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UMI
PRE-TEEN GIRLS' POPULAR MUSIC EXPERIENCES:
PERFORMING IDENTITIES AND BUILDING LITERACIES

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

Popular music is omnipresent and integral to pre-teen girls' everyday lives. In their engagements with popular music, they appropriate these commodities as local resources for expressing and performing group and individual identity identities, for negotiating gendered and racial relationships, for building and communicating literacies, and for making connections among a variety of social and ideological discourses. This dissertation study is an exploratory investigation into pre-teen girls' popular music experiences particularly as these experiences relate to and take place within the context of their everyday lives in school. Using ethnographic methods such as interviewing and participant observation at an urban elementary school, I explored how pre-teen girls engaged with popular music, how their engagements impacted identity construction, and how their interactions with and interpretations of music are embedded in their everyday lives.

Findings indicate that studying children and media requires careful attention to reflecting on and understanding the significance of children and researcher's performances of identity. In particular, my experiences with "playing girl" raised critical questions concerning the role of the researcher as social and critical actor. These experiences made present the difficulties of practicing cultural studies in the field.
highlighting the importance of recognizing that theory realized in research practices will influence and be influenced by the activities and relationships-in-process in the field.

Popular music is made present when the Central girls listen during lunchtime, when they talk about it in their classroom, when they are singing and dancing during recess when they music is not playing, and when they use their interpretations of music to bolster and/or create assumptions about self < -- > other. Findings illustrated that when and where they listened to music was always dependent on their needs, their readings of the appropriateness of engaging with the genre, who they were with, and what else was going on around them. How often they listened to their music was connected to where they were, who they were with, and whether or not they had access to the music. In addition how they listened to music and for what purposes all varied dependent on these factors as well.

When the Central girls talked about popular music, sang and danced in the lunchroom and on the playground, they communicated not only pleasure, but also their racial < -- > gendered < -- > age-related identities. During these performances, the girls constructed a sense of self < -- > other that was shifting and sometimes contingent on contextual conditions, their understandings of sociocultural relationships, and their interpretation of what it means to be "me." The most prevalent identity performances were "acting your age," "acting your color," and "gendered allegiances." Their identity performances disrupted genre--identity fusion; communicated the importance of understanding identity as process; demonstrated their sociocultural literacies, and created space for self-expression and group cohesion.
The Central girls' engagements with popular music are learning experiences that serve as a means to communicate and build on particular social and ideological understandings of identities, learning, and their sense of place in their social and official school worlds. They draw on a variety of discourses to make sense of their popular music experiences. In doing so, the girls develop literacies and deliberately and sometimes inadvertently communicate knowledge about sociocultural relations--knowledge that informs their day to day lives. In particular, they communicate through this meaning construction process understandings about 1) racial distinctions, 2) gendered roles, and 3) what is considered legitimate knowledge. The impact of popular music in their lives is mediated and conceived through the interaction between the music, the girls' interpretations of the text, their experiences in relationship to these interpretations, and the sociocultural and structural relations that permeate their lives. I argue that we can learn from these constructions how girls navigate through several versions of what is means to be a girl, what is means to belong to a particular racial group, and what it means to engage with and find pleasure in popular music.
Dedicated to my husband, Steve
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture is omnipresent and integral to girls’ everyday lives. In their engagements with popular culture, girls appropriate these commodities as local resources for expressing group and individual identity, for negotiating relationships, for communicating sociocultural knowledge, and for resistance (Currie, 1999; Durham, 1999; McRobbie, 1994; Tracy, 1994). Their experiences can be seen as epistemic journeys with girls actively making connections between self and other to foster identity construction. These journeys are always in articulation with a variety of discourses and sociocultural practices that fuse ideology experience; self other; and agency social structure. Thus, how girls interpret, enact, and appropriate popular culture is situated and lived out in the inter-dependent relationship among immediate experiences, local contexts, and larger social, economic, political, and ideological practices that enable and hinder girls’ experiences and meaning constructions.

Among the myriad of popular culture and media commodities practices, popular music is considered to be “a primary, if not the primary, leisure resource for young people” (Bennett, 2000, p. 34). Due in part to music’s mobility, accessibility, and
qualities youth consider music to be their “number one nonschool activity” (Christenson & Roberts, 1998). According to Christenson and Roberts (1998), music is used to “form and solidify friendships, express resistance against adult authority, identify subculture and demarcate psychological and physical boundaries both within youth culture and between the youth and adult culture” (p. 42). Scholars argue that the popularity of popular music is related to qualities that are particularly appealing to youth. For example, Longhurst (1995), Frith (1996) and Bennett (2000) emphasize the often contested and controversial forms of sound and meaning embodied in rock n' roll, rap, hip-hop, rhythm and blues, and punk lyrics and sound. Considerable subculture research has focused on youth creation of and appropriation of musical forms as means for social resistance (see Amit-Talai & Wulff, 1995; Gelder & Thornton, 1997).

Girls, in particular, engage with music at an earlier age and listen to popular music more frequently than boys do (Christenson & Roberts, 1998; Brown et al, 1990). McRobbie notes that girls’ engagement with popular music extends beyond listening to adopting fashion and dance styles that communicate group and individual identity. Girls act out, dress like, and organize around favorite pop stars and music genres.

The intertextual relationship between music, dance, and fashion has resulted in an explosion of external marketing targeted to girls. In addition to setting fashion trends, pop stars appear on school supplies, in their own magazines, on posters, in cosmetic advertisements, as dolls, in calendars, and in video games. In their study of Spice Girl fandom, Cowman and Kaloski (1998) called attention to the commodification of “girl power” through fan merchandise. While they argue that “there was a lot of it! T-shirts,
stationery, jewellery, dolls, mugs, calendars—not to mention core items such as CDs, videos, and posters...one of the most surprising findings was that most of the Spice goodies were unsolicited presents from adults, mothers, fathers, aunties... for some of the most ardent...shopping and owning was not the mark of a fan” (p.5). Their research illustrates the importance of understanding girls’ engagements with popular music as more than the music’s position as a commodity and as immersed in social relations.

This dissertation is an exploration of how popular music and its corresponding popular culture commodities — practices are featured in pre-teen girls’ lives—particularly their day-to-day school lives. This study is motivated, in part, by the fairly recent eruption of girl-centered literature in both academic and popular press. While conducting research in 1994 on girls’ uses of teen magazines, I had a great deal of difficulty finding theoretical and methodological guidance for my research. Among feminist scholarship particularly within media studies, there was a considerable dearth of research focusing on girls and popular culture/media. In addition, at this time the most visible girl-centered texts, teen magazines, were limited to the historically dominant Teen, Seventeen, and YM. Other titles such as New Moon, Sassy, and Girl (alternative formats) were emerging, but had not gained the readership needed to challenge the top contenders. Overall, the idea that girls, particularly adolescent girls, were valued consumers is of a recent origin.

Since 1994, however, numerous books have been published aimed at informing the public about “the everyday dangers of being young and female” (Pipher, 1994), the “confidence gap” for young girls (Orenstein, 1994), “the difference” between boys and
girls who grow up in America (Mann, 1994); the voices of the next feminist generation” (Findlen, 1995), and girls’ sexuality (Wolf, 1997). Furthermore, “girl power” is being celebrated in popular culture/media texts such as the “Power Puff Girls,” “Buffy, the Vampire Slayer,” Spice Girls, and advice books such as “Girls Know Best” and “A Girls Guide to Life” both written “by girls for girls.” In addition, the Scholastic Arrow Book Club, a book-ordering organization for classrooms only, is marketing collections of “strong girl” books as “girl power” packs.

Within academia, feminist scholars, in particular, have analyzed, documented, and theorized about girls’ psychological development (Gilligan, 1982; Tolman, 1991), girl’s physical development (Robinson, 1991), girls’ youth cultures (McRobbie, 1994; Nava, 1992; Wulff, 1995), girls’ educational experiences (Davies, 1993; Finders, 1997; Gallas, 1998) and the ways in which girls interpret and make sense out of media texts (Brown, Barton, & Nikopoulou, 1993; Currie, 1999; Durham, 1999; Tracy, 1994). While there are theoretical, methodological, and political differences within and among these bodies of work, all express a commitment to making visible the voices and lived experiences of girls. I have found that the ways in which these voices and experiences are made visible has the power to construct particular ontological assumptions regarding the “nature” of girlhood and media/popular culture experiences. These assumptions impact pedagogical practices, influence public perceptions of media/popular culture, and help to construct particular understandings of what it means to be a girl, what it means to embody femininity, and what it means to be a good citizen.
My interest in this research is also motivated by the tensions that exist in current cultural studies theorizing about the relationship between the audience and popular culture/media texts and practices. In the case of popular music, cultural studies scholars simultaneously recognize the importance of pop music as a vehicle for collective and individual resistance and also analyze its existence as a high-priced commodity (Bennett, 2000; Frith, 1996; Kirschner, 1998). As Bennett (2000) states, cultural studies scholars are left with the dilemma of "how to reconcile popular music’s position in the marketplace with its function as a potentially counter-hegemonic cultural resource" (p. 35). In this study, I have opted to embrace this dilemma both theoretically and methodologically. Although I often struggled with this, I tried to keep my thinking, writing, reading, listening, and observing active by continuously reflecting on the theoretical, methodological, personal, and social aspects of this work. I have placed significant emphasis on how music is "performed" and "heard" in the local context of an elementary school. I started from the position that girls' have knowledge and enact this knowledge about popular culture, power, and identity in their daily interactions with others. In doing so, I opted to lean on the side of "active interpretations" bracketing temporarily and as much as possible critical theories of media impact. In addition, I was mindful throughout the data collection and analysis of the need to incorporate my findings into pedagogical practice—the teleology that this study could inform the development of media pedagogy projects was important.

In this chapter, I will extend this discussion by highlighting the theoretical and philosophical influences in this study. First, I call attention to the different trends in
children and media research indicating the shifts in foci that impact how we think about childhood, media/popular culture, and power. Included in this section is a discussion of cultural studies approaches to audiences and consumption, and, in particular, the focus on contextualizing media experiences and theorizing identity. In specific reference to this study, I focus attention on one particular “context”—the relationship between popular culture/media and schooling. Next, I review theoretical and empirical work centered on “girlhood” including a review of specific studies concerning girls and popular culture. In the final section, I summarize the purpose of the study, briefly describe the study design, and explain the scope of the study and findings. Finally, I provide an outline of the chapters to follow.

**Studying Children and Media/Popular Culture**

Since the early 1930s, mass communication researchers, often in coordination with governmental agencies, have studied how media and popular culture impact children’s lives. In response to public concern about the emergence of new media and governed by the assumption that children are particularly vulnerable, researchers focused their attention on how media negatively affected children’s social and cognitive development. The presumption of negative media effects has set precedence and today continues to dominate both academic and public discourses regarding the relationship between childhood and media (Barker & Petley, 1997; Buckingham, 2000).

Between 1929-1932, researchers, in response to the growth of motion picture production, engaged in a series of studies, known as the Payne Fund Studies, to investigate media influence on children. Scholars using multiple methods such as content
analyses of over 1500 films, experiments and interviews with children, focused on effects such as “acquisition of information, change in attitudes, stimulation of emotions, harm to health, erosion of moral standards, and influence on conduct” (Lowery & Defleur, 1988, p.34). Since these early studies, media and children research has expanded to include a variety of perspectives and methods in the quest to understand how media affect children’s lives. Within the context of popular music, according to Roberts and Christiansen (2001), most of the public and academic concern for the negative effects of popular music on children/adolescents has focused on

attitudinal and behavioral impact of some of its more ‘extreme’ messages...even though a relatively small proportion of popular songs and music videos really push the edge of topics such as sex, violence, racism, misogyny, suicide, and Satanism...the fundamental concern is that kids will adopt beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors articulated in some of these songs. (p. 407)

Longhurst (1995) also calls attention to the tendency to study the negative impact of popular music. This concentration on the negative effects of popular music influences how parents, researchers, teachers, and other public agencies perceive children/youth as listeners (Barket & Petley, 1997).

In an effort to understand the potential negative effects of popular music on children and adolescents, researchers have examined children/adolescent’s interpretation of lyrics, the impact of music videos, the immediate and long term emotional impact of popular music, and the “social uses” of popular music (Greenfield et. al, 1987; Leming, 1987; Rosenbaum & Prinsky, 1987). While Roberts & Christiansen (2001) note that a positive correlation between aggressive behaviors and exposure to violent music lyrics and performances has been established, they question whether or not the relationships
may be indicative of other variables or the possibility that these behaviors preceded the use of popular music. Their hesitancies in establishing cause and effect relationships hint at the need to study youth and popular music in the course of their everyday lives taking into account sociocultural issues related to social identities and other conditional factors that may impact music use. Scholars continue to challenge research that concentrates on negative effects. They argue that children/youth are often constructed as relatively passive listeners serving to reproduce music as more powerful in terms of psychological and immediate and long-term behavioral impact than demonstrated in children’s/youth’s everyday lives (Christenson & Roberts, 1998; Roberts & Christenson, 2001; Longhurst, 1995).

Other studies of popular music effects include uses and gratification approaches. Uses and gratification research is grounded in the assumption that media’s impact is best understood in terms of how people use media to fulfill their needs. In relationship to youth and popular music, scholarship has focused on the affective uses of popular music including youth’s use to relieve boredom (Christenson & Roberts, 1998) and to enhance or alter their moods (Roe, 1985; Rosenbaum & Prinsky, 1987). Within the context of uses and gratifications popular music research particularly studies that focus on individual solitary uses, there is a tendency to neglect the ways that music gratifications impact listeners beyond the moment of contact. To understand that youth use music for particular purposes doesn’t necessarily get at how these uses impact their day to day interactions with others—interactions that are always saturated with social, cultural, political, and economic relations.
Lull (1987) and Frith (1981) challenged individual level analyses by considering peer group affiliation and popular music appeal. They argued that the social uses of popular music offer insight into the “delayed” impact of music use for everyday life. Frith (1981) noted that music preference was connected to choosing friends. Music choice was embedded with value systems and preference was understood as far from innocent. In this sense, music selection for particular uses and needs was politicized to account for social, class-related, and gendered relations. Lull (1987) argued that when youth use music when they are alone they may be developing from their interpretations of lyrics and their social worlds understandings that impact they day to day interactions with others. In addition, he highlights the importance of being affiliated with particular kinds of music as important social work. The concentration on the social uses of popular music was an important break from studying individual uses. The recognition that media use informs social relationships is further developed in work that calls attention to the ways that media and popular culture use is implicated in a complex process of meaning construction incorporating an understanding of the audience as negotiating sociocultural relations.

**Cultural Studies Approaches**

Reception study scholars, influenced by British Cultural Studies, theorized meaning construction as taking place in the dialectical relationship between the culturally situated audience and the structurally produced text. This was a movement toward a view of the audience as active, yet inscribed within social, political, and economic conditions. Gramsci’s influence within audience research shifted attention away from
understanding humans as occupying "subject position" or locations constructed by ideology to a more complex understanding of the ways in which human actors use cultural products to construct social identities, to resist hegemonic impulses, and to transform "common sense" into "good sense" or a conscious awareness of the workings of power and dominant leadership. Reception studies are at the very least connected in their belief that ideology is a site of struggle over meaning and a struggle that may be enacted in the process of meaning construction when the audience engages with media texts.

Theorizing the audience as active, yet positioned within particular relations of power is complex and often results in polemics regarding the location of power in the text/audience dichotomy and resistance. Often, reception scholars are critiqued for attributing too much "activity" to media audiences. According to Evans (1990), theories of active audiences give too much credence to experience and audience's re-tellings of these experiences. Critics argue that too often experience is, in the final instance, dislodged from its relationship to ideology and structure sometimes resulting in a "romanticizing of the audience" and dismissal of the constraints of power relations. On the other hand, scholars who call for more attention to the ways in which audiences are constrained and inhibited by media are charged with theorizing the media as overwhelmingly powerful and capable of manipulating audiences and consumers. Debates centered on the location of power in the text-audience relationship have resulted in the construction and reification of several other binaries such as agency/structure and ideology/pleasure.
These polemics leave audience scholars with the dilemma of how to integrate macro-social and micro-social accounts of media experience and interpretations; it seems that this particular impasse leaves unanswered—how do we study the particular without losing site of the larger social structure (Marcus, 1986)? In reference to this dissertation study, I needed to interrogate how I would account for the pleasure children/youth get from their appropriations of popular music without dismissing the ways in which media institutions work to create consumers by playing into children’s desires. Also, how would I investigate how power is enacted in children’s lives without dismissing how children challenge and re-create their lived experiences. These concerns require a renewed interest in focusing on identity construction and context as contingent on the articulation of a variety of discourses as practiced and featured in girls’ day-to-day lives.

Theorizing Identity

Within the context of cultural studies, identity continues to be an important theoretical concept and fodder for much debate. Within the context of this study, identity is understood as our perceptions and performances of self <--> other. Identities are continuously under construction influenced by our interpretations of our immediate experiences, our understandings of larger social and ideological discourse such as media, and our readings of how we are constructed by others. Feminist scholarship, particularly US third world (see Sandoval, 1995; Moraga, 1983; Anzaldúa, 1987) and cultural studies feminist theories of identity (Probyn, 1993; McRobbie, 1994) significantly influence this study. Both discourses embrace the importance of understanding identity as emerging through interaction. In direct response to the early feminist constructions of “woman,”
women who identified their oppressions as multiple and simultaneously constructed by their many identities based on race, class, sexual orientation, cultural displacement, nationalities, ethnicities, and disabilities, mistrusted the monolithic notion of "woman" embedded in much of feminist theory and practice. Identity was unfixed from its essentialized corresponding gender, race, class, and sexuality social positions and understood as process—as enunciation and expression. Identity, then, is performed and communicated rather than pre-determined.

De-stabilizing the category of "woman" has led to important discussions about how identities are constructed. In reconceptualizing the category of "woman," postmodern feminists and US third world feminists embrace the ambiguity of their own subjectivities and the mobility of their own identities. Their theorizing is based on the experiences of women and men who find themselves moving from one oppositional ideology to another, "juggling cultures" and identities. This conceptualization of identity purges the Enlightenment's unified subject and reconfigures identity to reveal the real conditions of transnationalism, diaspora, and displacement characteristic of a postmodern world (Kaplan, 1994). This feminism represents a "dilemma of the mixed breed" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78), "la mestiza," a new consciousness fluid in its constant fluctuations between cultural realms, which themselves remain in constant movement and process. According to Moraga (1983), US third world feminists refuse to choose between cultural and sexual identity, between race and femaleness. They presume out of political and personal necessity the need to transform oneself in response to the exigency of the moment and location. This flexibility is embedded in experience and inescapable.
out of necessity. According to Berger (1992), identity is based on historical situations that position and within which people position themselves. It is in the layers of subjectivities in relation to others where identity is constructed and transformed.

As noted by Probyn (1993), subjectivity is both identity and subject position; both ontology and epistemology,

the self...is a doubled entity: it is involved in the ways in which we go about our everyday lives, and it puts into motion a mode of theory that problematizes the material conditions of these practices...self as material evidence of our fluctuating being as women...the process of being gendered and the project of putting that process into discourse...an ensemble of techniques and practices enacted on an everyday basis and that it entails the necessary problematization of these practices. The self is not simply put forward, but rather it is reworked in its enunciation.” (p. 3).

In reference to this study, I am interested in how identities get enacted and constructed and how girls negotiate the ever-present ambiguities in their lives. So, rather than focus entirely on how their social category (e.g. age, gender, race, class, sexuality) determines what music they listen to; I wanted to locate their interactions with the media in their everyday lives—which encompasses past and present; continuity and discontinuity. The premise of ambiguity, multiplicity, and contingency creates a messy feminism and requires consistent negotiations between theory < --- > practice and self < --- > other. By rethinking experience as a process, by reinterpreting identities as multiple and shifting, and by integrating the politics of my own location into my research, I was able to think differently about my role as a researcher and differently about what girls’ media experiences revealed about their identity construction.
Contextualizing Media Experiences

In theoretical articulation with feminist scholars, Hall (1997) argues that identity should be “understood as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies” (p. 4). In doing so, he communicates the necessity of contextualizing media experiences in order to understand not only media impact, but how identity as process impacts media production, consumption, and meaning construction.

According to Buckingham (1993), Durham (1999), and McRobbie (1994), there is a considerable dearth of research about children and media that focuses on how the consumption of media content is enacted and played out in the context of everyday life. We know surprisingly little about how girls, in particular, make sense out of media and how this process of meaning construction is connected to the larger and more immediate social structures that serve to open and close possibilities of interpretation and action (Durham, 1999). Ang (1996) argues that meaning construction emerges within contextualized audience practices. Thus, how we come to understand audiences’ interpretations of media content and the experience of reading, viewing, and listening must be interrogated within social, political, and cultural relations. McRobbie (1994) posits “how young people, male and female, experience the society around them and how they in turn express this experiences, continue to be immensely important questions” (p.155).

Williams and Hoggart’s culturalist perspective significantly impacted current theoretical and methodological practices of contextualizing media experiences.
"Culturalist audience studies" (Ang, 1996) is characterized by “work that starts out from the recognition that media consumption is an ongoing set of popular cultural practices, whose significance and effectivities only take shape in the complex and contradictory terrain...in which people live out their everyday lives” (p. 248). According to Bennett (2000), attention to the local is essential in terms of understanding the sociocultural significance of popular music for youth. He defines the local

as cultural space in which music is collectively heard and used by young audiences...a highly contested territory that is crossed by different forms of collective life and the competing sensibilities that the latter bring to bear on the interpretation and social realisation of a particular place. (p. 53)

In his ethnographic studies of youth and popular music, he states that when discussing the meanings that music had for them, young people invariably used the local as a central point of reference.

For example, a particular club, the people who went there and, equally importantly, those who didn’t, all become important focal points as interviewees mapped out and explained to me the role and significance of music in their daily lives ...in seeking to justify particular tastes in music and style on a more personal level, individuals invariably draw upon a range of locally embedded images, discourses, and social sensibilities centred around the familiar, the accessible, the easily recognisable (p. 197).

Other scholars who study popular music and youth culture have embraced the significance of the local. According to Pickering and Green (1987) social actors

selectively and creatively adopt and adapt particular songs according to their own criteria of how they can serve their own way of thinking and feeling...songs construct ways of handling the empirically experienced world...supporting and challenging how things are, or how they are represented ideologically. (p. 3)

The movement to understanding meaning construction as contextualized experience is both a theoretical and a methodological move. As a theoretical move,
contextualizing media experience means that we cannot understand the meaning of media
texts outside of their experiences as listeners and performers. In addition, we cannot
interpret the audience-text interaction without taking into account the contexts of
listening, the contexts of talking about media experiences, and the contexts of
interpretations. Thus, audience experiences are not just “expressions of different needs,
uses or reading, but viewing practices are intimately connected to the ways in which
particular social subjects are structurally positioned in relation to each other” (Ang,
1996). As a methodological move, contextualizing media experiences, required careful
reflection on how girls’ experiences are interpreted. These reflections included paying
attention to the social and political relationships between the research and the participant,
the environment in which the girls’ experiences are observed, and the ways in which the
girls’ experience are represented in the written text. I will attend to these methodological
issues regarding context more thoroughly in the Chapter 2.

In this study, context refers to a “culturally and historically situated place and
time, a specific here and now...the world as realized through interaction” (Graue and
Walsh, 1997, p. 9). Because context is understood as “realized through interaction” it
will be studied as always in process and under construction through communication. In
addition, context is made real through the ongoing dialectical relationship between
human actors and structural conditions. According to Graue and Walsh (1997), the
“process of doing interpretation in a cultural-historical framework requires attention to
the fit between the local situation within which we have become immersed and the larger
picture” (p. 9). They define the local context as the “right here, right now...it is the
physical and social place, a yard or a park or a classroom...local context is embedded in many larger nested and overlapping contexts” (p.9).

Building on Graue and Walsh’s theory of context, in this study, I understand context as incorporating:

1. the conditions of exposure: girl’s immediate viewing environment (where experiencing, with whom and how)
2. the construction of subject positions: how girls are positioned in terms of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity
3. the conditions of production: economic relations that influence what kinds of media are produced and made available
4. self-concept: girls’ understanding of self in relation to others
5. the public discourses about media, girls, and other related issues
6. educational practices such as curriculum, discipline, rules, teacher-student relationships, school day schedules, role of media in curriculum
7. the theoretical assumptions embedded in this study
8. my role as a researcher which includes the “physical aspect of doing fieldwork... also conditions brought to the project such as personal history, perspective on research and the topic of the project, and methodological choices made within the project (Graue & Walsh , p. 72)

Studying Popular Music

Within the context of cultural studies scholarship, we know the most about youth and popular music from subcultural research. Influenced by Gramsci, particularly the notion of resistance embedded in hegemony theory, British cultural scholars (e.g. Hebdige, Hall, McRobbie) sought to account for the ways in which youth cultures appropriated dominant forms and signs for their own use in order to express difference, solidarity, and their relationship to the hegemonic structures that devalued their practices. The audience was a politically meaningful category that helped to explain the conditions among the working class in post-war Britain. Hebdige used semiotics in his analysis of mod and hipster youth cultures to "attempt to account for the variable significance of
objects and images as they are circulated in different consumer markets' (Hebdige, 1979, p. 59). In terms of the audience-text relationship, media audiences adopt for themselves objects and images that offer an account of their lived experiences and a sense of community. Thus, he focused here not so much on effects, but on the process of appropriation and incorporation. Subculture research had a significant impact on defining the relationship between youth and popular music. McRobbie's (1984), "Dance and Social Fantasy", involved a more ethnographic approach to studying working class girls' culture. Using multiple methods, she analyzed the production of films such as Flashdance and Fame and incorporated her observations of gender relations in dance clubs and interviews with girls regarding their experiences and interpretation of these films. She found that dance as "a purveyor of fantasy addresses areas of absolute privacy and personal intimacy, especially important for girls and women" (p. 134). These acts of dancing for girls de-centralized the "straightforwardly romantic, heavily heterosexual goal-oriented drive" (p. 134) and featured the importance of friendship intimacy. Recent subcultural work focuses on the ways in which girl music cultures such as Riot Grrls rework patriarchy by appropriating negative images and expressions of girls for their own. For example, Riot Grrls' music groups are named Hole, Burning Bush, and Pop Smear to call attention to the ways in which they have been oppressed through discourses of sexuality and femininity, that have constructed them as objects of male desire (Gottlieb & Wald, 1994).

Most subcultural work locates audiences within dominant ideology or practices. Audience activity is valued as important counter-cultural moves that signify significant
acts of resistance. Scholars have critiqued this area of research for its class-centered nature, its tendency to homogenize subcultures based on regional and/or text-based characteristics failing to "account for local variation in youth’s responses to music and style" (Bennett, 2000, p.). According to McRobbie (1994),

these vibrant noisy products which emerge from in between the spaces for expression, discovered by young people inside and outside of the large social institutions which regulate and control their movements and experiences, might still seem trivial and unimportant if judged from the perspective of traditional youth politics...what is needed, then, in relation to the study of youth, with particular reference to ethnicity and sexuality, is a research mode which prioritizes multiple levels of experience, including the ongoing relations which connect everyday life with cultural forms (p.185).

In this study, I attempt to incorporate McRobbie’s critique into my project by focusing specifically on girls’ engagements with music in school. While this sociocultural space serves as the primary location of this study, I do not perceive this to be a fixed space. School district rules, teacher-student relationships, friendships, curriculum, different classroom spaces, student-student relationships, and teacher and administrative perceptions of media, popular culture, and learning are some of the “contexts” that frame everyday interactions within the geographical confines of this school.

**Popular Culture, Education and Schooling**

Educator’s attitudes about media are important to this study for two reasons: 1) because I will be conducting research in school and 2) because I want to explore what can be learned from pre-adolescent girls popular music experiences to help develop critical media pedagogical practices.
According to Buckingham and Sexton-Green (1994) "public debates about education and culture often invoke deep-seated anxieties about the influence of the media on young people" (p. 17). More often than not, media are believed to produce laziness, poor language skills, and to encourage violence. In response to these anxieties, over several decades, educators in the United States have adopted pedagogical approaches that seek to shield "the innocent," the children, from the negative effects of the media (Forsberg, 1993). Whether constructed within leftist or more conservative perspectives, educators sought to uncover ideologies embedded in media practices. In most cases, preferred knowledge was generated from teacher's insights and parental guidance, the assumption being that their readings of the state of the media nation and the conditions of children's lives were the more "true" representations of reality (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Curriculum was designed to change children's understandings of media messages and students were, for the most part, perceived to be relatively passive media consumers. Skeptics of these approaches have argued that these methods can be ineffective. According to Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994), students learn how to anticipate teacher's responses and mimic what is required of them, students also reject the authorial reading in order to resist yet another form of oppression. In addition, a focus on the educator as expert particularly when students consider themselves experts might impact learning (Dyson, 1997).

Lusted (1985) refers to the ideology of media in schools as being embedded in a "history of suspicion" (p.11). Television and other forms of media have been treated as either irrelevant, therefore, ignored in relationship to learning or understood as harmful
and teachers were expected to reveal its negative influence to children. Most teachers were found to be particularly worried about media impact on language acquisition and the development of imagination and creativity. In addition, teachers' perceptions of the relevancy of popular culture and media in the curriculum are constructed within the context of local district demands. Administrative decisions regarding whether or not popular culture can be included in school curriculum or on the school grounds impacts teacher's decisions about media relevance to learning. Also, the demands on teachers to construct curriculum to meet testing requirements significantly impacts the amount of time available to incorporate media, a subject that is most likely already considered to be irrelevant or distracting, into the tightly structured schedule of the day. In addition, parental fears about media's impact on children's attitudes and behaviors also contributes to the climate of suspicion and subsequent exclusion of media in schools (Seiter, 1996). In coordination with current concerns about the role of media in inducing school violence as well as the theoretical tradition of constructing children as unsophisticated and particularly vulnerable consumers, inquiries into the role of media in children's everyday lives are significantly under-theorized. Yet, media and popular culture are central to children's lives. In many instances, the media are considered to be more reliable and less threatening sources of information about sex, relationships, body changes, and psychological concerns than parents and even peers (Currie 1999, Tracy, 1994).

Media and popular culture, however, are not entirely absent in schools. According to Jacobson and Mazur (1995), media is showing up on a regular basis in schools across the nation. They characterize public education in the 1990s as a place
"where advertisements fill the hallways and classroom and ooze their way into the curriculum" (p. 29). They argue that corporations have managed to penetrate schools by: 1) providing free educational materials including teacher's guides that frame their "own versions of facts, issues, and history"-companies like Georgia-Pacific distribute materials about the importance of clear cutting, 2) selling advertising spaces on buses, and 3) developing corporate-school partnerships. The total amount that corporations spend on education has increased from $5 million in 1965 to about $500 million in 1999 (Kilbourne, 1999). The much-disputed Channel One, a program that funds school media equipment in return they are given permission to broadcast news programs, infiltrated schools in the 1980s armed with commercials between programming. According to Kilbourne (1999), advertisers are "reaching nearly 8 million public-school students each day." This political economic analysis of the role of media production in educational spaces highlights the importance of studying the role of media in education particularly given the history and practice of suspicion. Media presence in schools as a commodity helps to frame media meaning and children's relationship to media.

