



Thank Heaven for Little Girls:¹ Girls' Drawings as Representations of Self

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I consider ways in which young girls' self-initiated drawings reveal how they negotiate meanings and construct sometimes-contradictory selves through their production of visual images. This inquiry is developed from my experiences as a young woman teaching elementary art. In their drawings, girls' representations of self serve as both repositories of pleasure and desire and as projections of possible and multiple identities. The drawings disclose aesthetic preferences, make social relationships visible, and challenge the dominant positioning in visual culture of girls' identities as inevitable. Through their production of visual images, young girls position themselves as social agents and as producers of visual culture. In this study, I interpret the use of girl icons, look at expressions of social relationships, and consider whether the girls' gaze is a form of agency in three artworks: (a) my own childhood make-over drawings, (b) a drawing of a first communion, and (c) a reinvention of a popular television show, *Survivor*. I problematize my methodology for this study with the concept of girls' private space referred to as bedroom culture, and the dichotomy between the public and private spaces of girls' lives and productions.

In this analysis, there is no room for little girls to have fantasies that belong to them, as feminists in that psychoanalytic mode have argued, because their fantasies are shaped entirely by the available representations: there are no fantasies that originate with girls, only those projected onto them. (Walkerdine, 1997, p. 166)

Introduction and Questions

Inspired by Valerie Walkerdine's exposure of herself in her work, I have chosen to begin this paper with a story through which I implicate myself as an art teacher who initiates children into culturally coded ways of making, receiving, and interpreting images. My participation in this discourse is further complicated by my own "afterlife" (Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, 2002) of girlhood and my recollection of that time as one of questioning, confusion, and complexity, and my own desires and constructions of myself as a girl, woman, teacher, and researcher (Walkerdine, 1990). Troubled by the quotation that appears above, I began to question ways in which I saw girls in my elementary art classroom express desire and fantasy and construct sometimes-contradictory identities through their drawings. I found it difficult to accept that it was culturally inevitable for girls to only represent themselves in whole, idealized, iconic, and predetermined ways. I also recalled ways in which I had represented myself as a young girl in my own drawings and whether or not I, or my students, had felt trapped or powerful—or both—through our visual productions.

As a beginning elementary art teacher, I decided to work with each of my grade levels, from kindergarten through fifth grade, on a self-portrait unit. I based this idea upon my interpretation of my school district's curriculum—one that was aligned with state and national standards, and my experiences during student teaching where I had noticed that my students were eager to talk about themselves in the classroom. The kindergarteners delighted in this process—it was evident that they themselves were a favorite subject of their drawings—and they seemed neither to voice nor display much targeted concern that the marks they produced on paper rarely matched an adult's conception of the forms they saw in their hand-held mirrors. Narrating as they drew, they expressed pleasure in making representational marks and were sometimes even

happy with unintentional resemblances. First and second graders (Figures 1 & 2)² completed graceful contour drawings of their features or covered their skin with thick coatings of oil pastel, and seemed to delight in the discovery of their multiple skin tones and varied eye and hair colors. Their portraits—school art—seemed apart from their “free” drawings. Third graders (Figure 3) seemed most concerned with what they would wear in their portraits, “can I wear my soccer jersey even though I’m not wearing it today?” and with the backgrounds, “does it have to be real?” but not necessarily with their self-images.



Figure 1: A first grade girl's self-portrait in oil pastel.



Figure 2: A second grade girl's self-portrait drawing.



Figure 3: A third grade girl shows herself in a field with her dog.

The fifth graders were more reticent. Even after being intrigued by considering various self-portraits made by artists that I had introduced, they saw the portrait as an “assignment” and seemed to have an underlying expectation that the portrait be “realistic.” Several students expressed doubts about their representational abilities. I talked with the students and we came up with the plan of presenting ourselves with multiple views of one another in a variety of media, an undertaking new to each of us that we would do together. In fifth grade, we first posed for digital photos, which we then imported into *Adobe PhotoShop*®, used the tile feature for multiples, printed in black and white outline, and then prepared for reproduction by transferring the grid to large, heavy paper (Figure 4). Drawing in two inch by two-inch squares would make the process easier—the grid method is a trick that has been used by artists for centuries to reproduce something exactly and this method has become a convention of art education pedagogical practice. All eighty, fifth grade students finished the process of transferring the drawings with a great deal of representational success.



Figure 4: A fifth grader poses for a digital photograph to be transferred as a drawing.

Then, something interesting began to happen. I noticed that asking students to draw self-portraits raised questions of how identity and subjectivity are defined in both seemingly dominant and subversive

ways. Perhaps also influenced by the “surrealist” artists—Dali, Magritte, Oppenheim—who had fascinated them in our first unit of the school year, some of the boys seemed to celebrate depicting themselves down to every minor detail, including their scars, scrapes, and pimples. Some of them even transferred the smudgy marks from the photocopier toner onto their drawings; smearing lines with oily, thick, drawing pencils. Some made their images as grotesque as possible and placed themselves in fantastical situations—for example, cruising on a broom across the *Quidditch* field with Harry Potter.³ Others focused on using facial expression and the posture from the photographs to convey an idea of self.

