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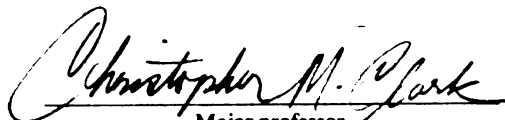
**Taking Ourselves Seriously: Girls Constructing  
Intellectual Identities in a Book Discussion Group**

presented by

**Susan Michelle Wallace-Cowell**

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Educational Psychology

  
Major professor

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**TAKING OURSELVES SERIOUSLY:  
GIRLS CONSTRUCTING INTELLECTUAL IDENTITIES IN  
A BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP**

By

Susan Michelle Wallace-Cowell

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to  
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## ABSTRACT

### TAKING OURSELVES SERIOUSLY: GIRLS CONSTRUCTING INTELLECTUAL IDENTITIES IN A BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

By

Susan Michelle Wallace-Cowell

This study describes and explores adolescent girls' identity development in the context of a book discussion group. This has been a collaborative intervention in which the researcher and the participants together explored issues surrounding their identity development. The exploration of these issues was focused around discussions and writing based on reading books that were selected collaboratively. The books were gender-sensitive in that they focused on female characters during adolescence who were dealing with varying identity issues: school, family, death, puberty, maturation, sibling rivalry. The purpose of this intervention was to explore the following questions: How does a caring and connected context facilitate the emergence of voice for girls?; How will participation in a book discussion group facilitate intellectual identity exploration and development for participating adolescent females?

Researchers have found that for young women in particular, this time period has been characterized as one of great concern as young girls have been shut down and become silenced in school and other activities as they navigate adolescence and begin trying to resolve identity issues in their lives. As has been illustrated in other gender-sensitive research on adolescent development, girls have different ways of coming to know and

learn that may not be valued in schools. Specifically, girls benefit from supportive, nurturing and caring environments where trust can be developed and their voices can be heard. This study sought to construct such an environment and use books as a common ground on which to explore issues central to their lives that might not otherwise be addressed or expressed in their learning. The most meaningful way to care for and nurture girls is to listen to them and take them seriously as intelligent people. By engaging them in the intellectual acts of reading, writing and talking about literature, the girls were not only able to be taken seriously by me and others in the group, but they began to take themselves more seriously as well. Creating the opportunity for them to take themselves seriously as people who have something to contribute could change the way they understand their competence in other aspects of their lives and ultimately change the ways they view themselves as intellectually capable young women.

In effect, this study set up a greenhouse within which to describe girls' development and better understand the processes of identity development co-constructed within (and outside) a book discussion group. In the end, this is my story of how seven girls made sense of their experiences and how I believe they are constructing identities. This dissertation demonstrates ways in which girls can flourish by being taken seriously and sheds light on social structures that may help them to better navigate and manage adolescence and their lives.

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To my husband, Kevin, who provided  
unconditional support, love and encouragement throughout this process

To my parents who are always my greatest cheering section  
and who never stop believing in me

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: TELLING MY STORY, EXPLAINING MY STUDY

This study is about girls taking themselves seriously as thinkers and knowers. Situated within a book discussion group, this study highlights the processes of identity development among adolescent participants, and describes one type of context within which positive conceptions and images of one's self and one's voice could begin to develop. As such, this study is both about the context and the processes involved in creating a unique opportunity for girls to come together around the common ground of books and to take themselves seriously as individuals and as intellectuals. Taking one's self seriously is perhaps the most important thing that young women have to learn to do as they navigate adolescence. For girls in particular, adolescence can be a time of great loss where girls come to doubt themselves as thinkers, learners, and knowers while they struggle to negotiate multiple contexts and relationships in their daily lives. For me, this tale was all too real.

My Story: It was during high school that I experienced a shift from being a vocal, contributing member of my freshman English and biology classes, to becoming a received knower (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and silent doubter of my intellectual ability in my junior physics class. Although I felt that I belonged in the class socially, intellectually I felt isolated, disconnected and much like an impostor (MacIntosh, 1985). I wondered what I was doing in accelerated classes and came to question my ability as a learner and as a knower.

When I recall my years prior to seventh grade, I conjure up memories of excellent grades and confidence about myself as a smart person. I was confident in myself as a capable learner and student, but I also had no friends. I remember being sent to a school counselor because my parents were worried about my lack of friends. I don't remember being worried about this. I thought that I had friends and told the counselor I didn't know if other kids liked me because I was smart or if they liked me because of who I was as a person. I also remembered my parents talking to me and wondering if I understood why I didn't have friends. Mostly, I just remember getting the sense that it was not good for me not to have friends and that being smart and talking about being smart were not the ways to make friends.

It was at this time that my family moved to a new town and school and I experienced a shift in my attitude about myself and others. I went from working hard and trying to get the highest grades in school (math in particular), to suddenly being much more influenced by what the other kids thought and did. It is not that I stopped trying hard, but having recently moved to a new school I wanted to fit in. I worked very hard at playing down my academic ability and I focused on athletics, music and other social endeavors. Being smart and capable became associated with isolation from friends and other people. I don't know if this shift in my beliefs was the start of my change in attitude about academics, but I do remember feeling that social acceptance was valued more highly than intellectual pursuits. I still worked hard, but I began to value my ability to interact with people more than I valued my ability to think. It was as if social qualities were the only ones that should matter. I also emerged as a singer and athlete during that

year, so recognition was given for activities outside my academic studies (though I did receive the math award as the outstanding math student when I graduated from eighth grade). The extra-curricular recognition created a feeling of belonging and acceptance, which carried forward into high school.

Most of the students in my high school classes were good students like me who wanted to do well. I did join cross country and choir my first year, but I still worked hard academically and seemed to have no fear of engaging in my classes as a vocal participant. I asked questions and worked hard in all of my classes particularly during my first and second years of high school. Interestingly, however, the recognition and feeling of belonging still came primarily from my other activities--namely singing and running. Somewhere during this time I began to change. I remember starting to feel embarrassed and stupid about asking questions in classes and at the same time feeling intimidated by the quick question/answer style of my teachers. I recall sitting in physics class where I suddenly felt that I knew nothing and was somehow not capable of finding out anything. I no longer spoke at all--at least not in the classroom setting. My self-evaluation became based on my ability to engage interpersonally with others. I had become unable to see myself as an individual with true intellectual capabilities. As an alternative, I focused on my running and singing and gained confidence in these pursuits as a way to balance my academic insecurities and silence. In academic pursuits, I developed a circular, self-defeating mode of thinking; I didn't want to try too hard when it came to accomplishing tasks because I was afraid to try too hard and fail. If I didn't try too hard and still did all right then I would tell myself that I could have done better if I had tried

harder. I know that I was intimidated by many of the students in the accelerated classes, and often wondered how I ended up in the same class with them. Interestingly, I never believed that there was anything significant about the changes that occurred other than that **I** must have done something to cause them to happen. I felt a sense of isolation during this time, and felt that I was supposed to go through this time alone. I never considered that it might have been the nature of the discourse community or the social system's response to my gender that might have interacted to create the restricted image I had of myself as a thinker and knower. This carried through to college and only began to change during my master's program where I began to excel and push myself academically and intellectually. I argue that my experiences in adolescence had a great impact on the subsequent choices I made in terms of where I would go to school, what I would pursue while I was there, and how I would engage as a learner and a thinker.

My Study. My experiences during adolescence were the very ones that have led me to try to better understand girls' identity development during adolescence. What is it about adolescence that creates a crisis for many girls about their intellectual identities? What might be done to foster intellectual identity development in girls' personal and academic lives? Upon reflection on my experiences and encountering similar stories told by my female undergraduate students at Michigan State University, I became interested in conceptions of identity and identity development in girls--particularly during adolescence.

Sadker and Sadker (1994) reflect some of my experiences and questions in their book Failing at Fairness: How America's Schools Cheat Girls. The book addresses the issue of sexism in the classroom as evidenced through twenty years of classroom research.

Although, as suggested by the research, girls appear to be doing better on the surface because they get better grades and less punishment, the result is that "girls receive less time, less help, and fewer challenges. Reinforced for passivity, their independence and self-esteem suffer" (p. 44). Sadker and Sadker cite the American Association of University Women (AAUW) study, conducted in 1990, which revealed a large self-esteem gap between girls and boys as they entered adolescence. Researchers have suggested that middle and high schools are large and socially complicated places that are isolating and out of touch with the needs of adolescents (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker and Sadker, 1994). Many adolescent girls deny their intelligence as they enter adolescence as a way to become accepted and fit in with social norms (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). For many young women this results in a loss of voice and feelings of isolation during a time where connection and caring are needed (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). In addition, research has indicated that as self-esteem drops so does the belief that one is capable, particularly in math and science where significant drop-offs in achievement are noted for girls. Young girls begin to perceive these subjects as "cold, impersonal, and without clear application to their lives or society" (Sadker and Sadker, 1994, p. 122).

In addition to the experiences of isolation and disconnection, high schools are constructed around patriarchal conceptions of teaching where competition and independence are still valued over ways of knowing that value cooperation and connection. Girls are struggling to stay in connection and relation to others within multiple contexts in their lives, as well as to function intellectually in a school

environment that creates isolation and does not support the ways in which they may come to know. Thus, girls do not have access to opportunities where they can push themselves intellectually outside (and often inside) the classroom. There are activities that claim intellectual connections, such as the National Honor Society, but instead of being sites of intellectual expression and development become sites for fund raising and organizational issues. Girls are left largely without experiences within which to construct positive images of themselves as intellectually capable, and are also left isolated and disconnected from their other experiences in school. If adolescent girls are struggling with disconnection, isolation and lack of intellectual stimulation, then how might a context which promotes connection, caring, voice and intellectual stimulation help girls to see themselves as thinkers and knowers? Is it possible to create an environment that could foster their identity exploration, which in turn could help them to better navigate this crucial period in their development? This study addresses these types of questions.

The intellectual framework for this study, then, draws from feminist and social constructivist conceptions of knowing and learning that might facilitate intellectual growth and confidence within a community of learners. In essence, this study created one model for an optimal intellectual experience where girls could engage in intellectual dialogue about books and each others' lives and also where they could explore and develop positive conceptions of voice, self and mind. In order for them to do this and for me to study it, I created an intervention that had a chance to compete with the other social forces in their lives that are so salient and that work against girls constructing a view of themselves as people whose self and ideas should be taken seriously. The pages that

follow will show how this was done with seven adolescent girls in a book club discussion group.

Specifically, this study qualitatively and ethnographically describes and explores the learning and intellectual identity development experiences of adolescent girls participating in a book club. I wanted to understand what would happen when a caring and connected learning context is created with adolescent girls using gender and identity-related literature in a book discussion group. The following research questions guided my study:

Main Questions:

1. How can reading, writing and talking about gender and identity-related books facilitate identity development for adolescent girls?
2. How does a learning context that values caring, connection, and relational ways of knowing facilitate the emergence of voice for girls?

Coming to an understanding of the experiences of these girls contributes to knowledge about girls' identity development, particularly as it relates to contexts that may support the emergence of voice and to positive conceptions themselves as thinkers and knowers. Understanding adolescent girls' identity development can inform discussions about the reasons girls may or may not be engaging in more challenging subject matter as they move from middle school into high school. It sheds light on situations where girls seem to lose confidence, become silenced, and come to doubt themselves as thinkers and knowers. This study also has implications for teachers'

practices, particularly with their female students, who may be struggling with issues of self-confidence, self-esteem and intellectual identity.

Exploring one context for such development can also shed light on possible sites within which to stimulate and facilitate discussions and insights into self and identity, as well as give young girls the opportunity to engage in intellectual practices of discussing, reading, and writing about literature. Understanding what intellectual identity development looks like for these young women can also shed light on issues of teacher practice and in helping us to understand why adolescence is often a time of turmoil and discouragement for many young women. Creating an opportunity like the book discussion group is important and necessary for girls if they are to take themselves seriously as intellectuals and be conscious and active contributors in the multiple contexts of their daily lives.

## CHAPTER II

### SITUATING THE RESEARCH

In this section, I construct an argument and plan for studying girls' identity development within the context of a book discussion group. I begin by exploring the literature on identity development and gender, as well as the literature on feminist epistemology regarding the importance of voice, caring, and women's ways of knowing in creating contexts that can facilitate instead of stifling growth. I conclude by relating this to literature on book discussion groups as sites for facilitating and studying identity development in adolescent girls.

#### **Developmental Theories, Identity, and Gender**

Identifying the transformation of my identity as a thinker and a knower during adolescence seemed significant not only in understanding my own development, but also in trying to understand identity development for all adolescent girls. For the purposes of this review, I focus on the psychosocial development of identity as conceptualized by Erikson, through both the individual or psychological lens (Erikson, 1968; Gilligan, 1982; Marcia, 1994 ), as well as through a social or Vygotskian perspective (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995). Although a number of other theorists (Bosma, Graafsma, Grotevant and de Levita, 1994; Kroger, 1989) have utilized different conceptual frames to describe identity development, Erikson (1968) has been most influential in my own thinking. This approach allows insight into the issue of individuation and separation as part of the process of identity development, a prevalent issue in identity research (Kroger, 1989).

Erikson's work contrasts with a relational or connected view of development (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver and Surrey, 1991) brought forward in feminist epistemologies. After both theoretical frameworks have been introduced, this review examines the phenomena of identity from individually and socially constructed or situated perspectives (Erikson, 1968; Penuel and Wertsch, 1995; Gergen, 1991). The section concludes by examining the role of narrative and dialogue in mediating action as it relates to girls reading books and constructing identity.

**Erik Erikson's Theory of Identity Development.** Erikson (1968) nominated identity development as the primary task of adolescence. His theory of identity development came out of the psychosexual work of Freud and much of his developmental work parallels Freud's early stages. In Freud's work identity is never really addressed except as it related to libidinal drives and functions of psychosexual development coming from within the individual (Kroger, 1989; Erikson, 1968). Erikson, however, found it important to acknowledge the role of the environment/community in facilitating identity growth and this became central to his theory. Erikson acknowledges the interaction between the individual and the community as central to the development of the self and also suggests that development did not end in adolescence as suggested by Freud, but is a lifelong process (Erikson, 1968; Bosma et al., 1994). In this way, Erikson comes to conceptualize identity development as psychosocial because he acknowledges and explores the role of the environment/community in recognizing, supporting and helping to shape identity development. He argues for a three-part model of development where development occurs through the dynamics of biological endowment, intellectual structures

(how the person makes sense of experiences) and cultural circumstances such as institutions or social contexts that have developed within a culture's history (Erikson, 1968). He represents these three dynamics as operating within an eight-stage developmental model through which individuals must progress in order to develop. Each stage involves a "crisis" that must be resolved in order to move to the next stage. The successful resolution of earlier stages influences an individual's ability to successfully resolve the fifth stage: identity achievement. A construct underlying Erikson's theory is "epigenesis": each stage influences each prior stage as well as each subsequent stage, and the sequence of stages is fixed and universal. Erikson posits that the resolution of a given stage is not an either/or proposition. Rather, Erikson argues, through experiences and interactions with their environment and culture, children are able to create a balance between the positive and negative poles of each stage. As suggested by Marcia (1994), "...an individual constructs his or her own particular form of resolution which incorporates both positive and negative aspects of [a] stage" (p. 68). Each earlier stage conflict provides the basis for eventual identity development by allowing a young child to introject the mother figure and identify with admired others. But for Erikson, the first opportunity to resolve the identity crisis occurs during adolescence. At this unique period in a young person's upbringing an individual's physical, cognitive and psychosexual growth converge with relevant social expectations and sanctions (Marcia, 1994).

It is important to understand, however, that Erikson (1968) does not see identity formation as static. He suggests that "where identities can be individually constructed

rather than societally imposed, the identity formed at late adolescence is only the first one" (p.70). Erikson suggests that the process of identity development encompass three domains of commitment involving *fidelity* (commitment to others one can trust), *ideology* (promise of a place in the world with a hopeful future) and *work* (actualization of the promises of the ideology) (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). The aforementioned domains and their relation to Erikson's understanding of the construct of identity constitute the basic assumptions of Erikson's theory, which was based solely on Erikson's clinical observations and not on the study of normal development. Erikson's approach, then, was not empirically studied until the identity status research of Marcia (1966). Marcia's program of research utilized Erikson's dimension of commitment along with exploration and derived four different types of identity statuses to empirically study identity development. These four are *diffusion*, *foreclosure*, *moratorium*, and *identity achievement* and they constitute points in development that allowed for the empirical study of Erikson's clinical work as generalized to larger populations. This framework inspired hundreds of studies that have helped researchers understand what type of identity status has occurred. This characterization of Erikson's work has led to a narrow focus for the study of identity and has raised questions about what features constitute a "positively constructed identity" (Marcia, 1966).

The research questions pursued in identity status research have been based on assumptions about individual psychological functions and have related to choices around areas of commitment and exploration as suggested by Marcia (1966)--domains that have been deemed important by Erikson and others as indicative of life choices and

commitments made during adolescence. Identity status researchers also assume that successful identity achievement occurs through separation and individuation (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 1989). This approach has raised questions about a gender bias in this research (Gilligan, 1982), since feminist conceptions of identity development push toward cooperation and relation. Relational and connected conceptions of identity have been central to my concerns about the separate and individuated processes of identity development of Erikson particularly as they relate to adolescent girls. More specifically, gender-sensitive researchers have suggested a different theory of development from those espoused by theorists such as Freud and Erikson (Gilligan 1982).

**Gender-Sensitive Identity Research.** According to Gilligan (1982) the development of self for women is related to their sense of connectedness. That is, Gilligan suggests that the issue of women's development is one of the "importance of attachment in the human life cycle" (p.23), and that women have different conceptions of self and morality that bring a feminine-relational perspective to human experience. Gilligan discusses the fact that the very issues identified as strengths in women (such as sensitivity to others and a tendency to focus on the voices of others rather than on their own) are those traits that do not support autonomy, seen as a necessary part of "normal" adolescent development and adulthood. Chodorow (1974) and Noddings (1984, 1988), suggest that issues of development for women do not depend on separation, but rather are defined through attachment. The identity of women, therefore, is threatened by separation while a male's identity is threatened by connection. Because women cannot easily separate, Chodorow suggests that they are perceived as failing to develop. The

issue of connection versus separation thus becomes particularly significant during adolescence when society expects greater independence and autonomy from youth as signs of development and maturity, and additionally shapes education and schooling around this historically patriarchal model of development.

Stern (1989) problematized the tension of connection versus separation in interviews with adolescent girls. She found that even as girls described their understandings of the concepts of independence and separation, they used descriptions and definitions of these concepts that kept the girls in connected relation to others. That is, they defined the words "independence" and "separation" in ways that kept the girls in relationship with others even as they spoke of being able to do things without needing help. Franz, Cole, Crosby and Stewart (1994) attempt to do that as they wrestle with ways to better make sense of women's identity development. They argue that "typical treatments of identity formation such as Erikson's set up a false dichotomy between self and others and a false sense of structure instead of a process" (p. 325). Franz et al. (1994) suggest that

Identity is, necessarily, characterized by the nature of one's relations with others ...and that because human survival and existence are necessarily relational, so are human sentience and selfhood....On the one hand, identity (i.e. how the woman experiences herself) sets each individual apart as distinct from every other. Simultaneously, interconnection is the foundation of identity (i.e. how the woman describes herself). These two facets exist not as mutually exclusive poles, but instead as two facets of the same coin. It is not the case that a person is at one moment somehow separate and at another somehow connected; rather, at every moment, what makes the individual unlike any other individual--to herself and to others--is that she has a unique constellation of relationships to other people (p.326).

This definition and exploration of identity as balancing the tension between separation and connection seems to be a helpful way to begin to think about the development of identity. It certainly synthesizes the competing notions of Gilligan (1982) and Erikson (1968) who take opposing views regarding connection and separation as ways to think about identity development.

This tension highlights one of the central dilemmas for adolescent girls in trying to construct a sense of themselves. If a need for connection is especially important for women, what is the impact of pressure for independence on adolescents as they move through this period of change? As has been suggested by Gilligan(1992) and others (Noddings, 1984, 1988, 1992; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker and Sadker, 1994), adolescence is a time when young girls are at heightened psychological risk, with research suggesting loss of vitality, resilience, sense of self and others. In thinking about these issues, I suggest that these negative effects on the psychological well-being of adolescent girls are also reflected in depression of their intellectual development and the ways they come to know and to learn. Do our societal and cultural structures encourage a separateness that has come to be viewed as important for men but that might be a barrier to women's development?

**Socio-Cultural Perspectives on Identity Development.** In exploring a socio-cultural perspective on identity development, it seems appropriate to focus on Vygotsky as a starting point and highlight more discursively based notions of self that depend on the mediational tool of language. Vygotsky's (1978) beliefs about identity formation are based on the idea that even though there is an ontogenetic period within an individual's life

when she develops in a pre-determined way, there comes a point when culture and social interactions play a formative role in the development of the individual and the construction of the self. According to Wertsch (1985), Vygotsky's argument gave priority to the power of the social over the individual and argued that social processes are, over time, internalized through a process of transformation. Harre (1994) portrayed this process in a model of a "Vygotsky space," where learning is first public (occurring within the zone of proximal development) and then becomes internalized as the individual learns without the scaffolding provided by a more knowledgeable other. The process becomes internalized and transformed and then the transformed knowledge is brought back into the public sphere to be reconstituted and considered in a variety of settings and contexts.<sup>1</sup>

This type of interaction occurs through what Vygotsky calls "tools and signs." Within our society a central means of making sense of self and one another is through our use of language, a mediational tool (Wertsch, 1991). Vygotsky, however, was more interested in how tools are used in action. In particular, a socio-cultural approach to identity formation

...considers the poles of socio-cultural processes and individual functioning as interacting moments in human action...and human action...provides the unit of analysis for a consideration of how individual intentions are, moreover, realized by different tools or mediational means used for carrying out action, tools in turn shape individual functioning (Wertsch, in press, cited in Penuel and Wertsch, 1995).

I argue that action occurs through the use of language as a mediational tool within the construction of identity and that the self is continually reconstituted in different forms

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<sup>1</sup> This process is developed more thoroughly in the analysis chapter on identity

given the variety of discourse contexts within which it functions (Gergen, 1991). Identity within this context then, is no longer static, but is seen "...as a dynamic dimension or moment in action, that may in fundamental ways change from activity to activity, depending on the way, in each activity, the purpose, form, cultural tools as contexts are coordinated" (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995. p. 84). The beliefs surrounding the role of language in mediating action, and also in mediating the development of sense of self and identity, have been explored by a number of researchers (Giddens, 1991; Gergen, 1991; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1991). Additionally, the central roles of narrative and dialogue in constructing knowledge and constructing self and identity are also under exploration (Polkinghorne, 1991; Harre, 1994). Text, narrative and dialogue can mediate action as girls read and discuss books that facilitate identity construction.

**Identity Construction and Reading.** Not only are the issues of voice and language within the classroom salient, but the texts that facilitate gendered identity development (Cherland, 1994) and facilitate in the co-construction of language practices seem central to understanding the situated nature of identity and connection for girls. Fetterley (1978) examines the construction of identity through classroom texts. She acknowledges the loss of women's voice and influence within a patriarchal society and how, through literature, girls are "forced in every way to identify with men, yet incessantly reminded of being [women, they] undergo a transformation into an "it", the dominion of personhood lost indeed" (p. ix). With this as a starting point, Fetterley sets out to define this loss for women and consider ways for women to regain their voice

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development processes.

through altering the ways in which they experience literature. Specifically, she suggests that girls learn to be “resisting readers”. I was particularly interested in the issue of the politics of literature because I believe that so much of people's experiences of reading are developed through power relations and hidden curriculums or agendas. Fetterley is able to bring these realities to the surface in analyzing canonical pieces of fiction and reconsidering them through a feminist lens; a lens that allows women to reconsider their interpretations of text and bring themselves into the larger conversation of literature. She draws our attention to the exclusion of women authors and strong characters from much of the literature used in typical classrooms and argues that schools need to expand their curriculum to include these authors and characters .

