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THE GENDERING OF LITERACIES: THE READING AND WRITING PRACTICES OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN RURAL APPALACHIA

by

JEAN THOMPSON COREY

A Dissertation Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies
of Middle Tennessee State University in Partial Fulfillment
of the
Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF ARTS

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The Reading and Writing Practices of Adolescent Girls in

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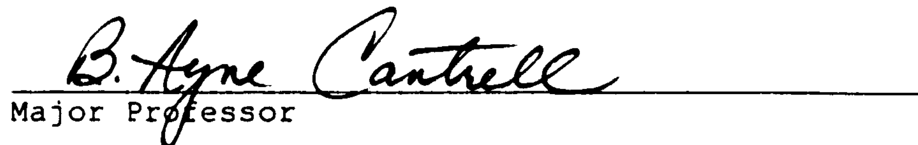

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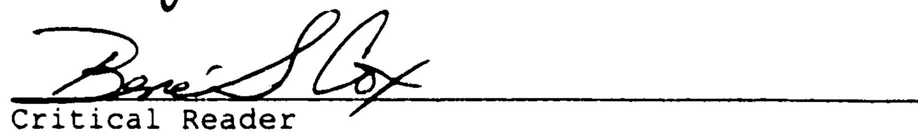

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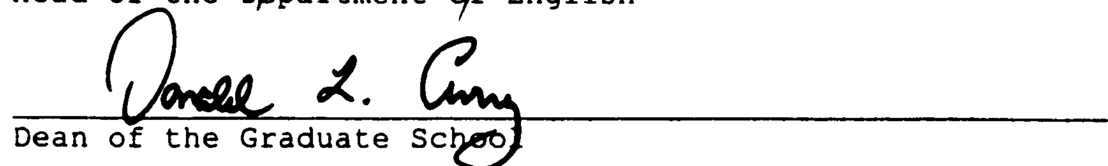

Dean of the Graduate School

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Abstract

The Gendering of Literacies: The Reading and Writing Practices of Adolescent Girls in Rural Appalachia

by Jean Corey

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the literacies of adolescent girls in rural Appalachia. This study focuses on the literacies of six girls, two girls each from sixth, ninth, and eleventh grades. Representing the span of adolescence, the six girls were chosen as acknowledged leaders by classmates and teachers. Over the course of a semester, these girls were observed and interviewed both in and out of the classroom. Parents, teachers, and administrators were also interviewed. The girls' literacies examined in the study include the reading and writing practices sanctioned by school, as well as those that usually go unnoticed by teachers and school administrators.

The findings of this study suggest that the writing and reading required in school often dismiss the experiences and aesthetics that rural Appalachian girls bring with them to school, thus cutting them off from the strengths and potentials of their cultures at home. The literacies sanctioned by school limit the girls' ability to think critically about the roles and scripts available for

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women in their culture. Examination of the girls' unsanctioned reading and writing practices, however, reveals the political possibility of these literacies. At the same time that girls seem to embrace their prescribed roles as women in their culture, they also resist and talk back to both school and home cultures in their underground practice of writing notes. In this literacy practice girls shed the "nice," "sweet" personas constructed within their schools' sanctioned literacies and engage in imaginative and creative forms of writing that are important for staying connected to the confidence they knew as younger girls.

Girls find their experiences as adolescents validated through reading teen magazines and are offered a subjectivity, however limited, that they do not find elsewhere in their culture. Through reading these magazines, they are offered a window to cultures beyond their own; cultures where girls are often allowed more cultural agency than the girls of rural Appalachia.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of making room in the classroom for all the literacies students possess. As girls are empowered and their voices are made audible, it is crucial that we make places for their voices to be heard.

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Acknowledgements

The seed for this dissertation was planted in a research and methods of teaching composition class taught by Hephzibah Roskelly. As a student in that class I understood for the first time that teaching at the intersection of theory and practice was not only possible but essential for a classroom where learning is fluid and dynamic. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater's work in the field of ethnography gave me a glimpse of the possibilities in research. I owe much to her helpful questions, genuine interest, and personal encouragement. I am deeply grateful to Ayne Cantrell, who affirmed me in my vision for this study and then gave countless hours, reading and advising, and moving me closer to my final draft. Bene Cox graciously helped with the final fitting, tightening things up and cutting loose ends.

Without my sister Jane Stephens, who blazed this trail and traveled it with me, this dissertation would not have happened. I am thankful beyond words for her continual enthusiasm and confidence in me. I owe many thanks to my research assistants John, Sue, Mark, Emmy, Ben, Jack, Sarah, Peter, and Stuart. How grateful I am for the help and encouragement they gave me in so many ways.

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Finally, I would like to give my great appreciation to the girls and women I met along the way, for their graciousness, their spirit, their friendship, and their willingness to allow me to enter their world. I am a richer person for having made the journey.

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Table of Contents

Chapter Page

I. Introduction 1

II. Rocktown Girls: Finding the Right Fit 25

III. Sanctioned Literacies at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools 42

IV. Stories from the Porch: Unsanctioned Literacies at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools 73

V. "Firmly Planted, Forward Moving": Root Bound in Rocktown 111

Works Cited 127

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Chapter I

Introduction

> *Yet Women's culture has remained largely unrecorded and unrecognized. It must be stressed that women have been left out of history not because of the evil intent of male historians, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history that are inappropriate to women. To rectify this we must, for a time, focus on a woman-centered inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women*
> --Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought*

Situated in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, in the rural community of Rocktown, Shadow Lake Elementary School is beautiful in May, with rhododendron and mountain laurel blooming in front of the small white school. Many parents and grandparents of the students also attended this school, which was built at the beginning of the century. The school's pride for its rich history is evident in the motto printed above the door of the school: "Firmly Planted, Forward Moving." A large metal structure serving as the gym stands next to the school with a picture of its mascot, a fierce growling tiger, painted across the front of the gym. Last year, parents spent many hours raising money to install a state-of-the-art floor for the gym. On the other side of the school is a small trailer, which some parents renovated several years ago to house the school library.

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The shelves inside the library are filled with books, most are musty and torn, having been donated to the library by families from Birmingham and Atlanta who have second homes in this mountain town. Two years ago the parents' hard work paid off, and the county agreed to provide a librarian for the school two days a week. In back of the school sits a trailer put in by the county to serve as the new head start center. The school shares a parking lot and much more with Shadow Lake Baptist Church; the principal serves as deacon in the church and many church members volunteer in all sorts of capacities at the school.

The end of the 1999-2000 academic year is approaching, and the graduating sixth graders of Shadow Lake Elementary School are preparing to go on their class trip to a girls' camp three miles down the road. They will spend three nights in cabins at the camp. The sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Bailey, has promised opportunities for swimming and fishing, as well as canoeing, climbing and rappelling, and archery, all activities the girls have never experienced. Their town boasts several private summer camps, four of them girls' camps. Yet only Liz, whose parents own one of the girls' camps, has ever been to summer camp; some of the girls have never spent the night away from home. The girls

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are still trying to convince Mandy and Lisa, who have decided not to go on the trip, to join them, but Mandy warns Lisa not to give in (Lisa later confessed to Liz that she really wanted to go, but she didn't have the nerve to cross Mandy).

All year, teachers have been preparing the sixth graders for "going down to the high school." Mrs. Bailey is particularly concerned that the students be prepared for next year and often tells the students they are "going to have a rude awakening down at the high school." But Mrs. Bailey has not and could not prepare them for the "rude awakenings" they have had to make this year as sixth graders. Besides obvious physical changes, there have been significant changes in the girls' relationships with family, friends, and teachers. This year when Tiffany's note full of obscenities about Mrs. Crowe (her favorite teacher) was found, she was sent to the "A school," the county's alternative school for children with behavioral problems. Last week, Sherry, a newcomer this year to Shadow Lake, was committed to Mountain View mental hospital after trying to commit suicide. Both events clearly mark the transitions that have taken place for the sixth grade girls this year.

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Down at the High School:

Mary Anne and Wanda were the best of friends
All through their high school days
Both members of the 4H club
Both active in the FFA.
After graduation Mary Anne went out lookin
For a bright new world
Wanda looked all around this town
And all she found was Earl.
--Dixie Chicks "Goodbye Earl"

Laurel Gap School sits at the foot of the mountain; there are two buildings, one houses K-6th grades, the other 7th-12th grades. Shadow Lake is the only other school that feeds Laurel Gap's junior/senior high school. Like Shadow Lake School, Laurel Gap School is an old school; again, parents and grandparents of the students here are Laurel Gap graduates. The front hall of the school is lined on both sides with showcases of trophies, retired jerseys, and signed footballs. One section is dedicated to a football player from the class of '66 who was inducted into the state's football hall of fame. On the wall facing the doors, posters advertise a car wash sponsored by the Future Farmers of America, tickets for the Miss Spring Fantasy contest, and Wednesday morning prayer around the flagpole, a devotional sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Further down the hall, the Future Homemakers of America display the quilts they have made this semester.

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In the auditorium, the thirty-six graduating seniors practice for Class Night, a night when seniors can use their creativity to entertain the community and celebrate their graduation. One of the skits they are rehearsing is a pantomime to the Dixie Chicks' song "Good-by Earl." Laughter erupts as "Wanda" is abused by "Earl," and loud cheers erupt when "Mary Anne" comes back on stage and helps "Wanda" kill and bury "Earl." Buddy, a twenty-year-old man who has returned to school with hopes to graduate, plays "Earl." Buddy is living with his fifteen-year-old girlfriend, who is expecting twins, and her family until he graduates. Another skit is titled, "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire." In order to win the hand of the redneck, the nine contestants must answer such questions as, "How many children do you want to have?" and "What is your idea of a perfect evening?" Denise, who in real life plans to attend auto-body repair school next year, answers that she would like a dozen children and her perfect evening is giving her husband a bath. There is more hilarity from the audience. The seniors have had to plan skits that do not require many guys because their class is down to only four men. Senior English teacher Mrs. Simpson explains that most of the male students leave when they are old enough to get jobs in the

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sock mills in town. School cannot compete with the temptation of a weekly paycheck that "they can invest in a vehicle." Mrs. Simpson adds thoughtfully that unless a girl gets pregnant, the girls usually stay through graduation. This has been a good year; they have not lost any girls. Last year they lost four girls due to pregnancy from this class. Several of the girls who will graduate in a few weeks plan on marrying soon. Melissa, the class valedictorian, and Renee both have had fiancés die this year; Melissa's fiancé died just a week ago from an aneurysm in his brain, and Renee's fiancé died in January while helping move trees with his four-wheeler during an ice storm. Melissa is the only girl who plans to leave the area. She will attend a small Baptist school in the Southern part of the state. Two girls plan to enroll in the county's community college; the other girls say they will probably get jobs in the mills, at the WalMart in the county seat, or wait tables.

A child of Appalachia herself, Southern novelist Lee Smith claims, "the mountains which used to imprison me have become my chosen stalking ground" ("Terrain of the Heart"). Smith had to put great distance between herself and those mountains before she could, as she says, "get a purchase on

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it" (qtd. in Parrish 166). Yet, few women from rural Appalachia are afforded the same opportunities Smith has been given.

Because Smith writes about her roots it is not surprising to find that the same strong women and oral tradition that are essential to her novels are found in Rocktown. Certainly all cultures tell stories, the people of Rocktown, however, understand the distinctive power of stories to render meaning and significance. As I began this study of the literacies of adolescent girls at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap schools* I was particularly interested in how this "narrative knowing," so important to the local culture, manifested itself in the writing and reading practices of the adolescent girls in the community. I also wanted to discern why though the women of Rocktown seem remarkably strong, they persist in relationships which are often controlling and abusive; though these women are usually the primary economic providers for their families, they have no vision for careers that would take them away from Rocktown. There seems to be much that leaves the women of Rocktown stranded on their mountain, unable to get

*For reasons of confidentiality, names of the schools, town, and all people and places are fictitious.

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"a purchase" on the rich resources of their mountain home. Through my research I hoped to better understand girls' identity formations, ways of knowing, and personal choices as influenced by their rural Southern Appalachian culture.

Recent Research on Adolescent Girls

Much research over the past two decades has focused on the struggles adolescent girls face in and out of the classroom. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan's research between 1986 and 1990 discovered ways in which the hierarchical structure of schools works against girls. In 1992, Harvard University Press published *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development*, Brown and Gilligan's book about what happens on girls' journey to adulthood. After interviewing over one hundred girls between ages seven and eighteen, Brown and Gilligan found that younger girls spoke with strong, clear voices, but as they got older, their voices became softer and less certain. Brown and Gilligan concluded that as adolescent girls in America become silent and disconnected during adolescence, they experience a loss of self.

While Gilligan and Brown were conducting their research, the American Association of University Women's published their 1990 report *Shortchanging Girls,*

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Shortchanging America. The report documented that in spite of the many doors that had been opened for women in the our society, girls continued to experience low self-image, self-doubt, and self-censorship of their creative and intellectual potential. High school seemed to lower girls' expectations; as a result they had less confidence in themselves and their abilities than boys had. The report found that all girls knew some loss of self-esteem during their high school years, but the intensity of the loss varied among ethnic groups.

Understandably, Gillian and Brown's research along with the AAUW report sounded an alarm to educators and parents across the nation; in 1994, three important books, David and Myra Sadker's *Failing at Fairness: How Our Girls Cheat Girls*, Peggy Orenstein's *Schoolgirls*, and Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* were published. After years of research, the Sadkers found significant gender inequity in education at every level. There is a hidden curriculum in classroom interaction that works to boys' advantage and girls' disadvantage. Often, teachers participate in this curriculum unknowingly (73). The Sadkers claim, "regardless of ethnic or racial background, all American

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girls share a common bond: a gender gap in test performance that leaves them still behind the boys" (140). Journalist Peggy Orenstein looked behind the statistics reported by the AAUW and studied the real lives of adolescent girls in a suburban and inner-city school. She, too, finds that girls experience a loss of self-worth, but she attributes the problem to both families and education. Clinical psychologist Mary Pipher points beyond family and education to a "girl poisoning" culture as the real threat to girls' sense of self (28). Educators and parents were learning about culture's influence on girls' education and self esteem.

Yet, Christine Hoff Sommers now contests this research. Dismissive of qualitative research, Sommers asserts that recent research that claims there is gender bias against girls in education is "riddled with errors." Sommers provides evidence to support her position that "girls are thriving in schools" with what she calls "more traditional research," which consists of large national surveys and standardized test scores. However, Sommers misses the point. Whether adolescent girls are "thriving" cannot be measured in surveys and test scores. Girls' esteem, which is the issue in question in the research she

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is contesting, is not dependent on test scores.