Researchers in both media studies and education studies have investigated how children experience media and how these experiences impact their learning and/or their school-based relationships with teachers and their peers. In his study of children's experiences with television, Buckingham (1993) argues that children's talk about television permeated their schoolwork and their interactions with others in the classroom. This talk, he claims, "seems to provide a means of defining relationships and establishing a kind of social pecking order among the peer group" (p.40). Durham (1999) in her study
of girls, media and peer groups in a middle school also noted similar findings. Media and popular culture were deemed an important part of children and adolescent everyday lives at school. In relationship to literacy curriculum, Dyson (1997) studied how children use popular cultural forms specifically superhero stories for social affiliation and social play and to negotiate their relationship to literature and their role as learners in the classroom. The children's appropriation of media forms in relationship to literature revealed the intersections between children's media lives and what is expected of them as students. In doing so, she illustrates the importance of incorporating "cultural materials children themselves find accessible and meaningful" (p. 7).

Constructing Girlhood

Historically, media research projects were designed to study children in general. However, the theoretical assumptions embedded in these projects regarding social and psychological development are based predominantly on boys' experiences and do not sufficiently account for gender differences. The boy-centered nature of this research is evident in the focus on physical aggression, selection of media texts used in studies, how differences between boys and girls are theorized, and the contexts, usually public spaces, where research takes place or where research focuses. When girls are included, they have been treated categorically as variables situated in theories and contexts more relevant to boys' experiences (Gilligan, Rogers, & Tolman 1991; McRobbie, 1991). In addition, girls are often treated as a monolithic category; consequently, differences among girls are under-theorized.
Interest in girls’ social and psychological development was influenced considerably by feminist scholarship that made visible the ‘missing girl’ in theory construction. In her theory-breaking study of adolescent girls, Gilligan (1982) called attention to the missing girl in psychological literature. She noted that theories of adolescent development particularly moral development were generated from boy’s experiences. In addition, McRobbie (1991) scrutinized Hebdige’s landmark study of working class subcultures in the United Kingdom for excluding girls in his analysis. She posited that adolescent subculture research has focused considerably on youth life that reflects a more “masculine” domain pertaining to the lives of boys and young men. These ‘discoveries’ generated a great deal of research focusing on girls psychological (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman, 1991, Pipher, 1994; Irvine, 1994) and girls’ social development particularly the relationship between their identity development and media consumption (Frazer, 1987, Nava, 1992, Tracy, 1994, Durham, 1999, Brown, 1993).

The increased interest in girls can be attributed to several factors including: 1) the aforementioned historical absence of girls’ experiences and voices in both academic and public discourses, 2) the proliferation of girls as consumers, and 3) the concern and fear about girls’ lives particularly media and popular culture’s impact on girl’s identity development. I want to preface here that most of the research about girlhood focuses on adolescent girls. Although I study pre-adolescent girls in this dissertation project, I argue that literature and assumptions about adolescent girls, as media consumers are relevant. The concentration on adolescent girls as media victims has been conceptualized as a
crisis for all girls. The absence of information about pre-teens has resulted, I think, in a homogenization of all girls under this category. In addition, because younger girls are being recognized as current profitable consumers and on their way to being adolescent spenders, the connection between adolescent girls’ lives and pre-teen girls’ experiences is important. Finally, the conceptualization of the category “adolescence” is intimately tied to puberty and body changes and researchers are positing that girls are reaching puberty earlier than previous generations (Brody, 1999; Whitehead, 1998). Thus, there is a growing concern about how this early onset of menarche will impact girl’s sense of self and relations with others.

**Girls as Consumers.**

According to Kilbourne (1999), “girls are extremely desirable to advertisers because they are new consumers, are beginning to have significant disposable income, and are developing brand loyalty that may last a lifetime” (p. 131). Girls ages 8-12 or “tween” girls make up 15 million of the US population. Part of Generation Y, girls aged 5-20 year old are considered to be “hyperconsumers” buying 3.6 million handbags, $195.2-mil worth of jewelry and $336.6-mil worth of fashion watches in 1998 (The Teen Scene, 1999, p. 60). In addition, girls are sought after not only for their own spending but also for their influence on adult spending. According to Gardner (2000), “elementary-school-age kids are an irresistible target...those between 4 and 12 are directly responsible for $170 billion in spending (either their own money or money spent on their behalf) and indirectly influences at least twice that amount” (p. 1). This increased consumerism has provoked media corporations to take girls seriously and recognize their influence as
consumers now and in the future. For example, companies like Levi Strauss distribute mailings to girls ages 7-12 year old to learn more about them and to attempt to influence the construction of their brand recognition and loyalty.

The goal of many marketing companies is to develop "brand loyalty." In order to entice advertisers, Seventeen magazine promises "Reach a girl in her Seventeen years and she may be yours for life" (as quoted in Johnson and Mazur, 1995). According to Podell, director of real estate for G+G Retail owners of Rave Girl and Rave stores, "If we get a customer at 7 or 8, she can stay with us through 25...it's a natural progression from Rave Girl to Rave" (quoted in Wilson, 1999, p. 54). A "get them while they are young" attitude among advertisers has resulted in an abundance of products marketing adult-like themes to children including games like "Careers for Girls" feature occupations such as "supermom" and secretary and Mall Madness. In perhaps one of the most insidious attempts to build consumers, Limited Too, a nationwide pre-teen clothing store and a subsidy of The Limited Corporation, has developed the "Fashion Adventure" program for the Girl Scouts of America. This program "offers girls the chance to hone knowledge of clothing design and retail merchandising, while exercised their purchasing power at a 15% discount rate" (Getting to them early, p. 4). The focus on beauty and self improvement that permeates ads and products designed for girls serves to emphasize the importance of being a savvy consuming girl and eventually a "credit-card carrying" housewife and mother.

According to Currie (1998), advertising capitalizes on young girls' lack of confidence. McCracken reiterates this point and argues that teen magazines, in
particular, rely on a theme of female inadequacy to sell products. In particular, girls are enticing consumers for the cosmetic industry, one of the leading advertisers in teen magazines and teen television programming. According to McCracken (1993) teen magazines, in particular,

Employ childish advertising and features to initiate readers into the world of female consumption. Cosmetics, fashion, food preparation, and romance are the predominant themes that prepare girls for their future roles as wives and mothers, when they will be responsible not only for the family’s consumption but for decorating themselves with cosmetics and fashion to secure a man’s love. (p. 137)

Advertisers also wield a considerable amount of power in terms of regulating media content. The transformation of Sassy magazine is one example. Sassy began in 1988 and originally was modeled after women’s magazines such as Lear’s and Elle and the popular magazine Dolly, a successful teen magazine in Australia. Sassy was noted for its real life appeal to its target audience, girls between the ages of 14 and 19 years old. According to Jane Pratt, Sassy was created to emphasize to girls that “you can make your own decisions, and that all kinds of individuality are acceptable (cited in Kelley, 1989, p. 14). The main focus was to please its audience and provide them with answers or discussions of some of the most controversial teenage issues. These issues ranged from sexuality issues to death and suicide. It up front attitude was evident in its content and more specifically in its use of teen language. Eventually, the editors were accused of publishing “slathering sex” and within its first year of operation, due to pressures from advertisers and the fear of a decline in circulation, Sassy had to do a face-lift and capitulate to the extreme criticisms it was receiving. Sassy’s transformation included an
increased focus on fashion and beauty consciousness and an overall preoccupation with more traditional feminine issues (McCracken, 1993).

Fear and Concern for the Girls' Lives

In response to the absent girl in public and academic discourses and fueled also by public concern for social issues associated with girls such as teenage sexuality (pregnancy, abortion, contraception), adolescent violence (date rape, girl gangs), and eating disorders, girl-centered literature has grown considerably. One of the most prolific and oft-cited accounts of girls' lives is Pipher's (1994) *Reviving Ophelia*. According to Pipher (1994), "girls are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture" (p.12) than previous generations of young women. She continues by arguing that

this girl-poisoning culture... today's music, television, and movies... truncates their wholeness and leaves many of them traumatized... one way in which to think about the pain and pathology of adolescence is to say that the culture is just too hard for most girls to understand and master at this point in their development. They become overwhelmed and symptomatic" (p. 12, 13).

Gilligan's construction of adolescent girl's experiences at the ages of 12 and 13 years as "the edge of adolescence" serves as an ontological assumption embedded in Pipher's account of girls' lives. Gilligan and Brown (1992) characterize "the edge of adolescence" as embodying an increased psychological risk for girls. In this sense, girls seem to be "losing their vitality, their resilience, their immunity for depression, their sense of themselves, and their character" (p.2). Girls' epistemic understanding of their world becomes a tension between what they know through experiences and what others tell them they should know and feel.
These "saplings," Pipher argues, are made vulnerable by the conditions of "living on the edge." For example, she claims that "during their early adolescence their body changes, they think differently (i.e. more mean, superficial, egocentric), they simply react to American culture and in turn, focus more on their bodies and their appearances, and in doing so, distance themselves from their parents and turn to peers and the "junk values of mass culture" (p.12). Focusing specifically on adolescence, she argues that this is a time when girls split from their authentic selves into "false, superficial, uncontrollable selves."

While I agree that the majority of media and popular culture images of women and girls reproduce stereotypical and ideological preferred feminine bodies and behaviors, I disagree with Pipher’s use of terms such as "saplings," "distortions," and "false" and "true" selves. I worry that her work reproduces potentially damaging constructions of girls as always already victim, and I am concerned about how these representations of girls impact girls’ perception of self and other. Girl’s uncertainties and ambiguities regarding their place in their worlds continue to be characterized in terms of lacking knowledge, discipline, and personal management skills (Johnson, Roberts, & Weld, 1999).

More generally, girls’ problems are often identified as body troubles. For instance, a considerable amount of research has been conducted focusing on eating disorders (Hesse-Biber, S. 1996; Myers & Biocca, 1992; Ogletree, Williams, Raffeld, Mason, Fricke, 1990; Paxton, S. J., 1991; Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, Kelly, 1986) and girl’s sexuality (Irvine, 1994). Girls’ sexuality is discussed primarily in relationship to epidemics of teen pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual violence.
According to Fine (1988), the prevailing discourse of female sexuality is a discourse of female sexual victimization. Thus, pleasure and desire, when mentioned, are carefully framed within this particular discourse of sexuality. This construction of girls' sexuality inhibits girls' expressions of pleasure in ways that serve to construct them as victims. Tolman and Higgins (1996) also claim that the constructed relationship between sexuality and victimization as well as "being bad" may inhibit girls from seeking legal and medical council when needed. Knowing that they will be constructed in particular negative ways, girls may resist help. Kilbourne (1999) posits that advertisers contribute to the construction of girls' sexuality by representing girls as sex objects. "The emphasis for girls and women is always on being desirable, not on experiencing desire" (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 148).

Researchers are increasingly concerned about girls' self-concept in terms of body images. Studies have shown that 40-80 percent of 4th grade girls are on diets (Stein, 1986). In a study conducted by Sanchiko (1993), "sixty percent of girls between grades one and six develop distorted body images and overestimate their weight" (p. 3) and this trend continues today. In addition, scholars argue that girls "obsession" with weight and body image is constructed as normal by the media (Kilbourne, 1999). Researchers conclude that the more often girls read fashion magazines the more likely they are to see themselves as inadequate in relationship to the model and images presented in these magazine (Field, Cheung, Wolf, Herzog, Gortmaker, 1999, Then, 1992; Richins, 1991).
Unfortunately, there is current trend to name girls’ responses to media’s obsession with thinness as distortions of reality or girl’s inability to see the ways in which media constructs body image for them.

Theorizing girls as being passive consumers who tend to distort reality or who don’t understand media influence is problematic for many reasons. First, the naming of girls’ responses to and interactions with culture as “misperceptions” and “distortions” of reality may inhibit focusing on what girls’ know about media effects and how they negotiate a variety of competing discourses in their everyday lives. According to Bordo (1993), the naming of girls’ responses to and interactions with culture as “misperceptions” and “distortions” of reality denies the possibilities that girls have learned “all too well the dominant cultural standards of how to perceive” (p. 57) their bodies. They have, in many ways, “correctly discerned that norms shape others’ perceptions of them” (p. 201). Others scholars call attention to the predominant stereotypical representation of girls as being “at best, uncertain and overly concerned with appearance and, at worst, as a victim of eating disorders, declining self-esteem, and risky sexual behavior” (Johnson, Roberts, & Worell, 1999). In a review of 10 years of research on adolescent girls, Johnson et. al (1999) argue that these representations fail to account for the diversity of girls’ experiences and what they know through their experiences about the world around them.

My frustration with these discussions about girls and popular culture is not a denial of the difficulties of being a girl nor is it grounds for an argument that girls’ are all-knowing or particularly cognizant of the ways in which power is exercised or the
ways that they participate in re-producing particular kinds of knowledge. From my own experiences and the narrative of girls I have had the opportunity to interview and interact with, it is apparent that popular culture can work in ways to mask power relations that we are not always aware of. However, we need to be cautious of our assumptions and cognizant of the potential implications of our representations about girls’ knowledge. We need to continue to reflect on how our “common sense” beliefs, research methods, and theoretical assumptions construct particular discourses about girlhood and how these constructions impact our personal, social, and pedagogical interactions with girls.

Differences among girls are often erased in the discussion of the crises of girlhood. Very few projects have explored minority girl’s identity construction (Way, 1995). Research on African-American girls and self-perception in terms of body image have revealed that they are less dissatisfied with their body weight and less likely to diet than their White peers (Parker, et. al, 1995; Jaffee & Mahle, 1995). Scholars attribute this difference in part to cultural expectations regarding beauty, weight, and style (Parker, et. al, 1995). However, because African American girls are situated in a larger culture that values White beauty as the standard, they argue that African American girls’ high body image does not mean that these females are necessarily less anxious about their appearances. They posit that “what is at issue is what type of self-presentation is culturally valued by African Americans females, in what context, and for what reasons” (p. 104). Identity and difference is theorized here as always relational and situated. The obvious consequence of theorizing girlhood through the lens of white, middle class girls is the absence of minority girls experience and, as important, by constructing girlhood as
a monolithic category the layering and simultaneity of girls’ identities as both African American and female, for example, are under-theorized. Unfortunately, other forms of knowing and being might get lost in the essentializing of the category “girl.”

In addition, media scholars have too often engaged in research establishing a priori which effects are important to investigate, which media texts girls find most significant in their lives, and which conditions are most likely to impact girls’ experiences with media. Another way in which research has impacted the gendered construction of girlhood is in the theoretically fixed relationship between gender and sex or in this case, femininity and girl. This assumption has stimulated an overwhelming focus on girls as consumers of feminine texts such as romance novels and teen magazines (Brown et al, 1993, Currie, 1998, Frazer, 1987, Greenberg and Linsberg, 1993; Tracy, 1994). In doing so, girls identities have repeatedly been fixed in relationship to feminine texts. Schwichtenberg (1994) argues that the assumption that all women and girl attended to the same media texts specifically ones that addressed and created the needs of femininity erased the differences among women. Consequently, early studies of women and girls media consumption focused on primarily white, heterosexual females who engaged in traditional feminine culture.

Therefore, it seems that the very discursive act of creating space and making visible is not unproblematic. The very act of studying girls and popular music is embedded in a variety of discourses not only concerning girls as consumers, but also concerning how children and media have been studied as well as how popular culture and media are constructed in the public imagination and practices.
What I do know from my experiences of interacting with young girls and discussing their experiences with “the media,” is that the process of meaning construction, the process of engaging with media texts, and the process of constructing identities and beings in the world is always in motion. I don’t mean to argue here that there are never coherencies, habitual engagements or rigidities that leave their traces from moment to moment, but I do think that these stabilities are enacted rather than given. Adolescent girls are influenced by the media (they tell me this) and influence the ways in which the meaning of media content gets enacted, understood, and embodied in their experiential world. Sometimes this is an almost transparent activity: “I see ad for perfume, I buy perfume,” however, what leads these girls to participate and scent their bodies with these commodities are not isolated in the text-audience relationship itself. The viewing process is always more than this—their families, their school environments, their friendships, and their inner struggles work with and sometimes against their interpretations, their behaviors, and their resistance. We can write off this scenting activity as conformity or compliance with the dominant culture; however, I am not sure, until I contextualize this interpretation, what impact this might have on changing or rearranging cultural conditions. As I observe a group of fourth grade girls argue over who can use the glitter makeup, I am not sure of the utility of positioning this act as compliance or resistance for that matter (perhaps it is considered taboo to spend too much time on appearance during class or perhaps this is a way of marking insiders and outsiders). How can I come to understand the implications of their interpretations? And, what does this tell me about identity construction?
Studying Girls and Popular Culture

Feminist cultural studies scholars have offered alternative ways in which to study and conceptualize girls and popular culture. Their attention to the dynamics of identity construction and the importance of local spaces provides much needed theoretical and methodological guidance. I want to highlight some of the ways in which girls as audiences are theorized in interpretivist mass communication studies in order to provide a framework for my project and to report what is "known" about girls' media experiences. Scholars call attention to the ways in which girls read and actively engage with media texts. Following up on McRobbie's textual analysis of teenage magazines, Jackie and Just Seventeen, Frazer (1987) interviewed seven groups of selected girls about a photo story in Jackie. She concluded that based on these interviews:

- a self-conscious and reflexive approach to texts is a natural approach for teenage girls... they demonstrated a level of understanding, not only of the fiction, but of the genre of publications for girls in which Jackie is part of...ideology is undercut, that is, by readers' reflexivity and reflectiveness (p.416).

She posits that girls actively negotiated the meaning of these texts and engaged in critical readings of the story. However, this activity is a situated phenomenon. She introduces the notion that what other researchers have called "contradiction" in the voices of girls, she renames as "discourse registers" (p. 417). Discourse registers account for the various positions these girls are speaking including the "institutionalized, situationally specific, culturally familiar, public ways of talking" (p. 417). Thus, these registers "constrain" and "enable" girls to express their understandings and interpretations of the messages of the text. Discourse registers account for the variations in the way of talking about their readings of the texts.
In their study of adolescents and media consumption, Steele and Brown (1995) focused on how both adolescent girls and boys incorporated media content into their everyday lives and how this incorporation helped to reveal the construction of identities. Using methods such as “room tours,” Steele and Brown investigated the context of adolescent bedrooms to learn more about the enactment of media interpretation. In doing so, they theorize “adolescent media use as a dialectical process played out through everyday practices...and the connections between adolescents’ identities and media selection, interaction, and application” (p. 551). Steele and Brown argue that “teens’ sense of who they are shapes their encounters with media, and those encounters in turn shape their sense of themselves in the ongoing process of cultural production and reproduction” (p. 557); thus, how children see themselves is always in contest with how they are positioned by others.

In my study of adolescent girls’ reading of contemporary teen magazines (see Tracy, 1994), girls expressed both a fondness for the usefulness of these media texts and simultaneously a distrust in the advertising techniques and images presented to them. In particular, they disapproved of the predominant representations of physical perfection, admonished the advertisers for their preoccupation with sex and deconstructed the ads for their unrealistic approaches to displaying girls and products in farfetched situations. The girls’ interpretations of these texts were framed considerably by their experiences of living in a remote rural community. Their own experiences as rural female teens played a crucial role in their negotiation of the meanings of the texts and served as a strategic site of conflict and identity struggle. This negotiation revealed some aspects of their cultural
identity; in particular, their shared understandings of what it means to live in a place that is distanced from the ideal world presented in the magazines. Their readings were embedded with struggles for place and identity within a larger world and the competing beliefs of their smaller one in Caribou. For example, if the wearing of the "alternative" fashions displayed in the magazines can be seen as possible sites of cultural resistance, these girls are confined by the very belief system that mediates and makes possible their critical readings of these texts. Because they lived in a world that seems so different from the one represented in teen magazines, they were able to deconstruct the fantasy-like portrayals of others girls and their lived experiences. But, because they are confined by a conservative system of codes that constrain their use of alternative expressions of self, they are challenged by this very power of interpretation. This seemed to be a complex network of structures to resist and certainly illustrated the necessity of contextualizing girls’ media experiences.

In her ethnography of middle-school girls and popular music, Durham (1999) studied how ideologies of femininity were interpreted and put into practice. She argues that "while race and class were differentiators of girls' socialization and concomitant media use, the differences highlighted the ways in which their different cultures functioned to uphold different aspects of dominant ideologies of femininity" (p.211). She found that peer group activity simultaneously affected and was affected by girls' consumption of media content and their construction of difference. Buckingham (1993) also notes that "talk about television is instrumental in constructing and sustaining our
social relationships, and thus our sense of our own social identity” (p. 39). Girls’ assessments of television programs served to be a means for them to define themselves as females, in the sense that they have shared preferences and are able to recognize what is ‘for them’... they were also defining themselves in terms of age in rejecting what they described as ‘babyish’ (and, coincidentally, ‘for boys’), they are implicitly defining themselves as more mature and sophisticated. (p. 55)

Through their interactions with media and identification with characters, girls also explored and enacted possible identities.

The majority of studies about girl’s media experiences focus on adolescence—very little is known about how pre-adolescent girls interact with music and how this intersects with identity construction. Nevertheless, researchers have illustrated that age matters in terms of girls’ interpretations of media and how these interpretations are enacted in their everyday life (Brown et. al, 1993; Buckingham, 1993; Richards, 1993; Tracy, 1994). Given the increased interest in pre-teen girls as consumers and the recent attention to earlier menarche, this proposed study fills an important gap in research about girls’ media experiences.

**Overview of Study**

Using ethnographic methods such as interviewing and participant observation this research project seeks to challenge some of the assumptions and practices embedded in the study of media and children, specifically research about girls’ media experiences. In doing so, I explore how pre-adolescent girls engage with popular music, how this engagement impacts identity construction, and how their interactions with and interpretations of music are connected to their everyday lives specifically schooling. In
doing so, I investigate how girls’ experiences can impact theory construction and the
development of media pedagogical practices. More specifically, I am interested in
exploring the following research questions:

RQ1: How do pre-adolescent girls experience popular music?
RQ2: How do pre-teen girls’ popular music experiences impact their everyday
lives?
RQ3: What can be learned from pre-adolescent girls’ popular music experiences
to help develop theories about girls and media engagement?
RQ4: What can be learned from pre-adolescent girls’ popular music experiences
to help develop media pedagogical practices?

This dissertation adds to previous audience studies:

1. by focusing specifically on pre-adolescent girls’ popular music
   experiences
2. by contextualizing these media experiences to incorporate a sense of
   both interpersonal/relational and more structural situations/conditions
3. by framing the study keeping in mind the teleological aim of
   developing media pedagogical practices
4. by using methods of inquiry to help rethink the category “girl” to
   incorporate the dialectical relationship between binaries such as
   ideology/pleasure and structure/agency.

Focus on Popular Music

After spending several months with the girls, in their classroom and in more
informal school settings like the playground and cafeteria, it became apparent that
popular music was important in terms of their performance of self in school. They sang
throughout the day, talked to each other about music groups during free time and
independent reading, they listened to and performed music during lunch, and they
danced in the hallways, in the classroom, and during recess. Therefore, I decided to
structure this study around their uses and interpretations of popular music.
Scope and Limitations of the Study

The intent of this dissertation is to describe and make sense of a group of 14 pre-teen girls’ experiences with popular culture. The project is bound by the context of this one particular elementary school. While the research questions were broad, the generalization of findings to other groups of girls and other school environments may not be appropriate. I intended to keep the research questions broad because this was an exploratory study—I did not want to impose specific foci in fear of limiting my understandings of girls’ experiences. While this served to be advantageous, it also limited my ability to concentrate intensely on one or more aspects of the girls’ experiences. Some girls’ experiences and “voices” are represented more heavily than others in the data collected and the corresponding findings. Some of the 9 key informants were more enthusiastic about their music, had more to say, were more out-spoken, and might have had different perceptions about talking to adults than others.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 is divided into four sections: methodological considerations, location of study/participants, methods used for data collection, and data analysis procedures. In particular, I discuss the importance of theorizing the politics of the researcher—participant relationship as well as the importance of understanding the implications of representing others. In addition to discussing the specific location of the study, I provide an overview of the participants’ uses of popular music. I describe the participant observation procedures, the interview protocol, and the questionnaires in the method section. The chapter concludes with a discussion of data analysis procedures.
In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological and political significance of doing field research. In particular, I focus on our (researcher and participants) uses of popular culture as a medium for performing “girlness,” as a means to establish trust, and, perhaps unknowingly as a means to reproduce consumption. This chapter represents my processing of the theoretical dilemma of how we account for both agency and structure while being mindful about the methodological concern regarding how we manage valuing experiences and thinking critically about it.

In Chapter 4, I provide an analysis of girls’ popular music experiences. I argue that through their use of popular music, girls performed gendered, age-related, and racial identities. I begin with a discussion of how the girls conceptualized identity. I continue by offering three types of performances: acting your age, acting your color, and gendered allegiances. I maintain that gendered < -- > racial < -- > age-related identities are intermingled and always present during these performances. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how girls’ popular music experiences might impact media theorizing and teaching practices.

Chapter 5 builds on the previous chapter by exploring the Central girls’ engagements with popular music as learning experiences and as means to communicate and build on particular social and ideological understandings about social identities, learning, and their sense of place in their social and official school worlds. Using the concept of literacies, I argue that girls communicate and build their knowledge and understandings of self < -- > other through their popular music experiences. The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of literacies and exemplars of how the Central girls
express knowledge. I continue with a discussion of the girls' popular culture/music knowledge including their interpretations of singers/groups lifestyles, music lyrics, and music production. The bulk of the chapter concentrates on the ways that girls communicate and develop literacies concerning gendered roles, racial distinctions, and legitimate knowledge. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the potential implications for critical media pedagogy. Chapter 6 serves as a summary of findings and directions for future research.
CHAPTER 2
METHODOLOGY

This study is premised on the assumption that in order to understand girls’ media experiences, it is essential to investigate the contextual conditions that serve to frame girls’ experiences. According to Graue and Walsh (1998) “just as their (children’s) contexts are shaped by their presence, children and their contexts mutually constitute each other. To try to think about children without considering their life situations is to strip children and their actions of meaning” (p. 8). Because of my commitment to studying girls' media experiences in the context of their everyday lives, I wanted to select methods that would help me explore girls’ thinking, feeling, and sense making as well as document the social, ideological, and cultural dimensions of their media experiences. In addition, because this dissertation is grounded in the epistemological assumption that knowledge is always incomplete and partial and the ontological assumption that reality is constructed by human actors, thus inherently incomplete, I needed to incorporate methodological discussions regarding the acts of interpretation and representation crucial to theorize identity and experience as process. Thus, interpretivist methodologies and feminist methodologies inform this study.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodological issues and concerns experienced in the planning and implementation of this research project. I provide an overview of the
methodological and theoretical discussions that informed the construction of research design and my reflections on the research practices. In addition, I describe the data collection methods and analysis procedures.

Interpretivist methodologies are united by the assumption that in order to understand the world of lived experience, researchers need to focus on the emic point of view—the point of view of those who live it. While girls' perspectives are considered essential to understanding how media experiences are enacted in everyday life, interpretivist researchers influenced by cultural studies argue that participants' interpretations of their experiences need to be put in relationship to the conditions that frame these interpretations. According to Denzin (1989), it is important to connect the study of meaning making in social interaction to the communication process and the communication industry that produce and shape the meanings that circulate in everyday life...cultural studies directs the interpretive interactionist toward a critical appraisal of how interacting individuals connect their lived experiences to the cultural representations of those experiences. (p. 125).

Critical interpretivist scholars seek to put the researchers understanding of socio-political conditions (empirically derived) in dialogue with the participant’s account of her experience.

The methodological move to incorporate the etic and emic perspective in interpretive research involves more than incorporating multiple methods of inquiry. Intimately tied to the selection of methods are essential methodological questions related to issues of representation, interpretation and the politics of the research process. Feminist theorizing about these important methodological issues significantly influences
this study. I want to briefly discuss how these concerns impact my study of pre-adolescent girls’ media experiences by calling attention to the importance of thinking about:

- the politics of conducting research
- representation and voice
- how experience is theorized

The Politics of Location.

One of the key principles of feminist methodology is the notion of self-reflectivity. Self-reflectivity mandates that researchers carefully assess how their beings are inextricably embedded in the research process. Feminist scholars have addressed several methodological issues related to self-reflexivity particularly the recognition of one's social position and privilege as a researcher. The researcher's social and political “location” in relationship to the participant as well as in reference to the immediate conditions of engagement can impact how we interpret other's lives, how we choose to collect data, which data we choose to attend to, and to what extent we are perceived to be trustworthy researchers and legitimate sources of information.

In terms of this study, I want to highlight the politics of my own location in relationship to the girls who participated in this study. According to Graue and Walsh (1998) one of the most profound mistakes that adults make when researching children's lives is taking as given the assumption that because s/he was once a child, teen or young adult, s/he has insider knowledge of what the child is experiencing. In doing so, the construct of “childhood” is fixed across time and space and differences are sometimes
erased or de-emphasized. Thus, my knowledge of what it meant to be a girl—while important in terms of offering insight—was a potential opening, but not in itself grounds for identification. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3. For now, it is important to note that “being a girl” is an illusive category—one that is both ideologically constructed and one that is constructed in relationship with others.

I was an adult White woman conducting research in an adult-governed environment. My experiences taught me that developing trust for some children takes time. Although I did not occupy the role of disciplinarian and did not administer grades, I learned that girls (and boys) sometimes positioned me in these roles. It was indeed very important that I reflected on how my position as an adult particularly a white adult female influenced the research process. Again, I discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

I worked with the teachers at this elementary school on a separate research project for 7 months prior to this study. I developed relationships with them and discussed the “everydayness” of the school with them. These interactions sometimes included discussions about students. It seems to be part of teacher’s culture (and informal therapy) to talk about students, to share stories, and to seek advice from each other. These storytelling moments provide teachers with an opportunity to discuss their everyday experiences with children including times of frustration and celebration. However, in terms of this study, I carefully considered how I would make the transition from a teacher-centered to student-centered projects. In particular, I wanted to address the ramifications of sharing girls’ stories with teachers. In doing so, I discussed with the teachers the importance of honoring the girls’ confidentiality and that I could not share
any of the girls' stories with them excluding, of course, the final written text. As I anticipated, the teachers expressed their support by respecting the girls' privacy and by not asking direct questions about data collected. They continued to be interested in the project, but asked more general questions such as "how is the research going," and "are you able to finish all that you set out to do?"

**Experience and Representing Self and Other.**

Feminist scholars, in particular, have called attention to the absence of girl's experiences in public discourses, and most cultural studies audience scholars are invested in understanding the lived experiences of human actors. Thus, the process of making present the voices and experiences of those who have been silenced is deemed necessary and important to teasing out power as lived and the possibilities of changing the conditions of these very lives. And, this process is far from innocent. The representing of "other" in research practices has become an important area of discussion within feminist methodological arenas—these discussions are intimately tied to how feminist researchers theorize the relationships among experience, representation, and power.