Christian-Smith (1993), explores how popular genres for teen novels influence how girls think about themselves and their futures. Christian-Smith points out that literacy is not a neutral act and that reading encompasses "social, economic and political relations that shape readers' interpretations" (p. 1). Additionally, young women are incorporated into "a patriarchal and profit driven social structure and as a potential means of resisting women's traditional places in this structure" through the reading of the series novel. She highlights the Sweet Valley High and the Baby-sitters Club series as two series that serve specific economic, political, and social functions for girls. Awareness of gender subjectivities and awareness of sexual differences are being socially constructed, with young women readers positioned in the texts as "consumers, future homemakers, and mothers"...as well as..."heterosexual lovers" (p. 2).

Cherland (1994) demonstrates that reading practices are a site where girls learn to "do gender" and how that influences their identity development. She begins by acknowledging the influence of social forces on gender construction and how literacy practices are both shaped by and shape gender identity construction. She describes how children come to learn their gender (or the practices of their culture that include gender) by watching others and come to be engendered in "culturally appropriate" ways. She suggests that recent research has started to reveal an "ideological character of gendered literacies" (p. 9). This ideology helps to create and maintain differences among girls and boys and maintains political and power relations. She goes on to suggest that the reading of teen romances can influence decisions that girls make about their futures, and can also provide a place for them to engage with issues surrounding the construction of identity. Cherland points out that she doesn't view reading as a neutral, cognitive process but rather as "varied forms of social, cultural, and political practices" (p. 6).

Central to Cherland's theoretical perspective is the idea of multiple discourses that surround the identity of women today. She places her study within a critical feminist educational discourse and uses culture as a lens for problematizing literate practices of girls. Cherland studied a school in Canada and explored the reading practice of girls there. In describing their reading practices, and through talking to and interacting with their families, Cherland reconstructs what she calls the girls' beliefs about gender and its relation to their reading of fiction and their identity. Cherland concludes that these gendered literacies ultimately create gendered practices and separations that preserve inequalities between genders. She highlights the influence of these practices on

curriculum (the explicit and implicit) and how curriculum has political implications. She also reflects on pedagogical issues and how teachers can use this critical approach to create a different type of classroom. Her ultimate argument is one that transforms how we construct gender, race and class; in a sense she seems to be trying to empower those involved in constructing more gender-sensitive reading practices.

More recently, Finders (1997) examined the literate practices of early adolescent girls by also examining the books they read, as well as broadening the lens of literacy and looking at their practices of passing notes, signing yearbooks, and doing homework together as additional literate activities. She also examines the significance of relationships to girls' developing sense of themselves and suggests that girls often choose their peers allegiance in lieu of high levels of intellectual engagement. In this way, Finders shows how literacy is a social event that facilitates the construction of social identities and seems similar to Cherland's (1994) argument that their literate practices influence their understanding of gender and their identities. She also argues that literacy affords adolescence with a "tangible means by which to claim status, challenge authority, and document social allegiances" (p.4). In the end she argues that classrooms need to take into account the power of social relationships among students in altering their ability to perform and that we need to think about how we construct student-centered classrooms. What Finders does not examine, however, is what happens when the dynamics of their daily lives and literate activities are influenced by the creation of new learning contexts that shift the nature of their relationships among one another. How can the power of literate practices be used to positively influence girls' conceptions of themselves as

thinkers, learners and knowers? Specifically, how can we begin to think about how to create discourse communities that value the social influences in girls lives and facilitate the emergence of rather than the silencing of their voices? The next section explores issues of voice, discourse communities and ways of knowing to begin to address these questions.

### **Voice, Discourse Communities and Ways of Knowing**

In attempting to further understand feminist epistemology of identity development as related to issues of self-in-relation (Jordan et al., 1991) it is important to discuss issues of voice. Gilligan (1987) talks about the disparity between young girls' inner and outer voices. She suggests that as girls enter adolescence they start to see a discrepancy between their internal view of the way things are and an external view of the way others want them to behave and respond. Gilligan suggests that this view becomes pertinent during adolescence, when young women learn which voice will be accepted. She refers to this as a "...kind of voice and ear training, designed to make it clear what voices people like to listen to in girls and what girls can say without being considered 'stupid' or 'rude'" (p. 149). It seems that women are pressed to silence their true inner voice in order to feel the connection with others as suggested by Gilligan (1982, 1987, 1992) and Belenky et al. (1986). By gaining this connection with others through activities that subvert their true voice, however, women are not really being heard or connecting at all. Gilligan (1987) goes on to discuss the struggle in women's separation of voice and poses a paradox in which women sacrifice themselves in order to connect and have a relationship, yet lose themselves in the process of trying to connect.

An important connection inherent in this discussion is the issue of discourse and being part of a discourse community. Again, I reflect on the period of my adolescence when I believe unhelpful changes in perceptions about myself took place. I recognize the change in myself when I began to focus outside the realm of academia and consider myself someone who could use humor, make people laugh, and still get by academically. What was I really giving up (if anything) to take on this role and how might this have influenced my learning and knowing? Would this changing of attitudes, beliefs or language be a way in which women might sacrifice the self in order to move within different discourse communities?

The theoretical image of women sacrificing themselves for relationship suggests that they are trying to change their inner selves in order to feel a connection to a discourse community. The discourse community of the classroom, however, might not be fostering the kinds of connection that young women need in order to develop an intellectual identity. Research has suggested that women are excluded from the discourse of the traditional classroom because they cannot find a "common voice" with which to connect (Lewis and Simon, 1986; Noddings, 1984, 1988; Sadker and Sadker, 1994). That common voice cannot be found because the dominant voice of the male culture is one that privileges independence and isolation and is pervasive within the classroom.

The book Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986) suggested alternative ways to consider connections between gender, development and ways that women come to know. Belenky et al. (1986) studied a group of women because they were interested in why women seemed to doubt themselves intellectually,

and why they often talked about "gaps in their learning" (p. 4). As a way to explore this issue, they interviewed and surveyed primarily college aged women and later classified their responses as reflecting different perspectives on knowing. Their analysis suggested that women (as well as men) have different ways of coming to know that are not necessarily valued or recognized as legitimate, particularly within the school setting. Two types of knowing described are silence, which is "a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority" and received knowledge, which is a "perspective from which women conceive themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities, but not capable of creating knowledge on their own" (p. 15).

Our schools, community and environment are organized according to a patriarchal model which reinforces the findings of Belenky et al. (1986). Lewis and Simon (1986) discussed this dynamic in their exploration of questions about the relationship between text and discourse related to issues of language and power. These researchers explored the process of silencing during a seminar course where one researcher was the male teacher and the other was the female student. Issues that arose seemed to tie into what Belenky et al. (1986) and Gilligan (1982, 1992) suggest about silence and loss of voice. The class discussion was monopolized by men from the beginning and the women watched as if only spectators. Lewis comments,

When a woman speaks, it means that a man cannot speak, and when a man cannot speak it means that social relations among men are disrupted. Women, therefore, have no place in this playing field. Independently, we felt our exclusion more and more intensely the more we struggled to find room for our voices and to locate ourselves in the discourse. (p. 461).

Lewis' claim has helped me to again consider the exclusion of women from the prominent discourse of the society and the classroom. Even as a teacher and student in the classroom, the researchers were unable to resolve the issue of finding a common discourse within which all their students could speak. Lewis again addresses the issue that we, as women, have only been able to legitimate ourselves when we are able to or willing to become a part of the male agenda. That is, women take on the values, attitudes and beliefs of men (in the context of a classroom) in order to become part of the classroom discourse. In the case of Lewis and Simon (1986), the nature of the class allowed people to speak at length, so the men would dominate the conversation. If a woman began to speak at the same time as a man, the researchers found that the woman "always deferred to the man" (p. 462).

Gilligan (1987) argues that the notion of voice becomes political because girls must struggle between their relation with themselves and their relations with others. Gilligan suggests, on the one hand, that if young women let their voices be heard, they come in conflict with the "prevailing authority" (as in the case with women not wanting to interrupt or participate (Lewis and Simon, 1986)). On the other hand, if these women allow themselves to be silenced then they conflict with themselves because they have taken themselves out of the relationship. Can women stay connected with themselves and with others when they are constantly having to take on the voice of the patriarchal model within the schools? Even if women are able to stay connected, what does it mean

for women to have a voice and speak from a feminine perspective when that voice is not valued in the schools?

It has been argued that new approaches to schooling are needed that will nurture caring, morality, connectedness, and equality for both men's and women's development (Belenky et al., 1986; Noddings, 1984, 1988, 1992; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Nel Noddings' book Caring (1984) argues that our schools are not "intellectually stimulating places, even for many students who are intellectually oriented" (p. 19). She urges educators to listen for a different voice within the schools. Noddings, in discussing the issue of voice and dialogue in the schools, views the traditional curriculum as masculine. She suggests that schools separate and isolate the student from the "world of relation and project [that student], as object, into a thoroughly objectified world" (p. 192). Noddings suggests that children be allowed to remain in the "relational world" and claims that connection is important for all children in order to develop a sense of caring and to grow intellectually. She also argues that intellectual caring and interpersonal caring are connected and that feminine teaching and learning should not be considered anti-intellectual because it is about caring.

In many ways, I support Noddings' notions about the ways to structure schools. To begin, she addresses the often one-sided (masculine) version of the ways our schools are run. This acknowledgment is the first step toward creating developmentally sensitive organizational change. Schools should allow for multiplicity of voices through different sorts of caring relations since research suggests there is a need for more connectedness in school, especially in the development of women during adolescence. Noddings also calls

for more personal interactions and cooperative experiences in which students engage in intellectual as well as ethical pursuits. It seems that connection is a large part of development that has only recently been recognized. Through the understanding of others' research and my own experiences, I have come to believe that schools need to foster more of the cooperative, connected relationships suggested by Noddings.

### **Book Discussion Groups**

One way to support women in exercising multiple ways of knowing, developing voice, and facilitating identity development is through book discussion groups. The formation of women's clubs have a historical basis in the United States. Book Discussion Groups or women's clubs where texts were read, written and discussed were prominent in the late 1800's to early 1900's with over two million women participating. Women's clubs in this time period were formed with the goal of intellectual improvement for members as well as the goal of fostering more progressive views on womanhood (Gere, 1997). These clubs incorporated reading, writing and discussion of various texts--often written by members of the club--and members reported that they benefited from associating in the conversations of the clubs. Specifically, they could "think aloud with less timidity and with more directness" (Gere, 1997, p. 17). Although not the only aspect of the clubs, the reading of shared texts was central to the goal of the clubs. Book Discussion Groups, then, have been used in the past to support women's growth and were important sites for "substantial intellectual work in an intimate social context" (Gere, p. 11). Not only did women's clubs provide a space for social interaction and

intellectual growth, but they fostered the emergence of voice, and utilized multiple ways of knowing in valuing different women's contributions.

More recently, researchers have used book discussion groups in various forms to facilitate literacy development, and to foster learning about culture and identity. Raphael and her colleagues created one model called Book Club as a way to support elementary students' development in reading, writing and learning about literature (Raphael and McMahon, 1994; McMahon and Raphael, 1997). This research highlighted the important role of learning through social interactions within communities of learners. Florio-Ruane (1994), in attempting to help pre-service teachers learn about culture, created the Future Teachers' Autobiography Club. This group read, discussed and wrote about ethnic autobiographical texts to foster beginning teachers' exploration of culture as it related to their teaching, cultural identities and literacy learning. Not only did this group support the importance of social interaction in learning, but it also highlighted the significant role of ethnic autobiographical text in fostering cultural identity development among participants (Florio-Ruane, 1994; Florio-Ruane and deTar, 1995).

Both the Book Club and Future Teachers' Autobiography Club laid the foundation for the development of the Autobiography Book Club (Florio-Ruane, Raphael, Glazier, McVee, Shellhorn and Wallace, 1997). As a researcher in this study, I began to explore the professional and personal identity development of participants as revealed in interviews that I had conducted and catalogued (Wallace, 1996). Preliminary analysis revealed that participation in the Autobiography Book Club enhanced participants' perceptions of themselves as thinkers and knowers (Florio-Ruane et al.,

1997; Wallace, 1996). This research suggests that book discussion groups have the potential to introduce an alternative discourse community for female students--a discourse community grounded in mutual respect, relational connection, critical thinking and the cooperative discussion of important ideas and values. If this type of community can work for women why not for adolescents? Since it has been shown that reading books help girls learn to "do gender" (Cherland, 1994), creating an alternative discourse community where girls are reading, writing and talking around alternative texts<sup>2</sup> could be used to help girls begin to take themselves seriously as intellectuals.

This research created an alternative discourse community in the form of a book discussion group in order to facilitate the intellectual identity development of adolescent girls. Previous research with adult women revealed enhanced feelings about themselves as intellectuals (Florio-Ruane et. al, 1997; Wallace, 1996), but has not explored the impact of a book discussion group in which adolescent girls read literature focusing on identity development and adolescent life. This study explores whether a literature-based social context characterized by connection and caring can foster identity development for adolescents--a developing sense of the self as intellectually, socially, and emotionally capable.

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<sup>2</sup> By alternative text, I am referring to the types of texts suggested by Cherland (1994) and Fetterley (1978) that introduce strong characters and female authors to the girls reading selections.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS RESEARCH**

Although identity development in adolescence continues to be explored in research, issues directly related to adolescents' perceptions of themselves as intellectually able remain under-examined. In particular, understanding how adolescent girls come to view themselves as thinkers and knowers in a particular discourse community will add to theoretical discussions on the development of identity for girls. Adolescence is often a time of self-doubt and questioning for young women and this can have an impact on their current lives as well as on subsequent decisions and attitudes they may make or have in the future. This work offers insights into young girls' lives and thus gives researchers another lens with which to explore identity development.

From a practical standpoint, this work may help teachers to understand how and why girls come to stop participating and engaging in their classrooms. Further, it offers insight into ways in which teachers may begin to reengage and reconnect with those students who seem lost or disconnected in school. Additionally, it can shed light on possible sites that can be used to stimulate and facilitate discussions and insights into self and identity, as well as give young girls opportunities to engage in intellectual practices of discussing, reading, and writing about literature. It is my hope that this research will help girls begin to take themselves seriously as thinkers, knowers and learners who have much to offer themselves and others throughout their adolescence and throughout their lives.

## CHAPTER III

### CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH: THEORY, METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

I proposed that girls be given an opportunity to engage in varied forms of social, cultural, and political practices, which were based on texts that had the potential to challenge their present conceptions of themselves and what it means to be learners, knowers and thinkers. By giving them opportunities to engage with book characters as well as others in the group, participants had the opportunity to “try on” others’ perspectives and imagine and explore other ways of being and thinking. In creating the Book Discussion Group, I hoped to offer an experience for the girls that I theorized would allow them to utilize the connected and relational ways of knowing that girls may prefer by creating a caring and connected community of learners. In taking different perspectives and in talking, sharing and connecting with others, I hoped they would: (1) begin to think through different ideas and experiences of the characters as well as others in the group and in doing so (2) begin to take themselves seriously as intellectually capable young women. I also hoped to better understand how the act of caring intellectually about these girls could (3) help them to take themselves more seriously as knowers and thinkers.

In this chapter I will describe the theoretical perspective that guided this study, I will describe the inquiry site, and the ways in which the Book Discussion Group was

formed, introduce the members of the group, explain the context within which we met, introduce the books that were read, and summarize the methods of data collection and analysis that I used.

### **Description of the Inquiry Site**

The Book Discussion Group was composed of girls who all attended a coed public high school in a mid-size town (Hillsdale) in the North Eastern region of the United States. This high school was the school that I attended so I had intricate knowledge of the school, the teachers and the community. Hillsdale High School is situated between two small towns with an enrollment of approximately sixteen hundred students. The school enrolls students in grades nine through twelve that feed from six elementary schools in the surrounding area. The socio-economic make-up of the school is mostly lower middle-class to upper middle-class and the population of both the students and the teachers are primarily Euro-American. Since the completion of a main highway in the last ten years that directly links Hillsdale to a major metropolitan area, the population of the school has become increasingly transient and the number of students whose parents have white-collar jobs has grown. Prior to the highway completion, the region was considered to be a relatively rural part of the state with a great number of students from lower middle-class backgrounds.

## **Recruiting the participants**

The book discussion group included me and seven female students<sup>3</sup>. The group of seven group members volunteered from a pool of eighteen girls nominated by their high school teacher and cross country coach. The girls were all between fifteen and eighteen years old representing all grade levels at Hillsdale. All were members of the cross country team. The teacher/coach organized a meeting with potential group members where I introduced myself to the girls and explained the study objectives and their rights as should they choose to participate. Each girl received a consent letter explaining the intent, goals, activities and applications of the study. Further, the letter stressed the voluntary nature of participation and issues of confidentiality. I remained available at this meeting to answer the girls' questions regarding their rights during participation in this study. All of the girls took the letters home and if they chose to participate, signed and returned them in envelopes that I provided. If participants were under the age of eighteen, their parents were also asked to give their consent by signing the letter. These letters were then to be mailed back to me. The girls and their parents were also encouraged to contact me by phone, e-mail or in person with any questions they had regarding the study.

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<sup>3</sup> There were originally 9 girls who volunteered to participate in the group. One of these was a senior who came to one meeting and then stopped attending. Another was a senior who attended the first four meetings and then stopped attending. The third was a freshman who told me that she did not read fast enough and couldn't keep up with what we were doing in the group. This participant came sporadically through the first eight meetings and then stopped attending. In addition to the three that left the group, one participant (Lindsey) joined the group during the second book at the suggestion of the nominating teacher. This left seven girls total who participated.

My recruitment of group members was guided by several factors. First, I sought all female participants since I was studying female adolescent identity development, and group dynamics can change when male voices are added to the conversation (Coates and Cameron, 1989). Secondly, I sought out a group of girls who already knew one another so that it would not take as much time to develop trust and intimacy with one another. In considering the importance of finding a group who already knew each other, I decided that a sports team would be ideal since these girls would know each other but would not necessarily interact with each other outside their sport. In this way, the group started out with something in common, which I believe decreased the time it took to establish a community in the book discussion meetings. In previous research (Florio-Ruane et al., 1996), the development of trust and the ability to talk openly took many months to establish--time that I did not have. With only seven months to work with participants, and I did not want to start from the beginning with a group of girls who did not know each other and build a trusting, connected and intimate group from the ground up. I searched for a group with a foundation already in place so that although they know each other in one way, we would still be creating a new context together where we would be interacting and engaging in ways different from their previous experiences.

### **The Participants**

In most ways, the girls in the book discussion group are very similar to one another. All are Euro-American, teenagers and athletes, and all come from homes with intact families with at least one sibling. Still, they were also each confronted with different complex issues associated with adolescence. One of the girls had not yet reached

puberty and this was on her mind, others were learning how to drive, struggling with their relationships with their parents, worrying about college, dealing with boyfriend and girlfriend relationships and struggling with classes. There was rarely a dull moment in these girls' lives and each had her own way of sharing her life as part of the book discussion groups. Table 1 lists the participants names<sup>4</sup>, ages and grades when they began the Book Discussion Group. It is followed by a description of each of the participants.

Table 1: Book Discussion Group Members

NAME	AGE	GRADE
Ellen	16	Junior
Gail	16	Junior
Jenny	16	Junior
Jill	16	Junior
Karen	16	Junior
Katy	15	Freshman
Lindsey	16	Sophomore

**Ellen:**

Ellen had moved into the school district just the previous year so she did not have the history of school and friendships that the other girls had. She was also the most quiet of all the participants and this may have had an impact on her contributions. Ellen was

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<sup>4</sup> All names are pseudonyms

interesting in that she always attended the meetings, but it seemed that she often did not read and she rarely wrote in her journal. I would often have to ask her what she was thinking during meetings in order to get her to talk. Like many of the other members of this group, she was an excellent student and was planning to attend college after graduation. She struggled during the year with her family's decision about whether or not to move to Michigan for her senior year. Ellen was very torn by this and the decision had been left up to her. Ellen did more personal communication over e-mail than other members of the group and seemed comfortable talking about her life in general through this medium though it was difficult to get her to engage around the book ideas. Ellen's voice more clearly emerged around social issues for example, when she would e-mail about what was happening at school or what she had recently been doing. It was only after she had had a spiritual encounter during the sixth month of the study that she really opened up at a meeting and shared what she had learned and what had been happening in her life as it related to the book.

**Gail:**

Vivacious and energetic, Gail was almost never without a smile on her face when we met for the book discussion group. She was usually quick to discuss her personal life but less likely to engage in discussion around the books during the early meetings of the group. She revealed in her interviews that she was too concerned about making others happy and often spread herself too thin in her attempts to make everyone happy. In many ways, Gail is typical of the adolescent portrayed by Gilligan (1988) and others studying relational ways of knowing and developing. She was concerned about staying in

connection and relation to her friends and family and this affected her ability to express herself. She did not want to stand out, and for the first half of our meetings she always appeared in the shadow of Jill. Gail was always the one who was the brunt of Jill's jokes and would also never run ahead of Jill in workouts on the track even though she could run with her. This changed over the course of the meetings, however, with Gail slowly standing much more on her own by the end of the meetings and claiming this change in herself during her closing interview. She repeated several times throughout her interview that she had learned, "you have to be true to yourself."

**Jenny:**

Jenny was always smiling and laughing, and many of the girls in the group would comment that Jenny was always the one who was happy, had a nice boyfriend, worked hard at school and generally had no problems. In beginning of the Book Discussion Group, Jenny was always prepared, a good reader and contributor, but seemed to slack off toward the end when she ran into serious boyfriend trouble that had her questioning herself and her own motives. She was often more tired toward the end and less likely to contribute, though she continued to come to meetings and generally seemed to enjoy herself.

**Jill:**

Jill was co-captain of the track team and is known as the best athlete, having just come in fourth in the state in cross country the previous fall and been named the area's top athlete. Interestingly, whereas Jill was clearly a leader on the track, she was not a leader in the group. For the first several meetings she would show up late without having read

or written in her journal. She would come in and start talking about how horrible her day was or how tired she was and that she hadn't been able to get anything done. She usually paired up with Gail in these situations. I was surprised when I received a note from her mother after the fourth meeting saying that Jill really seemed to be enjoying herself and how good this experience had been for her. As we got to know one another through running together and talking about issues such as her SAT's, Jill began to read more and engage more in substantive discussions during the meetings. Jill's increased participation, as she got to know me better, related to her interview comments that knowing her teachers and feeling connected to them made a difference in her participation. Relating this to the literature on connection and voice, Jill supports the argument that when girls feel disconnected they become silenced. She was also hard on herself as a student saying that although she had a 3.9 GPA, she was a slow learner and had to work a lot harder than other students. She was focused on her running and how that would help her to get into college especially since she was concerned that she would not do well enough on her SATs to get into the school she wanted to attend.

**Karen:**

Initially, Karen appeared the most reluctant to participate in the group and was fairly quiet, but began to speak more as the meetings went on. She often lamented that her parents wanted her to go to a community college until she was certain of what she wanted to do because her brother had dropped out and the parents did not want her to do that. She also spoke several times about wanting to be a writer, but said her parents wouldn't let her go to school for that (not stable enough for them) so she would probably become a

lawyer. Of all the participants, Karen was the most outspoken in her opinions (particularly critical opinions) and was sarcastic at times. She is very bright, scoring 1400+ on her SAT's and she took mostly accelerated classes at school. At the same time, however, Karen reported that her participation in the book discussion group was very different than in school where she said she did not speak up in class. Like many adolescents, Karen found her classes intimidating and felt that she was judged when she spoke. She repeatedly commented that the support of the group and the feelings that people were listening to her helped her to take more risks.

**Katy:**

The youngest of the group, Katy said she decided to join the group because she really liked the other girls and wanted to spend more time with them. She always participated and was ready to talk about ideas when she got to the meetings. Katy was a very driven young woman who was almost compulsive about her work and grades. She reported that she had already gone to visit Duke University with her father as a possible place to go to college. She was an excellent student and her mother told me she was glad that Katy was participating because she finally read some other books than just what she was assigned in school. Katy was always prepared for the meetings, not only having read everything, but also having marked her book with paper tabs and written in her journal. She said she loved to write and wanted to become a journalist or a lawyer. She also had quite a sense of humor and would often crack jokes during or outside the meetings. It was this social side of Katy that continued to emerge during the meetings and would surprise everyone in the group who considered Katy more reserved and less engaging.