Too, Sommers' "more traditional approach" is problematic. She would do well to attend to the research she dismisses so quickly. In *A Different Voice*, Gilligan warns of the difficulty of getting women to tell the truth, to use their real voices in an interview. In this important research on women's development, Gilligan finds that despite changing laws and attitudes about women's rights, many women still have an internalized editor that will not allow them to speak with their own voices: "women often sensed that it was dangerous to say or even know what they wanted or thought—upsetting to others and therefore carrying with it the threat of abandonment or retaliation" (ix). Gilligan believes that her research interviews were more honest than traditional research because of her relational style and carefully protected agreements about confidentiality. Because Sommers has only looked at the product of education rather than the process, her conclusions are suspect, obviously based on incomplete data.

Three important books dealing specifically with the literacy of adolescent girls have been published since 1994: *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior*

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High, by Margaret Finders; *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity*, by Meredith Rogers Cherland; and *Sound From the Heart: Learning to Listen to Girls* by Maureen Barbieri. These studies, along with the research of Gilligan and Brown, the AAUW, the Sadkers, Orenstein, and Pipher, have made great strides in challenging administrators, teachers, and parents to rethink what is being communicated about gender to adolescents. However, they have all focused on race and gender, with little attention given to class. Author Dorothy Allison, keynote speaker at the 1999 Feminist(s) and Rhetoric(s) conference in Minneapolis, called attention to the missing voice of poor white women in the current feminist dialogue and addressed the need to help all "young people to think of themselves as being powerful."

Little research has been done on literacy and gender in rural areas. Although Shirley Brice Heath's pivotal ethnography *Ways with Words* focuses on the use of language in rural areas, Heath pays little attention to gender in her study. My hope is that this study of the literacy of adolescent girls might be a voice for these women who have so long been omitted from discussions of gender equity both in and out of the classroom.

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Statement of the Problem and Research Methodology and Assumptions

Arranging our techniques for arranging, and thinking about thinking. --I. A. Richards, *Philsophy of Rhetoric*

This study of the literacy of adolescent girls at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools attempts to answer these questions: 1) How do the girls of this community construct their identities in their reading and writing practices? 2) How do the structures and sanctioned literacies of school empower these girls to think critically about their position in their culture? 3) How do they negotiate the diverse cultures of home and school? 4) What perpetuates the disenfranchisement of women in this culture?

My research method is primarily ethnoqraphical. All research carries with it a particular way of understanding the world. Ethnographer Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater believes that "as academics and researchers we choose our topics and our methods because of our belief systems and personalities" (xx). I chose an ethnographic approach for this study of the literacy of adolescent girls because it seems to embrace the relational approach to research that scholars such as Gilligan believes works best with women. I also find ethnography provides the best avenue to understanding the culture in rural Southern Appalachian.

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Ethnographers Amy Zaharlick and Judith Green describe ethnography as a "research method in which researchers do field research to 'identify' and explore the cultural patterns of everyday life . . . for . . . members of particular cultural groups" (206). According to compositionist Beverly Moss, ethnography as a research method among composition teachers "is growing in popularity" (471). Moss further explains,

> Ethnographers attempt to become participant-observers in the communities they study and seek to provide 'thick' description (Geertz 1973) of the cultural patterns of those communities through the eyes of the members of the community . . . . Whereas ethnography was once seen as a way to study remote and foreign culture, it has become accepted as a way to study subcultures within our own culture. (472)

Though some scholars question the objectivity of ethnographic research, Frederick Erickson understands ethnography as a "deliberate inquiry process guided by a point of view" (51). This point of view is not a "liability, but a stance that informs and empowers the researcher's intuitive understandings," according to

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compositionists Eleanor Kutz and Hephzibah Roskelly (29). As ethnographer, I have had to become conscious of my own point of view, allowing my reactions to direct me to some significant aspects of the culture I have attempted to understand. My perspective necessarily brings with it certain assumptions about language, literacy, and gender; these assumptions guide me in both the questions I ask of this topic and the ways I interpret my data.

I view both language and literacy as social constructions. I use the word "gender" in this study because I find the roles of women are culturally, rather than biologically dictated. Simone de Beauvoir contends, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (9). Gender theorist Dawn Currie explains the constructed nature of gender: "As constructs, gendered identities are constantly being re-enacted through practices that express a continual process of becoming as well as being" (4). These practices vary among cultures; different cultures produce different behaviors, attitudes, presentations of self, and so on for women.

Influenced by the thinking of Lev Vygotsky and his colleagues, I find that language is inextricably linked to the social context in which it occurs. Because of its

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sociocultural nature, language reflects the way people within that culture view themselves, as well as prescribes the roles they are to play. Richard Rorty claims, "the human self is created by use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary" (7). Drawing from theorists such as Wertsch, Gee, Dyson, and Freedman, Finders concludes:

> when people speak or write they are engaging in a dialogue socially situated within multiple relations of power. Understanding the link between language and power makes visible sociopolitical tensions that create and constrain social roles. (9)

By examining the reading and writing practices of adolescent girls in rural Appalachia, ethnographic research can uncover some of those tensions that "create and constrain social roles" for women.

Limitations of the Study and Research Strategies

Though I did not grow up in the southern Appalachian community of Rocktown, it has been my home for nine years. Because Rocktown is my home as well as the site of my research, I was both an insider and outsider to the culture I studied, allowing me multiple perspectives. Since I had

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substituted as a teacher and had been involved in the local schools during the past few years, I knew administrators, teachers, and students, a relationship which made for an easy entry into the schools. My first challenge was choosing the age and number of girls I would study. Intrigued with the three studies by Barbieri, Cherland, and Finders, which addresses the reading and writing practices of sixth and seventh grade girls, I knew I wanted to observe sixth grade girls, but I also wanted to understand the changes that took place with girls "down at the high school." I wanted to provide a "thick" description of these girls, so I decided to limit the study to two girls each from the sixth, ninth, and eleventh grades, their ages ranging from twelve to seventeen years of age. Once I made that decision, the girls from each class surfaced quickly. Because I wanted to discover the strengths of the schools and culture, I chose to observe the girls who seemed to be the leaders, who had the most potential to succeed both socially and academically. I soon discovered that succeeding socially does not necessarily correlate with succeeding academically, so I chose some students who were the leaders socially and some who were leaders academically. The parents of all six girls chosen had

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grown up in Rocktown. I thought this stipulation was necessary for a clearer understanding of the local culture.

In the sixth grade, finding two leaders out of the twelve girls was very easy--there were two very distinct groups in the classroom, each had a leader acknowledged by students and teachers alike. Interestingly, each leader had an inseparable sidekick, a girl who was considered best friend, yet was clearly the follower in the relationship. Though the ninth and eleventh grade classes were not much larger in enrollment, there were not the distinct groups found in the sixth grade. Since I wanted to choose girls who had graduated from Shadow Lake, I observed those who had been students there. After observing the girls in the classroom as well as on the playground, I was able to choose two girls who seemed to have more energy and connections with others in the class. When I asked the teacher (the same teacher teaches seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade) about these girls, she quickly assured me they were class leaders.

My reading in the field of ethnography directed me towards several strategies in my research. I knew I needed to pay close attention to the setting; I looked for the kinds of recommendations that were being made to students

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by administration and teachers. I found these artifacts as written information on bulletin boards, hallways, and in offices. I also looked for claims made by students on posted writing, which included posters advertising activities, notes left on blackboards, and graffiti in the bathroom.

I also interviewed students, administrators, teachers, and mothers of students in the school. Because I wanted to listen to what was actually being said, to listen for the true voices that I might have missed during the interview, I taped and transcribed these interviews. When I first began my interviewing, I had a list of questions that I planned on asking each student: "Tell me about the kinds of writing you do. Tell me about the kinds of reading you do. What do you like about writing and reading? How do you see school preparing you for the future?" But these questions were quickly put aside--I found that when I let the conversation take its own course, though it sometimes turned in directions I did not anticipate or even worse, it stalled, sputtered, and almost died, these wrong turns and even the sputtering led me to the most provocative and helpful information.

I found the same situation to be true with my

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interviews with teachers. I also had prepared questions for them: "What did they want to see happen with their students and reading and writing? Could they tell me something about their philosophy of education? What was their hope for these students as they leave their classroom or school? What was the most difficult thing about teaching reading and writing to these students?" Again, standing on the playground or in the halls between classes, the teachers were happy to have a listener, someone who would be sympathetic with the difficulty of their jobs. I would let the conversation unravel as it would, and in the unraveling I found that threads I might have missed in an interview often led me to important connections and revealing gaps. As I listened to and transcribed tapes, as I attempted to unpack the culture, I listened for key words that informed girls of who they were, how they were to behave, and what place they have in their culture.

From January to May 2000, I was in the schools two days a week. I also attended extracurricular events such as basketball games, pageants, and dances, as well as the events that involved the whole town. During this time I looked carefully for ritualized language events. There were two kinds of literacies in which the girls were

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engaged: (1) the literacies that were sanctioned by the school, such as essays, accelerated reading, production of the yearbook and school newspaper, and standardized tests, and (2) the unsanctioned literacies such as writing notes, signing yearbooks, signing shirts, and the teen magazines they pulled out during recess. Different occasions demanded different kinds of writing. I read the writing they did for different occasions to see how they negotiate relationships in their writing; how they refer to themselves, to adults, and to boys; and how they write about their hopes, their fears, their loves and their futures. I also looked for any references to the myths that informed them of how they were to live in their culture.

In *Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High*, Finders uses Ervin Goffman's definition of social interactions as performances played out for particular audiences to talk about social roles as contextual:

> In other words, social roles shift depending on who is present and what the established expectations are of those present. I am not suggesting that social roles are put on like outer garments to protect or to conceal a true

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> self, but rather that roles represent multiple and shifting selves. Defining a social role not as static but as a performative act allows one to examine critically the context and the roles that are made available therein. (9)

Finders defines the term *hidden literacies* as the "discourse that takes place offstage" (9), which refers to Goffman's distinction between center and backstage performances. Drawing on anthropologist James Scott's understanding that the only way to clearly outline issues of power is to mark the differences between hidden transcripts, or "discourse that takes place offstage beyond direct observation by powerholders," and public transcripts, the "open interactions between subordinates and those who dominate," Finders maintains that although much important research has been attentive to "public transcripts," more attention needs to be paid to the hidden literacies that "might disrupt the public" (10). Swayed by Finders' claim, my initial intent was to study just the hidden or unsanctioned literacies, but acknowledging the likelihood that sanctioned literacies in the schools were systemically keeping these girls and young women from realizing any real cultural power, I decided that an

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understanding of both public and hidden literacies was necessary in order to understand the constrictions faced by rural Appalachian adolescent girls.

Summary of the dissertation

In Chapter II, I provide the setting of my research, as well as a panoramic and close-up view of the girls I focused my research on. Chapter III explores the ways the sanctioned literacies of Rocktown schools perpetuate the status quo. Through an outcome-based education, girls are kept from thinking critically and thus kept from examining their marginal position in their culture. Chapter IV is a discussion of the hidden literacies of adolescent girls, and the ways girls negotiate their roles as women, yet maintain connection with their imperious girl selves. In their engagement of school's unsanctioned practices of reading, the girls are allowed to "talk back" to the authorities of school and the restrictive roles school culture offers them. As girls read teen magazines, "teenzines," they are offered subjectivity, however limited, as well as a window to the lives of girls in other cultures. Through their hidden literacies girls both resist their immediate culture and dream of transcending that culture. In Chapter V, I conclude by suggesting

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schools need to be attentive to how literacies that are often unwelcome in school have the potential power to help girls be more reflective of who they are and where they are going. I also share my concern that the voices of girls who share the same values and beliefs of Rocktown girls be listened to and taken seriously by other cultures, particularly feminism(s).

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Chapter II

Rocktown Girls: Finding the Right Fit

> *My mama did not run away. My aunt Dot and aunt Grace and cousin Billie with her near dozen children--they did not run. They learned resilience and determination and the cost of hard compromises. None of them ever intended to lose their lives or their children's lives, to be trapped by those hard compromises and ground down until they no longer knew who they were, what they had first intended. But it happened. It happened over and over again.* --Dorothy Allison, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*

Rocktown

The road leading up the mountain to Rocktown has occasional signs advertising bustling summer camps and charming bed and breakfast accommodations. There is a flashing light at the top of the mountain--the only traffic light in town. On either side of the road stand old inns, built at the turn of the century for vacationers wanting to take advantage of the natural springs for their health or to escape the stifling heat of Southern summers. A craft village stands next to the inn on one side, but it is still boarded up for the winter. With a population of six hundred, the town can barely sustain the four small stores --two that sell gas and a few groceries, one hardware store, and Flicks and Bronze, a tanning bed and video store. There are no developed neighborhoods in this town; woods or fields separate the houses and trailers in town.

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Perched along the edge of the mountain and along the banks of Cherokee River and Shadow Lake, are large summer homes, owned by families from Atlanta and Birmingham. Across the street from the school, there is a small private lake, Shadow Lake, owned by several families from Birmingham. A padlocked gate keeps trespassers away during the winter; few children from Shadow Lake School have ever actually seen the lake their school was named after. Many trailers dot the countryside, but zoning laws have eliminated threats of trailer parks. A small town hall serves as the poll during elections; the town council meets there monthly and the book mobile comes to the town hall parking lot every Wednesday. On the other side of the road is the Kountry Chef, a popular restaurant for locals. Another restaurant in town, the Tigers' Den, attracts the tourists; it is open only on weekends during the winter, but opens for weekdays during the summer. Noticeably missing are bars; this is a dry county, though alcoholism is a real concern.

The difference between local population and the summer residents is the most significant distinction among people in Rocktown. In Margaret Finders' research, she observes how teachers and administrators are aware of class

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distinction and the disturbing ramifications of this awareness in the classroom. This concern does not seem to be a threat in the schools here--perhaps because there is no racial diversity in the town (it is 100% white and the summer folk do not attend school). Judith Fiene's speaks to this egalitarian quality in her research of rural Appalachia:

> The need to maintain cooperative behaviors in small rural communities has required the belief that all people are accepted and equal. Although social distinctions have been present in Appalachia rural communities for generations, the observance of the egalitarian ethic persists in local social customs. (47)

Among the local population, a very small middle class exists, but most people in the town live below the poverty level. According to the Appalachian Regional Commission's index of economic distress, based on the U.S. Census and a three year average unemployment rate, in a range from "very strong" to "severely distressed," Bunker county is "severely distressed" (1). Some of the men moved to Rocktown when there was an active strip mine, others to work with logging companies. The only jobs for women on

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the mountain are teaching in the elementary school, waiting tables or washing dishes at the local restaurant, or working during the summer at the camps, cooking or cleaning (program staff for the summer camps are all imported from southern colleges and universities). Most of the women go down the mountain to work in the many mills found in Laurel Gap. The mills provide steady employment and sometimes benefits for women; women's salaries are often the primary sources of income for families. Some men and women work with camps or the tourist industry during the summer and depend on welfare (which the townspeople call "drawing") during the winter. A few families depend solely on welfare and disability payments.

