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The Good Girl Bad Girl Dilemma: Exploring Rural Maine Girls' Sexual Desires, Behaviors, and Relationships

Mary Madden

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THE GOOD GIRL BAD GIRL DILEMMA:
EXPLORING RURAL MAINE GIRLS' SEXUAL DESIRES,
BEHAVIORS, AND RELATIONSHIPS

BY

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B.S., University of Maine, 1986

M.Ed, University of Maine, 1994

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Individualized in Education and Human Development)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

December, 2000

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An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
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In the past decade, feminist researchers have re-framed girls' developmental issues examining the complexities inherent in growing up female in a patriarchal society. In particular, these studies have provided information on the complications girls encounter in their efforts to negotiate ideals of white middle-class conventions of femininity. In the few studies that examine how these ideals of femininity effect girls' sexuality, rural girls from poor and working-class families are rarely considered.

The goal of this study was to deepen and expand the current understanding of adolescent girls' sexuality by bringing the voices of rural girls from poor and working-class families into the discussion. The study explored the way these girls negotiate conventions of femininity, particularly conventions that apply to sexual desires, behaviors, and relationships.

The research design employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary method for collecting data was an adaptation of focus group methodology.

While generally focus groups meet one time, in this study each group met five times. In addition, a survey, which incorporated two scales for measuring constructs of adolescent femininity ideology, was conducted with girls in the focus groups, as well as a small number of girls not participating in the focus groups. Transcripts from the discussions were transcribed and analyzed using the Listening Guide Method, a method developed by researchers at the Harvard Project on the Psychology of Women and Development of Girls.

The results of this study showed that poor and working-class rural girls have a complex relationship with middle class conventions of femininity and sexuality. Struggling to determine the boundaries of the good girl bad girl dichotomy, they reproduce, maintain, and challenge the ideals that are meant to control their sexuality. The study highlights the importance of listening to poor and working-class girls' constructions of sexual desire, behavior, and relationships in a nonjudgmental manner. Only then will it be possible to create a supportive environment which facilitates girls' attainment of sexual health.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
CHAPTER I	
Introduction: Skirting the Real Issues.....	1
CHAPTER II	
Literature Review: Adolescent Girls, Femininity, and Sexuality.....	6
Girls' Relationship with Conventions of Femininity.....	6
Adolescent Girls' Sexuality.....	13
Considerations for the Proposed Study.....	20
CHAPTER III	
Research Design.....	22
Research Goal and Questions.....	22
Research Methodology.....	22
Participants.....	25
Data Collection.....	28
Data Analysis.....	29
Research Design Summary.....	31
CHAPTER IV	
Negotiating Femininity and Sexuality: Analysis and Discussion of Findings	
Girl Talk.....	32
Over the Line.....	33

Good vs. Bad Decisions.....	35
What Makes a Slut?.....	36
The Connections Between Relationships and Sex.....	41
To Plan or Not To Plan.....	43
Controlling Desire.....	44
What the Numbers Say or Don't Say.....	51
Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale.....	52
Objectified Relationship with Body Sub-scale.....	55
Romantic Conventions Index.....	58
Mean Scores.....	62
Correlations Between AFIS Scales and the RCI.....	66
Listening to Three Girls.....	68
Andrea: The Good Bad Girl.....	68
Dana: The Bad, Bad Girl.....	74
Natalie: Living Outside the Lines.....	79
summary.....	83

CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions.....	84
Summary of Research Design.....	84
Summary of Findings.....	85
Limitations.....	90
Supporting and Challenging the Literature.....	91
Implications of the Study.....	94

REFERENCES.....98

APPENDICES

Appendix A Parent Consent Letter.....103

Appendix B Girls' Survey.....105

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....108

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Inauthentic Self in Relationship Sub-scale Items.....	53
Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Objectified Relationship with Body Sub-scale Items.....	57
Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Romantic Conventions Index Items.....	60
Table 4. Mean Scores for AFIS Sub-scales and Romantic Conventions Index.....	62
Table 5. Correlations Between AFIS Sub-scales and Romantic Convention Index.....	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: SKIRTING THE REAL ISSUES

“What I really want to know is why do adults tell us all the reasons why we shouldn’t have sex and all the consequences [of having sex], but they never give us a reason why we should have sex?” This question, posed by a girl in this study, highlights what I have come to recognize during my 15 years as a sexuality educator. In our efforts to help young people protect themselves against teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) we have failed to acknowledge and respond to their genuine concerns and questions about sexuality. In the case of girls, we have abandoned them as they struggle to negotiate confounding cultural directives about female sexuality.

Multitudes of sexuality curricula have been developed in an effort to reduce the health and social consequences of adolescent sexual behavior. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has invested substantial funds and effort to identify “curricula that have demonstrated credible evidence of reducing risk behaviors among youth” (ETR Associates, 1997, p. iii). These curricula urge teenagers to say “no” to sexual intercourse or to use a condom if they have intercourse. The tactics used to educate adolescents about pregnancy and disease prevention ignore dominant cultural assumptions that frame female and male relational experience. Further, the curricula ignore the relational contexts in which sexual decisions are made and lack a realistic approach to negotiating sexual relationships.

The department of education for each state is responsible for disseminating the curricula to schools and agencies throughout that state, which they accomplish by

training local educators to implement the curricula in their communities. As a consultant to the HIV Program sponsored by the Maine Department of Education from 1994 to 1999, I provided such training to Maine teachers. My colleague, Chuck Rhoades, and I were hired by the Maine Department of Education to develop and deliver training for teachers on the CDC-backed curricula. We accepted the task despite our philosophical differences with the curriculum developers and supporters on the best method to educate young people about sexuality. Our hope was that we could encourage teachers to expand their understanding of adolescent sexuality and facilitate honest dialogue with their students about sexual desire, behavior, and relationships. However, even our most sincere efforts failed to bridge the gap between adolescents' needs for education that addressed their authentic questions, dilemmas, and relationship situations, and the curriculum materials teachers were encouraged to implement in their classrooms.

Chuck and I realized that in order to meet the students' needs, we needed to first listen to young people's perspectives about the sexuality education that they were receiving. To this end, we conducted focus groups with middle and high school students and found that, in general, students could recite the educational messages they had learned, were exasperated with the abstinence focus, and longed for an honest discussion that included their real needs, experiences, and questions. (Madden & Rhoades, 1996, 1998)

Interestingly, the girls in three of the four middle school focus groups were outspoken and anxious to talk about sex. They easily engaged in discussions with me, were remarkably frank, and provided more in-depth information than I expected them to reveal in a one-time session. The insights they shared were, at times, surprising and

shocking, despite my many years of listening to adolescents talk about sexuality. Further discussions with school personnel who had selected students to participate in the groups revealed that they had chosen girls based on staffs' perceptions that the girls were engaging in risky sexual behavior. They were concerned for the girls and frustrated at their own inability to affect the girls' "promiscuous" behavior. Listening to the girls, it was unclear to me the extent to which these girls had actually engaged in sexual behavior though it was evident that these girls liked to talk about sex. The girls seemed to be aware that their openness about sexuality made adults uncomfortable, and I suspect they liked the shocked reaction that their conversation provoked. Interestingly, girls' stories, and comments from staff led me to conclude that most of the girls were from poor and working-class families. I recognized I was at a familiar place, a place I had been many times in my career. On one side of me were professional educators sharing their "concerns" for "these" girls: girls who spoke too loudly about their sexual curiosity, desires, and behaviors; girls who seemed out of control; poor and working-class girls. On the other side were girls hungry for a dialogue, hungry for someone to listen without judging them.

My goal in the aforementioned focus groups had been to learn how the sexuality education being implemented in schools matched the needs of adolescents. What the girls taught me is that I was asking the wrong question. The curricula being implemented assumed an understanding of adolescent sexual decision-making and behavior. Girls helped me realize that until we really listened to them about their struggles to negotiate sexual decisions and behavior, we could not possibly develop educational programs that address their needs or that help them to become sexually healthy individuals. This

experience challenged me to find ways to listen to these girls, poor and working-class girls, girls who were most perplexing to educators. Hence, this study was conceived.

My goal in the reported study is to expand our understanding of female adolescent sexuality, by bringing the voices and experiences of poor and working-class girls into the discussion. I have a special affinity for poor and working-class girls; I was one of them. I grew up in New York City in a working-class family, became pregnant as a teenager, and married young. During this study, my own experiences offered me an insider's perspective on the life of one teenage girl growing up in a family of a lower socioeconomic class, my own. My experiences differ in many ways from those of the girls in my study, most notably in terms of time and geography. My current location as a middle-class, 43-year-old feminist researcher provided me with an opportunity to focus attention on these girls through my research. My goal in this study was to expand the discussions about adolescent female sexuality to include the experiences of poor and working-class girls by investigating the intersections of girls' development, sexuality and class. Using a feminist lens, my own experiences as a female in a patriarchal society, and my belief that gender is a crucial lens through which to analyze people's experiences, I was cognizant of interpreting girls' experiences within the larger social context. This approach helped me to avoid colluding with predominate cultural views that stress individualism and meritocracy and often misinterpret the experiences of these girls.

In addition to my feminist perspective and my personal history, I brought to this research my 15 years of professional experience as a Family Life and Sexuality Educator. During this time, I worked extensively with rural Maine middle and high school students, and their teachers. This experience provided insights into adolescent sexuality from the

perspectives of young people along with the perspective of the adults and institutions that desperately struggle to restrain adolescents' sexuality.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW:

ADOLESCENT GIRLS, FEMININITY, AND SEXUALITY

This review of the literature focuses on research by feminists during the last decade, which explore girls' development and sexuality within the context of U.S. society. Much of the research is conducted using qualitative methods and integrates girls' narrations of their experiences. These narratives are then analyzed with a feminist lens, a lens that acknowledges the systematic oppression of girls and women in our society. The foremost research contributing to our understanding of girls' development originates with a collective group of researchers who participated in the Harvard Project on the Psychology of Women and Development of Girls. Through research and writing they have documented girls' experiences as they move from childhood into, and through, adolescence in a culture that encourages them to "trade in parts of themselves in order to become a woman in this culture" (Debold, Wilson, & Malave, 1993, p. 11).

Girls' Relationships with Conventions of Femininity

Conventional femininity is the brand of femininity supported by white middle-class culture. According to Lyn Brown (1998), it is the brand of femininity most often held out as a model for girls in schools. She asserts that white middle-class femininity teaches girls "what to say, how to speak, what to feel and think, if they want to be the right kind of girl, if they want to be listened to, accepted, rewarded, included. The right kind of girls are "calm and quiet, they speak softly, they do not complain or demand to be heard, they do not shout, they do not directly express anger" (p. 12). Conventional femininity also requires girls and women to silence desire, especially sexual desire, or

risk being negatively labeled (Tolman 1994, 1996, 1999a). According to Debold, Wilson, and Malave (1993) conventional femininity asks women to “give up power and authority in the world in exchange for being taken care of and protected” (p. 70). They identify another form of middle-class femininity in which women are encouraged to pursue professional careers and in doing so to be “one of the boys” with success dependent “on women accepting the norms and values of male privilege without question, while maintaining a thin veneer of femininity” (p.71). This form of femininity requires women to always be cognizant to balance femininity and male standards.

In their longitudinal study of 100 girls at Laurel, a private girls’ school, Brown and Gilligan (1992) explored the ways girls negotiate conventions of femininity. The majority of girls in the study were white girls from middle- and upper-middle-class families. Girls of color and girls from working-class families participated, but in smaller numbers. Seven and 8-year-old girls in this study spoke loudly and clearly about what they knew, felt, and thought. These girls understood that in relationships people disagree and can get hurt. Astute at identifying the differences between authentic and inauthentic relationships, these girls were willing to disrupt relationships by naming relational violations. Girls were conscious of adult voices around them, especially women’s voices, encouraging them to be “nice and kind.” However, girls seldom let the instruction to be “nice and kind” interfere with how they conducted their relationships. As Annie Rogers (1993) would say, they “speak their mind by telling all their heart” (p. 203).

Brown and Gilligan (1992) found that girls’ freedom to voice their observations of the world and relationships was sharply interrupted as they approached adolescence. As they

grew older, girls were encouraged to conform to the dominant culture's conventions of femininity. Girls at preadolescence often referred to, and spoke about, the

perfect girl-the girl who has no bad thoughts or feelings; the kind of person everyone wants to be with; the girl who, in her perfection, is worthy of praise and attention, worthy of inclusion and love[She is] the girl who speaks quietly, calmly, who is always nice and kind, never mean or bossy (p. 58-59).

This image of the perfect girl encourages a girl to “give over the reality of her astute observations of herself and the human world around her -- or at least to modulate her voice and not speak about what she sees and hears, feels and thinks, and therefore knows” (p. 61). It is often the adult women in girls' lives that hold out the possibility of the perfect girl.

According to Gilligan (1990), when girls reach adolescence they are at risk of “losing their voices.” They tend to silence what they know and understand, as their reality is questioned. Unsure about whether or not to speak of their reality, girls often used the phrase, “I don't know.” This phrase signaled a girl's reluctance to share her knowledge with peers or adults. Instead, girls take their knowledge to what Gilligan refers to as the “underground.” As they struggle to hold on to what they know as reality:

Girls pose genuine questions about love and power, truth and relationship. And their questions, if taken seriously, disturb the framework and disrupt the prevailing order of relationships. When their voices are muted or modulated, when their experience is denied, their reality questioned, their feelings explained away, girls describe a relational impasse -- a sense of being unable to move

forward in relation with others, a feeling of coming up against a wall. (Brown & Gilligan, 1992 p. 160)

Fearing that if they speak their truths, they risk their relationships, girls struggle to be “perfect girls and model women” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992 p. 180).

Faced with this pressure to silence themselves, to let go of their reality and to accept the culturally sanctioned version of reality for women, girls adopted one of three strategies to negotiate their entrance into womanhood. The first strategy was to accept the culturally defined version of femininity and strive to become the “perfect girl.” This strategy required girls to silence their voices -- give up what they know to be true from their experiences and adopt “reality” as defined by the male-dominated culture. These girls question, and eventually let go of, their relational knowledge thereby leaving relational violations unnamed (Brown and Gilligan, 1992). They must, as Gilligan (1991) says, take themselves out of relationship “for the sake of relationships” (p. 23).

The second strategy identified by Brown and Gilligan (1992) that girls used to face the culturally sanctioned version of womanhood was to negotiate a double life. By all outward appearance these girls conformed to mandates to be “nice” and “good.” They played the game but held onto their relational knowledge and retained the ability to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic relationships. These girls took their knowledge “underground” speaking their true thoughts and feelings only when in the presence of a true friend or a woman willing to engage in honest dialogue. A girl who adopted this strategy might eventually find it difficult to discern her true thoughts and feelings from those that she portrayed.

Political resistance was the third strategy identified by Brown and Gilligan (1992). Political resisters held onto their relational knowledge continuing to voice their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge. Retaining a critical perspective on their world, these girls labeled their experiences, pointed to relational violations, and identified inconsistencies in their world -- all the while conscious that their resistance was “disruptive and disturbing” (p. 193) to those around them. Their brand of resistance differed from psychological resistance, which Gilligan (1991) defines as “resistance to knowing what is happening and an impulse to cover the struggle” (p. 25).

Recognizing that those most able to resist the conventional notions of femininity in the Laurel-Harvard study were girls of color or girls from working-class families Brown (1998) launched a study to examine the relationship between socioeconomic class and girls’ responses to middle-class femininity. She noted that the literature generally equates poor and working-class status with people of color. However, in Maine, where Brown conducted her study, youth from poor and working-class families are predominately white. Nineteen girls from two Maine communities participated in focus group discussions over the course of a year to discuss their experiences of and perspectives on an array of topics. The fictitious names Mansfield and Acadia were assigned to the hometowns where the girls’ lived. Girls from Mansfield, a small rural Maine town, were from poor and working-class families. Girls from Acadia, a mid-sized Maine city, were from middle-class families. Brown examined the girls’ relationships with the conventional expectations of white middle-class femininity focusing on their anger.

Brown (1998) discovered that the two groups of girls subscribed to different constructions of femininity. The poor and working-class girls' constructions of femininity included

toughness, a self-protective invulnerability to sadness and fear, an often direct and unapologetic expression of anger, as well as a deep capacity for love and nurturance toward those who need them. . . . They readily and openly express their anger toward perceived injustice, admit their love for fighting and debate, admire those who do not take abuse, who stand up for themselves, and sometimes aggressively lash out at those who inflict pain (p. 69-70).