**Lindsey:**

Lindsey did not start the book discussion meetings at the same time as everyone else but joined about a book and a half into the meetings upon the recommendation of the running coach. She joined the group enthusiastically and was a regular contributor in her journal and in the meetings. I would call Lindsey the most serious of the group in her demeanor. She was not silly like many of the other girls even though she did like to joke around and was friends with everyone. She often commented that her mother would make her do the rest of her school work (even during the summer) before she was allowed to do any reading for the Book Discussion Group. She was another conscientious young woman who seemed confident and hardworking as a student and as an athlete. Lindsey had an almost business-like manner in her approach to book discussions, but her writing revealed a more complex picture of her concerns about her own life in relation to book characters.

**The Meeting Context and My Role as Group Facilitator**

The group met twelve times from February through August 1998. We met five times at the school, five times at my parents' home, and twice at participants' houses. We began meeting in classrooms at the school, then went to my parents' home several times through the spring and moved out of the school to my parents' and other participants' homes during the summer. The most difficult aspect of the meetings was planning. It was difficult to get all of the girls in the same place at the same time as someone inevitably would forget about a doctor or dentist appointment or a choir practice. I took responsibility for reminding the group about the meetings and always sent out a reminder letter the week of the meeting. My letters were sometimes met with

gasps of students who had forgotten that we had a meeting. I also sent e-mail, but the girls did not check regularly nor did all of them have e-mail, so this was not a reliable method.

The decision to move the meetings from schools into homes was based on my previous experiences as a book club participant<sup>5</sup> where shifts in context changed the ways people interacted. I felt that the school setting made the group feel more like another class even though it did serve the purpose of introducing the group to me and helping them to become more committed to participating in the discussion group. Meeting outside school allowed us to get to know one another in a different context and to introduce food into our meetings which made the events more social in nature. I had hoped that this would help to create greater feelings of intimacy and safety for participants so that they would feel free to open up and take social and intellectual risks. I gave suggestions for meeting times and dates, but overall I let the girls pick the time and place, and if possible, I let them organize things such as the food.

During the school year, the girls were asked to read one half of a book before each meeting so that the Book Discussion Group would not interfere with their regular school work. In preparation for each meeting they were asked to read whatever book had been selected, write about the book in journals that I provided for them, and then come to the meeting to talk about the book and sometimes write more about it. The purpose of the

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<sup>5</sup> From 1995-1997 I participated in a research project called the Autobiography Book Club with Susan Florio-Ruane, Taffy Raphael, Jocelyn Glazier, Mary McVee and Bette Shellhorn. This project moved from the school setting into the homes of various

journal varied depending upon the participant--some people used it to write thoughts, others to write quotes from the books, etc. The students brought the journals with them to each meeting. The journals were another way in which the participants were able to identify with characters or make sense of the book. At the beginning of most meetings, I posed a question about the book we were reading and asked everyone (myself included) to write for five to ten minutes about that question before we began to talk about the book. We then began our discussions which lasted from sixty to ninety minutes and occasionally went longer. The girls were also encouraged to correspond by e-mail and use that as their journal if it was easier or more comfortable for them. I continued to meet with the participants throughout the spring and into the summer. At the conclusion of the final meeting, the students were asked to sign up for individual interviews with me that lasted approximately an hour and twenty minutes. These interviews allowed me to get a better understanding of the girls' experiences in the Book Discussion Group.

Since I was interested in valuing different types of knowing than those that might be valued in school, I specifically encouraged them to make connections to their own experiences and lives as they read, wrote about and discussed those issues with the group. I did not want to be the director of the group, but instead hoped that they would slowly take leadership into their own hands and allow me to act as another participant. This happened to some degree in that I was able to do less of the planning and they came to meetings with more that they wanted to say, but I found that my role took on multiple

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participants and ultimately to a local coffee shop. The change in venues did change the feelings about the conversations.

parts. I was a friend, a mentor, a leader, and a listener. Depending on the time, the place, and the girl, I could be any one of these and I needed to stay in tune to which role was needed at what time. Although not always a simple task, these multiple roles allowed me to get to know the girls in different ways as individuals and as a group.

The meetings never seemed to start on time. Someone was usually late or confessed they had to leave early for an appointment. Sometimes people forgot about the meetings (during the school year) and we would have to track them down. Usually it meant starting meetings about ten minutes late and sometimes having to reschedule if too many people were absent. Upon arrival, group members would chat with me and each other about what was happening in school and in a particular class or with other students. Initially this type of talk would take up a good part of the beginning of the meeting as if the girls were not ready or did not know how to talk about the books since none had ever been in a book discussion group. As the meetings progressed, the conversations would still be personal, but the group had a better sense of transitioning between social talk and discussions of the book, though often people would figure out ways to work personal talk into our discussions. I would always begin taping the conversations as soon as people arrived, as the early conversations would often relate to the books or would help to better understand the context of their lives outside the meetings.

### **Selection of Texts**

An important aspect of the design of this study was the selection of the books to read and discuss. I had specific criteria in mind when nominating the books and this influenced not only my selections but also selections made by the participants. Since one

of my beliefs is that what we read can facilitate identity development and, specifically, the way we come to take ourselves seriously as thinkers knowers and learners, I wanted the girls to read and discuss books that would challenge their conceptions about themselves and their world. I wanted books that were authored by women, with main characters who were adolescent girls, and who were struggling with issues of identity and gender as well as dealing with issues of themselves as thinkers and knowers. As suggested in research on reading and identity, girls' gender identity is facilitated by the books that they read (Cherland, 1994). In this group the girls were encouraged to select books and to read books that I had selected that portrayed characters different than those they experienced in their every day lives. Since I believe that texts can make a difference by allowing girls to identify with particular roles and characters and then appropriate them into their own thinking about themselves, selection of particular books was an important facet of the design of this study. I selected the first book in order to get the group started, but I encouraged the group to make book nominations and selections so that they would feel ownership over the development of the readings and of their experiences in the book discussion group. I felt that developing a sense of ownership was important in fostering both alternative ways of knowing and in encouraging the development of each girl's voice. As things developed, one participant came up with the idea to read the second book (Dacey's Song), but besides that the participants selected from a group of possibilities that I introduced to them. In the end, we read five books and reread the first book for our final meeting. The following is the list of the books that were

selected by myself and the group with a synopsis of each to show the themes that tie the books together around issues of adolescent identity development.

Jacob Have I Loved. This book was recommended by a colleague who described it as one girl's quest for her identity. The book focuses around twin sisters, particularly around one sister, Louise, and her struggles to deal with her sister. The story is told from Louise's perspective and details her perceptions of her sister as the one that everyone not only cares for, but who is also successful, attractive and talented--one who has everything go her way. It is Louise's journey toward discovery of her own gifts and of herself that made this story interesting to me as a book for the group. Louise is outspoken, strong and independent, so in one sense as a reader you feel that she is in control of her life. At the same time, one cannot help but feel her uncertainty about who she is and what her purpose is in life other than to help her parents and take over her father's job. Her struggle with her own career is also explored as she is very smart and does exceptionally well in school but is talked out of becoming a doctor and becomes a midwife and nurse instead. The contrast between Louise and her very feminine, traditional, weak sister Caroline is very stark, with comparisons being drawn between the relationship of Jacob and Esau in the Bible.

Dacey's Song. This book continues the chronicle of the Tillerman family that began in the book Homecoming. Dacey Tillerman (the main character of the book) has brought her sister and two brothers to live with their grandmother after their mother abandons them in a mall parking lot. Dacey has been the leader of the family and must learn how to adjust her role as they cope with both her mother's mental illness and her

grandmother's influence. This book explores Dicey's struggles with letting go as well as with holding on to those things that really matter, such as her family. She is a stubborn character who has a lot of trouble seeing that she can learn from others, and it is not until the end of the book that she begins to realize that everyone has something that they can be teaching her. She is a strong student in school and she perceives herself that way, but she is also defensive and does not easily allow people to get very close to her. This book examines Dicey's struggle with her identity but also with issues of trust and believing in other people. One of the participants (Jenny) picked this book after I gave the criteria for selection and it seemed to fit well.

What Girls Learn. This book was the story of two sisters as told from the perspective of the older sister, Tilden. The main story line of this book is how these two sisters deal with their own lives and with their mother who has been diagnosed with cancer. In the story, the mother falls in love and moves the girls to a new town to be with her boyfriend. Though the boyfriend turns out to be a good guy, the girls still struggle with being in a new town, with a visit from their uncle who makes a sexual advance toward Tilden, and with the death of their mother. In addition, Tilden continues to struggle with the fact that her younger sister Elizabeth is experiencing things earlier than Tilden. Elizabeth deals with sexual issues, alcohol and her body developing earlier than Tilden's. In the end, it is the girls' bond as sisters, their resilience in the face of their mother's death, and their relationship with their mother's boyfriend (who becomes their stepfather) that leaves the reader knowing they will be all right.

Ellen Foster. This book is about the character Ellen Foster. It is told by showing Ellen in her present situation, but also by shifting back to her life prior to her placement in a foster home. Ellen is a young girl who lives with a physically and verbally abusive alcoholic father. Her mother has died (which is recounted in the book) and she is left to deal with her father who does not take care of her at all. She is basically left to fend for herself. She is a good friend with a young Black girl named Starletta who Ellen sees as strange, but she still goes over to Starletta's house and likes to spend time with them (they work the land for her father). Ellen's father finally dies and she is supposed to go live with her cruel aunt and cousin, but in the end Ellen convinces a family who takes in foster children to take her in.

This book is very sad in many respects but triumphant in others. Ellen overcomes abuse, death, poverty, and loneliness with her guts, humor, and spunk. In the end, Ellen realizes that the color of your skin does not dictate the kind of person you are as she sees the cruelty of her aunt against the kindness of Starletta's family. In addition, Ellen seems to have a certain sense about herself in that she knows she is smart and works hard in school even in the midst of the craziness with her father. During one scene in the book she is meeting with a psychiatrist who asks her why she calls herself Ellen Foster when that is not really her name. This seems to be the undertone for the entire book, which addresses issues of identity and how we can project identities on other people because of their skin color, what they do, or where they live, but this identity does not necessarily match who they really are. I chose this book because of the struggles of this thirteen year old and how she was trying to come to understand who she was and who

others were in her world. At the same time she had an inner strength that seemed to carry her through the terrible times and it was this inner strength that I thought would be particularly interesting for the book discussion meetings.

The Road From Coorain. This book is the autobiography of Jill Ker Conway from her birth until the age of about 18 when she heads off to the United States from her homeland of Australia. The book chronicles her upbringing on Coorain, a 10,000 acre sheep station owned by her family, where survival is based on the weather and one bad season of drought can destroy a family forever. Jill tells her story as the only girl and youngest of three who loses her father at a young age in what appears to be a suicide and who must deal with her alcoholic controlling mother until she leaves for America at the end of the book. She tells of how she learned through long distance schooling on Coorain, and that when she had to do her school work it was real treat because it meant she did not have to be out attending to the thousands of sheep with her family. She and her mother end up leaving Coorain after her father dies and she spends her adolescence in Sydney where she attended an elite boarding school and got an excellent education. Although she was at the top of her class and did exceptionally well in college, she quickly realized that she had limitations as a woman and set her sights on graduate school in the United States. The book ends with her leaving for graduate school at Harvard University at the age of eighteen.

At the heart of this book is Jill's intellectual journey as it lead her from Coorain, to Sydney, to boarding school, college and graduate school. Her unwavering strength and her intellectual confidence are the threads that seem constant in her life in the midst of the

turmoil of losing a father and brother as well as dealing with her alcoholic mother. This true story gets to the center of adolescent struggles with self, mind, friendship and family and gives readers an opportunity to see an ordinary woman do some extraordinary things. I felt this book would be a good way for the book discussion group to get at issues of being an intellectual and how women fit into different roles.

### **Data Collection**

Five types of data were collected for subsequent analysis during the spring and summer of 1998. The first type of data was **audiotapes** of the discussions from each meeting. Each of the meeting audiotapes were catalogued and then selectively transcribed for subsequent analysis. The second type of data was **journal entries** written by the students throughout the book club experience. These journals were photocopied periodically throughout the study and the originals returned to the participants. The third type of data was **fieldnotes** taken throughout the study. Fieldnotes were written during and after each book discussion group and sometimes written following interesting events occurring outside of the meeting times. The fourth data source was follow-up **interviews** conducted at the end of the study. The interviews asked open-ended questions about their experiences which were audiotaped and transcribed for subsequent analysis. The fifth data source was a two-part **survey** conducted at the end of the study. The survey asked the girls a series of questions to be answered from a past perspective in the first part and then a present perspective in the second part. If their perspective had changed at all from past to present they were asked to explain to what they attributed these changes.

## **Data Analysis**

Two main questions guided my analyses: How does a learning context that values caring, connection, and relational ways of knowing facilitate the emergence of voice for girls? How can reading, writing and talking about gender and identity-related books facilitate identity development for adolescent girls? Analysis of the data was ongoing, using qualitative methods from ethnography and sociolinguistics to develop answers to these guiding research questions. The follow-up interviews and meeting transcripts served as primary data sources for the analyses as it is in the public and social spheres that private transformations can be “seen” and “heard” (Wallace, 1996). The journals, fieldnotes and surveys served as secondary sources. In analyzing these primary and secondary sources of data, I was guided by an interpretive theoretical framework that emphasizes understanding and describing actions and meaning rather than a more positivist approach that seeks to find a highly generalizable “truth” or one narrow answer to my questions.

The first analysis focused on the development of the book discussion group context and how this context facilitated the emergence of voice for the participants. The interviews served as the primary source of data in this analysis. Meeting transcripts, journals and surveys served as secondary sources for triangulation purposes. Using grounded theory techniques and the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I began by cataloguing four of the interviews. This consisted of creating detailed summaries that helped to capture the girls’ responses in a shortened form. From these catalogues, patterns in the girls’ responses began to emerge

around issues such as support and connection. Specifically, as I read the catalogues, I found that the words “support” and “connection” came up regularly in their responses. I used the catalogues as starting points to mark the data for these general categories.

Taking these initial categories, I moved from the interview catalogues to the interview transcripts and began coding the data as it related to these aspects as well as coding for other aspects that I found interesting but had not yet developed a model to explain. Initially, I found myself coding many sections of the transcript, as I continued to find various ways in which the girls were speaking about their experiences in the book discussion group--particularly as they reported on their participation. In addition to support and connection, issues of safety, trust, caring and emotional support were also being marked in the data. To the girls, these topics seemed central to their understanding of their experience, how it differed from school or other contexts, and how it facilitated their participation. I focused on two of the seven girls in the beginning, coding their transcripts and trying to come to an understanding of what I thought they were saying. I pulled out the quotes I had marked and put them together in temporary groupings to create a prototype of a coding scheme for the other interviews. For example, I had a group of quotes under the section titled “Issues of book discussion group providing opportunities for them to see they are not alone.” These initial divisions helped me to begin to work with the data across the girls to better understand how I was defining issues such as support and connection. After creating initial categories of support, connection and caring for the first two girls, I then moved through the next five transcripts, using my initial categories as guides but quickly finding that these did not completely fit.

Using constant comparative method I moved in and out of the data as I refined and developed my theory regarding the development of the book discussion group context (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). I would go into the data, come up with categories, then step back from the data to make sense of what I was seeing, then go back into the data to see how it fit. As I moved through each of the transcripts the categories shifted and some categories, such as the category of caring, were removed. In the end, the categories that were coded for context were safety, trust, common bond, and support. After creating this coding system, I went through the rest of the interviews and coded them, then pulled out the relevant quotes for each category. As I coded, I also wrote memos and began drawing diagrams to represent what I had been finding in the data. I used the codes to conceptualize a theory that helped to make sense of how the context facilitated and related to the emergence of voice. The coding, the diagrams, and the analytic memos resulted in a theory of how certain features of the book discussion group created a space within which voice could emerge. This analysis and theory became Chapter 4--Taking Ourselves Seriously: Creating A Relational Space To Nurture Voice.

The second analysis focused on the question of identity development and used the interviews and the meeting transcripts as primary data. In this analysis, I also used grounded theory and sociolinguistic strategies to theorize about the data, but I situated my analysis within a socio-cultural lens. I used Harre's (1984) Vygotsky Space (Gavelek and Raphael, 1996) as the framework within through which to analyze the data.

Specifically, I argued that the girls' talk within the social and public quadrants<sup>6</sup> of the Vygotsky Space was central to their changing perceptions of their identities within the context of the book discussion group. Within the public/social quadrant of the Vygotsky Space, the issues of role identification and more knowledgeable others were examined as ways to make sense of how the girls were developing and learning from the book discussion group. In support of my hypotheses about the significance of the book discussion group in facilitating intellectual identity development, I focused on Gail to show her identity development in the group. Although I could have selected any of the girls, I selected Gail because she was most like the girls on whom research on relational and connected ways of knowing focus (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1988; Orenstein, 1984). That is, Gail worried more about staying in relation and connection to others and would silence herself to be liked and to stay in connection with others. Gail could be considered someone who is silenced in school contexts and who I believed could benefit from an alternative learning community. I used Gail to illustrate the process of identity development in the book discussion group. In order to build Gail's case, I focused on her interview transcripts as the primary data source and then looked at meeting transcripts, her survey responses and her journal writing as means to support my argument.

I began looking at Gail because of three instances that clearly stood out in my mind that related to Gail's identity. The first was her early comment in a discussion

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<sup>6</sup>The social and public quadrants of the Vygotsky Space (Harre, 1984; Gavelek and Raphael, 1996) are detailed in chapter five.

when asked “Gail who are you?”, she responded “Who she says I am”, pointing to her friend. A second telling instance was when Gail became visibly upset and expressed her fears and doubts about herself and her intellectual ability, and in her exit interview where Gail discussed a change in the way she was thinking about herself as it related to her intellectual identity. These three events were the initial markers that had come out of my fieldnotes and recollections of Gail’s experiences that I used as the starting point and guide for my analysis. Beginning with these events, I began to analyze Gail’s interview by recoding it for issues related to her intellectual identity and other issues about changing perceptions of herself as a thinker and a knower. I began to triangulate her responses about changes in herself with her survey responses as well as with her participation in the meetings. In order to document her participation in meetings, I began by counting the times she would participate in the discussion from the beginning meetings to the final meetings, which revealed an increase in her frequency of participation. I then analyzed the nature of her participation by looking at transcribed segments of meetings that revealed the changing nature of the way she was participating in the group discussions. As I came to understand the data about Gail’s changing participation and sense of herself, I utilized the Vygotsky Space (Harre, 1984) as an analytic tool in order to explain how her participation, interview responses, survey responses and journal writing could be seen as examples of transformations in her thinking and understanding of herself. This analysis became Chapter 5--Using Our Voices, Crafting Our Selves: The Social Construction of Intellectual Identity.

CHAPTER IV  
TAKING GIRLS SERIOUSLY:  
CREATING A RELATIONAL SPACE TO NURTURE VOICE

*...In school, I don't raise my hand and talk as much as I did in the book club. I talked a lot more[here]. And I wasn't as afraid. Like in school, you're, I always am afraid of like what are people gonna think, they'd be like oh, you're wrong. So I don't really insert my ideas strongly in school. But in the book club it was easier because they were people that I knew kind of, I knew from cross country, and it was more like, a more supportive surrounding (Karen Interview 8/3/98).*

For Karen, the context of the Book Discussion Group made a difference in her participation and ultimately in the emergence of her voice--a voice that was silent in other settings for fear of judgment or disconnection from others<sup>7</sup>. Specifically, Karen's voice emerged more easily in an environment where: 1) she felt safe; 2) she trusted that she would not be judged; 3) she felt a common bond with others in the group; and 4) she felt supported. Contrasting her experience in the Book Discussion Group with her experiences in school, Karen reveals how voicing her opinion and letting her ideas be heard is a struggle in school, yet in the book discussion group there were elements of the context that made it easier for her to participate actively. Karen's quote is representative of a pattern that emerged throughout the interview data. Although, in many respects,

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<sup>7</sup>I am not implying that Karen (or any of the girls) did not have a voice other than in the context of the book discussion group. When we talked about running and boys--social topics that were perceived as safe and which everyone could talk about she and others had no problem voicing opinions and ideas. What I am suggesting is that a different voice emerged (a voice that was more personal, reflective and vulnerable) that was silent in their school context, a voice related to the work of Gilligan et al. (1982;1988), who explore issues of girls silencing themselves in contexts such as school. The voices that they speak with were ones that put new and different ideas out which moved them away

group members can be seen as successful, confident and outgoing students, each revealed struggles similar to Karen's regarding their willingness to speak out in school. This contrasted with their comments about the nature of the book discussion group context that allowed them to speak out and use their voices. These revelations caused me to examine more closely how the book discussion group context was created and what this meant for the emergence of voice. Although the interaction of the books, the girls, and myself formed the basic elements of the book discussion group, it became clear that we had created a fourth element--intellectual caring--that allowed girls' voices to emerge. The element of intellectual caring helped to create a space where safety, trust, connection and support were nurtured. The creation of a relational space and its implications for girls' voice are the focus of this chapter.

I begin by describing three basic elements of the context--the girls, myself, and the books--and how each element mirrors aspects of typical classrooms. Next, I examine how these three elements were active in fostering the fourth element--personal and intellectual caring--and at the same time in creating a relational space where voice could emerge. I then examine the development of this relational space as it coincides with changes in the girls' engagement over time.

### **The Beginning Context of the Book Discussion Group**

In order to create a context that supported the emergence of voice, the book discussion group needed a starting point from which to develop. Our starting point consisted of three basic elements (see Figure 1) that look similar to traditional classroom

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from topics they were used to such as boys and school.

contexts. The basic elements consisted of the students(girls), the teacher(me) and the content (books) and these formed the basis of the context for the book discussion group. Initially, the girls' role in the discussion group was to come to the meetings having read the book and, if they chose to, do some writing about the book in their journals. They were also to think of book selections for upcoming meetings and decide as a group what we would read. Their follow-through with these tasks was to form the basis of our group

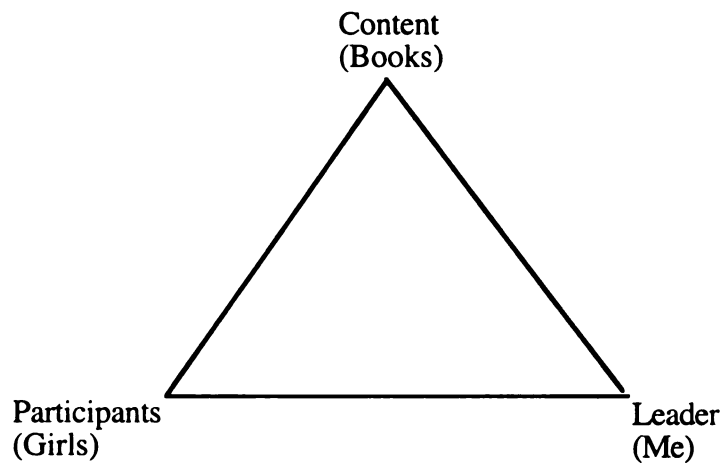


Figure 1: Basic Elements of the Book Discussion Group

discussions. The second element involved my role as creator of the book discussion group. As such, I was to read the books and be prepared to talk and facilitate discussions with the girls. Finally, the books themselves were to provide the content of our discussions. These books were chosen because they dealt with issues of identity, girls and adolescence. Taken at face value, the three basic components look much like the typical classroom.

It was not enough, however, that the basic elements of the book discussion group existed or that each element had a particular role it was supposed to play. It was our actions and interactions as a book discussion group, not the separate roles we played, that facilitated caring relations and opened up a relational space for girls where their voices were encouraged and heard. How, then, was this space created?

### **Creating A Relational Space**

In the case of the book discussion group, girls' voices emerged because a space was created for their voices and by their voices--a space that valued trust, support, safety and connection as part of this discourse community. What became apparent in analyzing how a space was created for girls' voices was that the girls, myself, and the books were active participants in our learning and development. Unlike traditional classrooms where the voice of the teacher is valued above others, this context equally valued the engagement of the girls' voices, my voice, and the books' voices<sup>8</sup> as central to learning and development in the book discussion group. The engagement of these voices as reflected in interviews, fieldnotes, meeting transcripts and journals, became the focus of my analysis as I sought to understand how this context facilitated the emergence of adolescent girls' voices.

