulting from this research. No information related to this research will appear in any of the students' school records.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project may be addressed to the Secretariat of the Ethics Committee (562-5800, ext. 4057). If you have any questions you may contact me, Nadene Henry-Keon, at (829-3872).

There are two copies of the consent form for you to sign and date. Please return a copy to me. You should keep one for your own records.

**Appendix VI
Principal Consent Form**

The information collected for this project is confidential and protected under the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 1989.

I have read the request for grade nine female adolescents to participate in the study concerning their perspectives on a Canadian teen magazine written by girls for girls.

----- I give permission for these students to participate.

----- I do not give permission for these students to participate.

Name of Principal: (please print) -----

Signature of Principal: ----- Date: -----

Signature of Researcher: ----- Date: -----

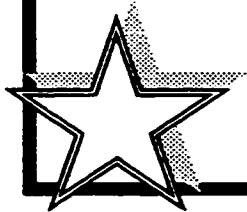
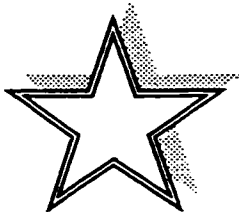
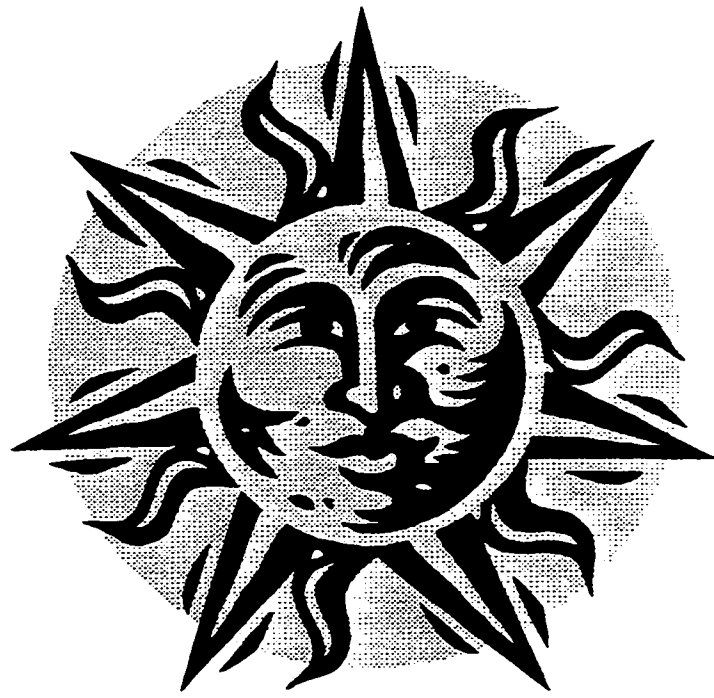
Appendix VII General Interview Questions

Hailing the Hero: Critical Cultural Studies, Subjectivity and Girls in Vocational High School

This study examines the engagement of teenage girls with a popular culture teen magazine, Reluctant Hero, as they negotiate their place and identity within the context of a vocational high school. Open-ended interview questions will allow me to; first, “break the ice” with the students; secondly, facilitate my understanding of the students’ perceived notions of what their school culture (academic and social) offers, or does not offer them and thirdly, explore how these teens feel about attending vocational high school. The following questions will guide the first fifty minute interview with each student:

1. How was it decided that this particular school would be best suited to your needs?
2. Would you rather attend your local high school or ----- (name of school)?
3. Can you list three words that describe this school?
4. What do you wish for or dream about or need at this time of your life?
5. How has the school met your needs/dreams/wishes, both academically and socially?
6. How has the school frustrated your needs/dreams/wishes, both academically and socially?
7. What do you think the school/teachers expect of you as a teenager, as a student?
8. How does that make you feel?
9. What do you do in your spare/free/leisure time, in school and when you are not in school?
10. What would you like to be able to do in your spare/free/leisure time?
11. What is it you imagine or hope that your future will be once you graduate?
12. How do you think the school is preparing you for the future?
13. How does your life outside the school compare to your life inside the school?
14. What does it mean to be successful as a teenager, as a student, as a graduate?
15. Who are your heroes – in sports – in media – in school – in family/community?
16. List three words to describe yourself.
17. List three words that your friends would use to describe you.