According to Scott, how we think about representing others is connected to how we theorize experience. She claims that experience is not innocent, that the very telling of one's experience is wrapped up in an interpretive process, therefore, must be interrogated and understood as more than one moment, as more than evidence to substantiate some truth claim, and more than personal experiences of one person in isolation. Experience, in this sense, is itself a construction embedded in discursive practices that render it visible. Fundamental to Scott's argument is the critique of what
experience and the telling of one's experience comes to mean. She argues that experiences are constructed and enacted as if self-evident, as an authentic and original source to validate truth and knowledge substantiated by the very act of narrating, the very act of seeing, the very act of experiencing. In this sense, meaning becomes transparent and the ways in which experiences are constructed (narratively and materially) is masked and ignored. Thus, she argues, it is imperative that experience is interpreted and interrogated. In this project, I was committed to valuing girls' experiences, their knowledges about their media worlds, and how this plays itself out in their everyday lives. And, I take seriously the importance of recognizing girls’ narratives about their media experiences as partial and embedded within social conditions that help to frame these experiences. In direct response to overwhelming theoretical and public discussions about girls’ vulnerability to popular culture and the construction of them as relatively passive audiences, I tried to bracket, as much as possible, theoretical and critical views of popular culture and audience interaction. I was more interested in their knowledge construction, interpretations, and enactments of popular music and culture, in general. I considered their uses of popular music, their adornment of related fashions, and their talk about movies, television, and the internet to be grounded in knowledge rather than submission. I want to emphasize that this did not mean that I sought to “romanticize” these girls as being outside ideology or even particularly “knowledgeable” about the politics or economics of popular culture, instead, I opted to privilege their interpretations at the initial moments of engagement and data analysis. I understood the sociocultural, political, and economic production of popular culture texts and practices to be
inseparable from their engagement with popular music. As I will discuss later in this chapter, I focused data analysis first on their interpretations then layered my interpretation with questions about contextual conditions. I wanted to be sure that I “heard” what they were saying, doing, and claiming before I engaged in critique. I think that this is particularly important in ethnographic research and necessary for constructing pedagogical practices.

In terms of representing others’ experiences, feminist and postmodern scholars have launched a substantial and necessary critique of qualitative approaches. These critiques are based on the premise that much of ethnographic work has not reflected on the role of the researcher and the researcher’s text in constructing identities and experiences of others. Questions of who can speak and who has the authority to tell stories and to make present the lives of others have become fundamental inquiries in the knowledge production process (Shuman, 1986). In addition, McRobbie (1991) posits that we need to recognize the partiality of our account of audiences' experiences. This partiality is not based solely on the participant’s disillusionment as subjects-in-ideology, but is as much of a reflection on the limitations of our own interpretations.

Outside of media studies, other scholars have questioned the nature of ethnographic research. In the process of "writing culture," Clifford (1986) maintains that writing has become the central enterprise of the ethnographic process, specifically it is the primary predicament of ethnography and one that is "always caught up in the invention, not the representation of 'cultures'" (p.2). With the emergence of ethnographic techniques and the study of audiences as "cultures," "subcultures," and "interpretive
communities," how "culture" is written in text becomes a necessary concern for media scholars. Historically, the theorizing of meaning construction within reception study work has been nearly void of methodological discussions regarding the epistemological and teleological assumptions embedded in audience study. Within reception studies, very few scholars have questioned the research process and how this process of interpretation of audience behavior and understandings of their interaction with media texts is conceived and limited. Ang (1989) posits that "the aim of cultural studies is to arrive at a more historicized insight into the ways in which 'audience activity' is related to social and political structures and practices" (p.101). She visualized, however, this interpretation process as but one moment in cultural struggle. For Ang, audience researchers need to consider particular questions in relationship to the teleology of such scholarship. She asks specifically, "what kind of knowledge does this produce, what does it mean to subject audiences to the researcher's gaze, and how is it possible to do research 'on the side' of the audience (p.104)"? In questioning the process of knowledge production itself, Ang introduces important considerations for media ethnographers who engage in polemics concerning the nature of the audience--text relationship.

These considerations should not be limited to an understanding of the account as just a limitation of the research process (e.g. time and money constraints), but as a text created by the researcher and one that does not fully represent the audience and their everyday experiences. Due to this textual construction process, audience resistance or inhibitions should not be read as "truth" and/or discounted as limited without a complex understanding of the political location of the researcher in relationship to the researched,
the potential pedagogical and practical consequences, and the impact on communication. In addition, audience scholars need to contextualize their findings and situate these accounts within particular locations.

In terms of this study, I:

1. focused on girls' media experiences with an understanding that a variety of conditions impact their interpretations and performances.
2. reflected on how I recorded data (which data are recorded, making sure that my interpretations of the data are marked clearly) and established procedures for doing so. During field observation and while writing my notes, I was careful to indicate my thoughts and methodological questions by using ALL CAPITAL LETTERS. I also put direct quotes in quotation marks to separate them from paraphrasing.
3. used methods that allowed for this contestation of interpretations to be made present by incorporating both observation and self-report procedures.
4. reflected on the written account of girls' media experiences and built on ways to represent the inherently interpretive nature of both girls' accounts of their experiences and my re-telling of these accounts.  

Epistemological concerns related to validity in qualitative research projects are tied to methodological issues of representation. Altheide and Johnson (1994) argue that "as long as we strive to base our claims and interpretations of social life on data of any kind, we must have a logic for assessing and communicating the interactive process through which the investigator acquired the research experience and information" (p. 485). Based on the premise that the social world is inherently and inescapably interpretive, they posit that the research process is inherently subjective. In order to account for the validity of research findings, they offer suggestions for accounting for us as researchers and experiential interpreters. Researchers must include in their accounts an in-depth discussion regarding the immediate contexts of data collection including the physical setting, history, hierarchies, division of labor, social rules, disciplinary
procedures, everyday routines, significant events and their origins and potential consequences. In addition, there needs to be a detailed and complete discussion of how participants are selected and how participants responded to their role in the research process. In terms of researcher role, investigators need to discuss how they got entrée, how they developed rapport with participants, how they presented themselves in terms of their purpose in this setting, and how much time was spent with participants. In terms of methods, researchers need to account for any mistakes, misconceptions and surprises. In addition, the scholar needs to provide details regarding the process of data collection and recording and how data are coded and organized. These procedures help to ensure that the truth claims offered by the researchers can be systematically assessed.

Jorgensen (1989) discusses validity specifically in relationship to participant observation. He argues that participant observation requires that the researcher collect multiple indicators or forms of evidence regarding key concepts and ideas. In terms of checking the validity of participation observation data, he offers the following criteria: the use of multiple procedures and forms of evidence, the need to describe and discuss fully the procedures used to collect information including limitations and advantages of these procedures, and the possibilities of testing the actual usage of important concepts in everyday life. Analyzing qualitative data is an iterative process; nevertheless, the researcher is still responsible for making clear both the ways in which concepts are studied and how these concepts/themes have been measured.
Thus, I addressed validity by:

1. using a variety of methods to incorporate different interpretive lenses.
   providing a plan of action in terms of how I collected data—field notes, informal discussions, researcher comments
2. focusing on context and how this impacted data collection
3. providing details of how data were coded and analyzed

Location of Study

I conducted research at an urban elementary school (herein referred to as Central) in a large Midwestern city, specifically in one 4th grade classroom (Room 2). It is not always easy to gain entrée into conducting research on-site at a public school; however, I was fortunate enough to have worked on a separate research project at this school at the time that I was formulating this research project. I spent several months at this location, interacting with both teachers and students, and I had developed a good rapport with them. I also noted during this time period that teachers and students were receptive to research projects and the gentle methodological intrusions that emerged during their day-to-day activities. I was also intrigued by the ways in which popular culture and media were both present and absent in this school. Finally, because I had spent time with the students in this classroom and throughout Central Alternative, I gained invaluable insight concerning the relevance of popular music in their everyday school lives. With Mary’s, Room 2’s teacher, support and with the consent of school administration, I was granted permission to conduct research at Central Alternative. The girls were excited to be part of this project, and Mary trusted that I would respect her time and the importance of scheduled classroom activities. She was candid about her inability to devote much time to my project; and expressed her support and trust in my involvement.
Before I discuss the specifics of this research project, I want to describe Central Alternative through my eyes and the words, activities, and expressions of the participants. One of my first memories of the social "informality" of Central happened on my first day. I went to elementary school in the early 1970’s, in a small rural community in Northern Maine. Our days were governed and chartered by relatively firm rules establishing behavioral and architectural boundaries. I recall large bathroom passes—that announced to the world where you were going—used only in emergencies because the classroom usually took a community bathroom break at a specified time. I also remember never leaving the classroom without a teacher. The classrooms were classically arranged with assigned desks facing the teacher in the front of the room. We spent most of the day in our desks—leaving our seats for lunch and recess. The classrooms were immaculate and neatly arranged—quite sterile when I reflect on it now. The room felt like the teacher’s space, and I was a visitor. This arrangement of space and time framed my understanding of elementary school, so I was surprised by the apparent "informality" at Central.

During class read-aloud, 4 students frequently and in relative silence walked up to Mary and took the discreet clothes-pin bathroom pass and proceeded without interruption and verbal permission to the bathroom—two floors away. Some returned in what seemed to be a standard appropriate amount of time; others seemed to take a bit longer. Several students were what I called "frequent releasers," faithfully retrieving the clothes pin every read aloud and often throughout the day. With permission, students, during independent reading, read alone or with others in the hallways; they were permitted to go
the library, art room, and to other classrooms on their own. While I struggled with and was surprised by my embodied protest to so much freedom, the level of trust embedded in this practice intrigued me. This "freedom" did not mean that there were no restraints or rules—it was not the case that the classroom was out of control. In fact, on several occasions, Mary restricted movement to emergency only when “things got out of hand.” In addition, Mary managed student behavior through disciplinary actions including sending students temporarily to PEAK, a disciplinary program located on the same floor, creating practices, such as bell ringing and frequent “class meetings” to keep the students quiet and on task. Mary also assigned seats to some students who were chronic misbehavers. In addition, students still formed the familiar single lines to move collectively to recess or to other parts of the building. And, much to my surprise, the teachers created a list of students who misbehaved or didn’t finish their work complete with a tally of their infractions—this list hung in the multi-purpose. Students with too many tally marks were not permitted to participate in some events.

When I first walked into Room 2, the classroom arrangement startled my memories of what a classroom should look like. Room 2 had no chairs with built-in desks and no “front” of the classroom. The moveable chairs were located next to round tables positioned at different spaces in the room. The only central, traditionally looking, authoritative location was the student desk where Mary sat during read aloud and class meeting time. Interestingly enough, this desk looked like the traditional built-in chair-desk similar to the one I remembered sitting in as a child. Quite honestly, the room looked cluttered and full; there seemed to be a history in this space—a sense that is was
lived in. Room 2 had a broken-in, living room chair—joined a few days later by an equally comfy sofa donated by Mary’s parents. A rug covered the “classroom meeting” and read aloud space on the floor. During meeting time, the class met with the door closed with, as Mary explained, “everyone on the same level (on the floor) in as close circle as you can.” The class met occasionally to discuss adjustments in routine schedules, to organize special events, to work through classroom problems such as space issues, and to touch base after school breaks and time away. Mary also used this space to facilitate “relaxation time” after recess. This time was an opportunity for all of them to “make a transition” into work time. In doing so, Mary asked the students to get into relaxation mood—no books opened and eyes closed. She discussed how relaxation mood is a “transition to being in the classroom… breathe in and out… roll your head… roll shoulders.” I was surprised to see that most students responded. Mary explained to the class that “this is different than last year for some of you and you’ll have to get used to.”

A dry erase board chair covered with announcements of the scheduled daily activities stood on the edge of the rug next to Mary’s built-in chair desk. On this day, it read:

845-915 unfinished work
915-1010 around the world share games
1010-1100 music
1100-1200 power writing
1200-100 lunch/recess
100-230 literacy block
230-315 work completion
The announcer (the student in charge of the board) had written “The Rock Rules”—in reference to the professional wrestler—above the scheduled events. Mary used the standard chalkboards for hanging student work, spelling rules, and other posters. On the bulletin board closest to the door, the Person of the Week, Tracey, displayed her photographic “life history.” She chose to exhibit an African wedding picture, a picture of her dancing “last Easter at church” she explains her choice “because I am a dancer.” In addition, she included a photo of her cousin, another with friends in a swimming pool, and a picture of “daddy and me, he is in Marine Corps, and this picture shows an outfit he brought me from Japan and I still have it.” Each student is selected to be person of the week; during this time, they create a photo display and have their choice of where they want to sit during work time.

Perhaps, the most distinguishing feature about Room 2, was the large loft that took up a considerable amount of space on one side of the classroom. I noticed, on the first days of observation that only girls gathered in the loft. The loft was the social--workspace for reading, and, on this day, the girls in the loft seem to be talking more than reading. It was my impression that the loft was their space--boys did not sit in the loft and in fact, didn't attempt to enter this space. This changed, however, during the second week of observations—their third week as a classroom group. Mary called for a “class meeting” to discuss the “pillow” and “loft” problem. She and other students had observed that the same people used the fluffy pillows and sat in the loft. During the meeting, the class decided (based on Anthony's suggestion) that they take turns using the chair, sofa, loft, and pillows. Mary would appoint a designated person each day that
could invite people to join her/him in the loft and on the sofa. The sharing of the comfy objects was negotiated as a group and the new guidelines took effect the next day.

Throughout the course of my field observations, I rarely witnessed mixed-sex groups in the loft and on the sofa. And, the boys that were allowed in the girls' space were selected based on their ability and willingness to get along with the girls. Daniel and occasionally, but more rarely, Mark were allowed to share the space.

Overall, I was impressed with the "lived-in" feel of Central Alternative. The hallways were lined with student artwork and projects--sometimes spilling out into the general walkway. During regular classroom time, students gathered in the hallway to work on their group and individual projects. Popular culture was displayed sporadically throughout the school. For example, among the many Room 2 biography displays, Vanecia and Teresa had drawn a picture of Whitney Houston, an African-American popular music singer, holding a Diet Coke. And, Kyle had pictured Adam Sandler, a white male comedian, at the MTV (music television) movie awards. On their display titled "Celebrating the Achievements of African Americans," kids in a third grade classroom had written comments about Will Smith, a movie and music star, ("I like his movies") and Shaq (Shaquille O'Neal), a professional basketball player. In their biography display, another 4/5th-grade classroom had a life-size poster titled "The Life and Times of Lucille Ball," a legendary white film and television star. And, acting as investigative reporters, a third grade classroom displayed their creative writing—a
newspaper project using popular magazines to make collages of important events. In an article on discipline, the kids used cutouts of Rugrats, a children’s cartoon, coordinated with clips from the “Learning Magazine” to create their article.

In addition to the classroom, the "multi-purpose" room was an important space for Central students and teachers. The room looked like a gym complete with basketball rims and appropriate sport-lines on the floor, however, there was a beautiful mural created by students on one wall. And, there was a stage on the opposing side of the room with a single computer and desk in the corner. The functionality of the room was somewhat disrupted by the presence of a large CD player on a cart cluttered with a variety of CDs and cassette tapes. The students used the room for dance class, lunch, concerts and a variety of other events. While there always seemed to be an essence of gym-ness in this space, the activities that took place here altered this essence a bit. For example, during dance class, Room 2 students choreographed and performed movements to created images of the different “elements of the earth,” including water, fire, earth, and air. The students moved in grace and their own created styles to music—each group member maintaining both independence and group dependence when they performed their roles. The room, at this time, was transformed into a different space. One group of boys opted to use the stage as a landscape for the tumbling and ever-revolving earth—stumbling and turning off the steps they worked together to create the image of earth. It was a touching and inspiring event.
This school is founded on the philosophy of the informal classroom and the
conceptualization of learning as process. As stated in the Parent-Student Guide:

the informal philosophy recognizes the unique growth of each child and provides
a personalized as well as individualized experience of that child. At the same
time, it recognizes the stages of intellectual growth that all children go
through... (T)he program provides a fully integrated curriculum in which there is a
free flow between subject areas, thereby reflecting the reality of the
interrelatedness of all human knowledge. The creative arts hold a special place in
the informal curriculum. The informal learning environment provides
opportunities for exploration, manipulation, and first-hand experience... builds on
child's own interests and abilities... (I)nformal education seeks to build on
strength as well as eliminate weaknesses, to stretch as well as to
motivate... (I)nformal education is concerned with the moral development of the
child. The classroom is structured to provide opportunities for varied social
interaction by using multi-aged groupings... the teacher actively helps to guide the
children from egocentricity into a deeper understanding of themselves and the
feelings and rights of others... (I)nformal education is deeply humane and
concerned with the best interests of the child. At the same time, it is practical,
applicable, and basic. It deals with real problems, real experiences, and real
people.

In terms of student rights and responsibilities, Central Alternative School
provides specific guidelines for how "rules" of interaction and discipline. Students
participate in student-led conferences with parents and teachers, school safety patrol,
Central Alternative School student council, and a variety of extra-curricular activities.

Central Alternative School is particularly known for its chess championships. In the
1999-2000 school year, the time period when I conducted my research, the Central's
student enrollment was 330. Of the 330 students, 217 were "non-minorities," 104 or 31.5
% were "Black," 3 students were "Spanish-American," and 6 were "Asian."

Popular Culture, Music, and Central Alternative

Within the local context of this elementary school there were both "official" and
unofficial school policies and practices about the use of popular culture. In the girls'
classroom, the only forms of popular culture used were magazines for collages, internet for researching and entertainment during free time, and occasional uses of different genres of music for entertainment as well. Discussions about popular culture were usually controlled by Mary and more often than not represented cautionary tales of what the kids should or should not be watching, listening to, or reading. For example, the students related their reading and classroom discussion frequently to their experiences with movies. On one occasion, Curtis commented that their discussion about the bombing of Hiroshima reminded him of the movie, “The Three Kings,” he just saw. Mary responded in shock, she said “really, R-rated movies are not for kids your age.” I had not seen the film, but knew that it was about the Gulf War, and involved, at least, some violence.

Several times throughout the school year, the Scholastic book club, a book ordering club for schools only, offered a variety of media related books for kids to order including biographies of musical stars Britney Spears, The BackStreet Boys, N’Sync, as well as football superstars, and the motion picture, Star Wars. In addition, computers with Internet access had recently been installed in every classroom. The boys often used the computers during free time to visit websites where they can play video games. The girls usually logged on to websites featuring their favorite hip-hop or pop music group. Both Nickelodeon and The Disney Channel, both networks geared toward children, were popular sites for both the boys and girls.

As noted earlier, among educators there seemed to be an oscillating back and forth concerning their perception and, I think, genuine concern about the relevance of
popular culture in school, and this uncertainty was realized on several occasions. For example, as reported to me by students and teachers and by the principal in an all-school announcement, *Pokemon* cards are not allowed. There is a general concern among school administrators that *Pokemon* card trading can result in violence among students. One boy told me that the ban didn’t matter because they often went to their “bathroom sanctuary” to trade cards. Despite the ban, popular culture in the form of corporate sponsorship invaded the school in November 1999 and again in March 2000 when *Pokemon* sponsored the school’s lunch menu complete with advertising and word games.

During a Read-a-Thon organized by Mary, “celebrity” readers were asked to lead a read aloud in designated classrooms. Mary chose the most “celebrated” celebrity, a local TV anchorwoman, to read to her class. The kids were ecstatic. Mary had selected the book, “Library Lil” which tells the story of a librarian in a town of television addicts. In this text, TV is talked about as a “demon” and Library Lil saves the town and introduces everyone to the value of literature. In the end, she is partnered with the biker, who likes to watch wrestling, and they compromise—he learns to read and Library Lil “watches wrestling with him on Tuesday nights.” While she was reading the book, the anchorwoman, stopped to say that she didn’t know if she agreed with what Library Lil was saying about television “always being bad.” She seemed relieved at the end when the compromise had been achieved. After the read aloud, Mary told me that she was a bit embarrassed about the book selection and hadn’t thought about the book she selected and what that would mean for a local television celebrity to read it.
In the context of my research, there seemed to be an ongoing dilemma between valuing students' experiences with popular culture and suspicions about the value and credibility of popular culture as a source of information and knowledge. I had the opportunity to witness several conversations among teachers about the role of popular culture in kids' lives. While accompanying two teachers to a local children's bookstore, I participated in a conversation about which people were appropriate for biographical writing. Popular culture stars like Will Smith and sports figures were seen as being too ephemeral "not lasting" and essentially without a substantial history. They both seemed to agree that there was something shallow or unimportant about these people. This attitude was realized in practice, albeit in a seemingly arbitrary manner, when the kids were deciding on biographical subjects. While two girls were allowed to write about Whitney Houston, an African American pop music performer, and one boy was given the opportunity to conduct research on Adam Sandler, a white comedian, several other girls were denied their requests to study popular music groups such as N'Sync, Britney Spears, Destiny's Child and TLC. The girls were frustrated by this inconsistent decision making, and this practice communicated the hesitancy of incorporating some forms of popular culture in the classroom.

On another occasion while I was sitting in the teacher's lounge taking a break, I listened to three teachers talking about girls and body changes. One of the teachers said that she was surprised how early girls "are having their periods" or as the girls call it "the dot." This led them to a discussion about how girls "seem to be growing up so fast." One teacher said, "well, look at who their role models are!" Knowing intuitively that she
was talking about pop stars, another teacher says in agreement, “yeah, I am not thrilled about Britney Spears being their role model.” They talked more about this and switched to discussing boys and media particularly rap music and how this is connected to how girls think about themselves. One woman commented that “most of the rap music puts down women and this is harmful to how women see themselves and how girls see themselves.”

After completing one of my interviews, I went outside and helped with the school “Spruce Up” project by re-painting the map of the United States on the playground. Before I started painting, the principal, Mrs. Miller, came over to me and asked me how my research was going. She proceeded to tell me a story about her experiences with one 1st grade girl. Recently she was observing a classroom, and while the kids were using the Internet this particular girl was at a Barbie website. After watching the girl maneuver the website and the Internet overall, the principal was amazed by what she saw. She commented to me, “she doesn’t know the alphabet, but she knows all about this.” Her tone of voice and remarks indicated concern and frustration.

While working on her Whitney Houston’s biography project, Teresa told me that the principal came into their class and saw that they were writing about Whitney Houston. She told them that Whitney uses drugs and “that we might want to think about this when they are writing and reading.” I asked them why they thought the principal gave them this information, and Teresa said “because Whitney is being a bad role model.” A few days later, we continue our discussion. I asked Teresa if she got more information about what others are saying about Whitney Houston and her use of drugs.
And, she said, "no, but thanks to Mrs. Miller (the principal) she gave me information about Whitney Houston and drug abuse." I ask her if she thinks this is true. And, she says "yes." I ask her what she thinks about it? And, she says that she thinks that "someone once offered her (Whitney Houston) a beer and that she liked it... and she has to pull her life together." Tracey enters the conversation and says in response, "I didn’t know Whitney Houston did that stuff...my mom told me about it the other day."

Popular music (some popular music) seemed to be the exception to the rule. During lunch and dance class, the multi-purpose room became a space for students to engage with and perform popular music. Destiny's Child, N'Sync, BackStreet Boys and Lil Sammy were played during lunch almost everyday. Kids sang and danced in their seats and regularly brought in their own music for the teachers to play while they eat. Occasionally when the teachers played YMCA, a 1970s song, or The Electric Slide, a 1980s dance song, the kids left their seats and danced together in the aisles. The girls' informed me that music with "cussing" and other "bad" lyrics like "rap music like DMX that has swear words in it" would not be played. In addition to their lunchtime listening, Mary played "their" music during free time and parties in the classroom. During dance/physical education class, Isabella played N'Sync, Destiny’s Child, Backstreet Boys or other "appropriate" requests while kids are jumping rope or playing kickball. More informally, girls are often performing their music in the hallways, during class work, and on the playground. The girls told me that they have a "dancing group" that meets occasionally during recess. The purpose of this group is to sing and dance to music (music is not allowed on the playground, so the girls have to create their own through
collaborative singing) and according to Tracey, to teach “girls who can’t dance well” to perform signature moves “so that others won’t make fun of them.” The girls periodically complain about the teachers playing their “old” or “weird” music during lunch and free time. This “old” music consists of The Beatles, Jackson 5, and Aretha Franklin, for example.

There were several benefits to conducting research at this site, they include:

- public school that draws from citywide area opening up the possibilities for a diverse student body.
- teachers and administrators who were open to research projects and students who were accustomed to researchers in their classrooms.
- the “alternative” environment in terms of having less rigid structure was conducive to interacting with children in ways that might not be possible in school with more structure.
- my rapport with teachers and students.
- contradictory nature of role of media and popular culture in the school.

Some of the potential limitations of researching at Central Alternative School include:

- the “alternative” structure may distinguish Central Alternative School from other elementary schools; although, the district’s demands have served to take away from the “alternative” nature some.
- I had, at the beginning of the study, anticipated some potential issues with establishing trust with the girls because of my relationship with teachers. I found, however, that the girls were willing to develop a relationship with me which included trusting that I would keep their stories, their actions, and their beliefs confidential. Of course, I have no way of knowing what they didn’t share with me. I also worried that the teachers would want me to share information with them—this was not the case, however. The teachers welcomed the research AND did not ask to participate or discuss what the girls were doing, saying, and how they were interacting. I am very grateful for their cooperation and their willingness to trust the process as it unfolded.

Participants

I researched with a group of 4th grade girls (Room 2 girls). There were 28 students in Room 2—14 boys and 14 girls. Because this study was an ethnographic
project designed to provide in-depth accounts regarding girls’ media experiences, I was advised to keep the number of participants to under 10 girls. In addition, I knew that I would be incorporating a variety of methods, all of which would yield a considerable amount of data. In terms of determining sample size, I wanted to be sure that I included enough participants to provide a useful illustration of pre-teen girls’ experiences and how these experiences impact theoretical and pedagogical development while at the same time keeping data manageable to ensure a thorough account.

I observed all of the girls in Room 2, and all of the girls participated in at least one interview. I conducted 8 individual interviews, 2 general group interviews, and 2 peer group interviews. I focused on 8 girls for individual interviews—these 8 girls made up the core group for data collection and analysis. In order to ensure fairness and to make sure some girls were not being perceived as favorites, I included the 2 general interviews. These interviews were conducted in the same manner as the peer group interviews. I added the peer group interviews during the field research because it became apparent that the girls' uses of popular music were intimately tied to their relationships and interactions with their close friends. I selected 2 groups of 3 girls for peer group interviews. Five out of the six girls interviewed were part of the original group of 8; one girl was added to this original group creating a group of 9 core informants. I did not include the 2 group interviews. Nevertheless, I included field note data, which was based on my interactions and observations of all 14 girls. In terms of data analysis, I included the 8 individual interviews and 2 peer group interviews. I analyzed all 14 questionnaires.
In selecting the key informants, I used judgmental sampling relying on my own judgment and experiences with the girls in Room 2. In doing so, I decided which girls would be included in the primary data collection process. This was a difficult decision to make. In general, I wanted to have an even number of both Caucasian and minority girls in this study. Because of the small sample size, I needed to be sure that I selected girls who demonstrated interest as well as a desire to fulfill the requirements of the study. Thus, I selected girls who represented the criteria established (commitment, truthfulness, willingness to talk about music, social demographics) and who would help me to explore the research questions posited.

At this stage, I want to provide some general demographic information about the girls—I will include more detailed narrative descriptions in later chapters. This information is based on the questionnaires and includes data from all 14 participants. The girls' ages ranged from 9-11; 3 girls were 9 years old, 10 participants were 10 years old, and 1 girl was 11 years old. In terms of race and ethnicity, the girls comprised 5 European American/Caucasian, 5 African Americans, 1 African American/American Indian/Caucasian, 1 American Indian/Caucasian, 1 Asian American (Malaysian), and 1 Hawaiian (Maria wrote this in next to Other).

In terms of media use, their time spent watching TV and the television programming they engaged with varied. Ten girls reported watching one to four hours of TV during the week; among these ten girls, seven indicated that their viewing time increased over the weekend. Two girls, Nathasia and Vanecia, reported that they watched five to eight hours of TV during the week; both decreased their viewing during
the weekends. Emily and Maria reported watching less than one hour of TV, Monday through Friday with an increase in time spent on the weekends. The girls watch a variety of programming. All of the girls reported in their questionnaires that they watched cartoons. Eight girls watched the Rugrats, a cartoon based on the everyday antics of a group of babies. Eight girls also mentioned that they frequently watched music video channels including MTV, VH-1, and Nickelodeon’s *All That*. In terms of other TV programming, the girls watch family sitcoms and dramas such as *Fullhouse, Home Improvement*, and *The Hughleys*. In addition, the girls watch a variety of children’s/youth sitcoms and programming such as *Smart Guy* (six girls watch this program), *Boy Meets World, Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, and *Amanda*. Only two girls reported watching more young adult/adult programming such as *Friends* and *Providence*.

Eleven out of the 14 girls indicated that they read magazines. Among the eleven, seven said that they read teen magazines including *J-14, Teen, YM, Seventeen, Teen People, All About You*, and *Girl*. Some of the Central girls also read media and product based magazines such as *Nickelodeon, Fox Kids, American Girl*, and *Gap*. Natashia and Vanecia read pop music magazines designed for specific music groups such as N’Sync, Destiny’s Child, and Britney Spears. Teresa, Erin, and Dominique, all African American girls, stated that they read African American/Black centered magazines such as *Jet, Black Hair*, and *Essence*. In terms of other print media, when asked how many times over the past week they read a newspaper, nine of the girls reported not reading a newspaper. Teresa and Julia indicated that they read the *Columbus Dispatch*, the local newspaper, and in particular the comic section. Maria noted that she read the Columbus Dispatch,
twice attending to the comic section and the "toy ads." Nathasia read the Dispatch's comic section, three times in that one week. And, April reported reading Room 20's version of the Dispatch.

All of the girls indicated that they attended movies; ten of the girls go to the movies at least once a month. Teresa and Shaquilla go twice a month; Heather goes once a week; and Dominique attends on average three times a year. Vanecia, Maria, and Emily said that they "don't remember" the last five movies they attended. Dominique, Tracey, Julia, and Erin listed all G-rated movies including The Tigger Movie, Goofy's 1st Movie, Doug's 1st Movie, Rugrats, Stuart Little, Tarzan, Toy Story 2, and Disney's The Dinosaur. Teresa, Nathasia, and Heather named R-rated movies such as Deep Blue Sea, an adult suspense film; Gladiator, an action film, The Matrix, a science fiction action film, and The Sixth Sense, an adult drama/suspense film. Other titles mentioned included a variety of PG and PG-13 films including My Dog Skip, Big Daddy, Never Been Kissed, Ten Things I Hate About You, Galaxy Quest, Bicentennial Man and Snowday.