Using grounded theory technique and the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990), I analyzed interview data and fieldnotes to

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<sup>8</sup> In a socially constructed view of learning, a text is viewed as active a participant as any one person or group of individuals. In essence, the text added another voice to the conversation, just as participants brought their own voices to the discussions.

make sense of how the book discussion group facilitated voice. Throughout the interviews, the girls revealed aspects of their discussion group experiences that they felt facilitated their participation. My fieldnotes also revealed patterns of interactions in which I engaged that seemed to have a direct impact on the girls' participation. From these analyses, I identified three main features as pertinent to the emergence of girls' voices in this context-- "connecting points," "taking them seriously," and "giving permission." These features are introduced and developed below.

**Connecting Points.** During their interviews, the girls reported various ways in which they were connected to different aspects of the book discussion group. By connection, I mean a sense of familiarity with, relation to or common bond with other people, other ideas or other experiences. The girls not only reported such connections, but also related these connections to creating feelings such as comfort, trust, security, safety and confidence within the context of the book discussion group that helped them to open up and express themselves. More specifically, my analysis revealed four different kinds of connections, which I refer to as "connecting points," that the girls were making in the book discussion group. These connecting points were means by which the girls made sense of their experience. As will be demonstrated below, each connecting point played a role in the girls' willingness to openly participate in the book discussion group, and at the same time these points helped to create a more trusting, safe and supportive environment.

The first connecting point relates to the **common background** between myself and the girls. Coming back to my old high school had not been a factor I had anticipated would make a significant difference in the girls' experience, but our similar histories

influenced the girls' desire to participate. As Karen stated, "Well, when I first, when we first started talking about this, I thought it would be really cool because Susan, former cross country runner. She's from here. She's just like us" (8/3/98 p. 31). For Karen and others in the group, the fact that I had a similar background not only contributed to their desire to participate but also helped them to open up more in the group. Karen further commented,

"...since you were, like, a woman, like us, and you were a runner and you went to the same high school, it was more like you weren't as much a...you were like a facilitator but you were also like kind of an equal more...I think it made a difference in us opening up more and talking more about our own experiences... Because, if you were like a 50 year old man, it'd be completely different.(8/3/98, p.34)

For the girls, the fact that this was a single sex group and that we shared similar interests (e.g. running), made the experience different for them. Ellen echoes this sentiment when she remarked how comfortable everyone was with one another and that if the group was "like co-ed or something, it would be different. I think it would turn out a lot different" (8/3/98, p.23). She goes on to talk about how similar they are as a group and "[that] was kinda cool because we could relate to each other more." For these girls, these points of connection made a difference. There were aspects of our histories (runners; went to same school) and facts of our lives (we were all female; I was not that much older) that connected us even before the group got started.

In addition to connecting to each others' backgrounds, the girls commented on the importance of **connecting to their peers' ideas and experiences**. As Ellen commented, "Everybody was familiar and everyone knows each other and everything. And if we said

something, it's not like you were in a room full of strangers and they'd be like oh, you know. If it was dumb or whatever" (8/28/98, p.2). For Ellen and others it was not enough that they had similar backgrounds, but there was also a sense that they were connected more deeply--they knew one another. This type of familiarity created a feeling for Katy where "I can just say anything" (8/28/98, p.2). However, this feeling of being open because they knew one another was not initially apparent for all members of the group. For Karen there was a perception of others in the group that initially put her at a distance from them. She commented that "...in the beginning though, I kind of had like preconceived images of how these people were gonna be... and then like they kind of changed but not really...I guess everyone just became a person instead of like what I thought they were." When I asked Karen to give an example she talked about Jenny stating: "I thought she was just happy all the time, and then like I realized that like she has all the same problems that I do so... I always felt like a bad person because I wasn't nice to everyone as much [as she was]. But then I saw, like, her problems so I felt more like we were equals" (8/3/98, p.31). It was only in Karen's realization that Jenny had problems similar to her own that she could see herself as connecting to Jenny as a peer and not just as someone she had known through running.

The realization that they were not alone was an important factor for the girls. When I asked Gail why connecting to others' experiences was important she responded, "It's like you feel more comfortable about yourself. Because if everybody's [saying] this, then we should just all forget [worrying about] it" (8/28/98, p. 19). Connecting to her peers as they shared their experiences in the group helped Gail and others to see their

own problems as less significant. In looking at both Karen's and Gail's examples, you can see the girls developing a sense of confidence that let them value their experiences in different ways. For Karen, there was a sense of confidence in her relationship with Jenny in that sharing a common experience made her feel more like an equal. Karen could value her own experience more when she could relate it to the experience of someone who she held in some esteem. For Gail, a feeling of confidence came from being able to let go of her own insecurities when she realized that everyone was experiencing the same doubts and fears as she was. Deciding to "forget" her own issues was important in helping Gail to assert herself. She was no longer as concerned about what everyone would think. This pattern of realizing they were not alone in their feelings and experiences is discussed by others (e.g., Gilligan, 1988; Sadker and Sadker, 1994) who argue that girls are seeking connection, not separation, during adolescence. The lack of connection, it is argued, is what creates the loss of confidence and questioning of one's self. When asked if there were moments that boosted her confidence, Ellen said she gained confidence when others shared her ideas: "Yeah, like say you, brought up a point and people were like yeah, yeah, that happened to me! I'm like, wow, I'm not the only one" (8/28/98). This type of response encouraged her further participation. Although examples of connecting to others revealed a great deal about how connection made a difference in creating confidence and openness for the girls, their comments about disconnection were equally revealing.

In their interviews, the girls talked about why connection was important but this sometimes came out in discussions about disconnection. Jill spoke about what would happen if she said something that didn't connect with her peers in the group:

J: ...if I sat down in the book club and I said my opinion and everyone else there said we don't agree with you, then I'd feel like an outsider, you know. It's just the way it is.....You just gotta feel comfortable....Because people are just so dependent on each other. Like as much as people try to be independent individuals, like everyone's dependent on each other and you need that sense of like companionship or almost just to belong or that people accept you

I: What does that do for you?

J: Makes me feel much more comfortable with myself. I mean, it makes me feel more secure about myself, like it's okay, you know (8/29/98).

As Jill shows, feeling disconnected creates isolation and isolation makes her feel less secure. For Ellen, the tenuous nature of connection was revealed when she spoke about what happened when she put an idea out on the floor that was not picked up:

I'd begin saying something and if we didn't like follow up on it, I'd be like oh, you know, I shouldn't have said that. So sometimes I did feel like a little bit weird. Like I would say blah blah blah and then somebody'd be like, yeah. And we wouldn't talk about it so I'd be like was I totally wrong. I know some other people felt like that cuz Katy was saying she'd say something and no one would say anything, only silence...then your confidence kinda shoots down, I guess (8/28/98).

Feeling that others connected to and supported her ideas was so important that it took just one instance of people not supporting her to lower Ellen's confidence. If one instance creates a loss of confidence in a context that encourages their participation and voice then it is easy to imagine their silence in the classroom where voices may not be valued. Jill related this sort of experience as she tells the story of her English teacher making Jenny cry:

Like Jenny, one time, she raised her hand and said something to [the teacher] and he was just like "No." And, she was just like, "what?" And he said "No, you're wrong" or something like that. And she was just like...it was almost like he kinda like laughed, he started laughing at her and

she started crying. And people like that are just kinda discouraging... it's kinda discouraging like for the kids to contribute...I don't think I raised my hand once this year with Mr. C. (8/29/98).

These examples reveal the importance of connection to their participation, but also the sensitivity of response they have to experiences of disconnection and its subsequent ability to shut them down and silence them. The relationship between connection and opening up and using their voices was recognized by Ellen: "If we can be that open with each other, we must have a pretty good, you know, like connection. If someone's able to express truly what they're thinking and even coming to tears, you know, not a lot of people would do that" (8/28/98). For Ellen, connection was a prerequisite to truly expressing oneself and in her eyes, the girls must be connected because they are so open. At the same time, the opportunity to truly express oneself was a rare occurrence for these girls as Ellen remarks that "not a lot of people would do that [open up]". For this group, connecting to each other allowed them to reveal themselves and let their voices be heard in ways that were rarely available to them in their daily lives in school.

At the same time they were connecting to each other, the girls spoke of ways that they were **connecting to me**. The girls spoke of my expressed hope that they would talk about their feelings when we first began to meet as a group and their sense that this would not happen because they had not established a relationship with me. As Jill remarked, "Well, I think the first session was actually pretty hilarious, because we all just sat there and were like, ugh, we don't know this lady and she wants us to talk about our feelings and we don't wanta talk about our feelings because we don't know her" (8/29/98). This changed as they got to know me: "I know a lot of us were like I don't like to talk to a

stranger and spill our guts and all, but now you don't seem like a stranger. I think in the beginning it was a little eh, I don't know if I wanta say anything but then by the end it got, you know, it was like really easy" (Katy Interview, 8/3/98). It was important to the girls that they felt they knew me and this seemed to be facilitated by my sharing of my own experiences and stories. Katy shared how my telling of my own experiences helped them to open up. She commented, "I think you helped us [open up] by telling us about experiences in your life. And when you shared your own ideas, I think it helped. When you were like, wow, I thought this part and we were like wow, I thought the same thing, too. I think we all connected somehow" (8/3/98).

The feelings of connection to me that the girls experienced also seemed focused around their feelings that I had already been through all that they were going through. As Jenny stated, "I guess like talking to you, you know, you've been through that. You've been in high school, so I guess that's why it was kinda cool. Like if we were all, if you were 17 too, it might have been hard, but I think that's what gave like a lot of girls a chance to like, open up because you were, more mature, you know, more than we were" (8/28/98). Because they felt I had been through many of their experiences, the girls felt a connection to me that facilitated their participation. This connection was also fueled by their perception of my role in the group. By sharing my experiences I had become more than just the facilitator. As Gail stated, "You definitely got it (the discussions) all going. Without just being like the person, you know, giving us the books, you ended up being like, like a peer, telling us your own experiences, too." (8/29/98). This feeling that I was both a leader and a peer did not fit with their previous experiences. As Gail stated,

“Whereas you’re the leader but at the same time you were sharing everything with us.”

(8/29/98). It seemed that this combination of roles created a connection for them that was different from those with other adult figures in their lives.

In the two excerpts below, the girls reveal a contrast between the way they perceived my relationship with them and their relationship with other adults such as parents and teachers. In the first excerpt Jill highlights the lack of people in her life to whom she talks and the importance of her sense of connection to me around shared experiences. She stated:

I loved listening to the things that you would talk about. Because you don't, you don't normally get an adult opinion. Because, you know, who do we talk to? We talk to our parents but it's like.... You can't, I mean, I wouldn't tell my parents half, tell my mom half the things that we said to you, you know. And like we felt so comfortable with you. We could talk about anything. But it wasn't just teenagers talking about it. It was like we had an adult there who's been through all that we've been through...has experienced it all and you could give us a lot of advice. (8/29/98)

In the second excerpt, Gail comments on the difference in the way that we interacted as it contrasted with her school experience. Specifically, she distinguishes between the feeling of being talked to at school and the sense that in the book discussion group I was talking with them. She comments, “When you're within school, like the teachers are preaching to you, but you[Susan], like, were talking about the stuff with us. You were like, it was like you were going through the book with us, you were giving your own experiences, you were talking about your own life” (Gail Interview, 8/29/98). The way that I interacted with the girls and shared my own stories not only helped them to get to know me, but made them feel that we were connected and somehow on a relatively equal plane. This

seems most clear in Gail's statement that I was talking with them instead of to them and Jill's comment that they "felt so comfortable with [me], we could talk about anything." For Jill, this also translated into her classroom participation where knowing her teacher really made a difference. She remarked, "The teachers that I get to know, like even, even the one teacher, I had her this year for bio and for chemistry last year, I hate the lady. But I know her real well...and like in a way, just because I know her better and I understand her better, I'll contribute to the class"(8/29/98).

For Jill and others it was important that they felt they "knew" me before they were willing to really open up and let me "know" them. Their sense of connection to me played an important role in their feeling that they could be open and voice their opinion. It also facilitated feelings of safety and trust as they saw me sharing my own experiences. The more I shared my experiences with them and the more they felt a common bond, the more they began to open up and share their own experiences and ideas in the book discussion group. The ideas that they expressed, however, were usually focused around the books we were reading.

For the girls, **connecting to the books**, particularly to characters in the books, was another point of connection that facilitated their participation. When I was selecting books for the group, and trying to get the girls to select them as well, I had criteria in mind with regard to what should be chosen. I shared with the girls that I wanted the books to be female character based, relate to issues of identity and to adolescence. Since we were to be talking about the girls' lives and experiences in relation to the books, it made sense to me that the books be connected to their present experiences in these ways. The focus

of the books seemed to make sense to the girls as well. As Ellen stated, “Just all the characters, you know, I think it was definitely good since it's like girls, you know, you were doing the study on us [girls], so it is much easier to associate with all the characters cuz they were girls” (8/28/98). For Ellen and others, just the fact that the characters had similarities to themselves made it easier to relate. For Katy, the connection ran even deeper as she remarked in the following excerpt:

Like since the characters were all girls, I think that definitely helped. We could all like relate to the girls, because *girls can always relate to each other*, you know, and I kinda felt like that. I could always relate to them, usually somehow. Even if we were completely different, I think just having girls around our age [in the books], *you always could just put yourself in their shoes....*If we had to read a book about like an 80 year old man, no, we can't do this, you know. But since they were all girls, teenagers, I think that was a lot easier cuz they're going through the same things we go through.(8/3/98) (emphasis added)

For Katy, connecting to the book characters was more like relating to peers. In her eyes, the characters were other girls with whom she had connection just by the fact that they were girls. Much like connecting to peers, Katy and others would put herself in the shoes of the characters *because* “they were going through the same things we were going through.” Katy used the characters to connect to her own life and experiences. As she remarked, “All of the characters were kind of strong and, like, you'd watch them as they developed their identity and then like we could relate to ourselves and like what we go through, that makes up our identity” (8/3/98). The connection to the books encouraged participation as it also helped the girls to reflect on their own lives. Consider the following exchange from a book discussion group meeting as Jill relates the way a

character is feeling to her own life. She begins by reading a section of the book and then connects it to how she and Gail feel in their daily lives.

Jill: yeah, it says... "I got to thinking when it was too late, you have to reach out to people." I just thought it was really interesting 'cause it sums up a lot, 'cause I know Gail and I have a lot of trouble some times like opening up to people. And like not necessarily ...like certain people you can just go up to and tell them your whole life story. But like sometimes, it's just like with people you get so intimidated by them that you don't just don't act yourself

Katy: yeah

Jill: And...I don't know. So I just thought that was like when I read that I was like...you know, I should listen to her. (She starts to laugh with others).  
(meeting transcript 3/26/98)

In this excerpt, Jill is relating the experiences of Dicey, the main character in the book (Dicey's Song), to her own life. In the book, Dicey is faced with many hardships and she must find ways to continue reaching out. When Jill connects with Dicey's experience, she not only has something to contribute to the discussion, she also finds a way to reflect on her own life and begin to consider that maybe, "I should listen to her" and begin to take risks and open up with people. Book connections were helpful ways in which the girls could take risks and find support not just in other members of the group who might share their experiences but also in the characters who encouraged them to take risks and open up, much the way Dicey's words helped Jill.

For the girls, connecting points--common backgrounds, connecting with peers, connecting to me and connecting to the books--served several purposes. They made the girls feel more comfortable with themselves, with each other, and with me. These connections helped them to realize they were not alone which helped build a sense of

confidence and security. For these girls connection came in various forms but translated into the same thing--a more secure sense of themselves that helped facilitate the emergence of their voices.

**Taking Them Seriously.** The second feature that emerged as significant in creating a relational space for girls' voice, was "taking the girls seriously." Unlike the first feature of "connecting points" which focused on connections that the girls were making, this feature focuses on my actions toward and interactions with the girls, both inside and outside the book discussion group meetings. By "taking them seriously" I am referring to ways in which I let the girls know that I valued them--their ideas, their experiences, their persons. For the girls, this was a new experience, especially as it contrasted with their school experiences where they did not see a place for their perspectives and beliefs. Jill addressed this when she talked about how school was different than the book discussion group. She stated,

Cuz school's all about academics. *Nobody there, like sits down or there's no like one on one classes where it's like, let's talk about you. Let's talk about your feelings, let's talk about your reactions to things, let's talk about your emotions.....* I think it could be but I don't think it is. And when I think, I think in English more it happens. Like I had a teacher last year who I absolutely loved for English and I developed a really good relationship with the teacher *but it was outside the classroom* that I, that we would talk about things, like, he would talk a lot to me about like my feelings and my life and stuff like that. And it's like everybody's just like well, your life outside of school is your life outside of school. But in school you have to do this, this, this and this. (8/29/98) [*emphasis added*]

For Jill and others, there was no space in the classroom for their voice--their experiences, feelings, reactions to what they were doing in school. That is, the girls were not taken seriously as having experiences, etc. that would contribute to their learning and

development in the classroom. The classroom was disconnected from their lives and experiences. It would make sense, then, that they might feel silenced and not be willing or able to let their voices be heard. If girls' voices are to be encouraged and heard, then they need to spend significant time in contexts in which their experiences and their voices are seen as significant and valuable for their learning and development. In the book discussion group, I attempted to value their experiences in different ways as the "more knowledgeable other" (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985). This role seemed significant to the girls in their learning. As Jill explained when I asked her about how she thought I made a difference in the discussions,

We wouldn't have had the discussions we would have had, we would have... I mean, I think we would have had some serious discussions about things but I think that we wouldn't have talked about, you know, the books as much. And I don't think we would have actually like had to think like intellectually and had to think like, relating yourself to the book.... You were like our leader, you know. You, you were like our mom. Not in a bad way. But you were like, it was almost like you took care of us and you guided us towards, towards what we were trying to get at. (8/29/98)

For Jill and others, I was their "leader" in that I facilitated their intellectual thinking and their making connections to their lives. They had a sense that I had shared some of their experiences but also had more experience about what we were doing and talking about.

As Jenny stated, "you've been through this before so you could offer advice" (8/28/98).

In this context, however, there was still a sense that we were equal participants. As Karen stated, "you weren't as much a, you were like a facilitator but you were also like kind of an equal more" (8/3/98). I worked hard to maintain a balance between facilitator and peer as we socially constructed the book discussion group context. I wanted them to

feel that their voices were as important as mine, but I also recognized my part in getting them to feel this way. This analysis focuses on the actions I took in trying to facilitate a context where the girls would feel valued--where their voices would count and could be heard.

In analyzing my role as “more knowledgeable other,” I found that my actions facilitated changes in the ways that the girls participated in the book discussion group. The changing nature of their participation signaled, to me, a change in the nature of the girls’ voices in the book discussion group. The girls not only engaged more, but they engaged in different ways--ways that showed they were beginning to take themselves more seriously as girls whose voices mattered and made a difference in the context of the discussions. In particular, I examine four ways that I “took them seriously.” I then relate my actions to the changing nature of their participation, or emerging voices, in the book discussion group.

One act of my taking the girls seriously was by **giving them feedback in writing**. After the first meeting, I realized that talking about the books was not easy for them. As Ellen said in her interview,

At first we didn't really know what was going on because I don't think anyone had really done a book club before so it's like what do you talk about? After it became a routine, I was able to talk, but I still felt like, I don't know. It's different from anything that I've ever done. You know, and when you do that [talk about the books], it takes a while to get used to. And that's all I mean really is, you know, it got better but still...just different. (8/28/98)

I was feeling uncertain about how the group was progressing so I gave them some suggestions in their second meeting letter<sup>9</sup>. The letters alone were not working and I was struggling. As I commented in my fieldnotes,

I am struggling with how to get them going. I come to the group and have given them suggestions on how to have a conversation, but feel like we stall out and I end up having to ask the questions about what they are thinking and feeling about the book. How do I get them to buy into this [the book discussion group] and buy into me? (Meeting Notes, 2/28/98)

I decided to collect four of the girls' journals at the end of the second meeting believing that this would afford me the opportunity to show that I was taking them seriously. After reading them, I wrote each girl a card and mailed the card and the journal back to them. In the card I asked them questions about what they had written, I said to each that I had enjoyed and learned a lot from their writing, and I encouraged each to keep writing as they read. At the next meeting, the four girls to whom I had written personal notes and asked questions were the only four who brought both their books and journals, had written in their journals, and had tabbed their books. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, "Ellen, Karen, Katy and Jenny were all ready to go at the meeting today. They had written in their journals and had used the book tabs I had sent out" (Meeting Notes, 2/28/98). This was a clear indication to me that they were responding to my act of taking them seriously by taking themselves and their ideas more seriously. A similar response occurred with Jill when I added a hand written note onto her meeting letter. I had noticed

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<sup>9</sup> I sent out a letter to the girls prior to each meeting, reminding them about the time, place, etc. of the upcoming meeting. In these letters I would also encourage them to write in their journals and give suggestions about how to do that.

that Jill was the most resistant<sup>10</sup> to engaging in discussions around the actual text of the books. Whatever the reason, she was avoiding engaging in reading, writing and thinking about the books and her life. As I wrote in my meeting notes,

When Jill comes to the meetings she is normally tired or has some reason why she doesn't have her books or her journal, etc. She and Gail arrived to the last meeting together and although a conversation had already started about the book, they came in and started talking about a fight with a boy they were having and why they were late.(3/26/98)

I would often joke with Jill about getting her to read the books when we were outside of the meeting, but I finally decided to say something more serious and direct as a postscript to the 4th meeting letter. I wrote, "Jill, I only give you a hard time about reading because I really want to hear what you have to say. I think you have a lot to offer to the conversation" (Meeting Letter 3/11/98). At the next meeting, Jill arrived ready to share her ideas as demonstrated in the following transcript segment from the beginning of the meeting:

Jill: Can I talk?

SW/others: Yeah, go!

Jill: On p. 134? If you would all like to open up. um, I thought this part was kind of funny cause um, Dicey was talking with her gram...and um I thought it was funny because it reminded me of myself because, like, when we go, when we talk to our parents and stuff sometimes we won't like say anything....

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<sup>10</sup>By resistance I am referring to the different ways that Jill would avoid taking part in the book aspect of the discussion. She would forget her book or her journal, she would arrive late and she would disrupt the conversation when she entered by talking about what was happening in school. Gutierrez (1995) refers to these types of moves as "counterscripts" in the classroom that work against the "script" of the classroom--in this case the book discussion group. I believe it was Jill's way of not taking herself seriously.

This exchange occurred at the beginning of the meeting and was uncharacteristic of Jill's participation in the group prior to that point. As I wrote in my fieldnotes,

For the first time ever, Jill commented that she wanted to say a few things. She had marked the book and had insightful comments ready to make when she started. This was a big departure from the other book club meetings where the focal group has been Karen, Katy, Ellen and Jenny. (3/26/98)

Jill was not only prepared to talk (having marked her book and actually read) but she was also willing to talk. This had never happened before in the discussion group and I believe it was a direct result of my personal note telling her that I wanted to hear what she had to say--that I valued her as a thinker and as a person.

In both the instances of written communication I described above, there was a change in the girls preparation and participation for the book discussion group. In all cases the girls came prepared to talk. Although one could argue that preparation does not guarantee participation, I argue that it reduces the number of excuses the girls could make for not wanting to take risks and put ideas out to the group. As I quoted from my notes earlier, Jill normally, "has some reason why she doesn't have her books or her journal", but in being prepared she took away those reasons and created opportunities for herself to let her voice be heard in a different way<sup>11</sup>. These girls were taking themselves seriously by giving themselves the opportunity.

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<sup>11</sup> Jill's voice was in the meetings, but it was a voice of resistance that she used to avoid engaging in discussions around the book.