ZYNAMI



WHO AM I

**I AM
THE SILENCE OF THE MOVING CLOUDS
THE PATIENCE OF THE CATERPILLAR**

**I AM
THE STRENGTH OF THE MIGHTY WIND
THE COURAGE OF THE BEE**

**I AM
THE SOFTNESS OF THE SWAYING TREE
THE WISDOM OF THE EAGLE**

**I AM
THE LOVE AND HATE
THE TEAR AND SMILE**

**I AM
A MOTHER AND CHILD
A LOVER AND GIVER**

**I AM
A WOMAN.**

Submitted by: RAZ

I think **Zynami** is really cool. One reason is that it makes me want to get a job. Also, it makes me happy never sad. Only sometimes am I sad when I hear something like when your boyfriend goes to jail or that your boyfriend is dead. It is hard to hear things like that. **Zynami** makes me feel like all the people in it are so nice to me. They are never mean at all. They never say, "Shut up" to me at all. They are my friends.

✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂

I hate my life and to me I think this group Zynami helps me a lot... well, I know who my real friends are.

✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂✂

I like how people keep things to themselves and don't share anything with people outside of the group.

Advice to Alexandra...

I know how you feel. I don't get bullied that much anymore (since this school), but the last school I was in I was the bitch. So all I can really say to you is don't go to their level. If you do they will realize that it is getting on your nerves. Just say stuff like, "Oh, that's a shame 'cause I really like you!" or, "Too bad I can't get to know your good side." They will keep it up for a long time but after they grow up they will realize that they were the bitches. Just remember they're the problem, not you. For the time being, do stuff that makes you feel good... read, write, sing, or just sit in front of the mirror and tell yourself that you are beautiful and smart. Keep yourself very busy. Do lots of extra things at school, like extra homework, projects, help with younger kids work (tutor). Don't ever give up on your school work because in the real world people don't care if you were popular in school. It is how smart you are.



I'd introduce myself and tell her I know how she feels 'cause I was bullied in grade 7 by my own cousin 'cause I wouldn't do something with her. She called me a bitch, skank, and fat. She pushed me into lockers, punched me, threw pens and erasers at me in art class, and tripped me. I went through this for one year. At the end of the year she said, "Sorry." My advice to you is don't let them get to you because they are jealous of you. And it doesn't matter what you look like, what counts is the inside. As much as it hurts you ignore them. You are a better person. Just walk away. Then they will get mad 'cause you ignore them so it pisses them off. Then they'll stop. ... What stresses me is best friends, boyfriends, ex-boyfriends and school. My best friend, 'cause she thinks she's ugly and fat but she is not. She's pretty and skinny. Ex-boyfriends when they find out you have another boyfriend and they try to break you up. School, 'cause I'm trying to get good marks! So you think you got it bad, you don't. Just remember that you're not the problem, they are! Good luck. Use my advice.... **Jenn**

Poetry # 1

Crying in My Room

At this moment I started crying
But my love for you will never die.
Oh my love, why can't you see?
My loving is not strong enough.

I'm crying in my room.
Vivid memories of you and I.
I can't take it anymore!
Come back, it's driving me crazy.

At the beginning it was a dream
As time goes on it seems like a nightmare.
The fighting only got worse and worse.
The fighting then tore us apart.

I'm crying in my room.
Vivid memories of you and I.
I can't take it anymore.
Come back, it's driving me crazy.

My heart is aching for your love.
My mind is always on you.
Memories float of when we were happy.
But now I'm crying in my room.

It's driving me crazy. Just come back please
I'm crazy for you
Flying high
Then I said good-bye.

Written By: Taylor

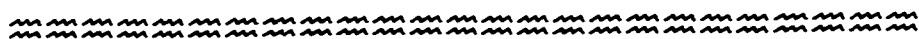
More advice to Alexandra...