The middle-class girls, by and large, portrayed the values of white middle-class femininity dividing the world of girls into good and bad. Good girls or

nice girls are kind and caring, they listen, they don't hurt others, they don't get in trouble or cause scenes, they don't express anger or say what they want directly, and they don't brag or call attention to themselves. Bad girls, by contrast are sexual, express their desires, dress provocatively, speak too often and too loudly, and express their anger directly: they call attention to themselves and thus are 'out of control' and 'obnoxious' (p. 82).

Brown (1997, 1998) found that girls in each group exhibited an ambivalent relationship with the conventional ideals of femininity both resisting and accommodating these ideals though in different ways. The Mansfield girls demonstrated an understanding of the perfect girl, choosing "when and for whom to perform this particular character" (p. 694). At times, the girls poked fun at the feminine ideal by noting its absurdities. Yet, at other times, the girls voiced the ideals only to find themselves

interrupted by their own, and each other's realities. Brown identifies that the Mansfield girls, while generally resistant to the conventions of femininity, found themselves constrained by these same conventions when pressured by boys to engage in sexual relationships. Niobe Way (1995) found similar dynamics in her study with poor and working-class urban high school girls. The girls were outspoken with female peers, parents, and teachers; however, this did not translate to being outspoken in relationships with male peers.

In Brown's study (1997) the Acadia girls had a more difficult time differentiating themselves from the cultural ideal of femininity since this model was consistently held out for them by adults as desirable and attainable. These girls set themselves apart from the ideal by magnifying characteristics of femininity and investing them in the "popular" girls, which they were not. Girls in the focus group took pride in being recognized as smart.

Deborah Tolman and Michelle Porche (1999, in press) have developed and piloted the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale in an attempt to measure the extent to which a girl has internalized or resisted white, middle-class femininity ideology. Femininity ideology as defined by Tolman and Porche is "the individual-level construct that links individual females to cultural constructions of femininity" (p. 1). Femininity ideology goes beyond beliefs and attitudes about gender roles for women. Rather, it organizes "socially appropriate behavior, qualities, practices, identities, and expression of emotions, needs and desires" (p. 3) for women. Tolman and Porche's (1999, in press) review of the literature shows that,

Feminists have articulated many debilitating aspects of femininity ideology, including sacrificing one's self in order to care for others and maintain relationships, being inauthentic (i.e., being agreeable when one is not feeling that way), avoiding anger and conflict (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, 1982; Jack, 1991; Miller, 1976), achieving and maintaining a thin body, and keeping physical desires diminished (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993; Steiner-Adair, 1990; Debold, 1991; Tolman & Debold, 1993; Young, 1990)" (p. 4).

This scale is being used in Tolman's current study -- a 5-year longitudinal study that examines the relationships between a girl's femininity ideology, her sexual decisions, and the consequences associated with those decisions.

Adolescent Girls' Sexuality

One would expect, given the progress in researching girls' development and the growing understanding of the power of the middle-class conventions of femininity in girls' lives, that research on girls' sexuality would consider these variables when researching adolescent sexuality. However, when I examined the literature on adolescent sexuality I found a wealth of information regarding the initiation of sexual intercourse, contraceptive use, sexually transmitted diseases, and teenage pregnancy (e.g., Grimley & Lee, 1997; Miller, Clark, & Moore, 1997; Santelli, Brener, Lowry, Bhatt & Zabin, 1998; Smith & Ramirez, 1997). In a review of the literature on adolescent sexuality, Phillips (1998) found that the percentage of adolescent girls that report having had sexual intercourse rose from a low of 29% in 1970 to a high of 55% in 1990 and back down to 50% in 1995. In 1995, 5% of the girls who reported having experienced sexual intercourse did so before they were 13 years old. More specific to Maine, the Youth Risk

Behavior Survey (1997) found that 50% of high school girls reported having had sexual intercourse, 38% within 3 months prior to the survey. Of these girls, 45% said their partner used a condom, and 36% used contraceptive pills the last time they had intercourse. Four percent of the girls reported that their first experience with intercourse occurred before the age of 13, and 12% have had four or more sexual partners in their lifetime. Nineteen percent of the girls reported they have been verbally or physically forced to take part in sexual activity, and 5% reported having been forced by a date to have sexual intercourse.

There were very few sources of literature that examined girls' sexuality in the context of the new understandings of girls' development put forth by feminist researchers. Deborah Tolman, one of the few researchers to undertake this task, documents the negative, consequential focus of the literature on adolescent sexuality. She points out the inadequacy of this approach in understanding girls' experiences and decisions about sexuality. The literature assumes what Tolman (1999a) refers to as:

A relational vacuum, in which sexual decision making is narrowly defined as an individual girl making good or bad decisions about sexual intercourse, meaning decisions that increase or diminish her risk of pregnancy and disease. The relational processes and consequences that shape, contextualize, and give meaning to girls' choices -- that is, the relational contexts within and through which girls make decisions about sexual intercourse and experience other aspects of sexuality have not been a focus of mainstream research on adolescent girls' sexual development. This conception of girls' sexuality leaves out important relational questions, such as how girls' relationships with their own bodies, with

specific people in their lives, and with the larger cultural ideals regulating “normal” and “moral” female identities shape their sexuality (p. 228).

While women’s sexuality has been a focus of feminists’ work, adolescent girls’ experiences of sexuality have been studied by only a few, most notably Deborah Tolman and her colleagues (1991, 1994, 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Tolman & Higgins 1996; Tolman and Porche 1999, in press) and Sharon Thompson (1995). Michelle Fine (1988) offers some insights into the representation of female sexuality in school curricula and debates on sexuality education.

Thompson (1995) reported on her interviews with 400 girls in which she explored girls’ experiences with sexuality and their approaches to sexual relationships. While the interviews are somewhat dated, taking place between 1978 and 1986, the way in which Thompson structured her findings and her conclusions are intriguing and worthy of attention. Thompson groups girls according to their approach to sex. In her representation, “Victims of Love” narrators viewed sex and love as intricately linked, holding onto the belief that sex could generate caring and commitment. They were silent about pleasure, failed to use contraception, and associated sex with fear, abandonment, and pregnancy. “Popular girl” narrators “played the field” switching boyfriends often and purposefully. These girls possessed enough power in their relationships to enforce their decisions regarding sexual behavior. “Stodious girl” narrators approached sex and love as an extracurricular activity that they needed to add to their resume prior to college.

Usually older when they first had sexual intercourse, these girls separated sex and reproduction, using contraception every time they engaged in intercourse. Girls with adult partners described their experiences as wanted, pleasurable, and educational. Most

viewed their relationships as temporary. Lesbian narrators regarded their sexual attraction and desire for other females as normal and expected that their sexual encounters would bring them pleasure. “Equity” narrators, often the daughters of feminists, were comfortable competing with boys in the arena of games. They kept a critical perspective on what was happening in romantic relationships, maintained a sense of humor and an active extracurricular life, kept sex and reproduction separate, and sought pleasure and experience rather than love. They used contraception every time they had sex. Thompson’s study led her to conclude that: The more a girl could separate love, sex, and reproduction; understand her romantic relationships as one aspect of a fuller life; “condition her consent on desire and protection” (p. 285); keep a firm hold on reality; and maintain a sense of humor, the more likely it was that she would make, and follow through, with decisions that served her best interests.

In an analysis of a sub-sample of 100 sexually active girls, Thompson (1990) identified two stories girls told about first intercourse. In the first story, girls explained that sex “just happened” (p. 343). Their experiences were framed as unexpected, painful, boring, disappointing, and often coerced but “worth it” (p. 348). Some took pride in having resisted penetration. As one said, “It’s like trying to put a big thing in a little hole” (p. 349). Thompson concluded that while the “pain, fear, and disappointment . . . were hurtful in and of themselves [they also] . . . decreased the probability of effective contraceptive practice and undercut the girl’s sense of well being and hope and generated depression and amnesia” (Thompson 1984, p. 350). The second story was told by girls who Thompson named “pleasure narrators” (p. 350). These girls reported stories of childhood masturbation and described “taking sexual initiative; satisfying their own

sexual curiosity; instigating petting and coital relations. If it's 'yes,' they say so. If it's 'no,' they say that too. From earliest childhood, they seem to take sexual subjectivity for granted" (p. 352). These girls expected to experience pleasure, communicated their desires to their partners, and were always prepared with contraception. While their first experiences with sexual intercourse did not always live up to the romantic pictures painted by the culture, or result in orgasm, most found their experiences were satisfying and offered a "promising beginning" (p. 355) in their pursuit of pleasurable sex. A distinct characteristic of pleasure narrators was their open, easy communication about sexuality with their mothers who shared more than the facts of life and were willing to relate personal experiences of desire, sex, and sexuality. Thompson concluded that in order for girls to become pleasure narrators, they need an "erotic education" (p. 358).

In her essay on school-based sexuality education, Michelle Fine (1988) highlighted the ways in which female adolescent sexuality is discussed in schools. In the four primary discourses two discourses center on violence and victimization portraying "males as potential predators and females as victims" (p. 34). The third discourse is that of "sexuality as individual morality" and urges abstinence before marriage for females. The last discourse is the "discourse of desire." This discourse is barely audible in schools, closely aligned with discussions about consequences, and leaves female pleasure and desire unspoken. She contends that, "a genuine discourse of desire in which youth have a voice would be informed and generated out of their own socially constructed meanings" (p. 33).

Building upon Fine's observations of the missing discourse of desire, Deborah Tolman explored girls' experiences and responses to their sexual desire. Tolman (1994)

conducted in-depth interviews with 28 girls who were juniors in urban and suburban high schools and two who were members of a gay and lesbian youth group. Urban girls were primarily from poor and working-class families and included girls of color, while suburban girls were primarily from white middle- and upper-middle-class families. Two-thirds of the girls in the study spoke of sexual desire, most often in terms of both pleasure and danger. The source of the danger differed according to a girl's location -- urban or suburban. Urban girls focused more on physical danger while suburban girls' danger was located in questions about being "good" and "normal" (p. 328). Girls in the study described sexual desire as "strong and pleasurable" but focused "not on the power of desire but of how desire may get them in trouble" (p. 338). Tolman found that girls adopted psychological moves to "distance and disconnect" (p. 339) them from the danger they associated with their desire. While these moves protected them from danger, they also closed off the powerful potential for knowing and responding to their desire.

Recently, Tolman, along with her colleague Szalacha (1999), explored methods to bring together her qualitative research on girls' sexual desire with quantitative methods. The researchers quantified distinct stories of pleasure and vulnerability, categorizing them according to location and history of sexual violence, and subjected them to statistical analysis. The combination of methods showed that: urban and suburban girls did not significantly differ in the number of reports of sexual violence; urban girls told more stories of vulnerability than pleasure; and suburban girls who do not report experiencing sexual violence told more stories about pleasure. In addition, they found that suburban girls who did not report sexual violence referred to desire as being

physical, mental, and emotional while girls from suburban communities who reported experiencing sexual violence alluded to the concept of desire but not the experience.

Studies have found that girls are aware of cultural mandates of femininity, which require them to silence their desire or face being labeled as “bad” (Tolman, 1991, 1994; 1996; Tolman & Higgins, 1996; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999). However, controlling their own desire is not the only criteria adolescent females must satisfy in order to avoid being labeled as bad. They also must control the desire and behavior of adolescent boys (Tolman & Higgins, 1996). Amidst controlling their desire, controlling boys’ desire, protecting themselves from danger, and spending “enormous amounts of time trying to ‘save it,’ ‘lose it,’ convince others that they lost or saved it, or trying to be ‘discreet’” (Fine, 1988, p. 37), girls’ attention and energy is diverted from learning sexual autonomy, experiencing sexual pleasure, and assuming responsibility for their own sexual experiences. It may well be that girls who can claim their desire and pleasure are those who are most likely to make decisions that protect their emotional and physical selves, to be clear about consent and non-consent, and ultimately to achieve sexual health (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1990, 1995; Tolman, 1991, 1994, 1996; Tolman & Higgins, 1996; Tolman & Porche, 1999, in press; Tolman & Szalacha, 1999).

Tolman (1999b) and her staff at Wellesley College have proposed a comprehensive model of sexual health for female adolescents. They have identified “four domains: (a) the individual girls, including knowledge and attitudes, sense of entitlement to self-pleasure and sexual self-concept; (b) romantic/sexual relationships, including use of condoms and some forms of contraception, avoiding or leaving abusive partners when possible, and adopting a critical perspective on romance conventions; (c)

social relationships, including having support to work through confusion and questions about sexuality, and to evaluate the quality of relationships; and (d) the sociopolitical dimensions of girls' sexuality, including access to and freedom to use reproductive health care, information, and materials to sustain sexual health, and images of girls' sexuality as normal and acceptable." Tolman and her colleagues are investigating the complex dimensions of this model in their current research project.

Tolman (1999a) makes a key connection between the research on girls' development and girls' sexuality when she says that "the centrality of relationships in girls' psychological development suggests the importance of relationships in girls' sexuality development, including girls' decisions about sexual behavior." She further suggests that, "to take girls' relational contexts seriously in our research demands a focus on the meanings of sexuality and sexual decisions and the processes by which girls develop their sexuality beyond their choice to have sexual intercourse" (p. 242).

Considerations for the Proposed Study

This literature search highlights questions that require further exploration if we are to develop a more comprehensive understanding of girls' development and sexuality. Lyn Brown (1998) observes that, in general, studies of girls link socioeconomic class to geographical location and race. Girls from poor, and working-class backgrounds are usually girls of color living in urban areas of the United States. This is true of Tolman's study of urban and suburban girls' sexual desire (1991, 1994). Thompson (1995) alludes to a small percent of the girls in her study being from rural communities but her findings are not reported in a way that allows the reader to differentiate the experiences of these girls' from those of other girls in the study. While Tolman and Thompson explore girls'

experiences of sexuality, white girls from rural, poor and working-class families are either excluded or not clearly identified. Brown (1998) examined the experiences of white middle-school rural girls from poor and working-class families in relation to middle-class conventions of femininity. While sexual and romantic relationships were not the primary focus of her study, she does observe that poor and working-class girls in her study often resist, and even mock, the ideals of femininity, yet become more limited by the ideals when faced with pressure to engage in sexual relationships. The research of Fine (1988), Brown (1998), Tolman (1991, 1994, 1996, 1999a, 1999b), Tolman and Higgins (1996) and Tolman and Porche (1999, in press) highlight the ways in which girls' sexuality is socially defined and negotiated for them.

Among the outstanding avenues of exploration, the ones I've chosen to pursue are: How do rural girls from poor and working-class families relate to the middle-class conventions of femininity as they enter middle and late adolescence? How do these girls resist or accommodate these conventions in their romantic and sexual relationships, especially those that are related to sexuality?

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Goal and Questions

The goal of this study was to deepen and expand the current understanding of adolescent girls' sexuality by bringing the voices of rural girls from poor and working-class families into the discussion. Research questions considered for this study include: How do rural poor and working-class girls relate to and negotiate white middle-class conventions of femininity, particularly the ideals about sexual desire, sexual behavior, and sexual relationships? How do these girls negotiate the norms in a group context with other girls like themselves? In what ways do girls' stories and group interactions interrupt these conventions?

Research Methodology

A purposeful decision was made to seek depth rather than breadth in this study. The research design employed both qualitative and quantitative methods. The primary method for collecting data was an adaptation of focus group methodology. While generally focus groups meet one time, in this study each group met five times. In addition, a survey that incorporated two scales for measuring constructs of adolescent femininity ideology was conducted with girls in the focus groups as well as a small number of girls not participating in the focus groups.

Focus groups were selected as the primary method of inquiry because of their unique contribution to qualitative research. Focus groups are a form of group interviews in which the researcher brings focused questions to a group and engages participants in discussion. This method produces rich, in-depth data about the questions at the center of

an inquiry. The group setting offers a social context for the collection of data enabling the researcher to explore and discover the ways in which participants speak about, co-construct, and interpret their experiences and how they react to the experiences of other group members (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Wilkinson, 1999a, 1999b). The group interaction produces data and insights not available in individual interviews (Morgan, 1988). Unlike one-on-one in-depth interviews, where the researcher asks the questions and the participant responds, the focus group resembles a conversation among multiple persons (Reinharz, 1992). This conversational format, which for many girls is familiar, offers the opportunity not only to talk but also to listen as others share and interpret their experiences. Individuals often form their ideas and opinions as they listen to others (Krueger, 1994.) This method encourages participants to construct their ideas in response to the group discussion and provides the researcher with insights into how participants' knowledge is "socially constructed, tentative, and emergent" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 230). The conversational style of the focus group enables girls to share stories they may have been reluctant to share in a one-on-one interview. Stories that participants simply thought unimportant or irrelevant become material for discussion when placed in the context of another person's story. Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) refer to this as the "synergistic effect of the group" (p. 16). The social context offered by the focus group is especially important to inquiry about girls' experiences of sexuality as their sexuality and sexual experiences are socially defined, negotiated, and interpreted (Fine, 1988; Tolman 1991, 1994; 1996; Tolman & Higgins, 1996).