Women and Poverty

Sociologist Janet Fitchen has contributed much to the study of poverty in rural America. Her 1981 study concludes that women from low economic backgrounds are able to maintain their role ideals as wives and mothers, while men from this social group are unable to live out their ideal roles as provider. Fitchen's research supports the need to consider class when analyzing gender construction.

Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule's pivotal study, *Women's Ways of Knowing,*

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explores the development of women's selves, voices, and minds; it is one of the few studies that attempts to understand the perspective of women from deprived economic and educational backgrounds. Belenky and her co-authors find that women from such backgrounds represent "extreme denial of self and dependence on external authority for direction" (24). In interviews with women in this group, researchers find commonality in these women's perceptions of words: "Words were perceived as weapons. Words were used to separate and diminish people, not to connect and empower them." Because of their mistrust of words, these women gave "no indications of dialogue with 'the self.' There were no words that suggested an awareness of mental acts, consciousness, or introspection" (26). This lack of introspection disconnected these women not only from the larger culture, but also from their "self." These women understood authorities as having ultimate power, and they perceived themselves as powerless. Belenky's conclusions bear significance for my study of sanctioned literacies in the schools and the ways that such sanctioning keeps women from thinking critically about their place in the rural Appalachian culture.

Appalachian Women's Social Roles

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During adolescence, girls begin to assume the adult roles that are socially and historically prescribed by their particular cultures. In order to analyze the roles rural Appalachian adolescent girls are negotiating, it is important to understand the roles made available to women within the dominant culture. Finding limited attention in research given to the perspectives of rural Appalachian women, I am indebted to the important contributions in this area made by Judith Fiene and Patricia Gagne.

Fiene's 1991 qualitative study describes rural low-status Appalachian women's construction of self:

> These women maintain positive feelings about themselves by confining their self-evaluations to the performance of feasible family roles as wives and mothers, to their ability to persevere, to their equitable treatment of others and to the value of their competencies and small achievements even when these are not recognized by others. (48)

Like most mothers, these Appalachian women are primarily interested in "doing right by their children." Fiene further explains "doing right" means physically protecting their children and making sure all their basic needs are

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met; the mothers do not feel "responsible for molding their children's intellectual development, nor do they judge their performance by their children's achievement." It also means "accepting all pregnancies." Fiene claims these women did not consider abortion an ethical option (50). I observed the adolescent girls I studied held the same assumptions.

Gagne's ethnography of a rural Appalachian community examines how the culture and social structure provide a "context in which the social control of women is achieved in a variety of ways, of which violence is only one." Gagne concludes that one way social control of women is maintained by men is through the "objectification and devaluation of women" (415). In both Fiene's and Gagne's research, they found that even though women are now the primary economic providers in rural Appalachia, they continue to maintain traditional gender roles. Gagne attributes this shift in roles to another form of social control.

Panoramic View: Girls and Women in Rocktown

An important event in Bunker County is the Bunker County Christmas parade. Every first Friday evening in December most of the county bundles up and lines the main

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thoroughfare of the Marion, the county seat, which has been blocked off for the parade of floats, marching bands, police cars, and fire engines. This year Santa Claus leads the parade on the float sponsored by the "Woodmen of the World," a lumber association. Following Santa's float is Wee Miss Bunker County--a girl from Rocktown. With a crown on top of her blond curls and dressed in a thin pink dress with ruffles and white anklets and patent leather shoes, the four-year-old girl sits on a small throne surrounded by her court of other four year old girls. Neither the cold December air nor the crowd seems to phase Miss Wee Bunker County or her attendants as they giggle and wave and play with each other's hair. Laurel Gap High School's marching band comes after the fifth float. The sequins on the outfits of the flag girls and majorettes catch the streetlights as the girls march to the music. Cheering erupts when the head majorette throws her baton twenty feet into the air and successfully catches it. The girls' bare arms and legs are red from the cold; their faces are solemn, either from nerves or cold, or perhaps from an adopted expression. A float sponsored by the Rocktown Church of God of Prophecy follows the Laurel Gap band; their choirs of mostly middle aged and older women, all

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dressed warmly, are kneeling and singing Christmas carols to the baby Jesus in the manger. Police cars and fire engines, with firefighters flanking the side and back, drive up and down the parade with their flashing lights and sirens. This cultural event offers a panoramic view of girls and women from Rocktown and the roles available to them through the span of their lives: cute little girls oblivious to the identity of the person carrying them or where they are going; adolescent girls, working hard to keep in step to a tune played by somebody else; and the mature women, kneeling over the baby, most likely the children of their young daughters who work to sustain their family--all of which take place in a world guided and directed by men who make and enforce the rules.

A Magnified View: Adolescence in Rockport

Mandy and Meredith, two of the girls I chose to focus on, are in many ways like sixth grade girls everywhere. They listen to the bands Backstreet Boys and N'Sync, talk on the phone, and write lots of notes during school. They write notes about boys, whom they wish would go out with them, and about girls they are mad at or do not like. They use the term "going out," even though sixth graders do not yet date. Although Rocktown is isolated in many ways, both

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Mandy and Meredith, as well as some of the other girls in their class, have cable TV and Internet access.

Mandy and Meredith's parents work hard to make sure they can provide their children with the material things they will need to get ahead. Mandy's mother, who receives no child support from her ex-husband, sometimes works two shifts to support her three children. Mandy's mother has been an active parent at Shadow Lake School, attending all of her boys' ballgames--I often hear Mandy's mother's voice above all the other voices, cheering her sons on or yelling at the referee's call. Now she has replaced Meredith's mother as cheerleader sponsor for Mandy.

Meredith's mother, Debbie, gave up working with the cheerleaders after Meredith's baby sister was born. Debbie has worked at the same mill in the valley since she was eighteen, the same year Meredith was born, and for the past five years Debbie has commuted to the university an hour half away, while still working second shift. In August she will graduate, certified to teach English. Although Debbie has been extremely busy with school and work, Debbie's father is not involved in Meredith's care at all. His father and he are welders and work out of his father's barn. Because Debbie is often at work when Shadow Lake

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School lets out in the afternoon, Debbie's mother picks up Meredith on her way home from work. Meredith has spent as many nights at her grandmother's house across the street as she has in her own trailer.

Meredith and Mandy both have strong influence among the sixth grade girls, but they do not get along with each other. Bud, a sixth grade boy, once explained to me that both Mandy and Meredith needed to "boss people around," and each girl knew it was futile to try boss the other girl. Bud further explained that while the boys did not need to be in a group, the girls divided into two groups, which he called Meredith's group and Mandy's group. He believes they did this because "girls have feelings-feelings get hurt." Apparently, as a sixth grader, Bud is already convinced that boys did not have feelings. Though I do not buy Bud's theory about feelings, it is true there are two distinct groups of girls operating in his classroom, one led by Meredith, the other led by Mandy.

Mandy and Lisa have been best friends since kindergarten as have Meredith and Kayla. The operating pronoun for these girls is "we" (in one conversation I heard Lisa ask Mandy "Didn't we like her last year?"). Other friends drift in and out of these two sets of

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friends. Meredith's sphere of influence sometimes includes Brittany and Tiffany, and Mandy's usually includes Heather and Ashley. Liz is the only girl in the class who seems to stay outside of either girl's circle.

At Laurel Gap High School, the girls operate more independently. Although there are visible friendships between girls (now most girls are some boy's girlfriend), there does not seem to be the same division between groups that exists with the sixth grade girls at Shadow Lake.

Tricia and Dawn Marie are ninth graders at Laurel Gap High School. Tricia is a lively, friendly fifteen-year-old with big dreams. As Tricia explains to me where she lives, she asks me if I know her Uncle Lester. (I am asked questions like this over and over again, and I am aware of how often the girls assume everyone knows their families.) Tricia has grown up on her father's farm helping with the horses her father rents to the camps in the summer, and Tricia dreams of being a veterinarian some day. I noticed that Tricia wears what looks like an engagement ring on her left hand. When I ask her about it, she says that she has been engaged but broke if off a few months ago. Tricia is one of the few students who is attentive and eager to answer in Mrs. Underwood's English class, which has mostly

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boys in it.

Dawn Marie is in the same English class as Tricia, but Mrs. Underwood barely notices Dawn Marie is there because she is so quiet. Although Dawn Marie is quiet, she is a popular girl. This year she entered the Spring Fantasy Contest; she did not win but received many points from the judges. Dawn Marie is a cheerleader, a FHA member, and is a faithful attendee of the Bible club. After living with her grandmother most of her life, Dawn Marie moved in with her mother and new stepfather this year. While her mother works at the second shift at the mill, Dawn Marie takes care of her four little sisters and new baby brother, leaving Dawn Marie with little time for homework.

Eleventh graders Shelley and Melissa are active band members. Shelley has been drum major this year, a position which has kept her busy with band competitions. Unfortunately, Laurel Gap's small band has not won any competitions, but Shelley still loves working together as a team. Next year Shelley will not be in the band; she plans on taking only three classes so she can get a job in the afternoons and spend time with her boyfriend who makes good money as a welder. An anomaly in Rocktown, Shelley has lived with her single father since her mother moved with

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Shelley's oldest sister back to the mother's family home in Florida eight years ago. Shelley's father works as the maintenance operator at a camp that operates year round; it would be hard to find a father as proud of his daughter as he. Besides being in band, Shelley is on the newspaper staff, student council vice president, president of the FHA (Shelley laughed when she told me the organization is attempting to change the name from Future Homemakers of America to Future Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America). This year Shelley was elected by her classmates to be the senior homecoming queen's attendant; she has a job for the summer at the barbecue restaurant down in the valley, as well as a job entering data for a company. She is saving her money for a new car.

Melissa's schedule is just as busy as Shelley's. She plays the flute, attends Bible club, and works on the yearbook staff. Not surprisingly, Melissa, an attractive young woman, won the Spring Fantasy beauty pageant this year. She waitresses alongside her mother at the Kountry Chef after school and on weekends. Melissa offers, "The house is pretty lonely when Dad is driving his rig." With hopes of going to the community college to become a nurse, Melissa has kept her grades up all year in spite of her

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full schedule. Both Shelley and Melissa both assure me they do not want to be in the food service industry the rest their lives.

City Sizes for Rural Girls

One day, while I was talking with Meredith, Kayla, and Brittany on the playground, as was often the case they forgot my presence and picked up a conversation they were having earlier. Conversations among the girls that week had focused on one thing--the first Shadow Lake School Spring Social in history, which was conceived by Mandy's mother. Today they were discussing what they should wear on Saturday night. Mandy thought she might be able to get her mother to take her over to The Limited (a women's clothing store) in Smithville, the closest city with a mall. Kayla gave a look of disapproval and told Mandy that The Limited only had clothes for city girls. Mandy ignored Kayla's comment and kept on talking about what she wanted to buy. When I asked Kayla later why The Limited was only for city girls, Kayla explained, "They don't have no clothes that fit--they're made for skinny girls, like the ones that live in cities."

I later realized the truth of Kayla's statement. Many items besides clothes, which may fit more weight conscious

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girls in the city or suburbs, do not fit the adolescent girls of Rocktown. The adolescent girls described in *Reviving Ophelia,* and later in *Ophelia Speaks,* a book about adolescent girls written by adolescent girls, deal with such situations as multiple abortions, eating disorders, and self-mutilation. Mary Pipher attributes some of this to the "chaotic and fragmented world" adolescent girls are growing up in today's society (284). Although Rocktown objectifies women through the numerous beauty pageants held as fundraisers each year, anorexia and bulimia are not as prevalent in Rocktown. According to Michelle Payne, author of *Bodily Discourses*, anorexic and bulimic behavior is seen mostly in young women from middle-class to upper-class families: "these young women are often afraid of choosing wrongly from the many opportunities they have" (58). Having too many opportunities to choose from is not a problem for the girls of Rocktown. Girls are sexually active in Rocktown; teen pregnancy is the primary reason girls drop out of Laurel Gap High School, but not one girl knew of a girl from their school who had an abortion. And while physical violence plagues many households, the girls I interviewed from Rocktown have never heard of self-mutilation. Life in Rocktown is slow paced, neither

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chaotic nor fragmented. Each day the principals of both schools greet each student by name. It would be hard for a girl in Rocktown to lead an anonymous or hidden life. The problems attributed to adolescent girls in the city and suburbs do not necessarily fit girls from Rocktown, yet their culture has presented them with values and expectations that are equally as real and limiting as the ones faced by adolescent girls in the cities and suburbs.

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Chapter III

Sanctioned Literacies at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools

> *My grandmother was a storyteller; she knew her way around words. She never learned to read and write, but somehow she knew the good of reading and writing; she had learned how to listen and delight. She had learned that in words and in language, and there only, she could have whole and consummate being. She told stories, and she taught me how to listen. I was a child and I listened. She could neither read nor write, you see, but she taught me how to live among her words, how to listen and delight. "Storytelling; to utter and to hear. . . ." And the simple act of listening is crucial to the concept of language, and more crucial even than reading and writing, and language is, in turn, crucial to human society. . . . When she told me those old stories, something strange and good and powerful was going on. I was a child, and that old woman was asking me to come directly into the presence of her mind and spirit; she was taking hold of my imagination, giving me to share in the great fortune of her wonder and delight. She was asking me to go with her to the confrontation of something that was sacred and eternal.* --Scott Momaday, *The House Made of Dawn (87-89)*

Sherry and Linda are mothers of Shadow Lake children, both very involved in the school, especially their children's classes. Standing on the front porch of the school, they laugh and tell stories about Miss Ruby Prewitt, town legend. Their favorite story (they heard it countless times when they were children at Shadow Lake) occurred during the flood when Miss Ruby was the bus driver for the school. Miss Ruby started over the Little River Bridge to deliver children home after a day of relentless

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raining. She did not get far before she realized the bridge was washed out. Miss Ruby stopped the bus and began putting children out of the back of the bus. After all the children were safely delivered on the dry bank, Miss Ruby climbed out of the bus herself and left the bus there to be swept up in the raging waters. They promise to tell me more stories involving Miss Ruby, but worry that those stories are not appropriate for the school porch.

Storytelling is a vital part of this Appalachian culture. At almost any given hour in the grocery, hardware, or video stores one can find men and women swapping stories over the counters. And most of the time the stories are about strong women who have endured difficult situations, whether it be keeping food on the table in the midst of overwhelming poverty, or outsmarting troublesome husbands, or surviving the heartbreak of rebellious children. In her study of Appalachian women, Kathy Kahn speaks of a history of strength:

> Their land was first settled by English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century, who came to the Southern mountains to escape an oppressive British government. They were proud people and independent. They made

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> their living from the land and passed down to their children a respect for family unity, for religion, and for music. (5)

The rich oral tradition and strong women that are a product of this community first drew me to my research. Although all cultures have stories, this culture seemed to value the meaning and knowledge that can be garnered from stories, or "narrative knowing," over the logical, analytical ways of reasoning I am more accustomed to. I was interested in how this translated into the writing and reading practices of the adolescent girls in the community. Eleanor Kutz and Hephzibah Roskelly observe, "schools are accustomed to seeing what students bring with them 'from the outside'--stories, ideas, beliefs--as excess baggage rather than chests full of tools to aid their learning" (57). I found Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools are no exceptions.