At the same time, some of the girls began to covertly change their images—a transition that was hinted at by an eruption of annoyed sighs from one particular table in my classroom. Cedillas replaced accurately rendered noses (Figure 5) on *Bratz*® doll-like faces. Wrinkled lips succumbed to the enticing curvature of a pert, pink Cupid’s bow. Ordinary ponytails became dramatic upsweeps with floating, face-framing, tendrils. Heads grew into caricatures and idealizations, while necks and shoulders remained the same. This happened with some drawings while other girls kept their images more accurately representational.



Figure 5: A drawing of a *Bratz*® doll with a cedilla nose.

During all of my art classes, I would sit with each small table group of four or five students, and talk with them as they worked. I would often take notes on their conversations, make notes of what they

were doing and why they seemed to do this, and sometimes photograph their work. I made certain to visit each group and to spend time talking with them. This informal research helped me to make sense of my role as a teacher and develop a relationship with my students. In this fifth grade class, almost all the table groups that students chose were segregated by gender, and this separation but also cooperation often changed the character of artworks as children worked and talked together. Curious about what I had seen happen, I sat with the table group of the four sighing girls who were also friends outside of class and asked them why they made these changes. Without hesitation, several replied, “I changed myself because I didn’t like how I looked,” “I can’t really look at myself as I really am,” or “I want to look more like this.” They then expressed their contempt for various parts of their faces, their hairstyles, their bodies, and their clothing. Noticing my appearance, they complimented me on my shoes. Our conversation turned quickly from the mere process of drawing to the concept of negotiating identity and concepts of beauty. I was also surprised how attuned they were to my own insecurities and my body as an object of continual work. I realized that they saw me both as a role model and older peer. I had never before considered how my own “teaching” body might be interpreted by my students. I had generally thought of my body as private, not as public—or public only in the sense that I maintain the “professional” and modest appearance of an elementary teacher. I had not realized that this polished and presented self was also instructional for young girls, nor did I consider how settings where public and private uneasily meet, like a school classroom, regulate and reproduce particular, socially sanctioned, bodies. Were their gazes focused upon me?

While I was talking with these four girls, I recalled my own series of drawings as a young girl, images in which I would draw the “before” and “after” effects of a makeover (Figure 6). These drawings were such a pleasurable escape for me that I made series after series of them, at home and in the margins of my pink school notebook. Even as a very young girl, I felt there was a strong and complicated connection between who I was and how I looked. When I was in control of how I looked—how I presented myself to the world—I thought I could more easily hide the contradictions I felt inside. My greatest fear was exposure. I recalled

pressing feelings of tension between my own seemingly “inner” desires and the outside image of me as a “serious” girl—a girl who was smart, caring, helpful, and polite. An expectation that I appear neat, clean, well-dressed, tasteful, well-groomed, and thin seemed to accompany this self-image. I realized that this appearance was quite similar to that of my public, teaching self where it was necessary to both mask contradictions and hide the true efforts of work upon myself. When I was a child, “making over” my fictional self allowed me to completely control my appearance and this fantasy was very pleasurable and powerful for me.



Figure 6: Make-over drawings from my elementary school notebook.

My makeover drawings were also popular with my friends. They often asked me to draw made-over pictures of them at school. These drawings occupied the hidden spaces of the classroom—those of recess and passed notes. They were a form of social capital for me, and provided me with another layer of my identity—that of an “artist.” I realized that through talking with the fifth grade girls in my classroom that I had entered this private-in-public space—their space—one of confusion, contradiction, and power. This was also the semi-secret space of girl friendships and cliques—the space where social relationships are defined, scrutinized and maintained, and ended. Rachel Simmon’s (2004) *Odd Girl Speaks Out* considers these spaces from the inside out and invites

girls to share their stories of inclusion and expulsion from the socially monitored spaces of girlhood. Simmons provides girls with the opportunity to share their stories of acceptance and rejection through their own narrative memories of girlhood. Girls' cultural productions open similar spaces that reveal social relationships between girls.

I also sought advice from colleagues and friends about what I had seen happen with some of the girls. In the teachers' room at lunch one day, there was a discussion about discomfort with one's own image, the onset of pre-adolescence, the seemingly earlier loss of childhood innocence, and the inappropriate fixation of girls on their bodies and looks. As is common in many elementary school settings, I worked with a staff of women. At the same time, I was also a teaching assistant for an undergraduate art appreciation course, and took my students (mostly pre-service elementary teachers) to an opening of Lauren Greenfield's exhibition *Girl Culture*. For most of them, it was their first experience discussing contemporary art. I was surprised by the visceral and tearful responses from some of the students to Greenfield's photographs. It was clearly a painful and provocative experience for the college students, as it was for me. In one sense, I was angry with Greenfield's apparent recognition of girls as mere consumers—of their acceptance of those “available representations”—and her invitation for the viewer to look upon them (and ourselves) with disgust and awe. In another, I was again struck by the ideas of masking and exposing identity. Some of what was being seen (for example, a girl's bedroom littered with clothing or a breast augmentation surgery) was clearly meant to remain hidden—only the “girlness” was to remain public and exposed. I was also struck by Greenfield's inclusion of “little” girls—in her works. These photographs seemed to highlight what my colleagues had noticed—young girls “losing” their innocence too early. But, these over-simplifications and obvious exploitations of young girls also seem to mask the contradictory lived experiences of most young girls.