In terms of computer and Internet use and access, eleven of the girls had access to a computer and the Internet at home. All of the girls' reported using the computer and the Internet at school. In terms of home use, ten girls noted that they played games on the computer, seven used the "web for fun," four of the girls used their computers for homework, writing letters, email, and participating in chat rooms. Two of the girls indicated that they use their computers for drawing and the Internet to make purchases.
They all reported using their computers for both word processing, playing games, and using the Internet, less than 4 hours a week. Julia and Nathasia noted an increase of their use over the weekends.

The Central Girls and Their Music

In this section, I provide an overview of the girls’ uses of popular music and, to a certain extent, their experiences with this music. I include descriptive information regarding how often, when, where, with whom, and why they engage with popular music. In addition, I talk about related popular culture artifacts that are linked to their music experiences. I also address the role of “authority members” in relationship to their music. The data discussed were generated from the girls’ questionnaires, media journals, and interviews.

With the exception of Teresa, all of the Central girls reported listening to pop music indicated in their references to N’Sync, Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears, LFO, Backstreet Boys, and Kid Rock. Eleven of the fourteen girls noted that they listened to R&B and hip-hop music including Destiny’s Child, TLC, Sisquo, Sammy, Nelly, and Macy Gray. Teresa and Erin mentioned rap groups such as DMX and Juvenile. In terms of music they wanted to listen to but couldn’t, Teresa, Nathasia, Maria, and Julia mentioned rap and hip-hop groups and singers including Eminem, Jay-Z, KMD, TLC, and Sisquo. They explained that they were not allowed to listen to this music because of “the cussing,” and “it’s very bad.” Dominique explained that she couldn’t listen to Destiny’s Child because she didn’t have the CD.
It is difficult to get a complete sense of how often the girls listen to music. In part, I think that this is due to the fact that music can seep into the background; therefore, making it difficult to discern how often we listen to music. In the questionnaires, media journals and in the interviews, I asked the girls to note when they listened to music, and I think their responses indicate moments when they were aware of music's presence.

Seven of the girls indicated that they listened to "their" music less than four or fewer hours a day per week; five of these girls noted that their use increased over the weekend. Five girls noted that they listened to music five to eight hours a day during the week; two girls indicated that they listened more frequently over the weekend. Nathasia and Kathleen both reported listening to music more then 18 hours a day during the week and over the weekend. In their interviews, the discussion focused on the song that we were attending to at this time. In this context, they communicated the ways that different contextual variables impacted how often they listened to their music. For example, Maria didn't listen to TLC's *UnPretty* when she was in the car with her dad or when she is visiting with her dad because he doesn't like this music. Also, Heather is limited to the radio to hear Macy Gray's *I Try*. And, all of the girls talked about the frequency of listening to their songs being, in part, dependent on whether or not Pete and Isabella played it during lunch. How often they listened is connected to where they are, who they are with, and whether or not they have access to the music. Most of the girls, with the exception of Kim, indicated that CDs were expensive and that they only had one or two, if any. This significantly impacted how often they listened to their favorite groups.

How they listen to music and for what purposes all vary dependent on where they
are, who they are with, and the activities surrounding their engagement. In the background, music did not frame their experiences and girls are often engaged in other activities while listening. For example, when Kim is with her friends swimming, music is used as background and not as media that framed their interaction. Also, Heather reported that when they were at parties, music was important, but they were “running around and playing” so much that they didn’t always notice the music. April, Maria, and Emily report that when they are with other Central girls at parties they use the music to create dance movements—the music, in these instances, being central to their activities. Emily, Heather, Shaquilla, and Maria cleaned with their moms with music playing in the background. However, Emily stated that she can’t listen to N’Sync when she is cleaning because “I’d be like jumping around and wouldn’t get anything done.” April reports listening to N’Sync when she is playing Nintendo and “kicking the soccer ball around.”

According to the girls, there seemed to be few restrictions on where they could listen to their music—unless the music contained “cuss words” or lyrics deemed unfavorable to the authority figures in their lives. Maria talked about not being able to listen in her dad’s car, Emily talked about taping N’Sync so she could listen to it in the car “because there’s no CD player in the car,” and Heather said that the car radio is one of the few places she actually heard her song. Not surprisingly, the girls listened to their music predominantly in their bedrooms and/or in spaces where they could have some privacy from their families. April mentioned that she liked to listen to her music in the basement because she “likes privacy sometimes.” Tracey talked about wanting to have time to relax with her music in her bedroom. Maria, Heather, April, Kim, and Emily all
mentioned the need to escape from their siblings—particularly brothers and sisters who made fun of their music. Kim said that she liked to listen with headphones because “that way you don’t have to hear anybody talk when you get tired of them when they yap, yap, yap too much. You get tired so you just put it on and you don’t hear them.” Where they listened impacted how they engaged with their music. For example, Maria talked about singing to the music when she was alone in her room and having difficulties doing the same thing when she was “downstairs with my sisters.” When in the company of their family members, particular authority figures, Emily and Maria changed or skipped over “bad words” in the songs.

The girls listened to their music mostly with their friends; in fact, during the interviews when asked to describe what they were thinking about, imagining, and/or feeling when they listened to their song, all of the girls mentioned friends. When they listened with others, particularly their family members, music was mostly in the background.

The girls listened to music when they were bored, to enhance their moods, to annoy their siblings, to help them create their own lyrics or dances, and to make-up with their friends. April, Vanecia, and Emily stated that listening to music can help to change their moods from “sad to happy.” Both Tracey and Maria claimed that they choose to not listen to music when they were mad because the music would distract them from their anger. For Maria, April, and Tracey, the kind of music matters in terms of how they respond emotionally. For Tracey, some music “slow” music helps her relax while Destiny’s Child’s *Jumpin’ Jumpin’* “makes you seem excited...like you just want to jump
up and dance.” April explains that when she listens to Destiny’s Child’s *Say My Name* she feels “overwhelmed with joy. I feel free. I feel open space. I feel I could do whatever I want to.” Her experiences with this song are tied to, in part, her peer group’s sharing of this “special song.”

A variety of other media artifacts and texts are connected to their musical experiences. The girls mentioned and used these other texts to provide explanation, to relate to their musical experiences, and to stimulate discussion. In addition, Kim, Emily, April, Maria, Heather, Vanecia, and Tracey talked about owning and displaying various popular music paraphernalia including posters, T-shirts, stickers, book bags, and pens/pencils. Emily drew a picture of all of the N’Sync, LFO, Britney Spear’s and 98 Degrees posters hanging on her wall. In terms of incorporating other media texts and images into their discussion of their music experiences, Shaquilla compared Power Puff Girls, a girl superhero cartoon, to 702, an R&B female band. Both Maria and Tracey talked about the Spice Girls movie in terms of understanding the girl power embedded in the music. In terms of creating images, Maria used an image from a Mary Kate and Ashley, pre-teen girl movie, book, and TV stars, to illustrate getting caught snooping in April’s brother’s room. Tracey talked about “getting the Lucy’s out” when she listened to music in direct reference to the “Lucy, I’m home” reference from the *I Love Lucy* TV series. Throughout the entire peer group interview with April, Emily, and Maria, the girls slipped in their talk comments about *VeggieTales*, a children’s cartoon; *Bananas in Pajamas*, another children’s cartoon, and *Barney*, a children’s educational program featuring a large purple dinosaur. Barney was constructed as a metaphor for girls’ who
didn't act their own age and who listened to the wrong music. References to *Dukes of Hazard*, a late 1970s action show, and the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, a sitcom about an African-American teen who relocates to a wealthy suburbs to live with his uncle, as points of reference to make their points clear.

In terms of authority members' influences on their music experiences, the girls reported that they didn't really think about authority (parents, teachers, older siblings) when they listened to music. They listened to music with their parents when cleaning with mom (Shaquilla, Heather, April, Maria), when they had nothing else to do (Heather), and occasionally after dinner (Emily). With their teachers they listened primarily during lunch and during other free times during the day. Authority members impacted their experiences by restricting their access to particular music. With the exception of Teresa and Heather, the girls stated that they were not allowed to listen to music with "cussing." Their parents and teachers constructed these rules. During the school day, the teachers were in complete control in terms of when they could listen to their music, and which kinds of music they could listen to. The authority figures in their lives are not opposed to most of the music they listen to—with the exception of any music that, once again, has cussing in it. As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 and 5, parents life lessons such as "don't date boys, yet," "watch out for boys," and don't cuss influenced how they interpreted lyrics and how they co-constructed self < -- > other.

*Getting Started*

First, I talked to Mary about the possibility of conducting my dissertation research in her classroom. I explained the project to her including the proposed time-line and
methods involved. I assured her that the girls would not be taken out of class, and that I would negotiate with her when I would observe. As previously mentioned, she was candid about her inability to be intensely involved in the study, and I reassured her that that was fine and that the focus of this investigation would be on the girls. She agreed to the project and gave me a schedule of daily activities. She encouraged me to observe whenever I wanted confident that I would not disrupt daily activities. She did, however, open up the possibility of conducting interviews during free time and, if necessary, during independent reading. She suggested that I attend the girls' art and dance classes as well as an upcoming "roller skating party." Mary’s willingness to support this research project is significant for several reasons. At the time of my fieldwork, Mary and the students were preparing for and participating in fourth grade proficiency testing. Proficiency testing creates a considerable amount of anxiety and need for special time commitments for preparation. In terms of this project, this meant that I needed to be very careful about keeping to my proposed schedule and being mindful about when I observed. However, after testing was completed, there was a noticeable collective sigh of relief that created space for more flexibility in data collection. In addition to proficiency testing, I collected data at the end of the school year. During this time several special events took place that communicated a desire to reflect on the past year and to continue to build community for the upcoming year (Mary and the students would be together the next year). I wanted to be careful not to interfere with activities that signified a sense of
teacher-student bonding and reflection. The students invited me to everything, but I always waited for an invitation from Mary in order to respect their privacy and need for time together.

Mary allotted time in the daily schedule to discuss the project with the entire class. Because I had been conducting research in this room for several months on a separate project, I wanted to talk to all the students about what I would be doing and why I felt it was important. When I announced to the class that I would be doing research with the girls, some of the boys moaned and, one of the girls, Shaquilla, shouted "it's about time" that someone focused on girls only. I explained that there had been more research conducted with boys in the past and very little with girls. A few days later, Daniel called me over to his lunch table and said "I don't mean to be greedy, but why can't you give the boys something besides pencils (referring to the Pokemon pencils I gave them earlier)?" I told him that I really couldn’t afford to give them presents all the time and that the girls were given folder and gel pens to help them complete their media journals. He says, "but, you are giving the girls a pizza party." I told him that I was not planning on doing this. He said, "that's what they are saying. I know you are doing this with all girls, but can you help me with something, can you tell Teresa to stop making fun of me because I am not in the project. She keeps telling me all the stuff that she gets to do and is laughing at me because I can't do it." I asked him "why does this bother you so much"? And, he said "because I feel left out of something." I suggested that he talk to Teresa, but he explained that "she won't listen to me, but if you say something she will stop." I decided not to talk to Teresa about this. Instead I kept in touch with Daniel--his
frustrations waned quickly and he continued to ask me to read with him. This conversation with Daniel indicated the potential complexities of conducting research with children, and it illustrated the importance of understanding how my role as a researcher can impact day-to-day activities and relationships. As I came to realize in my interactions with the students, fairness, who is included, and who is not mattered a great deal in their day to day lives. I tried to respect this as much as possible throughout the project. Despite the initial moaning and the "it is not fair" from a few of the boys, in the upcoming weeks most of them seemed to accept this and still interacted with me. They continued to ask me for my help or talk to me about their projects or to tell me jokes. The word of the projects, more specifically, the opportunity for "free stuff," quickly spread throughout the school. And, on a few occasions boys from other classes would stop and ask me for a gel pen or if they had to pretend to be girls to be part of the project.

After the general classroom discussion, I briefly met with the girls to give an overview of the project and to hand out parental permission forms. I reassured everyone that if they didn’t want to participate that it was okay with me and that I would not be upset and it wouldn’t affect their grades. We set a meeting time for the following week, to hand in the forms and to discuss the project in more detail.

Participants were assured of confidentiality prior to the beginning of the research. Given that the research was conducted in an adult-governed environment and particularly a school environment, I recognized that they may be timid at first and may need to be reassured that what they say to me will not be communicated to their parents or their teachers/principal. My experiences had been that discussion with girls about media can
generate discussions about behaviors and feelings that they do not share with their parents such as dating, behaviors at school, how they feel about authority (teachers, parents, etc), wearing makeup, their engagement with forbidden media, or what they do in their leisure time. For example, during our second meeting to discuss the project in more detail, the girls asked me several questions about confidentiality and what they could tell me. Nathasia asked me “can we talk about our boyfriends?” And, Erin asked “what if you interview us on tape and someone sees the tape during the next interview?” I assured them that I use new tapes for each interview, and that I would be using fake names when I talked about what they told me. I also made it clear that they could tell me anything that they wanted to, but that I would have to report any information that indicated that they were being abused or asked to participate in illegal activities by an adult or another student. They agreed that this was fair. In addition, I reminded them that all of this meant that I could not share with them what another girl had said during the interviews, in her questionnaire, or during observation. This requirement was tested on several occasions during the field research. Girls asked me which song another girl chose for her interview and how they “performed” during the interviews. In addition, they would occasionally ask to see my field notes and/or peek over my shoulder. I do believe that these actions were based on curiosity and general conversation about the research and not an attempt to breech their peer’s confidentiality. We negotiated these moments successfully—I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

During this meeting, we discussed the media journals, interview procedures, and participant observation. I gave them their media journals, which included a folder,
journal entry forms, a zipper compartment, and a gel pen. I told them that they would receive a prize for every week that they completed entries. Each girl handed in the parental permission form and filled out their own permission indicating their interest in participating in the study. I struggled during this meeting with maintaining order and providing an opportunity for group discussion. There were several moments of disorder and it was difficult to not engage in “disciplining talk” to keep them on task. I knew that we wouldn’t have many opportunities to meet as a group and I struggled with letting them “play” and wanting to get the work done. It was very important that I established at this time and throughout the project a distance from other adults, particularly, adults who were considered authority figures. This was important for data collection purposes because I wanted to make sure that the girls felt comfortable being themselves in front of me, and it was important because I wanted to communicate a genuine interest in understanding their day-to-day lives at school. On several occasions throughout the project, the girls communicated this comfort. For example, Maria and Emily invited me to the Nickelodeon *All That* concert. When I said that I would like to go, but suggested that they bring one of their friends instead, Maria said “my mom also said that, and I told her that I thought of you as a friend.” It is general knowledge at Central Alternative that “cussing” in any form (verbal, musically, and nonverbally) is prohibited. They talked about this in great length during the interviews, and maintained this rule during classroom activities. However, some girls broke this rule when talking with me or in front of me. During recess, Teresa and a girl from another classroom were fighting over the tetherball. At a stalemate, they each clung to the ball. I walked over and asked what was going on,
and they proceeded in unison to tell me “I was here first.” I asked them how they were going to solve the problem. And, Teresa says nonchalantly, “well, if she would let the fucking ball go.” The other girls around me gasped and looked in my direction, and I replied, “Well, Teresa, that would be one way to solve it, but I am not sure she would agree. Let me know if I can help.” And, I walked away. Other occasions of communicating trust and comfort are discussed in upcoming sections.

As the research progressed, it became apparent that the girls enjoyed their participation in this project. They often asked me if we could have regular meetings every week explaining that “I thought we would have like a club or something.” In addition, they talked to me regularly about how many journal entries they completed and carried their media journals with them throughout the day. They actively participated in the data collection by reporting to me what they think I should know or read about to understand their engagement with popular music. While the girls were eager to tell me what they knew and to participate in the study, they did not always complete the tasks required nor did they seem to feel compelled to “stick to the schedule.” On two occasions, I had to reschedule interviews because Tracey wanted to play with her friends at recess, and Vanecia decided to go to lunch with her mom. As much as I think that they liked me and wanted to sit next to me during lunch, they didn’t hesitate to misbehave in front of me, follow the rules even if they told me they didn’t believe the rules “were fair,” or to ignore my presence when they were deeply engaged in an activity. In addition, they re-constructed my presence in their school lives frequently. The girls tried to position as a researcher, teacher, disciplinarian, peer, and pop cultural resource. My point here is
that I feel that it is possible that the girls were eager to express their knowledge and to be proud of their participation in the study without having to perform in ways that they felt I expected them to. I had been in their classroom for 7 months prior to this study—when they didn’t know that I would study their use of popular music—and, I witnessed similar music related behaviors during this time period. In addition, because they tried to reinvent my role in the lives daily, my own identity was more fluid than anticipated—this fluidity might have affected the girls’ performing for me as researcher.

Methods

Triangulation or the use of multiple methods is important to this study for several reasons. According to Crabtree and Miller (1992), “the triangulation of research methods...is helpful in qualitative research to confirm the reliability and validity of the interpretations” (p.191). Thus, by using observation, interviewing and media journals/questionnaires, I was able to identify convergences and divergences in data that indicated significant themes or trends in girls' experiences. In addition, by using multiple methods, I sought to embrace the notion of identity as process by allowing space for differences among girls’ interpretative processes to be made possible. In addition, multiple methods helped me to investigate girls’ experiences from different methodological lenses lending to the richness of the data.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is defined as a research process with a particular interest in human meaning construction and interaction. Focusing specifically on human experiences as situated within particular contexts, participant observation is “a logic and
process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in settings” (Jorgensen, 1989). Researchers engaged in participant observation use direct observation along with other methods of gathering information. According to Jorgensen (1989), participant observation is useful and appropriate for research projects when “little is known about the phenomenon” when the perspective of “insiders” may be significantly different than the perspective of “outsiders,” and when the “phenomenon is hidden from public view” (p. 12-13). In addition, participant observation is appropriate when the research problem is concerned with human meaning making from the insider’s/participant’s perspective, the phenomenon of interest is observable, the researcher is able to gain access to the setting, the parameters of the phenomenon are sufficiently limited in size and location to be studied as a case, and the research questions are appropriate for case study. In general, he argues that participant observation is “especially appropriate for exploratory studies, descriptive studies and studies aimed at generating theoretical interpretations.”

Specific to this study, I was interested in understanding how girls experienced popular music including what they do with this music and how they integrate it into their everyday lives. I considered girls’ experiences to be inherently relational, thus I explored how both interpersonal and more structural conditions impacted their interpretations and use of media. In addition, I was interested in how other's perception of popular music impacted girls’ experiences. Thus, it was important to gain a better understanding of how teachers, parents, and other authority figures talk about media and frame a particular context that provides opportunity and/or inhibits girls’ media experiences.
I spent the months of April, May and June (school closed on June 8th) observing specifically for my dissertation project. In April during the second half of the month, I observed on average 3 times a week for 3 to 4 hours each day. In May, I spent 19 out of 23 possible days at Central with an average of 4 hours a day—either conducting interviews, conducting interviews and observing, or solely observing. In June, I spent all 6 possible days observing at Central. During this time, I observed regularly during recess, lunch, free time, literacy block, dance, and art class. During recess I played basketball with the girls, played word games such as “hangman,” tic-tac-toe, and MASH. MASH was particularly popular. The girls would create a variety of lists of 7 including cars, boys names, animals, types of houses, and number of children. Using a randomly selected number to eliminate items off each list, the girls would construct a narrative about their future. For example, I learned on one occasion that I would marry Tom Cruise, live in a beach house, drive a Volkswagen, and have 2 children. During free time we listened to music on the CD player and on the computer, and frequently engaged in fun artwork such as creating bubble-lettered nameplates for Kathleen’s birthday party. During lunch, I listened to music with them and occasionally danced to the “Electric Slide” (they had to teach me the moves) and did the motions to the Village People’s YMCA. During dance class, I observed, cheered them on during activities, and jumped rope with them. In addition, I attended classroom end-of-the year parties (e.g. family night). I participated in a school-wide roller-skating party, clean-up event, read-a-thon, and spring concert. I also went with them for a classroom fieldtrip to a local children’s bookstore. During all of these events, I took what I considered to be open fieldnotes.
Using blue fuzzy pens, gel pens, and a lime green journal, I took notes while I was interacting with them. I think that I was able to be overt about writing notes because I had established a trusting relationship with them. They didn’t seem to be bothered by my note taking and often participated in creating the field notes with me. They became accustomed to seeing me with my journal. I recorded in the field notes information regarding my interactions and observations (see Appendix A).

I did include, in part, my involvement at Central Alternative School over the previous 6-7 months. Over the previous 7 months for two days a week 2-3 hours a day in Room 2, and since January an additional day a week for 2-3 hours in another classroom, I participated in a research project with Dr. Patricia Enciso regarding reading education. Although my presence at Central Alternative School during this time was not directly related to my dissertation project, I learned a great deal about Central Alternative School, developed relationships with both teachers and students, and gained insight into some of the possible openings and closings I would experience in my dissertation research. In addition, I also participated in Room 2’s classroom parties with invitations from both teacher and students. I brought my son to school on two separate occasions per student’s requests, I went to a school concert, I regularly purchased books from book clubs to catch up on student’s interests, but also to help with building points for Room 23 so they can buy books, and I donated books to Room 2. And, I also spent time helping in the classroom with math, computer work, or other activities as needed.

During this 7 month time period, I developed relationships with the students in Room 2. I was asked by the students on several occasions to read with them individually
during quiet reading. They shared “secrets” with me including telling me about their relationships with other classmates, who did something “bad,” their escape into the “bathroom sanctuary” to socialize or trade the forbidden Pokemon cards, and their concerns about getting in trouble. In addition, I shared resources with the students by swapping books to read and lending books to girls, taking girls’ suggestions on good books to read and following up with them. I worked hard not to be seen as a disciplinarian—as previously mentioned my status as an adult seems to position me in this location. In doing so, I struggled with when to tell the teacher about kid’s “rule-breaking,” opting to warn some kids that they will get in trouble if they continue their current behavior, resolving conflicts among classmates, and discussing student complaints or concerns about the teacher and the learning process.

Direct observation helped me to compare girls’ self-reports of media use and meaning to their interactions in everyday life. In addition, I was able to record how media was perceived in the school context and how this perception impacted girls’ experiences. In terms of this study, I observed classroom activities, lunchtime/recess interactions, and other school related activities such as dance, art, etc. I also participated in classroom related group interactions such as literature circle discussion, read aloud, classroom free time and other activities as deemed appropriate. Based on my initial observations at Central Alternative School and on the research outlined in the literature review, I observed and recorded instances when popular culture and/or related products were made visible. I differentiated between instances when girls made popular culture visible and instances when authority figures made popular culture present through
classroom discussions and homework assignments, and I also noted popular culture presence through institutional artifacts (e.g. school lunch menus, newsletters and other displays in the entire school (e.g. hallway collages, advertisements). In addition, I noted popular culture presence during school activities (concerts, school celebrations). Finally, I paid attention to instances when contradictory messages or acts in relationship to media are present. The administrative ban on *Pokemon* and the concurrent *Pokemon* sponsorship of school lunch menus is an example.

**Symbolic Representation Interview (SRI)**

"To bridge the gap between students’ literary experiences and their ability to convey these experiences" (Enciso, 1996, p. 180), Enciso created the Symbolic Representation Interview. According to Enciso, the SRI enables "children to read, depict their reading experience through symbolic representation, and to talk about the representation and its relationship to their evocation of the text" (p. 51). The method incorporates methodological introspection protocols with "the movement of paper cutout that represent characters, the setting, the reader, the author, and the narrative (Enciso, 1996, p. 180). Depending on the scope of the study, procedurally, children are asked to: select a favorite book or favorite selection from a book, read a passage from the book, discuss their immediate experiences with reading the book, make a list of characters and create symbols or cutouts that represent how they see or visualize these characters, make a list of reader and his/her experiences and create cutouts, and read the story using the characters and reader cutouts in order to illustrate the "movement, relationships, images, and ideas they experienced." According to Enciso (1998), the SRI interview process
helped kids to express their feeling and thoughts about the story and how it fit in their lives. She states “as I have continued to use this method with both children and adults, I have found that they enjoy every aspect of the SRI...they find that they have interesting, sometimes playful and provocative ways of describing an otherwise elusive experience. Adults and children alike are particularly intrigued with actually seeing the variety of positions they take up relative to characters” (p.47).

The conceptualization of the reader as engaged and active interpreters is embedded in the SRI. Similar to active audience theories in mass communication research, engaged readers “elaborate on and connect their own experiences with the text...they seek books of interest to them; use their knowledge of textual structures, the world, and personal experiences to construct and evaluate meaning, and embed their reading in social purposes and interactions that facilitate intertextual, interpersonal, and societal understanding” (Enciso, 1996, p. 172) Enciso’s conceptualization of the engaged reader emphasizes the relational and contextual nature of meaning construction; thus, how readers construct and are constructed by social and political relations is important to exploring and understanding reading.

In my dissertation study, I was interested in understanding how girls experienced popular music, in particular, how they constructed meaning and how this related to their everyday lives. And, because I see this process as always constructed in relationship to others and to the contexts of their everyday lives, I wanted to know what conditions impacted this meaning construction. In addition, I wanted to know more about what information they take away from their engagements with popular music. While reading a
book and listening to and performing popular music may require different processes of engagement, the SRI was helpful in terms of making visible girls’ thoughts and feelings. In addition, because the SRI makes axiomatic the need to examine socio-political relations, the use of this method may help me to understand how girls perceive the role of authority in their media lives.

Before conducting the SRI interview for my dissertation, I pre-tested interviews with 3 girls from another classroom. In doing so, I explored the usefulness of this protocol for studying media, in general, and popular music, in particular. At this time, I had not decided to focus on popular music; therefore, girls were asked to bring in a media text (e.g. song, magazines, and television show) that they wanted to discuss. One girl selected a magazine, another a TV show, and the third participant, a song. Based on these interviews and the specified focus on popular music, the interview protocol was modified to generate the best results. For example, some of the girls’ responses to questions asked did not reveal how their thoughts and feelings were connected to their everyday lives. Given this, I was careful to insert probes throughout the interview that asked “how is this connected to your life.” In addition, I had originally planned on playing the song at the beginning of Part II—during the pretesting it was apparent that the girls needed to hear the song, look through the magazine, and watch a clip of the TV show prior to the beginning of the interview.

As previously mentioned, I conducted 8 individual interviews, 2 general group interviews (3 girls/per group), and 2 peer group interviews (3 girls/per group). The interviews were divided into two parts (2 one-hour sessions) on 2 separate days. On 2
occasions (due to space and time constraints), I had to meet with a girl on 3 separate occasions. Nevertheless, the interviews on average lasted between 1 1/2 hours to 2 hours. At Central, there are few rooms for private meetings and these spaces have to be negotiated around other scheduled activities such as Chess Club, French Club, and Drums. Therefore, we had to shuffle between the Drama Room, the computer lab, the library, and the art room. During one interview, we had to gather our stuff mid-interview and move to another private location. In order to ensure privacy, it was imperative that we were careful to not continue with others in the room. During these interruptions, we stopped the interview. These space and time negotiations affected to a certain extent the time allowed for interviewing, the quality of taping (I lost recording on audiotape, but thankfully had the videotape as a backup), and our focus on what we were attending to at the time. And, we always seemed to quickly recover and resume the interview. The girls met with me during lunch and recess, which occasionally posed an additional set of issues. Mary agreed that they could eat in the classroom on their interview days, I asked them if they could do this; some agreed, others professed that they were too hungry and proceeded to eat during the interview. Also, because recess and lunch were one of the few times they could socialize during the day, I had to reschedule some interviews due to social activities. For example, after a field trip to a local bookstore, the girls wanted to “do their American Girls gossip book” together during recess. In response to their request, I moved Tracey's interview to the next day. In reflecting back on the interviews, I would argue that 2 hours was enough for these girls; however, I felt rushed and unable
to fully probe some key issues and questions. I am not sure if more time would have achieved this given their hunger pangs, restlessness to get to the room, and desire to be with friends.

The interviews were both audio and videotaped. Before we started the interview, I had each participant look through the lens of the camera to get a sense of what I was videotaping. In addition, I showed her how to operate the audiotape player in case she wanted to turn it off during the session. While I always gave them the option of turning off the video and audio players during the interview, the girls did not opt to do so. They seemed to be comfortable with both recorders, and during one of the peer group interviews, April, Emily, and Maria videotaped each other dancing and singing to Destiny’s Child.

**Individual Interviews**

I have provided an interview protocol (see Appendix B). The first section represents a general exploration of their experiences with this media text including why they choose this text and the act of reading these texts. The second section is a discussion of the participation immediate introspective recall of her engagement with the text.

In Part I, I explored song selection, preference, and the intertextual relationships between this song and other media. I also investigated the immediate conditions of viewing in particular, when, where, how, and with whom she engages with the music. In addition, we explored the intertextual relationship between the act of listening compared to other media engagements. In doing so, I asked the participant questions related to these issues, recorded these responses in the form of a list using her words to capture the
essence of what she was describing. Before the girls constructed their symbols, we negotiated which topics on the list would be represented. The girls were asked which ones were most important in terms of describing their experiences—not all of the items of the list were chosen. I only intervened if I felt a topic was repeated often and should be represented. The participants were asked to construct cutouts that represented these experiences. In addition, she was asked to cutout a symbol that best represented who she was she was listening to or performing the song. And, the participant was asked to make a cutout of authority figures in her life. Using the symbolic representations of the text, act of reading, self and authority figure, I asked the participant to talk about her most recent or most memorable experiences with this song. During her discussion, the participant selected the symbols that best represented what was happening during this engagement with the text. As she described the engagement, I asked: “what are you thinking now? what were you feeling? where are you now? are authority figures present? is anyone else present? The interview concluded with questions about the interview process.

Because I was interested in which conditions impacted their popular music experiences and how these experiences were connected to their everyday lives, in Part II of the SRI interview, we explored character/image identification, conditions that impacted their engagements, and how the participants saw themselves in relationship to the song, characters, “authors,” and authority figures. Participants were asked to talk about their favorite part or most memorable part of the text. We listened to the song together. I asked the participant questions about what she was thinking and feeling and
recorded these responses in the form of a list using her words to capture the essence of what she was describing. The participant constructed cutouts that represent these experiences.

I asked questions about the characters and/or images that come to mind during engagement. We listed these characters and she made symbols that represented what these characters were about or what they looked like. For example, the girls typically listed as characters: their friends, the music group members, or scenes from particular videos. The cutout of the “listener” constructed in the first interview along with the cutouts of the authority figures were used as well. I did provide an opportunity for the participant to construct new cutouts to represent the reader and the authority figure(s)—no one opted to do this. Using the symbolic representations of the reading experience, characters, self and authority figures, the participant talked about her most recent or most memorable experiences with this song. During her discussion, the participant selected the symbols that best represented what was happening during this engagement with the song. As she described the engagement, I asked: “what are you thinking now? what were you feeling? where are you now? are authority figures present? is anyone else present?”