My letters and notes to the girls were actions I took outside of the context of the book discussion group, but there were other acts of taking them seriously that occurred within the book discussion group context. A second act of taking them seriously was by **asking questions** when the girls were expressing their ideas. Within the book discussion group, I wanted the girls to know that I was listening to them so I asked them questions. My questions, however, were also intended to push their thinking and further facilitate them taking themselves seriously. Jill supported this goal when she said, “you made us think” (8/29/98). I wanted them to challenge themselves and their thinking and also scaffold<sup>12</sup> them as they learned to engage with and talk about their ideas. Karen commented on my role, stating, “I think [you] kept us a little bit more talking about the book. And more like exploring deeper into like a certain topic...through your questions.” (8/3/98). My questions helped them to take their own experiences and insights seriously and pushed them to delve more deeply into topics. Some of my questions were about the books but often they were about the connection between the books and their lives. For example, when we were discussing Ellen Foster, we began talking about how the character Ellen seemed to have a sense of herself as smart. I asked the girls, “How does Ellen maintain a sense of herself as smart with all that has happened to her?” (Meeting transcript, 6/18/98). This question allowed us to talk about what was happening in the book, but to also address deeper issues of how individuals maintain themselves in the face

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<sup>12</sup> When I refer to “scaffolding” ways of engaging and talking about their ideas, I am referring to the work of Vygotsky (1978). Vygotsky refers to scaffolding as the support provided by the more knowledgeable other in a learning context. The more

of adversity. Shortly after asking this question, I then asked them questions such as “Do you think you are smart?” and “How do you maintain a sense of yourself when you are faced with a challenge?” (6/18/98). I wanted them to think deeply about the books, and also to make connections to how their own stories were valued and made a difference in how they were making sense of the books. By asking them questions about their lives, I was valuing their stories as ones that were as important as the book stories. In short, I was valuing their voices.

A third way that I took the girls seriously was by **getting them involved** in the book discussion group. By this I am referring to times when I would call on people who weren't talking in order to help them realize that their contributions mattered to the discussions. During each conversation there were different people who were not engaging in the discussions for various reasons. As a way for them to know that I valued what they had to say, I would specifically ask the apparently disengaged girls what they were thinking during a discussion or encourage them to talk about something they had written if I had read it in their journal or through an e-mail. The point was not to put people on the spot, but rather to let them know they were valued and we wanted to hear from them. As Ellen stated when I asked her if she could always say what she wanted to say, “I always felt it was, I said whatever and if someone wasn't saying anything, you'd be like well, what do you have to say? Cuz sometimes teachers don't do that, you know. Make sure everyone's a part of the group” (8/28/98). For Ellen and others, the fact that I took the

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knowledgeable other gives support as the learner is learning and then removes the support when the learner has developed the skill to do that task on their own.

time to acknowledge them as individuals and get them involved in the conversation was important to their active engagement in the group.

Closely related to my getting them involved in the discussions was my **getting involved in their lives** outside of the book discussion group. By this I am referring to different ways that I got personal with them and let them know they were not just valued for their ability to participate in the book discussion group. If I was going to truly value these girls and their experiences, then I felt it was important to value everything that was happening in their lives. For example, when Jenny came to a meeting upset because of boyfriend problems, we did not talk about the book, but instead focused the whole time on what was happening with her and we rescheduled the book discussion meeting for another day. As I wrote in my fieldnotes, “Jenny came in all upset and I decided to forget the official meeting and let her talk” (meeting notes 4/3/98). For Jenny and others, these types of experiences with me were important to helping them feel that they mattered and were valued. As Jenny commented,

whereas somebody my age mighta said like ‘why are you worrying about that? Stop worrying about it’, you were like, ‘yeah, you should [worry about it] because you know, it happened to me and a lot of other people I know and if it's something you are worried about or it's something you wanta explain, something you're not happy about then you should talk about it. (8/28/98)

It was important to me that I valued their whole person, not just what they could say in relation to a book. This seemed important to the girls in getting them to open up, especially in relation to how they experienced school. As Ellen stated, “You know how teachers have a specific role, like they have to teach, but some teachers take the next step

and they'll interact with their students, they'll get personal. I think it's the way you [Susan] got personal with everyone...you came to our [cross country] practices and stuff and that made us a little more open" (8/28/98). I made a point to interact with the girls outside the discussion meetings so that they could see they were valued in multiple ways. They did not normally have adults in their lives who took them seriously and my involvement let them feel they were being valued. As Gail stated, "If it had been a different person doing this, it could have been, you know, totally, totally different. I don't know, like some people when they're, as they get older, they kinda look down at adolescents as if they're bad" (8/29/98). For Gail and others it was very important that they felt valued and that they were not looked down on by an adult as they felt they were in other parts of their life. By getting involved, I showed them that they were people to be taken seriously, that they were important and that they mattered.

The different ways that I took them seriously by giving them feedback in writing, asking questions, getting them involved with the discussions, and getting myself involved in their lives facilitated the girls' participation in the book discussion group. My actions helped them to take themselves more seriously by becoming more involved in the group, more engaged intellectually, valuing their experiences and getting them to open up and let their voices be heard. My actions were another means by which we constructed the context and created a space for their voices.

**Giving Permission.** The third feature of the conversational context that emerged in my analysis is "giving permission." Unlike the first feature which focused on the girls activity, and the second feature which focused on my activity, "giving permission"

focuses on the activity of the books in creating a relational space. By “giving permission” I am referring to the different ways that the books gave the girls and myself access to certain topics and issues that we addressed in the book discussion group. Specifically, the books gave the girls permission to engage in discussions by providing a common ground, to discuss particular topics, and to question and talk about themselves and their lives. In addition, the books gave me permission to ask certain kinds of questions. These four means of “giving permission” are examined below.

The first way the books acted was by giving the girls **permission to talk**. That is, the books provided something in common to talk about. As Karen commented, “I guess we could have [talked without the books] but [conversation] would have like slowed down and then we woulda had to think of things to talk about. So by having the books, it like helped our conversations get started” ( 8/3/98). For Karen, having the books made it easier for the girls to talk because they didn’t have to invent topics of conversation; they had the books to get them started. The books served as common ground on which everyone could speak. This was important, particularly for people who might not participate in other settings. As Jenny remarked when discussing Karen’s involvement in the book discussion group in relation to their running context,

But like the books kind of helped, you know, for people to open up. Like maybe Karen wouldn't have opened up or somebody else....like sometimes in cross country, it might just be Jill and Gail talking or me and not everyone else. But it kinda like gave them [everyone else] a common ground [cause] the book was the same. And we were talking about the same thing and then it kinda related to our own life. But they might not have been able to do that if it was just a group of girls running, because we probably would have broken off into different, you know, not cliques but like what you usually do. If we're on a run, I might start talking to Jill or

Gail instead of, you know, somebody else because they [Jill and Gail] were talking...[the books] gave like a common ground (8/28/98).

As Jenny suggested, the books gave the girls permission to talk--to have a voice--when they might not have that chance in other contexts. The books provided a “common ground” which put everyone on equal footing in terms of having something to contribute to the conversation. Unlike team practices where only certain voices were heard, Jenny reveals the power of the books at giving everyone a chance to have a voice. As Jenny commented, “it's like Karen took the floor for a second. It was like wow, I'd never seen that in Karen before” (8/28/98). The “that” to which Jenny is referring to have seen in Karen is about Karen’s voice being heard as she made connections between the books and her life. Jenny had not really heard Karen speak about these types of issues before and she believed it was the books that gave Karen and others the opportunity to participate. The books gave everyone the same basic experience as a starting point that then allowed everyone the chance to participate.

In addition to allowing the girls to speak and participate in the conversations, the books also gave the girls “**topical permission**”<sup>13</sup>. By topical permission, I mean that the books gave the girls license to discuss certain topics that they might not have otherwise addressed. As Ellen stated, they “definitely guided the conversations” (8/28/98). Jill made a similar remark when I asked if we needed to have the books for our discussions. She commented, “We could've but we wouldn't have talked about the same thing. We wouldn't have gotten on the same topics. We wouldn't have talked about those weird and

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<sup>13</sup> Thanks to Chris Clark for suggesting this term to describe my idea.

crazy things that happened in What Girls Learn" (8/29/98). For the girls, the books gave them the opportunity to address certain topics. The books were "triggers" for the girls to get into subjects pertaining to both the books and their lives. As Katy stated, "The books triggered ideas but...we brought them out and talked about them...I never ever sit down, [and] talk about myself like this, and I think the books definitely triggered things. Because I would just never normally come out with this" (8/3/98). For Katy, the books gave her permission to talk about new things. As she stated, the books brought up things for her that she would "never normally come out with." Even though Katy takes responsibility for bringing the topics out and talking about them, she repeats the idea that it was the books that triggered these ideas and they would not have talked about the ideas without the book. The books not only gave the girls permission to bring up issues that were in the books, but they also gave them permission to probe more deeply into both the book topics and their own lives. As Gail stated when asked if we could have had the discussions without the books,

Well, we couldn't have. I mean, we could have started but I don't think that the conversation would have went as in-depth or we would have had, you know, as much to say. Because we used their [the book characters] experiences and although we switched from subject to subject, without that [the characters' experiences], we wouldn't have gotten to certain subjects (8/29/98).

The books gave her permission to delve into topics more deeply, and because of the topics covered, they also had more to say. For Gail, that came about because she was able to "use" the book characters' experiences as a way to talk about topics. The topics

did not have to be personalized to her, as they would have been had we not had the books, but she could bring up the topics because they were written about in the books.

In addition to giving the girls permission to talk about particular, sometimes difficult topics, the books also gave the girls **permission to question themselves** and their lives. As Karen stated, “I guess they [books] showed different ways to look at the world and you think about each one and how you look at the world, and how they do, and you can compare and contrast” (8/3/98). For the girls, the books opened up issues that they could explore and relate to in their own lives. The books allowed them to consider new possibilities for their futures. As Karen stated, “I guess it shows you what you're going through now and what the outcome, like all the different girls in the end, they all had like a kind of positive outcome. It kinda shows you what you can do to make yourself have a positive outcome” (8/3/98). Using books to question their own lives was not typical practice of these girls and they acknowledged the books’ role in getting them to think as well as in getting them to open up more about their own lives. As Jenny remarked,

...because we had to talk about the books and people got more open and then people started saying, you know, hey, this isn't related to the book but it kind of like makes me think about my problem. And then if we didn't have the book there, then they might not have thought about that because, you know, it made you think, made us think. I don't think we could have done it without the books (8/28/98).

Jenny’s comment reveal the books’ role as facilitator of ideas that allowed the girls to begin incorporating their own stories and experiences into the book discussion group.

The girls were able to value their own experiences when they could make connections to

the stories they were reading. These stories, however, were not the same stories they told in their everyday lives. It was a different voice that was emerging in the discussion group and the books “gave permission” for that to happen. As Jill commented when I asked her if we could have had the group without the books,

I don't think we could have done it. Just talking, just... cuz you know what? It would have ended up like so what happened in school today and you talk about it. And it'd just be like what's going on in school? What's going on in cross country? What's going on at home? You know, but it wouldn't bring up like the subjects that you, that we talked like in depth about, like about ourselves (8/29/98).

The books not only allowed the girls to question themselves, they also allowed them to interact in ways that were different from other contexts such as running. This type of talk would not have been possible, as they have reported, without the books creating the opportunities for them to reflect on their own lives.

A final influence of the books was that they **gave me permission to ask questions**. Because we read literature relating to identity, girls, adolescence, etc., the books gave me opportunities to probe the girls about these issues in ways that were connected to the discussions they were already having. As Jill commented, “Like you asked so many questions, like how does this relate to you? What do you think about that? You know, how does that make you feel. I'm like... we got that from the book, from the books that we read” (8/29/98). As Jill stated, it was the books that allowed me to ask those questions and it was those questions that helped the girls think about and reflect on their own experiences. The following meeting excerpt shows an example of how a book gave me permission to ask questions. In this excerpt we are talking about how one

character stood up for another character in the face of adversity. Although it starts off focusing on the book, I take the opportunity to ask a few pointed questions that get them thinking about their own lives. Jill starts off talking about how the main character, Dicey, was being ridiculed by her teacher, but a friend stood up for her:

Jill: An interesting thing in the book was how Minah (Dicey's friend) stood up. Like I thought that was really like so unexpected cause I was just like, cause she was like supposed to be like this popular girl, and I'm like, that's not necessarily people like that [popular] don't normally step DOWN or whatever. I mean, that sounds horrible to say...

SW: **Do you think that you would have someone do that for you?** That's a good point

Jill: I think that if anything like that ever happened to me in class, somebody would say something. (One girl nods her head in agreement.)

Becky: I think I'd say something if that happened to somebody else (others nodding)

Jill: I think I would too cause it would be, like it would be so degrading.

SW: **But would you stand up for yourself?**

Katy: We would all unite

Becky: I would stand up for somebody else before I would stand up for myself

Gail: yeah, I know I would

Jill: I think I'd be too much in shock if someone like.. I'd just be like what? (Meeting Transcript 3/26/98) [emphasis added]

In the previous excerpt, I was able to use a scene from the book to push them to think about themselves and their experiences. Since I was trying to create a context where their voices would emerge and be valued, questions were a direct means by which I could get a response. That being said, the fact that the book created the context for the questions

made it easier for girls to open up. They had the book experience to compare themselves to, which helped them to envision their own scenario. Also, by asking questions about them and their lives, I was able to both value their experiences and voices and also create opportunities for their voices to emerge. The books permitted me to delve into the girls' lives in a connected way that valued their experiences and stories, but the books also allowed them to couch their experiences within the texts they had read. This connected way of asking questions and creating conversation was an important element in creating a relational space. In fact, all of the parts of "giving permission" were important toward creating a relational space. In short, the books' role in "giving permission" was central to getting the girls to engage in discussions by providing a common ground, in getting them to discuss particular topics because of their subject matter, and in getting them to question and talk about themselves because they could relate it to their lives on their own and through my questions.

**Intellectual Caring and Relational Space.** The three features addressed in this chapter-- "connecting points," "taking them seriously" and "giving permission"-- all supported the girls in becoming more engaged in the book discussion group because they supported the development of a fourth element--the element of intellectual caring-- that emerged as the girls, myself and the books socially constructed the book discussion group context (see Figure 2). The three features addressed in this chapter incorporated aspects of intellectual caring. By intellectual caring I am referring to ways in which we showed concern for, had regard for, and valued one another as thinkers and knowers. By referring to caring as an intellectual act, I am focusing on the nature of our caring. It was not

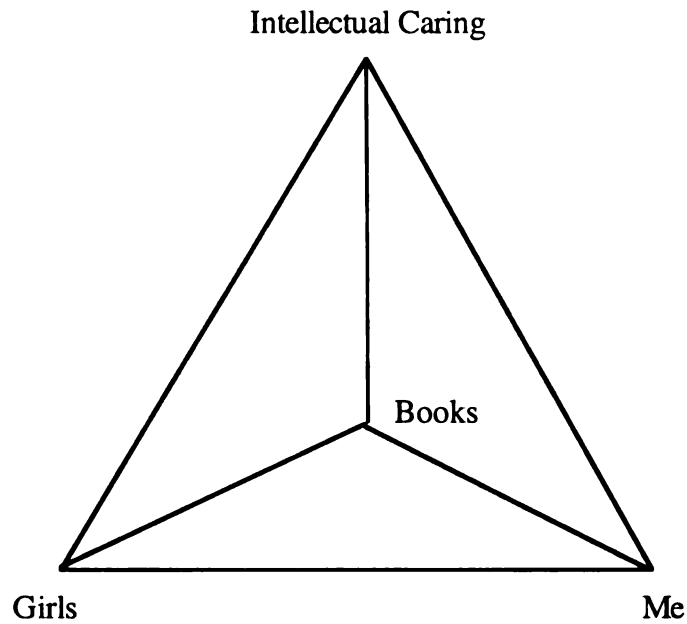


Figure 2: Relational Space Diagram

enough that we cared about each others feelings, or that we broadly cared about each others' lives. In this context we cared about each others stories and experiences within the book discussion group. It was in the revealing of the personal that we were able to care for one another as intellectuals. This is a different vision of acting as an intellectual--one grounded in experience and connection<sup>14</sup>. This type of caring valued a different more relational voice than the distanced objective voice of the traditional intellectual. This definition of intellectual caring values the relational, connected ways that we came to know and learn in the group and resulted in our shared feelings of trust, safety, support and connection that were demonstrated throughout this chapter. It was our caring about

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<sup>14</sup> This is very different than traditional, more masculine, conceptions of the intellectual as someone who is outside the mainstream. It is there job/role to fight for the truth. If one is a true intellectual they will always be on the fringes, marginalizing and exiling themselves from others in their community in the process (Said, 1993).

each others' experiences and ideas as they related to our discussions that helped to create a space for their voice within the context of the book discussion group.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the fourth element of intellectual caring created a space where I suggest that voice was able to emerge. The space inside the pyramid represents the relational space where voice emerged. When they felt safe, trusted, had a common bond and felt supported their voices emerged. As Gail stated, "Just the amazing thing is the ability to talk. I personally have gained a lot from that, just being able to talk to people and stuff...some things you go to, no matter how many times you do it you still feel intimidated by it, but I don't think I felt that here at all" (8/29/98). However, they also needed the books to focus and direct them and give them permission, myself to take them seriously when they put their ideas out in the public space, and points of connection to help them relate to one another and to the characters portrayed in the books. It was the activity of each feature that created the opportunities for intellectual caring, but without the intellectual caring there would have been no space for our voices. In the end, the relational space created by the book discussion group allowed girls to value their own voices and in turn to take themselves seriously.

## CHAPTER V

### USING OUR VOICES, CRAFTING OUR SELVES: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF INTELLECTUAL IDENTITIES

*...the whole process, this whole year, like the books and everything that's happened, I just realize you have to be true to yourself and you can't, you know, do things you don't wanta do. You have to stand up for yourself and I feel right now like I'm at a point where I just know, not necessarily what I'm gonna be, but I'm fine with that...and I just know that I'm gonna do something that I end up like wanting...I think all the discussions helped everybody realize things about themselves and I think that [the books] played a big role (Gail Interview 8/29/98).*

Gail's comments about being , "true to yourself", "standing up for yourself" and having the knowledge that she would end up doing something that she "end[s] up, like, wanting", puts forth the image of a young woman with strong beliefs in herself and her views, a willingness to stand up for those beliefs, and confidence about her ability to control her destiny. In short, Gail appears to be someone with a good sense of herself as a capable thinker and knower--a person with a positive conception intellectual identity. This image is set in contrast to my first meeting with Gail in the book discussion group.

When I first met Gail, I could only get a sense of who she was through her relationship with Jill, another member of the book discussion group. From the beginning, it was difficult to separate Jill and Gail, thus my early perceptions of Gail were shaped by her relationship to Jill. This relationship was evident at the first meeting when I asked the girls to write down ten words in their journals that described themselves. As they began to write Gail remarked, "What if we can't do that?" (Meeting Transcript 2/9/98). I

told her to give it a try and then I gave the group examples of words that might describe themselves which Gail wrote on her list as I said them. The group joked with Gail about this and helped her with her list. I jokingly asked, “Gail, who are you?” to which she replied, “who she says I am” pointing to her best friend Jill.

In that meeting I continued having them write more words about themselves as daughters, athletes, students, etc. and again Gail struggled. I wrote in my meeting notes during this time, “I wonder why this is such a struggle for Gail? Is this just the way she is or is she really struggling with her identity? Then again, maybe she just doesn’t know what to write” (2/9/98). Later in the same meeting we were discussing the book, Jacob Have I Loved. I asked the group if they had ever had an experience in which they felt diminished or counted out. Most of them said, “yes,” and Jenny and Gail said, “yeah, ‘tag along’” (Meeting Transcript, 2/9/98). This response provided support for my thought that Gail was questioning or uncertain about who she was and what her role was in relation to her friends. Her joking about being, “who she says I am” took on a different meaning as I got to know Gail. Specifically, I had the opportunity to drive Gail home after a meeting and she revealed that she had a boyfriend but didn’t want anyone to know, especially Jill, because she would receive relentless harassment. She told me that this is what happened to her and we talked about the fact that people respond more to her because she reacts to what they do. Sure enough someone found out and the ribbing began the next day during track practice, with Gail laughing the whole time so it would be difficult for her friends to know it was bothering her (Meeting Notes, 2/9/98,2/10/98). Gail was the classic example of a silenced adolescent (Gilligan, 1988). In order to stay

connected to her friends, she subverted her true feelings and projected a voice that she felt maintained her relationships, even when it was at her expense. At the same time, she seemed to have no sense of her self because she was so caught up in pleasing everyone else. As she commented, “I think I oblige myself to too many people at the same time cause I don’t want to let anyone down and then I end up like, letting them down anyway cause I can’t do everything I said I would” (8/29/98). Gail’s comment supported my initial impression and understanding of Gail both inside and outside the book discussion group.

How, then, did Gail come to have a sense of herself as a confident, capable young woman? This chapter examines that question in relation to how Gail and the other girls were socially constructing intellectual identities in the book discussion group.

Specifically, I examine how the book discussion group created opportunities for talk around the texts that allowed the girls to consider (even to “try on”) different types of identities. I begin by introducing the theoretical underpinnings of this analysis.

Specifically, I discuss how books influence identity construction and then connect this to socio-cultural theory on learning and development. I then introduce Harre’s (1984) “Vygotsky Space” which is both the model that describes the process of identity development and also the analytic tool in this chapter. I then examine two features that were relevant to the social construction of intellectual identities in the book discussion group--more knowledgeable others and perspective taking. Finally, I return to Gail to make sense of her changing sense of her intellectual identity as it emerged in the book discussion group.

**Theoretical Underpinnings.** Research has found that girls construct gendered identities through the fiction that they read (Cherland, 1994). Cherland found that the books girls read provided them access to “textual constructions of gender and these constructions were also positioning the girls to grow into certain kinds of women” (p. 96). The girls in Cherland’s study were growing into women who perpetuated traditional stereotypes of the female gender. In our group, the girls read books that challenged traditional assumptions about gender and identity. By introducing female characters who are strong, confident, resilient, outspoken, and intellectual, I hoped to challenge their conceptions of themselves as thinkers and knowers--the very identities that have traditionally been silenced in adolescence (Gilligan, 1982, 1988; Orenstein, 1994). Simply introducing them to inspiring characters, however, would not be enough. We needed the discourse community of the book discussion group to engage around the texts and to think more deeply about identity issues.

The context of the book discussion group created a relational space where the girls’ voices emerged. Having a voice--being active contributors to discussions--is central to a socio-cultural perspective on learning and development. Specifically, language plays a central role in the development of thought and mind (Wertsch, 1985). In a social constructivist theory of learning and development, social interactions are the basis for psychological development. As Vygotsky (1981) wrote, “Any function appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First, it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the [person] as an intrapsychological category” (p. 163). In a socially constructed view of identity development the unit of

analysis is mediated action--with language as the mediational tool for action. That is, identities are viewed not as a "...static, inflexible structure of the self, but as a dynamic dimension or moment in action" (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995, p. 84). When we speak we are putting our thoughts into action and it is this action (which is mediated by language) that both reveals and creates identities. Thus, our conversations were central to, and the basis for, our individual learning and identity development. Still, identity as mediated action only reveals the observable and public aspects of identity construction. How can we make sense of both the visible and invisible processes involved in constructing identities? Harre (1984) developed a model--the Vygotsky Space--for explaining how learning moves from the social plane to the individual plane. This model was helpful in explaining how we socially constructed our identities in the book discussion group. In the next section, I examine this model and its' relevance to girls' identity development.