Girlness—what Lynda Barry (2002) defines as “pretty clothes,” “teeny toys,” and “long, combable, fixable hair,” is something that is meant to be publicly praised and displayed (p. 185). It is also quite precarious—easily lost and only accessible by a few. It is the mainstream, middle-class, White, ideal of the girl. It is almost an object outside the

girl—an accessory and a mask. It is the flawless, impersonal, yet immediately recognizable face I noticed in my fifth grade students', in my own makeover drawings, and in the girl icons of popular visual culture. It is a powerful deflection. By making themselves look more like *Bratz*® dolls or *shôjo*, the heroines of *Manga* for girls who Susan Napier explains are “allied with such signifiers of immaturity/innocence as stuffed animals, fluffy dresses, and an overall cute (*kawaii*) image, the *shôjo* seems to signify the girl who never grows up” (p. 94). The girls were exploiting the aesthetic of the “cute.” Frances Richard (2001) theorizes the cute as an aesthetic device that operates on “masking,” explaining: “Cute marks a crucial absence. It guarantees, by definition, the nonappearance of malice, premeditation, irony, self-consciousness, accusation, or mercenary agenda,” and that “Morphologically—that is, aesthetically—cute relies on big eyes, round heads [...] its mouth abstracted or disproportionately tiny, its nose button [...]” (p. 1). Gayle Wald (1998) also considers perpetual “girlhood” as a device of masking—a marketing strategy that “girlish” celebrities who appeal to very young girls exploit. Gary Cross (2004) also discusses the cute and its connection to innocence as well as its fragility and its displacement function.

Was this simultaneous masking and projection of self a pleasurable escape for my students the way that it had been for me? Was it an act of submission or subversion? Were young girls accepting the fantasies projected onto them or were they negotiating their own fantasies? Remaining unsatisfied with simple explanations, I refused to believe that what had happened in my art classroom with the fifth grade girls was the result of a biological inevitability or a permanent social construction that caused young girls to become so suddenly uncomfortable with their own images that they could not bear to draw them. What else is a portrait but a societal mirror reflected through oneself and back at her? With these ideas in mind, I returned to look again at the drawings that girls made so often in my art classroom.

Looking at Girls' Visual Productions within the Study of Children's Art

This inquiry takes its place in a long history of looking at children's drawings as representative of thought, but a history, in its em-

phasis on development and cognition, that has largely ignored gendered productions and the discourses that constitute them. This paper is part of an attempt to reveal relationships between how children think, construct their identities, and represent their thoughts and their participation in particular cultures and subcultures. From children's earliest forays into scribbling, usually before they articulate complete sentences and before they read, they attempt to represent themselves and the world around them through a graphic discourse of constructed and manipulated signs. By drawing, children graphically speak themselves (through their use of visual language) into existence and join a dialogue already long in progress. As Wilson, Hurwitz, and Wilson (1987) have noted, children draw most often with forms that are invented or innate, but are a part of a larger societal currency. In this way, drawing is a discursive act and in Silverman's (2000) terminology, also a libidinal speech act—one that operates on desire and naming.

As soon as we draw ourselves, we become a sign—a representation of self. In the early and mid-twentieth century, children's drawings were sometimes seen as "printouts" of the child's mind. In early child development theories the ability to draw a human with complete body parts was equated with cognitive and spatial understanding of self. Children gained the competence to complete these processes on a hierarchical scale, progressing through one stage to the next. Incomplete or distorted figures could signify under or abnormal development. "Mistakes" that children made in drawings (such as transparencies rather than occlusions) showed children's lack of understanding of spatial relationships. It was generally assumed that children would progress in their abilities to render accurate representations, and this wholeness and accuracy was valued. These theories, in their concern with cognitive processes, gave little attention to children's motivations to draw or children's relationships with the objects of their representations. Many of the drawings collected by researchers were made in response to prompts and often in experimental settings. Although drawings are no longer considered by most as mere internal "printouts," especially by those who study children's art, they are seen as images that signify in varied, complicated, and meaningful ways. These discoveries have resulted in researchers' preferences for children's spontaneous and voluntary drawings—those motivated by the child and

perhaps revealing of more emotional representations.