One of the questions I asked as I observed the sanctioned literacies of the schools was why the stories so valued by the people of Rocktown stayed out on the porch, making no impact on the literacy practices inside the school.

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Writing at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools: Transparent Backpacks

Signs informing students and visitors to enter quietly line the front porch of Shadow Lake School. Other signs inform visitors to report to the office for a visitor's identification tag before going to classrooms. Because of the Columbine tragedy last year, teachers must wear identification cards around their neck, even though there are only seven teachers who are all from Rocktown, and both students and teachers know everyone in the school. Students are required by the county education office to carry see-through backpacks. Administrators, teachers, and students comply with the county's mandates and expect students to comply with their mandates at all times. Students' failure to comply with teachers' expectations or failure to show respect to school authorities result in punishment. Paddling is a sanctioned form of discipline through students' senior year. I am intrigued with this acceptance of authority at all levels in the school because though there is respect for authority within the educational hierarchical structures, there is real mistrust of the government. This was evident when the Supreme Court ordered the county schools be monitored for prayer in

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school or for any other violations of the first amendment. Most classrooms in the county had always begun the day with prayer, and students prayed before lunch, and now the government was not allowing prayer in schools. While the citizens of Rocktown were resentful of the government telling them what they could and could not do, they passively received what was handed down to the schools by the state department of education.

In an effort to prepare the students for junior high, the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades switch classes between three teachers. I observed all classes, but spent most of my time in the language arts class. On my first day at Shadow Lake, I walked into the sixth graders' language arts class while they were reciting a jingle in unison:

> A sentence, sentence, sentence is complete, complete, complete, when five simple rules it meets, meets, meets. It has a subject, subject, subject and a verb, verb, verb; it makes sense, sense, sense with every word. (Shurley 1)

The jingle is part of the Shurley Method, which has been

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adopted countywide with hopes of increasing the low Standard Achievement Test scores for which the county is known. Chrystal sat at the overhead projector ready to mark subjects, verbs, articles, prepositions, objects of prepositions, adjectives, and adverbs as the class identified them in unison. As Chrystal pulled out a red pen to mark the overhead, Clint yelled that red is a "stupid" color. Buck put in his vote with "Yeah, it's *ugly*." Mrs. Crowe told the boys they would lose points if they were not quiet. When Mrs. Crowe asked the class to identify the sentence, several boys shot up their hands while Meredith, the only girl to respond, timidly raised her hand. When Mrs. Crowe called on Meredith, her answer, while correct, was almost inaudible. Before Mrs. Crowe could respond to Meredith's answer her attention was diverted by laughter at the back of the room over Bud's enormous belch.

Girls sat at a table on either side of the room. Mandy sat in the middle of one table with Brittany and Tiffany on one side and Lisa on the other side, playing with Mandy's hair. While the rest of the class sang the jingle or called out the parts of speech, the girls sat quietly, not participating. At the other table Jessica, Lynn, Meredith,

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and Amelia, a bit more eager to please, were somewhat involved with the Shurley lesson.

Posters and signs covered the walls and bulletin boards. One poster encouraged reading, another advocated respect: "Respect, learn it. Earn it." A poster with the 4H pledge was centered on the front wall: "I pledge my head to clearer thinking. / I pledge my heart to greater loyalty. / I pledge my hand to larger service. / I pledge my health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world."

After the Shurley lesson, Mrs. Crowe stopped to introduce me. I asked the class if they knew why I was there. They all replied in unison, "Because we flunked the test," and pointed to the bulletin board. Posted on the bulletin board was the local newspaper's article with a report of the county scores on last year's state writing assessment. The article includes a "report card" for each school based on the schools' fifth grade students' test scores. Shadow Lake received a D- last year because of the present sixth graders' test scores.

Mrs. Crowe was anxious to help this class improve when they take it next year as seventh graders, so she spent most of her ninety-minute block of time for language arts

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on writing. On the same bulletin board where last year's test scores are posted, she has information about the writing process--brain storming, revision, and editing, as well as the distinctions between narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive writing. There is also a poster heralding "The Magic Five Outline": a topic sentence, body with three points, and a conclusion.

In my discussions with Mrs. Crowe, she talked about the writing process in an informed way, but it was clear she did not have the theory that informed the process. At one point in my conversation I asked Mrs. Crowe where she learned what she knew about the writing process:

> I've just read some about the writing process. I've never taken a class that taught me about teaching writing at all. Really, none of my classes prepared me for what I'm doing now. When every school in the county did so bad, Mrs. Dunn, the curriculum coordinator called a meeting of all fifth grade language arts teachers. She gave us the rubric they use for grading the test, but that's all the help we got from the county.

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At this point Mrs. Crowe offered to show me the rubric used for the state "Direct Assessment of Writing." Every May all fifth and seventh graders in the state are given forty-five minutes to write a short expository, descriptive, or narrative essay on a particular topic; "A Day I will Always Remember" is an example of a narrative topic. The document Mrs. Crowe handed me explained the holistic scoring used for the assessment. Essays are rated at one of four levels. A Level I essay is worth two or three points:

> Level I essays show limited success in attempting to address the writing task. The writer indicates some understanding of the writing task, but the response is often partially out of mode and/or off topic. There is little or no sense of audience and purpose, minimal author involvement, and weak organization and clarity. This response is distinguished by the use of inappropriate, repetitive, vague vocabulary. Several or many grammar usage, and/or spelling errors. (Direct Assessment of Writing)

In a Level IV essay, the writer "successfully addresses and controls the writing task with a strong sense of audience and purpose." Level IV essays also demonstrate creativity,

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enthusiasm, and voice, and have "no grammar and usage errors" (Direct Assessment of Writing)

Clearly the "Direct Assessment of Writing" expects a great deal from fifth and seventh graders. To have an essay that demonstrates enthusiasm, creativity, and voice presents a real challenge to fifth and seventh grade students--and to those who are expected to teach the fifth and seventh graders. Mrs. Crowe is not sure what they mean by "voice," but she is confident of her ability to check for grammar and spelling, and that is where she directs her energy, often working against the creativity, enthusiasm, and especially against voice in her students' writing.

Because the writing assessment asks specifically for descriptive, narrative, persuasive, and expository essays, Mrs. Crowe has diligently made students write within the genres specified by the state writing assessment.

When I asked Mandy questions about writing, she made it clear to me that she did *not* like writing. She did not consider the several notes she wrote to friends each day "writing." I noticed often when Mrs. Crowe asked the students to brainstorm on a topic, Mandy would not pick up her pencil. When I asked Mrs. Crowe about Mandy, she told me Mandy always turned in her writing assignments, but she

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usually worked on them at home and used a minimum of effort. Mrs. Crowe whispered to me that Mandy was one of the students in the class who received an F on the writing assessment last year.

On Valentine's Day Mrs. Crowe had just retrieved a dozen roses from the office, sent to her by her husband; she evidently was feeling playful. As she arranged her flowers, she suggested the children should write a poem about love for Valentine's day. I was surprised when Mandy picked up her pencil and quickly became absorbed in her work. Mrs. Crowe did not collect the students' writing that day because it was just for fun. (Teachers often made clear distinctions between fun and the real work of school.) But I am incurably curious, so I later asked Mandy if I could see what she wrote. She seemed pleased to give me her poem about love:

> Love is like a net that catches you when you fall
> Love is like a key that opens a door
> Love is the thing that pikes [sic] you up when
> you are down
> Love is the life of the world
> Love is like the sun it keeps burning.

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Mandy's poem, which uses metaphor to probe the complexities of love, blurs the artificial divisions of genre made by the state writing assessment (and it clearly has more than three points). Such writing cannot find a place at Shadow Lake School.

Educational philosopher and composition theorist Ann Berthoff emphasizes the important relationship between composing and making meaning: "I believe we can best teach the composing process by conceiving of it as a continuum of making meaning, by seeing writing as analogous to all those processes by which we make sense of the world" (*The Making of Meaning* 69). However, this process of making meanings happens when the writer learns to embrace chaos and ambiguity. Berthoff explains:

> Meanings don't come out of the air; we make them out of a chaos of images, half-truths, remembrances, syntactic fragments, from the mysterious and unformed. . . . When we teach prewriting as a phase of the composing process, what we are teaching is not how to get a thesis statement but the generation and uses of chaos; when we teach revision as a phase of the composing process, we are teaching just that--reseeing the

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> ways out of chaos. Now chaos is scary: the meanings that can emerge from it, which can be discerned taking shape within it, can be discovered only if students who are learning to write can learn to tolerate ambiguity. (*The Making of Meaning* 70)

Mrs. Crowe's efforts to get the children to fit their writing into the particular forms used in the state writing assessment keeps the ideas of her students from fully forming, cutting them off from making their own meaning. Mrs. Crowe, like every teacher at Bunker County, is a product of Bunker County Education and teaches from her own reading and writing experiences. Mrs. Crowe has been told to teach a process approach, but has never been given the theory behind the practice.

Laurel Gap: Preparing to Exit

At Laurel Gap Mrs. Underwood's classroom is large with twenty-foot ceilings, which makes it feel bright and airy. She too has posters covering walls and bulletin boards; the posters encourage students with sayings such as "You never know what you can do until you try," "Winners don't set limits they set goals," "Succeed. Read," "Explore with Reading," "Life is a spectacular ride." Caricatures of

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Emily Dickinson, Faulkner, Shakespeare, and Hemingway are posted over the front blackboard. *Romeo and Juliet, Huckleberry Finn,* and *The Titanic* movie posters, with a sign "Literature in Movies," are posted over the side blackboard. Across the room hangs a large Beta Club (the school's honor society) flag. Desks are arranged in rows facing the podium at the front of the class.

On my first day in Laurel Gap's eleventh grade honors English class, only six girls were in attendance; Mrs. Underwood explained that the other girls were away on a Future Homemakers of America (FHA) fieldtrip. On this day, like most of the days I spent at Laurel Gap, the students were working quietly at their desks or on the two computers in the classroom. The following week the tenth and eleventh grades would make their first attempt at the state graduation exit exam. Rumors were that the test, which had been completely revised, was going to be extremely difficult. Although teachers are not allowed to see the actual exams, either before or after their students take the exam, the state provides a practice exam, as well as exit exam practice software. This test preparation has required a substantial investment of time and money from the county. After significant failure by the county's

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students last year, the county has mandated that each teacher document the class time spent on preparing students to pass the exit exam. The School Superintendent was quoted in the local newspaper as saying, "We're making sure we're teaching what's on the test." I asked Mrs. Underwood if I could look at the practice exit exam for English. Devoted to grammar and usage, the language section of the exit exam is multiple choice. Some sections ask for identification of the parts of speech; some test vocabulary. One section makes the distinction between formal and informal writing, and asks students to make decisions for formal writing such as choose the best introductory paragraph or the best conclusion. Correct answers for the best conclusions are always those that restate the introduction. Students are not asked for their own ideas, only to make decisions about arrangements for other people's ideas. Another section of the exam tests whether students know what they need to know about active and passive voice. The test objectives state that students should "understand uses of active and passive voice, know forms of verbs used for active and passive voice, and know that active voice is preferred over passive."

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Unfortunately, the Exit Exam has insured that the learners themselves are passive.

The attitude about the school lacks energy. Shelley tells me that Laurel Gap is really easy: "all you gotta do is show up." She cannot understand why so many boys in her class have dropped out of school. She was incredulous that several seniors dropped out a month before graduation. She guesses "Them boys must just be lazy," but after some thought Shelley adds that most of the boys leave because "they get mad; then they go off and fight with coaches, or they get mad at something the principal done said." The eleventh grade class that began in ninth grade with fifty-eight students is down to forty-two. Melissa agrees with Shelley, but adds she expects a few more to quit before next fall. Like Mrs. Underwood, Melissa and Shelley both say girls only quit when they get pregnant. Shelley says that girls used to be sent away when they were pregnant, but "now it's like, wow a baby, how cute."

When the ninth grade class comes into Mrs. Underwood's room, she begins class with what eleventh graders tell me is her famous adjective and adverb lecture. Mrs. Underwood attempts to put these mysterious parts of speech in terms the students will understand: "Girls, *never* date an

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adjective because he will leave you on the sidelines at the dances while he's off with other girls. An adverb however, will stick right by your side." At this point she digresses with a lecture about nutrition: "Nutrition is the most important thing. Girls need good nutrition so they can produce a healthy baby. Boys need good nutrition so they can produce good sperm to help the women produce healthy babies."

The ninth graders then settle down to business, which is working in their language books. It's not long before the boys get tired of conjugating verbs; Mrs. Underwood tries to get their attention by telling them "You're going to need this on the exit exam."

I asked ninth grader Dawn Marie about the essays she had written this year--she responded with a blank look. "Haven't you written any essays this year?" I asked. "No, all we done is work on our workbooks. But I like to write poetry at home." Mrs. Underwood later confirmed Dawn Marie's claim, but said she did not have time to have students write because of preparation for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (the SAT, not to be confused with that taken for college admissions, which is not offered at Laurel Gap) and the exit exam. Besides preparing students for the exit

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exam, Mrs. Underwood must make sure students do well on the SAT. Eleventh and twelfth graders take both the SAT and the exit exam during the spring semester. Three weeks out of their English class will be spent taking national and state competency exams. (Because the county has adopted the block system, four ninety-minute classes meet each day for a semester rather than seven fifty-minute classes meeting all year long: the English class is one semester long.) With preparation for and the actual taking of the tests, Mrs. Underwood has little time left for what she considers "really teaching."

Competency was the word I heard over and over again in conversations with administrators and teachers. Competency, measured by the correct choice of tenses and active verbs, was what was all that was wanted and expected from their students. After the seventh grade writing assessment, students were no longer asked for creativity, enthusiasm, or voice. Over and over again I saw girls with real "voice" and drive caged in by school's attempts toward competency. Through the SAT and the Exit Exam, the students were constantly being reminded of what they did *not* know, much like the students Mike Rose describes in *Lives on the Boundary*. What Rose says of his experiences

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teaching the underprepared college student speaks to the experience of Laurel Gap students: "How much we don't see when we look only for deficiency, when we tally up all that people can't do" (222). Use of these tests may be insuring that students know how to use active voice, but in many ways it is leading to passive learners, who do not believe they possess the active voice necessary to transform their culture.