In addition to contextualizing research, focus groups have the potential to address the power dynamics in the research relationship, which are of concern to feminists. Wilkinson (1999a) acknowledges that “simply by virtue of the number of research participants simultaneously involved in the research interaction, the balance of power shifts away from the researcher” (p. 230). While Krueger (1994) expresses concerns about researchers losing control of the focus group, other researchers see participants outnumbering the researcher as a benefit of focus groups. As the majority, participants have more opportunity to generate their own questions and concerns, set directions for the discussion, and express their points of view (Morgan, 1988; Wilkinson, 1999b). My own experiences using group interviews and individual interviews with adolescent girls have shown that in a group setting participants are far less likely to be concerned with what I as the researcher want to know. They take the initiative to ask each other questions, converse with each other, and move the conversation in directions that are relevant to their experiences. In individual interviews girls tend to rigidly adhere to the questions posed, concerned with assuring that my research needs are met.

Girls were asked to complete a 34-question survey (Appendix A) which contains two main components: the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS) created by Deborah Tolman and Michelle Porche (1999, in press) and the Romantic Conventions Index (RCI) created by Tolman (1999b). The scales measure the extent to which girls internalize two constructs of white middle-class ideals of femininity. Grounded in feminist theory and created specifically for work with adolescent girls, these scales are based on the belief that the ideology of femininity and romantic relationships is a “form of oppression for girls and women and a fundamental component of patriarchy.” (Tolman

& Porche, in press). The AFIS is divided into sub-scales. The first of these scales, Inauthentic Self in Relationships (ISR), measures the extent to which a girl has internalized cultural messages that encourage her to silence herself in her peer relationships in order to avoid risking these relationships. The second sub-scale, Objectified Relationship with Body, measures the extent to which a girl has internalized norms which pressure girls to “look at and evaluate, rather than to feel and experience, their bodies.” (Tolman & Porche, 1999, p.7). The RCI (Tolman, 1999b), currently under development, measures the degree to which a girl has internalized norms which “regulate heterosexual relationships and center on girls identifying and meeting boys’ needs, including their sexual desire” at the “expense of their own needs and desires” (p. 135). The higher a girl scores on these measures the greater the degree to which she has internalized these ideologies. The scales were used to gain additional information about girls’ conceptions of femininity and romantic relationships.

Participants

Participants in this study were girls from poor and working-class families in rural Maine who had just completed their 2nd or 3rd year of high school. Girls at this age were targeted for participation in the study because research indicates that at this time in their lives girls are actively engaged in decisions about sexual relationships (CDC, 1997; Phillips, 1998).

The study was conducted with girls in the University of Maine’s Upward Bound Classic Program during the summer of 2000. The program provides ongoing services and support to students in preparation for college. The University of Maine’s program serves low-income students from the rural areas of the four counties that surround its

campus in Orono, Maine. The majority of Upward Bound students come from families whose income is at or below 150% of the poverty level and in which neither parent has earned a bachelor's degree. Many are in the middle to upper half of their class academically and aspire to post-secondary education. The program includes a 6-week residential program comprised of academic classes, health and wellness seminars, and cultural enrichment and recreational activities. Upward Bound was an excellent program from which to recruit participants not only because their students meet the socioeconomic criteria for this study but also because their extended stay on the University campus made it possible to meet with girls on a weekly basis. Seventy girls qualified for the study, 40 who had just completed their 2nd year of high school and 30 who had just completed their 3rd year of high school.

The recruitment of girls occurred in several stages. First, Upward Bound Counselors working with girls in their 2nd or 3rd year of high school provided written information about the study to girls during a visit to the girls' schools in May. Girls were informed about the study and advised girls that their parents would receive a packet of information explaining the study. The informational packet (Appendix B) sent to parents of eligible girls through Upward Bound included a letter describing the study and parental permission slips. Parents were asked to discuss the study with their daughter, and to sign and return the permission slip if their daughter was interested in the study and if they were willing to grant permission for her to participate. On the first day of the summer residential program, I participated in the check-in process for arriving students. I spoke with parents and girls who were eligible for the study to provide information on the study and to encourage their participation. If girls did not wish to participate in the focus

groups, they were asked if they would be willing to complete an anonymous survey. At this time, I also spoke with girls whose parents had returned signed permission forms for their daughter to participate in the groups to assure that the girls understood the study and were choosing to participate. Two girls elected at that time to withdraw from the study saying they had changed their minds about participating. The final step of the recruitment process was undertaken to assure that girls were choosing to participate freely and not as a response to pressure from parents. This step involved a request for written information in response to three questions to assure that girls were still interested and to provide me with information about girls' relationship experiences. The questions asked were:

1. Are you still interested in participating in the discussion groups 1 evening per week for 5 weeks?
2. Have you been in a dating relationship (even a brief relationship) while in high school?
3. If you have been in a dating relationship, how long was the longest relationship you were in?

After the final recruitment step, a total of 20 girls volunteered to participate in the focus groups.

Girls participating in the focus groups were divided into two groups. The first group was composed of 12 girls who had just completed their 2nd year of high school. Of the girls in this group, one discontinued attending after the first session. Of the remaining 11 girls, 8 attended at least 4 sessions. The 2nd group was composed of 8 girls who had just completed their 3rd year of high school. Of these girls, one discontinued her

attendance after the 1st week, one was dismissed from Upward Bound after attending two sessions, and one discontinued after attending two sessions. Five girls attended at least four discussion sessions. The fluctuations in attendance were due to other evening obligations the girls had while in the Upward Bound Program.

Parental consent was obtained for all girls participating in the focus groups and surveys. In addition, girls in the focus groups gave consent at the start of the first meeting after hearing a detailed explanation of the research and being given an opportunity to ask questions. Also, since the topics being discussed had the potential to raise complex and sensitive issues for girls, the guidance counselor for the Upward Bound Program served as a familiar resource girls could consult should issues arise that required one-on-one help or counseling.

Data Collection

Focus groups met once a week for 5 weeks in the evening for a period of 75 minutes. The sessions were audiotaped and videotaped. Girls in the groups assumed responsibility for operating the camcorder in order to avoid bringing in an outside person to perform this task. The audiotapes were transcribed, and the videotapes were used to check the audiotapes, match who was speaking whenever possible, and to analyze the non-verbal communication of girls. The focus of each session was as follows:

- Session one -- Introductions, explanation of the research, ground rules and discussion about the conventions of femininity;
- Session two -- Ideal partners and ideal relationships and how these match with girls' realities, romance, and love;

- Session three – Speaking out or silencing selves in the face of conflict in romantic relationships;
- Session four – Decisions about sexual relationships; and
- Session five – Open for girls to choose the focus of the discussion.

Surveys were administered to girls in the focus groups at the start of the fifth session. I met with girls who volunteered to complete the survey but were not in focus groups and girls who were not in attendance at the last focus group meeting during a mealtime. Girls completed and immediately returned the surveys to me during this time. A total of 28 surveys were completed, 19 by girls who participated in focus groups and 9 by girls who had not participated in focus groups.

There was a dilemma about the best time to administer the survey to girls participating in the focus groups. If administered prior to the first focus group session, the survey could potentially influence girls' participation in the focus groups. If administered after the completion of focus groups, participation in the focus groups could potentially influence girls' responses to the survey. Since I viewed the focus groups as my primary method of data collection, I decided to administer the survey after the focus groups and to acknowledge that girls' responses to the surveys were likely influenced by their participation in the focus groups.

Data Analysis

Focus group data were analyzed using the Listening Guide Method (Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991; Brown & Gilligan, 1992), a feminist method of analysis. This method requires that the listener read the narratives at least four times, each time through a different lens. The first reading familiarizes the researcher with the

general story, including any themes or contradictions evident. This reading also requires the researcher to examine her relationship to the narrative, identifying points of their reactions, places of connection and disconnection, and personal experiences that are similar and dissimilar to that of the speakers. The second reading explores the use of the first person in the narratives. The focus of the third reading examined how girls interpret and respond to cultural conventions and messages about sexual desire and sexual relationships. Case studies of three girls were developed to illustrate how three seemingly different girls negotiate sexual desire, behavior, and relationships. The fourth reading examined how girls construct sexual desire, behavior, and relationships in the context of the group.

The survey asked girls to respond to questions using a 6-point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. A response of strongly agree was given a score of six, agree five, more agree than disagree four, more disagree than agree three, disagree two, and strongly disagree one. Questions 4, 5, 10, 16, 19, 20, 22, 28, and 34 were scored in reverse. For example, a girl who strongly agrees with question 4, "I would not change the way I think in order to please others" received a score of one. A total score for each girl was computed for the AFIS sub-scale ISR by adding girls' responses to questions 1 through 10. The score for the AFIS sub-scale ORB was computed using girls' responses to questions 11 through 16, 18, 19, 20, and 22. Responses to questions 17 and 21 were omitted from the scoring of this scale based on the authors' revisions to the scales (D.L., personal communication, October 3, 2000). A score for the RCI was computed using girls' responses to questions 23 through 34. The higher the scores on the scales, the greater the degree to which a girl has internalized the conventions of femininity measured

by that particular scale. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were computed for each item as well as each scale. A reliability analysis was conducted on each scale to examine the reliability of the scales when used with girls in this study. A correlation between scales was also conducted. In addition, the scores of each of the three girls described in the case studies are reported and examined in light of these girls' voices as represented in the qualitative data.

Research Design Summary

The multi-method design used was a viable research methodology. The focus groups, which met multiple times, encouraged the discussions to go beyond the initial awkwardness often present when adults attempt to explore sensitive issues with adolescent girls. This group served as social context in which girls not only responded to my questions but also narrated stories of their experiences, shared their beliefs, and interacted with each other to explore, clarify, and sometimes complicate the explanation of girls' relationship to the ideals of femininity and romantic relationships. The AFIS scales and the RCI filled the role of providing additional information to assist me in understanding how poor and working-class girls in this study relate to white middle-class conventions of femininity.

CHAPTER IV
NEGOTIATING FEMININITY AND SEXUALITY:
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In middle-class American society there are explicit and implicit standards used to judge adolescent girls' sexual behavior. These standards contribute to a good girl/bad girl dichotomy. In the strictest of interpretations, "good" girls are controlled. Their sexual desire is controlled, their behavior is controlled, and their reproduction is controlled. On the other end of the scale are "bad" girls who are out of control. These girls flagrantly display their desire, are "promiscuous" in their sexual interactions, have children out of wedlock, and become infected with sexually transmitted diseases. The goal of this chapter is to examine how girls from working-class and poor families conform to, maintain, challenge, and interrupt this good/bad girl dichotomy. Using qualitative and quantitative data I explore how girls relate to conventions of femininity and romantic relationships, especially those conventions that speak to their sexual desire and behavior. I examine how the dichotomy of good and bad girls frames sexual desire and behavior in the group. I then listen to three girls as they negotiate the good/bad girl dichotomy and then examine their scores on the AFIS and the RCI in light of their voices. I have chosen to highlight these three girls because they appeared to negotiate the good/bad girl dichotomy in different ways.

Girl Talk

The good/bad girl dichotomy is socially constructed for girls. Social norms dictate how a girl should think, feel and act in order to be deemed as a good girl. This construction extends to girls' sexual behavior. The focus group setting provided a social

context, though artificially constructed, in which to explore how girls negotiate the confines of good/bad girls. It presented the opportunity to examine the ways in which they reinforce and reproduce the dichotomy in their peer culture. For example, I was able to detect how they use the dichotomy to control, judge, and regulate each other's behaviors. As they responded to my questions, asked each other questions, articulated their opinions, and narrated their experiences, it became evident that their relationships with middle-class ideals about relationships and sexuality are complicated, not easily categorized, and must be contextualized if they are to be understood.

Over the Line

I begin with an examination of one group's efforts to embarrass Natalie, a girl who has stepped over the good/bad line. On the evening of the 4th week, the focus of the discussion is on decisions about sex. I ask the group "What kinds of things do you think about when you're deciding whether or not to have sex?" Initially there's some banter to deal with individual embarrassment. Finally, one of the girls, Natalie, redirects the group by repeating the question. It becomes obvious that there is a story concerning Natalie and a sexual encounter, which has apparently happened since our last meeting and of which others in the group have knowledge. The girls make several attempts to pressure Natalie into sharing the story in the group setting.

Natalie: What kinds of things do you think about?

Mary: Yeah

Laughter

Unidentified group member: What are you thinking? Do you think?

Natalie: No . . . it all depends on the situation.

Mandy: Who with?

Natalie: Yeah.

Mary: So tell me what some of those situations would be?

Mandy: Go ahead Natalie.

Natalie: (with sarcasm in her voice) I don't know. I've never been in that predicament.

Laughter

Karla: Your face is all red.

Natalie: Why are you looking at me?

Karla: Okay Natalie answer.

Natalie: Go for it. You have the floor. (Redirecting to Karla)

When I ask, "How do you make a decision about whether or not to have sex?" the group lists off issues including, "your conscience," pregnancy, and disease. When the issue of how well you know your partner is mentioned, the discussion again focuses in on Natalie.

Mandy: Not knowing him that well.

Mary: So how well do you need to know someone?

Laughter

Natalie: Why is everyone looking at me again? Alicia?

Alicia: All you Natalie.

Unidentified group member: Come on Natalie.

As the discussion continues and several girls try to further explain how they make a decision about sex, they articulate one criterion as being whether or not you will regret your actions.

Alicia: If you have doubts in the beginning anyway you shouldn't be doing it.

Amanda: Yeah Natalie.

Alicia: I knew that was coming.

Mary: Why do you keep looking at Natalie?

Alicia: Do you really want to know?

Mary: No, not unless Natalie's telling.

This is one of those times that as the researcher, I felt compelled to step in to support Natalie's resistance to the persistent pressure by the other girls. It seemed that whatever Natalie has done, the other girls wanted to use the group as a way to shame her. They wished to bring what they see as her indiscretion out into the open in order to critique it against their criterion for a "good" decision. They held out Natalie's behavior as an example of a "poor" decision and the threat of embarrassment as the price she must pay for her breach of the rules. Despite the group's insistence, Natalie refused to yield to their attempts to sanction her behavior.

Good vs. Bad Decisions

Not regretting your behavior arises in several discussions as a standard by which to judge a decision about sexual intercourse. Andrea, who is especially conscious of good and bad and often struggles with keeping herself and her peers within the confines of the good, puts her own decision to have sex out there for a group critique.

Andrea: What do you think is a good time, like how long to wait [before having intercourse]?

Stephanie: That doesn't have a time like . . .

Dana: Umhmm. It's when it happens.

Stephanie: There's no time. It could be like a year, it could be like 2 months, and it could be two weeks. It just depends on how you feel about the person.

Andrea: I feel hard because I didn't wait no time at all but it's like . . .

Margo: Do you regret it?

Andrea: No.

Dana: If you don't regret it then it's . . .

The group offers Andrea assurance that she has acted within the boundaries of good girls.

The boundary here is not outlined by time but by a feeling of regret. If one does not regret their decision to have sex, then they have made a good decision. Conversely, if one regrets their decision, then it would be considered a poor decision.

What Makes a Slut?

“Slut” is a particularly familiar term in adolescent girls’ vocabulary. The word is used to label girls and to hold the girls accountable to the standards for a “good” girl.

The following three exchanges between the girls exemplify the importance and complexity of the term slut.

In the first exchange girls acknowledge that being labeled a slut sometimes has no connection to whether or not one has had sex.

Jenny: I've been called “easy” so many times in my life. I don't even take it to heart anymore.

Mary: What is that supposed to mean when someone says that?

Karla: That you give it out every chance that you get.

Natalie: Yeah but you know what, when everyone calls everyone a slut half the people who have been called a slut have never even slept with anyone.

Mary: So how do they get the name?

Justice: Like if you kiss like two people you're like a slut but . . .

Catalina: Or if you have sex.

Lynn: Or if you date a lot of different guys.

Jenny: Or if you have friends, like I have guy best friends that I like to give a hug to in the morning. Then I'll give another hug to my other guy friends and they'll see me hug both of them and they're like "SLUT!"

Felicity: Or sometimes it's the way you dress because I know I've been called a slut quite a few times and because I like to wear tank tops because I wear what I think is comfortable. . . . I don't wear like really, really skimpy?

Justice: You mean like half naked stuff?

Natalie: It also has to do with guys. If you don't put out to a guy, they'll come around school and say like everything about you. You're like whatever and you're mad because . . . I won't let you.

In the second exchange girls not only acknowledge the disconnection between the word slut and one's sexual history but also the motivations of those who would label one a slut and the difference in how male and female behavior is judged.