Throughout my time teaching, I have collected drawings that children made for me. Most of these drawings are self-initiated and often (before they were given to me) they lived in the marginal and private spaces in the classroom. I have looked at these drawings (both in process and as products) as artifacts of a graphic discourse. I have wondered why children chose to share them with me, and what they mean for their creators. Although many young girls' drawings do seem to adults' perception to convey the sweetness, innocence, and themes of girlhood, they are also the kinds of drawings often hung up and ignored or referred to as "sweet" or "cute." They are unlikely to solicit the attention of a young boys' drawing of a gun or a superhero fist fight. They seem pleasant and innocent. However, these drawings reveal and conceal girls' desires to see themselves not how they are but how they wish they might be or think they should be—a complicated matter operating on multiple levels of pleasure, desire, and sociality.

If, as Leslie Gotfrit (1991) attests, "pleasure is a key element in structuring the relationship of the individual to a cultural form," (p. 177) then why do girls seem so often to draw themselves as princesses, ballerinas, and pop stars? How do girls create themselves through these productions? How are girlness and femininity performed through them? What is the relationship between image and identity? How might they work as sites of compliance or resistance? Why is there an apparent disconnect between how girls represent themselves and how they actually appear? Is this mirror real or faulty? What is the benefit of picturing one's self as other? Why have these themes been naturalized over times? What and how does the "icon" of the girl mean? Can girls have a gaze? These questions need to be considered to understand what and how girls' drawings of themselves mean.

Girls' drawings have meanings that seem to fluctuate somewhere between the poles of a psychological interpretation that considers how children's drawings represent internalized fears and desires, and a cultural studies or visual culture approach that questions how cultural factors influence why and what they draw. Investigating this crucial space between how and what could reveal the why—the meanings that girls construct through their productions. It could also contribute to cultural

understanding of these social and emotional meanings. This could help to reposition girls not as only on the one-down end of a power relationship but as powerful and thoughtful agents navigating multifarious sites of identity.

Girlness: An Invisible Artifact?

Much of the attention historically given to gender difference in drawing has been based on a developmental viewpoint that credits girls with maturing more quickly than boys, and not on the larger meanings of drawings. Ideas about what girls' draw form a sort of conventional assemblage of stereotypical imagery. As Brent and Marjorie Wilson (1982) noted, "In the United States, for example, boys' drawings contain a profusion of violence, of villainy, and of vehicles; girls' drawings are full of benign animals, bugs, and blooms" (p. 163). Constructions of little boys come into play here as well, and as the Wilsons continue, "The cultural graphic narrative models such as comic books, however—even with female superheroes—are directed toward, consumed, and finally modeled by boys...Because boys are more influenced by the media, the realities that they re-invent are often richer, more complex, and more dynamic than are those of girls" (p. 163). Other researchers see boys' drawings as operating in fantasy worlds where according to Flannery and Watson (1995) "an individual characterized as male-typed may produce more violent drawings because of a motivation to produce drawings that are consistent with self-concept" (p. 114). Here, output on paper is linked to internal self-concept. In this same vein, girls' drawings are seen as more frequently depicting pastoral or domestic scenes and girls are noted as more preoccupied with emotion (Flannery & Watson, 1995). Common sense accounts often credit boys with greater drawing skill overall and girls with greater drawing skill in figure drawing. Several scholars (for example, Chen and Kantner, 1996) have dispelled these myths through quantitative inquiries but they have not necessarily looked at how drawings or these constructions of them function as discourses. From these studies, we can infer that girls are not always invited into the same type of graphic, violent, and public consumer/producer dialogues with the media or with art-making that initiate boys.

The attention given to the meaning of children's drawings from

a psychological perspective sometimes privileges what abnormalities drawings could potentially signify over the process of drawing and the multiple social and cultural factors that influence it. In one example of such a psychological perspective, Joseph Di Leo (1973) looks at a drawing of a human without limbs and explains that the drawer was timid.

It is interesting to note that historical accounts of "schoolgirl" art in the 18th and 19th centuries document girls' interpretations of notable works of "fine" art in their embroideries, and position girls as cultural producers (Stankiewicz, 2003). However, these constructions are also in need of complication because of the moral and social implications of such producing activities and the ways in which this historical context both informs and misinforms constructions of contemporary schoolgirls and their art.

The qualities within girls' drawings which are most emphasized—neatness, attention to detail, predomination of figures in relationship to one another—function consistently within the rhetoric of schoolgirl fiction that discursively shapes young girls as subjects and objects (Walkerdine, 1990). These qualities emphasize girls' stereotypical helpfulness, neatness, and concern with others and emotions. Walkerdine (1990) notes that these constructions of girls function to give young girls power in the primary grades because "their school lives are controlled by female teachers [...] the discursive position adopted by the teachers is similar to that of mothers [...] the very power of women in this transitory situation, between the domestic and the academic, is precisely what permits the early successes of girls" (p. 13).

But, why these particular roles? Why are they so often the repositories or (it could be argued) reliquaries for girls' desires? Do girls have no choice but to occupy the positions projected onto them, or, in their drawings do girls' reveal a deeper, more complicated context surrounding projection, consumption, production, and desire?