A poster beside the door of Mrs. Underwood's class claims "Knowledge is Power." But whose knowledge is power? In *Eating on the Street: Teaching Literacy in a Multi-Cultural Society*, author David Schaafsma suggests,

> . . . most schools limit student ways of knowing. Standards for acceptable linguistic behavior are imposed by teachers in terms of the "regimes of truth" of district language arts requirements, state departments of instruction mandates, and mainstream expectations for linguistic performance . . . These mechanisms are tied to ideological bases inseparable from structures of power. (39)

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Last month, poet Maya Angelou expressed similar beliefs about education in her introductory remarks at Salem College's Commencement in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. She told the Salem graduates that education, "this liberty, this freedom, this element more useful to man and woman than air, more needed than earth," will only be ours when it is "no longer that Gordian mumbo-jumbo of politicians." At Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools education still belongs to the politicians.

Outlining the distinction between working class people and managerial class people, Pierre Bordieu observes managerial class people tend to seek objectivity and the abstract; they like to adapt forms to formulas and see argumentation and exposition as venues to knowledge. Working class people, on the other hand, are more subjective: they learn by the rules, prefer to do one thing at a time, and see narrative as a means to knowing. Shadow Lake, though its students are primarily from working class family, privileges managerial class inclinations, rendering a view of knowledge as static and quantifiable, rather than fluid and dynamic. Knowledge is passed down from the state, rather than made in the classroom. Such knowledge requires students to leave on the school's front porch the

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language of their homes, narratives full of play, humor, and the mystery of inexplicable things, such as love. As they enter the front door of the school, students must strap on the language of school, as clear and utilitarian as the transparent backpacks mandated by the county.

Reading at Shadow Lake School

After a month of rehearsing every morning, the sixth graders are dressed in bright blue robes and caps, ready to receive their diplomas. Liz, known as the class brain since kindergarten, is the class valedictorian and is especially nervous because she will be delivering the graduation address. Besides having been to summer camp, Liz has had many opportunities that set her apart from the rest of the class, most notably Liz's use of "standard" English. When I asked the girls if they liked to read outside of school, they all vehemently said "no," and pointed to Liz. They assured me she was the only reader in the group. It was true: I often saw Liz reading at her desk after her work was done. While most girls read books such as *Little House on the Prairie, The Babysitters Club,* and *B is for Betsy* for their accelerated reading points, Liz reads popular adult fictions such as John Grisham's *The Firm*. Liz was voted most studious and most likely to

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succeed by her classmates for the "Who's Who" section of the yearbook. At sixth grade they have already learned to equate academic success with success in the public sphere, yet they often keep students with strong intellectual interest outside of the social circles. Liz writes reflectively about her identity as the class scholar: "My peers think of me as bookish, smart, always going to win essay contests. Sometimes it gets on my nerves because if they tried, they could definitely excel as far as I have."

Shadow Lake principal, Dr. Edwards, above all else wants for students to leave his school committed to life long learning, and he sees reading as an important contribution to his goal. In an effort to secure new books for the school, Dr. Edwards has allowed teachers to distribute Scholastic and Troll fliers. As children order books from these companies, the school gets points that enables it to buy books for the library and classrooms.

Although Dr. Edwards is often frustrated by a limited budget, he is pleased with the new, though expensive, programs he has been able to introduce to Shadow Lake. One of the programs the school has invested in is the "Accelerated Reading" program, which includes software with tests that determine the students' reading ability, a list

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of books appropriate for each reading level, and post reading comprehension tests. Students are allowed only to check out books that fall within the range of ability the test identifies for them. Students accumulate points by reading books and successfully taking the comprehension tests for the books. At different intervals throughout the year, students are allowed to go to the "AR store" to spend their AR points on small toys or candy. On the last day of school, those who have earned the most points get to throw a pie in the faces of the teacher of their choice.

Meredith, known by teachers for her willingness to serve and to please, has received the "citizenship" award this year. Although Meredith says she does not like to read, she has been a dutiful AR reader. She has accumulated enough points to throw a pie, which pleases her. Many of the books she has read this year are from the *Baby-sitters Club* series. Meredith explains that she has taken a course from the local hospital that prepares and certifies baby-sitters. Hoping to build up her clientele, Meredith has posted signs advertising her new baby-sitting business in the local stores.

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Mandy has not been as ambitious in her AR reading. The little reading she has done, books from the *Sweet Valley High* series and a few books about horses, and most of the *Little House on the Prairie* series, rarely gave Mandy enough points to buy things from the AR store. Mandy does, however, look forward to book orders, and almost always orders something when the book orders are given out, sometimes a new *Sweet Valley High* book, but more often the jewelry or makeup that is also included in the brochure.

In her essay "Sweet Dreams: Gender and Desire in Teen Romance Novels," Linda Christian-Smith claims series such as *Sweet Valley High* and *Babysitters Club* are an important revenue source for educational publishing. They are considered the " . . . Hi-Low market, which is comprised of books with 'interesting' content and limited difficulty of reading aimed at 'reluctant readers'" (48). While teachers are grateful for literature that will win the interest of "reluctant readers," Christian-Smith finds these books "discursive positions and practices which channel them towards future marriage, parenting, and work in low paid service sector jobs" (5).

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Dianne Cooper takes companies such as Scholastic Inc. to task in her discussion of how gender is retailed by targeting "the classroom: a state-sanctioned site for the reproduction of a gendered tradition." Cooper explains that by distributing book orders and brochures in the schools,

> girls are enticed . . . and hence learn to consume gender from an early age. Advertising engenders desire for a steady diet of 'romantic' fiction, through to adulthood with what could be termed the 'Barbie' of literature--literature that reinforces beliefs and attitudes about being feminine. (24)

On March 29, 2000, *The New York Times* quotes presidential candidate George W. Bush as saying, "We are divided into two nations, one that reads and one that doesn't, therefore one that dreams and one that doesn't." Sometimes reading can also limit dreaming, which may be the case with the books targeted for twelve-year-old girls. Unless these books are discussed and challenged by girls and teachers, they may serve to keep inequities in place by perpetuating the scripts and roles for girls that have been written by a patriarchal culture.

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Laurel Gap: Reading Men's Lives

Ninth graders at Laurel Gap read an abridged prose variation of *Romeo and Juliet* the last week of class. Most of their reading time this year has been spent on the paragraphs and comprehension questions representative of the reading section on the Exit Exam. Tricia wishes they could spend more time reading and less time preparing for the exit exam, although she does not think they would read the kind of books she likes: horror and mystery books. Dawn Marie, on the other hand, says she is not sad they have not had much time for reading in class; she does not really like to read, except for magazines for girls, which included *Seventeen* and *YM*.

Selecting books for the eleventh grade English honors class is not easy. Mrs. Underwood knows parents are easily upset over books with sexual implications, attributing this to the strong presence of the church in this area; she is careful not to include a book that will cause parents to phone the principal Mr. James. Of course, the eleventh graders always read *Huckleberry Finn*, but Mrs. Underwood also decided to include *Killer Angels*, the historical novel that formed the basis for the film *Gettysburg*; she included this book because the eleventh graders would be studying

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the civil war in U.S. History. She had hoped they would read *The Great Gatsby,* but the SAT and Exit Exams preempted her plan.

Shelley likes to read, but says she only reads what is required of her in school: "You know, I hate to sit down with a book when there are things I could be doing. Besides my Dad is usually home and he gets lonely, so I watch TV with him when I ain't with Jeff in the evenings." This was typical of Shelley's assessment of how she spent her time, either keeping her father from getting too lonely, or being her boyfriend's girlfriend.

Like Shelley and her father, most residents of Rocktown watch a good deal of cable television. Before beginning my research my guess was that television watching would be significant to girls' construction of self, but it actually seemed to have little impact on the girls I studied. Few shows these girls watch target adolescent girls as their audience and virtually no programs that represent the girls' local culture. (I found it intriguing that even though the residents of Rocktown watch a considerable amount of television, the "standard" English used by the actors and actresses on television has no effect on Rocktown residents' language use.)

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Melissa also likes to read, but is not interested in the reading they are required to do in school. She explains, "The books don't really have much to do with me." Unlike Shelley, Melissa finds time to read the things she wants, either when she is waiting for her mother to finish cleaning the restaurant or during school when she has finished all her work. Melissa's favorite genre is Christian romance novel, the implications of which I will discuss in Chapter IV.

Both Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools have libraries that are woefully inadequate. The books that fill the shelves are primarily books that have been discarded from the homes of the summer population. Although the bookmobile comes every Wednesday to Rocktown, the closest library to these girls is in the county seat twenty-five minutes away.

This Spring Internet access was made available in the schools, but there is only one computer in each classroom, which makes use of the Internet in school difficult. Even though Internet access is long distance for Rocktown homes, in just the past few months many girls' families have received access to the Internet in their homes for the first time. Girls say they intend to spend some time in

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chat rooms. I would like to study the girls' cyber spae literacies as their Internet practices become more established. It is too early to tell what changes might take place as more and more families become Internet users, but as girls write their own scripts in cyber space, unhindered by the cultures of school and home, significant repercussions to their school and home cultures seem inevitable.

Rereading Girls' Lives, Rewriting Girls' Lives

Tricia asked if I would come to the Laurel Gap's wrestling match because she was a "mat maid" for the wrestling team. Although I was not quite sure what a "mat maid" was, I, of course, was flattered by Tricia's invitation and immediately told her I would be there. I sat by a boy in the stands whom I recognized from Mrs. Underwood's class. I was enthralled with the performance enacted on the floor before me. Boys, sweating and grunting, were thrashing around on the mat, while the mat maids, dressed in their cheerleading outfits, sat around the mat cheering the boys on. I turned to ask the boy next to me what exactly a mat maid is; he responded without hesitation, "They're rejects--you know, cheerleading rejects." Over and over again I heard comments such as this

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this from the boys of Rocktown. Consistently boys were confident of their power to name and assign identities, and the girls unwittingly enabled the boys to remain in this privileged position.

Unfortunately, in Rocktown it is not only the language that has been thrust upon the girls through the external sanctioned literacies of Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap, but the language they inherit, own, and perpetuate keeps them from rewriting the scripts that have been written for them by the men of Rocktown.

Laurel Gap's yearbook is a text sanctioned by the schools where students both write and read their own texts. Yet they are reproducing the same texts written by their grandfathers and great-grandfathers which objectify women and judge woman's worth as the object of men's desires. Shelley is pictured as class beauty runner-up alongside Bethany, the class beauty. A profile shot of Melissa, wearing her strapless and backless sequined evening grown, is centered on the page devoted to the Spring Fantasy Contest, sponsored by the Laurel Gap marching band. Tricia is shown in her cheerleading outfit doing the splits at the homecoming game.

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The seniors have a section in the yearbook called "Who's Who," which has pictures of the students who were voted by their classmates as "Best Dressed," "Friendliest," "Class Clown," "Cutest," and "Most Likely to Succeed." This section closes with "Mr. and Miss Laurel Gap." I was interested that none of the girls acknowledged in the yearbook for their beauty were voted "Most Likely to Succeed."

I am hopeful, however, that perhaps the tide has begun to change at Laurel Gap School. I noticed that the young woman who was elected homecoming queen this year is a senior known for her capabilities as a musician and brains, not for her beauty. Perhaps the hidden literacies girls engage in are preparing them to leave the stranded banks of Little River. Embracing such literacies might enable girls to get back on the same bus Miss Ruby pulled them off so many years ago, so they can be transported to a culture which values the ways of both sexes, all races, all classes, and all beliefs.

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Chapter IV

Stories from the Porch: Unsanctioned Literacies at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap School

> *No, women, like you don't write. They carve the onion sculptures and potato statues. They sit in dark corners and braid their hair in new shapes and twists in order to control the stiffness, the unruliness, the rebelliousness.* --Edwidge Danticat, *Krik? Krak!*

During the last week of school, I attended the awards ceremony at Shadow Lake School. In the lower grades most of the recipients in the academic categories are girls, and they beam with pride as they walk, run, and sometimes skip toward their awards; many hug their teachers in thanks. When the sixth grade girls walk up to receive their awards, however, there is a startling difference. When Mandy hears her name called for the Spelling Award, she eagerly jumps down from her seat on the top bleacher, then quickly checks herself, slumps her shoulders, and hangs her head as she walks slowly toward the stage. Painfully self-aware, the other girls receive their awards in much the same way. The three sixth grade boys who receive awards, however, confidently stride up to the stage, hands in pockets, heads held high.

After the awards ceremony, I joined the sixth graders at lunch. The lunchroom door has a large sign that warns "Shhh! Enter Quietly!" Though the sixth graders are

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usually expected to eat without talking, the principal has given them permission to speak with me today. The boys, feeling they have been overlooked by me, are anxious to get *their* words on my tape recorder, so I ask them to tell me what it is like to be a sixth grade boy. Clint quickly responds, "Being a sixth grade boy is fun. You are the oldest in the school. We get to raise the flag in the morning and take it down in the afternoon. It's also fun because we're athletic, and we can run fast and play good sports."

Buck interjects, "Yeah, and you can sleep a lot on weekends. You can learn things fast, and get neat things for holidays." Thomas says, "The best thing about being a sixth grade boy is you can eat a lot and you can run a little bit later." Bud adds, "It's fun. Your life is thrilling--you can do wild things." Josh sums up the life of a sixth grade boy: "It can be fun and hard--fun if you make it and hard if you make it."

I later ask the girls what it is like being a sixth grade girl, and they seem much more aware of the responsibility of being the oldest in the school. Mandy tells me, "It's kind of fun because we're the oldest in the school, but it's also hard because we have to help the

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teachers a lot. We have to get the kindergartners' snacks and help with the younger children on recess." Lisa offers, "We have to wash the lunch tables after we eat, and clean the blackboards before we go home."

In recognition of their seniority, the sixth grade boys are assigned chores: moving tables and raising the flag, which reinforce the stereotypical qualities attributed to men, active, strong, defenders. This may explain Josh's confidence that the power to determine whether his life is hard or fun rests with *him,* not an outside source. At the same time the girls inherit the chores typically assigned to women--cleaning up after people and taking care of others' needs. Little wonder the girls are somewhat unsure as to whether they like their sixth grade responsibilities.

As they are working on descriptive writing, Mrs. Crowe has each student fill out two worksheets, one asking for a list of their talents and best qualities, the other asking for a classmate's talents and qualities. The girls' and boys' descriptions, both of themselves and each other, are very telling. Without exception, when describing one another, the girls write such things as "friendly," "nice," "caring," "sweet," "a good friend," "loves boys,"

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and "loves babies." For the most part, they describe themselves in similar ways, but also sometimes list activities such as "a basketball player," "riding four wheelers," "putting puzzles together," and "riding horses."

Not one of the boys' lists includes words like "caring," "nice," or "sweet"; those sort of adjectives imply relationship to others, and the boys do not seem to consider their love for other people--"being a good friend," or "even liking girls"--to be an admirable quality or talent. The boys' profiles of talents and qualities include what they do and what they know: "good basketball player," "good swimmer," or "knows about cars," and "knows about computers."