I would tell her to live her life as much as she can while she's still young. Don't let them bring you down. I have problems too. I was once like you. I couldn't help myself either but I did and if you could see me now from a year ago you would be amazed. My stresses were as high as yours. People would pretend to be my friend then get me where they wanted and tease me and beat me. I am small and I could not do anything but cry. So I understand where you are coming from. It always gets better. I switched schools and I have a boyfriend that loves me and won't let me do dumb things. It's your life. Change it now! Don't let people bring you down. I did and I regret it and so do they. I was scared to go to school because of what they would do. I never let them hurt me after I started into suicide. I thought about killing myself for six months and then my sister asked me why I would do something like this to please other people. I cut my arms, legs, face and it hurt. I went to counseling. Don't let it go this way for you. You don't want scars on the outside. Keep them inside so no one can see them. And now about your past. It is your move. Do whatever you have to do to get out. Change schools. Make new friends. Don't tell them about your past. Kyra



MONDAY MORNING

THIS MORNING I WOKE UP. I DIDN'T WANT TO WAKE UP. I WAS HAVING THE COOLEST DREAM. THEN I GOT DRESSED, GRABBED MY STUFF FOR SCHOOL, WENT OUT THE DOOR AND GOT ON MY BUS...



Grounded !

I hate it when I get grounded to my bedroom. I have to think about what I've done and sometimes I have to write down lines of what I did. Sometimes I have to write down maybe even what I'm sorry for and why. Maybe when I'm grounded I have to do extra chores for a week and a lot more sometimes....



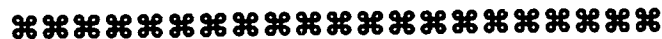
98 Degrees Concert

On March 17, 1999, 98 Degrees came to Ottawa at the Congress Centre. It was 7:00 pm. Joee was opening for them. He sang, *Baby If You Want It Come and Get It*. Everybody was screaming and crying. He was wearing a red, red jersey. Then 98 degrees came out. They sang, *Its All Because Of You* to their fans. It was so fun! It was over at 11:00 pm. I went home to bed very happy!



Fitting in.....

If I had a perfect life, people would not put other people down. There would be no negative energy. Everyone would be happy, kind and full of fun. It wouldn't matter if you were a straight A student, a failure or just didn't care about school. The hardest thing right now in my life is school work. I'm really scared about my grades. I used to have marks in the 80's but now they are in the 60's, just in a few months. I just don't care. It's not that I don't care. It's just that I don't really feel like doing school work. I started of caring but not as much now and that scares me. I want to go to college but if I don't get a scholarship, I won't be able to go because my family doesn't have a lot of money. I have always thought I'm not pretty so the only way I can fit into life is by being smart. But I'm not smart or pretty so how am I going to fit in!?



If I had a perfect life I would marry Ryan and have a nice apartment and a good job. I'd have a nice wedding, nice clothes and I would be tall and skinny. There would be no fighting in the world. Everybody would be nice to each other. I would have one pet and three fish and go shopping for clothes and a nice stereo system. That's my perfect life... And my best friend would marry Adam and have a great life as she deserves it. I want my parents to be happy and to have a loving family. Jenn



*🕯️🕯️ **A happy birthday day....** 🕯️🕯️🕯️*

My friends had a surprise party for my birthday at lunch. There was cake, balloons, pop and music. My boyfriend was there. It was my friends, Taylor and Shirley's idea. Thanks guys! I love you.



THE FIRST DAY OF HIGH SCHOOL...

IT ALL STARTED ON SEPTEMBER 3, 1998. I WAS SCARED. I WAS GOING TO A NEW SCHOOL. I WAS GETTING READY AND I HAD BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH. I WENT TO CATCH THE OC BUS. I WAS BITING MY NAILS. I ARRIVED AT SCHOOL. I WAS SHAKING. THE BELL RANG. I WENT TO THE ROOM THEY TOLD ME.



POETRY # 2***How The World Is***

Oh starry night, oh starry night
 How do your stars shine so bright?
 Seeing Jupiter and Mars
 Up so high and so far.

Dark and dreary
 How the world is
 The world will go around and around
 People sing crazy things.

How the world's not meant to be
 With anger, hate and pain.
 This the world should not be
 The children don't feel safe.