Much recent discussion (Thompson, 1995, 2004; Wilson, 2004) of children's drawings has considered the relationships between children and the media and popular culture in the subject matter that they choose to draw to position children as both discerning consumers and producers of visual culture. In Thompson's (1995) discussion of sketchbooks in early childhood, she describes the complicated social processes and

relationships that surround and support young children's voluntary drawings. This approach has more in common with cultural studies than with the discourse of children's drawings within developmental and projective psychology. A cultural studies approach considers children's visual culture as separate from but in relationship to adult popular visual culture. This perspective begins with a premise in analysis of children's drawings that children exercise ownership and authority over the cultural forms that they consume and produce. Inquiry in this vein repositions children as active agents in producing culture. Continued inquiry into young girls' productions could further reposition girls as producers of and critics of culture in their right by considering the complex and layered ways in which girls produce and consume culture.

However, some more general beliefs that consider the ways in which children interact with media often position children not as producers of their own visual culture, but as mere consumers or dupes (Action for Children's Television, 1971). Most of these accounts do not consider children's role as negotiators of meaning or producers of cultural products. Within these narrow considerations, girls are rarely mentioned as a separate category of child and their productions are further marginalized or ignored altogether. Finally, as Walkerdine concedes, there is little or no consideration of girls—"little" girls, not teenagers—as either cultural producers or the products of culture. Despite the lack of scholarship on their work, girls draw and construct meaning graphically, and their drawings have been considered by Paul Duncum (1985) in light of the fantasy and narratives they embody. In his article on girls' drawings of horses (historically a subject matter quite common in discussions of girls' drawings), Duncum (1985), criticizes the prevalent notion that children's drawings can be taken at face value and that their narratives are present entirely on the page. Instead, in the conversations he recorded with young girls who talk about their horse drawings, he revealed deeply embedded narratives that operate from the girls' positions of desire and fantasy. His work operates from the point of view that drawings function as complex signs, and that these signs carry both narrative and meaning in what they explicitly illustrate and what they implicitly do not. He looks for explanations as to how the horse functions as both a repository symbol and carrier of desire for school age girls. His work also contributes to an inquiry

of the social spaces that surround drawings and the performance of them. These are some of the spaces that seem most important to girls as they draw.

From my small collection of girls' drawings and from the time I have spent with girls in classrooms, I have also seen that many girls, often working together in social contexts, draw variations on the same themes of self or "girlness" (Figures 7 & 8). Girls seem to often draw princesses, dancers, ballerinas, ice-skaters, pop stars, fashion models, and still horses, but researchers have given little attention to what these drawings mean for the young girls who draw them. The fact that psychologists, educators, cultural critics, and other researchers have not considered young girls as cultural producers and social agents reflects both restrictive constructions of childhood and the even further subjugated position of girlhood. These omissions have rendered the history of girlness in girls' graphic productions as both invisible and inevitable.



Figure 7: A second grade girl draws a princess in her sketchbook during a Saturday School class.



Figure 8: A first grade girl's drawing of herself as a ballerina.

Representations and Repositories: Girls, Pleasure, and Desire

In order to position girls as agents and consider the ways in which pleasure and desire shape their drawings, we must first work to denaturalize childhood as Nancy Lesko (1996) has denaturalized adolescence by “calling into question key assumptions through rhetorical, historical, and feminist rereadings of the production of particular knowledges” (p. 140). This helps to render childhood not as innocent but as multiple, gendered,

and contingent. Jan Jagodzinski (2004) also exposes youth as “a historically constructed object of contested discursive representation” (p. 19), and illustrates how “childhood” changes with the gaze of who is defining it. Cross (2004) shows how the myth of childhood innocence is a hegemonic production that often underlies the common sense terms we use when discussing children and their productions. Wald (1998) refers to a “nostalgic appropriation of (imagined) girlhood” as evidence that childhood is more often imagined and performed by adults rather than lived by children (p. 597). As Jacqueline Rose explains, “childhood innocence was invented to ward off the way the child’s bisexual, polymorphous and perverse sexuality threatens our own precarious and insecure sexual identities” (1985, p. 4). By referencing Freud’s child, she shows how girlness and wholeness serve as devices to mask and make safe what is uncertain—how they civilize children and girls. Cross (2004) also sees constructions of the “wondrous” and “cute” child as performing a similar social function. By choosing to see the child as polymorphous and complicated, childhood can be restructured as a relational concept (Wyn & White, 1997) contingent upon context, and never fixed. Denaturalization is perhaps a more difficult undertaking with the idea of childhood, a construction that is so socially embedded it is almost impossible to think of as unnatural. Additionally, within the construction of childhood, the child is constructed as both rational and male (Walkerline, 1997).

In order to consider girls in the context of cultural production and desire, it might be more appropriate to position, as Wald (1998) suggests, “girlhood as a separate, exceptional, and/or pivotal phase in female identity formation” (p. 587). In doing so, we can consider, in John Fiske’s terms, how culture “is the constant process of producing meanings of and from our social experience, and such meanings necessarily produce a social identity for the people involved,” and how within “the production and circulation of these meanings lies pleasure” (1990, p. 1).