At this stage, I also explored the girls’ perceptions of characters and their perceptions of how others think/feel about these characters. In addition, I wanted to know how the participants conceptualized authority figures’ perceptions of the song and the characters.
In terms of popular music texts, I defined the “author” as who made the song? In this stage, the participants were asked questions about who they thought created the song, and how they thought decisions were made about what to put in the song and what to leave out. The participants cutout symbols that represented who they thought the author is, what they thought the author did, and how they thought the author made decisions. During her discussion, the participant selected the symbols that best represented what was happening during this engagement with the text. During this discussion, I asked questions about how she thought the author sees the characters, what she thought the author knew about the reader and what the author hoped she felt while listening to the song. In addition, I asked questions such as: if you could ask the author anything what would it be? do you think the author is correct in what they think about the reader? What changes would you ask the author to make? What would you like to stay the same? I am also interested in how the participants think authority figures see the author. The interview concluded with a final discussion about the interview process and a final reading of the text.

Throughout the interview, I used probes such as: is there anything else you want to add, any changes you would like to make, what’s happening now? How is this connected to your life? In addition, it is important to note that I did not be guess at what the symbols meant for the girls. I did ask at each stage of the interview, what the symbols meant to her—why this shape and color. I recorded her explanation on the back of each cutout.
**Group Interviews**

Due to time constraints and socializing, I anticipated that we would not be able complete the full interview protocol. I decided ahead of time to only focus on a few areas of the SRI (see Appendix C). The presence of 3 participants instead of one made a difference in terms of my participation in the interview, and the questions asked. In addition to my questions, the girls questioned each other about their responses, challenged responses, corroborated responses, and added to them. The group interviews were less structured than the individual interviews primarily because the girls socialized with each other (sometimes around the song).

**Notes about the SRI**

Prior to the individual interview, each girl was asked to bring in a song that she wanted to discuss. I told them that this could be any song and that if they did not have it, I would provide it for them. The following is a list of the songs discussed and participants:

1. April selected N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye*
2. Emily selected N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye*
3. Kim selected N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye*
4. Vanecia selected N’Sync’s *Just Got Paid*
5. Maria selected TLC’s *UnPretty*
6. Heather (note wanted Macy) selected Macy Gray’s *I Try*
7. Tracey selected Destiny’s Child’s *Jumpin’ Jumpin’*
8. April, Emily, Maria selected Destiny’s Child’s *Say My Name*
9. Teresa, Vanecia, Tracey selected TLC’s *No Scrubs*

Girls selected these songs for several reasons. Six girls selected the song because the group or performer was their favorite. Heather explains that she selected *I Try* because "it's actually one of my favorite songs. And, I like her voice because it's like different."
Like Mandy Moore and Britney Spears all sound the same. But she's like by herself and different." Kim selected *Bye, Bye, Bye* because she was "used to it." When I asked April why she selected *Bye, Bye, Bye*, she explained that "it is one of my favorites" and, unlike the Destiny's Child CD, she "could find a case for it." And, Vanecia selected *Just Got Paid* because she figured that "a lot of people would pick *Bye, Bye, Bye* for a song."

Overall, the girls seemed to enjoy the SRI. I asked them several times throughout the interview to reflect on the process and provide feedback. They talked about the interviews as "being fun." In addition, some girls saw this as an opportunity to talk about and express things they usually don't have the chance to discuss. For example, Shaquilla said that she liked the fact that she could "draw and make pictures about things that I like about the CD." Tracey commented that "I get to talk about my personal stuff to you." And, Heather explained that "well, you get to do stuff that expresses the song that you like. That probably you couldn't do with your friends or something." The girls seemed to enjoy making the symbols and having this time and attention focused on their thoughts and feelings. As Emily stated several times in her interview, "well, no one has ever asked me this stuff before."

The SRI opens up possibilities for both the researcher and the participant by 1) providing girls with the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings in oral, written, and artistic forms enabling them to represent that which is often difficult to describe verbally; 2) allowing researchers to incorporate social structure into the interview by probing for the ways in which power and authority influences their experiences; 3) helping girls demonstrate how their experiences are played out through time and space;
and 4) helping researchers explore how the participant sees herself in relationship to the text. The SRI, then, provides an opportunity for the researcher to interrogate the intersections between micro and macro social narratives that are linked with girls’ identities and their identification with popular culture music and literature.

The SRI helped me to understand more clearly how girls envisioned themselves in relationship to popular music and performers. For example, April constructed a cutout of herself as a member of the group N’Sync. She explained that she “feel(s) like part of the group” when she listened to the song. She drew herself as smaller than the group. This representation of self gave me the opportunity to probe the symbolism of her size in relationship to the pop culture icons. In addition, Emily saw herself as dancing and singing to the music. She was wearing roller blades and pigtails. During the movement of the symbols, Emily consistently positioned herself with her friends at school. This movement provided insight and further corroboration of the importance of peer relationships in enacting popular music.

The SRI also helped to illuminate girls’ knowledge of popular culture and the role of intertextuality (fashion and music; videos and listening to music) in their experiences with music. For example, in their representations of how they see themselves, several girls depicted themselves and others wearing pigtails, short dresses, rollerblades, sunglasses, tattoos, and platform shoes. The use of these fashions demonstrated their knowledge of popular culture and the influence of the commodification of girlness. Symbols of Mary Kate and Ashley were used to represent April and Maria’s adventure while “snooping in April’s brother’s room.” And, when representing how she saw the
producer of N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye*, April created an image of someone carrying a shopping bag to represent the producer as a “fun person.”

The symbol movement helped to get at the importance of the rhythm and beat of the music and how they imagined their bodies performing the music. During Tracey’s interview, she often expressed that while listening to Destiny Child she “can’t be still.” She represented these feelings best when she moved the symbol of herself all around the table when she was listening to the song. In the pre-test interview, Vanessia’s depiction of the white male producer of Britney Spear’s *The Beat Goes On*, illustrated, through the movement of her cutouts, how she envisioned the relationship between Spears and her producer by showing the white male scolding Britney Spears—a perception that she did not express until the symbol movement. This interaction with the cutouts also helped to demonstrate how they thought about the role of authority and power in their engagements with music.

The SRI also allowed for more reflection on thoughts and feelings by providing more detail. When I probed “can you draw’ what you are thinking, this seemed to help the girls answer questions and describe experiences, feelings, thoughts that they could not initially verbalize. This SRI offered the potential to help probe and co-interpret social narratives and identity construction.

*Questionnaire.*

The participants were asked to fill out a brief personal profile questionnaire. The purpose of this instrument was to collect demographic information and to get a sense of each girl’s leisure activities. I have included a draft of the questionnaire in Appendix D.
Media Journals

I was interested in how girls experienced popular music and other media, in general, and part of this is understanding the immediate conditions of their engagements with media including: what they attended to, when, with whom, and why. I conducted a pilot study with 10 girls in another classroom to test which instrument would yield the most useful data. Five girls were given journal entries that asked them to keep track of "what was it that you watched, listened to, read, or did that was about stuff kids your age are interested in." And, five girls were given journal entries that required them to circle the media they engaged with and to indicate the specific text. Results of this testing revealed that I would get more useful data from entries that probed for media experiences rather than the more general, "stuff kids your age are interested in."

Girls were asked to keep a media journal (see Appendix E) for one week at the beginning of the research process and for one week at another point of the process. I wanted to have them record their media encounters at two different time periods to account for the possibility that one atypical week may unusually impact their viewing. I provided the girls with gel pens, white journal folder, a plastic pencil holder inserted in the folder, and the promise of prizes if they finished their entries. Before giving them the journal, I discussed the purpose and importance of this activity and we negotiated what we meant by media. For the purpose of this study, we defined media as both form and content including magazines, movies, videotaped recordings of media texts, television shows, advertisements, commercials, music videos, concert videos, radio, internet websites, chatrooms, and music. In brief, the media journal probed: which
medium they watched, what particular content with a brief description, when they engaged with the media and for how long, if they were alone or with others, whether or not they were doing something else while engaging, where they were, why they decided to engage, and any questions or comments about this experience.

Despite the incentive offered, the completion rate for the journals was inadequate. Out of the 14 girls, 5 participants did not do any media journal entries. Six out of the nine key informants participated, but only for one week, not everyday, and sometimes only once a day. In addition, the girls did not fill in all the information requested. They carried their journals around initially, but the excitement of completing entries waned quickly. They explained that they were too busy or simply forgot to complete forms. Thus, they tended to not do them or to complete them at a later point in time from memory. I decided to use the completed media journals for summary information to compliment the questionnaire data. In retrospect, I should have asked the girls to only focus on their engagements with music.

Data Analysis

I used a modified version of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory for analyzing the interview and field note data. Grounded theory is based on the premise that theory building is generated from raw data. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990) "one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge." Due to time constraints and resources (while grounded theory is thorough and offers rigorous procedures, I would also argue that it is, to a certain extent, a methodology that requires a considerable amount of time
and resources to complete), I have opted to borrow from grounded theory certain concepts and useful practices to help me interpret the data. What is most appealing to me about grounded theory is the metatheoretical implications for method and data analysis. The authors assume that reality is not fixed in time and space and agree that our knowledge about the world is generated through interpretive processes. In addition, it is clear from their emphasis on the value of informant-generated data that researcher knowledge is not privileged and is put into question. Thus, grounded theory requires by necessity a continuous interrogation into theoretical influences that may be imposed on the data. Researchers are asked to examine closely the sources of their “theoretical sensitivity” or insights by frequently posing questions on data interpretation. In addition, the authors suggest that researchers “maintain an attitude of skepticism” (p.45) by questioning the relevancy of themes and categories generated from research literature. Strauss and Corbin also call for adherence to data collection and analysis procedures.

**Interview and Field Note Analysis**

Grounded theory’s first stage of data analysis is open coding. Open coding is the initial stage where raw data is broken down, examined, compared, conceptualized and categorized (p. 61). For the purpose of the study, nodes/themes refer to the smaller level groupings of raw data, categories are the major themes, and subcategories are nodes that are directly related to the corresponding category. I used QSR N5, a NUD*IST series data analysis software program, to conduct open coding and to help organize the
interview and field note data. Incidentally, NUD*IST software was created based on the principles of grounded theory. With QSR, I was able to:

1. import all text documents
2. code documents by creating nodes/files to store the transcript excerpts
3. name each file with complete description of contents—this allowed for establishing coding rules indicating which data belonged in each node
4. recognize from which raw data document excerpts originated
5. create memos while coding data. These memos helped me to keep track of theoretical and methodological questions and concerns during coding.
6. conduct text searches for terms or phrases
7. establish depth or the number of documents coded per file/node

QSR was a valuable resource to help organize data and to provide structure to maintain procedures.

During open coding, the unit of analysis was a set of turns around a particular topic. I read through each interview and field note and used the participant’s own words or “in vivo” codes (Strauss and Corbin, p. 69) and research questions to create initial nodes or themes. In addition to the research questions, I also used as theoretical guidance the assumption that meaning is constructed through the interactions between self, other, and media text—none of which are fixed. In addition, I maintained the belief that girls enact and embody knowledge about their social worlds. In the spirit of theoretical sensitivity, I was careful to question these assumptions throughout the process by recognizing the dialectical relationship between active sociocultural and political processes <--- experiences. In doing so, I continued to question whether or not the connections I was making between nodes/themes were appropriate and generated from the data, how I was generating categories, and how I was naming these categories.

Because there were several research questions to consider, I read through the transcripts
several times with different questions in mind. I used the following questions to guide different stages of the analysis.

1. How do pre-teen girls experience popular music?
   a) How do they use popular music?
   b) How do they interact with the music?
   c) What is the value of this music in their lives?
   d) How do they see themselves in relationship to the music and their experiences with the music?
   e) What are the immediate listening/performing/etc. conditions? (when, where, why, how, with whom?)

2. How do these experiences impact their everyday lives?
   a) How do the music (as text as performance) connect to their lives?
   b) How is the ‘use of,’ ‘performance of,’ etc. this music connected to their relationship with others?
   c) How are their experiences with this music connected to learning and/or schooling?
   d) How do others’ perceptions of popular music and/or their use of popular music impact their experiences?

Naming Nodes and Categories

In grounded theory, naming categories or themes can be a precarious process. Because of the necessity to keep literature-generated theory bracketed and the impossibility of entering any situation tabula rasa, the construction of major and minor categories to describe phenomenon is not an innocent process. The authors suggest, however, that initially titles are required to help organize, but should be kept under surveillance to ensure that the researcher is not hastily imposing meaning on the data. I opted in the first round of coding to name nodes/themes from information gleaned from the raw data. In some instances, I used “in vivo” coding to name themes such as “acting black,” “all that,” “cussing,” and “getting the groove on.” Later I did text searches of all documents to check on the presence of these phrases across data. In addition, I created nodes based on answers to interview questions. For example, I created nodes such as
"rhythm and beat," "going to clubs," "part of the group," and "boys make fun"—all phrases generated from the raw data. I also used the general research questions to guide thematic naming. For example, girls' statements about when, where, how, and with whom they engaged with popular music were placed under a general "media use" category. Other initial nodes included excerpts related to imposed interview questions concerning authority, characters/images, and author. This initial stage of coding generated over 160 nodes/themes (see Appendix F).

In the next stage, I collapsed nodes/themes that seemed to pertain to the same phenomenon. For example, the node "authority controlling use" was collapsed with "authority music restrictions." In general, I wanted to fine-tune the list without losing the importance of fine distinctions between nodes/themes. In addition, at the stage, I reflected on the second set of research questions, "how do these experiences impact their everyday lives," to merge themes into categories. For example, all nodes related to developing and maintaining relationships were given the "parent" label "relationships" and the unique quality of each node was used as a subcategory or "child" to use QSR language. The original node "friendship troubles" was renamed "relationships—friendship troubles," and the original node "difference" was incorporated into the appropriate major category. If the raw data that comprised a "difference" node was in relationship to how the girl thought about self or other and music, then it was collapsed with the major category "performing identity." At this stage, I developed categories such as "expressing knowledge," "performing identity," "intertextuality," "making connections," "methodology," "music use," "performing music," "relationships," "school
context," and "authority." In addition, there were several dangling nodes or themes that didn’t seem to be directly connected to these major categories, but were important in terms of understanding girls’ experiences. Dangling nodes such as “constructing fictional events” will be used as appropriate for summary information and, if applicable, for future research.

Particular research questions, (i.e. how do they see themselves and others, how affect relationships with others, how connected to learning/schooling, and other’s perception) served as guidance for establishing the major categories. I wanted, at this stage, to move beyond the surface of the raw data to an understanding of how their experiences impacted their everyday lives. Also, my commitment to understanding girls’ as knowers contributed to the construction of these categories. The title prefixes “performing,” and “expressing” came both from the data and from a conscious effort to communicate process in the findings. Performing is directly related to girls’ actual singing and dancing to music as well as their discussions about singing and dancing.

I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the construction of the category “expressing knowledge.” I was mindful of my desire to intervene in previous studies that framed girls as passive audiences and I wanted to make sure that I did not romanticize the interpretive power these girls practiced. In general, I wanted to be sure that I maintained an understanding of meaning construction that was both ideology < --- > experience and agency < --- > structure. In this next section, I provide examples of memos related to how I conceptualized this category. This exemplar will hopefully provide more in-depth explanation of the data analysis process.
During the open coding stage I found that girls repeatedly communicated (both solicited and unsolicited) what they knew about popular music lyrics, genres, and production. Girls mentioned that they liked songs because they knew the words, exclaimed to me and to each other that they knew lyrics, interpreted lyrics and connected them to their lives, faithfully acted as reporters telling me what was happening on MTV or informing me about "music stuff" I should know. In their musical storytelling, they seemed to communicate a pride in knowing this informing, and this was most clear when they offered this information unsolicited. I worked carefully through the relationships among category construction, literature-based theory, my own interventionist desires, and the girls' stories (see Appendix G).

The construction, then, of the major categories took time to process. Despite my reconceptualization or naming of these categories, I wanted to be sure that they were represented in the raw data. Thus, I determined that if the category showed depth or was represented in several documents and across participants, it warranted independence. I was careful to recognize, however, that depth may only represent their responses to solicited questions. So, it was important to consider the "communicated importance" of the category. For example, while "acting black" was discussed in the peer group interviews representing 2 out of the 10 documents, six out of the nine key informants were actively involved in this discussion. In addition, the intensity and relevance of this phenomenon to their everyday lives warranted closer examination and recognition. These data were not corroborated with the observation data. However, I would argue that at the very least social desirability ideologies about discussing race in public contributed
to the absence of these behaviors in public and in front of me. The field note data and questionnaires corroborated other categories and subcategories. Thus, it was important that I paid attention to both quantifiable depth and a qualitative assessment of the relevancy and importance of each category in girls’ everyday lives.

Throughout the entire open coding process and as a follow-up and more thorough check, I performed a modified version of grounded theory’s axial coding. Axial coding “is a set of procedures whereby data are put back together...by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). One of the foci in axial coding is making sense of a category in reference to conditions that gave rise to it or framed it (e.g. time, space, culture, economic status, history, individual biography, school rules, social position, public discourses about popular music). To interrogate the intervening condition that may have impacted experience, I imposed questions on the categories developed. This level of analysis was necessary for two reasons: 1) this helped to illuminate the contextual nature of media experiences, and 2) this process helped to connect categories through a theory of action and context. Axial coding also took place during the open coding process. More specifically, this happened when I was struggling with understanding the meaning of participant’s responses and behaviors.

In reference to my research questions and as outlined in my discussion about context in Chapter 1, I reflected on particular intervening conditions such as immediate viewing conditions, authority figures, public discourses about music/popular culture, school context, and social identities. For examples, when Teresa, Vanecia, and Tracey talked about their frustrations of other girls performing “black” music and named this
“acting black,” I wanted to understand how this relationship between genre, performance, ownership, and identity was understood, constructed, and practiced. In doing so, I imposed questions such as “under what conditions,” “how did they come to think about it this way,” “why don’t they talk about this more publicly—why haven’t I seen this on the playground or in the lunch room,” and “how do social identities impact how girls’ perform self and construct others.” These questions led to a richer understanding of racial identity as process. In addition, these questions led to the understanding that racial identification and solidarity are contingent, to a certain extent, on situational factors. And, these questions created connections to other categories such as “expressing knowledge.” One of the aims of axial coding is to explore connections between categories, the procedure of probing for intervening conditions helped to make present the situational connection between “performing identities” and “expressing knowledge.” I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 4.

**Analyzing Symbols**

As part of the SRI, girls constructed symbols to represent their thoughts and feelings. In accordance with the assumptions embedded in the SRI method particularly the importance of symbolic representation as a form to help participants communicate ideas and thoughts that are difficult to verbalize, I wanted to analyze the symbols constructed. The symbolic images were used to enhance or challenge the interview and field note data. The unit of analysis was the symbols themselves. I constructed an Excel spreadsheet to help map the different meanings of the symbols (see Appendix H). The column headings include “picture”—a re-drawing of the original symbol;
"description"—what she said about the symbol during the interview; “name”—the name given to the symbol; “cross-reference”—how the symbol is connected to other symbols in this case, and “coding”—connections to other established nodes and/or new nodes. I analyzed all symbols.

**Questionnaires and Media Journals**

I constructed another Excel spreadsheet to analyze and keep track of questionnaire data (see Appendix I for partial document example). Because of the small sample size, I was able to calculate frequencies and averages, as needed, by hand. The questionnaire data were used for participant summary information and to compare to interview and field note data. For example, I noticed that the songs selected by the participants for the interview did not always match the ones they indicated as listening to the most. This comparison provided insight into the sometimes-random nature of song selection in the interview.

**Videotapes**

In the SRI, the girls are asked to move their symbols to visually represent their thoughts and feelings about their experiences with popular music. I looked at their movement as needed for clarification or enhancement of their verbal representations of these movements. For example, if during the interview, the participant continuously positioned the symbol representing “self” away from the action taking place and if this is connected to interview and symbol data, I consulted the video for further explanation or clarification.
In reference to the two final research questions, what can be learned from girls’ experiences with popular music to help us develop alternative theories about girls and popular culture, and what can be learned from girls’ experiences with popular music to help us develop media pedagogical practices, I saw these questions as embedded in the entire analysis process as reflection for the discussion chapters. I address them, but they do not use them as the focus of my data analysis.
CHAPTER 3
THE POLITICS OF PLAYING GIRL

In this chapter, I interrogate what I identify as the politics of "playing girl" and the methodological implications of these performances. I focus my discussion on the researcher and participants' uses of popular culture as a medium for being "girls." I argue that this dilemma of "playing girl" illustrates the need for careful analyses of research methods and practices intended to interpret girls' experiences of popular culture and schooling. This dissonance also points at the importance of understanding and processing the significance of children and researcher's performances of identity. In addition, I provide a discussion of how my interactions with the girls led to critical questions concerning the role of the researcher as social critic and actor. And, these research experiences raise important questions concerning how theoretical and methodological dichotomies such as agency → structure, ideology → experience, and self → other are realized in the research process. This chapter represents my processing of the theoretical dilemma of how we account for both agency and structure while being mindful about the methodological concern regarding how we manage valuing experience and thinking critically about it.

One of the benefits of ethnographic research is the opportunity to witness moments when the intersections among self, other, and sociocultural discourses
converge. These moments can offer important insight into how the social and personal collude and collide impacting experience and identity construction. In addition, these events help contribute to opening up the scope of research by offering the opportunity to explore unanticipated research questions and concerns. These moments have the potential to shift our focus from what is happening on the surface to exploring what conditions helped to create these integrated experiences. And, these moments can serve as methodological “wake up calls,” stimulating reflection on our role as critical researchers. While conducting my field research, I experienced several of these moments.

While observing Room 2 during a teacher read aloud, I noticed two girls, Vanecia and Shaquilla engaging in a mutual tattooing session. They had created their own tattoos from ink and paper and were firmly holding their homemade artwork to their stomachs. I struggled at first with dismissing this event as individual deviant behaviors, but because I was interested in how sociocultural relations are enacted in the classroom, I wanted to frame my response to this event differently. In addition to the tattooing session, I had noted that several of the other girls in the classroom seemed to be particularly restless during the read aloud. How might their behaviors be connected to their engagement with this book? Do these behaviors tell us something about girls’ social positioning as readers and as participants in the classroom?

In the midst of my internal questioning, the girls noticed that I had seen what they were doing. I had been in the classroom for less than a month, so they eyed me with suspicion and nonverbally communicated their contempt and concern that I would tell on
them. Immediately, questions concerning my role in the classroom came to mind. My dilemma shifted from a theoretical interrogation of the event to the methodological issue of my role as a critical, action researcher. How was I going to respond to their behaviors? And, what implications did the witnessing of this moment and my subsequent response have for the relationship between the girls, the teacher, and myself?

Furthermore, as a feminist media scholar, very much concerned with girls' experiences with popular culture, I questioned how my response might communicate an approval or disapproval of the use of popular culture in everyday life. This pivotal moment marked the beginning of a yearlong struggle with enacting and processing my relationship with the girls in this particular classroom. The important intersections between theory and practice were realized in our attempts to negotiate our relationship as “girls.”

In summary, the theoretical and methodological discussions that inform my research emphasize that:

1. researchers recognize that audiences actively interpret their media experiences while simultaneously recognizing that these experiences are framed within socio-political contexts that create opportunities and close others.
2. we need to incorporate an understanding that all experiences are interpreted, incomplete, and implicated in larger social processes and we must value experience and the "local" as a means to understanding how power is practiced.
3. our beings are inextricably embedded in our practices as researchers and we need to consistently question our presence, getting out of the way enough to understand how others’ experience their worlds.

What is rarely discussed is the difficulty of putting all of this into practice. I believe strongly that how I conduct my research and how I interact with the girls are inherently politically imbricated with power relationships and situated within structural conditions such as schooling. I do have a responsibility to think critically about my interactions with
the participants, what we talk about, what we do, and how I represent these interactions. In reference to theory-as-practiced, in my research project, I am particularly concerned with how I gained access to girls’ experiences while simultaneously provoking critical introspection? How can I respect girls’ needs to be heard and understood while simultaneously maintaining a critical perspective about popular culture? What did this look like in practice and how did this impact how I conduct research?

Implications for Research and Consciousness Raising?

From the beginning, I became increasingly aware of my struggles with engaging with popular culture while conducting research. Early in the literacy study, I purchased some sale books for the class. I picked out several “Goosebumps” books—children’s/youth horror stories repackaged as Saturday morning TV shows. When the teacher was presenting the new selections to the class—I was struck by the gendered nature of the books. The boys responded with enthusiasm, and I thought “did I buy boy books”? While I felt comfortable buying “Goosebumps” books for the class, I did not feel comfortable purchasing or showing interest in “girl” series such as “Sweet Valley Twins” or “Mary Kate and Ashley” books. I did not want to participate in commodified girl culture without ample time to process this with the girls. At first, then, I was cautious of how I was interacting with the girls particularly in relationship to the their uses of popular culture. Over the course of the research, it was very difficult to not participate—some of the girls wanted to get to know me and to share their "stuff" with me. Mid-study, I became more obvious about my own displays of “being a girl” by purchasing girl book packets from the Scholastic book club, giving in to the relentless requests to
bring my 9 month old son to a class party, using 1970's retro fuzzy pens to write my fieldnotes, talking to the girls about their favorite music, television shows, etc. My uses of popular culture were both precarious in terms of my role in consciousness raising and critical reflection and important in terms of establishing trusting and thoughtful relationships.

**Precarious practices: Reproducing consumerism?**

In terms of political economy, one of the most disturbing corporate practices of popular culture is the construction of pre-teen girls as avid consumers. Given the current "get them while they are young" attitude, my use of the fuzzy 70's retro pens, the subscription to Smacklers monthly girl club, and the purchasing of girl (read feminine)-centered teen guides was not an innocent practice. I worried that I was communicating and reproducing cultural preoccupations with consumption. While I explained to the girls that my subscription to Smacklers B*Real Club was a way for me to learn more about what girls liked and what others thought they liked, the girls didn't always position my consumption in this way. At times, I was a resource, quite literally, someone who bought what they liked, and they wanted to share in my consumption. When the scholastic book orders came in, they wanted to read my "girl" book during silent reading time—a time when the adults in the room, including myself, would have preferred if they were reading more “serious” and valued literature.

In early spring, the class was treated to a shopping trip to a local children’s bookstore—they were able to purchase one book. While selecting their books, they were all asked to show their selection to the teacher, Mary, April, Kim, and Maria purchased
“Mary Kate and Ashley” books with no disagreement from Mary. This was not the case with Emily’s selection, however. While I was searching for a book, Emily came over to me and asked “what was the name of the book you were looking at school the other day about the famous people and girls’ stuff”? I said “Got Issues Much.” The book is a collection of testimonials written by famous pop, movie, and television stars about the issues they struggled with as teenagers. She said “can you help me find it. I want to buy it.” I say sure and we proceed to look for it. When she brought the book up to Mary for approval, Mary expressed much concern over her selection. She really didn’t want her to buy it and worked hard to discourage her. Emily said that I had a copy of it and that she read some of it and liked it. Mary looked at me with a smile and said, “thanks.” Emily and I walked away and I apologized for my part in all of this. Emily said “its okay,” looked disappointed and wandered off to select another book. This moment clearly demonstrated the need to examine the tensions and questions of my role as a researcher particularly in relationship to the apparent dissonance between my use of popular culture with the girls and some of the “official” and “unofficial” school rules. In this instance, this dissonance may have impacted the teacher-student relationship in ways that might not have been favorable to Emily.

In the beginning of my project, one of the most disconcerting elements of my interactions with the girls was, what I considered to be, the near absence of any form of popular culture critique. My hesitancy to be critical was grounded in both epistemological and ontological arguments that informed how I proceeded theoretically and methodologically. If I truly embraced the belief that how popular culture is practiced
in everyday life reveals more in terms of meaning and how power is exercised than the product itself, then it follows that I would be more interested in how girls' experienced popular music than the text itself. And, I continued to struggle with wanting to teach them "the meaning" of the lyrics, the truth about how music production took place, and how this might impact them. This slippage in media research and pedagogy is common and as research indicates often results in the students/participants telling you what they think you want to hear (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994) or not communicating with you at all. And, epistemologically, it communicates a belief that my interpretation represents the truth. In addition, based on my review of the literature, I had come to the conclusion that many studies and accounts of media and popular culture impact did not account for how girls engaged with popular culture instead the text and the audiences were written as fixed in time and space. In contrast, I wanted to create space in my project for girls' experiences to be fore-grounded and my preconceptions to be bracketed and kept in check. Thus, when the girls would critique each other for "acting Black" or "being all that" and uncritically assert that "N'Sync" and "Britney Spears" were in contrast, “acting themselves,” I struggled with how to engage them in critical discussion about the pop stars that seemed to be above suspicion. When girls would say that anyone could be a music star, it wasn't until after the data were collected and we had established a more trusting relationship, that I felt comfortable asking them critical questions about body image and the politics of whom can be famous. The fundamental dilemma of how to situate experience continued to be a source of dissonance for me.
Repositioning Selves

I found, however, that my use of popular culture opened up opportunities for developing relationships and creating conditions for interesting discussions and critical moments. At the beginning of the research project, two of the girls, Vanecia and Kim, remained distant and often eyed me with suspicion. With Vanecia, this happened, as previously mentioned, during the tattooing session I witnessed and continued until seven months into the project. Our relationship changed in April, when she asked me if she could read one of the “girl” books I ordered from Scholastic. In reviewing my field notes and reflecting on my interactions with her over the seven months, I noted that our interactions were grounded in sharing our knowledge about popular culture. She somewhat reluctantly showed me how she made her tattoo, she showed me the CD she brought in for free time, I commented on the “girl power” T-shirts she wore, and she was present when I had a discussion with her team’s Whitney Houston biography project.

Kim also seemed distant and suspicious. Once she learned of my interest in popular culture particularly popular music, she began to interact differently with me—sharing her knowledge and discussing our mutual popular culture purchases. In addition, she also shared her frustrations about teacher’s attitudes about popular culture and her general frustrations about being a student. During independent reading, Kim asked me “did you get your B*Real in the mail”—she had also subscribed to the “girlclub.” She asked me if I got the see-through book bag (in addition, to receiving a Smackers magazine, subscribers also get some kind of “girl” accessory). I said “yes.” She said, “on TV they say that kids should use see-through bags in case they have weapons.” I asked her “what
do you think about that?” She said “It sucks, ‘cause you may have something in there and someone will see it and steal it.” I do believe that we negotiated our relationships, in part, around and through our uses of popular culture knowledge.

The unfixed nature of our roles was realized in other ways. While I occupied a position of authority (I certainly observed behaviors that would have resulted in disciplinary action had I reported them), in my research with these 4th grade girls, they positioned me in many different roles depending on what they needed at that moment. For example, when they needed help with their reading or writing, I was positioned as a student teacher. When they wanted someone to play a game with, I was conveniently relocated as a peer. When they wanted help with conflict resolution or someone to quite frankly yell at other kids, I was recruited to be disciplinarian or confidante. My role was quite slippery and not always of my own making. This doesn’t mean that I willingly participated as they desired—the research process continued to be a negotiation of my role in their lives.