In *The Reproduction of Motherhood,* sociolinguist and psychotherapist Nancy Chodorow discusses the formation of gender identity in a culture such as ours in which small children are primarily cared for by mothers. After the first few years of his life, at about the time his language is forming, a little boy becomes aware of himself as being unlike his mother. He begins to act and use language in ways that define him as separate from her, and, as a result, begins to develop an inclination toward individuation and competition. A little girl, on the other

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hand, becomes increasingly aware of the ways in which she is *like* her mother and develops an inclination towards connection and empathy. All of this is compounded by the fact that children are developing language during this period of their lives, so that their language patterns and choices are formed by this bifurcation and are often perpetuated throughout their lives as they use language to understand and negotiate their roles and relationships. The results are as expected: men often develop psyches and language patterns that are ineffective for relating, and women often develop psyches and language that are ineffective for individuating.

Yet at the same time these girls are embracing their mothers' language of nurture and care, they are constructing themselves as assertive and active. Meredith describes herself relationally as loving children and loving boys, but also includes that she is adventurous, swims, rides four wheelers, and extends her love for children into her entrepreneurial ability as a baby-sitter. Unlike the boys, however, Melissa does not write that she is *good* at any of these things. Having just stepped onto the bridge from childhood to adulthood, the girls are still able to travel back and forth between the world of their

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childhood where they find a sense of competency and adventure, and the world of womanhood, where they find hesitancy and uncertainty.

Emily Hancock writes of the confidence she knew as a nine year old girl in *The Girl Within.* In her case studies of accomplished women in a variety of fields, Hancock found an unexpected commonality: "This girl within--the self-possessed child who serves as a touchstone for women's identity"(3). In many ways the sixth grade girls I observed and talked with are desperately trying to hold on to their girl-selves, very much like the inner girl Hancock describes:

> At nine, I can remember walking on a fence, all around a park, thinking I really liked being nine years old and I wouldn't mind being nine forever. I was finding out about the world, not doing anything particularly momentous, just thinking those thoughts to myself as I walked along the fence. I remember having a real sense of joy, of confidence about negotiating the world on my own. The image I have is of a child with a long string to hold onto, one she can move freely around. I felt secure and self-constrained. I had a sense

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> that "I can get by in the world, even if it means I am alone. There's a way for me to negotiate it. I can do it. (19)

Holding onto the certainty and power they knew as nine year olds is not easy for an adolescent girl--particularly in rural Appalachia, where the bridge between the worlds of childhood and womanhood is short, and the chasm is deep. Far more than the sign posted on the lunchroom door urges Shadow Lake sixth grade girls toward silence. Embedded in the structure and curriculum of the school are the sanctioned literacies that continually assault girls' imagination, confidence, and competencies. Still, I often found that even as students were working in their Shurley workbook or completing their spelling lessons, the literacies from the front porch were making their way into the school through the countless notes girls write back and forth to each other. In these notes the girls attempt to maintain the certainty, creativity, and power they knew as younger girls, as well as to talk back to the people and programs bent on silencing them as adolescents.

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Shhhh! Enter Quietly!: Writing Notes and Finding a Voice

Dr. Edwards grew up an only child less than a mile from the school. He is proud of the fresh look he's given the school during his tenure here; he coined the logo "Firmly planted and Forward Moving," for the school. When I comment to him that I am surprised there is no graffiti in the girls' bathroom, he assures me that I will not find any down at Laurel Gap either. He is right--no graffiti in the Laurel Gap bathrooms. As authority-centered schools, neither will tolerate such visible acts of rebellion, and when graffiti does somehow appear on the bathroom walls, it is quickly cleaned up.

Monitoring the extensive note writing that goes on in the schools, however, is much more difficult. When I first ask Mandy and Meredith if I can see their notes, they seem a little unsure. Mandy asks me if it matters whether the notes have bad words in them or not. When I assure her teachers will not see the notes; she giggles, "Really? Good, I have lots of those notes."

The next day Meredith and Mandy bring bags full of notes, both assuring me they have lots more at home--boxes and boxes. Meredith explains that writing notes is what girls do because "you want to be rebellious, but you don't

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want to be too bad." Mandy talks about note writing as a coming of age ritual, "You know when you're in sixth grade you're supposed to write notes." The notes themselves are works of art; intricately folded, they resemble the origami they learned in third grade. Pictures of flowers and vines adorn the inside of notes along with artistic lettering.

Adolescent girls everywhere adopt a special language for the notes they write in school. Many of Meredith's and Mandy's began and ended with:

2 Mandy

Hey! What's ↑? N M H [Not much here]

I'm bored and decided to write. . .

BFF [Best friends forever]

LYLAS [Love you like a sister]

Notes are primarily a means of declaring loyalty and solidarity with each other. In one note, Lisa writes to Mandy, "I think it's a good idea to promise each other not to argue anymore!" and signs the note BFF and LYLAS. This loyalty is representative of Carol Gilligan's discussion of women's ways of structuring relationships. In *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development,* Gilligan makes a critical distinction between typical male and female ways of structuring relationships

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(61). According to Gilligan, men often think about themselves and others in a hierarchical way, structuring their decisions and relationships around binary concepts such as winning and losing, right and wrong, power and weakness. Women, on the other hand, usually think in terms of a web of interconnectedness, structuring their decisions around love and care. Men fear finding themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy; women fear finding themselves outside of the web.

Sixth grade girls' note writing is indicative of such fear. They often write notes as a way of negotiating relationships of connection, while at the same time making sure someone else stays outside the web. Lisa writes to Mandy: "Brittany has no right saying that CRAP about us when she goes around acting better than everyone else. NOT US!!!!! Brittany is just a BIG BRAT anyway!" Lisa, who is always concerned that she remain in Mandy's favor, makes sure Brittany stays outside of their circle. Lisa signs the note BFF and LYLAS.

When I ask the sixth grade teacher Mrs. Bailey about the girls' relationships with each other, she maintains,

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> They've been together since kindergarten--they are all nice to each other. They know each other's quirks and respect them. All the girls even made an extra effort to include Sherry, who came into the class just this year.

Clearly Mrs. Bailey sees the same "sweet" "nice" "friendly" personas these girls created for themselves and each other in the sanctioned writing they do in Mrs. Crowe's class. These personas are left behind, however, in the unsanctioned literacies of these girls.

These school site self constructions of nice, sweet, compliant girls for school are particularly interesting because these same qualities are not expected of them at home. Mandy's mother, though a loving and nurturing woman, prides herself on her independence. At her sons' ball games, she can be heard above all others and does not hesitate to leap down from the bleachers and challenge any referee who makes a bad call for her sons' teams. Meredith comes from a long line of tough, strong women who are fun and lively, but would not be considered "sweet" by anyone in town. Disrupting the middle class notion of femininity as nice and sweet, both women are comfortable with their

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anger and are often directly aggressive, particularly when they believe their children have suffered an injustice of some sort. However, the women in this community are far more likely to challenge authority in the arena of ballgames and beauty competitions than in the domain of their children's education.

Lyn Mikel Brown's study of adolescent girls' anger, *Raising Their Voices: The Politics of Girls' Anger,* cites multiple studies, conducted with different populations in a variety of contexts; all the studies agree that girls at the brink of adolescence feel significant anger and express notable direct and indirect aggression. Though some would suggest indirect aggression and controlled anger are indications of girls' maturity, Brown interprets adolescent girls' anger differently:

> I contend that girls' increased anger and assertiveness at eleven and twelve reflects their emerging comprehension of the culture they are about to enter and their place as young women in it. On this view new cognitive competencies of early adolescence, catalyzed by pubertal changes that identify girls physically with women and that invite more pressures to accommodate to the

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> dominant cultural ideals of femininity, awaken girls to examine their childhood assumptions about what it means to be female and to reflect on their past and present experiences as girls. Early adolescence, in other words, disposes girls to see the cultural framework, and girls' and womens' subordinate place in it, for the first time. (15)

Unlike the girls' homes, Shadow Lake School reflects middle class values, expecting girls to be passive, silent, and subordinate. In her study of urban girls' writing, *She Say, He Say: Urban Girls Write Their Lives,* Brett Elizabeth Blake writes about the multiple voices used by adolescent girls. Drawing on the research of Belenky and Gilligan, Blake understands that "girls feel they must present separate voices depending on the context, audience, purpose, and theme for both speaking and writing" (26). Girls project one voice for the sanctioned literacies of Shadow Lake School, which do not allow girls room for anger or ways of examining their place in their culture. Unintentionally, perhaps unknowingly, however, the school is nonetheless a venue for a whole realm of unsanctioned literacies through which the girls take their anger

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underground where they raise their voices and talk back freely to authority.

Notes, peppered with words they are not otherwise allowed to say, describe the girls' anger at their teachers and the principal. After Mrs. Bailey implements a new schedule which allows students less recess time, Mandy writes, "Mrs. Bailey is a bitch"; Lisa agrees in her note, "She is a real asshole." Meredith writes to Kayla about Mr. Edward's decision not to allow her older boyfriend Frankie to escort her to the Spring Social: "It pisses me off." Such words are used often in their notes to describe adults and to respond to decisions made by those in authority. The girls are nervous, however, about continuing such practices since the note Tiffany wrote was found earlier this year, resulting in a week at the county's alternative school for troubled children. In this note Tiffany used all sorts of obscenities to depict Mrs. Crowe because she felt Mrs. Crowe had singled her out among the other girls by punishing her for talking in the lunchroom. Meredith tells me, "I'm not gonna write no more notes--because of what Tiffany done." Tiffany, who is standing within earshot, agrees, "I'm through writing notes!" Indeed, by the time girls reach the ninth grade,

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note writing no longer holds the kind of power it does for the girls in the sixth grades. I found that as girls' underground literacy of note writing was continually threatened or invaded by those in authority, girls eventually stopped writing notes, a ritual which allowed for solidarity and the courage to talk back to the dominant culture.

Writing at Laurel Gap: Crossing Over and Quieting Down

Many of the women in Emily Hancock's study *The Girl Within* describe their position as girls as being happily outside of the center of attention, of seeing but not being seen, of being liminal and powerful at the same time. They speak wistfully of this position and all the sense of self and invention that they brought to it. The hidden literacy of note writing allows the sixth grade girls this same position. Through writing notes the girls remain the good girls their teachers expect by hiding their disruptive activities and conversation; they remain outside the structures of power, yet have the power to dismiss teachers' authority; and they construct selves that are otherwise not welcome in the culture of school.

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As Hancock continues to describe this inner girl, however, she immediately moves to the win/lose terms that dominate the development of boys,

> The faster she can run, the higher she can jump, the more she is admired. Being a girl is secondary to being an athlete, a wizard at word games. Sharpshooter and ballet-dancer, spelling champion and botanist, applauded for being both smart and strong, she is mistress of excellence. (8)

In her assessment of this early stage in girls' development, Hancock fails to acknowledge the hierarchical assumptions she brings to her understanding of what affirms "the girl within." In her description, the private, imaginative stories that a nine-year-old girl tells herself on the cusp of adolescence is visible and validated in public, competitive activities such as sports or dance. For the girls of Laurel Gap, however, competitive activities--cheerleading, *Class Beauty*, homecoming queen, *Miss Spring Fantasy*--make girls the center of attention, highly visible with little vision, still liminal, but ultimately powerless to change their positions. I would suggest that the "girl within" flourishes because she is a

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private self who can create, and imagine, can talk back and effect change. When we begin to judge, codify, and compare her, she may either harden or wither.

Katerina, a German exchange student at Laurel Gap, is surprised at how quickly the girls at Laurel Gap assume what she considers adult status:

> The girls do not seem to have many interests here. I guess it is because they do not have much money--they all seem to have jobs they go to after school. In Germany we study and go to school; we do not have time for jobs. Also in Germany dating is different. In Germany it is unusual to date just one person. You would not seem a loser just because you do not date. Here everyone has a boyfriend, and if you do not there is something wrong with you. I was surprised at how all the girls talk about their sexual activities at the lunch table. In Germany, not so many girls are sexually active, and they do not discuss something so private with so many people.

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Although I am not sure Katerina consciously makes a connection, she immediately jumps from the girls' adult activities to the competitive nature of this culture. She explains, "When I saw the two and three year old girls walking down the aisle of the Spring Fantasy contest to be judged for their beauty, I felt sick." Katerina is used to competition over grades in her German school, but is unfamiliar with a culture that "asks me to vote for the most beautiful and popular girl." Such competition works towards extinguishing the creativity and imagination of the girl within.

When I ask ninth grade girls about note writing, they smile and tell me they used to write lots of notes, but invariably girls get caught; they all know stories like Tiffany's. Authorities feel that, like grafitti, the underground talk of note writing must be erased. By ninth grade girls are scared to continue note writing. Occasionally, they write notes when they have a pressing matter to discuss with a friend, but nothing like they used to do. The girls' energies are now focused on keeping their boyfriends, rather than keeping their web of connections intact. They begin to give up their solidarity with one another in order to accommodate a culture telling

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them their worth as women is found only in finding a man and having his children.

Tricia tells me the only writing she does besides that which she does for school is writing poetry. She smiles shyly, and says, "I really like writing poetry." I ask her if she would bring me some of her poetry. She seems flattered, but I have to remind her several times to bring it. I finally ask her, "What am I going to do with you?" Leonard, who is kneeling down in front of Tricia's desk answers for her: "Smack her!" The next morning Tricia brings her poetry in an envelope with stickers and drawings all over it. Inside she includes a letter to me, "I hope these poems are at least Okay for I am only a starter and will learn more as I go on. I hope you enjoy what I have written." At the end of the letter, as if she suddenly remembers I am an English teacher, Tricia adds "Grammer [sic] may not be correct."

Well on her way to womanhood, fifteen-year-old Ashley's poems embrace the central narratives of her culture: falling in love and finding faith in God. A poem about her recently broken wedding engagement has a drawing of two hearts at the top of the page. Interestingly one heart is complete; the other has been

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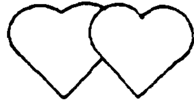
broken off to fit around the complete heart. Underneath the hearts Tricia writes her poem:



These are the hearts that
remind me of us
This was my heart when
you said I had all of your love.
These hearts above show my true love
These hearts remind my [sic] of us because they
seem as if they will be
together until one of them
discovers you can fall out of love.

I ask Tricia which heart belongs to her and which to the guy she is writing about. Not surprisingly, her heart is the one that has given way to fit around the boy's heart; she has learned the art of accommodation well.

Tricia also writes about the love of God. In her poem titled "Angels," she writes:

Angels from above
please heer [sic] my call
for I ask of a love

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> A holy love that only God give to the pure in
> heart. A love that feels the air
> as the clouds of Heaven rise as
> the Angels Holy walk away
> So I ask again.
> Angels from above
> please hear my call
> send my love that
> I've indured [sic] for so long.

If Tricia learns more about poetry writing, it will probably be *in spite* of her English classes at Laurel Gap High School. Mrs. Underwood is unaware that Tricia writes poetry. Busy preparing for state exams, there is little time in English class for poetry writing, which is the only successful way Tricia is able to construct meaning. Once more the sanctioned literacies of school dismiss students' efforts toward making sense of their world.