Natalie: You can have sex with one person and you are the biggest slut.

Alicia: Or you know it can be the first time.

Natalie: You can have sex with no one and you can be friends with all the guys and they'll be like "Oh my god! She is the biggest slut." And she doesn't even have sex.

Catalina: Most of it's jealousy.

Natalie: But it's alright for the guys because if a guy sleeps with a lot of people they're friends are like "Oh yeah, that was good. Good job!"

In the third exchange girls struggle with constructing a definition of the word "slut" that excludes themselves.

Tika: Bunch of sluts in our town.

Mary: What does a girl have to do in order for you to think of her as a slut?

Tika: Have sex with every guy.

Tessa: Any guy

Unidentified group member: And not be going out with them.

Dana: The worst one.

Andrea: We got a girl at school, she doesn't sleep with 'em, she just like, she flirts really bad. Gets 'em right to the point and then says no. But the guys keep going back but they know they're not going to get anything but they know . . . it's just kind of, they can mess around but she won't do anything. It's like, she's not technically a slut, but she's basically, she's slutty.

Dana: You really have to be careful in our town anyway. Like I think every other girl has a disease. It's not like . . .

Tika: There's a lot.

Dana: It's just like they have Herpes and stuff.

Tika: Genital warts and stuff.

Dana: Yeah.

Tika: I don't know. I think like everyone's a slut anyway, "Look at her she's a slut. That girl's a slut right there."

Mary: So what differentiates a slut from somebody who just sleeps with their boyfriend?

Tika: I think a slut is anybody who sleeps with anybody.

Andrea: Nooo!

Tessa: I mean, I think it's anybody that sleeps around and they're not going out with them and they like sleep with more than one person like in the same week, same night.

(Dana has a smirk on her face and is keeping her eyes downcast during this part of the discussion).

Andrea: Yeah.

Dana: That's too hard of a one to even talk about.

Mary: Why?

Dana: Cause I just don't . . .

Tessa: Too many of 'em around. Not enough people like me.

Dana: There's so many. . . .

Tika: Somebody who has their pants off more than they do on. That works.

Dana: That does.

These dialogues illustrate the power of the word slut for girls in these groups. The fact that the criteria used to determine if one is a slut is often applied arbitrarily, and at

times without cause, does not escape these girls. They recognize that one only needs to be perceived as being free with their desire in order to be branded a slut. A behavior as innocent as having male friends and showing public affection to these male friends puts a girl at risk for being labeled. The girls also understand that controlling one's actual sexual behavior is not insurance against being called a slut. Others can label a girl a slut at will and with no need to prove their allegation. In fact, one girl names jealousy as the motivation behind such unfounded accusations. Most of the girls' dialogue indicates that it is often other girls who initiate the use of the word slut, but there are also times when boys attempt to regulate girls' behavior by labeling them slut. This is evident in Natalie's statement about a boy spreading rumors to retaliate because a girl has refused to engage in a sexual encounter with him. However, if a girl does have a sexual encounter with a boy outside of an ongoing relationship, she risks being called a slut by other girls.

The exact criterion for what constitutes a slut is unstable, constantly in flux. As described by these girls, a wide array of behaviors, from flirting to having sex with multiple partners, can earn a person the label of slut. Given this shifting nature of the slut criteria, girls are vulnerable to crossing the line without even knowing they have done so. In struggling to describe how the label slut is applied to girls, individuals in the groups try to assure that they are able to exclude themselves and their behaviors from the descriptions. This is evident when Tika proposes a definition that states a slut is "anyone who sleeps with anybody." Andrea, who has only had sex with one boy, quickly and emphatically says "no" to signal her disagreement and her position. Dana, who has narrated many stories of sexual escapades with boys, tries to disrupt the definition by focusing on girls that have sexually transmitted diseases. When her attempt to divert the

discussion is unsuccessful, she becomes noticeably uncomfortable in both her verbal and nonverbal behavior. When Tessa suggests that a slut is anyone who sleeps with someone they're not going out with, Dana mumbles "that's too hard a one to even talk about." Finally, a description of a slut is offered that Dana is sure excludes her, "someone who has their pants off more than they do on" and she agrees that the definition "works."

Throughout the dialogues girls allude to the fact that a slut is a girl who experiences her desire but does not commit to a relationship. Girls who are comfortable dressing to their own liking, show affection to multiple platonic male friends, and who engage in sexual behavior with multiple boys, even if that behavior does not include intercourse, can all fit this criteria.

The Connection Between Relationships and Sex

Given the descriptions of what constitutes a slut, it is not surprising that a distinguishing factor between good and bad girls expressed by girls in this group is the context in which girls have sexual intercourse. Good girls have sex within the context of a relationship. The girls in this study seem determined to let others know that they adhere to this standard. Dana lets the group know that despite her talk about "messing around," her language for intimate sexual behavior which does not include sexual intercourse, she shares, "I have only been with four people so that's not bad. That's actually pretty good compared to my friends." She is also certain to let the group know that when she has sex with a person, she "more or less stays with that person." The power of the convention that says good girls only have sexual intercourse in the context of a relationship is strong enough so that it is negotiated prior to a sexual encounter as in this story, even when other concerns such as pregnancy prevention are not discussed. In

response to my question, “Have you ever felt pressure to do something you didn’t want to do?” the following dialogue occurs.

Dana: This was her first time.

Tessa: No, it’s just like I was at a party and then I left the party like at 3:30 in the morning and went to this guy’s house. But the way he got me to his house was he had a broken ankle and he left his crutches like at this house and it was just like across the street. He went in and wanted me to walk over with him. So, I walked over with him and then we started.

Dana: You could have summed it up for me like that.

Laughter

Mary: So, where was the pressure.

Tessa: When we went inside.

Dana: There’s always pressure on your first time though.

Tessa: No, I didn’t want to do it. I was scared or something but then after I did it . . . I wasn’t going out with him at the time I did it. Actually then we started going out and I was okay with it.

Mary: So, would you have felt different about it if it hadn’t ended up in a relationship?

Tessa: I wouldn’t have done it if it wouldn’t have ended up in a relationship.

Like I told him I didn’t want to do it unless we were gonna be together.

Andrea: How long was the relationship?

Dana: Like 2 days.

Laughter

Tika: I was waiting for something like that.

Tessa: I don't know it was probably like . . . I don't know.

In this story, Tessa's first experience with sexual intercourse is with a boy with whom she does not have a previous relationship. However, she negotiates a relationship by letting him know that she will only have intercourse with him if they are going to have a relationship. Based upon this negotiation she is able to justify her decision as being within the acceptable bounds of good girl behavior despite the brief duration of the relationship. Her justification is shaken slightly when the others in the group call her on the length of the relationship and she resorts, "I don't know."

To Plan or Not To Plan

A particular tension that arises for girls in trying to negotiate the boundaries of good and bad girls is whether a sexual encounter is constructed as planned or spontaneous. The following dialogue highlights this dilemma.

Mandy: It can be a last minute decision.

Karla: That sounds good for you Amanda.

Mary: It is really a last minute decision when you have sex with somebody?

Alicia: Not for me.

Mandy: It's not like you can plan it. Like yeah I'm gonna have sex with say like blah, blah . . .

Natalie: Hey you don't know that.

Mandy: It depends on a lot of stuff but I don't know it's not something you.. .

Felicity: Like really you don't sit there on your bed and say, "Damn, I wonder if I'm going to have sex."

Natalie: You might not.

Felicity: “Maybe I should. Maybe I shouldn’t.” You know you’re not going to sit there and think about it.

Catalina: I think about it as soon as I start dating a guy. I think about if I would.

Mandy: You can picture yourself. It’s the first thing you think about when you start dating. Can you picture yourself?

Natalie: Really not for me. The first time I see a guy is when I think about it.

Laughter

Mandy: Yeah we know Natalie.

Alicia: (mumbling with her head in her hands) Oh lord!

This dialogue highlights the complications experienced by girls in even interpreting this standard. If an encounter is spontaneous, than it most likely is not in the context of a relationship. If a sexual encounter is planned, that implies that a girl has given sex some forethought. Giving sex forethought may mean that a girl has to acknowledge her desire for sex. She may even need to admit that she fantasizes about a person she does not really know or with whom she does not have a relationship. The dilemma here is whether or not a girl can be a good girl if she admits to sexual desire and fantasy. Can a girl justify forethought about sex as making a responsible decision within the context of a meaningful relationship?

Controlling Desire

Control of sexual desire emerges as a major theme in the girls’ stories about negotiating the good/had girl dynamic. Girls stories show evidence of the enormous responsibility they feel to not only control their own desire but also the desire of boys.

Flirting is a way for girls to play with desire. The following discussion illustrates the way in which girls narrate the pleasures and cautions of flirting and how control enters the story.

Tessa: I have so many broad definitions of flirting. Like I can walk past somebody and hit them and like they hit me back or whatever and I can call that flirting. If I like that guy and then like . . . I don't know, just like holding hands and talking.

Mary: So what do you like best about it?

Tessa: It's fun if you're like single and if you just want to have fun and you don't really want to do something that you'll regret. Flirting works cause it like gets the guys.

Dana: (with a note of sarcasm in her voice) I'm never gonna flirt again.

Mary: Why is that?

Dana: I get myself in too much trouble.

Mary: By flirting?

Dana: I just. . .

Tessa: If you flirt too much, you do.

Dana: Lately, I've been flirting way too much.

Andrea: You can get a name for flirting.

Dana: I flirted with this one guy and he just decided he liked me so we were seeing each other and I don't agree with that.

Tessa: Some guys if you flirt with them like all night long and they know you are flirting with them all night long, then they can take advantage of you. But if you

have your mind set up that you're going to do that until you get a boyfriend, then you're all set. You just have to watch yourself when you flirt.

Dana: I just. . .

Tessa: You have to know when to stop, when to call it quits.

Dana: I kept flirting until I had like 10 guys lined up that I like.

Tessa: Then you have to play eanie, meanie, minie, moe which is the cutest?

Dana: I have 6 guys that I'm playing hard core cause I flirted with them. So now I'm trying to keep all of them separate so they don't know.

Tessa: "What did you do last night? I kissed Dana. I kissed her too."

Dana: It's down to that right there. I mean I wouldn't go sleep with every one of them but I just had fun flirting with them and they're really right in love.

Tessa narrates a story of controlled desire. Her story is about knowing when to go forward and when to stop. Dana, on the other hand, narrates a story of desire that pushes the boundaries and that appears to be out of control. She enjoys telling about her dilemma of 6 or maybe 10 boys now in love with her because of her flirting. She does, however, make sure the group understands that she is in control of desire. After all, she would not "sleep" with all of them. In Dana's vocabulary the word "sleep" is used to imply sexual intercourse.

As shown in the previous dialogue, Dana enjoys narrating tales about playing with desire and pushing the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Often Andrea is the one who feels the need to socialize her about the limits of proper behavior and the need to control desire.

Dana: I don't agree with seeing. You always get yourself in trouble.

Mary: How so?

Dana: Cause if you're, if you're seeing one person and they think it's more and then you see someone else . . .

Andrea: That's why you make it clear.

Dana: . . . and then you see someone else. Then you just feel really dumb after that.

Andrea: See, like I'm seeing Davie. Like we're together, it's like you know.

Dana: Yes, but I can't kiss someone else and then the next day go kiss someone else cause I was only seeing them. I can't do that. I've done it before but I can't do it.

Andrea: But you can't do it!

Dana: I've done it.

Andrea: No, no, I'm with him. I don't . . . if I'm with him; I'm seeing him. I'm with him.

Mary: So seeing implies you're just with each other?

Dana: No, like you mess around that's it.

Andrea's efforts to make Dana understand the error of her ways is lost on Dana, or perhaps Dana is enjoying teasing Andrea by purposely stepping over the line into bad girl.

Girls in this study internalize society's message that they are responsible for controlling not only their own sexual desire, but also the desire of their partners. Boys are framed as sexual predators, not partners in sexual decisions or behaviors. In this version of the story girls, not boys, must accept the consequences of uncontrolled desire

that leads to sexual behavior. In one discussion on birth control, Mandy says, “I don’t like condoms. I hate ‘em. I stick with my birth control [pills] and if that don’t work, it’s my own fault for spreading my legs.”

The extent to which the girls in this study have internalized the cultural message about responsibility and blame are demonstrated in the following dialogue.

Jenny: I’ve seen my friend after she got raped.

Mary: After she got raped?

Jenny: By her mother’s boyfriend.

Mary: What was that like for you?

Jenny: I was so scared. She was a virgin. She wasn’t planning on having sex until she was married. He did it to her sister and her best friend too and he’s not in jail.

Mary: Did she tell somebody?

Jenny: She went to the police but he’s not in jail. They blamed it on her. Said she was a slut.

Mary: Do you think women and girls get blamed a lot for rape?

Mandy: Some people bring it on themselves I believe.

Mary: Like what do they do?

Amanda: Like they just throw themselves at a guy, hang all over them and then expect them not to think anything.

Catalina: Or wear really, really revealing clothing.

Amanda: But that’s, that’s, I don’t see that as something . . .

Justice: I heard of people who lie about being raped.

Amanda: Yeah there's girl that was with six guys one night and said she was raped.

Mary: Lied and said she was raped?

Justice and Amanda: Mmmhm!

Mary: So why would they do that?

Justice: Attention.

Amanda: Because guys didn't really like her. They just like . . .

Justice: It's more common than most people think it is.

Mary: Rape is?

Justice: No lying about it.

Even in the face of Jenny's story about her friend, the girls repeat the horrific message that they have come to know so well. Girls and women are responsible for their own rapes. They reproduce the stories that say girls (or women) who are raped asked for it; girls who yield to uncontrollable desire "slutty" behavior call it rape to save their reputation and; girls cry rape to get attention. Confronted with this construction of girls' responsibility to control desire one can begin to understand the narrow limitations within which girls must frame their sexual desire and behavior.

Struggles with constructions of good and bad girls, Madonna and slut, leave girls who acknowledge their desire without a label for themselves other than those which would be associated with sluts, whores, and perverts regardless of whether they act upon their desire or not. The following two stories illustrate this point. The first story is about Maria who participates in the group only the 1st week. When she initially introduces herself, she says, "I'm currently single because I'm just a little too perverted. Sometimes

I get even worse than they [the boys] do. Maybe that's the reason I'm single." Later in the evening the following exchange occurs,

Maria: The only time a girl of my kind gets a boyfriend is if she puts out.

Leslie: But you said you were a pervert, so how's that a problem?

Maria: I haven't had sex yet! That's the problem. Boys know I won't give it to them although I talk about it a lot."

Maria later explains that there are three reasons she has never had sex; her Baptist upbringing, her knowledge that her mother would "dump her as fast as she could" if she ever found out that she was having sex, and her fear "about what's going to happen after she has it." Maria labels herself perverted because for her there is no alternative way to describe or to understand the strong, confusing urges she feels in her body.

The second story is about an exchange between Natalie and Alicia as they leave the group one evening. That particular evening the discussion is focused on sexual decisions and relationships. Natalie has taken more risks than anyone in the group that evening. She has narrated several stories about sexual behavior and desire, particularly the strength of her desire. As the girls exit the room Alicia says to Natalie, "I can't believe you said all that." Natalie replies by saying, "Hey, I'm a slut and I don't care who knows it." For Natalie it may be easier to label herself a slut than to wait for the judgment of others. Her statement and tone of voice seem to indicate that she is resigned to the fact that girls like her, girls who openly acknowledge, claim, and act upon their desire will be labeled sluts. In her world, the world of adolescent girls, and especially the world of working-class and poor girls, there are no alternative labels for girls who acknowledge and own their desire.

What the Numbers Say or Don't Say

Twenty-eight girls, 19 involved in the focus groups and 9 not involved in the focus groups, completed a survey intended to measure the extent to which girls have “internalized or resisted” middle-class ideals about femininity and romantic relationships. The survey consisted of 36 questions, 22 from the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale (AFIS) and 12 from Romantics Conventions Index (RCI). The AFIS and RCI were both developed by Deborah Tolman at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women (Tolman, 1999a; in press). These scales were used with the hope that they could provide additional information with which to interpret girls’ relationships with conventional ideals of femininity and romantic relationships.

Respondents were asked to rate their response to each item using a 6-point scale. Choices ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. A strongly disagree was scored as a 1 and strongly agree as a 6, except in the cases where the items was scored in reverse. For example, on item number five, “I tell me friends what I honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea” a girl who strongly agreed would receive a score of one instead of six. On all items, the higher a girl’s score the greater the degree to which she internalized middle-class conventional scripts about femininity and romance. Tolman (1999a, in press) hypothesizes that a greater degree of internalization of femininity ideology and romantic conventions places a girl at greater risk for health and psychological problems. It should be noted that in the survey used in this study, the Likert scale was presented as strongly agree to strongly disagree, the opposite of how Tolman indicates she presented her scale.

Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale

The AFIS measures two constructs of adolescent girls' femininity ideology, Inauthentic Self in Relationships (ISR) and Objectified Relationship with Body (ORB). Tolman cautions against computing a total score for the AFIS and instead advises that separate scores be computed for each sub-scale. In her opinion, the two scales are related but we still lack a sufficient theoretical base to justify combining the two scales (D.L. Tolman, personal communication, October 3, 2000). In this analysis I have chosen to heed Tolman's caution and have analyzed the data as two scales.

The ISR scale consists of 10 questions and measures the extent to which girls internalize conventions that encourage them to regulate and compromise themselves in relationships with other girls. Items 1 through 10 on the survey correspond with this scale. When tested with a sample of 53 high school girls, Tolman and Porche (1999, in press) found the reliability of the ISR scale to be .75. I computed a Cronbach's alpha for the ISR scale for this study, as shown in [Table 1](#) and found it to be .68, slightly lower than Tolman found with her sample. The item correlations, which measure the correlation of an individual variable with the other items in the scale, reveal that the following questions have a correlation of $< .10$; "I worry that I make others feel bad if I am successful" (.07) and "I would not change the way I think in order to please someone else" (.08). This suggests that for this sample these questions may have been troublesome. In the first of these questions, the word "successful" may not resonate with poor and working-class girls. For most, their parents have not experienced "success" in the way society defines success. Girls' problems with the second of these statements, which refers to changing their thinking to please others, is best understood in the context

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Inauthentic Self in Relationship Sub-scale Items

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
I would tell a friend she looks nice, even if I think she shouldn't go out of the house dressed like that.	28	2.64	1.52
I express my opinion only if I can think of a nice way to do it.	28	3.14	1.46
I worry that I make others feel bad if I am successful.	28	2.50	1.43
I would not change the way I think in order to please someone else.*	28	2.79	1.75
I tell my friends what I honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea.	28	2.21	1.20
Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others even if I don't feel happy on the inside.	28	4.29	1.49
I wish I could say what I feel more often than I do.	28	3.93	1.36
I feel like it is my fault when I have disagreements with my friends.	28	3.46	1.43

Table 1 cont'd

When my friends ignore my feelings, I think that my feelings weren't very important.	28	2.96	1.43
I usually tell my friends when they have hurt my feelings.	27	3.19	1.59

Note. Items are scored 1 to 6 with 1 being equal to strongly disagree and strongly agree.

In cases where the item is followed by an asterisk, the scoring was reversed: 1 was equal to strongly agree and 6 to strongly disagree. On all items, the higher the score the greater the degree to which girls have internalized the femininity ideology measured by the item.

of their stories meant to display their toughness and invulnerability. For example, Dana says of her plans to join the military and her newly developing relationship, "The guy I'm seeing now I already warned him the day I graduate I'm out of this town. He can follow me if he wants or he can stay behind. I don't care." Catalina, who claims she doesn't speak up often, explains that she does speak up if a boy tries to tell her with whom she can and can't spend time. She says, "I'm like you're not gonna tell me who I can hang out with and who I can't hang out with. If you don't like it, that's tough." When Lisa's boyfriend tried to tell her he didn't want her to hang out with her male friends, she told him that he either "needed to deal [with it] or walk." Repeatedly, the girls narrate stories meant to showcase their resistance to being told what to do or think. It is possible that this question, evoked girls performances of toughness and invulnerability.

Descriptive statistics for items in ISR sub-scale are detailed in [Table 1](#). The results show that the girls were least likely to internalize the convention that dictates that a girl silence herself in peer relationships. They scored lowest on the item, “I tell my friends what I honestly think even it is an unpopular idea” suggesting that girls in this study are less likely to silence themselves in their peer relationships than were middle- and upper-middle-class girls in Brown and Gilligan’s 1992 study.

Objectified Relationship with Body Sub-scale

The ORB scale as published in Tolman and Porche’s working paper (1999) consisted of 12 items that I used in the survey completed by girls in my study. My initial attempts to score and analyze responses to this scale raised questions about how two of the questions, numbered 17 and 21 in my survey, were intended to fit into the overall scale. In a discussion with Deborah Tolman (personal communication, October 3, 2000), I learned that in her ongoing work to refine the AFIS, she had dropped two questions from the ORB scale. These two questions, “When I like someone I get all fluttery inside” and “When I am happy about something, I get tingles in my body” were difficult for girls to interpret. Based on my discussion with Tolman, I eliminated these questions from my analysis. It should also be noted that item number 3 in this scale, “A girl has to be beautiful to feel beautiful” was changed to read “A girl has to be thin to feel beautiful” in Tolman’s final version of the scale. The Cronbach alpha for this scale in my study was a .77 close to Tolman’s .80 for her sample of high school girls. The descriptive statistics for the items in this scale are reported in [Table 2](#).

As a group, girls were least likely to internalize the convention that says, “I think a girl has to have a light complexion and delicate features to be thought of as beautiful.”

Their low score on this item might be explained by their lack of experience with racial diversity. A predominately white-skinned population in Maine, especially in rural areas, may mean that judgments based on skin color are not something that these girls have thought about or been exposed to.

Girls appear to have a complex relationship with ideals about girls' bodies. They were most likely to internalize the conventions that encourage girls to be dissatisfied with their bodies scoring highest on the item that reads, "I often wish my body were different." The next highest scoring item, "The way I can tell I'm a good weight is when I fit into a smaller size" may be an indication of the way in which girls wish for their bodies to be different. However, one of girls' lowest scoring items, "I decide how much to eat by how hungry I am" indicates that these girls may not be willing to sacrifice eating to fit into the smaller size clothing. The qualitative data indicates that girls understand and can articulate the ideals for the female body. They describe the "right look" as including "perfect hair . . . perfect make-up . . . really expensive clothes," being "a certain size, skinny . . . and tall." One girl explained that the right look also means that a girl is, "smaller than [she is] and has bigger tits. It's like everyone is looking for the perfect size and the perfect figure." The tone of voice and manner in which the girls list the criteria is as if they are reading a grocery list. Despite their articulation of the ideals, the girls' interrupt them with their critique, identifying the lack of reality embodied in the ideals. Amy shares her observation about her school where, "Not everybody's like you have to be a size 2 and nobody is a size 2. I mean there are some small people but you don't have to be small to be popular. And you don't have to

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Objectified Relationship with Body Sub-scale Items

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
The way I can tell that I am at a good weight is when I fit into a small size.	28	3.86	1.63
I often wish my body were different.	28	4.54	1.62
I think that a girl has to beautiful to feel beautiful.	28	2.32	1.39
I think a girl has to have a light complexion and delicate features to be thought of as beautiful.	28	2.11	1.42
I am more concerned about how my body looks than how my body feels.	28	3.64	1.54
I feel comfortable looking at all parts of my body.*	27	3.81	1.55
I often feel uncomfortable in my body.	28	3.82	1.66
There are times when I have really good feelings in my body.*	28	2.75	1.17
The way I decide I am at a good weight is when I feel healthy.	28	2.93	1.51
I decide how much to eat by how hungry I am.	28	2.29	1.08

Table 2 cont'd

Note. Items are scored 1 to 6 with 1 being equal to strongly disagree and 6 to strongly agree. In cases where the item is followed by an asterisk, the scoring was reversed: 1 was equal to strongly agree and 6 to strongly disagree. On all items, the higher the score the greater the degree to which girls have internalized the femininity ideology measured by the item.

be pretty.” Maria further complicates the analysis of bodies by bringing class to the discussion when she says, “I think it’s really your social status like where you stand. I notice that’s a big thing because I’m not on the social ladder at school. The only time a girl of my kind gets a boyfriend is if she puts out.”

Romantic Conventions Index

The Romantic Conventions Index is composed of twelve questions corresponding to questions 23 through 34 on the survey completed by the girls in my study. Also developed by Tolman, these questions measure the extent to which girls have internalized the conventions of heterosexual romantic relationships. These conventions “reflect the norms regulating heterosexual relationships and center on girls identifying and meeting boys’ needs, including their sexual desires, and encouraging girls to seek and maintain these relationships at the expense of their own needs and desires” (Tolman 1999b, p. 135). In order to keep the response scale for RCI consistent with that of the AFIS, I used a 6-point Likert-type scale. This differs from Tolman’s 4-point Likert-type scale. I computed a Cronbach’s alpha for the Romantic Conventions Index and found it to be .78, slightly higher than the .75 alpha Tolman found with her sample. Tolman’s sample for

the RCI consisted of eighth grade girls compared to my sample, which consisted of girls entering the 3rd and 4th years of high school. This age difference may account for the slightly higher reliability with my sample as high school girls have more experience on which to base their responses to the questions. Descriptive statistics for items in this scale are reported in [Table 3](#).

Girls scored low on several of the items in this scale. The lowest mean score was in response to the item, “I think a girl should do sexual things with a boy just to keep him happy.” When placed in the contexts of the girls’ voices, this finding is not surprising. In fact in girls’ discussions regarding decisions about sex, the issue of boys’ happiness was not identified as an issue. Instead, girls were more concerned about their issues such as whether or not they were in a relationship and whether or not they believed they would later regret their decision.

Three items on this scale measure the degree to which girls have internalized the message that they must have a boyfriend: (a) “I believe a girl should have a boyfriend to make her life complete;” (b) “Other things are more important to me than having a romantic relationship;” and (c) “Getting a boyfriend is unimportant to me.” Interestingly girls score low on the first two of these items, (1.89 and 2.29 respectively) but their score of 3.57 on the third item is their highest on this scale. On this scale that would be interpreted to mean that a girl has internalized the last item to a greater degree than the first two items. Examination of the item correlations for the scale show that the last item, “Getting a boyfriend is unimportant to me” has a negative correlation (-.42) with “I believe a girl should have a boyfriend to make her life complete” and a low correlation

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Romantic Conventions Index Items

	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
I believe a girl should have a boyfriend to make her life complete.	28	1.89	1.40
I think girls should try to dress in a way that boys like.	28	2.21	1.52
I think a girl should do sexual things with a boyfriend just to keep him happy.	28	1.64	1.22
I believe a girl knows for sure that she is attractive when a boy shows interest.	28	2.86	1.58
It is natural for a girl not to have as much time for her friends when she has a boyfriend.	28	2.41	1.60
Getting a boyfriend is unimportant to me.	28	3.57	1.57
A girl should always try to please her boyfriend.	28	2.54	1.14
A girl should do whatever it takes to keep her boyfriend.	28	2.07	1.36
A girl should dress in a way that will keep her from getting a reputation.	28	3.57	1.43
A girl who has a boyfriend gets respect from other girls.	28	3.04	1.60

Table 3 cont'd

A girl should try to look appealing to boys.	28	3.18	1.33
Other things are more important to me than having a romantic relationship.	28	2.29	1.49

Note: Items are scored 1 to 6 with 1 being equal to strongly disagree and 6 to strongly agree. In cases where the item is followed by an asterisk, the scoring was reversed: 1 was equal to strongly agree and 6 to strongly disagree. On all items, the higher the score the greater the degree to which girls have internalized the femininity ideology measured by the item.

(.14) with “Other things are more important to me than having a romantic relationship.” Unlike these results, girls’ scores on items that are conceptually related would be expected to correlate. The discrepancy in girls’ responses raises questions about these items in the scale.

The item, “A girl should dress in a way that keeps her from getting a reputation” is also noteworthy of mention. Girls’ mean score on this item, 3.57, represents the highest score. One other item received this score. For these girls, this question is conceivably related to their struggle with the label slut. As indicated in the group analysis of girls’ definitions of, and use of the word slut, they are aware that the way a girl dresses could place her at risk for being labeled as a slut. Given girls’ struggles to avoid this label, it is not surprising that this convention would resonate with girls and, therefore, they score high.

Mean Scores

A mean score for each scale was computed using the mean scores for each of the items within that scale. As shown by Table 4, girls' mean score was highest, 3.28, for the ISR scale followed closely by 3.20 for the ORB scale. Girls scored lowest on the RCI scale. The lower the score the less girls have internalized conventional ideals about femininity or romance. Therefore, according to these scores, girls have internalized romance conventions to a lesser degree than conventional ideals about relationships with peers or relationship with their bodies.

Table 4

Mean Scores for AFIS Sub-scales and Romantic Conventions Index

	<u>N</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Inauthentic Self in Relationships	28	2.00	4.40	3.28	.62
Objectified Relationship with Body	28	1.60	5.00	3.20	.84
Romantic Conventions Index	28	1.75	5.00	2.61	.76

It is possible that girls in this study do internalize some conventions of romantic relationships. The focus group data clearly indicate that girls in the study struggle with conventions of romantic relationships especially when those conventions are related to sexuality. They are negotiating conventions that include their own sexual desire, whether or not sex can be planned, avoiding the label of slut, and keeping sexual intercourse within the context of a relationship. It may be that the way in which the conventions are framed and articulated in the RCI do not match poor and working-class girls' language or reality. The following example from the qualitative data illustrates this point. When I

ask the girls about a romantic time with a partner, several girls interpret this to mean a date and use this as an opportunity to educate me about the reality of living in rural Maine.

Mary: Leslie, you said there was no such thing?

Stephanie: Not in a small town not really, when I think of that I think of like going out on a date or something like that and it's like there isn't such thing as a date. Where are they going to take you, Ames?

(Laughter)

Unidentified group member: McDonalds.

Stephanie: Cause you could go to Fashion Bug after.

Andrea: "Hey let's go out tomorrow, to McDonalds."

Mary: So what do you usually do when you go out with someone?

Tika: We don't go out.

Stephanie: We don't date in our town.

A short time later I substitute the word "seeing" for dating. The girls use this as an opportunity to launch into a parody.

Mary: So seeing implies like you're just with each other? Is that what seeing implies?

Dana: No like, you mess around, that's it. (chuckle)

Stephanie: Seeing implies like you hang around and it's like you might make out or something every so often but you haven't actually come out and said "we're dating."

Tika: "Will you go out with me?"

Stephanie: “Will you go out with me?” That sounds so stupid!

Margo: That’s why I don’t use that. I don’t, I don’t use going out.

Tika: That’s all I hear.

Andrea: My “going out” is “seeing.” I call it dating cause that’s what we do. We date.

Mary: So you actually like . . .

Leslie: Do you want to be my girlfriend?

(Laughter)

Margo: Do you want to wear my class ring?

Yuck!

(Laughter)

Andrea: “Will you carry my books?”

Girls reject my attempts to place these labels on their relationships. The labels are outdated to the girls and they most likely sense the middle-class implications of labels such as “dating” or “seeing.” Language used in the scales such as “appealing,” “respect,” and “romantic relationship” are likely to be words that similarly do not resonate with these girls.

In addition to a language barrier, I also suspect that as written, the conventions in the RCI are too subtle for these girls and do not deal as directly with sex as they need to for these girls. Only one question asks directly about sex and one other implies sexual behavior; yet in the stories told by girls in this study, sex is a major theme. The romantic conventions with which these girls struggle are more complex and sexualized than those articulated in the RCI. Working with the girls I learned that nice polite language and

inferences used to refer to sexuality would not get a response from them. On one occasion, I gently approach the topic of sexual desire using my researcher language. I am interested in learning if girls consider their own sexual desire when making a decision about sex.

Mary: Where does your own sexual desires and feelings come into your decisions to have sex or to not have sex? And what do you do with those?

Dana: You lost me at the beginning.

Mary: There's a discussion, there's this body of new research that talks about some girls really having trouble identifying that they have sexual feelings and desires and owning those and feeling like they have a right to them.

Dana: You still lost me.

Mary: What do you do when you're horny Dana?

Laughter

Dana: Oh that's a good time!

It's clear that Dana either does not understand, or will not respond to my question, until I am willing to let go of my proper language and engage her on her terms, in her language and with the same directness that she relates to me. Complicating this analysis even further is the fact that Dana is the girl who scores highest on the RCI. Dana, the girl who most insists I speak in her language, seemingly responds to the language used on the survey. However, the case study of Dana which follows soon in the manuscript shows that Dana may choose when to relate and not relate to language which is not on her terms.