Their willingness to place me in these different roles required trust and developing this trust took time and a commitment to rethinking how I conceptualized the role of popular culture in girl’s identity construction. Ethnographic researchers speak a great deal about “gaining access” to the intimate happenings of everyday life and this needs to be achieved respectfully and without pretense. At the beginning, it was important that I negotiated relationships with other authority figures concerning what I could and could not tell them regarding the children’s behaviors. I had to respect the girls’ spaces and work to manage carefully invitation and invasion. For example, when
the girls were having private discussions, I did not interfere unless invited. In coordination with negotiating spaces, I had to reflect carefully on how I was becoming part of the community. Most importantly, I encouraged the girls to become part of the research process. It worked for me to make visible my research role in the classroom and, at times, this was not necessarily of my choosing. The girls frequently asked me what I was writing down and often peaked over my shoulder to look at my field notes. I did have to remind them that I was writing about others as well and that I didn’t want to invade their privacy, the girls agreed that this was important and proceeded to develop different strategies of engagement. Instead they would take the position of “reporters” telling me when to write up activities that they deemed important. For example, during one lunch period, the teacher in charge played Destiny’s Child’s “Bills, Bills, Bills.” April yelled across the table, “hey, this is the music that we like to listen to.” While looking through the Scholastic book order forms with Heather and April, April said to me “I bet you order this book (book about N’Sync and other pop bands), so you can learn more about what we like.” I smile and say “yes, I probably will.” While sitting on the couch during free time, Tracey, April, and Maria came over and asked to write in my journal. They proceeded to write down their favorite websites including www.nsync.com, www.bandhunt.com, www.foxskids.com, and www.candystand.com/arcade. They told me that this “is stuff that you should know.” In their role as popular culture reporters, they were not only positioning themselves as active participants in this project, they were also communicating to me the importance of their knowledge. In addition, they continuously asked me questions such as “what are you
“doing now,” “why did you write this down,” and “you are going to write down what I just did aren’t you.” Thorne (1997) talks about her similar experiences during her ethnographic research with elementary children. Reflecting back, I do attribute the unfixed nature of our relationship in part to our collaborative use of popular culture—I am not sure if they would have interacted in the same ways with me if I didn’t show an active interest in what they deemed to be important to them.

My struggles both theoretically and methodologically represent a strong case for the necessity not only for ethnographic study, but also for the careful reflection on how theory informs method. It wasn’t until the end of my data collection that I felt I had earned enough trust to ask critical questions concerning their experiences with and perceptions of popular culture. Only then did I feel that I was able to communicate fully the value of their experiences and the need for all of us to think critically about the relationship between self and other and self and structure.

Embedded in the theoretical and methodological assumption that knowledge is partial and experience is interpreted, research is understood as always in process guided by both the abstract theorizing about epistemology and ontology in coordination with lived theory. Within the context of this particular research experience, the either/or discursive constructions of the role of popular culture in education, the relationship between experience and ideology, and the researcher–participant relationship were called into question by re-conceptualizing the in between moments of ambiguity as opportunities for critical reflection. As I tried to negotiate understanding girls’ experiences with popular culture and reading with the dissonance of validating
uncritically their uses of commodified popular culture, I, at times, colluded with “the powers that be.” However, these moments of dissonance and ambiguity must be understood within the local context—in this case, this school, our relationships, and the role of popular culture in girls everyday lives. As is the case with how girls interpret and experience culture, research experiences must be contextualized as well. The ways in which theory is realized in research practices will influence and be influenced by the activities and relationships-in-process in the field.
CHAPTER 4
PERFORMING IDENTITIES

After spending several months with the Central Alternative girls, it became apparent that listening to, dancing, singing, and creating popular music meant more than entertainment and popping to their favorite singers and groups. When they talked about popular music, sang and danced in the lunchroom and on the playground, and acted out TLC and Destiny's Child in their bedrooms and basements, these girls communicated not only pleasure, but also their racial < -- > gendered identities. The type of music they listened to, how they listened to this music, and who they listened with mattered in terms of how they organized friendships, how they expressed their sense of self and other, and how they negotiated their place in their social and cultural worlds. During these identity performances, the girls embodied music through fashion, positioned themselves in relationship to the singers and music genre, created racial/gendered/and age related distinctions, fantasized about being older, forged gendered allegiances, and communicated racial alliances and politics. In this chapter, I discuss the ways that this group of girls performed a sense of self and other through their uses of popular music. In doing so, I focus on their talk about singing, dancing, and creating music as well as my observations of these performances in process. In particular, I call attention to three examples of identity performances, “acting your age,” “acting your color,” and
gendered allegiances. First, I want to discuss how the girls conceptualized identity or, in their language, “who I am.”

**How the Girls’ Think About “Who I am”**

You can buy your hair if it won’t grow  
You can fix your nose if he says so  
You can buy all the make up  
That man can make  
But if you can’t look inside you  
Find out who am I too  
Be in the position to make me feel  
So damn unpretty  
I’ll make you unpretty too  
(chorus from TLC’s *UnPretty*)

As critiqued by several feminist and Black Studies scholars, historically literature theorizing identity development (e.g. Erickson) has been grounded in an understanding of self growth (read: progress) as an individual process with the healthy development of self as movement toward independence away from others. Way (1995) argues that an understanding of identity development as individual focus denies the ways in which African American women and girls, for example, develop a sense of self and other through community—grounded in both shared cultural experiences and political necessity. As demonstrated in TLC’s *UnPretty*, one of Maria’s favorites, *you and me* are tightly connected in a dialectical relationship imbued with power relations and co-determination. And, the tension between “looking inside you” and being defined by others mirrors some of the Central Alternative girls’ daily struggles and triumphs.

In their experiences with popular music and in their narratives about their everyday lives, the girls communicated the ways identity is very much embedded in sociocultural relations. How they see themselves, how they see others, and how they are
seen and constructed are interconnected and realized through their belief systems and daily practices. In my interactions with the girls, they communicated a variety of perspectives on what it means to “be me.” The most prevalent of their identity theories were: 1) “being yourself” or the belief in an authentic self, 2) “you could just pull her out of a crowd” or the self as a desire to be different/unique, and 3) “you switch on and off” or the necessity of being more than one identity depending on the situation. At least three common threads, 1) the embodied dialectical relationship between self and other, 2) self as social, and 3) a sense of time and space, unite these belief systems and practices.

All conceptualizations of “who I am” are connected by the practice of comparing self to other. While this was not always recognized or conscious, the underlying assumption that in order to understand whom I am I need an “other” was inextricably linked to how they performed and conceptualized “me.” It is important to note, that the me → you relationship took on a variety of forms including, 1) I am me because I am not you, 2) the more intentional construction of I am me and don’t want to be you or I desire to be different than you, 3) I am me because I believe who you think I am, 4) I am me because I am similar to you. The practices and underlying ideologies of me → you are always in articulation with a variety of discourses that create images and representations of what the self → other relationship is. The self as social and as constructed through interaction with someone else or to a group of “others” permeated their day to day lives. The social self is integral to understanding the Central Alternative girls’ self-concepts because it highlights the active discursive and performative construction of me, you, and we. And, in the process of defining “me” (this was always
ongoing and never complete—even if, they desired it to be), the girls communicated a sense of time and space—who was there, when it happened, and where you were mattered in terms of how they communicated self and other. Time, in this case, is more broadly defined to incorporate age, duration, time of day, and how often.

“Being Yourself”: The Quest for Authenticity

The quest to be your true self is not a new belief. This ideology of individuality permeates psychological development literature (Way, 1995), the principles of consumption or consumerism (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1998), educational literature, and popular press literature about child development (Pipher, 1995)–to name but a few discourse communities. Therefore, it is not surprising to witness this philosophy both spoken and practiced at Central Alternative.

When Maria decided on a song for her interview, I was not surprised by her selection of *TLC's UnPretty*, and I was admittedly quite thrilled that we would have the opportunity to discuss what I considered to be a “girl friendly” song. While I find it difficult to characterize the girls across time and space, I would say that more often than not, Maria tended to be in the position of observer, listening intently to what others were saying and doing. She communicated a certain, yet mostly silent belief of “right and wrong” in her interactions with others. She often communicated that she didn’t want to be the one to make decisions for others or choose what their group would do next, and she was forthright in her opinions about particular issues. For example, one Friday during a free choice lunch (the students decide who they want to sit with instead of their regular routine of sitting with their classes), Emily coaxed us (Maria, April, Erin, and me)
to sit at the same table as Devon, a boy that Erin liked. After much deliberation, Erin agreed (and, seemed to be pleased that the suggestion was made), but I had to be the one to sit next to him. When we sat down and Erin proceeded to talk loudly trying to get Devon’s attention, Maria leaned over and said quietly to Erin with a tone of flippant judgment, “Erin, you need to stop being so boy crazy. It makes you look desperate.” Despite her frequently observed quiet persona, Maria communicated firm beliefs about what was right and wrong, and her mother’s opinions and influences featured prominently in these discussions. She often invoked her mother’s beliefs about “cussing,” boy and girl relationships, fashion, and what media was appropriate for kids her age. Maria and her sister both attended Central Alternative, and their mother was active in school events. She was a strong presence in Maria’s life, and this presence impacted how Maria interacted with others and with popular culture.

As indicated in the chorus above, the lyrics tell the story of a woman/girl who decides, according to Maria,

that they are stupid because they did what somebody else wanted them to do. So they could get the girlfriend or something.

The song offered what both she and her mother agreed to be a “good message” and reaffirmed Maria’s belief that “you can be who you want and like what you like.” She explained that she often saw others “not being themselves” particularly when they made decisions about how to be and what to like based on what others said and did.
my neighbors always say, like don't be with them, because they don’t get along with my other neighbors and if I’m their friend, they don’t like me to play with them. And they, like my sister, we went out and bought new things and she doesn’t wear them just because of her friends. And she used to like this boy, but now she doesn’t because something he wears...Well, like sometimes the kids in our class, they go, well if you’re this person’s friend then you can’t play with us and maybe like if you have this color of lipstick you can’t.

I believe that Maria would say that “being yourself” is about finding out who you are independent of what others think you are or should be. She expresses frustration with others who “do what people tell them to do” and she actively expressed a desire to hold on to “who I am.” She explained

(B)ecause like (classmate)...she always says “I’ll go out with you if you’re not these people’s friend.” And, “if you don’t wear those shoes.” And, like my sister, she is always trying on new things. And, (I tell her) “you don’t have to change yourself just to look good to others.”

Maria also admits that location and companionship matter in terms of how she performs a sense of self. She explains that she both listened to TLC alone in her room and with her sisters and mom downstairs. Where she is and who she is with impacted how she performed music. For example, she said that she sang in her room when she was alone, but wouldn’t do this downstairs with others.

Maria: Because when I’m in my room I can do who knows what....well, sometimes I sing, but I don’t sing downstairs because, well, I am becoming more comfortable with it. Sometimes, I will sing because I think that since my sisters do it and stuff, I’m more active downstairs now.

In addition, she believed that you can be yourself and still be connected to others through a sense of equality. When drawing a symbol for TLC, Maria discussed why she likes TLC more than Destiny’s Child. She explains that TLC seemed to be “more fair” and that each member had an equal part in the song and in the band. Destiny’s Child, on the
other hand, produced similar music, but there seemed to be a “boss”—one woman who played a larger role in the group, and this was undesirable to Maria. This sense of fair play reoccurred several times in my interactions with and observations of Maria with her friends and classmates. Sameness < -- > difference and being yourself < -- > being other are important tropes for the girls. What was interesting about her comments was that she and other Room 2 girls slipped back and forth holding steadfast to the both/and of difference < -- > sameness. She liked that they did their own things, but also that they engaged in egalitarian relationships as a group. TLC was unique and mindful of their differences. She explained,

Maria: Yeah. They (TLC) all like their own things, like Destiny’s Child, I like them but sometimes it seems like one of them does more than the other and the other ones are kind of just, she’s like the boss and every other ones are just left out. Because she’s like the main singer.

Pam: So TLC, they all do the same thing. They all sing equally?
Maria: Yeah. And they all, they all do things. They don’t wear the same things.

At the end of the interview, Maria once again reiterates the differences between Destiny’s Child and TLC. She says, “for me, Destiny’s Child seems to all dress alike but yet one of the girl, one of the girls in the group seems to be the boss and I don’t like that. Where TLC all dresses differently and there’s no real boss. They all just work together. So I wanted to add that.” So, for Maria, it is desirable for girls/woman to be themselves and unique and still maintain a connection to others.

Maria and other girls’ concept of self was tied to “what I like.” During her interview, when I asked Maria to position the image of herself in relationship to the other symbols she created, she told me that she saw herself “next to the symbols for ‘who I am’
and ‘what I like.’ In this sense, identity and preferences/tastes are fused together. It would seem then, that by default, girls communicate, according to Marie, a sense of self when they stand strong for what they believe and what they prefer.

When she is talking about the relationship between Destiny’s Child and girls relationships with boys particularly the importance of girls acting strong, Tracey reiterates this belief in standing strong.

By standing up to what they really say instead of just saying “oh can you go tell him for me.” Like if you say you like a boy or something then you say “well, I like a boy. There.” Instead of saying, “um, hey Heather, can you go tell him” You go tell him I like a boy or something like that. You would say it like, you would say, “OK, I like a boy, so what.”

During her interview, Tracey communicated a disdain for girls “who thought they were all that.” She explained that girls who thought they were “all that” were not her friends and, with the exception of Kathleen’s different music tastes, were not any of the Room 2 girls. Girls who were “all that” were notorious because they thought they were perfect, they wore tight clothes, and “needed to get an education.” They were, in general, girls with an attitude that distanced themselves from other girls through their belief that they were better. When I asked Tracey to describe what she would say to the “all that” girl, she said:

Tracey: I would say, “stop being, thinking that you’re all that. Because you, you’re just like yourself. You should be yourself.

Pam OK. What do you think your mom would want to say to this girl?

Tracey: Girl, go home and put on a regular T-shirt. Stop think that you are that. And don’t be wearing dresses or shorts that are too tight for you.

Pam What do you think your dad would say?

Tracey: I think, you’re just like you need to be smart, and you’re just throwing your education away. You’re still, you’re all that, but you know that if you think you’re all that, you’re really not.

Pam OK. What do you think Mary would say?
Tracey I think she would say, go and get an education if you ain’t got one. And if you were in my classroom, you should see some of the girls that are in my classroom. They don’t even think, they don’t even act like they’re all that. They learn and they don’t just say “oh I’m all that, I’m perfect, I’m smart.”

Tracey’s symbolic representation of the “all that” girl revealed a great deal about “who I am” as well as how self is always framed within discourses that prescribe appropriate behaviors. In terms of identity, “being all that” meant that you were not “being yourself” and trying to be what others wanted you to be.

The concept of “being yourself” was also discussed during the peer group interview with Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa. In their discussion about their “white” classmate Kyle’s “annoying” habit of “acting black,” they articulate the importance of “being yourself” which was tied to fulfilling particular socioculturally defined roles and expectations.

Teresa: Kyle tries to be a black boy.
Pam: What does that mean?
Teresa: That he tries to be black like this, “Hey, what’s up my homie.”
Vanecia: And, he is always trying to be like Daniel and Nate.
Pam: Why do you think he tries to do that?
Vanecia: ‘Cause he wants to be a homie. He want to fit it...fit in.
Pam: What do you think about this?
Vanecia: He gets on my nerves.
Teresa: I think he should be who he is and stop acting like a jerk and try to be other people...I think of him as an idiot and why can't you just be yourself?
Teresa: Oh my gosh, the tape is on. I forgot...
Pam: Its okay, no one is going to hear this and know that you said it.
Vanecia: What I think is they need to be themselves.
Pam: What would it mean for Kyle to be himself?
Vanecia: To act white. Try not to be anybody else that he isn't.
Pam: What does it mean to act white?
Vanecia: No offense to you (Pam) or anything... like well, some black people act like gangsters. Like for instance....
Pam: Tell me first what it means to act white.
Vanecia: Well, what I'm trying to say is how black people act like gangsters. And then white people try and go and live on Second Avenue and try acting like gangsters. But, like then the white people... when black people just played around and called their friends niggers... then white people try to go around and call people niggers and then... every time a black person find out a word to say, and white people hold on to it... Once a white person say something then the black person gotta say... I mean once the black person say something the white person gotta say the same thing. And I don't get why they say that.

Tracey: Okay, it's my turn to say something. For one, some white people, no offense (directed at Pam) some white people, once the black person say something... (interrupted by Vanecia)

Vanecia: No offense to me either Tracey, um... (I want to note here that Vanecia identifies herself as being both African American/Black and Caucasian—"my mom is Black and my dad is White." Based on my observations and discussions with the girls, I would say that the other girls identify her as African American/Black. However, my assertion here is tricky. As I will discuss later in this chapter, racial talk had been predominantly "underground" until these peer group interviews which took place during the last two days of data collection. Thus, my experiences and subsequently my interpretations are incomplete. Nevertheless, I find it important that she can at one moment clearly align herself firmly with Tracey and Teresa while at the same time recognize and make present her difference from them. This doesn't seem to impact their coalition as Black or as Tracey prefers, Colored girls. Tracey and Teresa never questioned her right to accuse others of 'acting black.'

Tracey then white people go off and they say (the same things).

Pam: The black person is saying this to the white person?

Teresa: Just say it. (She is directing this at Tracey encouraging her to say what is on her mind and not worry about what I will think or say)

Later in this chapter, I will discuss in more detail the girls' conversations about "acting black," but for now I want to call attention to the ways in which being yourself was constructed in this conversation. The girls' construction of what it meant to act white remained in direct opposition to acting black. For these girls, acting white was not acting black. In addition, being yourself was tied to fashion, action, and music preference. And, in this particular case, Kyle was not being himself--not acting white--because he liked Nate's music, performed hip-hop movements, and used language that
the girls deemed to be indicative of "being black." Embedded in their theory of what it means to be yourself is a quest for authenticity—finding out who you are, acting like who you are, and doing so without being someone else. Their conceptualization of acting black is, to a certain extent, an essentializing move working to homogenize both Whites and Blacks. However, their passion must be understood in terms of larger socio-political discourses. I will discuss this in more detail later in the chapter.

"You could just pull her out of a crowd": Being Different/Being Unique

In the previous section, "being yourself" meant being who you want to be, being who you should be, and doing this while still being connected to others. There is a subtle difference between this form of performing identity and being unique and different. As will be illustrated, Heather's desire to be seen as unique from others and Kathleen's construction by others as being different because of her music tastes, marks a quest for both being yourself, but more specifically, being unique from others. At several moments, the Room 2 girls made distinctions among girls, their "self," and others in order to communicate a need to be seen differently. In doing so, there definitions of "who I am" referred to their ability to be different, their pride in this difference, and their actions to position others as different. This difference was not based on a quest for authenticity or a 'true self' rather it was based on making particular choices that made you or someone else "stand out in a crowd."
In her talk about singing and dancing to Macy Gray’s *I Try* and the distinctions she made between Macy Gray and Britney Spears, Heather (she originally wanted to be referred to as Macy in the study) proclaimed the importance of being different and unique.

Pam: You said she is different than other singers, why?
Heather: Well, her voice is not squeaky and it’s not, I mean there’s really no word to fit her voice. But she’s just different, like, I don’t really know her as a person. But as a singer and the voice she’s, her voice is different. Like, if you listen to Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera their voices are the same. (um hm) And hers you could just pull her out right out of a crowd...I mean like if I listen to the whole Britney Spears CD I like it and enjoy it, but then when I turn on the Christina Aguilera’s CD it’s like I’ve already heard this, I don’t want to listen to it again, I turn it off. Because they’re so the same. So I have to I can’t listen to them straight in a row.

When I asked her how her talk about Macy Gray being different was connected to her life, she explained:

my voice is different from a lot of people. And I really don’t fit into my family from my looks. I don’t look like my dad or my sisters, except everybody says I do. But my mom doesn’t think I do. And I don’t act like my mom or nobody. I’m just like an orphan.

In addition to Macy Gray's different voice; Heather explains that she also liked singers who blended music genres. For example, she said "I like Hoku, she's like Mandy Moore, but she is kind of like a hip-hop and rock mix. She doesn't do just hip-hop. She's from Hawaii. She does "Another Dumb Blonde" from the movie Snow Day, the soundtrack."

In an attempt to explain why difference was important to her she said, "I just don't like the same all the time."

In my interactions with Heather, her ‘difference’ from other girls her age was at times very visible. She often spent time with girls in other classrooms—a fact that was
noticed and frowned upon by the other Room 2 girls. She tended to interact with different age groups more comfortably than other girls. For example, she would spend time at recess playing games with her younger sister and her sister's friends. In addition, she told many stories about her relationship with her mom's friends, Susan, who introduced her to Macy Gray's music. The other girls recognized that her music tastes were different. As Kim explained, "Heather really doesn't like N'Sync. She says that they sound the same as BackStreet Boys." In addition, Heather frequently wore "New Kids on the Block" and Ricky Martin T-shirts—both considered outdated and not as socially important as other more popular bands and singers. I also discerned that what she wore and how she dressed didn't matter as much to her. And, this difference could be attributed to financial access to more trendy clothes. When she constructed symbols for images and feelings during her interviews, Heather, unlike the other girls, did not make reference to fashion in her drawings. Images that conveyed emotions seemed to be more important to her. While she wanted to be noticed for her difference from others, I would not characterize this desire for recognition as a means to get attention in any overt way. Instead there was a quiet maturity to her moments of distinctions from the others—she seemed to be proud that she was different. Heather also seemed to be the only girl who was in a relationship with a boy. Other girls talked about her "going out" with Nate often, and, at the same time, separated this relationship from the other crushes that were happening in the school. Although, unless you were told so, Heather and Nate's relationship was not publicly displayed. Nevertheless, according to Heather and other girls, it continued throughout most of the school year.
Another way that the girls communicated a sense of self < -- > other was through their talk about music tastes and other related activities and performances. Other girls' expressions of wanting to be seen as different and/or unique were more subtle. For example, Tracey often made public her love for dance and her ability as a dancer. The fact that she practiced ballet and "liked to teach others to dance" afforded her a unique place among her peers.

In their descriptions of girls who didn't like their music or people that they wouldn't share their music with, the girls created a sense of what it means to be a girl and what it means to be "you." All of the girls talked about Kathleen's different music tastes. Her taste for what Tracey calls "dance music" or "opera and symphony music" occasionally served to separate her from the rest of the group. At the time of my fieldwork, Kathleen was asked to join a countywide chorus deemed by many to be a prestigious honor.

Maria: Kathleen wouldn't listen to it (TLC or Destiny's Child) at all. Because she does not like rap. No, no, no, she hates it.
Pam Why do you think she hates it?
Maria Well, her mom, is a singer...and, I think that maybe she's not used to it. Like I don't really like rock and roll because I'm not used to hearing it. And, I think she thinks it's kind of too wild maybe. Or she might like TLC, but maybe her impression of those people, like the people who sing, that Sisqo guy or someone. I don't know maybe she thinks its too fast to keep up with.
Tracey Girls that are like, like they think they’re, all that, and they like to listen to dance music and not like rap music or anything, like Kathleen she doesn’t like rap music… she doesn’t like it all talk… she told me this once. She said something about, “look they just talk.” She said “they just talk.” I said “Kathleen, some rap music just don’t talk. They sing like Destiny’s Child. Some part is they talk, sometimes they don’t.” So that’s why she don’t like it. Because some of that music is just talk.

Based, in part, on her music tastes, Kathleen stood out among her peers and was subsequently positioned as different.

“You switch on and off”: Identity shifting

In her discussion of what she meant by “Girl Power,” Tracey articulated not only the hegemony of gendered ideologies, but also simultaneously the uncertainty of how to perform these prescribed identities. In doing so, she communicates a sense of identity that is unfixed and shifting based on the moment. As she explains in her interview what she means by Girl Power, she stumbled at times to capture how she conceptualized and practiced playing a girl and playing a boy when necessary.

...(W)hat I mean by girl power, I think, it’s not only boy power because boys like, oh man, girls, and we just felt like some girls are, like Mark, he said ‘well, I know a boy that can beat you in racing.’ And I said ‘Mark, you know what, not all boys can beat girls. Girls can beat boys too’… so there’s a lot of boys that are weak and a lot of girls are strong. (Girl Power also means) like because like don’t be afraid. Like my mom, my grandma, they used to play with like boys all the time. Grandma, she used to teach her boys how to play football and stuff, and I think that girl power is just is showing your feelings and how you feel and not just like being afraid and being a little girl. I mean, sometimes, like being kind of a boy, but not a boy boy… It’s like a tomboy. You play football. You wear dresses, you wear pants, you wear shorts. You wear things that boys wear sometimes, like baggy pants or some things that girls wear sometimes. Like you switch on and off being a girl instead of just being totally. Sometimes in your life you have to be a boy.

Being a girl is both not being a boy (the girls often vehemently constructed these two gendered positions in direct opposition), and requires acting like a boy on certain
occasions. I would be remiss not to mention that Tracey's gender talk does keep in place, to a certain extent, dominant ideologies of what is meant by masculinity and femininity. The actors, however, change. Being “me,” for Tracey is sometimes being other. I discuss in more detail later other ways in which the girls “switch on and off” their different identities—although I would argue that this switching is more like making more salient at that moment one me < -- > you relationship constructed through their negotiation of a variety of discourse.

The girls communicated a sense of identity as both embedded in their everyday lives as well as visibly created through forging unions with each other. In their talk about being me, the girls communicate the ambiguity, instability, and sometimes rigidities of identity. In addition, the girls’ talk and, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter, the girls’ music performances, demonstrate the interdependence of self < -- > other; girl < -- > boy, Black < -- > White, and, more generally, sameness < -- > difference. The girls theories about “who I am” are grounded both unconsciously and deliberately in their understanding of self < -- > other as inextricably connected and unsteady across time and space. As will be illustrated in the upcoming sections, there are moments of coherency when skin color and social allegiance are fixed in relationship to each other, and there are times when “being a girl” is enough to form a union and to relate to each other. And, there are instances when these seemingly seamless connections are re-woven and patched together in unexpected ways.

The discussion that follows implies a separation of identities into age, race and gender categories. While the section titles may communicate this itemization, it was my
intention to communicate what was salient and highlighted in the data based on the exigency of the moment. I attempt in these discussions to illustrate the ways in which gendered < — > racial < — > age-related identities are intermingled and always present during these performances. In doing so, I focus on three exemplars of these performances: "acting your age, “acting your color,” and gendered allegiances.

"Acting Your Age"

"Pam, in the 4th grade that’s the way the world is.” (Emily)

For the Central Alternative girls, “who I am” is very much connected to how they conceptualized their age in relationship to how they saw themselves and how others perceived them. Who they were now was connected to who they were and how they thought about “self” in the future. There were implicit age-appropriate rules that they all collectively understood and sometimes abided by in their day to day lives—particularly when they engaged with popular music. How they positioned themselves in relationship to these expectations communicated a great deal about how they defined “self.” In addition, their discussions about and performances of age-related identity revealed their knowledge about how their teachers and parents defined what meant to be a good girl.

When they performed music, the girls expressed their embodied beliefs about what it meant to be in the fourth grade. In addition, they also communicated underlying assumptions about the importance of time/age in defining their identity. Among most of the Room 2 girls, it was important to act your age, and if you didn’t, this revealed a great deal about you. Of course, how they came to the conclusions about what it meant to act your age was greatly influenced by their parents and teachers. In this section, I want to
demonstrate the importance of perceived notions of chronological age in terms of influencing how self is constructed and enacted.

Thou shall get your party on
Ladies leave your man at home
The club is full of ballers and there pockets full grown
And all you fellas leave your girl with her friends
Cuz its 11:30 and the club is jumpin’ jumpin’
(chorus to Destiny’s Child’s Jumpin’ Jumpin’)

In my discussion with Tracey about why she chose to talk about Destiny’s Child’s *Jumpin’ Jumpin’* during her interview, she explained:

Well, the song is, is like it makes you seem excited and it makes you think of like when you are older, and you are goin’ to a club or something like that...what I mean by clubs is where you hang out with your friends a lot or like if you are married then you would go over there sometimes for an anniversary or something. Cause that’s what my mom and dad do...you party, dance, have a few drinks, I think.

She continued throughout the interview to talk about how she and her friends “are always looking into our future.” In particular, “what about if we grow up and be singers. What about if we grow up to be dancers.” In doing so, this practice of performing “being older” showed up in their engagements with popular music. Tracey, Teresa, Vanecia, Emily, April and Maria formed “dance clubs” in order to play out “being older.” And, being older, according to Tracey, looks like “me with a short dress on and I got some gloves on and I’m just dancing. I feel like a dancer, like trying to do a dance routine, you know. I’m a professional dancer.” Shaquilla also commented that when she thought about herself listening to 702’s *Where My Girls At*, she saw herself in the future “as a piano teacher,” she added that she imagined this despite the fact that she didn’t play the piano.
Tracey provided a sophisticated definition about what it means to be a “girl my age.” During her interview, I asked her if she thought Destiny’s Child’s music and N’Sync’s music were about girls her age.

Pam: So do you think this music and N Sync music is about girls your age, stuff you do?

Tracey: Probably. But it’s like we’re pre teens and they’re teenagers. But it’s like we make, we turn that into just not teenager music, but pre teen music too.

Pam: How do you turn it into pre teen music?

Tracey: By listening to it and making, and if a teenager say “hey don’t be touching that, don’t be listening to that,” We’re like “it’s for us too.” And like Britney Spears and Chris Aguilera they’re like, they’re not just teen.

Pam: They’re both pre teen and teen?

Tracey: Yeah, because we always say if we’re, like we’re nine or three fourths of nine or something but not nine and a half, and we’re half pre teen, but if we’re ten we’re a full pre teen.

Pam: Where did you learn this? Who taught you?

Tracey: Well, you know what, we made that up because like there’s are teenagers and adults. There’s kids, teenage, adults. Well we decided maybe if or like we could make a little suggestion, like we’re not just kids no more once we hit ten. We’re pre teens, that means we’re half-teenager. And not (a kid). So we decided to do it.

Pam: Why is it important for you not to be considered a kid, but a pre teen? How is this connected to your life?

Tracey: Like, I’m getting older, I’m not just like seven or eight or nine no more. I’m getting, like in the double-digit numbers. I’m not like one single number, I’m in the double digits. And I’m happy.

Pam: You’re happy, are you happy to be getting older?

Tracey: Mm hm.

Later in the interview, Tracey told me that she thought that “teens are more immature and the pre-teens are mature.” She represented her feelings about these different age categories by using a red scribble to communicate that “teenagers, they are violent.” And, that she was scared about being a teenager, but she was excited about being twenty.

In fact, Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa, and Emily “used to play a game when we were
younger, if you’re seven you’re seventeen, if you was eight, you was eighteen, and if you’re nine, you might be nineteen now. And, if we were still playing the game, we’ll be twenty.” She said that they were all excited about being twenty.

Occupying the in-between space of being a “pre-teen,” was also communicated in their other media tastes and fashion choices. For example, I was struck by instances when I would see the girls dancing and singing to Destiny’s Child while wearing Winnie-The-Pooh overalls—a cartoon and storybook character that my two-year old son watches almost every night. Tigger Rules, Pooh Bear Rules, and Rabbit Rules (cartoon characters associated with Winnie-The-Pooh) were frequently written on the announcement board, Shaquilla had a Pooh notebook, Erin, Nathasia, and Maria frequently wore her Pooh T-shirt, and once April lifted her pant cuff to show me her Pooh socks. Frequently, Vanecia and Tracey wore Tweety Bird shirts and Symphony wore Tweety Bird shorts. 