Looking at a Girl’s Drawings

A second grader in one of my art classes at a parochial school described herself as an artist, and was seen as the class artist in her group of girlfriends. In her drawings, she often illustrated themes associated with girls’ work (Figures 9 & 10).



Figure 9: A second grade girl's drawing of school.



Figure 10: A second grade girl's drawing of a sundae.

One particular drawing (Figure 11) is interesting to consider because it raises questions of exactly what children's and girls' popular culture is and how it differs with reference to context, or how "image and text are articulated to the *skilled practices and routines* accomplishing femininity in a local historical setting" (Smith, 1988, p. 45). As a student in a Catholic school, First Communion and the accoutrements that accompany it constitute a right of passage (a Sacrament, to be precise) that parallels marriage.



Figure 11: A drawing of a second grade girl receiving first communion.

In her drawing, she positions us (and herself) as viewers looking down on the Church aisle as she walks it. Although she shows herself from behind, we can see she is wearing a gown with an elaborately decorated bodice. In the few weeks before the event, both parties and gowns were one of the primary topics of discussion in my classroom where this drawing was made. Girls brought their dresses and veils to school for the rehearsal of the event, and there was a special, holiday-like, excitement in my classroom. Because they wore uniforms to school, the girls rarely had the opportunity to dress "up" or "down," and these occasions were made more memorable by their rarity. Even in school situations, girls (see Figure 9) show themselves wearing clothes they might like to wear, and not their uniforms. This particular group of second grade girls also accessorized and personalized their uniforms. They often wore colorful hair bands, shoelaces and shoes, socks, and jewelry. These small differen-

tiations and allegiances with one another were significant for them.

Her sophisticated treatment of space gives us a sense of the significance of the event. As she approaches the altar, she seems as if she is the only girl in the church and her family the only attendants. There is only a cross on the altar cloth waiting to greet her, not the other children nor the priest. The drawing has both a contemplative and celebratory mood—it shows her understanding of this and seems to also symbolize her real or imagined relationship with God. First Communion, as a Sacrament, is only conferred once children reach the age of reason so that they are aware of the religious significance of the event. The drawing also illustrates her understanding of the personal significance of a girl's walk down to the altar while she is wearing a veil and while all eyes are upon her: an event that reoccurs with marriage and baptism of a new child within Catholicism. The sacred objects that always occupy the altar are rendered with thought and care, suggesting both a familiarity with them and their significance to both this special event and life in a Catholic school. The candles are lit, the grade level banners are hung in prominent place, and a video cord is present, suggesting that these details were noticed during one of the weekly school masses. The children were very rarely in the chapel outside of mass during school time and never there unaccompanied by adults. The few viewers in the pews represent her family, including a new baby who has turned around to watch her. Their gender is differentiated only by their hairstyles. This drawing challenges society's notions of the content of girls' popular visual culture, and how they make meaning from a conglomerate of cultural images that constitute their complex subjectivities.

The girls in my class loved this drawing—this illustrates ways in which girls' drawings function socially and are both constitutive and representative of girls' friendships and how these friendships function and what they mean. Several studies (Boyatzis & Albertini, 2000; Thompson, 1995) illustrate how children's drawing is social and how it both defines and mediates friendships and social relationships. Many of the girls, who also knew I was about to be married, asked me if my veil would be like theirs. One of my students even drew a picture that speculated upon what I might look like on my wedding day (Figure 12).



Figure 12: A second grade girl speculates as to what my wedding day will be like.

They were intrigued with the idea of the veil—the one article of clothing that they believed made a beautiful dress all the more significant and special. The veil might have functioned as an icon for them. It figures prominently in many religious icons, and girls are only given the opportunity to wear a veil (and imagine themselves as one of these icons) on special, ritualized, occasions. This veil once symbolized innocence, purity, and modesty. Even though contemporary church law no longer requires that girls and women wear veils on these occasions or for ordinary Masses, they have become important secular symbols of these attributes and have also become a memorable part of the growing fashion-industry commerce for such events. Contemporary communions can be large, expensive events that include special “mini-bride” dresses, cakes and parties, and professional portrait photography. These surrounding elements both heighten the sense of importance of the event for the children who participate in it but also reveal adults' desires to see young girls, especially, as beautiful and innocent.

Beyond Drawing: Other Types of Girls' Productions

Further attention must be paid to young girls' productions in other areas than drawings, including photography, video, crafts, clothing making and alteration, alteration of their toys, and other areas of visual production and expression. Although scholars have recognized the importance of older girls' and young women's productions (including zines, video, and blogs), children and little girls often do not have access to media that can be specialized and is expensive. Additionally, much of this important scholarship (for example, Harris, 2004) is focused on teenage girls and young women, who have both greater access to cultural resources and greater visibility. Because young girls often are unable to participate in the economy as purchasers (although this is rapidly changing) many children's productions are makeshift or modifications of items that they already own. These items and collections often remain private. This is one of the reasons that inquiries about children's visual productions have been so often focused on drawings—the materials needed to produce them were accessible to both children and researchers. But, it is crucial to explore how girls make meaning in multiple productive ways, and girls may often have more access to expressive media in a classroom setting.