Love, courage, and lots of care
 That's what we children would like.
 So we would know that everyone
 Has love, courage and cares.

Anger and pain should not be
 A problem in any life.
 But there is something you can do
 In the passing light.

You want, you do too.
 But at times people won't care,
 love or have courage.
 They have to believe in themselves
 if they want to have a better world.

Lets try it together. We can do it together.

Written By: Taylor



♦♦♦ The story of my life ♦♦♦

My life is about drugs and alcohol and sex. When I was 12 years old I was doing alcohol. On my 13th birthday I was doing drugs and sex. My life now is not the same, but when I say it's not the same, I mean I'll never be myself again. People call me pot head or druggie! Sometimes when I get up I look at myself and say I'm not me anymore. My grades are not the same anymore! October first to the eighth I ran away because of my friends, my life and my Mom, my boyfriends and my Dad. It's been fifteen years since I saw my dad and I just got to meet him on January 15th of 1999. When I saw him it was like looking at myself because he did drugs and alcohol too. I'm in a group home because me and my Mom don't get along anymore. I feel like my Mom does not want me any more. I get so stressed out because of my Mother and my group home and my friends. Just because I do drugs it doesn't mean that I'm a bad teen in life. I go down town and smoke pot and other drugs. Guys, well they just want sex and other sh- - like that. When I walk down the hallway people just look at me and say, "Do you want to go and smoke some pot with me some time?" sometimes I say, "No," and sometimes I say, "Yes." all I want is a right life for me. Why does it have to happen to me? Maybe it's just my friends. It's April 7th and I did drugs again because that's my life, f - - ed up, and all I am is just a pot head. But sometimes I don't do pot. I just do alcohol and get f - - ed. That's what I do and I don't like it. But I have done sex for a long time and I just think that teens should not be doing sex, alcohol and drugs because look at my life. **Raz**



Your cheating heart...

I found out on Tuesday March 23, 1999 that my boyfriend cheated on me with one of my bestest friends. I was so upset! I went home and I started to cry. I thought it was all my fault! I was wrong! I'll never be able to trust another guy for a long time! Cause I got hurt! What do I do??? **Jenn**



 ***I Choose My Attitude*** 

***Two frogs fell into a can of cream
Or so I've been told.
The can was deep and shiny
The cream was deep and cold.***

***"What's the use?" cried Filbert
"There's no help around
good-bye tragic world"
and weeping he drowned.***

***But Freddy
Made of stronger stuff
Swam long and hard
And he didn't give up!***

***For hours he paddled
Not stopping to mutter
And before he knew it he jumped right out
For the cream had turned to butter!***

**Author Unknown
Submitted by: Nadene**

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☺ *Smile away... give a smile away today.*
Dawn ☺



My Hobby

Witchcraft for me is something spiritual and something I do for a hobby. Witchcraft is really cool. Here is a really awesome protection spell.

Sit or stand before any fire. Look into the flames (Or flame if using a candle). Visualize the fire bathing you with glowing, protective light. The fire creates a flaming, shimmering sphere around you. If you wish, say the following:

*“Craft the spell in the fire;
Craft it well; Weave it higher.
Weave it now of shining flame;
None shall come to hurt or maim.
None shall pass this fiery wall;
None shall pass no, none at all.”*

Submitted by: Taylor

What is going On????????

It's so scary! What is the world coming to? I mean, the shooting at the bus station, the war and now the high school shooting. Why is every one going mad? There are little ways people go mad too. Like my friends are all happy and then all of a sudden they will be mad, crying or quiet. It's like the universe is out of wack! Sometimes it feels like we won't make it to the year 2000.

MYSELF

*YOU SEE YOURSELF AND YOU
THINK OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING RIGHT*

*YOU ASK YOURSELF AND YOU SAY
WHY AM I HERE AND WHAT DO I DO?*

*THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS TO SAY
"I LOVE MYSELF"... BUT THEN YOU THINK,*

*"I HAVE NO INSPIRATION."
THEN YOU SAY TO YOURSELF, "WHY ME?..."
IT'S JUST THAT WAY BECAUSE OF WHAT YOU ARE."*

*YOU HAVE NO INSPIRATION.
YOU ASK YOURSELF, "WHY THIS LIFE?"
YOU SAY TO YOURSELF, "WHY MY LIFE?"*

Written By: Raz

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Mood Swings



It all starts with my cousin Shawn. He is 17. He can be nice but when my sister is around he is mean. He hates my sister so he changes. It drives me crazy. But when we are alone he's so nice to me. We get along! I tell him how I feel. He says, "Sorry." He doesn't mean to be mean but when my sister's around he is!