During a Friday free time, while the girls were sharing the computers, I commented on Emily’s Winnie the Pooh shirt. Emily explained that “Winnie the Pooh is popular with us (girls)” I ask them if the boys like Winnie and they said “probably, but they are afraid to admit it...people will make fun of them.” I ask why they think the boys will be made fun of and not the girls and Emily said “Pam, in 4th grade that’s the way the world is.” They say that the boys don’t like any kids stuff and that no one (boy or girl their age) likes Barney anymore. I ask them how they know this and they say “because we see people wearing it and see people get laughed at.”

On several occasions, the girls critiqued other girls for not “acting their age” based on what music they listened to and how they interacted with boys or thought about
heterosexual relationships. They actively made connections between music preferences as well as dating attitudes and behaviors and what this said about who you are. Girls who listened to “children’s music” and girls who dated boys or talked about kissing and other sexual activity were deemed to be “not acting their age.” For example, in response to my question about whether or not other girls liked Destiny’s Child, Emily, Maria, and April communicated the connection between music preferences, age, and identity. April described Julie, a girl in another classroom, as someone who doesn’t follow the “rules” about how to act her age. First, she said that Julie wore “really short skirts,” “cusses,” and tried to be older than she is, then she retracted this judgment and said, “you know, she listens to Barney and she knows all the words. She goes “Barney is a dinosaur…” Singing Barney songs represents the epitome of not acting your age and communicating a self that doesn’t fit with expectations.

When asked if they thought Destiny’s Child’s *Say My Name* would be helpful to other girls, Emily, April, and Maria discussed why they thought “girls who are boy crazy” might benefit.

Pam: Do you think it’s helpful to other girls?
Emily: Probably
Pam: How could it be helpful?
April: People that are boy crazy. Like Kathleen.
Emily: Maybe they'll know to watch out and be careful because some people are total idiots. Like him (the man in the song) for instance.
Pam: So it might be helpful to boy crazy girls?
April: Or other girls who have to watch out because it doesn't sound like, in the song, it doesn't sound like they knew that he was with someone else but they kind of figured it out and maybe other people can watch out.
Emily: Why did you think of that, April?
April: Because they're because Tiffany has dated everyone in the class, or at least they think they are and my mom thinks it's nuts because they're not even 12... Tiffany is going to run into a lot of trouble if she's like this when she gets older because Tiffany is in fourth grade and everyone else is in fifth grade.

Tiffany, a fourth grade girl in another classroom, is featured in the Room 2 girl’s narratives often. Her interactions with boys and her cross-racial friendships seemed to represent someone who was “not being herself” and not acting her age.

In their discussion about singing and dancing to TLC, Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa also revealed what it meant to be “their age” and “older” particularly in relationship to sexuality.

Tracey: We are just like them (TLC). The boys like us, we like them. Then, all of a sudden we go off and get our groove on when we get older...
Vanecia: Get our groove on? I’m not getting my groove on till I’m old enough to get my groove on.
Tracey: I said, when we get older we get our groove on, you know.
Vanecia: My mom would slap me upside the head if I ever got my groove on.
Tracey: (in agreement) For real though.

When she expressed that N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye* lyrics were not connected to her life, Kim also expressed the perceived inappropriateness of certain behaviors for girls her age.

Pam: What do you think the video means? What do you think they are trying to say?
Kim: I think they’re trying to say bye, bye, bye to... it’s just like they are saying they are leaving or something, I don’t know.
Pam: Leaving who?
Kim: Leaving their girlfriends or something. I don’t know. I’m too young to be understanding this stuff.

The girls also provided interesting commentary on the relationship among age, gender, and music preferences. April made it clear that boys her age would not be seen
wearing Winnie-The-Pooh because they were afraid of “being made fun of.” In
relationship to performing popular music and music preferences, there were certainly
rules of conduct that significantly impacted one’s gendered identity. It became clear that
boys their age and older did not listen to or dance to N’Sync whereas boys who were
younger than them often engaged with this music. Emily explained that she has two
brothers, both younger than she is, and that they both liked N’Sync. She said “my
brother keeps wanting me to buy him the CD of it.” I also observed in the lunchroom
when Pete or Isabella played N’Sync, that the fourth and fifth grade boys yelled “oh, no”
and covered their ears whereas the younger boys did not protest and some even joined in
with the girls’ singing. In addition, April explained that she first heard TLC when her
brother was playing it in his room, but now that “he is fifteen, he doesn’t listen to TLC
anymore.” Maria explained that she wouldn’t want to share TLC with her stepbrothers
because “they like make fun of it...because they’re like one of them’s almost 13.” Thus,
it was repeatedly made clear, through their discussions and my observations of boys’
reactions to the “girls music,” that gendered < -- > age related identity was communicated
through their engagement/disengagement with certain genres of popular music.

“Why Don’t You Act Your Color”

During my first peer group interview with April, Emily, and Maria, the girls
discussed why they felt that African-American girls might connect to Destiny’s Child’s
music more than they (read: non-Black girls) did. This discussion slowly evolved into
several stories about their experiences with being told to “act their own color.” There is a
lot to unpack in the girls’ talk about racial differences. In Chapter 5, I discuss how their
analyses of what it means to act your color demonstrate 1) their sociocultural knowledge about race, racism, and difference; 2) the inherent racism embedded in these discussions, and 3) the importance of both their knowledge and enactments of racism for developing pedagogy. In this chapter, I interpret their narratives in terms of how these stories are related to identity and popular music experiences. First, I want to frame this discussion methodologically.

The ethnographic methods used in this study enabled a closer investigation into girls' popular music experiences particularly in terms of understanding more fully how they enacted their identities. By spending more time with them and expressing my interest in their lives, we were able to create some space for discussing difficult and seemingly taboo topics. For example, their feelings and beliefs about "acting your own color" were not revealed to me until the end of my fieldwork. Teresa, Tracey, and Vanecia frequently made fun of Kyle and asked me to "watch" him on several occasions, but they did not verbalize this as "acting black." In addition, April, Emily, and Maria did not discuss with me their feelings about being told not "to act black." Furthermore, they only discussed "acting your own color" during peer group interviews. While my status as an adult who was interested in their stuff and who didn't discipline them afforded me access to their private conversations, my presence as a white female, my own social identity, may have affected what they discussed. During the peer group interviews, Teresa, Vanecia, and Tracey repeatedly said "no offense to you, Pam" when they expressed their frustrations with whites acting black. In addition, Teresa expressed her initial apprehension when she proclaimed that she forgot the tape was running when she
expressed her frustrations about Kyle acting black. These methodological moments are
important in terms of understanding the ways in which race and racism is made present in
these girls day to day school lives. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 5.

However, it is important to note that girls initially struggled with talking about race-
related issues—Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa with "being real" in front of a White
woman, and April, Maria, and Emily with sounding racist and not being politically
correct.

Emily, April, and Maria on “Acting Black”

Emily: They (African-American/Black girls) like listen to this kind of music
(R&B, hip-hop) and we listen to it sometimes. Once I was singing a song
and I was singing The Thong Song and Vanecia and Teresa were like,
"Emily, you're not black, why do you act like a black person."

Pam: Do you think about this a lot during school when you are singing these
songs, do you think about what Shaquilla and Vanecia might be thinking?

Maria: Kind of (all the girls are talking at once). I listen to Britney Spears songs
so they won't like see me...

April: Like a lot of black people like white things and white people never say
anything bad about black people...

Emily: Yeah. We all like Britney Spears...

Maria: Like at my birthday party... Remember at my birthday party, Chelsea just
started dancing and Shaquilla and Vanecia were playing together and they
just went, “Oh no, you're white Chelsea. Listen to something else.”

Pam: Does this affect your friendships?

Maria: Kind of.

Maria: Me, Emily, and April don't even listen to some of the music around them.
when we want to because we are their friends

Emily: We know what they are going to say..

Maria: Yeah.

Pam: What kind of music? Like Destiny’s Child?

Maria: Like even Destiny’s Child they go, like Shaquilla goes “Oh, no, don’t do
that.”

Emily: Me and April were singing it once and she’s like “No Emily, no April.”

Maria: And Tiffany, remember when they said that about Tiffany. They're
not Tiffany's friend even though last year Shaquilla and them were
Tiffany’s friend. They're not her friend this year because they think she
acts like she's black. But she just... everyone in her class is more, not
really her color except for...
April: the geeks...
Maria: No offense Emily, I know they're your friends...
Emily: Who?
Maria: I think she just has to hang out with them because she doesn't want to really play with them and so everyone goes, Tiffany "we're not your friend because you act like you're black."
Pam: Why do you think the girls say that? Do you think it bothers them?
April: Probably it does but I don't know why.
Maria: I think they say it because she just hangs out more with that color in her class and she always dances with them because she doesn't want to be sitting there going like... while everyone else is like up dancing and stuff so she has to go with the group. And every time she does something, like they are doing the talent show, but no one else... like all the other girls in our class that are not that color, they were real shy.
Emily: And they just like read on recess and stuff.
Maria: Yeah. They are like Miss Education.

During lunch one day, Maria made a similar comment albeit with a less charitable tone about Tiffany’s relationship with the African American/Black girls in her classroom.

While most of the students were singing and dancing in their seats to Destiny’s Child’s “Bills, Bills, Bills,” Maria was watching Tiffany’s classroom. She turned to me and said, in a rather judgmental tone, “Tiffany never used to do stuff like that at the beginning of the year.” I asked her what she meant by “stuff.” She explained that Tiffany didn’t sing or dance to the music during lunch and now she did. Maria said that she thought that she didn’t because Tiffany’s mom was deaf and maybe she didn’t listen to this music and “now, she is dancing and stuff. I think the girls in her room didn’t know her at first.”

This comment took place early on in my field research, and, I would argue that Maria was not willing at this time to reveal explicitly how racial identity was connected to Tiffany’s behavior and relationships.
April, Emily, and Maria were visibly upset about their friends’ accusations of them “acting black.” Maria, who described herself as being Hawaiian, explained that she was mad at Shaquilla for saying “those things” particularly because she didn’t see herself as fitting in as a White girl. When Maria drew a symbol to represent these experiences, she drew a face with a tongue sticking out of the mouth. She started to write "it doesn’t make a difference" but didn’t finish. Next to the drawing of the face, Maria depicted a stick figure is saying the words "you’re not Black." When I asked her what she meant by “no difference.” She explained:

> There’s no difference because Shaquilla always goes “you’re not black.” And, I go “there is no difference between us except there may be some different ways about how we act, but there’s no difference. We’re both fully the same color.” I mean I’m not even white and I don’t complain about it.”

The concept of “no difference” particularly when it is tied to, as Emily once said, “we are really the same, except we have different actions for things” was featured in some of the girls discussions about racial differences. Once again, it is important to position their comments within larger sociocultural discourse, and I cover this in more detail later. For now, it is important to note that the girls, I would argue, are borrowing from larger multicultural discourses about understanding difference. In addition, I do think that, their struggles with trying to understand why they are being treated this way is also framed by their quest for difference <--> sameness—a goal to be both unique and like others in a world that very typically pits these processes in direct opposition to each other. And, for Maria, I would argue, part of her frustration is grounded in her attempt to understand how she fits in with “acting black” because she doesn’t fit comfortably in either socially and structurally imposed category.
Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa on “Acting Black”

After this first peer group interview, I sought advice concerning whether or not I should introduce the practice of “acting black” during the next peer group interview with Teresa, Vanecia, and Tracey. I decided that I would not discuss it unless the girl’s raised the issue. And, to be clear, I would not mention that the other girls had discussed this. The girls did approach the topic and provided a lengthy discussion about what “acting your own color” meant to them.

While they were discussing how they came to know the dance move “poppin’”—a hip movement back and forth—Teresa, Tracey, and Vanecia started making fun of the boys in their class who try to do this. In doing so, they started to tell stories about one White boy, Kyle, who tried to “act black.” This discussion lead to their frustrations with other girls who sang and danced, in particular ways that mirrored Black style, to their favorite music. First, they explained that they liked to form dance groups during recess to act out their favorite singers, particularly TLC.

Pam: So you girls have talked about this song before obviously. And who you are in TLC. When have you done this (acted out TLC)?
Tracey: When we're like in clubs and stuff.
Teresa: Yes.. when we had the girls' club...
Tracey: Like Destiny's Child and stuff like 702...
Pam: Do you three do this with anybody else?
Teresa: Yep. Shaquilla, Emily, April...
Tracey: Yo, those are my sisters... Shaquilla, Emily, April, Maria...(inaudible)
Pam: Okay, it sounds like you want to talk about what you just said about someone trying to act black?
Tracey: Okay. I want to be preaching up in there?
Pam: Vanecia are you paying attention? Come on back?
Tracey: Vanecia, come on. I'm about to preach.
Teresa: Oh gosh. (long pause)
Pam: Okay, the other girls that you do this with, Shaquilla, Emily, April, Maria... you do the same thing. They say who they are (which singer they are)...

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Vanecia: They say who they are. When we do this and stuff, we do clubs and all of that other junk and then Emily, she goes, “okay like you know” and she be acting all black and all hard like (Vanecia is snapping her fingers and moving her head back and forth) this no offense, Tracey (I think she said this because she knows they are Tracey’s friends), but she acting all black and hard and other things like that. And I be like “Emily, no,” and she be like, “oh no,” and sometimes I be playing with her and I be acting like I'm a different color...

Tracey: And then she go out and get a attitude (unclear).

Vanecia: I'm like, “oh yeah,” and say, “totally” and stuff like that cause I know how to act like that.

Tracey: I can't see why they do that.

Vanecia: “Like so totally... like so dude...”

Teresa: “Totally dude”...

Pam: Who does that? Who does the “like totally”.

Vanecia: I'm saying white girls. God. (Vanecia is frustrated with my questioning)

Pam: Okay, you were saying that Emily tries to act black. What does Emily say when you tell her?

Vanecia: I say, “Emily, don’t be acting our color, act your color.” And she's like, “okay then whatever.” And then on the next day she be acting our color and I tell her again and she gets real smart with me and we get into fights...I end up punching her and she end up running off crying and they end up coming back punching me back and I end up...

Tracey: You guys are not punching.

Vanecia: Yes I do, I punch her in the back. Okay. (they argue more about this.)

Pam: What bothers you about Emily acting your color?

Teresa: Cause it's like...

Tracey: It's annoying...

Vanecia: Well, what I'm trying to say is I can't see why white people act white, black people act black, it would be fine.

Teresa: I know. When white people try to act like black people, it seems like they're not happy with their own color. Or when they try to be like black...

Vanecia: So people will let them fit in.

Pam: So you do listen to this song with other girls. What happens when you are listening to it and Emily is trying to act black, do you still keep on listening to it? Do you stop?

Vanecia: I listen to it and I tell her to stop.

Tracey: Because you're black you need to learn to act your own color.

Teresa: I know, because it gets on my nerves when she tries to act like black people.

Vanecia: You forgot to say, "Yo, Yo open up your mind"

Teresa: Because it's like, why can't they just be happy with their color? Don't try to be like other people. If you don't fit into something, just let somebody know and try to...

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Pam: If Emily or other white girls who are acting black, just decided they weren't going to act black anymore, it would be okay? They could still dance with you doing TLC and all of that stuff?
All: Yep.

Through their arguments concerning who can listen to and dance to Destiny's Child, these girls articulated social beliefs concerning social, political, and economic histories of race relations and their racial < -- > gendered identities. The girls' frustrations with each other and their struggles to understand what it means to "act your color" are an important part of their musical experiences. What it means to "act black," for instance, illustrates the complexities of girls' uses of media and highlights the necessity of studying how popular culture and media experiences impact everyday life. More specifically, their comments and interactions provide insight into how frequently genre and identity are fused together. In addition, their discussions illustrate the sometimes stability < -- > instability of fixed identity categories including the contextual and layered conditions of their identities. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which race and gender as well as friendship histories impact and are impacted by girls' uses of popular music. First, I want to position this discussion and the girls' frustrations within a larger social context.

The Social and Economic Politics of "Acting Black"

In case you haven't noticed the latest cultural trend, it's now hip to be Black, as long as you aren't actually Black. African-American cadence and costuming are suddenly being celebrated at least when exhibited by white people. (Williams, 2000, p. A6)

Williams' comment specifically addresses the success of "Black impressionist" Eminem, a white rap singer. Others who are troubled by the implications of Whites coopting Black culture, and the inherent racism embedded in the music industry have
echoed the same concern. Eminem and his predecessor, Marky Mark, have been criticized for minimizing the political importance of the rap and hip-hop musical art forms. Williams argues, “it is sad to see rap music eviscerated of its passion and pathos and appropriated by the mainstream...even though I have never enjoyed rap as an art form, I could always at least appreciate it as an authentic outlet of expression for poor, inner city Black youths” (p. A6). While the politics of rap and hip-hop have been disputed (see Dent, 1992), its insurgence as a means to articulate racial injustices continues to permeate its lyrics and rhythms. White musicians and youth appropriation of hip-hop fashion, dancing, graffiti art, rapping, deejaying, lyrics, talk, walk, and “the attitude” (Hicks Harper, 2000), needs to be understood as embedded with political, economic, and cultural consequences.

Both Powell (2000) and Williams (2000) conceptualize White appropriation as indicative of a corporate controlled culture. Williams comments that Madison Avenue has gotten into the act, with ads like William Shatner's on behalf of Priceline.com. TO the beat of Young MC's hit tune “Bust a Move,” Shatner raps his way through an ebonics-laced pitch for airline ticket. “I wanted to chill, but making all of my travel arrangements were freaking me out,” the commercial starts. Bill then informs us that at Priceline, we’ll find “dope airfare, a hip hotel, and a fly rental car.” After making the macho ghetto challenge, “You want some of this?” he summarizes with, “You know what to do, dog! Bust a move.”

Williams’s analysis of Captain Kirk’s ad is reminiscent of my experiences of African American/Black undergraduate students’ complaints about the use of rap music in cartoons and “even in Sugar Smack ads.”

According to Thomas Burrell, chairman and CEO of the Burrell Communications Group, “the best way to get White kids into a product is to get Black kids to buy it” (quoted in Chapelle, 1998, p. 42). According to Chappelle (1998),
Some observers see Madison Avenue's interest in African-American culture and Black dollars as progress. But there are others who wonder whether it is a way to suck Black America dry of its most marketable product: Black creativity. (p. 44)

Speigler (1996) and Chapelle (1998) both note that fashion designers such as Tommy Hilfiger and Ralph Lauren have relied both on the emergence of the Black consumer and on White youth's desire to "be black" in their marketing of new "baggy-clothes" fashions. Hilfiger who is quoted in FORBES magazines as saying "(m)any of these people (African-American/Black) would rather have a Rolex than a home" (quoted in Chappelle, 1998, p. 43), has profited considerably from the inherent racism embedded in consumer marketplace.

Friendship Histories

The concepts of "acting black" or more broadly, "acting your color" are complex when enacted in everyday life. In this case, friendship histories and gendered relationships significantly impacted how girls enacted and thought about racial identities. For example, Kyle, the middle-class Caucasian boy who doesn't "act his color," represented for these girls (Teresa, Vanecia, Tracey, and Maria) the most visible "acting black" case. They spoke frequently about Kyle's attempts to act like his Black friend, Nate. According to Teresa, "Kyle tries to be a black boy...listening to our music and saying "hey, what's up my homie"...this is annoying and I tell him to stop." While it "annoyed" Teresa, she also explained that she doesn't think it bothered Nate because he and Kyle have been friends for a long time. Maria and Emily also made the same assessment. Tracey's charge that "yo, those are my sisters" seemed to indicate that while she didn't always like them "acting black," Emily, April and Maria were her friends. Emily's comment that it was hard to talk about "acting your own color" because "one of her best friends is African-American may also indicate the ways in which friendship histories might complicate "acting black." Friendship histories in relationship to racial
identities were important in terms of understanding how both girls and boys negotiated their differences. These interactions illustrated that identities are not frozen in time, but enacted in relationships and contexts that change how we think about what it means to "be white" and to "be black."

Girls' accusations about "acting your color" only reveal part of their musical story. While racial alliances were forged at these moments, on other occasions, girls publicly relied on each other in their journey to "get the boys out of their face." Their gendered allegiance in the quest was evident in their collaborative attempts to make sure "their music" (not the boy's music) was played during lunch and free time in the classroom. In addition, they often engaged in public scrutiny of boys who made fun of their music especially when these same boys sang and danced to TLC and N'Sync at other times. Their connections to each other through their shared gendered experiences with boys reveals the, by necessity, unfixed nature of identity.

In addition, in their daily experiences with popular music, this group of pre-teen girls actively made connections between the music's lyrics and rhythm as well as their knowledge about the music group and genre to their own lives. For example, Tracey describes the ways in which popular music helps her to "make up" with other girls after a playground fight. She explains,

"like we were mad because we were outside and everything went wrong. Then during lunch, someone will go up and ask Isabella and Pete (teachers) to turn on Destiny's Child. So they play it and all the girls (who have been fighting) they like get back together once they get back in the class...because right when they say *Say My Name*...you can picture your group together...when you get together, it makes you end up happy and makes you want to dance and stuff like that."

In this context, after a fight and in the lunchroom—a space that they associate with listening to "their music," the meaning of Destiny's Child music and the relationship once established between genre and identity changed. For these girls, their relationships and
the context of their interactions and engagement with music mattered in terms of how they expressed who they were and how they perceived others. While their racial and gendered identities were always present, these girls shifted their identification with others, at times, based on the exigency of the moment.

**Gendered Allegiances**

I think that they (other girls) like it (Destiny’s Child’s *Jumpin’ Jumpin’*) because of the rhythm and the group because its just girls singing. And, all of the boys, usually all we hear is boys’ music and you never get to hear like girls music sometimes. So when the music comes on, all we get to do is like stand by ourselves. And, the boys go “aw man” they get to sing a lot of girl things and we don’t. (Tracey)

Through the mutual love for particular singers, the girls sang and danced to their music, and in doing so, created moments of both unplanned and strategic gendered allegiances. During observation, I witnessed everyday several moments of girls singing and dancing together while they went down the hallway, ate in the lunchroom, and studied in the classroom. For example, I was usually surprised when I witnessed the girls performing music during relatively quiet study time in the classroom. On one occasion while they were working on their math fraction games, Tracey, Teresa, and Shaquilla were talking about music and singing some “big butt” song that I had never heard of before. As Teresa was singing the lyrics “Oh my God, I looked at her butt, I like big butts, I can not lie,” Shaquilla was saying “that’s nasty, you don’t have to be doing that. I’ll be givin’ you a whoopin.” The girls continued by singing and moving to another song, they agreed on, TLC’s *Bills, Bills, Bills*. During dance class, when the kids were playing dodge ball and jumping rope, Emily asked Isabella to play *Say My Name*, and Tracey yells for her to play *Jumpin’ Jumpin’*. Isabella chose *Jumpin’ Jumpin’* and Tracey and
Emily started to dance and sing together. These two scenarios represented a fraction of the times when girls performed music together at school. And, they did this despite the fact that music is not allowed on the playground, in the hallways, and in the classroom unless permitted by the teacher.

These gendered allegiances consisted of both relating to each other because they were girls who shared musical and fashion interests and making conscious efforts through shared musical performances and strategies to form coalitions. It is important to note that these allegiances did not include all of the girls and were certainly not consistent across time and space. Some girls only connected through their mutual appreciation of music, and did not see themselves as connected in other ways.

Making Connections

When they discussed how they saw themselves or where they positioned themselves when they listened to popular music, the girls frequently expressed their unity with other girls because of their shared interest for Destiny’s Child, N’Sync, and Britney Spears. Emily said that “I see myself sitting with my friends. Doing the same thing they’re doing. I feel like I am right there (in April’s basement). In their peer group interview, April, Emily, and Maria all seem to share the same feelings about how performing this music is connected to their friendship.

Pam: What images come to mind when you listen to this song?
Emily: It’s totally the action that comes to mind when I listen to it. It’s April jumping around and singing it.
April: I think of Caitlin and Deja dancing to it...
Maria: This is in April’s basement and we’re both dancing. And, then Emily comes over sometimes...well, when Emily comes over and we all start dancing and we talk about this...
Pam: So where are you in all of this? Where do you see yourself?
Maria: I’m dancing. I’m having fun with everyone else and talking about stuff.
April: Its my turn. Alright. Me. I’m in the basement. Then, I call all of us and we start to dance and dress up really pretty and stuff. And, we’re in the basement and we’re listening to my Destiny’s Child. Say My Name is on over and over again.

Other girls saw musical experiences as a way in which to connect with other girls. Shaquilla said that listening to 702’s Where My Girl At reminds her of her friends “we dance a lot of songs at recess and stuff, Vanecia and Tracey, they be singing the songs at recess.” These moments are important to her because “sometimes I think they don’t know the song that I know” this helps her connect with the other girls. Kim also tells a story about when she first met Tracey, who was at the beginning of the school year a new girl at Central Alternative. She explained that “Tracey was a new kid who came walking in, feeling shy. And then, I show her my N’Sync poster…Tracey went crazy…and, then we got to know her.”

When I asked Tracey, in her interview, what came to mind when she listened to “Jumpin’ Jumpin,” she named “her friends” as one of the images. She explained “because I keep thinking about them. I can’t, like when I go home, I can’t keep my mind off them. Like what we’ll be doing tomorrow. Ok, “we are going to do this, we’re going to do that.”

In direct opposition to her peers, Heather stated that she doesn’t like, in fact, “hates” N’Sync because “well, BackStreet Boys have been around longer, and I just like, I mean everything was BackStreet Boys, and N’Sync started after them…and, I just think they copied them too much.” The decision to hate N’Sync goes against the grain of popular choice among the Room 2 girls. Nevertheless, she explained that when they listened to N’Sync together, she transcended this and bonded with the other girls because
"like we have fun, when we’re, when I throw parties and stuff or anybody else, we don’t really pay attention to music. It’s just like background stuff. So it’s OK that N’Sync is playing."

**Working Together**

In her discussion of the differences between Destiny’s Child and TLC, Maria professed her desire for difference and equality. The value of working together as a group was appealing to both Maria and Tracey. During her interview, Tracey frequently expressed the importance of her girl-friendships. She did this through her discussions and through the symbols she made. In doing so, she reiterated the importance of girls sticking together and the ways in which this can be achieved through their uses of popular music.

Pam: Why is Destiny’s Child your favorite group?  
Tracey: Well, they work together, they don’t get into fights like sometimes we do when we have clubs. They don’t break up the club every single second. They don’t like, say “OK, you have to be there right, right now or right then.” They say “OK, if you can’t be here today, they we have to be here just whenever we can.”

Pam: How did you find out about, like how they work together?  
Tracey: It’s just the way that they sing, you can tell that they really like to work together. And sometimes you hear it on like big news or if they interview them like once when they got interviewed.

Pam: And you said this is not like you, you mean your friends or what do you mean . . .

Tracey: Well, it’s like, with my, well we fight a lot. Sometimes. It’s like people don’t get along with each other. But once we make, our group, singing group, dancing group, whatever we do, then we automatic break up or go have a fight or plan won’t go on no more. We’ll have two days in the club and then the next day we’re...but, sometimes we work together and they always work together. So . . .

Pam Yeah, why do you think this song, or you know, why do you think this song helps you to get back together?  
Teresa: Because right when they say “say my name, say my name” you’re
thinking of a group but you just can’t picture their group. You can picture your group together and you and stuff like that. When you get together, it makes you end up happy and makes you want to dance and stuff like that.

She continued later on in the interview to describe the symbols she made to represent Destiny’s Child and the connection to her life.

Tracey: Like they always say a circle never ends.
Pam: Destiny’s Child says that?
Tracey: Yeah. I always get that like from my friends and stuff. And they always say a circle never ends. So that’s a circle that never ends.
Pam: What does it mean, the circle that never ends?
Tracey: Uh, never thought of this before. It means that your friendship last, like last forever and like they always are very good friends. It is forever. And it never ends...

Tracey: (This symbol means) work together and don’t fight. [pause] This is like…this is what I said. Everywhere there’s a guy, there’s two people, like the people that fights a lot with Teresa and me and a girl. There’s two that doesn’t fight a lot…so there’s like two girls and then they come together .(Tracey drew a picture of a triangle to represent the three friends coming together).
Pam: Then you have one of friends fighting.
Tracey: Friends fighting. Ooh, I know that one. That’s a good one. The triangle means, what’s it called, “work together and don’t fight.” But the square to me, it means we’re not working together, we’re fighting.
Pam: So when you guys work together like when you’re a singing group or a dancing group, if you get into fights and stuff. (yeah) What do you do?
Tracey: Right now, we’re doing a, we’re doing a dancing club, a dancing club, school, for like the people who don’t know how to dance and teach them our moves that we learned. Because I been doing are easy ones that I know from kindergarten.
Pam: So when do you do this?
Tracey: Outside on recess.
Pam: Recess. So during recess you’re teaching people like you said, Erin, and stuff like that.
Tracey: Yeah, Erin is one. We might teach Kim, we might teach Heather who she’s not here today, but we’re going to teach her. We’re going to teach a lot of people how to dance. If they don’t know how to dance, don’t go like this, it’s going to be more like this.
Pam: Why do you think, why do you want to teach them?
Tracey: Like some people, we like, behind me that ask me, “aw look at her, she don’t know how to dance or what and be like, Okay, Okay,
she's gone.” She, Erin don’t know how to dance and I think that, she’s just, all she listens to is Backstreet Boys and stuff like that. I want to teach those people how to dance so people won’t be talking about them behind their back. But like I told Dominique, we’ll be judging people, and they go like “aw she just said my name you know, would I be her friend.” I was like “it doesn’t really matter about if you want to be, if she don’t want to be your friend or nothing. Just you still have friends.”

For Tracey and her friends, Destiny’s Child and other popular music was a way for them to connect with their school friends. “The circle that never ends” was one way in which gender allegiances were communicated through friendship loyalty. Her friendship with Teresa and Vanecia was marked by their mutual desire to perform the band members of TLC.

Teresa: Who are you Chili or Left Eye? I'm the prettiest girl...
Vanecia: Are you TBoz?
Teresa: I'm Chilli, 'cause she ain't got the thing under her eye.
Tracey: I'm TBoz. I know half of the song by heart.
Teresa: I know the whole song by heart.
Tracey: I didn't say I don't know the song by heart. I said I know half of the dance by heart.
Vanecia: Left Eye... is the person that I am.

Being the band, TLC, Teresa, Vanecia, and Tracey form gendered racial alliances. According to the threesome, the group and their lyrics are “just like us.” And, they claim that they even look like Left Eye, T-Boz, and Chilli.

Vanecia: They're like us. Look, for one, ... where's the thing?
Tracey: I like T Boz a lot. And T Boz has short hair like me and she has like long hair like Left Eye.