**Harre's "Vygotsky Space".** Harre's model demonstrates how learning occurs for individuals within a socially constructed view of learning and development. Raphael and Gavelek (1996) adapted Harre's model to explore language use in the classroom (see Figure 3). The model positions two continuums in relation to one another that show how language is used in a socially constructed learning process. The first continuum is the public/private continuum. On this continuum the public pole exemplifies the most visible and open language acts of the girls as they participated in the book discussion group. The girls had ideas about the texts they often shared publicly. As Lindsey commented, "I liked how you (the group) could be very open and you could just say what you thought" (8/3/98). The private pole of the continuum signifies language

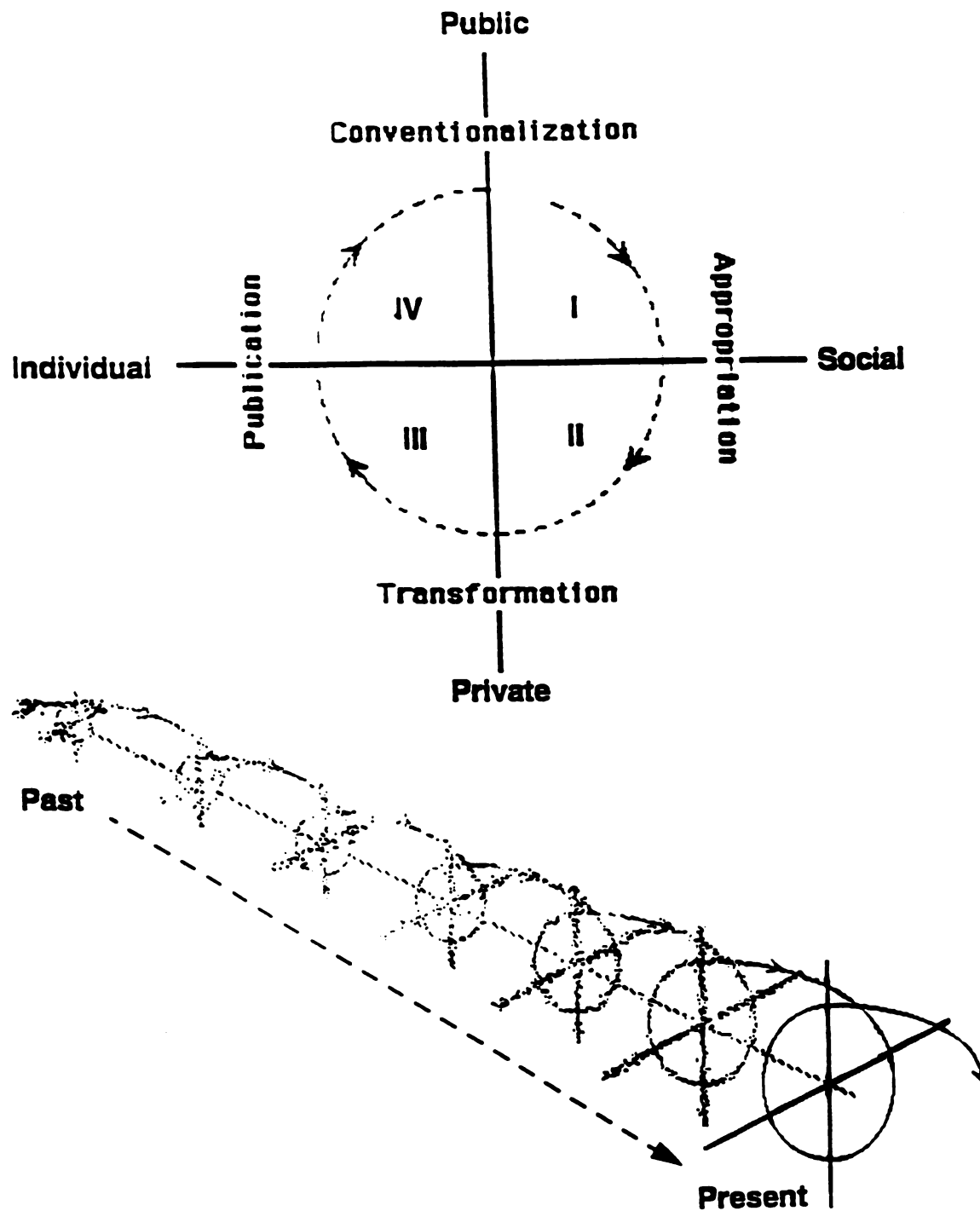


Figure 3: The Vygotsky Space (Adapted from Harre (1984) and Gavelek and Raphael (1996).

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activities that were internal and not observable. As Katy commented when referring to her journal writing, “They were good because you could write down your little thoughts and remember them...and even if you didn’t want to share with the whole group, you could just write in the journal. It could be like your own little thing” (8/3/98). The second continuum is the social/individual continuum. The social end of the continuum refers to the larger societal forces influencing the language activities that occur among individuals in a social setting such as the book discussion group. The individual end of the continuum represents language activity that occurs when an individual is working on her own. For example, Jenny remarked that outside our meeting time she wasn’t always writing in her journal, but “I thought a lot though. I did [think], probably more than I wrote” (8/28/98).

As is depicted in Figure 3, learning occurs in a circular pattern with learning moving through the four quadrants created by the two intersecting continuums. At any on point a learner can be conceptualized as moving within one of these four quadrants: public/social (QI), private/social (QII), private/individual (QIII), and individual/social (QIV). The figure at the bottom of the page shows how learning occurs over time in a spiraling fashion as the learner’s language moves continuously around the four quadrants. As the learner moves from the first quadrant (QI) through the second, third and fourth quadrants (Q2, Q3, Q4) four processes are going on--appropriation, transformation, publication, and conventionalization.

**Appropriation** (Q1/Q2) is defined as the ways that learners adopt strategies that are introduced in the public and social spaces. In the book discussion group, the girls had

to first learn how to talk about the books so I introduced strategies that they could use. For example, in the first meeting I gave the girls sticky tabs to mark their books as they read. At the start of the next meeting the following exchange occurred:

SW: "I have been using my tabs"

Katy: "I tabbed mine. (holding up her book)"

Becky: "Me too. I was tabbin' it up."

Katy and Becky adopted the strategy of using tabs that I had initiated during our first meeting. Conversations such as these occurred often in the beginning stages of the book discussion group because none of the girls had ever participated in this type of learning environment. We talked about what and how to write in their journals (using personal connections, parts that struck you, writing interesting questions, etc.) and how to use the books in their discussions (quoting passages, referencing an idea, asking a question about an uncertainty). The role of more knowledgeable others is central in this process as it is the more knowledgeable other who introduces concepts and ideas into the public space. This will be revisited when I discuss identity construction in the book discussion group.

The second process is **transformation** (QII, QIII). In this process, learners take the concepts that they have appropriated in the social space and transform them for their personal use. Transformation is primarily a private process that goes on within the individual between the time they appropriate ideas and when they make these ideas public again. As such the process of transformation can only be inferred when learners put their new ideas back out in the public space through speaking or writing.

**Publication** is the third process that occurs as the transformed ideas of the learner in the private/individual quadrant (QIII) are made public so others can respond. This is the place where I had access to the girls' thinking about their identities as well as the ways of talking about and writing about books that I had introduced as a more knowledgeable other. At times, the publications of the girls sounded almost identical to the strategies I had given them. For example, when I asked Jenny what she had written in her journal that she wanted to share with the group she commented, "I did a character profile" (Meeting Transcript, 2/23/98). Writing a character profile was a strategy I had given the girls in trying to get them to write about the books in their journals. At the same time, some of the publications of the girls expressed their personal understandings about how to talk about the books. For example, Karen went home after one of the meetings and used the Bible as a reference to talk about the title of the book Jacob Have I Loved. She sent an e-mail message to me after the meeting when we talked about the book. She wrote, "I was thinking about the whole Jacob and Esau thing from Jacob Have I Loved and I got out my trusty children's bible, which gave me some ideas about the book" (E-mail Correspondence, 2/26/98). She went on to analyze the characters according to the story in the Bible on Jacob and Esau. In this instance, Karen put her comments in the public space using a strategy for talking about the books that she had transformed from the ways that we had discussed the books.

The fourth process is called **conventionalization**. This is the process by which the ideas or concepts introduced in the public space are incorporated into the language of the discourse community. In this process, the transformed ideas are coming from the

individual and being made part of the discourse (in this case the discussion group), thus starting the cycle of learning over again. For the girls, talking about personal experiences became a conventionalized form of talk in the book discussion group. For example, Karen talked about her relationship with her father and her inability to control her emotions with him. She remarked,

Like sometimes when I get angry I just cry and then it's not good because I don't like stick up for myself, but I can't while I'm crying and then like everyone thinks less of you when you cry, like you're not as strong...Like with my Dad sometimes, I get so mad at him and then I just start crying and I can't like fight back with him and show him what I feel (Meeting Transcripts 3/26/98).

This type of talk, personal and emotional, became an important aspect of the talk in our group. The girls would talk about the books and then make connections to their own lives that we would explore and examine. This talk became an important aspect of the girls' identity development. In this instance, Karen is talking about the struggle of standing up for yourself when you are emotional. At the same time that the example is personal and part of the conventions of the group, the concept or idea of emotion and sticking up for oneself are being put out in the public and social spaces to be appropriated and examined by others in the group.

We engaged in these processes-- appropriation, transformation, publication and conventionalization--both inside and outside the book discussion group. The four processes are all part of a larger process called **internalization** describing how we not only gained knowledge, but also transformed knowledge and in the process, learned.

Lindsey seems to capture the essence of this process in describing how the book discussion group was different than school. She stated,

...it [book discussion group] doesn't feel as much like a learning experience but then you realize you are learning stuff, like about yourself...It was a lot different cuz I know in school it's the same general formula. You know, you take it, you work with it a little bit, then you spit it back out. And then you forget it. But this one was more like, you take it in and you work with it but, you think about it and you actually realize what's going on. Like you know, figure out the story, what this character's thinking. And then you talk about it, but you know, you keep it with you kinda. Like that's why you learn stuff, because you keep it with you rather than just throwing it all back out at the teacher and you know, that's the end of it (8/3/98).

She captures the processes of "...tak[ing] it in" (appropriation), "...work[ing] with it, think[ing] about it" (transformation), "...talk[ing] about it" (publication/conventionalization). These processes together make up "internalization" or as Lindsey describes it, the point where "...you keep it with you rather than just throwing it all back at the teacher". The Vygotsky Space, then, was central to understanding how the girls learned and how they constructed identities in the book discussion group.

The public and social spaces (QI,QIV), in particular, are the most significant spaces for understanding the process of identity development, because it was there that identity construction is social, visible and observable. Appropriation of ideas and concepts discussed and introduced in the book discussion group, as well as the internalization and private transformations of the girls' thinking, can only be viewed through written or spoken "products" that emerged in the group. The fact that the girls' voices emerged in the book discussion group, then, was paramount to both their identity

construction and my understanding of their constructions. Their voices--the discourse of the book discussion group--made them active contributors to their own identity construction. Returning to Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) argument for studying identity in action, I focus on the social and public quadrants to examine mediated actions--their language use--to understand how the girls were constructing intellectual identities. To do this I examined two important components related to how the talk in the book discussion group was constructed: the role of more knowledgeable others and the role of perspective taking (or role identification).

In order for the girls to construct alternative conceptions of themselves and their identities, we needed to construct discourse opportunities that put differing conceptions of what it meant to be a girl, a daughter, a student, a thinker, a knower etc. into the public and social space. The books were selected for the book discussion group because of their alternative representations of female characters and they were the means through which we could introduce alternative representations. As such, our conversations were facilitated to make those alternative representations part of the discourse. In particular, two aspects of the discourse that functioned to create such opportunities, and that were central to the girls' constructing positive conceptions of their intellectual identities, were the role of more knowledgeable others and the use of perspective taking (role identification) in relating characters' lives to their own.

**More Knowledgeable Others.** The role of a more knowledgeable other is central to the learning process in a socially constructed view of learning and development (Vygotsky, 1981). It is the **more knowledgeable other** who introduces concepts, ideas

and strategies that are appropriated and transformed by others to then be put back into the public space as part of the discourse. In the early part of the book discussion group, my role as more knowledgeable other was to facilitate ways of talking about the books by introducing strategies and concepts. For example, during the second meeting Katy made an assertion about characters in Jacob Have I Loved and I asked, "Can you find the reference for that in the text?" (2/9/98). Other types of questions I asked during the first two meetings were directed at getting the girls to make connections between what they were reading and their own lives. During the first meeting I asked the girls to write in their journals how they would compare themselves to one of the twins (Caroline or Louise) in Jacob Have I Loved. We then got to the fact that Louise seems diminished and I asked, "Have any of you ever felt diminished or counted out?" (Meeting Transcript, 2/9/98).

As these concepts and strategies became conventionalized in our talk, I became more focused on facilitating ways of thinking more deeply about identity issues raised in the books and in our discussions. The girls were quick to make connections between the characters' lives and their own, but they did not often raise questions about the connections they were making that would allow them to appropriate new ways of thinking about their identities. In these instances I acted as the more knowledgeable other and questioned them about their ideas. I wanted to introduce concepts or ideas related to intellectual identity into the public space for uptake by the girls<sup>15</sup>. Unlike the questioning

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<sup>15</sup> Since language mediates thought (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995), the discussions that we had would shape the ways the girls were thinking about and constructing their identities.

I described in chapter four, however, these questions were substantively focused around identity issues, particularly issues that I perceived to be important in constructing intellectual identities. Of particular importance were issues that challenged traditional conceptions of gender and conceptions of the ways that girls come to know and think. For example, the group was discussing a scene in Dicey's Song where a teacher accuses Dicey of cheating and she just stand there and does nothing. Jill commented, "Yeah, I was upset about that because she's getting scolded and abused in front of the entire class and she just stands there and that essay meant so much to her. Like she had so much emotion in her writing...and she just stood there. I would have started bawling!" (3/26/98). After this comment a conversation ensued around how the girls would have handled this situation. Most of them said they would have left or cried and they continued to wonder why she did it. Karen begins the next segment where they address this issue:

Karen: I think it meant so much to her that it didn't matter what anyone else said.

Ellen: yeah, she was confident ("yeah" all around the group) (3/26/98).

Still, the girls go on to talk about how even though they could see why she might have done it, they would not have been able to stand there, but instead would have cried or left the room. For the girls, the humiliation of the social outweighed any personal beliefs they might have had about their own writing in this sort of situation. In many ways, the girls' passive and emotional responses could be seen as a typically gendered response to a situation where a person's identity (Dicey's sense of herself as a writer) is challenged. Instead of believing that they would have stood their ground in this situation, each of the girls backs down in the face of the challenge.

The conversation transitions into the role of Dicey's friend, Minah, focusing on how she stood up to the teacher on Dicey's behalf. During this conversation I ask, "...but would you stand up for yourself?", to which the girls make a series of responses about how they would stand up for someone else before they would stand up for themselves and how when it happens to other people they want to stand up for them. Unlike the first set of responses where the girls backed down in dealing with their own crisis, when the problem was someone else's they became more opinionated stating, "and like who said it's [what someone wrote] wrong?" (Jenny 2/26/98) and "it's [your writing] your opinion!" (All 2/26/98). In this part of the discussion, the girls find it much easier to voice their opinions when they are not at the center of what they are discussing. In asking questions about what they would do if they were in this situation, I wanted to get them to further examine both Dicey's position as well as their own position regarding their ability to stand their ground in the face of a challenge. By creating a scenario where they could see themselves stepping up to help someone else out, they were able to explore themselves in alternative ways in this setting other than being the victim or the passive recipient of abuse. Of course, I was not the only person acting as a more knowledgeable other in this situation. When Jill introduced her ideas about what happened to Dicey when the teacher confronted her, she was the more knowledgeable other putting her ideas out in the public space for examination. It is her comments in this instance that led to the exploration of what the girls would have done in that situation. The role of more knowledgeable others, then, was central to the beginning stages of learning and development within the book discussion group.

**Perspective Taking.** The second feature significant in our discussions was **perspective taking**. By perspective taking, I am referring to different ways that the girls identified with the characters, with me, and with each other. By taking others' perspectives the girls were able to have conversations about issues such as standing up for themselves and being strong, being resilient in the face of failure, dealing with their emotions, having confidence in their intellects, feeling smart, and so forth. These issues were not examined in their daily lives, but in taking the perspective of the characters they had opportunities to examine alternative identities. As Jenny commented,

...I think you can get a lot of stuff from reading. Kinda helps you sort out your own life cuz when you read something, you know, you're kind of absorbed in that other person's life instead of your own for a second. So it kind of like takes you out of your own life and, you know, makes you realize what it's like to be in somebody else's shoes kinda. So you do things differently, I guess, in your own life. If it [being in someone else's shoes] affects you that much, you might (8/28/98).

Jenny's quote suggests that the opportunity to step into "somebody else's shoes" helped her to not only reflect on her own life, but also consider making changes in her life as a result of that experience. She acknowledged the importance of becoming a part of another person's world for even just a moment in order to look at herself in a different way. Imagining herself differently helped Jenny make sense of who she was and who she might want to be. The other girls in the book discussion group echoed Jenny's feelings about the importance of being able to "step into others' shoes" as helpful to their thinking about themselves and their identities in new ways. As Ellen stated, "At first you're like, how can I learn from a book...how do I associate with that, so you just step in that person's shoes, imagine yourself in their shoes and what they must be feeling and

try to understand them” (8/28/98). For the girls, opportunities to experience other people’s lives in relation to their own was important to their identity development. Specifically, the different people<sup>16</sup> with whom we interacted in the book discussion group were central to us as we socially constructed our identities.

The characters’ identities, in particular, allowed us to raise issues related to our own identities. As Karen stated, “All of the characters were kind of strong and, like, you’d watch them as they developed their identity and then, like, we could relate ourselves and what we go through that makes up our identity” (8/3/98). The issue of strength and standing up for yourself was a theme both in our discussions and in the girls’ interviews. This issue seemed important for them to reflect upon and connect to themselves. Conceptions of strong women work against traditional conceptions of women as willing to subsume their own needs to meet the needs of others. Although these perceptions are changing, the struggle for girls to value their strength was still evident in the girls’ comments. As Ellen said when referring to a comment that Karen had made about the characters in the books,

...I think Karen was saying, you know, all the characters we were reading about were so strong and have you ever met a character that wasn’t strong like any of them...I noticed that too. That all these characters are really strong, It makes you think, is it just a book that always does that so there’ll never be a weak character or is this how people are? Are they really stronger than they put themselves up to be or, you know, do they have enough confidence in themselves or is that just the way the books are written? [Because] I probably do have more [strength] in me than I think. So it’s probably what it means (8/28/98).

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<sup>16</sup> “People” refers to members of the book discussion group, characters in the books we read, and people that the girls referenced in telling their own stories.

In this example, Ellen is examining her identity in relation to the characters portrayed in the books. Karen acted as the more knowledgeable other, introducing the concept of strength in the characters. Ellen then appropriated this concept introduced by Karen, and transformed it into an issue about her own strength, questioning whether she could be strong and thinking that she probably was stronger than she had previously believed.

When the girls took the perspective of a character and put their ideas in the public space, it created discourse opportunities where we could question and ponder what had been put out on the table that allowed for more interaction and a deeper level of learning (appropriating ideas) about ourselves. This opportunity for reflection and exploration, and social construction of characters, allowed them to internalize and appropriate ideas and strategies. These ideas and strategies then re-emerged in the public space when they were responding to questions during their interviews. For example, Karen had transformed and internalized our discussions about strength and standing up for one's self when she stated,

...each of the characters was kinda strong and like they searched for that, their identity, [and that] like showed you that you should be strong and go after what you want and not what other people think you should have...I guess kinda like the characters, I should like listen less to what other people's opinions are and more to what I think and like what I wanta do and what I want my identity to be...I think I need more of a balance, I guess. I need to discover more like who I am and like what my opinions are (8/3/98).

For Karen, there was a greater awareness that she mattered in making decisions about her life. This was significant for Karen who was considering not pursuing her dreams of being a writer because her father told her she wouldn't make money and it wasn't a good

choice<sup>17</sup>. The notion of creating a balance between what others wanted her to do and what she wanted was a new perspective for Karen and was important in her crafting of her intellectual identity. When she counted her opinion as part of her decision making process, she was valuing her ways of knowing and thinking--claiming her intellectual identity. This type of consideration of what she wants positions her understanding of gender in a new light. Counting herself and her ideas as important as the opinions of other people in her life pushes against traditional conceptions of gender role and intellectual identity where women look first to others and only then to themselves in deciding what to do and who to be. Karen's ways of knowing in this instance reflect a shift from her being a received knower who listens only to the voices of others, to a subjective knower who values her own voice as well as the voices of others in her thinking and knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). Karen has not abandoned her relationship with her father in this instance, but instead is trying find "more of a balance" that gives some control back to her over her life but still allows her to stay in connection and relation to him. In valuing herself this way, she is revealing positive conceptions of her intellectual identity. Karen was not alone in her perceptions. As Lindsey stated,

I think I've learned how to go towards a challenge kind of. Like today, I thought I was gonna be like really nervous [driving] and I thought I was just

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<sup>17</sup> Karen had struggled with personal issues throughout the book discussion group and had broken down emotionally two times. One related to her performance in school where she felt she had stopped progressing. This was related to a recent poor performance on a paper when writing was the medium in which she was most confident in herself. She revealed that she was doubting herself as a writer because of one teacher's evaluation and it was affecting her in other classes (Meeting Notes, 2/26/98). The other area was her relationship with her father where she felt she had no say or control about what she was doing with her life (Meeting Transcript, 3/26/98).

gonna mess up and I probably would have, but you see in these books these girls that just...I mean, they have tougher challenges than getting in a car and driving it. I mean, they pretty much just jump over them and leave them behind. I thought I did learn like how to push myself forward and try to get over obstacles. Because they probably are pretty small in the scale of everything. I may have this little problem, but this girl, like her mother died. I mean, that's a big problem (8/3/98).

In Lindsey's case, strength came from learning how to put things into perspective. When she could put herself in the characters' situations she was able to gain a better perspective on her own situation where she might otherwise doubt or question herself. The ability to take on the perspective of characters who embodied non-traditional characteristics of adolescent girls was paramount to the girls constructing alternative images of themselves and their futures. These opportunities enabled the girls to see other possibilities for who they were and what they were going to do with themselves in the future.

In the last section, I examined the process of identity development through the lens of the Vygotsky Space and identified two visible and observable features related to this process--more knowledgeable others and perspective taking. I illuminated different ways that the girls were socially constructing their identities as we read, wrote about and discussed books. Now I return to the case of Gail who I introduced at the beginning of this chapter. I examine her identity in action<sup>18</sup> by examining her social and public thinking as it emerged over time in the book discussion group.

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<sup>18</sup>I am referring to Penuel and Wertsch's (1995) notion of looking at mediated action (their language in the public and social spaces) to understand identity.

**Identity Development in Action: The Case Of Gail.** The view of Gail revealed in the opening quote of this chapter and the Gail who revealed herself in the beginning of the book discussion group meetings were somewhat different representations of her identity in action. Gail initially appeared as someone who doubted her intellectual capabilities. She relied on others to provide answers for her and perceived her role in the group as that of a follower. She responded to a question about who she was by suggesting that she was “who she [her best friend] says I am”. In short, Gail came across as a typical adolescent girl that Gilligan describes. She sacrifices herself and her own voice in order to stay in connection with those around her (Gilligan, 1988). Gail revealed this struggle in her interview when she stated, “...I used to wonder how people perceived [me]. I used to always worry about it like people were talking about me and stuff like that. [I would] think about it and be like ‘eeeh, what am I gonna do’” (8/29/98). Gail connected her struggles to her early grades when she moved to the United States from Ireland.

The transition was difficult for her and she recalled that it seemed to coincide with her growing doubts about her ability to write and to speak, especially in school. As she stated, “...my whole problem is my whole English thing. I’m always intimidated in those classes and things like that....I’ve always been put down for my writing...I think somewhere along the line I just missed the whole basics of it” (8/29/98). This was supported by Gail’s lack of written or oral participation during the early meetings of the book discussion group. Gail had only one set of entries about the book What Girls Learn, which was the third book we read. Other than that, she would write only when

explicitly asked to during our meetings. Even then, she was hesitant to put her thoughts in writing as revealed in her comment at the beginning of this chapter when she stated, “What if I can’t do it[write]?” In relation to her reticence to speak out, Gail also told how she normally avoided participating. She stated, “I always opt out of saying stuff...like in classes. I always do in English class. When it comes to books [it’s] always the case of sounding stupid or stuff” (8/29/98). For Gail the public acts of writing and speaking were so threatening to her sense of herself that she avoided both. These feelings further supported Gail’s low intellectual image of herself. That is, speaking and writing are the spaces where our intellectual ideas are heard, acknowledged and responded to. By not engaging in public and social contexts related to her thinking about ideas and concepts, Gail could not actively construct an alternative view of her identity. Instead, her silence and doubts facilitated the maintenance of her perceptions because the ideas she was appropriating in various social contexts were being transformed in her mind to support her beliefs that she was not capable. Unwilling to risk making her ideas public, Gail continued to doubt herself and her voice.