JENN

Why Sports are My Life

I started playing sports in grade 3. They took all my pain that I had inside away and no one knew about it. I could go and play sports and act as if nothing was wrong. In sports people were my friends but out of sports people didn't care if they liked me or not. Ya, they were my friends because I was so good in sports and they wanted me on their team. I remember one time I was really sick and I couldn't play. They blamed their losing on me because I wasn't feeling well and it was all my fault. Now people like me for how I am and if I don't feel well it's OK and they like me in and out of sports. I am who I am. I didn't change and people like me for who I am now. I'm liked for what I am. Sports are still everything to me. **KYRA**



Look The Same Way You Feel

Look the same way you feel (NO WAY)

So many people, yet so alone.

So much stuff to do, yet so boring.

Everything the same, yet so different.

Everything is happening, yet nothing goes on.

I'm screaming, yet nobody hears.

I'm smiling, yet I'm crying.

Need to be loved, yet go away.

Need to learn, yet don't want to know.

Alive... yet dead.

♥♥♥♥♥ Memories of a Friend ♥♥♥♥♥

My boyfriend's name was Kris. He died in September, the third week of school. The doctors told me that he died of a heart attack. He had heart problems when he was a little boy. I think it's weird to just think of a dead guy who was your boyfriend. It helps me get through my day thinking of him. But every time I think of him I cry or get stomach aches and it hurts just to be alive without him. I'm going out with a guy for now, but I'm not having too much fun with him now or ever... not as much fun as with Kris. Yes, it's very painful to loose someone you love. You never know if you want to live or die... just to be with them in the same place. I remember the good times we had, going to fairs, dinner, dancing or just talking together... His birthday is April, 30th. I don't know how I'm going to celebrate his birthday this year... maybe I'll look at his picture and dance or sing and say, "Thank-You" for being there for me... maybe I'll buy some flowers for his grave... SM



My Big Sister

My big sister helps me in so many ways. She makes me feel like I have a future and that it is worth being here. She listens to me when I talk and she doesn't treat me like I'm 5 years old. Why do people think teens are dumb or mean? Not all teens are like that.





At this moment...

I really miss my Mom and I want to be a singer but I don't know where to go about doing this... maybe I should write a book about my life or about something that I like doing a lot... I want to sing and write... at this moment... RAZ

I'm not feeling the same today. I am crying inside and I don't know why. Today is very different from other days. I don't feel like doing the same things as I did other days but I don't know how to change. I don't want to change but I'm so tired of being in the same things. How I feel is how I am. I guess I won't change. I'll stay the same and I'll feel this way for this is how I feel... at this moment... KYRA



A Fashion Show to brighten the day...

I have a very cool life. Sometimes it can be OK and sometimes it can be sh ---! Well, anyway I think we need to put on a fashion show. Also all the girls in our club are really pretty. I hate it when I hear, "Oh I am so ugly or I am too-fat!" I think everyone is pretty. A fashion show is cool. You get to wear all these nice clothes. In this fashion show I am going to be with my friends and I am going to be going up on stage with my friends. SQUEEKY

Poetry # 3

Crazy

Crazy things have happened.
Love is a pain.
With dying devotion
I think I'm going insane.

I'm crazy for you.
Are you crazy for me?
I'm crazy for you.
Can't you see?

Am I blinding you?
I really hope not.
If I'm blinding you
I've already been caught.

I'm crazy for you.
Are you crazy for me?
I'm crazy for you.
Can't you see?

Ending love will never die.
Going around in circles,
Flying very high.
People dancing high and low
While you and I are dancing slow.

I'm crazy for you.
Are you crazy for me?
I'm crazy for you.
Can't you see?

Written By: Taylor