In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Mary Belenky and her colleagues discuss the importance of oral and written forms of language in cultivating the practice of introspection:

> In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen

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> or read and write--sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. (26)

As the girls' own voices are silenced through both the sanctioned and unsanctioned literacies of school, they are left without ways of reflecting in generative ways about their disenfranchisement from the larger culture.

Reading Teen Magazines: Echoes of Cultural Agency

Although every girl in the sixth grade other than Liz vows they do not like to read, one of their favorite activities during recess is exchanging their magazines. Even though they are not quite teens, they like to read "teenzines"; *Seventeen, Young & Modern (YM), Cosmo Girl, Twist*, and *Jump* are a few of their favorites. Liz is the only girl in the class who does not read teenzines; she explains, "My mom doesn't want me to read that stuff." When I ask the girls why they like these magazines, Mandy smiles slyly and tells me, "We like the pictures of guys in the magazines." Lisa agrees and adds, "They have posters of *N'Sync* and the *Backstreet Boys* in some." Mandy further explains, "One day I wanna be a singer, or a model, or a

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movie star. These magazines tell you lots of stuff about people like that."

Meredith finds that teenzines, "tell us about girls like us--you know the problems they have and stuff." She says, "We want to read them cause you know, people think like you're still babies, play with your Barbies, when we're not. We don't like Barbies no more; we like boys!" With that statement they both begin talking about the Barbies they still have and laugh about how they used to play with them. After some discussion, they confess that sometimes they still like to play with Barbies; one foot in the teen world of boyfriends and one in the childhood world of Barbies, the girls find they are unable to find a stepping stone on which to rest between the two worlds.

On this day Meredith has an issue of *Seventeen* and her friend Kayla has borrowed an issue of *YM* from Tiffany. The cover of *Seventeen* has a close up of Freddie Prinze, Jr., the star of their favorite television show *Down to You*. Acknowledging the publishers' awareness of the problems of anorexia and bulimia, Prinze's assurance, "girls don't have to be thin to be hot" is highlighted on the cover. Apparently, however, it is still important to be "hot" or desirable to men. Though Prinze claims,'Girls don't have

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to be thin," the first four pages of the magazine consist of advertisements that contradict Prinze's claim. One ad is for hair gel; the ad pictures a thin girl in the arms of a rugged looking guy. The other ad is for Ralph Lauren perfume; this ad pictures a very thin young woman in a long sleeveless black dress with cowboy boots. The woman is being held by a young man in the same manner a father might carry his young children; she is facing him and her legs are wrapped around his waist. In fact, *only* very thin girls are portrayed in this magazine.

Articles included in this issue of *Seventeen* deal with self-improvement through fashion and beauty tips: "Spring Fashion Preview: 110 Fresh Ideas"; "Makeup Lesson 101: Eyes, Cheeks and Lips"; and "The Best Brush for Your Hair." Also included is an article celebrating romance, "Real Life Romeos and Juliets," and an article which discusses girls in a nationwide sect who say no to sex: "Girls Who Can Say No." There is a picture above the article of the girls who say no (to sex), ironically it is the only picture included in the magazine of girls who do not seem to be fashion models. Kayla's favorite band, *N Sync*, is on this month's cover of *YM*, which includes articles such as "Your Perfect Guy: How to Meet Your Match," "Look Summer Sexy: 99 Beauty

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Boosts," and "Quiz--Do You Try Too Hard With Guys?" These magazines support Ellis Evans and colleagues' 1991 analysis of teen magazines, which finds that fashion and beauty are the primary subjects of three of the best selling North American magazines for adolescent girls (104). Feature articles deal predominantly with interpersonal relationships, particularly dating. Heterosexuality is always assumed. Discussion of academic or intellectual pursuits, as well as political issues, is virtually nonexistent in these magazines. Evans et al. conclude that contemporary magazines for girls perpetuate traditional roles for women (112).

In *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers,* Dawn Currie summarizes the debate surrounding the content of women's magazines:

> On one side, feminists argue that women's magazines are a medium of cultural representation that helps to reproduce the dominant order through the construction of identities which resonate with the patriarchal subordination of women. . . . On the other side of the debate, however, women's magazines are more recently described as women-centered texts which provide

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> resources for women's playful self-expression and utopian fantasies. (53)

Currie negotiates this tension by moving beyond the understanding of these magazines as static cultural objects and focusing her research on how girls make meaning as readers of these texts.

While researchers have found that women claim to read women's magazines merely for pleasure, the adolescent girls Currie studied read teen magazines for useful knowledge about teenage life. These girls favored teen magazines because "they address the reader as a teenage girl" and "they deal with 'real life' situations and relations" (166). The "real life" situations in these magazines however, are invariably specific to middle-class to upper-class teens; for instance, the issue of *Seventeen* that Meredith hands me includes an article titled "I Don't Want to Go to College." This article tells of a young woman who has turned down a scholarship to Texas A & M in order to take time out to grow up before school. At the bottom of the article are pictures of entertainment figures who have opted out of college. Implied in this article is the notion that young girls choose whether they go to college. According to author Sean Smith, girls choose not to go to

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college because they are pursuing careers in singing or dancing. There is no mention of not going to college because the girl is pregnant, or because she will get a job in the mill just as her mother did, or that she could not go to college because her high school has failed to prepare her for college, or that she cannot afford the financial costs of college. In spite of such discrepancies between the experiences of girls in these texts and their own experiences, these texts come closer to speaking to Mandy and Meredith's experiences than the texts they encounter in school. Meredith reads these magazines to find out about the problems of "girls like us." Not only are her experiences as an adolescent girl validated in teenzines in ways they are not validated elsewhere, teenzines also serve as windows through which Meredith can look outside of her culture to see what life looks like for those who hold cultural power.

The girls in Currie's study read advice columns, as well as the question-and-answer format employed in many feature articles, in ways that allow for self-discovery. Meredith's *Seventeen* has a monthly column, which deals with "hard questions." This month's questions deal with anorexia and problems experienced by girls while attending

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concerts, issues seldom engaged at Shadow Lake School. The *YM* Kayla has borrowed has a column titled "Girlz Rule! Who You Are, How You Live, & What You Love" (Khidekel 16). This week there is a mini quiz, which asks girls to consider whether they are "control freaks." Of course, there are "right" answers to the quiz that will land girls in the "normal" range between bossy and spineless. Currie further explains that while the texts of advice columns and the question-and-answer format of articles invite girls "to 'know the truth of oneself,'" these texts produce subjectivity that is "constantly engaged in self-regulation and normalization" (207). Even so, such texts acknowledge that girls have the capacity to think introspectively, and indeed should pursue reflective thought. Such texts indicate to girls that what they love matters and that they have a say in what it is they love. As students at an authority-centered school that posits students as products rather than learners, these texts are the one place where the sixth grade girls at Shadow Lake School are allowed subjectivity.

Meredith and Kayla like to read the question and advice columns included in these magazines. *YM* has a monthly column titled "Ask Anything: The Lowdown on Sex and

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your Bod." This month's questions deal with masturbation, tampons, and bleeding during intercourse. Though the girls at Shadow Lake participate in competitions such as Miss Shadow Lake and Most Popular and Cutest, which reference their sexuality, adults at school treat students as asexual. During my interview with Katerina, she tells me she is shocked by the lack of education of sexuality at Laurel Gap School. She believes this lack of education is the reason students at Laurel Gap are sexually active much earlier than the teenagers at her school in Germany.

Katerina says the only sex education she received at Laurel Gap was a movie they watched in health class. The movie, however, was not about sex, but abortion, and was produced by a Right to Life organization. After watching the movie, Katerina says she understands why people at Laurel Gap are so against abortion--abortions performed in Germany are not nearly as violent as those performed in America.

Though little mention of girls' sexuality is made by the adults at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools, the girls' culture at home does not deny their sexuality. In fact, in the homes of these girls, expectations for sexual purity seem to be markedly lower than those of middle or

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upper class white homes. There is little condemnation of girls who become pregnant, and it is not unusual for girls at Laurel Gap School to be living with their boyfriends in their parents' homes. Interestingly, this is true even for families who are firmly committed to the church. Kayla's sister, seven months pregnant, was recently married in the Baptist church. In some ways, teen magazines' recognition of girls' sexuality bridges the gap between school and home for these girls. Perhaps Meredith prefers reading teen magazines to the books provided in Accelerated Reading because these magazines permit her to leave her childhood world of Barbies to explore what she perceives as the adulthood world of "boys" and sexuality.

Unfortunately, the magazines send conflicting messages. While girls are allowed to explore their sexuality through these magazines, they are also encouraged to think of themselves as worthy only in their sexual appeal to boys. Girls like Meredith read teenzines hoping to discover cultural agency, yet in many ways these magazines continue to name girls with tired names which have described women's worth as objects of men's desire for generations: "hot," "sexy," "babes." Such names encourage

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girls to embrace the same labels that deprived them of cultural agency in the first place.

Currie rightfully disagrees with cultural critics who suggest "gaps and contradictions" in teenzines are a "point of instability in dominant systems of meaning which invite rewriting and the construction of alternative, subversive meanings" (245). She observes that the girls in her study have not been invited to read their teenzine texts with a critical eye. This is certainly true for the sixth grade girls of Shadow Lake School.

Teenzines will continue to appeal to adolescent girls because, as Currie points out, they "make available a voice for teenage girls" (291). At a time when girls are being silenced by the structures, curricula, and authorities at Shadow Lake School, these magazines give voice to girls, not only locally, but in the larger culture as well. Offering hope and vision for transcending their immediate culture, it is little wonder these magazines hold such appeal for the sixth grade girls at Shadow Lake School. By the time girls in Rocktown actually reach the age of seventeen, however, they have abandoned the hope and vision they once found in reading *Seventeen* magazine for the same reasons they abandoned their Barbies--because their culture

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tells them to move on. Much like the echoes these girls made as children by yelling across the "hollers" of their mountain, the voice once made available to them in their underground reading practices has returned to them, detached from the speaker.

Reading at Laurel Gap: Settling In

On the day I ask Melissa what she likes to read, she has on a shirt with a slogan advertising her Baptist Church: "Boot Camp: In Training for Service in the Army of God." Melissa's family is a vigorous force in their Church. Like many girls her age, Melissa, likes romance novels and asks, "Have you ever read Jannette Oke's books?" I have not, so she tells me,

> Her books are great. The girls in her books are usually interested in the wrong guy and then God shows them the right guy and everything ends up fine. I think I'd like school better if we could read books like that in school.

Melissa happens to have a book by Jannette Okes in her backpack--she offers to lend me *The Measure of a Heart.* The jacket of the book describes Anna Trent who "loved to learn, loved the excitement of new discoveries, loved the quickening of her pulse as she shared some great adventure

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in the pages of a book. And now that is over." Things change:

> Austin Barker comes to their church to fill the pastorate for the summer months, the young seminarian is captured by Anna's admirable qualities, especially her intense desire to learn. Through his books and correspondence, Anna's education continues to expand, and the sweet country girl grows into a lovely woman.

Of course, Anna becomes Austin's wife. It is little wonder that Melissa finds it easier to connect with Anna, a "young country girl" interested in God and men, than she does with Huck and Jim or the Civil War generals in *Killer Angels*.

Novels such as Janette Oke's can be accused of promoting a "gendered tradition," much like the books the Shadow Lake girls read for Accelerated Reading. Resembling the romance series Meredith Cherland and Carole Edelsky speak of in their essay "Girls and Reading: The desire for Agency and the Horror of Helplessness in Fictional Encounters," Janette Oke's books advocate a gendered form of cultural agency for girls by promoting "women who will act as agents within the family and wield power in personal relationships" (41). It is true Anna serves God by

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becoming the wife of the minister, rather than the minister.

But at the same time books such as *The Measure of a Heart* limit the agency of women to the culture's prescribed notion of women's agency, such books at least recognize the existence of girls like Melissa--girls whose dreams of cultural power have been thwarted by the cultures they live in, girls who are on the cusp of adulthood and have already begun to embrace the roles of women defined by their culture. These books also represent the aesthetic that is privileged in Melissa's culture: testimonies of God's faithfulness to obedient humans. Rarely are such books--books that speak of the experiences of young women like Melissa and embrace the aesthetic privileged in her culture--found in any high school English curriculum. Such books are dismissed for their sentimentality, or perhps for their narrative presence of the hand of God, which might be seen as inappropriate for school.

Jane Tompkins speaks to the power of a sentimental novel in her pivotal essay "Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History":

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> The power of a sentimental novel to move its audience depends upon the audience's being in possession of the conceptual categories that constitute character and event. That storehouse of assumptions includes attitudes towards the family and towards social institutions, a definition of power and its relation to individual human feeling, notions of political and social equality, and above all, a set of religious beliefs that organize and sustain the rest. Once in possession of the system of beliefs that undergirds the patterns of sentimental fiction, it is possible for modern readers to see how its tearful episodes and frequent violations of probability were invested with a structure of meanings that fixed these works, for nineteenth-century readers, not in the realm of fairy tale or escapist fantasy, but in the very bedrock of reality. (85)

I would add that the sentimental novel also has power for twentieth-and twenty-first century readers, who like Melissa still embrace many of the beliefs Tompkins

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attributes to the nineteenth-century reader, particularly the religious beliefs.

I am not suggesting that high schools give up *Huckleberry Finn* (though much discussion about its place in the curriculum has been devoted to this idea), but rather it be balanced with books more reflective of the students' own experience and culture. Although I think it is unethical for the schools to participate alongside book clubs in exploiting children and urging them toward consumerism as the book orders distributed at Shadow Lake seem to do, it seems important to bring books that speak to girls' experience and culture into the classroom. As girls are taught to challenge and discuss the roles prescribed for women by both their immediate culture and the books, they will ultimately be empowered to participate in revision, composing new roles.

The sanctioned literacies imposed on the students at Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap, through testing and curriculum decisions, in many ways leave them stranded in Rocktown--on the same bank Miss Ruby delivered them safely to so many years ago. The students are unable to accomplish "the fundamental task of human beings" which according to Freire "should be reading the world, writing the world; reading

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the words, writing the words" (qtd. in Berthoff *The Sense of Learning* 126). A new bridge must be built connecting the larger cultural power located outside of Rocktown to the local culture found in Rocktown. However, young women will only realize the freedom to cross back and forth between these two cultures when they have been permitted to use their own language to disrupt their culture as a way to explore and discover self in new cultures. According to Freire it is only through the students' particular language that they "can develop their own voice. It is through their own language that they will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture, hence their position in the world" (Foreword ix).