In a recent example of this, a group of fourth grade girls in my class wanted to make a video reproduction of the popular TV "reality" show, *Survivor*. To do so, they created storyboards, wrote scripts, designed costumes, and prepared elaborate "challenges" that they planned to record with a digital video camera that I borrowed from a nearby university. During the preparation for their productions they discussed the idea of surveillance and what watching a show like *Survivor* or *Fear Factor* (a close second favorite) means to them. They expressed concern that contestants in the show were being hurt or humiliated and sought to re-write and re-produce the script of the show. They assigned roles—stunt master, make-up, set director, host, movie maker (camera person)—to each of their friends in the cast and made detailed plans on paper of the set, the names of the teams, the mottos, and the goals of their show. The impulse to recreate a show that they found pleasurable to watch was pleasurable for them in other ways, too. This experience soon eclipsed the walls of the art room and began to occupy many of the marginal spaces

of school time. The girls invited me to lunch with them in the cafeteria to discuss their plans and they made detailed, folded notes (Figure 13) describing their secret "show." They asked me to keep the notes in a special drawer in my desk, to which only they would have access.

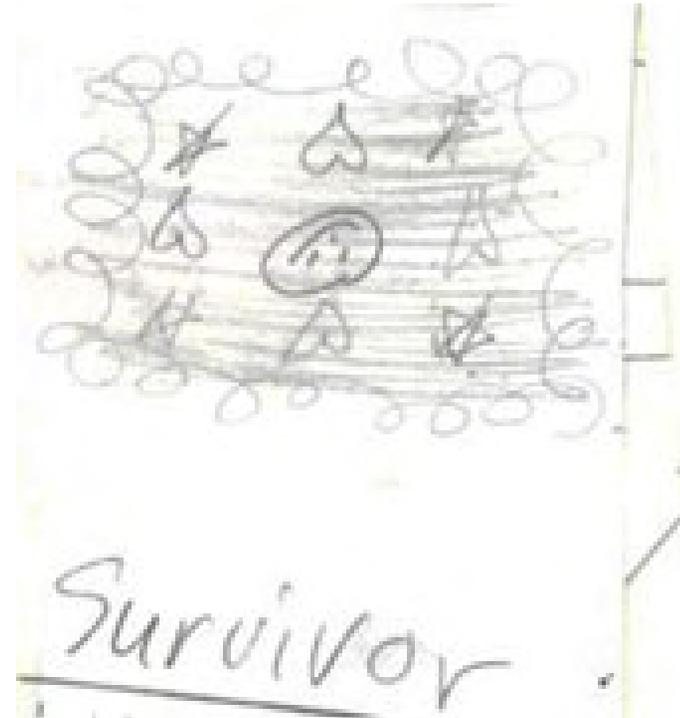


Figure 13: The folded, secret, *Survivor* plans.

The fourth grade girls saw themselves as agents of their own reality, as having the authority to re-write a script and to position themselves in guiding and forming roles. The idea for this project then morphed into a photography project in which the girls took disposable cameras to document their lives. This, in turn, led to an after-school project in which the girls and I walked through our small town and they documented the spaces and places that were important to them (Figures 14 & 15). Although we were never actually able to make the entire movie, the girls' efforts further raise the questions of girls as authoritative agents and producers of culture, the idea of a girls' gaze, and the pleasure of secrecy,

conspiracy, and privacy. It also discloses the spaces in between consumption, critique, and production of media as tangled with relationships and deeply embedded with fantasy, desire, embodied knowledge and experience, and pleasure.

The girls' connections to their game of *Survivor*, and their interest in its secrecy also reveal their relationships with one another, and with the other girls in the class. The *Survivor* group was an exclusive group, at the exclusion of other girls in the class. Even though the idea for the project began in class during a discussion of a project on games, the "real" life of *Survivor* quickly left the classroom for safety in more private spaces. Like the girls that speak out in Simmons' (2004) novel, the girls in this group felt a special level of inclusion, but also a significant level of vulnerability to the group and to the other girls' opinions of them. They were forced to negotiate each aspect of the fantasy—to delegate roles, to share resources, and to sustain both pleasurable play and social relationships.



Figure 14: A photograph fourth grade girls made of the magnolia tree and figure of the Virgin Mary in front of the school.



Figure 15: A photograph a fourth grade girl made to remember her friend's old house on a walk around the town.