In the book discussion group, however, Gail began to take risks with her voice and her ideas. Early on, Gail’s contributions were limited to one or two words. By this I mean that she commented only in response to someone else’s comments with a one or two word remark such as “me too”, or “yeah”. She was indirectly voicing her ideas by relying on the voices of others to express her thinking. Gail did not address issues of the book or her own life until the fourth meeting where she introduced her first commentary into the public space in talking about the book What Girls Learn. Her comment was more

a statement than an analysis or questioning of the text. She remarked, "One weird comment. I didn't like that thing about the bottle. It made me uncomfortable" (4/29/98). With her comment, Gail was taking her first tentative step out into conversation as suggested with her opening caveat that her comment was "weird." Still, it was a beginning and she received positive responses from the group in support of her reaction to the book--they all thought the section of the book was strange as well. Later in the same meeting she ventured into the discussion again by relating a personal story about the death of her grandfather to the book. Relating personal stories was the second means of participation that Gail engaged in during this meeting. Both kinds of participation during this meeting marked a transition for Gail. Not only was she beginning to actively participate in the discussions, but her increased participation suggested that she was also beginning to feel more comfortable using her voice and she was beginning to value her voice as a part of our discussions. Gail acknowledged the significance of this change in her participation. She stated,

Right in the beginning we were saying absolutely nothing. Like the first meeting...you had to ask every question. You got like a one word response and a couple of expansions but that's it. But towards the end I remember sitting there and, you know, everybody had stuff to say...even though I probably wasn't much outspoken, it was outspoken for me...I felt a lot more comfortable just saying whatever (8/29/98).

As we continued to meet as a group, Gail's participation continued to evolve to a point where she was not only offering statements and personal stories but she was also analyzing the text and making those analyses public. For example, Gail introduced her

analysis of why Ellen's (the main character in Ellen Foster) opinions about Black people might have changed:

Gail: You know the time she stays with her grandmother and then she goes to work, basically is working with the Black people like a slave. I think that had a lot to do with her like opinions of Blacks, cause she realized being with them [that] she liked them more cause like

SW: Aaaaah...

Gail: cause she became really good friends with them

SW: Where was that?

Gail: In the middle somewhere, not too far in

Katy: She said she felt Black

Karen: She had an epiphany

In this exchange, Gail has introduced an analytic statement, a statement that leaves her open to responses and questioning from the group. This type of involvement entailed a greater risk than her earlier types of participation because she introduced an idea of her own that she put into the public space for examination by others in the group. Gail's actions in this instance--her engagement in ideas in the public space--suggests that Gail is changing her conceptions of herself as a thinker. She is taking herself and her ideas more seriously by putting them out in the public space. Unlike Gail's previous experiences of silence she is beginning to take risks and finding support from the group as suggested above in both Katy's, Karen's and my responses to her analysis of the text. Both the emergence of Gail's voice and the changing nature of her participation over time were significant in creating opportunities for her to more actively construct conceptions of

herself as a thinker and a knower. Gail remarked on her changing sense of herself as a thinker in her survey. When asked to locate herself on a continuum of (1 is low and 5 is high) in relation to “confidence in your “voice”--that you have something to offer/that what you have to say matters” (8/29/98) Gail marked a one for her confidence when she began the book discussion group and a three for her confidence at the end of the discussion group. In relation to this change she wrote, “[this is] higher because I realize that I do have something to say which I have learned through our talking” (8/29/98). She also said her perception changed in relation to her confidence as a thinker. She wrote, “[It is] higher. Definitely the club helped me to think about things more and talk more” (8/29/98). As she and the other girls began to take more risks in the discussions by sharing ideas and concepts, opportunities were created for transformative thinking about their identities. Clearly, Gail had changed her conceptions of herself as a thinker and knower, change that she attributed to her participation in the book discussion group.

It was not until our ninth meeting at Karen’s house on the last day of school that I saw Gail struggling with issues of her identity in the public space. This meeting was significant to Gail’s identity construction for several reasons. She later revealed in her interview that this meeting was her most memorable experience of the book discussion group. As she stated, “...it [this meeting] was a turning point...there was a lot of stuff I felt going wrong and I couldn’t like get it under control...It[her emotions] just popped” (8/29/98). Secondly, Gail was visibly upset during this meeting, which brought out a lot of her feelings about her struggles with herself as an intellectual. Third, the conversations that were going on leading up to the moment where Gail “popped” are important in

understanding how she was appropriating ideas and transforming them both during and after the meeting.

We had gathered at Karen's home on the last day of the school year to discuss the book Ellen Foster. From the beginning of the discussion, Gail was an active contributor as she had become in the book discussion group. Our conversation became focused on how everyone dealt with challenges in their lives and then more specifically focused on how everyone had done on their final exams and how they prepared for them. The talk during this segment of the meeting was fast, loud and overlapping. During the larger and louder conversation around grades and how they studied for exams, Gail was having a quieter parallel conversation about how she had changed in school this past year:

Gail: I have had such a change. I was so good freshman and sophomore year, I did everything. I did all my homework all the time.

Jill: Then this year you started...

Gail: Then this year I didn't do it. Like it's the most important year.

SW: Did it affect you?

Gail: Yeah (in a soft voice)

Jill: Not, like, terribly though (referring to Gail being affected)

Gail: Yeah, but it still affected me. Like last year I got straight A's and one B, the year before that I had straight A's and one B. This year, I have C's, it's a big difference.

In this segment Gail's voice is wavering a little and takes on a serious tone that I did not pick up until I listened to the meeting audiotape. I argue that Gail was trying to be taken seriously by Jill who tries to brush off the seriousness of Gail's comments by

saying that Gail's lack of studying did "not terribly" affect her. Gail mumbles "but it still affected me" and then goes on to specify how her grades changed. Her comments, however, go almost unheard by the rest of the group because everyone is talking about their AP exams or how they studied for their finals. Gail has tried to put her concerns on the floor, but instead ends up defending herself in response to Jill's comments. Their conversation ends as the group shifted topics.

It was not long after this that I asked the group how Ellen (the main character in Ellen Foster) was able to maintain a sense of herself as smart and capable in school in the midst of a lot of family trauma and life difficulties. We talked about Ellen's sense of herself as smart and I asked the group if they thought of themselves as smart. There is a three or four second silence from the group and then responses of "yes", "sort of", etc. start to trickle in from the girls:

SW: Are you all really smart?

Karen: Relatively

Jenny: Yeah

Gail: Well what do you consider smart?

SW: Well the x-c team is ...

Jenny: Gail!

SW: Who's smart?

Lindsey and Others: Gail is smart, yeah, Gail you're smart...

SW: Yeah, but what does Gail say?

Gail: I don't know (everyone else laughs at this) (6/18/98).

In examining the transcript, I noticed that Gail had not contributed for the previous fifteen minutes since the comments about grades and her struggle with feeling she had “blown it” in school this year. I suggest that Gail had taken the ideas from everyone’s conversations about final grades and exams and had transformed them to support her doubts about herself as smart because she had not studied like everyone else. These doubts that she was transforming were brought to the surface when she stated, “What do you mean by smart?” and “I don’t know.” Gail was in doubt of herself but did not let on and instead laughed with everyone else. She remarked on this moment in her interview stating, “Yeah, but see, that's what killed... everybody was saying they're smart. See, I doubt myself so much, every year, going into whatever math class. The same with English. I always think I can't do this” (8/29/98). The conversation had brought up aspects of Gail’s identity that she was not ready to deal with so she had removed herself from the conversation. By not being an active contributor she was not giving the group or herself an opportunity to grapple with what she was thinking and feeling. It would take two more conversations during this meeting to finally push her thinking back into the public space. The next conversation focused on the importance of “listening to yourself.”

It was now several minutes after the previous exchange around being smart and Gail had been silent. We began talking about what we have learned from Ellen Foster. Katy remarked how our opinions are often shaped by the majority. She related how people need to think for themselves. She commented, “... sometimes we are like brain washed and it is so hard to think for yourselves when you are being told, ‘this is bad, this

is good'. Just like little experiences in school with like friends" (6/18/98). This started a conversation about the importance of listening to yourself which Jenny continued:

Jenny: And you've got to decide for yourself, if you listen to everybody people will tell you so many different things and then you say stuff and you are like wait a minute, 'do I really feel that way?

Jill: You just learned that didn't you?

Jenny: Yeah

Jenny: You've got to listen to you know, sometimes it takes someone older and wiser to you know open up your eyes cause they've been there and done that. Your friends can tell you this person is such a jerk 'They bought the same shirt as I did, Oh my god!', you know? You can listen to that or whatever, you have to decide for yourself.

As I looked around the group while the conversation unfolded, I noticed that Gail had still not talked and was sitting silently as the group discussed the idea of listening to yourself. At this point I turned to Gail and the following exchange occurred:

SW: What did Ellen Foster teach you Gail?

Gail: I don't know

SW: Or did you read it and feel disconnected from her or are we losing you over in the corner?

Gail: You are losing me over in the corner

SW: Why?

Jenny: Are you OK? (she nods yes)

SW: You don't look OK, what's wrong?

Gail: I... (starts crying then gets up and leaves the room)

Jenny: Oh no...

SW: Does anyone know what this is about?

At this point, I could see tears welling up in her eyes as she got up and left the room. She proceeded to shut herself in the bathroom. The group sat quietly after she left and I suggested that two of the girls (Jill and Jenny) go talk to her. They came back within minutes and said that she didn't want to talk to them. Jill suggested that I give it a try since I was more removed from the peer group. I went to find her. When she opened the door I placed my hand on the back of her head and asked her how she was doing and if everything was all right. She began to cry more and then poured out her feelings about the conversation that had just unfolded. She began by saying that she had "blown it" this year with her grades and felt like everyone else was saying they were smart and she did not feel that way. She was concerned about how these grades would effect her application to colleges and was generally overwhelmed that everyone else could feel they were smart. As I wrote in my fieldnotes:

As she was talking she also began to talk about the fact that she had "had it" with the way she was being treated by her friends. She was tired of not being taken seriously by her friends and that every time she tried to say something serious her friends would turn it into a joke and not listen to her. She specifically talked about Jill's role in this and that she was tired of being picked on and being the butt of the jokes. I asked her if she had tried to talk to Jill and she said that she didn't talk to anybody and that she had been carrying this around inside of her for quite a while. She basically wanted to change the role she played in her group of friends but felt that she was failing at doing that. I talked to her about the fact that she needed to begin changing the ways she responded to her friends when they

busted on her and that she needed to stop allowing herself to be the butt of the jokes. Additionally we talked about the fact that if Jill was really her friend she would be dying inside if she knew that she was hurting Gail. Gail talked about her difficulty sharing her feelings and letting herself be taken seriously, and we continued to discuss the fact that if these people couldn't accept her then they were not her friends at all. She shared again that she had been carrying this around with her for a while and she just couldn't take it anymore (Meeting Fieldnotes, 6/20/98).

Our conversation about perceptions of self as smart and the side conversation she had with Jill about her grades where Jill tried to minimize the significance for Gail, coupled with my asking Gail to share her ideas during our group discussion forced her emotions and thoughts to the surface and into the public space. Unlike the book discussion group where we could not socially construct her thinking, we were able to have a discussion and I was able to offer other ways for her to understand and think about who she was and how she should look at her life. As the more knowledgeable other in this instance, I offered ideas and strategies for Gail to appropriate and internalize regarding her intellectual identity. For Gail, the significance of this meeting would not be made public until Gail revealed what she had learned during our interview. One important concept that Gail had internalized from the discussion was that she had to stop being afraid to put herself and her ideas out in the public space. She commented in her interview that she doubted herself every year, but she was realizing that she needed to stop being afraid:

Gail: Like every year, you read the thing in the book [the course options] and it makes it [math class] seem so hard but then it turns out like, I got through sophomore math class. I was so afraid. I got through it with straight As. Same with last year. And you know, now I'm doing the same thing this year, doubting myself, because I'm taking AP Calc but I took, I signed up for BC [the lower level calculus] cuz I had that teacher sophomore year. I know how he teaches and I know I liked it. I'm just

afraid because I'm with all these people who I know, their SATs are like 1600 and 1590 and they're gonna do better than me before the class even starts.

SW: No, you just think they are. You just think they are.

Gail: And that's what I was talking about to my friend the other day, and she does the same thing. She's like we do this every year. And every year we handled it but we just have to give it a try and what do we got to lose? So I feel good about it now (8/29/98).

Gail was finally beginning to realistically assess her previous successes and use that to change her attitude about her next challenge in school. Her attitude of “what have we got to lose” suggests an increased sense of confidence on Gail’s part that she is capable of handling the challenges of her AP classes even if it does make her nervous. Similar to the examples of the other girls learning how to be strong and take on challenges, I argue that Gail’s conceptions of not being afraid and taking more risks were appropriated and internalized over time as we examined the various characters in the books that we read. This idea was also connected to Gail’s strong sense that she needed to stop being afraid of how people were going to respond to her. She repeated several times throughout the interview that she and others needed to stop “being afraid” of how other people were going to respond to her and that the most important thing was to be “true to yourself.” I argue that Katy and Jenny’s discussion about listening to yourself was introduced into the public space and Gail appropriated and transformed it around issues of being true to yourself and not being afraid. She revealed these conceptions by telling the story of her friend who would pretend she hadn’t studied for tests just in case she failed so she wouldn’t look stupid. She stated:

...it's like she's afraid of...I think for someone like her, that this whole experience could have been really helpful. Just to realize that she doesn't have to be afraid. Like she knows that and I know that because obviously the same thing goes for her with me. But just to realize you gotta be true to yourself. You can't just, little things like saying you didn't do your homework. Like why? You know, there's no need to have to lie about it. Nobody's gonna hurt you...they're your friends. They're not gonna respond badly to it. Like afraid of sounding smart in case you do fail at something, you know what I mean (8/29/98).

This seems significant when considering Gail's great concerns about staying in relation and connected to others. By suggesting that people need to trust more, be open and be true to themselves she is suggesting that putting your ideas out in the public space does not create disconnection (which seemed to be her fear and reason for her silence) but rather creates more connection. She related an example of when she returned from her summer trip to Ireland and people were trying to pull her in different directions. Instead of her normal response, which would have been to try and please everyone, Gail told herself "...this is my first day back and if people can't understand that then there is nothing I can do about it" (8/29/98). She expressed her feelings to her friends and she said, "...they listened to me and everything was fine" (8/29/98). For Gail this was a big step forward in her taking herself and her own concerns seriously while at the same time valuing her relationships with others. She was learning how to stand up for herself and went on to say that "...when something is wrong...instead of hiding things people need to trust and be more open. You have to trust people more you can't just hold it in--whether the trust is not going to work with some people is something you will have to find out (8/29/98). Gail was learning to value her voice in the public space and use it to take more control of herself and her environment.

Throughout this section I have examined ways that Gail was socially constructing, with the other girls and me, a view of herself that challenged her notions about herself as an intellectual. She remarked on this twice in her questionnaire. When asked if she had confidence in herself as an intellectual she reported a change in her feelings about herself and wrote, "I've realized that I'm actually pretty smart" (8/29/98). When asked if she took herself seriously as an intellectual she remarked that her perception of herself had improved, "because of the book club and realizing that I am and everybody is an intellectual" (8/29/98). Through the book discussion group, Gail came to value her thoughts, her voice and herself as she engaged more in the discussions and had multiple opportunities to construct conceptions of herself and her ways of thinking and knowing. In short, she had developed more positive conceptions of her intellectual identity.

**Using Our Voices, Construct Our Identities.** If we are to begin changing the ways in which adolescent girls perceive their intellectual identities then we must provide girls with alternative images of women and gender. Through reading a variety of novels with a variety of strong characters, Gail and the rest of the girls were given access to female perspectives and experiences that they might not otherwise have encountered in their everyday lives. The exposure to these characters gave the girls the opportunity to juxtapose the book characters with their own and each others' lives thus creating opportunities to socially construct their identities. Exposure alone, however, was not enough. The girls needed more knowledgeable others to introduce ideas into the social and public space to be discussed, for it is within social and public spaces that ideas are constructed, appropriated and internalized. In the book discussion group, the girls

identified with the book characters' stories, identified with my life stories, and identified with each others' stories as they reflected upon their own stories and crafted their identities. The more the girls' voices were heard in the discussion group the more opportunities there were for examining and questioning, and the more they actively participated in crafting positive conceptions of their intellectual identities. Whether or not this alternative experience will carry forward into their everyday lives remains to be seen, but within this space seven adolescent girls were able to construct different views of the world and of themselves.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

ABOUT GIRLS INTELLECTUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

In this study I examined how seven adolescent girls were developing their voices and constructing their intellectual identities while participating in a book discussion group. My goals for this study were to 1) examine the **context** of a book discussion group as it might relate to the emergence of girls' voices, and 2) explore the **process** of identity construction and how a book discussion group might facilitate girls' sense of themselves as intellectuals. I studied how the girls used reading, writing, and discussing books to examine and reflect on themselves and each other as thinkers and knowers as they socially constructed their identities. Through this I hoped to better understand how to facilitate girls' constructing positive conceptions of their intellectual identities. The following two questions guided my research:

1. How does a learning context that values caring, connection, and relational ways of knowing facilitate the emergence of girls' voices?
2. How can reading, writing and talking about gender and identity-related books facilitate identity development for adolescent girls?

In this chapter, I address these questions and reflect on what I learned. I begin by addressing what I learned from each of the research questions. After examining each of my questions I discuss the construct of intellectual identity and show how this is

important to girls' lives and development. I then discuss limitations of my study and implications for research and practice.

### How Did the Context Facilitate the Emergence of Voice?

At the beginning of my study, I was curious about how a caring and connected learning community could facilitate the emergence of voice for girls in a book discussion group. Research suggests that girls/women are seeking connection, caring and being in relation in their lives and when they feel disconnected, isolated or uncared for (as is often the case in adolescence) they become silenced and begin to doubt themselves and their capabilities (Sadker and Sadker, 1994; Gilligan, 1982, 1988; Noddings, 1992; Pipher, 1994). I set out to create a context that would support connection, caring and being-in-relation to see if this could make a difference in girls' understandings of themselves and their capabilities.

Previous work documented identity development through literate practices in natural settings (Cherland, 1994; Finders, 1997) but I set out to create a particular context that introduced certain types of books and ways of interacting that would be a supportive context for girls' intellectual identity development. In chapter four, I described and analyzed the context that was created--the book discussion group. The girls' interview data support the claim that this context made a positive difference in the ways that the girls participated in the book discussion group. Specifically, three features of the book discussion group context were most influential: "connecting points", "taking them seriously" and "giving permission." Connecting points refers to the different ways that girls made connections to the books, to each other, to me, and to themselves as well as

how those connections facilitated their participation in the book discussion group.

Taking them seriously indicates the ways that I valued the girls as thinkers and knowers in the book discussion group. Giving permission refers to the ways that the books allowed the girls to talk about particular ideas and topics, to question themselves, and allowed me to question the girls in particular ways. These three features combined with a fourth element--intellectual caring--created a relational space where girls' voices could emerge and be heard.

The construct of intellectual caring further develops Noddings' (1984, 1988) work on caring by suggesting that caring can be both an intellectual act as well as an emotional or psychological act. This dissertation pushes on the idea that intellectual caring is not just about making everyone feel good, or just having everyone care about ideas; instead, intellectual caring is caring about other people's ideas and their thinking as a way to support their intellectual growth at the same time you are caring about them as individuals. This perspective on intellectual caring challenges the criticism that classrooms that are caring are only about making students feel good and don't allow them to be intellectually challenged--that emotions get in the way of intellectual engagement. In fact, the experience of the book discussion group suggests just the opposite, in that intellectual engagement emerged when we had a caring and connected community of learners who felt safe, trusted one another, had a common bond and felt supported. Intellectual caring emerged as we engaged and constructed a relational space. While intellectual caring emerged within this space, I argue that without it there would not have been a space for girls' voices in this context. That is, the girls needed to engage in acts of

intellectual caring at the same time that the three main features--making connections, taking them seriously, giving permission--were emerging in order to create a relational space where their voices could be heard.

Of particular importance to the girls in the book discussion group context was the realization that they were not alone in their thinking. Many girls' voices remain silent because they fear that by saying what they really think and feel may disconnect them from their peers or significant others in their lives (Gilligan, 1982; Orenstein, 1994). Staying in relation to others may supersede girls' own thoughts and feelings ultimately creating feelings of self-doubt. Finders (1997) supported this idea in describing how peer relations among girls superseded intellectual engagement in school. For Finders, these results suggested that school environments where girls worked in groups or through discussions should be questioned since the girls were choosing peers over intellectual ideas. At the beginning of the book discussion group, Jill's and Gail's resistance to engaging in talk around the books would further support Finders' claims. The girls preferred to talk about what had been happening in school and how hard their day had been while at the same time making excuses for why they hadn't read their books or had forgotten their journals. Over time, however, the book discussion group came to counter Finders' claims by complexifying the picture of girls' intellectual engagement. My analyses showed how peer alliance could ultimately encourage intellectual engagement as members began to see that they could take each other seriously and engage in intellectual dialogue without becoming disconnected from their peers. As the girls shared more with each other, responding and adding to each other's ideas, the girls found themselves

becoming more connected to each other instead of isolated and disconnected. As the girls put their ideas into the public space and found other group members acknowledging that they were having similar feelings they all felt supported and valued. Finding support and value through connection is consistent with previous research related to women seeking connection (Gilligan, 1982; Belenky et al., 1986), but also reveals that girls can learn to use their voices to create connection instead of subverting their voices to maintain connection.

Equally interesting was what happened to the girls when they felt their ideas were not shared by others or when others did not follow up on what they had said in our discussions. For the girls, these situations fostered feelings of doubt and revealed the tenuous nature of their connections to one another, particularly around thinking and ideas. As Ellen said, "I'd begin saying something and if we didn't like follow up on it, I'd be like oh, you know, I shouldn't have said that. So sometimes I'd feel a little weird...then your confidence kinda shoots down" (8/28/98). Although the book discussion group context was very supportive of the girls' thinking, one poorly received response or feeling of rejection could make them doubt themselves even if they already had experienced many positive interactions. Given the fragility of connection, it is easy to imagine how classroom contexts, where girls' voices are not always encouraged, can foster feelings of self-doubt.

In addition to the importance of connection, I also learned that I had an important role as a more knowledgeable other in facilitating the emergence of girls' voices. My acts of taking them seriously helped to create a relational space for the girls' voices by

showing and telling them that their ideas mattered--each of them was important to the learning and thinking of the group. It was equally important, however, that I valued them both inside and outside the meetings and not just in their ability to produce commentary about the books we had read. This sometimes meant having long phone conversations or postponing an entire meeting to talk about one girl's personal problem, or going to track workouts with them and listening to them talk about their lives as adolescent girls. I believed that in order to take them seriously as thinkers and knowers I had to value all aspects of their lives and selves because the more public aspects of their lives would help open doors into their more private thoughts. It was in valuing their whole persons that I was able to begin helping them to value their intellectual selves.

In addition to taking the girls seriously, the selection of the books that we read was an important component of the context. As the heart of the book discussion group context, the books gave us a reason for getting together, they introduced complex and interesting characters and stories to us and they provided the basis of our discussions. By giving permission, the books opened up ideas and concepts that might not have otherwise surfaced, but were central to the girls' thinking about their lives and their views of themselves as capable thinkers and knowers. Topics such as resilience, strength, taking on challenges, standing up for oneself, facing death, coping with relationships, going to school and being smart all marked ways that the girls were able to examine their own lives in new and interesting ways. The books provided a common starting point from which we could talk about risky topics and ideas without necessarily having to bring our own experiences directly into the line of fire. Our experiences often did become part

of the discussion, but the group always had the characters' experiences with which to juxtapose themselves--as invitations to talk about their own ideas and lives.

### How Did the Book Discussion Group Facilitate Intellectual Identity Construction for Girls?

I set out to examine how girls were constructing intellectual identities through reading, writing, and talking about books. I defined intellectual identity as the way that the girls understood themselves as thinkers and knowers--as people with intellectual capabilities. As such, I needed a lens with which to examine their identities as they were constructed in the book discussion group. In chapter five, I introduced Harre's (1984) Vygotsky Space as both a way that learning was facilitated in group discussions as well as the means through which I could examine the process of identity development for the girls. I argued that the girls' internal cognition (how they thought about themselves as thinkers and knowers) could be recognized by what they revealed in the public discourse of the book discussion group through their writing and talking. The Vygotsky Space helped me to think about and examine the girls' identity development in action as mediated through their language use in the book discussion group.