Correlations Between AFIS Scales and the RCI

I conducted an analysis of the correlation between the mean scores of the ISR and ORB sub-scales and the RCI. The reason for conducting this correlation is that theoretically one expects the sub-scales of the AFIS and the RCI to be related because the RCI is constructed to measure another dimension of femininity ideology -- girls' internalization of the how they should act in heterosexual romantic relationships. Tolman explained that she constructed the scale with high school girls in mind, and therefore, she would predict a higher correlation between the AFIS scales and the RCI than she found with the eighth grade girls in her study (D.L. Tolman, personal communication, October 3, 2000). As shown in [Table 5](#), there is a statistically significant correlation between the ISR and ORB sub-scales of the AFIS ($r = .40$, $p < .05$). The correlation between these two sub-scales is not as strong as the correlation for high school girls in Tolman's (in press) study ($r = .60$, $p < .001$). Unlike Tolman's study (1999b, p. 135) with 8th grade girls which showed a correlation ($r = .53$, $p < .001$) for white girls between the RCI and the ORB the correlation in this study ($r = .28$) was not significant. In this same study, Tolman reported that she did not find a significant correlation between the ISR sub-scale and the RCI but the correlation between these two scales was stronger for white girls in her study ($r = .22$) than in this study. The correlation between these two scales for the girls in this study was very weak ($r = .09$). A scatter-plot revealed that there were two outliers in the data. These two girls had higher than average scores on the RCI but average scores on the ISR and ORB sub-scales of the AFIS. There was not justification for removing the surveys of these two girls from the data.

Table 5

Correlations Between AFIS Sub-scales and Romantic Convention Index

		ISR	ORB	RCI
Inauthentic Self in Relationships	Pearson	1.00	.398*	.094
	Correlation		.036	.634
	Sig. (2-tailed)	28	28	28
Objectified Relationship with Body	Pearson	3.98 ^{**}	1.00	.275
	Correlation	.036		.156
	Sig. (2-tailed)	28	28	28
Romantic Conventions Index	Pearson	.094	.275	1.00
	Correlation	.634	.156	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	28	28	28

Note. *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Listening to Three Girls

The following are case studies of three girls who participated in the focus groups, Andrea, Dana, and Natalie. I chose to highlight the stories of these three girls because they presented three different approaches to negotiating the conventions of femininity and sexuality. Each case examines how the girl relates to conventions of femininity and sexuality as well as how she, and others, regulate her sexuality. Each case study also includes an analysis of the narrative voice each girl uses when telling her stories. This analysis, which is part of the Listening Guide Method, highlights the way each girl positions herself in her stories and helps one to understand the individual on her own terms.

Andrea: The Good Bad Girl

At 17 years old, Andrea has just completed her 3rd year of high school. Her dreams include attending college, a feat not previously accomplished by any of her family members. She describes herself as “quiet” and a “good [student] that always has her face in the books.” In her family, she is the responsible daughter, different from her younger sister who is perceived as the wilder one.

Andrea’s parents are divorced and she lives primarily with her dad. She describes her dad as “super strict.” Andrea’s mom was 16 when she became pregnant with Andrea. Her dad was 19 at the time. They have high expectations for Andrea and do not wish her to, as she says, “mess up like they did.” In order to avoid this, Andrea’s dad regulates her social activities, her friends, and her reproductive capabilities. At the age of 14, 3 years prior to her first encounter with sexual intercourse, her parents “made her go on the pill.” She was told “she had no choice” in the decision about whether or not to use birth

control pills. At the same time, her father made it clear to her that his actions did not imply that he was “giving permission” for her to have sex.

Andrea strives to be “good,” to live up to her parents’ expectations of her. She voices concern about how others view her. Her life in a small town has taught her that there’s not much you can keep private. In her world, even people she is not acquainted with seem to know intimate details about her.

“These people I don’t know . . . people at school know you. They know who you hang out with, they know where you live, they know just about . . . it seems like people know more about you than you know yourself.”

In addition to her parents, the eyes of these strangers that see and know all about her act as a regulator of Andrea’s behavior. As she says, “You kind of watch what you do [because] you don’t want them to say anything about you.” She is particularly cautious about behavior that places sexual desire on public display. She informs the group, that you need to be cautious about flirting because “you can get a name for flirting.” Andrea and her boyfriend “don’t maul each other in the hallway” at school. In her opinion there are “places for those things.” While Andrea wishes she could adopt an attitude of indifference toward others’ opinions of her, she admits that their opinions really do matter, “It’s like you really don’t care, but yet you really do. You may say you don’t but you really do care what they think.”

In the group interviews, Andrea speaks in a first person voice the majority of the time, claiming thoughts, feelings, and decisions.

I’m more kind of quiet . . . I think . . . I used protection . . . I took my pills . . . I don’t know what went wrong . . . I haven’t told . . . I wrote him an email . . . I told

him . . . I swore at him and swore at him . . . I wanted to keep it . . . I won't do it . . . I'll be honest I thought about it . . . I knew I couldn't do it . . . I cannot do it . . . I don't feel it's right . . . I can't kill a baby . . . I have a job . . . It really ticks me off. . . . I'm with one guy . . . we did everything they tell you . . . I told her I didn't want . . . I know it's gonna be hard . . . I don't think I could live the rest of my life knowing if I did . . . I had a lot of plans. I can still do them . . . I think I'll be fine.

There are times however, when Andrea switches to the third person narrative:

“You kind of like get to know . . . you just, you feel more . . . You already know . . . you're best friends . . . They know who you hang out with . . . where you live . . . you don't want them to say . . . you really don't care but yet you do. You know everyone has hard times, but you get through them.”

The transition from a first to a third person narration occurs when Andrea speaks about other's knowledge and perceptions of her.

Careful observation has led Andrea to an understanding that the line between “good” and “bad” is very thin. In a discussion on perfect girls, popular girls, Andrea reminds the other girls in the group that “they [the popular girls] are not as good as everyone thinks they are.” Her evidence is a story of one of her peers who is “the nice, perfect type, captain of the cheering team and you know has the hottest guy at school . . . and [whose] family is Catholic . . . becomes pregnant.”

Andrea's own experiences have further emphasized the fragility of the line between “good” and “bad” girls. While her goal was to keep her virginity until she graduated from high school, a romantic relationship, which began a few months prior to the study, has changed all that. Andrea is currently involved in her first sexual

relationship. Concerned that she did not wait the appropriate length of time before having sexual intercourse with her boyfriend, she poses the following question to the group, “What do you think is a good time, like how long to wait?” Andrea seems to be looking to her peers for confirmation that her decision was within “acceptable” bounds. Unable to self-affirm her behavior, she admits that she, “feels hard because [she] didn’t wait no time at all.” Desire has led Andrea to break the rules that organize her understanding of the confines of “good” girls. This breach of the rules brings her to a new understanding and revised criteria for “good” girls. Based upon this criterion, good girls act on their desire only “when they are with the right guy.” They have long-term monogamous relationships where they strive for closeness and intimacy with a partner and they act responsibly to prevent pregnancy. This last criterion, pregnancy prevention, may be the most important standard given Andrea’s family history. Her mother’s pregnancy during adolescence, her parents’ early marriage, and their divorce, give her an insider’s perspective on the impact teenage pregnancy has on one’s life.

During our 5 weeks together, Andrea learns that she is pregnant. In her struggle to cope with this situation, its effect on her life plans, and her relationship with her boyfriend, Andrea articulates her disbelief and her anger. Andrea’s organization and reorganization of the rules of romance and sexuality for “good” girls have been thrown into chaos. After all, she has followed the rules for “good” girls who have sex. She has waited until a much older age than her peers at school before having intercourse with a partner, she has one partner, and they have used birth control pills and condoms “every time but once.” It does appear from Andrea’s story that she has been faithful in the use

of her birth control pills until her health care provider changed her birth control pill, instructing her to wait for her period prior to beginning her new prescription.

During the time between birth control prescriptions, she admits to having sex without condoms one time. Given her faithfulness, to birth control and the fact that she has only had one partner she believes, “Oh God, it won’t happen to me.” Her circumstance is an unjust one to her. She believes that if one plays by the rules, then one should be safe,

It really ticks me off that some girls go out there . . . and sleep with whoever and don’t take any like precautions and they’re fine. And it’s like I’m with one guy for 3 months and we did everything they tell you you should do if you’re having sex. And it made me really mad. . . . I’ve only had sex for the last 3 months. So, it’s like, this is like, everything is like, boom. It’s like, I’ve only had a boyfriend like the last 3 months. It’s like, I’ve only had sex for the last 3 months and it’s like other people, they have boyfriends for 3 years and nothing happens. They don’t use anything. It’s like, what the heck, I do everything I’m suppose to. I do and it’s like, what the heck.

Andrea’s unplanned pregnancy does not correspond with the impression she has of herself; “I did what I was suppose to. . . . I never in a million years would have imagined that it would happen to me.” Nor does this pregnancy, or the desire that led to it, fit other’s perceptions of Andrea, “Like you ask anyone that really knows me. I would be the last person you would ever expect.” Andrea’s public persona as a “good” girl will be shattered when news of her pregnancy becomes public in her hometown. She fully expects that upon return to school she will have to endure the hypocrisy of her peers who

will whisper behind her back but be “nice” to her face. She also understands that other’s critique of the situation will fall squarely on her behavior not on the behavior of her boyfriend, “The guy doesn’t get the criticism. They’re like ‘Oh, that girl did that.’ They don’t say like ‘Oh the guy wasn’t ready.’ It’s like ‘Do you think the girl was ready?’”

As a result of her experience, Andrea has come to the conclusion that desire is a dangerous thing. She knows now that, “you can’t be safe enough.” Desire is more powerful than rules and difficult to control in Andrea’s experience. Despite her pregnancy, Andrea is unsure if she would or could change her decision to have sex if given the chance. In her words, “I would but I wouldn’t. I know I could hold off but I say I wouldn’t.”

Examination of the AFIS and RCI results reveals that Andrea scored above the group mean on all three measures of femininity ideology. According to the intent of the scales, one could interpret this to mean that she has internalized societal norms about regulating themselves in peer relationships and objectifying their bodies. In fact, one could make such a case for Andrea taking into consideration her keen sense that others observe her and how closely she monitors her thoughts, feelings, body, and desires so as not to be the focus of other’s criticism. However, Andrea appears to be more complex than her scores on these measures would indicate. She is one of the few girls in the focus groups that have used contraceptives on a fairly consistent basis. In order to do this, she had to plan and follow through on accessing contraceptive pills despite her moral struggle about having sexual intercourse while in high school. Faced currently with a decision about her unplanned pregnancy, under pressure from her partner to abort the pregnancy, in fear of her father’s reaction, and acutely aware that she will be the talk of the town,

Andrea stays with her feelings, needs, and wishes in making her decision. She reminds herself, and the group, over and over that “it won’t be easy,” but that she “can do it.”

Dana: The Bad Bad Girl

Dana is 17 years old and has just completed her 3rd year of high school. She has enlisted in the military and plans to leave for basic training immediately after graduation. Her long-range plan includes college and a career in law enforcement.

Dana lives with her parents who attempt to control her with religion, curfews, and rules about whom she can socialize with and whom she can date. Dana takes pride in challenging and ignoring the rules, even going as far as moving out to show her parents that she means business. In particular, her parents have cautioned her against having sex. She articulates this warning in the following way, “They made it clear that they don’t want me doing anything, but if I am, I better be careful not to let them know.” When her parents learn of Dana’s sexual activity, they caution her not to come home pregnant. According to Dana, her parents refuse to help her obtain contraception telling her that she “shouldn’t be doing it so she’s not going to put me on it [birth control pills] because [she] doesn’t need it.” In her parents’ view, supporting her use of birth control pills implies granting their consent for their daughter to have sex. Despite Dana’s proud tales of defiance, contraceptive use is one area where she complies with her parents’ instructions. Thus far, she has not accessed family planning services as she explains, “I can’t lie to my parents, and they won’t put me on it so I’m not even gonna bother.” She later admits, that lack of a driver’s license has also kept her from going to the family planning clinic.

Dana perceives herself as one who likes to “nit-pick” and “goes into every relationship looking for an argument.” She tells stories of screaming at partners,

throwing plates, and hunting down partners who fail to show up when promised. Despite this picture of the tough, aggressive female that Dana paints of herself, she also recognizes that there are times in her romantic relationships when she chooses to remain silent. Silence for Dana often occurs in the face of sexual encounters involving intercourse. Avoidance tactics and diversion frequently take the place of saying “no” to her partners. The first time she was faced with whether or not to have intercourse she broke her ankle. She explains, “The first guy I went out with in my freshman year I was gonna have sex with him, but I broke my ankle to get out of it cause I didn’t want to say no. . . . I fell down two stairs. I didn’t want to say no. I didn’t dare to. He was older than me.” Her fear was that saying “no” would have led to a break up of the relationship. Unprotected sex is also a difficult arena for Dana to assert herself. If a condom is to be used, it is her partner who must initiate its use. She claims she “won’t dare” ask a partner to use a condom. She finds that she is “more afraid to speak out to the older ones [males]” than she is to boys her own age. Dana is able to justify not using condoms because either she knows the guy or she “more or less stays with that person” once she has sexual intercourse with them.

Experiencing her desire and claiming it appear to be relatively simple for Dana. She enjoys playing with desire, both hers and that of her male partners. As she says, when she’s horny “that’s a good time.” She describes her adventures with desire and flirting with sheer delight and satisfaction. Flirting has enormous potential for Dana and most recently has led to an amusing dilemma. After flirting with six males, all during the same time period, she is now faced with how to juggle their infatuation with her. “They’re all like you flirted with me. . . . I don’t know like right now, I have six guys that

I'm playing hard core with cause I flirted with 'em so now I'm trying to keep all of 'em separate." In her estimation, they have misjudged her intentions. She "was just having fun" and they in turn are "really right in love." To hear Dana tell her story is to understand that the outcome of her flirtations is as entertaining as the flirting behavior itself. Being desired is as much fun as experiencing her own desire.

Dana has no qualms about moving from flirting to intimate sexual behavior. Her goal appears to be to experience her own sexual desire and arouse the desire of her partner while avoiding sexual intercourse. She perceives herself as able to control the level of sexual involvement regardless of the extent of the sexual touching and exploration. The limit she has set for herself in these encounters is not communicated to her partner verbally. Rather, her strategy to preclude intercourse is to tell her partner that she has to urinate. She explains, "you're right in the middle of something and you don't want it to get anymore serious so you're like, "I've got to pee." It just like ruins the mood completely. That's the cool thing, but the guys kind of get mad. . . . Then he starts swearing and you leave." For Dana intercourse equals sex and all other forms of sexual behavior are "messaging around." This messaging around is permissible for her even when she is dating someone else. Interestingly, Dana's stories about the way in which she interrupts a sexual encounter so that it does not progress to sexual intercourse leaves out any description of what becomes of Dana's sexual desire when she abruptly ends these encounters.

At the same time she boasts of her sexual escapades to the group Dana is also invested in assuring that she is not labeled a slut. She does this by informing the group that she has had only four partners with whom she has had "sex." In her tales of flirting,

she ensures that the group understands her limits in flirting, “I mean I wouldn’t go sleep with every one of ‘em but I just had fun flirting with ‘em.” It’s imperative to Dana that she and others are able to eliminate her from their descriptions of what constitutes a slut. During a discussion of how the others in the group define a slut, Dana keeps her eyes downcast on the table in an attempt to hide her smirk and most likely to avoid being drawn into the conversation. At one point she mumbles “that’s too hard a one to even talk about.” She is finally able to speak when one of her peers offers a description that Dana sees as excluding her and her behavior, “someone who has their pants off more than on.”

Desire and sexual behavior are disconnected from pregnancy or the threat of sexually transmitted diseases for Dana. She is adamant that she will not become pregnant, but her conviction does not translate into prevention behaviors. In her words, she “knows better than to go and get pregnant. I would never.” Even when Andrea, who has just learned she is pregnant, questions Dana’s assumption: Dana remains convinced that she will not become pregnant. She tells the group she is “not worried about it for some reason.” After all she has “been having pure luck” for 3 years. As for the problem of sexually transmitted disease, Dana considers herself safe because she knows who in her town has a disease, and she avoids these individuals.

When Dana narrates her stories she does so in the first person.

“I don’t agree . . . I can’t kiss someone . . . I can’t do that . . . I’ve done it before but I can’t do it . . . I think I nit-pick . . . I do so bad . . . I will find something . . . so I can say . . . I’m kind of going through the phase . . . I’ll chase someone . . . I was going out . . . I stayed . . . I didn’t care . . . I didn’t tell him what I was

thinking . . . I was going to kick his ass . . . I didn't want to go out with him . . . I figured . . . I'd end up going back out with him . . . I didn't want that . . . I didn't say anything but I wanted to . . . I was very rude . . . I like took what I did . . . so I could have a fight . . . I don't know . . . I didn't like . . . I went and hung out with . . . I ended up kissing one of em . . . I went with mine . . . I go "well good" . . . I wanted a fight . . . I had this bad feeling . . . I was sitting . . . I got pissed . . . I went up and I finished painting . . . I remembered . . . I just shut up . . . I confronted him . . . I was going to break up with him . . . I just called him . . . I didn't care . . . I had someone else . . . I'm having a blast . . . I kind of miss him."