In Lee Smith's novel *Saving Grace*, Grace the narrator is an Appalachian woman from a Pentecostal home who has learned she has to save herself. Grace reflects on the despair that was her childhood in the Appalachian mountains:

> When I think on my childhood now, it appears to me as a wild mountainside where I was lost. Often over the years I have dreamed about it. In these dreams I always have a duty--to take something to somebody, to tell somebody

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> something--but the trees are thick and the path disappears beneath my feet. I never know where I'm going, and I never get there. (4)

As long as the girls of Rocktown continue to be disconnected from their own voices, the only voices that have the capacity to disrupt their culture, they will remain as lost on their mountainside as Grace, never knowing where they are going and never getting there.

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Chapter V

"Firmly Planted, Forward Moving": Root Bound in Rocktown

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice--
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do--
determined to save
the only life you could save.

--Mary Oliver, "The Journey," *House of Light*

One of Rocktown's claims to fame is Little River, which runs through the center of town. This pristine

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river, deep and clear, is unusual because it begins on the top of the mountain, running its course along the tabletop mountain and ending in a lake at the bottom. Like Little River, the adolescent girls of Rocktown, for the most part, seldom venture farther than the foot of the mountain. Inherently conflicted, the Shadow Lake School's motto, "Firmly Planted, Forward Moving," is finally a profoundly hampered position.

With administrators and teachers who are products of the same system they supervise, there is no cross-pollination of culture actually present in their lives, resulting in a kind of cultural incest. This stagnation is due partly to the middle class values instituted by faceless authorities five hundred miles away in a school that does not have middle class students. Disconnected from their values at home, students either give up on school, or become numbed by it—sticking it out, as Melissa says, wanting to "do good in school," but never liking it.

In Charles Dickens' classic novel *Hard Times*, Sissy Jupe, known as girl number twenty in Thomas Gradgrind's model school, experiences the same tension between home and school. She cannot seem to answer the questions of her teacher Mr. McChoakumchild satisfactorily. When asked if she would use a carpet with "representations of flowers

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upon it," Sissy cannot help but answer yes. When questioned further about her answer, Sissy timidly explains, "If you please sir, I am very fond of flowers." Mr. McChoakumchild asks Sissy why she would want to put "tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?" Sissy answers, "It wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither if you please sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy----," which signals to Mr. McChoakumchild Sissy's cultural defect: "Aye, aye, aye! But you mustn't fancy . . . . That's it! You are never to fancy" (16).

Sissy is right the flowers on the carpet will not crush or wither, but Sissy, and the girls of Rocktown, will wither, if they are disconnected from their "fancy," their imagination. Written nearly a century and a half ago, *Hard Times* addresses the same reductive practices of education employed in Shadow Lake and Laurel Gap Schools. The educational bureaucracy of these schools all too often regresses to the strategies of what Paulo Freire calls "the well-behaved past" (*Pedagogy* 23): standardized testing; outcome-based education; teacher-centered classrooms, where like the schoolmaster of *Hard Times*, the teacher is expected to pour "gallons of facts" in students' heads

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(12). The results are predictable. The students of Rocktown respond in ways comparable to the students at Dickens' Gradgrind's school: the boys rebel, playing the part of Tom, and the girls are like Louisa, inexplicably tired.

In *Hard Times* Sissy Jupe eventually becomes Tom and Louisa's teacher. Sissy is poor, uneducated, female, dark, perhaps even gypsy, but she has the art and the vision that McChoakumchild is missing, and she is able to lead them toward an education of the heart. As she is brought into the classroom, her insouciance has a disruptive potential to the culture of school. On the cusp of adolescence, the sixth grade girls at Shadow Lake School possess the same potential in the hidden literacies that allow them to navigate the world of womanhood, while still holding fast to the imaginative, creative, courageous girl within.

This disruptive potential is rendered impotent, however, as the schools attempt to organize, codify, and mold their students. Indeed the schools' approach to education ensures that students are not merely "firmly planted," but root bound, unable to grow in ways that will allow them to move forward. From the mountain, both literally and figuratively, no navigable river allows girls access to the larger culture. The girls, unfamiliar to the

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power of critical thinking, turn their restless spirits toward their scripts from home as girlfriends, wives, and mothers.

Not long ago I was discussing my research with the assistant District Attorney of this county. When I told him of my discouraging findings, he commented that he was not surprised. He related a recent conversation about education with superintendent of the county schools in which the superintendent said he did not want to give the students of this county false hope: "No matter what we do, we're still educating the next generation of lintheads [millworkers]." I found this same oppressive attitude at every level of the school system.

In *Writing a Woman's Life,* Carolyn G. Heilbrun tells us "we are the stories we tell" (83). I believe, however, that as the girls of Rocktown give up the power to name themselves through their hidden literacies, they become the stories *other* people tell *about* them. Not only are they given names such as "lintheads" by those in authority outside of their home culture, they are given equally destructive names by boys in their community who use language to control them.

I became acutely aware of boys' power to tell girls' stories just a week ago when I attended one of the summer

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league baseball games. The boys on the Rockport team were excited because Greg, who had been one of the school's great stars before being expelled and sent to a detoxification center, had been allowed a one night leave to come home and pitch in their big game. The team, visibly heady with their own power, was up by six runs at the bottom of the ninth inning. As they went out to the field, I heard Greg yell to his team members, "Come on guys. I strike these three out and go get some pussy before I go back to detox. I'll get pussy for this game!" Greg's assumption that he deserves "pussy" for his good game is in many ways perpetuated by the women in this community. As the women's anger is directed toward visible arbitrators of the county's values (umpires and judges of beauty contestants), they fail to address the stronger currents of power that flow around them, thus enabling men, both inside and outside of their culture, to continue to tell their stories for them, stories in which women are "lintheads" and "pussies."

The underground literacies of the younger girls allowed them to practice a more generative anger than I found in the adult women in the community. In the preface to her book *Raising Their Voices: The Politics of Girls' Anger*, Lyn Mikel Brown speaks to the potential of the anger

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she and Gilligan found while conducting earlier research for their book *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development:*

> We heard the curiosity and witnessed the disruptive behavior of the younger girls; we observed the sometimes cynical and angry resistance of girls on the brink of adolescence; and we experienced the political potential of the active underground as girls moved through adolescence. Here in the girls' intense struggle against pressures not to know and not to speak, we thought, was the hope for a different developmental trajectory, and with it, potential for societal change. (xi)

Often I heard girls respond to questions such as "do you want to spend the night?" or, "could you help me with this?" with the answer, "I don't care to." I always assumed this answer meant, "No, I don't want to." But one day when my friend Kathy told me she "didn't care to" go to town with me, I asked her why she did not want to go. She laughed for ten minutes, then explained to me that "I don't care to," means "I'd like to." This passive answer to indicate eagerness to do something is indicative of what happens as girls become women in Rocktown. As their hidden

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literacies are given up, so is their anger, their greatest potential for cultural change. Older girls no longer challenge the gatekeepers of school culture or resist the identities offered them by both school and home cultures. More distressingly, they give up one of their most valuable resources, the strength they find in their collective identities.

Lynn is a thirty-four-year-old single mother of a fifteen-year-old mentally handicapped girl who attends Laurel Gap School. Conversation with Lynn takes considerable concentration, for it winds all over the map of her life, seemingly going in several disparate directions at once, yet arriving at a single destination: Lynn's sense of isolation. She discusses her boyfriend Steve, whom she has lived with for twelve years; he is still not ready to get married. She discusses her fears of what might happen to her daughter Sarah, whether some boy might "you know take advantage of the fact she's not real smart." In the next breath Lynn expresses her disappointment that Sarah is not like other girls, going on dates and cheerleading for the football team. Lynn talks about her loneliness since she has given up her job on the assembly line down at the sock mill in order to start her own housecleaning business; she explains, "There ain't no

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one there when I clean houses. They're all summer folks." Today Lynn is mad at Steve, and she says with conviction "I think I don't need no man. I believe I'm ready to live by myself, just me and Sarah--no man." Lynn tells me this morning Steve refused to take her down the mountain to have her truck fixed, and she felt she did not have anyone she could call to help her out. As she speaks, Lynn realizes that her boyfriend would not have needed her to take him down; he would have had lots of friends to call on, including his large family as well as his drinking buddies. But Lynn does not have friends like that. Sometimes cleaning three large houses in one day, then coming home to tend to Sarah, or going over to check on her mother, Lynn has little time left for friends. I tell Lynn I have noticed that this seems to be the case for most women in Rocktown. She laughs and seems to discover the reason for this in her own answer:

> Most of the men in town ain't fit for half a day's work. By noon they done finished workin' and are ready for a beer. Some go hang out in the Kountry Chef pestering Cat and Dessie [table waiters]. Men don't spend no time cleanin' up their houses or cookin' dinner, or takin' care of

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> kids. They have lots of time for friends cause they got themselves a wife.

remembering her relational status with Steve, Lynn adds "or a girlfriend."

I believe Lynn's observation has real merit. Often considered women's real source of strength, the solidarity the mountain women find in relationships with each other has been given up as they move into the responsibilities and demands of womanhood in this culture.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Paulo Freire describes the lethargy and sense of purposelessness of people who are domesticated and disempowered:

> So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything--that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive--that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (49)

Since their fate does not seem to depend upon their actions, but rather on the cruelty or heroism of others, the oppressed lose their sense of their own subjectivity. The cycle is relentless: subjectivity that is gained at the hands of the dominant culture only perpetuates a reliance on that culture--and so, it is not true subjectivity at all. For the women of Rocktown, their emergence from

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passivity into cultural power and subjectivity is much less dependent upon the generosity and reformation of those who possess cultural power than it is upon their ability to wake themselves up both collectively and individually, to the energetic, irrepressible, imaginative, little girl both within them and among them.

If the adolescent girls of Rocktown are to keep this dauntless girl alive, their hidden literacies--their stories on the porch--must be brought into the school, where their anger can be recognized and used to direct them toward change; their resistance can redefine roles for both men and women; and their windows to the larger culture can be unlocked and opened, allowing them access to other worlds. Maxine Greene's *The Dialectic of Freedom* speaks to the importance of allowing the multiple literacies that students possess into the classroom for what she calls the "remaking of a democratic community":

> There must of course be a new commitment to intelligence, a new fidelity in communication, a new regard for imagination. It would mean fresh and sometimes startling winds blowing through the classrooms of the nation. It would mean the granting of audibility to numerous voices seldom heard before and, at once, an involvement with

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> all sorts of young people being provoked to make their own the multilinguality needed for structuring of contemporary experience and thematizing lived worlds. (126-27)

<u>Building Bridges</u>

I am in complete agreement with Greene's impassioned plea to grant audibility to seldom heard voices. But once girls like those who live in Rocktown have been empowered with an audible voice, I wonder who will hear them.

Last fall I had the privilege of teaching a women's class, *Life-writing,* one evening a week at Shadow Lake School. I knew that some of the women who had moved to the mountain after their retirement might be interested in the class, but, though I was not very hopeful, I very much wanted some of the mothers of Shadow Lake children to join it as well. Much to my surprise one mother, Kathy, was able to join the class. A mother of four children, Kathy lives just a quarter mile down the road from Shadow Lake School on an acre of land in a house next door to the house she grew up in. Before her father died, Kathy and her father maintained the largest garden in Rocktown, supplying neighbors with the best silver queen corn around. Kathy still plants a large garden, but cannot keep up the size garden she kept with her father. Kathy married at

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eighteen, and before Kenneth and Kathy had their third child, Kathy worked alongside her husband and his father in the mill. Her husband, Kenneth, still works in the same dye house in the mill where his father worked all of his life. Kathy left the mill when her mother became too ill to care for Kathy's children and she started her own cottage industry in the basement of her house repairing the nylon bags used in mills to dip socks in the dye. Kathy wakes up at four thirty each morning to have some time to work on the bags before her children wake up. Since her mother has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Kathy has had little time to work in the basement. Kathy has moved her mother from their family house across the driveway into her own family's home, so that she can take better care of her. With all Kathy has to juggle, I was unprepared for the eagerness Kathy brought to the class.

During each class meeting, we would take time to read what we had written during the week. Reading our pieces aloud was optional, so I was surprised at Kathy's willingness to share her work. I asked her if I might include in this study the following piece she brought to class one night:

> I heard the quote the other day that said "Live Fast, Die Young, and Leave a Good Looking

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Corpse".[sic] Yesterday afternoon I bought The January 31st Newsweek Magazine at the grocery store. It's [sic] cover story is on Alzheimer's. It talks about all us baby boomers who take good care of our health, only to go on and develop Alzheimer's Disease because we live longer lives. The article said that the disease affects nearly half of people 85 and older. Quote: "Then the fog thickens. Your own children come to look like strangers, and terrifying delusions migrate freely from your dreams into waking consciousness. Eventually your limbs, bowel and bladder escape your control. You drift into a silent stupor, and after a year or two of bedsores, and diaper rash, you stop swallowing food. Death, when it comes is a formality." Poor Momma, poor a lot of people! "Some 4 million Americans--one in five of those 75 to 84 and nearly half of those 85 and older--are now afflicted." So my 'fast living' today involves, cleaning house, washing, hanging out clothes, folding clothes, putting away clothes. Washing dishes, picking up floors, and maybe going to the Bookmobile sometime between 11:30 and 1. And

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> maybe watching MacGyver at 1:00 while I fold clothes that, hopefully, will be dry by then. Cooking chicken, rice and yams for supper. Fast living, Huh? Momma is still asleep. I checked on her. She is not dead, just still asleep. Maybe we'll be in a calm, sleep cycle for a day or so! Tonight is church. I probably won't do aerobics because of how it makes my knees hurt. Next Wednesday Lizabeth is going to come visit and I hope we can sew together. There's a line in Stephen Curtis Chapman's song "Lord of the Dance" that says God turns 'chance into purpose'.[sic] I believe that, and I've had that song repeating over and over on the CD this week. I pray I'll keep finding joy in my purpose!

Kathy explains to the class that she believes her purpose right now is taking care of her children and mother.

Feminists claim the personal is political. But I wonder how Kathy's sense of purpose and beliefs would be welcomed in the feminist community? If girls who espouse the same beliefs as Kathy are allowed a voice in the larger culture, will they be heard? Cultural agency only happens when voices are acknowledged by those who have the authority to bestow that agency.

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As feminists, we have learned of the danger of validating only white middle and upper class women's experience. Toni Morrison is often asked what she considers is essentially a question of when she is going to start writing about white people. She describes her marginalized position as an African American woman:

> 'You write well enough. You could come on into the center if you wanted to. You don't have to stay out here on the margins.' And I'm saying, Yeah, well I'm gonna stay out here on the margins, and let the center look for me. (119-20)

If we are to hear the voices of girls like those from Rockport, we must never make our home in the center.

Throughout my research I was continually made aware of how much I have to learn from women like Kathy. Kathy's sense of commitment, her understanding of family, and her ethic of hard work are much to be admired. We need to build bridges to communities like Rocktown, so that busloads of children can travel back and forth between many cultures, bringing with them the literacies of their culture, perhaps creating a new culture where multiple voices are spoken and heard, and a center is eliminated altogether.

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