Using the Vygotsky Space as an analytic tool, I examined the discourse that emerged in the public space of the discussion group meetings as well as in our interviews, e-mail correspondence, writing logs, and questionnaire responses. In designing the book discussion group, I theorized that the books we read would allow the girls to examine and discuss issues of gender and identity in ways that would challenge traditional constructions of these concepts. Unlike previous research which showed how literature

recreates traditional stereotypes of girls and women (Cherland, 1994; Finders, 1997), I set out to examine how alternative literature choices could help the girls mediate their understandings of themselves as thinkers and knowers in new ways. Since I believe that language mediates thought, I argued that if we read about characters who were strong, confident, resilient, smart and so forth, we would put ideas into the public space that pushed their thinking about their identities. Because research has shown that the identities girls create through books they read recreate traditional gendered stereotypes of women (Cherland, 1994), I wanted to introduce the girls to characters I believed contrasted with their conceptions of gender.

In exploring the book characters, the girls recognized that these were not people who they would normally have opportunities to meet. For example, the girls all discussed different characters' strength and how this was a theme throughout the books. In particular, said that thinking and talking about the characters' strengths caused them to reflect on their own strengths--particularly their mental strength. This indicated to me that they were examining their intellectual identities. I argue that feeling mentally strong is one sign of positive feelings about oneself as a thinker and a knower. Thus, the girls used book characters as an opportunity to identify with strong and complex images of possible girlhoods otherwise unavailable to them. Specifically, the girls were discussing and examining issues such as resilience, strength, being smart, facing challenges, standing up for themselves, and making career choices--issues that do not seem to be a part of the popular teenage literature to which most of these girls are exposed.

It is important to note, however, that it was not only reading the books and identifying with the characters that allowed for the development of intellectual identity. The book discussion group provided a discourse space in which the girls could explore together these new issues and character traits. Two interesting features emerged around the ways that we talked about the books-- “more knowledgeable others” and “perspective taking.” These features were important in understanding how the girls were able to construct intellectual identities in the book discussion group. The role of more knowledgeable other was central to the book discussion group conversation for it was the more knowledgeable other who introduced ideas and concepts into the public space of the discussion group for appropriation and transformation by members of the group. With each book that we read, different members emerged as more knowledgeable others as they put their ideas and insights out onto the floor for public examination. These speech acts served as means through which the girls were able to make their own transformations public, as well as catalysts for others in the group to examine and transform their own thinking. An important way that these transformations were able to occur was through the girls’ act of taking on the perspective of different characters.

The book discussion group offered the girls opportunities to examine their intellectual identities by “trying on” the book characters’ perspectives. This was a way in which they were able to put their ideas into the public space and reflect on their own lives. The characters allowed the girls to step into other peoples’ shoes and live these peoples’ lives for a moment. As Jenny said, being able to step into characters’ lives for just a moment “...makes you realize what it’s like to be in somebody else’s shoes kinda.

So you do things differently, I guess in your own life. If it affects you that much, you might” (8/28/98). Characters such as Jill Ker Conway in The Road From Coorain gave the girls a way to reconsider their lives and their ways of thinking about themselves. The fact that a person such as Jill Ker Conway could triumph under great adversity powerfully influenced the girls thinking about themselves as learners and thinkers. As Karen stated, “she was so smart, and she had nothing. She really made me want to learn” (6/18/98). When the girls identified with aspects of the characters and also recognized ways that these people faced conflicts and stood up for themselves they began to reflect on and internalize ways that they might respond in similar situations. The characters’ lives and stories made a difference in the girls’ thinking about their lives and their stories.

As a way to discuss intellectual identity construction I highlighted the case of Gail, showing how she transformed her thinking about herself as an intellectual through the book discussion group. I found the shift in the way Gail was perceived by her peers as particularly interesting. Once the butt of jokes, Gail repositioned herself in the group as someone to be taken more seriously by the end of our discussions. Gail’s claim that “you have to be true to yourself” revealed a person who knows that she has something of value to contribute--that her voice matters. Gail constructed an intellectual identity in the book discussion group that placed her voice at the center of her ways of knowing. In this way, Gail constructed an identity that challenges the determinism implicit in research suggesting that girls subvert their own voice and doubt themselves as intellectuals in order to stay in connection and relation to others (Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1988; Orenstein, 1994).

Although I argue that the book discussion group was a powerful intervention in facilitating the girls' voices and in facilitating positive constructions of their intellectual identities, I am not convinced this counter-context was enough to infiltrate the larger socio-cultural contexts of their every day lives. At minimum, the book discussion group offered an alternative space for the girls to value themselves and their voices and construct positive conceptions of themselves as thinkers and knowers. It also provided more insights into understandings of identity and identity development. Clearly, the stage model of Erickson (1968) does not capture Gail's growth or the complex acts of socially constructing identities that occurred in the book discussion group. Rather, the theorizing about identity development of Franz and Cole et al. (1994) seems to be more reflective of her development. Specifically, the suggestion that how one's understands herself is "...necessarily characterized by the nature of one's relations to others" (p. 326) recognizes the significance of the social as it relates to the individual. For Gail, the fact that she stated that she was "who she (talking to her friend) says I am" reflects both Gail's questioning of her identity, but also the significance of others in how our identities are constructed and understood. As suggested by this dissertation, identities are not only socially constructed, but also influenced by the contexts within which we function and participate; identities do not just come upon us through crisis resolution, but instead are being continually crafted and reconstituted as we engage in the various social and societal contexts of our daily lives.

### What Can Be Learned About Intellectual Identity?

From the outset, this study has been about intellectual identity. As I defined it, intellectual identity is how one perceives herself as a thinker and a knower--how a person takes herself seriously as an intellectual. This definition and the construct of intellectual identity were terms I developed to help me make sense of issues that I wanted to discuss and explore. Specifically, I wanted to understand why girls became silenced and stopped taking themselves seriously. Research had addressed issues of girls' identity development and what that might look like or mean, but there was no work specifically about girls' intellectual identity development. The premise of my work, then, was the idea that if girls were taken seriously--treated as intellectuals--they would begin to take themselves seriously as intellectuals. As I began to consider what this meant, I realized that the more relational and connected ways that girls came to know (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982) did not map onto traditional, more masculine conceptions of what it meant to be an intellectual.

The Oxford dictionary defines an intellectual being as "a person possessing or supposed to possess superior powers of intellect" (p. 1068). This seemed consistent with general notions I had about what it meant to be an intellectual. That is, I took from this definition that being an intellectual was about thinking, but also about something that a person already possessed--you were either intellectual or you were not. For me, this related to conceptions of how people perceived subject matter in school--particularly math and science.

Teachers in math and science were considered smart and intellectual because these areas had objective answers. These subjects somehow held up singular, provable truth for inspection. It was in math and science that I began to feel I was not intellectually connected. These classes were taught in ways that shaped my sense of which fields were for "intellectuals." That is, instruction assumed an objectivity about the truth--there was only one answer and one means of understanding so discussion and connection were not part of the intellectual context of this class. When discussion did take place, as in English class, the more subjective nature of the work seemed to lend itself to the belief that this subject was somehow easier than others and required less intellectual "power." It seemed that anyone could analyze a book, but not everyone could ace physics class. Even in college, students were considered smarter when they were in engineering, science or math. Objectivity and truth, then, were two markers of being an intellectual as I grew up understanding them. These conceptions seemed to map onto the Said's (1993) writings about being an intellectual.

Said writes about being an intellectual in "Representations of the Intellectual" (1993). He develops a conception of the intellectual that suggests that being an intellectual is more than possessing superior powers of intellect and reason as suggested in the dictionary. He adds to this definition by arguing that an intellectual must be someone who is able to stand outside and objectively represent those groups who are marginalized. The intellectual must be someone who is outside the mainstream and take on the cause of the underrepresented. It is their role and duty to fight for the truth. If

one is a true intellectual according to Said, one will always be on the fringes, marginalizing and exiling themselves from others in their community in the process.

This conception of the intellectual as the loner, the individual, the voice for the oppressed, seemed to blend well with both the dictionary definition and my experiences. That is, this view of the intellectual was a masculine view in that an intellectual is someone who must be disconnected and isolated in order to be considered an intellectual. Said's argument seems to map onto conceptions of identity and growth as a process of separation and individuation as opposed to one built around interdependence or connection. This conception leaves anyone who operates within the majority out of contention and also suggests that subjectivity or connected ways of knowing do not "count" as intellectual because this behavior would not be objective. If women tend to depict their identity through their connections with other people (Gilligan, 1982), yet they see being intellectual as something that is disconnected and isolating, how might they be resolving this dilemma as they construct perceptions of themselves as intellectually able? How could girls and women ever recognize themselves or be recognized by others as intellectual when the prevailing model of intellectual activity excludes women's ways of knowing and being in intellectual communities? It seemed to me that we needed to reconsider our conceptions of what it means to be an intellectual, in order to bring to light ways of being and thinking available to women and girls that would be recognized as intellectual ways of being.

One might consider this as a parallel issue to Gilligan's (1982) argument for hearing a different voice in women's development. Just as we need to listen to a different voice in

moral and ethical domains as well as identity development, perhaps we also needed to consider different conceptions of how we might think about intellectual engagement that value experience and connection in addition to objectivity and reason. How could one look toward different ways of knowing and thinking to start to recognize women's ways of knowing as intellectual? Bateson's Composing A Life (1990), questions assumptions about the way we conceive of our lives and the need to reconceptualize development and growth as constantly changing and shifting--as works-in-progress. Her book highlights women who lead complex, fascinating and intellectual lives but she focuses on "changing the ways we organize human relationships, particularly within the family...for this provides the metaphors with which we think about broader ethical relations" (p. 114). Bateson considers the need for relationship and self in living a life and, in turn, in living an intellectual life. We cannot stand outside a given situation or outside our lives as if we were disconnected from it, for we are constantly filtering life through our own lenses and we must acknowledge these in order to ethically and authentically engage as intellectuals. To suggest we have objectivity, in my mind, is to be unethical to others and to one's self.

So in considering what it means to be an intellectual, I would like to highlight the importance of connection and relation as other ways to conceptualize and understand intellectual behavior. It is when we lose the ability to be thoughtful, to reflect and to connect that we will be unable to function as intellectuals and actively attend to situations (Langer, 1989). It is mindfulness, more than the objectivity that seems to be at the heart of intellectual behavior for women and girls. It is only within communities where individuals are able to develop ideas and trust that growth and intellectual activity take

place. It is only where there is a community, that one can be heard where one has a place to put ideas into the public space, where one can actually function as an intellectual. I created the book discussion group as one form of community where the intellect could be nurtured and girls' voices could be heard.

Specifically, I attempted to enact more connected and relational ways of intellectual engagement by valuing the girls voices and experiences--their ways of thinking and knowing--as intellectual ways of thinking and knowing (Belenky et al., 1986). In addition, I introduced the word "intellectual" to talk about the work we were doing in the book discussion group and to describe my perceptions of their abilities as thinkers and knowers. The girls, then, not only engaged in intellectual work according to my understanding, but they also began to engage in intellectual work according to the definitions they were internalizing. As Gail wrote, "through the book club I learned that I am, and everyone is, intellectual" (8/29/98). I am not suggesting that all cognitive activity is intellectual, but rather that all people are capable of engaging in thoughtful reflective thinking given the opportunity and multiple ways of engaging as thinkers and knowers.

By engaging intellectually and crafting intellectual identities, the girls in this study helped me to raise questions about recent research suggesting that girls choose agreement with peers over intellectual engagement (Finders, 1997). This argument is used to suggest that cooperative learning and small groups should not be used in classrooms because it creates intellectual disengagement. I argue that in the book discussion group they were able to choose both. The girls found that they could actually strengthen ties to their peers through intellectual engagement though this type of engagement did not occur naturally

but instead was fostered through the context of the book discussion group as suggested chapter four.

### Limitations of My Study

While the book discussion group created powerful opportunities for girls to use their voices and construct intellectual identities, and for me to examine this process, there were some limitations to the study. To begin, there was the issue of our connections to one another at the outset of the study. The girls and I were connected to one another in various ways (running, school, hometown, gender, etc.) and this seemed to facilitate their opening up and engaging in the book discussion group. The fact remains, however, that most of the other contexts of their lives, particularly their school contexts, have far fewer “ready-made” connections available. As a result, the book discussion group is not easily replicable. I argue that connections could be facilitated by a more knowledgeable other with more time to have shared experiences within a context such as the book discussion group, but they would not be as easily constructed in another group.

A second limit is that this study included a homogenous group of girls--all of them were White, middle class and raised in two-parent homes. While similarity of backgrounds allowed for more facile connections and potentially mediated their willingness to open up to one another, the homogeneity of the book discussion group also constrained the ways that we were able to address particular issues through the limited diversity of our experiences. While I believe that issues of intellectual identity development are relevant to all girls, the concerns and issues of this group of girls would be potentially difficult to relate to girls of varying ethnicities, socio-economic status and

urban life. Closely related to this is the fact that there were no boys in this study. Although there are all-girls schools the fact remains that the reality of most students' daily lives mean coed classrooms--a component that the girls acknowledged would have constrained their talk. It is unclear what we lost in our lack of diversity, even as we gained so much from our difference. That being said, my aim was to create a context where I would hear their voices and for this study that meant making it all about girls.

A third limitation of this study was the fact that these girls self-selected into this group. Unlike a classroom context where students are involuntarily grouped together, this was a group of girls who had already spent time together and joined the book discussion group as another opportunity to spend more time with people they already knew and liked. The girls were also encouraged to participate in the book discussion group by their cross country coach. Given the nature of selection and the small group size (seven girls), I would be hard pressed to make broad generalizations from this experience. Instead, I view this as an opportunity to raise more questions and speculate about how this research might reflect broader issues of voice and identity.

#### Implications For Further Research And Practice

Although this dissertation helped me to answer some of my questions about girls' intellectual identity development, this research also raised a number of new questions and issues to consider. These questions fall under two broad categories--research and practice.

Research. First, there is the issue of connections. Given that connections are so important to the emergence of girls' voice and, therefore, to the construction of

intellectual identity, it is important to consider future research that would examine the book discussion group with participants who did not have pre-constructed connections other than perhaps being in the same classroom or school. The pre-existing connections of my group members allowed their voices to emerge more quickly but through the shared experiences of reading, writing and talking a more diverse group might be able to create those types of connections. This is an important point in thinking about how book discussion groups could work for a variety of groups in a variety of contexts. Future research examining connecting points would be beneficial in thinking about how connections are created and maintained in order to facilitate the types of interactions that occurred in this book discussion group. In that same vein, further research should examine the impact of a book discussion group on the intellectual identity development of members varying in race, ethnicity, sex and socio-economic status. Now that the book discussion group has been shown to be a successful intervention for facilitating positive conceptions of girls' intellectual identity, it needs to be examined in contexts with groups of students more representative of both the larger adolescent population and of the realities of girls' everyday lives (e.g., there are boys in most girls' lives). Given that girls repeatedly mentioned the significance of having single gendered group, it is important to consider ways that conversation and other ways of engaging could be expanded to include coed discussion.

Another issue that deserves further consideration is how we conceptualize the role of the teacher as a more knowledgeable other. In the book discussion group I did many things that were "unteacher-like." For example, I ran with the girls, invited them to my

parents' home, spoke with them on the phone, and connected with them on a personal level. I also shared my own experiences as a member of the group. In sharing my own experiences as a more knowledgeable other I was engaging in very "unteacher like" ways. Further research should examine the role of a more knowledgeable other and consider the different ways that teachers might benefit from considering alternative conceptions of what it means to both teach and learn. Some things teachers might consider are: How might the sharing of more personal stories change the dynamics in a classroom? What types of connections would be established through teachers sharing personal stories and making connections? Even though I was older and more experienced than the girls in the book discussion group, as most teachers are in relation to their students, I represented a different type of authority for them which allowed to the girls to "respect me" (Jenny Interview 8/28/98) and see me as a mentor at the same time that they saw me as a peer (Gail Interview, 8/29/98). When some of their high school teachers took on authority roles that allowed for more personal connections, the girls reported that these were the classrooms where they would use their voices. How can teachers and teacher educators think about alternative ways of connecting to their students in ways that encourage their students voices? How might these alternative ways of relating to students reflect pedagogical perspectives they might adopt in their classrooms?

There is a small but growing movement in teacher education to study how reading, writing and talking about books facilitates literacy learning, culture and identity (Florio-Ruane and deTar, 1995; Florio-Ruane et al., 1997; McMahon and Raphael, 1997). My research adds to this work by focusing on the ways that literature can facilitate

intellectual identity development during adolescence. Unlike previous work that examines how literature and discussion groups foster literacy development, this work examines how the types of literature that are read can facilitate the construction of alternative identities. Literature and discussions, then, become a powerful social medium through which personal change can be facilitated. My work highlights ways that teachers and teacher educators can use literature to help girls and women examine and reflect upon their identities and craft themselves in new ways. Researchers need to continue examining contexts that encourage voice and reflection. Teacher educators and teachers need to continue to think about how they can engage their students in ways that will allow them to value themselves, and will also allow them to carry those beliefs into their lives beyond the classroom. It would be important for teacher educators to engage prospective teachers in discourse-intensive learning contexts such as the book discussion group so that they could engage in practices that facilitated the emergence of their own voices and then have these experiences available to draw on in their own classrooms.

In this study it was clear that having a voice and having one's voice valued were central to girls' growing conceptions of themselves as intellectually able. Both of these perspectives were central to constructing intellectual identities as it is in the public space where voices are heard that girls are able to examine their own and others' voices. Even if a classroom can't operationalize a book discussion group like the one in this study, teachers need to examine ways in which they can value their students voices and take them seriously as thinkers and knowers. As this research suggests, the more that girls are taken seriously, the more they begin to take themselves seriously.

The key to the emergence of voice in the book discussion group was that the girls, the books and I, all contributed to constructing the context. Since there needs to be both action and interaction for voice to emerge, we need to look at the ways classrooms and teachers are facilitating the active construction of these features. We also need to consider how inactivity--either by not taking girls seriously, by lacking connections or by not utilizing books that give permission--works against the development of girls' voices and minds. Girls commonly lack alternative representations of gender and identity, given that the vast majority of texts that they read in school are still written by male authors and about male characters. The books that girls read in school are not providing opportunities to identify with strong female characters or authors and envision alternative images of themselves. Additionally, teachers need to consider the role of texts in providing opportunities for girls to "try on" other perspectives. Texts with alternative images of what it means to be female and be an intellectual are lacking in girl's lives, and are an important resource when thinking of ways to get girls to take themselves seriously and engage intellectually.

This study also has implications for considering how to use literature in different ways to facilitate development. For example, diverse populations, such as students with learning problems, students with social and emotional problems, girls who are pregnant and so forth could benefit from discussion focused around books that might be topically relevant to their experiences (e.g., issues of pregnancy and parenthood). Literature could be utilized in ways that allow struggling students to begin to value themselves as

competent learners and thinkers. More broadly, the question that needs to be asked is-- how could literature be used in ways to help students learn more about themselves?

If we think about the Vygotsky Space as a way to represent learning that occurs first on a social plane (inter psychologically) and then on a psychological plane (intra psychologically) then girls who silence themselves are at a disadvantage in school because they never have an opportunity to engage their voice in the public space and thus are never actively participating in creating positive social constructions of themselves. They learn instead that their own voice is not part of a social dialogue. If they are active contributors to the public discourse then girls could be transforming public/social spaces and then could transform themselves. One step in aiding this process would be for teachers and teacher educators to think about classrooms more fluidly and how we might cultivate more socially constructed learning environments. In these environments, multiple voices and ways of knowing are valued and voices supported, thus allowing for the learning process to be facilitated. In the end, the book discussion group was a powerful means for these girls to find their voices and use their voices to construct and consider alternative conceptions of their intellectual identities.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW THEMES AND QUESTIONS

Introduction: As you know I am trying to understand identity development and learning in adolescence--particularly as it occurred in the book discussion group. I want to talk to you about your experiences in the book discussion group and will be audiotaping our conversation so I can feel free to talk to you without having to concentrate on notetaking.

Name:

Age:

Grade:

Parents:

# of kids in family/which number are you:

How long lived in this area:

1. General Experience in the Book Discussion Group: Can you tell me generally about your experiences in this book discussion group? (probe: was it enjoyable, what did you like, dislike). Would you say this has been a learning experience for you? In what ways?
2. Discussion: Tell me about the discussions themselves. How did you feel the conversations progressed overtime? Did you feel you were able to say the things that you wanted to say during the book discussion group meetings? Did you feel other people were able to say what they needed to say during the book discussion group meetings?  
  
Which discussion did you like the most? (Probe: Why? Can you give an example from that night?) Which did you like the least ? (Probe: Why? Can you give an example from that night?) Which discussion do you think you learned the most from? The least?
3. Literature: Let's talk about the books. Which books did you enjoy the most? Which

the least? Why? Which books did you connect to the most? Which the least? Why? Which book did you learn the most from? Which did you learn the least from? Why? how useful were the books in helping you to think about yourself as a thinker and a learner? How helpful were the books in helping you to think about your identity as an intellectual? Are there any of these books you would recommend to read again or any that you would say were not worth the time?

4. Writing: Were the journals helpful to your thinking and learning? How did you use your journal? Were there some books where you had a lot more to write about? Which ones? What was most useful about writing? What was least useful? What do you think about the journals as tools for learning through this experience?

5. Learning History: Can you tell me about yourself as a learner? What are you like when you are learning something new? Does your learning differ in and out of school? How would you describe yourself as a student? Do you speak out in class or do you tend to listen more? Have you always been talkative/listener? Has high school been a different type of experience for you? What about the way you learned in the book discussion group? How would you describe this?

6. Learning from the Book Discussion Group: What have you learned, if anything, from this experience? What do you think about the idea of learning through reading writing and talking about books? What have you learned about yourself as a learner from this experience? Can you give specific examples of when you remember learning something?

7. Identity: What have you learned about identity from participating in book discussion group? How did the reading, discussion and writing help you to think about your

identity (As a thinker? a knower? An intellectual?) What do you think you learned about your own identity from this experience? How did the characters in the books help you to think about identity issues--particularly intellectual ones?

8. My Role: What was my role in the book discussion group? Could you have had the book discussions without me? Did I make a difference in the discussions? How?

8. Most Memorable: What was your most memorable experience in the book discussion group? (Probe: good/bad, whatever stands out as most memorable--Tell me why was it that one, etc.)

9. Criticisms/Commentary on the experience: What was your favorite part of the experience? Why? What was your least favorite aspect of this experience? Why? What would you want to have done differently if you could do this again? Why?

APPENDIX B  
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Respondent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

PART I

Answer all questions from your perspective last fall--October of 1997.

Scale: 1 is low; 5 is high

Think back to the fall of last year, October of 1997. Locate yourself on a 5 point continuum in relation to

1. Confidence in yourself as an intellectual.

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. Confidence in yourself as a student

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. Confidence in yourself as a daughter

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. Confidence in yourself as an athlete

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. Confidence in your self--generally

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. Confidence in your "voice"--that you have something to offer/that what you have to say matters

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Rate the following according to your PAST PERSPECTIVE--October, 1997:

1--never do ,2--usually don't, 3--sort of 4- usually do 5--always do

7. I take myself seriously as an intellectual.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. I take myself seriously as a reader.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. I take myself seriously as a writer.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. I take myself seriously as a thinker.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. I take myself seriously as someone who has ideas to share.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. I take myself seriously as an athlete.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. My voice matters most in deciding what I want to do with my life.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

## PART II

Please answer all questions from your PRESENT PERSPECTIVE--August, 1998.

Scale: 1 is low; 5 is high

Think about yourself right now--August, 1998. Locate yourself on a 5 point continuum in relation to

1. Confidence in yourself as an intellectual.

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. Confidence in yourself as a student

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. Confidence in yourself as a daughter

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

4. Confidence in yourself as an athlete

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

5. Confidence in your self--generally

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

6. Confidence in your "voice"--you have something to offer/what you say matters

\_\_\_\_\_

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Rate the following according to your PRESENT PERSPECTIVE--August, 1998:

1--never do 2--usually don't 3--sort of 4- usually do 5--always do

7. I take myself seriously as an intellectual.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

8. I take myself seriously as a reader.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

9. I take myself seriously as a writer.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

10. I take myself seriously as a thinker.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

11. I take myself seriously as someone who has ideas to share.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

12. I take myself seriously as an athlete.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

13. My voice matters most in deciding what I want to do with my life.

---

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

### PART III

Now that you have answered this survey from your past perspective and your present perspectives, go back through and compare your responses between October, 1997 and August, 1998. In places where there is a change in your response, either positive or negative, please write down why you believe this change has occurred (to what do you attribute the change in your view of yourself?).

Thank you!

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