She is the central character in her stories. There are circumstances in which she challenges the boundaries of femininity and sexual desire seen as acceptable for adolescent girls. She embraces her desire, acts on it at will, feels entitled to and in control of her desire and that of her partners. Dana's strong voice is not necessarily an indicator of high self-esteem. In fact, Dana finds herself unable to speak out in her intimate relationships on issues of importance. She yields her power in the face of pressure from male partners. Niobe Way (1995) found that girls in her study that had a strong voice, do not use this voice in all situations. They were especially likely to silence themselves in the face of male peers. Unable to say no in a direct way, Dana uses manipulation to control sexual situations and fails to act to protect herself from pregnancy, the very risk she appears to understand will adversely impact her future plans.

Dana's scores on the ISR and ORB are above the group scores and she has the highest score on the RCI of any girl in the study. Dana views herself as tough, yet in the face of pressure from older males she yields. One could make a case that Dana has

internalized many conventions of femininity and romance, yet I seriously question this simple analysis. Despite Dana scores, she is not the picture of a girl who has internalized the rules of conventional femininity. Dana dances on the edges of “acceptable” behavior, often stepping over the line and laughing as she does so. She plays with sexual desire and behavior as if it were a game. It may be that Dana understands the conventional norms of femininity well enough to perform middle-class femininity when called upon to do so. For example, she tells about how she apologizes to her boyfriend for what she refers to as her “rude” behavior but she lets the groups know that she “wasn’t sorry” and she just “said it to make it look good.” It is possible that for Dana the survey was just another performance.

Natalie: Living Outside the Lines

Natalie is 16 years old and has just completed her 2nd year of high school. After high school, she plans to take a year off before going on to college. Natalie lives with her mother. Though there have been some problems in the past, Natalie describes her relationship with her mother now as a close one in which she is able to tell her anything.

During the focus group sessions, Natalie does not necessarily speak more often than the other girls do but they look to her to answer questions. She does not always accept this role. Natalie is seen by others as having more experience with sexual relationships. Indeed, Natalie is not embarrassed to talk about sexual issues and often raises issues that others do not dare to discuss. The subjects she brings into the group discussion include what’s it’s like to have a “hot” young male physician perform her first pap smear, questions about anal sex, why girls fake orgasms, and the “weird” questions boys ask during sexual encounter such as, “Does it hurt?” and “Is this the right hole?”

Natalie does not allow her voice or her actions to be regulated by rumors or fears of being labeled a slut. When a rumor is passed around school that she has crabs, her response is “I guess you’ll never know will you?” As an after thought she adds, “I should have been like, yeah I have crabs. Want some?” Natalie humorously refers to this discussion later in the session when she is caught on video making clawing motions with her hands, and saying “I’m a crab, I’m a crab.” Having been the object of rumors, Natalie knows that the label slut is applied to some girls regardless of their behavior. “You can have sex with no one and you can be friends with all the guys and they’ll be like ‘oh my God she is the biggest slut.’ She doesn’t even have sex.” Natalie understands that the word “slut” is used to control girls’, not boys’, sexual behavior. She points to the different standards applied to a boy who has sex. “If a guy sleeps with a lot of people, they’re friends are like ‘oh, yeah! That was good! Good job!”

Natalie is also the person in the group that interrupts her peers’ unrealistic descriptions of how things are. When her friend describes everyone in their school as getting along, Natalie reminds her that “not everyone” gets along and “not all the time.” When the group is describing the ideal partner, Natalie supports another group member who interrupts the dialogue to remind the other girls that the “perfect guy doesn’t exist.” She thanks her and adds, “There’s always going to be flaws.”

Desire, love, and sex are all distinct for Natalie. When she is attracted to someone, she experiences “butterflies.” She owns her desire even when there is no chance of acting upon it. She readily tells stories about being attracted to adolescent and adult males. Her physician is “the hottest.” She has a teacher who is “hot.” And she tells a humorous story about embarrassing herself in front of a “whole group of hot guys.”

Desire provides the basis for sexual fantasies and encounters and is distinct from love for Natalie. She half jokingly tells the group that “the first time she sees a guy” is when she begins to think about whether or not she would have sex with him. Sex can be based upon attraction for Natalie, and she does not delude herself into believing that such an encounter is the same as or will even lead to a relationship. She explains that, “You may have liked this guy for your whole life and now you’re getting a chance with him. You know you have the chance to have sex with him and you’ve wanted to your whole life.” She is clear that after such an encounter she has no expectations. Describing a tale about desire as powerful, Natalie explains that “if you really want to have sex with someone, it’s not that easy to tell yourself not to.” Once she acts on her desire, she acknowledges that it’s not realistic for her to limit her sexual encounter. “If I’m with a guy and like we’re doing anything like that and I really like him, I’m not stopping. I can’t stop.”

According to Natalie, love is distinct from desire or sex. She explains that “You can have sex with someone you don’t know or you can have sex with someone that you love. It’s just the type of person you are and how you feel at the time.” Natalie never articulates a judgment about an individual who has sex with someone they don’t know and reports that a person’s mood at the time can also effect their feelings. Currently in a relationship, she is in love. Though difficult to articulate, she is clear that love takes time to develop. “It’s like hard to explain. It’s a feeling you know. It’s not like having a boyfriend for a week and then saying, ‘oh I love you.’ You have to like get to know a person really well, and they have to get to know you.”

When Natalie began her first relationship, her mother raised the issue of birth control and helped her obtain birth control pills, even accompanying her to her first pelvic examination. Natalie shares that she is not currently using contraceptive pills because they make her ill. Nor does she choose to use condoms most times because she thinks, “it [intercourse] feels better without it. She is willing to risk pregnancy. “I’m not on birth control pills so if I get pregnant, I’m gonna get pregnant.” Despite her acceptance of the risk for pregnancy, she is more cautious about the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. She protects herself from disease by being selective about the people with whom she has sex. She says, “If I know stuff about him and he refused [to use a condom], I’m not going to take the chance to ruin my life for one night for one guy.”

When Natalie speaks, she most often narrates her stories in the first person.

Me and my mom . . . I moved out . . . I don’t talk . . . I don’t live . . . I don’t know . . . I don’t know if you really want to have sex . . . I know if I’m with a guy . . . I really like him I’m not stopping . . . I can’t stop . . . I think it feels better . . . If I get pregnant . . . I’m not on birth control . . . I was like wow . . . I was ready to drink . . . I leaned over . . . I went to put it back . . . I did it again . . . I just left.

Natalie complicates the dichotomy of good and bad girls because she chooses to live outside the boundaries of good and bad girl behavior. She is both unwilling to make judgments about other’s behaviors or to yield to judgments about her own behavior. She claims her own space and refuses to be pulled back into the box even when other girls call her to task. She illustrates this one evening as she is leaving group and her friend lets her know that she has said too much. Natalie replies by saying, “I’m a slut and I don’t

care who knows it.” Resigned to the fact that others have a need to label her outspokenness and her unwillingness to abide by the rules, she calmly and unapologetically re-appropriates the label girls fear the most.

Natalie scores below the group mean on the ISR and the ORB scales and slightly above the group mean on the RCI. Her contributions to, and interactions with, the group set Natalie apart from many of the girls because she is unwilling to play by conventional rules of femininity and romance or to police other girls conformity to the rules. She clearly claims her space, her desire, and her experiences with no apologies. I believe the scales are much too simplistic and polite to capture Natalie’s struggles with, and resistance to, the conventions of femininity. The instruments do not make room for Natalie’s straightforward way of talking about sexual desire and behaviors or the way she interprets her experiences. There is no room on the survey to be as clear about her sexual desire and behaviors as her stories reveal that she is able.

summary

This chapter examines how poor and working-class rural girls as a group, and as individuals, negotiate conventions of femininity, especially those conventions intended to regulate girls’ sexual desire, behavior, and relationships. Qualitative and quantitative sources are used to analyze the ways in which these girls reproduce, maintain, and interrupt these conventions in a group and as individuals.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Research Design

The goal of this study was to explore how poor and working-class rural adolescent girls relate to and negotiate white middle-class conventions of femininity, particularly the ideals pertaining to sexual desire, behavior and relationships. The research identified the ways in which girls negotiate the conventions, at times reproducing them and other times interrupting and challenging them. The intent was to bring poor and working-class rural girls' voices and experiences into the discussion about adolescent sexuality using feminist methodology and building upon feminist research which has re-conceptualized girls' development.

The participants in the study were 16 and 17 year old girls, taking part in the University of Maine's Upward Bound Program which serves high school students from lower socio-economic families in the rural areas of four Maine counties. Focus groups and surveys were utilized to gather data from the girls. Twenty girls participated in the focus groups and 28 girls responded to the survey. Focus groups met once a week for five weeks, each time for approximately 75 minutes. The multiple meetings of the focus groups were a strength of this study as it enabled trust to develop between the girls and myself. The trust in our relationship led to a more in-depth discussion of girls' experiences with romantic relationships and sexuality than has occurred in my previous experiences. The sessions were audio and video taped. Tapes of the focus group sessions were transcribed. They were analyzed using the Listening Guide Method, a method developed by the Harvard Project on the Psychology of Women and

Development of Girls. The survey that was used incorporated two instruments designed to measure the extent to which girls have internalized middle-class conventions of femininity and romantic relationships.

Summary of Findings

This study explored the ways in which poor and working-class girls relate to, negotiate, and interrupt white middle-class conventions of femininity, particularly the ideals about sexual desires, sexual behaviors, and sexual relationships. It also examined the ways in which they negotiate the ideals in a group context with other girls like themselves. The analysis revealed that the girls have an ambivalent relationship with conventions of femininity and female sexuality. They reproduce and maintain conventions of femininity and sexuality while also interrupting and challenging the very same conventions.

Narrating stories of independence, toughness, and a lack of vulnerability, many of the girls seemed to resist conventions which dictate that they be nice and kind in their relationships. However, as Brown (1997, 1998) and Way (1995) found, this ability to be outspoken and tough did not necessarily transfer to their relationships with boys. Dana, one of the most vocal girls who told many stories of resisting convention, was the one who was least able to directly tell a male partner that she did not want to have sex. She often used diversionary tactics to avoid intercourse, going so far as to injure herself rather than directly say no to a boyfriend.

The girls in this study narrated stories of sexual desire and behavior, demonstrating their understanding that they are responsible for controlling their desire and behavior as well as the desire and behavior of boys. The degree to which girls have

internalized messages about controlling desire is demonstrated in a discussion about rape. The girls expressed the beliefs of society, which place blame upon girls and women who are raped. They perceived that girls who claimed to have been raped did so because they had failed to control their desire and the boy's desire.

Despite the evidence that these girls maintain conventions about sexual desire, they also challenge the conventions. Simply by discussing desire in the ways they do in this study, they break a silence about sexual desire that is expected of girls. They further challenged the conventions when they acknowledge their own desire, and their right to act upon that desire. The case studies of Dana and Natalie show two different approaches to acknowledging desire. Dana resists silencing her own desire, narrates stories of sexual encounters that place her in control of male desire in a way she perceives as powerful and fun. However, Dana remains concerned about how others view her behaviors and strives to avoid being labeled a slut. She is invested in assuring that the group knows that just because she plays with desire she does not necessarily have sexual intercourse. Natalie also acknowledges her desire. She refuses to allow rumors at school or individual, or collective attempts of other girls, to shame her or regulate her desire or behavior. Natalie owns her desire in a way that empowers her to stay with what she knows and feels. She refuses to disconnect from her feelings and appears to base her decisions on these feelings and wants despite other's judgments of her decisions.

Girls in the study struggle with conventions of female sexuality that identify females as the gatekeeper in decisions about sexual activity. They are concerned with making "good" and justifiable decisions about sex and confine sexual intercourse to "relationships" even if it means a relationship is negotiated at the time of sexual

intercourse or is short-lived. They differ on whether or not to identify their decisions about sex as planned, questioning what it says if they give forethought to their decision.

Negative outcomes of sexual intercourse are very visible in the world in which these girls live. Some told stories about their parents' pregnancy as teenagers, most related stories of friends and peers who have experienced pregnancy, and the issue of pregnancy was raised in most of the focus group conversations. In fact one girl, Andrea, learned that she was pregnant during the study. In all of these discussions, the girls demonstrated their understanding and acceptance of the conventions, which place responsibility for the negative outcomes of sexual activity upon them. Yet, there are times when girls utter questions about boys' responsibility, as does Andrea when she acknowledges that it will be her that the town talks about when they learn she is pregnant, not her boyfriend.

These girls are well aware that a girl who does not play by the rules for good girls risks being labeled a slut. The term slut remains a powerful label used by other girls, and boys, to regulate girls' sexual behavior. As a group, and as individuals, girls struggled to construct a definition and description of slut that exempts their own behavior. The definition of a slut is volatile and therefore, places girls at risk of engaging in behaviors of a slut without being aware that they have done so. Although the girls in the study struggled with the label of slut, they also interrupted and challenged it. The girls identified ways in which the word is used indiscriminately and unfairly, often unconnected to sexual behavior. One girl even acknowledged that another individual's jealousy is at times the cause of the label slut being used. Natalie disrupted the

descriptions of sluts by her direct observation of the double standard that labels sexually active girls as sluts and rewards sexually active boys.

Girls in this study differed in their approach to negotiating the conventions of sexuality. Some, like Andrea, were vigilant about their own conformity to the rules that determine good girl status. Dana, on the other hand illustrated a girl who resists the rules for good girls, takes pleasure in being recognized as one who breaks the rules but becomes uncomfortable when her behavior places her at risk of negative judgment by her peers. Natalie is an example of a girl who refuses to recognize or abide by the rules. She maintains her resistance even when other girls police or attempt to sanction her behavior by spreading rumors or threatening to expose her behavior in the presence of an adult.

In the group discussion, girls showed evidence of policing each other's sexual desire and behavior. At times, the regulator is an individual girl like Andrea who tells Dana what is and is not acceptable flirting behavior or like Natalie's friend, who tells her she has said too much in the group one evening. At other times, the girls demonstrated how a group of girls collaborate to police the sexual behavior of one girl, in this case Natalie, that they believe has stepped outside of the lines of a good girl.

This study utilized the Adolescent Femininity Ideology Scale and the Romantic Conventions Index in an attempt to measure girls' internalization of the conventions of femininity and romantic relationships. Girls' scores on items were inconsistent in some cases. It seems that the language and concepts in the scales may not have resonated with girls or were in direct opposition to the self-concept of these girls. The correlations between the sub-scales of the AFIS and the RCI were extremely low. Theoretically, these scales should correlate because they are designed to measure different aspects of

femininity ideology. Tolman and Porche (1999, in press) did find a significant correlation between the ORB sub-scale and the RCI. Those findings were not replicated in this study. These instruments may underestimate the complexity of the relationship that rural poor and working-class girls have with middle-class conventions. On AFIS scales the girls may have had trouble relating to conventions which seem contradictory to their investment in being seen as independent and tough. Even though this may not fully be the case, the girls claim to dress for themselves, make their own decisions, rebel at being told who they can be friends with, and make decisions about sex based on their desire, not that of their partners. Further, the language used to describe the romantic conventions on the RCI may itself be too middle-class, too subtle when compared with the direct and explicit language used by girls in this study to describe their experiences with romantic relationships. The struggles with romantic relationships for these girls do not appear to center on pleasing boys but rather on avoiding labels, regret, and pregnancy. These girls seem to have limited expectations of relationships, especially those that have been on the other end of unfaithful partners. They understand someone can say they love you but still cheat on you, beat you, and leave you. Romance is limited in their world. They meet at parties, often under the influence of alcohol, have sexual encounters, and sometimes end up in a relationship. "Dating" as conceived of in middle-class terms is not a reality in their rural locations. The scales render the experiences of these rural poor and working-class girls invisible.

Limitations

Three aspects of this study limit the application of its findings. First the girls who participated in the study were from Upward Bound, a program designed to facilitate their preparation for college. The program recruits participants who have the academic ability and motivation to succeed in furthering their education. These girls may or may not differ from other poor and working-class girls in the way they relate to middle-class ideals of femininity and sexuality. The fact they are in a program that is preparing them for college may indicate more of a resistance to the limitations placed on them because of their socioeconomic status.

A second limitation of the study is the fact that girls volunteered and needed to have parental permission to participate in the study. Girls and parents were informed during the recruitment stage that the study would involve discussions about being a girl and making sexual decisions. While it was entirely necessary, and appropriate, to assure girls' willingness and parents' consent, it is also likely that the girls who did participate differed from girls who did not volunteer to participate or whose parents did not grant permission for them to participate. Girls who did volunteer may have had more experience with romantic relationships and/or more comfort talking about sexuality issues. Their parents may also have had more comfort allowing their daughters to discuss sexuality issues with an adult other than themselves. In several cases, however, parents tried to persuade their daughter to participate and the daughters declined.