Conclusions

These drawings created within the art classroom imply an adult-mediated relationship with children's productions. Children's, and girl's gazes often remain hidden, raising remarkable implications for future inquiry but also the ethical and moral propriety of the adult's intervention in such an investigation. For example, Walkerdine (1990, 1997) describes Janie, a "good" girl who becomes a "bad" girl when she sings Toni Basel's song *Mickey* in the girls' bathroom at school. Janie performs the role of "good" girl at home and school, but when she is in the private space of the girls' bathroom with her friends she looks at herself seductively in the mirror and sings. Her engagement with the song is reproductive of "girl" icons but is also subversive when we consider how Janie uses her body, power, and pleasure to perform her private "bad" girl role. The matter is further complicated by Walkerdine's construction of herself as a researcher: where she uses her unknown presence in the bathroom to record the event.

jagodzinski (2004) also calls for an acknowledgement of the uneasy power relationship between "researcher and youth" that he sees as rarely acknowledged in "field" work of this kind (p. 50). He also warns of the "misrecognitions" of the researcher's efforts to know the "Other"

(p. 51). His caution is significant, and demands an acknowledgement that a teacher, researcher, or other documenter always is in a contingent and partial position, and can never proclaim to reveal the “authentic” experience of either themselves or another person. They are always implicated.

Jacqueline Reid-Walsh and Claudia Mitchell (2002) both address bedroom culture (as does Mary Celeste Kearney, 1998) as a productive site in children’s and girls’ lives. This concept is problematic because it relegates girls’ productions to the private, domestic sphere, where they are likely to remain or only made visible through intervention (as in Janie’s story above). The concept of culture as relegated to the space of a bedroom also operates on ideas of girls’ sexuality. Reid-Walsh and Mitchell also discuss “kitchen research” or the research that often comes from parents studying their own children. Mitchell’s daughter Becca’s photographs are displayed in the chapter on children’s gaze. A consideration of these two concepts has helped me to conclude the preliminary work that I have done and to consider why the knowledges and products constructed by girls remain so marginalized and private and what is at stake in making them visible and public.

When I began this research, I was surprised to find that no accounts exist of the way girls’ drawings of themselves mean. I had assumed that the ways in which I had seen girls negotiating and making meaning in their cultural productions were happening in other classrooms as well.

Only when reading Reid-Walsh and Mitchell’s work, did I realize that I was working within a liminal space like that of girlhood (Turner, as cited by Lesko, 1996). My classroom was my “kitchen” and my relationships with the girls’ in my class invited me into one construction of their “bedrooms” (or, the art room after school). Because I had access to situations where children were actively constructing meanings through making, I had access to productions made that would normally occupy the private space of the home or of playing with friends—the space of young girls’ bedroom culture. Because the girls in my classroom knew me to value “art” and also saw me as a “girl,” drawings that normally might never be made public were given to me as gifts, inviting me into a dialogic relationship with both the drawer and her subject matter. In this way, both teacher and students shared a relationship in this liminal

space between—a generally private space in which teachers, parents, and caretakers have access to children’s thoughts.

Like *Gigi*, girls no longer have to be placed in the role of a “Cinderella” waiting to be rescued and appreciated or the precocious “tom-boy” who never quite relinquishes the coquettish appeal of a *Nabokovian* “nymph.” These available representations are not the only ways for girls to exercise power through their manipulation of an adult, male gaze.

The idea of a girls’ gaze (and children’s gazes, in general) is an important concept for educators, especially for art educators who have access to children’s drawings and through them, children’s fantasies, desires, and concepts of self. Girls’ gazes not only position girls as cultural agents, but also position girls in spaces where they objectify others, especially one another. In these relationships—even between peers—power remains unequal. At the same time, a girls’ gaze can be a powerful way for children to transform experiences and lived reality apart from adults’ constructions of them as whole and innocent. A child’s gaze can subvert, and can upset the power balance between adult and child, exposing and eclipsing the binary space between the two. Acknowledging girls’ and children’s power and desires in this way allows children and adults to enter into relationships that are productive of questions that surround multiple sites of identity and that help children to negotiate new opportunities to define and re-define themselves and the world around them.

Because educators and scholars have not studied young girls’ drawings and cultural productions in a systematic way, there is great need for further research. Because, too, those who often have the most intimate access to girls’ productions (mothers, girlfriends, and female teachers) have been traditionally constructed as objects of research and not as authoritative subjects of knowing, much of the context surrounding girls’ productions remains hidden or obscured, residing in the private transcript of the home or classroom, not in the public record of scholarship (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Making these knowledges and meanings visible within a public discourse while also acknowledging that this view is always subjective, partial, and infused with ethical concerns may contribute to a reconsideration of young girls as producers of culture and as cultural critics with social, cognitive, and emotional stakes in their production and consumption of visual culture.

End Notes

1. "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" is a double reference to both Walkerdine's first chapter in *Daddy's Girl* (1997) and to the original song that Maurice Chevalier sung in the film, *Gigi* (1958). This film was a musical adaptation of the novel, a classic "Cinderella" story. *Gigi* was also a highly successful play that featured Audrey Hepburn as Gigi.
2. Families have granted written permission for children's artworks to appear in this research.
3. In the popular series of children's books, Harry Potter is a powerful boy magician who attends the fantastic Hogwarts' school of witchcraft and wizardry. He is also a hero of the *Quidditch* field, the national wizarding sport. The Harry Potter books are among the best-selling children's book of all-time and have also generated a series of popular films. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, boys' identification with Harry Potter also raises questions about their fantasy and desire and how they communicate this through their visual productions.

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