The small number and selection process of girls participating in the survey constitutes the third limitation of the study. Responses from 28 girls are too few to allow statistical conclusions to be made from the data. Also, girls were not randomly selected

from the population of Upward Bound students and therefore, results cannot be generalized to a larger population of Upward Bound girls or poor and working-class girls. The intent of the survey was to provide additional information about girls in the study.

Supporting and Challenging the Literature

The findings of this study support, expand upon, and challenge the literature on girls' development and sexuality. The girls in this study illustrate a complex relationship with middle-class conventions of femininity as did the girls in Brown (1997, 1998) and Way's (1995) studies. These girls appear to subscribe to a form of femininity that both incorporates and resists conventions which dictate how a girl should be in relationships with peers and the ways in which girls should regulate their sexuality in order to be considered good. Tolman and Higgins' (1996) analysis of the good girl bad girl dynamic related to sexuality showed that to be considered a good girl one must be non-sexual, controlling their desire and behavior as well as the desire and behavior of boys. Failure to exert this control earns one a reputation as a bad girl and can be used to place blame upon a girl for sexual violations perpetrated upon her. The rural girls in this study were very aware of the convention directing girls to control desire, their own and boys, and assumed responsibility of this control without question. The girls also vocalized their understanding that girls who were raped were girls whose desire was out of control.

Like the girls in Tolman's study (1994) these girls talked about sexual desire and behavior in terms of the potential for pleasure and danger. Tolman found that urban girls were most concerned with safety from bodily harm while suburban girls were concerned about maintaining a sense of themselves as good. Girls in this study also spoke of sexual behavior and desire in terms of pleasure and danger. The dangers inherent in sexual

desire and behavior for these girls included concerns about being good, regretted decisions, and unplanned pregnancy. Sexual violence, though talked about, was something that happened to other girls, girls who were unable to control their desire. It was not discussed as an immediate threat with which these girls were concerned.

Tolman and her colleague (1994, 1999a, 1999b; Tolman and Higgins, 1996) hypothesize that girls who are able to own their sexual desire may be less vulnerable to the negative physical and psychological consequences of sexual behavior, better able to speak about their sexual interactions, and more capable of critiquing social and gender relationships. The findings of this study both support and contradict this hypothesis. Natalie is the one girl in this study who appears to claim her sexual desire in an empowered manner. She did show an ability to name gender inequities related to sexual behavior. She also was the one who interrupted others' versions of harmonious relationships between "everyone," as well as descriptions of perfect romantic partners and relationships. Despite her critical perspectives, she does not consistently protect herself from pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, she expressed a willingness to accept pregnancy as a consequence of her sexual activity and believes that she can avoid becoming infected with a sexually transmitted disease by being cautious about the boys with whom she has sex.

The girls in this study most likely to protect themselves from consequences of sexual activity are girls like Andrea. Andrea struggles, more than the others do, to contain her sexual feelings and expressions within the boundaries for good girls. However, she is one of the few girls in the study who claims to use contraceptives on a fairly regular basis. Her use of contraceptives does not arise from an empowerment to

make healthy decisions about her sexual behavior but out of fear that her parents will learn of her sexual behavior. Dana, who at the very least, likes to talk about and play with desire, is adamant that a pregnancy will not fit into her life plans at this time. She also fails to protect herself against pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases and instead relies upon her “luck” to continue. Natalie, Dana, and Andrea, along with other girls in the study raise questions about what motivates girls to make sexual decisions that consider their own interests.

Girls’ responses to the AFIS and RCI challenge the use of these scales for rural poor and working-class girls. Though Tolman and Porche, (1999, in press) have included poor and working-class girls in the development of the scales, this study raises questions about whether or not these girls can relate to the language and the particular conventions used in the scales. Some of the girls’ inability to relate may be due to socioeconomic class and some to geographical location.

This study differs from others in its focus on rural poor and working-class girls’ constructions of sexuality as they relate to conventions of femininity. Girls in this study talk at great length about the way in which their sexual desires, behaviors, and relationships are shaped by the good girl bad girl dilemma contributing to a better understanding of the complications experienced girls from different classes and geographical locations must confront when negotiating sexuality. They challenge any attempt to meld their experiences with the experiences of girls from urban or suburban areas, or from middle or upper-middle-class families.

This study was not a comparative study therefore I cannot definitively say that the findings are different than had this same study been conducted with middle or upper-

middle-class girls or urban or suburban girls. However, if I return to my experiences working with girls in the field of sexuality education, and in particular my experience conducting focus groups with girls about the connection between sexuality education and their experiences, there are indications that differences exist between girls of different classes. Brown's research (1998), and my experience with girls in Maine, illustrates that girls from different socioeconomic classes speak differently about sexuality in the presence of an adult. Most, middle and upper-middle-class girls remain guarded when talking about their sexual behavior and silent about sexual desire in the presence of adults. Likewise they are very cautious about their discussions with each other. In contrast, poor and working-class girls are more open, more curious, and more explicit in their discussions and questions in the presence of adults. They also are more likely to test adults with their provocative talk and behaviors. When displayed by the girls in a school setting, this behavior is anxiety producing for many adults and often leads to the adults identifying these girls as "promiscuous" and "at risk."

Implications of the Study

The way in which the girls in this study relate to and negotiate middle-class conventions of femininity and romantic relationships is complex. This relationship defies easy categorization or explanation. There are also variations among the girls, further complicating the analysis and raising questions about what other factors contribute to girls' negotiations of the ideals of femininity and sexuality. The study raises several challenges and questions for educators, parents, and others who work with girls.

Feminists researchers who have investigated girls' dilemmas with sexuality (Fine, 1988; Thompson, 1995; Tolman 1994) agree that if girls were encouraged to recognize

desire and empowered to “have and sustain a critical perspective on the culture’s silencing of their sexual desire” (Tolman 1994) it would then become possible for them to make sexual decisions in their own best interest, decisions that take into account the pleasure and danger of sexual encounters. This conclusion raises the question of how to best support rural poor and working-class girls in acknowledging desire as a normal, healthy experience and how to help them develop and sustain a critical perspective in the face of the good girl bad girl dilemma.

Thompson (1995) suggests that mothers, and I would add all women that work with these girls, have a crucial role in supporting the development of healthy sexuality. Girls need to be in conversation with women who talk honestly and explicitly about sexual desire, behavior, and relationships. The conversation needs to acknowledge pleasure, entitlement, and the right to make decisions that are good for us. For many women this means they must put aside their middle-class values and judgments, “cease to exist as ourselves for a moment” (Dilpert as cited in Debold, Brown, Weseen & Brookins, 1999), and engage in dialogue with girls on a level and in a language of their choosing. This conversation will require that women put aside assumptions about poor and working-class girls’ sexual decisions and behavior, listen carefully, and be willing to learn from the girls.

This study also has implications for formal sexuality education curricula currently supported by the Centers for Disease Control and the Maine Department of Education and implemented in Maine schools. These HIV and pregnancy prevention curricula encourage adolescents to say no to sex or to use condoms if they have sex. The curricula disregard the experiences and concerns of these girls and contribute to the girls’ struggles

with the good girl bad girl dichotomy. They intensify the silencing of girls' sexual desire, reinforce girls' role as the gatekeepers of decisions about sex, focus solely on negative consequences of sexual encounters, and fail to recognize the reality of the circumstances in which these girls make sexual decisions.

This study suggests that the Maine Department of Education and schools need to rethink sexuality education if they wish to impact the decisions rural poor and working-class girls make about sexual behavior. The focus of sexuality curricula needs to shift from the negative consequences of sexual intercourse and the prevention of these consequences to sexuality as a normal healthy human attribute. The education needs to include discussions about sexual desire and the ways in which the good girl bad girl dichotomy silences girls' desire. It also needs to include a focus on boys' responsibility for controlling their own desire. Furthermore, the curricula need to teach and support girls to make decisions about sexuality that consider their reality as well as their desires, safety, and future. The sexuality curricula currently being advanced in schools, while politically safer than the one I describe, does not address the issues with which poor and working-class girls struggle.

Last, but not least, this study illustrates the need to listen more carefully to rural poor and working-class girls; to listen in a way that seeks to understand the girls, on their own terms not in accordance with middle-class assumptions about female sexuality. We will only hear what the girls are saying if we create safe spaces, free of moral judgments, where girls can speak their truth, unmodulated by a dichotomy that labels some feelings, behaviors, and girls, good and others bad. If we fail to create these spaces for girls, we

will not hear what girls are saying and therefore, will continue to misinterpret the way in which rural poor and working-class girls negotiate and present their sexuality.

Failure to hear these girls will result in the continued ignorance about the authentic questions, dilemmas, and barriers faced by these girls as they attempt to become sexually healthy women: women who are empowered to act on their own behalf when making sexual decisions. We will continue to leave these girls, poor and working-class girls, rural girls, girls who speak too loudly about sexual behavior, girls judged by middle-class women to be promiscuous, on their own to manage complex negotiations in a world that is all too ready to exploit their sexuality.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Consent Letter

June 9, 2000

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Maine studying girls' development and education. I am doing a study on girls' romantic relationships and would like to ask your permission for your daughter to participate. I am interested in learning how girls think about love, romance, and sexuality and how they make decisions about sex. As a parent of two grown daughters, and an educator, I have tried to help girls make healthy decisions in their dating relationships. But, as I am sure you know girls do not always make decisions that take into account what is best for them. Supporting girls in making healthy decisions is not an easy job for parents or educators. Often times, we do not understand girls' situations as fully as we would like. I hope that by learning from girls what they think and experience, I can better help parents and educators to support girls in making healthier choices in their dating relationships.

Girls who are part of the Upward Bound Summer Program and who have just finished their second or third year of high school are eligible to take part in the study. If you consent to your daughter's participation in this study, and if she wishes to participate, her name will be added to the list of girls who could possibly take part in the study. There are two parts to the study. In part one, all girls with parental permission will be asked to fill out a survey regarding their beliefs about how they should look and how they should act in relationships. In part two of the study, 20 girls with parental permission will also be chosen to take part in a series of group discussions. They will be divided into two groups. The discussions will be focused on being a girl, love, romance, and sexuality. Each group will meet five times and each meeting will last for about 90 minutes. The group discussions will take place during the time girls are attending the Upward Bound summer program and will be held at the University.

Girls participating in the discussions will be told that they have a right not to answer any questions they do not wish to answer and they can leave the study at any time they wish. I will keep your daughter's identification confidential. Her name will not be used in any discussions or reports about the data. She will be asked to choose a name that she wishes for me to use when referring to her in any reports, documents, or journal articles. If your daughter chooses to reveal the name she has chosen the chance that her identity might become known increases. During the first group discussion, I will work with girls to form rules for participation. Girls will be asked not to share what others talk about outside of the group but I cannot guarantee that all group members will abide by this request. I also wish to make you aware that there are three instances when I cannot

maintain your daughter's confidentiality; 1) if any abuse is disclosed, 2) if I become aware that she intends to hurt herself or, 3) if I become aware that she intends to hurt someone else. If any of these three circumstances occur I am required by law to make a report to the Department of Human Services.

I will make audio and video recordings of the group discussions. Audiotapes will be transcribed into a written format and all identifiers will be removed from the transcripts. Only myself, and up to five professors on my doctoral committee, will view the transcripts of the audiotapes. The only persons who will have access to the video recording other than myself are Dr. Lyn Mike1 Brown of Colby College and Dr. Constance Perry of the University of Maine. Dr. Brown is a noted researcher in the field of girls' development and the author of two books, "Meeting at the Crossroads" and "Raising their Voices: The Politics of Girls Anger". Dr. Perry is a Professor of Education at the University's College of Education and Human Development and is supervising this study. During the study, all audiotapes, videotapes and written transcripts will be stored in a locked file in my office at the University. Audiotapes and videotapes will be destroyed when the study is completed.

The information collected through this study will be used to write my dissertation for my Ph.D. The report will be shared with educators, researchers, and others interested in girls' relationship experiences. It is also possible that the information will be used as the basis for articles written for submission to scholarly journals.

This study will provide an opportunity for your daughter to share her experiences and insights about being a girl, love, romance, and sexuality. The last session will also provide an opportunity for girls in the group to choose a related topic of the discussion, to expand upon discussions from previous meetings, and to ask any questions they have about love, romance, and sexuality. The project involves minimal risk to your daughter as she has control over if, and how, she responds to each question and may leave the study at any time she chooses.

If you agree to your daughter's participation in this study, please sign the attached permission form and return it in the enclosed envelope to Upward Bound. If you have additional questions about this study, feel free to contact me at 581-2414. I will also be available to answer questions on June 26th at the time your daughter checks in for the summer program. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mary Madden
Doctoral student,
College of Education and Human Development
University of Maine

APPENDIX B

Girls' Survey

This survey is part of the summer research project that you volunteered to participate in. I appreciate your willingness to take the survey. Please fill in the following information in Part I and proceed to Part II.

Part I:

Birth date: _____

Grade you will be in September: _____

Have you been in a dating relationship while in high school? **Yes** **No**

If yes, how long was the longest relationship _____

Part II

Directions: For each statement, please circle the response that best describes your opinion.

SA = strongly agree A = Agree MA = More agree than disagree
MD = More disagree than agree D = disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

1. I would tell a friend she looks nice, even if I think she shouldn't go out of the house dressed liked that.	SA	A	M	A	M	D	<u>D</u>	SD
2. I express my opinion only if I can think of a nice way of doing it.	SA	A	M	A	M	D	<u>D</u>	SD
3. I worry that I make others feel bad if I am successful.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>			SD
4. I would not change the way I think in order to please someone else.	SA	A	M	A	M	D	<u>D</u>	SD
5. I tell my friends what I honestly think even when it is an unpopular idea.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>			SD
6. Often I look happy on the outside in order to please others, even if I don't feel happy on the inside.	SA	A	M	A	M	D	<u>D</u>	SD
7. I wish I could say what I feel more often than I do.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>			SD
8. I feel like it's my fault when I have disagreements with my friends.	SA	A	M	A	MD	<u>D</u>		SD

9. When my friends ignore my feelings, I think that my feelings weren't very important anyway.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
10. I usually tell my friends when they hurt my feelings.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
11. The way I can tell that I am a good weight is when I fit into a small size.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
12. I often wish my body were different..	SA	A	MA	M	D	<u>D</u> SD
13. I think that a girl has to be beautiful to feel beautiful.	S	A	A	M	A	M D <u>D</u> SD
14. I think a girl has to have a light complexion and delicate features to be thought of as beautiful.	SA	A	MA	M	D	<u>D</u> SD
15. I am more concerned about how my body looks than how my body feels.	SA	A	MA	M	D	<u>D</u> SD
16. I feel comfortable looking at all parts of my body.	SA	A	MA	M	D	<u>D</u> SD
17. When I like someone I get all fluttery inside.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
18. I often feel uncomfortable in my body.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
19. There are times when I have really good feelings in my body.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
20. The way I decide I am at a good weight is when I feel healthy.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
21. When I am happy about something, I get tingles in my body.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
22. I decide how much to eat by how hungry I am.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
23. I believe a girl should have a boyfriend to make her life complete.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
24. I thi girls should try to dress in a way that boys like.	SA	A	M	A	M	D <u>D</u> SD
25. I think a girl should do sexual things with a boyfriend just to keep him happy.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
26. I believe a girl knows for sure that she is attractive when a boy shows interest.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
27. It is natural for a girl not to have much time for her friends when she has a boyfriend.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
28. Getting a boyfriend is unimportant to me.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD

29. A girl should always try to please her boyfriend.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
30. A girl should do whatever it takes to keep her boyfriend.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
31. A girl should dress in a way that will keep her from getting a reputation.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
32. A girl who has a boyfriend gets respect from other girls.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
33. A girl should try to look appealing to boys.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD
34. Other things are more important to me than having a romantic relationship.	SA	A	MA	MD	<u>D</u>	SD

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Mary Madden was born in New York City on July 2, 1957. She received her Bachelor of Science in Health and Family Life from the University of Maine in 1986 and a Master of Education with a concentration in Human Development in 1994. During the last 17 years, Mary has worked as an educator, program administrator, and consultant focusing her efforts on adolescent health concerns. In the fall of 1997, she enrolled in a individualized doctoral program at the University of Maine to study the development and education of adolescent girls. At present, Mary is a research associate in the College of Education and Human Development at The University of Maine. She is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree Individualized in Education and Human Development from The University of Maine in December, 2000.