In their recess dance group, they performed TLC, and laid claim to each singer.
More informally, other girls enacted the role of lead singer. When they performed, *Say My Name* during their peer interview, it was clear that April was the lead singer and Emily and Maria performed back up.

**Girls with pigtails and crop shirts**

The most implicit way in which girls communicated gendered allegiances was through fashion. In doing so, they presented an image of self < --- > other that emphasized the ways in which they constructed each other as similar and the ways in which they were constructed as consumers. The most consistent evidence of this embodied unity was through their construction of symbols indicating how they imagined self < --- > other in relationship to the music. As previously mentioned, the girls wore similar Disney-themes shirts, shorts, and pants; they formed alliances around who was allowed to wear Teresa’s glitter makeup; and they frequently talked about the social consequences of wearing short dresses and tight shirts at their age. During their interviews, they, individually and collectively, seemed to agree on what are “tight” (read: cool) clothes and how particular fashions connected to the music industry communicated a sense of self. It is important to note that the predominant images created during the interviews were not performed in “real life.” The images of the girls presented in the interviews were not the ones I encountered during my field observations. During the interviews, the girls represented visions of themselves when they were older and/or representations of what they wanted to look like and/or what girls look like when they are performing music. At the very least, it was apparent that the Britney Spear’s and Destiny’s Child’s look was “tight” and figured into how they imagined themselves.
interacting with popular music. In fact, the images created to represent self < -- > other were similar, if not, the same as those constructed to represent the different singers and groups.

The most predominant image was of a girl with pigtails wearing a short crop shirt cut at the belly button and either long flared pants or a short skirt. For example, in describing how she saw herself, Kim drew a picture of a girl with pigtails wearing a one-piece short dress. Teresa mimicked this image by depicting herself as a girl with brown pigtails with bows. She was wearing long red earrings, a blue shirt and a long red checkered skirt. The word “Chilli” was written in a blue cloud above the image. In her descriptions of herself, Emily, and Maria, April drew herself as a girl with red hair wearing a purple crop shirt, black wide legged pants, and no shoes. Emily was represented with long blond hair, a blue crop shirt and blue shorts. Maria was wearing a black crop shirt and black shorts. All of the girls are shown dancing to the music. In her individual interview, Emily drew herself wearing long, blond pigtails, long eyelashes dancing to Bye, Bye, Bye while on roller blades. In the peer group interview, her images of the three of them dancing to Say My Name mirrored April’s depiction.

During their peer group interviews, the girls communicated the importance of getting the fashion statement right as well as their shared knowledge about popular music fashion. In doing so, they critiqued and negotiated their symbolic representations of self < -- > other.

Tracey: Ooo, you making my hair like that? I'm going to kick your... oops...
Vanecia: I can't make her hair. I don't know how to do Tracey's hair.
Tracey: You are just dogging me. I put your hair all cute.
Teresa: Oo, your hair looks jacked.
Vanecia: I ain't making everybody all perfect.

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Teresa: See I got braids... see my hair...
Vanecia: Those aren't braids. Those are just, her hair is just like this.
Teresa: She's got naps...
Tracey: At least you could have done it in a ponytail. Okay, this is the three of us.

April: Emily is writing pink hair clips in her picture.
Maria: And shoes. That are 2 inches high.
Emily: I have different pants in every movement.
April: I have a mini skirt on.
Maria: This really fits Emily. She has the Daisy Duke shorts on and they're as tight as ever.
Emily: I have lots of jewelry on. I guess I'll just be wearing a dress and April... nice brown pretty hair.
Maria: Emily's retarded purple bows.
Emily: Sweet and sour, half and hour... Veggie Tales. April, you're going to be wearing green.
Maria: April’s wearing green, Emily’s wearing blue, and I'm wearing purple. I am wearing purple in my picture too.
Emily: April, your hair is going to look so beautiful. Some big little bows...
Maria: Big little bows.
April: That didn't make sense you know. (inaudible)
Emily: She got some of her hair dyed.
Maria: Emily has her highlights, some of her hair sticking out.
Emily: April has one those braid things in her hair... she has clips. I have a pink bow.
April: What color clip do you want? I'm wearing green? ...beautiful me...
Maria: Look at April dress, isn't it pretty? You'll have these big high shoes. Emily has one big really pretty green bow. And April has a big purse and she has a shirt that is green.

Reifying Heterosexuality: Bonding to N'Sync

As Durham (1999) states in her study of middle school girls, the girls reified heterosexuality through their interpretations of and performances of popular music. And, this was certainly the case with the Room 2 girls. They did this in a variety of ways. In their talk about and performances of popular music, they made specific reference to
boy—girl relationships only. As noted by April, N’Sync’s *Bye, Bye, Bye* had to have been written by a boy “well, just because N’Sync is a boy and I don’t think a girl would come up with a song about a girl.”

When they talked about how the music related and/or did not relate to their everyday lives, they made frequent references to how the song informed them about “boyfriends.” In addition, there near universal crushes on the members of N’Sync and Backstreet Boys clearly demonstrated their, at least, public displays of heterosexuality. This does not preclude the possibility of anyone of the girls being a lesbian or bisexual; however, their symbolic and verbal proclamations of heterosexuality were more visible.

**Collective Resistance: “Getting the boys off our backs”**

During the individual interviews, in their talk to each other, and in print on their clothes, the Central Alternative girls professed the importance of Girl Power and the importance of their sameness because they were girls. Associated initially with the all-female group, *Spice Girls*, Girl Power has emerged as the slogan for girls everywhere. Commodified in clothing, on stationary, on calendars, and in television shows, girls are encouraged to celebrate their gendered identities and, in the meantime, purchase the necessary products to help with their newfound empowerment. While I don’t have time here to offer a substantial critique of this troubled slogan, it is important to note that it clearly articulates an opposition to boys. Because Girl Power was quite visible in my interactions with the girls (they talked about it in their interviews, they wore Girl Power shirts, and watched Girl Power TV shows such as the PowerPuff Girls), I asked the girls
to tell me what this slogan meant to them. They quickly seized my journal and wrote the
following on one page. This list represents their individual and collective definitions of
Girl Power.

Girls Rule, Girls are Cool
Girls Have Power
Girls Have Power, Boys Don’t
Girls Are Better Than Boys
Girls are Strong
Girls Rule Boys Durel (Drool)
Girl Power Means Girls Rule
Girls Have the Most Power

This Girl Power ideology is reiterated in various forms in the songs that they
share together. The lyrics to the most popular songs, *Say My Name*, *Bills, Bills, Bills*,
*Jumpin’ Jumpin*, *No Scrubs*, and *UnPretty*, all contain multiple references to boys who
have done girls wrong, girls strength against boys and in spite of boys’ behaviors, the
importance of girls being strong, and characteristics of bad boys or no good “scrubs.”
According to Emily, the song *Say My Name* meant “that girls are better than boys.” For
example,

Any other day
I would call you would say
Baby how’s your day
But today it aint the same
Every other word is uh huh yeah ok
Could it be that you are at the crib with another lady
If you took it there
First of all let me say
I am not the one to sit around and be played
So prove yourself to me
If I’m the girl that you claim
Why don’t you say the things that you said to me yesterday
(from Destiny's Child's Say My Name)
Other lyrics include:

A scrub is a guy that thinks he's fly
And is also known as a buster
Always talkin' about what he wants
And just sit on his broke ass
(from TLC's No Scrubs)

Never insecure until I met you
Now I'm bein stupid
I used to be so cute to me
Just a little bit skinny
Why do I look to all these things
To keep you happy
Maybe get rid of you
And, then I'll get back to me (hey)
(from TLC's UnPretty)

You trifling, good for nothing type of brother
Silly me, why haven't I found another
A baller, when times get hard need someone to help me out
instead of a scrub like you who don't know what a man's about
(bridge to Destiny's Child's Bills, Bills, Bills)

I argue that the lyrics, the presence of all girl groups, and the omnipresence of Girl Power themes helped to frame their beliefs that "girls rule and boys drool--incidentally, this is the logo on a pink-trimmed baby's bib sold in baby warehouse stores. In the next section, I discuss how, through musical performances and other related activities, the girls are implicitly connected to each other by their performances of "girlness" which is both what is expected of them and what they expect of others. In addition, I discuss instances when they make a concerted effort to join together in unity against the boys. Finally, I present data that challenges, once again, the tidiness of these allegiances calling attention to the sometimes ephemeral, yet powerful nature of these identity coalitions.
Girls only groups

We do it outside on the playground. We can't find no hang out, but the one hang out is over here in a small corner we really like, when we get over there if it's cold or when we get over there, like, anyone will bring snacks for our group...the teachers don't know about the group...we make up our own songs...and, we only let boys who are nice to us be in the group (Tracey on the girls' dancing club)

In their mutual attempts to unite together, the girls formed a dancing/singing group outside on the playground. While they occasionally let boys in, typically Daniel and Mark, they did so only if the boys would entertain them and if the boys would let them be the leaders. According to Tracey,

Like Mark, he's the boy you have to watch out for. Like all the girls we're controlling him...we have to work hard to keep him away from the girls.

We got him in check

Pam: You got what?

Tracey: Mark, in check. So he was sitting right there and I was going back to the spot saying Mark get up and go. And, he says, "Ok."

Teresa and Shaquilla were particularly adamant about their desire for girl groups to remain girl groups. On one occasion, I walked into the coatroom while the girls where practicing for choir. During this time, they were negotiating what they were going to sing next. From the central classroom, Daniel strolled into their circle and began to direct their rounds. He seemed very proud that he was allowed to do this. Jason came in next and began to sing with them. Tracey and Missy, a girl from another room, stayed in the coatroom with the boys, and the other girls left. Quickly returning, Shaquilla, Dominique, and Teresa came back into the coatroom and said to Daniel and Jason, "this
is a girls’ choir.” Daniel said quite boldly, given the circumstance, “And, I am directing it.” Shaquilla walked up to him and said, “well, then I ain’t singing in it.” The group dispersed.

Boys Making Fun: And Girls Giving It Back

During free time while Mary was playing Jackson Five, an early 1970s African-American family music group, on the CD player, a small group girls, Erin, Shaquilla, Kim, and Emily were at www.nsync.com singing and dancing to N’Sync’s video Bye, Bye, Bye. Daniel and Mark were watching and mimicking the girls’ movements—they looked like they are planning an invasion. The girls didn’t see them at first, and Daniel and Mark told them to turn down the volume on the computer. The girls ignored them and Erin said “get off my shoulders.” A little later, at Kim’s request, Mary played Britney Spears and Erin and Shaquilla sang openly to the music. Mark began to sing and move his hand up and down to the music clearly making fun of the girls. In unison, they told him to “shut up.”

April explained that when the teachers played Bye, Bye, Bye in the lunchroom “mostly the fifth grade boys (made fun of it). we (the girls) still sang and danced and we just tried to ignore them. They think N’Sync is stupid.” Kim also talked about boys making fun of their music, she concluded that she thought “they were just jealous” because N’Sync “is so cute and we like them.” During one lunch period, Pete played Bye, Bye, Bye and the boys in the lunchroom yelled “no!” and covered their ears with their hands. Nate and Kyle were making fun of the song and seemed to know every word to the song. Kim said to me in obvious disgust, “they are always acting like girls to make
fun.” Later, Maria pointed at a group of boys who were singing and moving to *Bills*, *Bills* and said “they say they don’t like it, but look at them.” Erin agreed. I asked Maria and Erin why they think the boys say those things and Maria said “they will be embarrassed if they say they like it.” Daniel overheard what Maria said and responded with “that’s not true, its stupid music.” Teresa pipes in and says “yeah, right, Daniel.”

After the release of TLC’s infamous, *No Scrubs* a song that clearly articulated their disdain for boys/men who are along for the ride, Sporty Thievz, an all male hip-hop group, retorted with their song, *No Pigeons*. A song about women, “who are gold-diggers and pretend to be more than she really is and uses men to live way beyond her means” (Daily Dish).

*Cause I don’t want no pigeons*
them be them girls who gets no doves from me
Playin’ the bar dumb broke wit her best friend’s coat
Tryin’ to holler at me
I don’t want no Pigeons
Them be them girls who gets no dubs from me
the bar dumb broke wit her best friend’s coat
Tryin’ to holler at me
(chorus to Sporty Thievz’ No Pigeons)*

During their peer group interview, Teresa, Vanecia, and Tracey talked about their response to this song.

Vanecia: Us girls called the boys scrubs, three other boys made up a song called pigeons. It's called I Don't Want No Pigeons.
Pam: Is this song connected to your life in anyway, Teresa?
Teresa: Well it kind of it is because... well, no pigeons... well now that they heard that song they go around saying “those pigeons” and now every boy in my neighborhood knows that song and they call all of the girls pigeons.
Pam: What do you do when boys call you pigeon?
Vanecia: I turn around and kick their butt and call them scrubs.
Teresa: I kick em... I slap in the head...
Pam: Do the boys at school do that?
All: Yep.
Teresa: Just about all of the boys. Thomas tried to and he hit me in the butt.

Vanecia: They be hitting you in the butt? (Vanecia expresses this with anger).

The girls found ways to challenge boys who make fun, and they worked together in the lunchroom and classroom to protect “their music.” In terms of music preferences and public performances, the girls communicated their allegiance to each other through mutual criticisms of the boys who made fun of them. Boys were publicly criticized for saying they didn’t like Destiny’s Child while they sang every word to the song in the lunchroom.

Moments of Disruption

Few boys were allowed to participate in the girls activities. Daniel, Mark, Nate, three African-American boys, were permitted to dance and sing with the girls in their dance group. And, on one occasion, Tracey told the story of how she and the boys corroborated together against the teachers.

We listen to music a lot during lunch. But, except for when like if we’ve been bad or something and we won’t listen to it. What’s that called again? We’ll have silent lunch and we’ll be like “aw man this is silent lunch.” And then Daniel and Teresa they’ll go off (on the teachers). One time it was Daniel and Mark they were just doing at lunch Backstreet Boys. They sang making fun of it [she mimics them singing]. I cracked up all the way upstairs. I tried my best not to laugh but I couldn’t so I just did.

Tracey interpreted the boys performances of the Backstreet Boys as acts of "rebellion" against the teachers because of silent lunch. In doing so, she showed her support for the boys by laughing with them. In another instance, Maria described a situation when she provoked a collusion with Nate against his friend Kyle. Frustrated by

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Kyle's continuous episodes of not "being himself," trying to "act black," and making fun of their music, she recruits Nate to prove that Kyle is trying to act like him. She explained to me:

Nate was dancing and Kyle was like dancing and Nate was just there shoveling strawberries down his mouth at lunch time and so Kyle went and he started doing the exact same thing. So at recess time I said, "you're a copy cat, you always copy off of Nate at lunch time when he's dancing and stuff." And he said, "nuh, huh" So the next day I said, "Nate, I'm going to ask Isabella to play a kind of active song," and Kyle's been trying to memorize Say My Name and stuff, so I asked her to play one of those songs. And I told Nate to dance to see if he would copy. So he was dancing and Nate would look at him for a couple of minutes and then he'd start dancing. But he still says he doesn't do it.

Interestingly enough the only boys who are allowed to join the girls are typically African American boys. The other boys with the exception of Jason are not allowed to be part of their group or activities.

In practice, as argued by Sandoval (1991), identity as process can take on a variety of forms particularly in relationship to building allegiances in opposition to conditions of power. She notes that an oppositional consciousness is one that philosophically and pragmatically incorporates a sense of need based identity politics. Women and men (girls and boys) form coalitions based on the exigency the moment either maintaining out of necessity fixed social categories (based on skin color, sexuality, ethnicity, gender) or pulling together through difference to challenge current conditions. In doing so, the relationship between identity and politics is conceived as situational. As I watched the girls engage with popular music and as I listened to them talk about their experiences, the out-of-necessity coalitions as well as the almost essentialized "we are together because we are girls" allegiances communicated the complexity of how they
made and unmade identities. While Sandoval is talking about political activism in a very public sense, the girls' negotiations of power dynamics in their everyday school lives, while not revolutionary action, still merit legitimacy.

The girls musical experiences revealed how their shared performances at times undermined the song lyrics. At these moments, the lyrics were not as important as how they experienced the music together. This is contingent on the time and space of the performance, therefore, sometimes lyrics mattered in terms of what they said about boys, and sometimes sociocultural group identity mattered more. The girls' performances occasionally disrupted genre—identity fusion and communicated identity as process And, their identity performances created space for both self-expression and group cohesion. The ways in which they visualized their self/selves in relationship to popular music singers, lyrics and fashion informed how they performed identities in their everyday lives. During the interviews and field observations, the girls communicated how they constructed differences and made distinctions between what they considered to be appropriate and inappropriate social behaviors. In doing so, they communicated a sense of self and other as, at the very least, pre-teens.
In the previous chapter, I argued that through their use of popular music girls performed identities working to both deliberately and unknowingly communicate and construct a sense of self <--> other. In this chapter, I want to expand on this discussion by exploring the Central girls’ engagements with popular music as learning experiences and as means to communicate and build on particular social and ideological understandings about social identities, learning, and their sense of place in their social and official school worlds. In direct relationship to these meaning-making processes, I investigate the variety of resources the Central girls draw upon to make sense of their popular music experiences offering an examination of meaning construction in practice. In doing so, I call attention to the “hidden literacies” (Voss, 1996; Finders, 1997) or hidden knowledges that inform and are impacted by girls’ experiences with popular music. Within the context of this project, literacies are understood as the meaning construction process whereas girls read their social, cultural, and ideological worlds by sorting through a variety of experiential and socio-ideological discourses. These literacies are evident in their uses, performances, and interpretations of popular music and the ways that they use these epistemic resources to represent their beliefs, to construct self, and to position and interact with others. More specifically, I identify as literacies
1. their understandings of when, where, and how to perform particular kinds of music
2. their recognitions of particular social consequences related to their use of music
3. their use of particular linguistic strategies and utterances to convey meaning
4. their re-productions of particular sociocultural representations
5. their use of music and their knowledge of music for particular outcomes
6. their assessment of the role of popular music and culture at Central

In brief, I discuss what the girls know about popular music, how they gain this knowledge, how their experiences with popular music are connected to experiential and ideological assumptions about self < -- > other, and how these assumptions are informed. This exploration was motivated by: 1) the girls’ persistence in demonstrating the value of what they knew, 2) the girls’ references to the importance of knowing certain information, 3) my observations of their shared tacit understanding of popular music and culture, 4) my interest in how their music experiences are tied to pedagogy and learning, and 5) my attempts to conceptualize their experiences in relationship to ideology < -- > experience and agency < -- > structure dynamics. In this chapter, I discuss the concept of “literacies” as a theoretical tool for understanding the girls’ experiences. Next, I discuss how the Central girls express their individual and collective literacies. In order to describe the Central girls’ experiences with popular music in relationship to their knowledge about popular music, I provide an overview of what girls’ know about popular music celebrities, lyrics, and production. In the process of making sense of and performing popular music, the girls constructed and relied upon a variety of social and cultural resources. I argue that through their popular culture experiences and in their talk about popular music, they both deliberately and sometimes inadvertently communicate knowledge about sociocultural relations—knowledge that informs their
everyday practices. In particular, they communicate through this meaning construction process, understandings about 1) racial distinctions, 2) gendered roles, and 3) what is considered legitimate knowledge. In the process of building and performing literacies, the girls negotiated a variety of discourses—popular music being one of many. Thus, how they come to know self < -- > other is always more than their interactions with and interpretation of popular music. More appropriately, the impact of popular music in their lives is mediated and conceived through the interaction between the music, the girls’ interpretations of the text, their experiences in relationship to these interpretations, and the sociocultural and structural relations that permeate their lives. Finally, I discuss the implications of the Central girls’ popular music experiences for critical media pedagogy. I am not arguing here that we should necessarily celebrate all of the Central girls’ literacies. Instead, we should understand from these constructions how these girls navigate through several versions of what is means to be girl, what is means to belong to a particular racial group, and what it means to engage and find pleasure in popular music.

Conceptualizing Literacies

During data collection and throughout the analysis process, I struggled a great deal with determining what I would call the Central girls’ opinions and interpretations of popular music in their everyday lives. My various attempts to settle with a term that encompassed what I was trying to describe and understand usually stopped short of representing in a meaningful way the girls’ experiences. I found comfort in knowing that I was not alone in this process. In her study of the relationship between learning and children’s experiences at home and at school, Voss (1996), describes her own struggle
with defining what she came to call “hidden literacies” or literacies that were not
typically recognized as important to knowledge construction. The following description
of her dilemma mirrors my own.

I considered terms other than “literacies.” “Talents” was not quite right because it
implies innate predispositions toward particular fields and abilities that tend to be
admired by others. The behaviors I wanted to describe were not necessarily so
distinctive that they’d be commented on as “talents,” and they were not
necessarily innate. How about knowledges? That term seemed to imply
cognitive, rather than social, learning, and also implied that the knower was
conscious of the knowledge she or he had. The children I observed were not
always aware of what they knew in these special areas...I needed to speak more
informally of behaviors that were learned culturally and socially...Literacies
seemed to best describe what I meant: meaning-making systems that can be used
functionally (to get things done), communicatively (to relate to others),
reflectively (to think about critically), enjoyably (to do for pleasure), flexibly (to
apply in new situations). (Voss, 1996, p. 3)

Voss makes it clear that she does not believe that her use of “literacies”
necessarily usurps the importance of other traditional notions of literacy including print
literacy, media literacy, cultural literacy, and economic literacy. Instead, she argues that
“literacies” opens up space for “those understandings that allow an individual to make
meaning in a symbol system—spoken or written words, art or music or wood or media”
(p. 14). She explains that
talk, creating and building with tools, consumer awareness, reading people—can
be seen as literacies because they are ways of making meaning by reading signs in
the surrounding environment. They suggest fundamental ways each learner
observes situations, interprets or “reads” those situations, and finds significance
(p.14).

Finders (1997), also using the phrase “hidden literacies,” expands the definition of
literacy to include types of social knowledge which are often concealed or not recognized
by official knowledge producers. She states that girls’ everyday practices including
writing notes, signing yearbooks, and creating graffiti revealed particular "literate competencies." In addition, her analysis made present the ways that knowledge is circulated and constructed in the interstices between

sanctioned literacies (those literacies that are recognized, circulated, and sanctioned by adults in authority) and... 'literate underlife' (those practices that refuse in some way to accept the official view, practices designed and enacted to challenge and disrupt the official expectations). Within the institution, the two systems operate simultaneously, demanding adherence to competing expectations, rules, and rituals. (p. 24)

Her argument calls attention to how girls' understandings of what it means to be a social being is sometimes in direct opposition to and, at other moments, in line with what official knowledge communicates as the nature of girlhood. As noted in her research and observed in my study, girls juggle a variety of literacies. In her study of children and writing, Dyson (1993) calls for an understanding of literacy as the ways in which children use multimedia texts as a means to "represent their ideas and to interact with other people" (p. 4). In the process of performing these texts, the children are conducting social work both constructing and managing their social relationships with others. Thus, literacies, in this sense, are profoundly experiential and always saturated with social, cultural, political and class related histories.

Embedded in this notion of multiple literacies is the understanding that not all literacies are treated fairly. In her discussion of media interpretation and negotiation, Ellsworth (1989) states

media interpretation takes place within a context of socially constructed, unequal, and competing versions of reality within the text, the instructions of its productions and reception, and the social history of the participants. Not all versions of reality enjoy equal legitimacy within a given historical moment. Not all negotiators of meaning get a fair hearing. Not all negotiators have access to powerful negotiation skills or repertoires of discourse (p. 61-62).
In addition, these scholars are not arguing that all acts of literacy are moments of critical engagement or sites for resistance. Voss (1996) makes it clear that the children she worked with were not always aware of their literacies. Similarly, Dyson (1993) argues that children’s constructions of different “texts” is “a distinctly sociocultural process that involves making decisions, conscious or otherwise, about how one figures into the social world at any one point in time” (p. 7). Instead, their work communicates the importance of understanding and respecting the ways that children construct meaning and how these processes impact how they negotiate their place in the world—their “official” school sphere, “peer” sphere, and “home” sphere (Dyson, 1993).

Literacy building and expression is intimately tied to the ways that knowledge is produced and legitimized. Thus, this process involves navigating particular power relations that not only constrain movement, but also work ideologically to construct particular ways of knowing and being. As Fiske (1989) explains

Knowledge is never neutral, it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power. The discursive power to construct a commonsense reality that can be inserted into cultural and political life is central in the social relationship of power. The power of knowledge has to struggle to exert itself in two dimensions. The first is to control the “real,” to reduce reality to the knowable, which entails producing it as a discursive construct whose arbitrariness and inadequacy are disguised as far as possible. The second struggle is to have this discursively (and therefore sociopolitically) constructed reality accepted as truth by those whose interests may not necessarily be served by accepting it. Discursive power involves a struggle both to construct reality and to circulate that reality as widely and smoothly as possible throughout society. (Fiske, 1989, Reading the popular, p. 149-150).

This claim is important to understanding the Central girls’ popular music experiences for several reasons. The implication that the “circulation of knowledge” is a means to
reinforce hegemony and particular ideological constructions provides insight into the "not-so-innocent" ways in which girls' performances of popular music collude with and/or provide challenges to dominant assumptions about gendered and racial ways of knowing. In addition, the recognition that knowledge and the production of knowledge is power exercised opens up space to discuss how everyday practices such as schooling work to name what is considered to be valued knowledge and how the girls' literacies are figured into these practices. While this process is sometimes both insidious and coercive, Fiske's definition of the knowledge <---> power relationship implicitly argues that there is always the possibility of understanding self <---> other in alternative ways. The fact that discursive power has to work at the level of the everyday to exert control and legitimacy opens up the possibility of opposition. Gaps in the relationship between how we experience our world and how we are told to be and what to believe provide opportunities for negotiation and resistance (cite). Knowledge, and subsequently, literacies are conceptualized as process, performance, and practice also tied to relations of power.

What is valued as literacy is produced through the articulation of different discourses and understood as meaningful within particular local contexts. Thus, as "social work," building and communicating literacies requires figuring out contextual conditions. As outlined in Chapter 1, I define 'context' broadly incorporating place, time, social positionality, communicative events, and social structure. For the Central girls, the power of knowing about popular music and culture is dependent on the local significance of the information, perceived expectations, and potential outcomes. For
example, the importance of knowing how to “act your age” and listen to age-appropriate music was necessary for their day to day interactions at school. In addition, what is defined as “age-appropriate” takes on different meanings in different settings. What was considered important knowledge for living often provided guidance for how they presented self and how they interacted with other. For example, Maria, April, and Emily perceived Erin's inability to identify a Britney Spear's song during lunch as evidence of Erin not fitting in and as fodder for critiquing Erin, who was often considered to be too serious about learning. In addition, Tracey's perceived need to teach the other girls how to dance properly revealed the social importance of having knowledge that will prevent “others from talking about them behind their back.” This is, of course, not the end of the story. The girls and myself were not always aware of the ways in which power was etched on our bodies, in our everyday interactions, and in our engagement with popular culture. Thus, the epistemological stretch of context is not always known. Contexts are not always visible or knowable.

Dyson's notion of social work and social play imply that meaning construction as social practice is far from being a solitary pursuit. Drawing on Bahktin's conceptualization of the dialogic, Finders (1997) argues that self < -- > other are constructed through dialogue which is always already socially and communally situated and constructed. This dialogic understanding of meaning construction is empirically evident when the Central girls create meaning and build literacies in dialogue with each
other. For example, in the peer group interviews, they built on each other definitions and understandings of popular music and their “social worlds” and collectively created and legitimated certain kinds of knowledge.

Girls’ literacies need to be understood in relationship to web of discourses and linguistic practices that create conditions for meaning construction and impact the value of this knowledge in different times and spaces. Within the context of Central Alternative, girls must sort through the school’s official and unofficial practices, mediated ideologies presented in the lyrics and associated popular culture texts, their family belief systems, and their experiences with these discourses-in-practice. In doing so, they constructed and practiced their literacies as they drew upon their experiences as well as a variety of sociocultural discourses to make sense of their immediate environments, to make decisions, and to perform self < -- > other. The Central girls negotiated several knowledge realms attempting to position themselves and others in ways that were both aligned with dominant understandings and in ways that challenged these assumptions. In the midst of these negotiations, the girls work both underground and in official spaces to create understandings of self < -- > other.

Expressing and Practicing Literacies

The girls expressed their understanding of what it means to be a girl, what is means to be a member of a particular racial group, and what kinds of knowledge are valued in a variety of ways. Again, the following categories were not practiced in isolation of each other and often occurred simultaneously.
Embodied literacies

The girls' performed literacies through everyday bodily practices. In her study of literacy and elementary school children's appropriations of the superhero, Dyson (1997) argues that even though the children were not always aware, their play revealed their knowledge about sociocultural relations. She states

in their play in the unofficial peer world, the children's understandings about human actions and relations, about the nature of power and love, were more implicit than explicit. Indeed, in such play, most children's ideological assumptions are 'written'—made visible—primarily in their words and actions as they engage in activities, not discursively recorded or explicitly critiqued (p. 16).

I refer to these "hidden" literacies as embodied literacies. These embodied literacies are practiced in the girls' symbolic representations, in their adoption/rejection of particular fashions, and in their performances of popular music. For example, through their appropriation of a variety of pop cultural resources such as fashion, the Central girls communicated an understanding of the ways that these practices construct meaning and position individuals within the context of Central Alternative.

Girls as Reporters

As previously mentioned, the girls frequently and without solicitation provided information about popular music and their uses of other popular culture forms. In addition, they also directed my attention toward other students and teachers uses of popular music. They documented what was important knowledge for me to be aware of when they recorded their favorite websites, their favorite music groups, and their opinions about certain music genres. As reporters, they communicated the value of this information and the importance of their roles in constructing this knowledge.
Knowing the Words

Knowing the words to songs was important to the Central Girls and served as a source of social literacy. "Knowing the words" was a device for judging which songs were their favorites, to determine whether others liked their music, and to establish a position of status among their peers. For example, Shaquilla is surprised that other girls know the lyrics to 702's songs and implied that this knowledge is important in establishing and maintaining friendships.

Pam: Does it make you feel a certain way? Does it make you think about things?
Shaquilla: It makes me feel about my friends.
Pam: What does it make you feel about your friends?
Shaquilla: Like kind of dancing ... video and we dance a lot of songs at recess and stuff.
Pam: Do you see this music, 702, or the song in school? Do you hear it in school? Is it being used here?
Shaquilla: No. Only when my friends sing it.
Pam: Do you find it helpful or useful to you in anyway when your friends are singing it?
Shaquilla: Yeah, because sometimes I think they don't know the songs that I listen to and when they sing it, it surprises me, I'm glad they know them.
Pam: What does that make you feel like when they sing the songs that you know. You said it surprises you. Why does it surprise you?
Shaquilla: Because most people, they don't listen to this music that much. Well, some of my friends in other classes in Desiree’s class, they (in other Mary’s class) don't listen to this music that much and I wouldn't ... I didn't know that they would know the songs.

Some of the girls also used “knowing the words” as evidence that other girls liked their music. For example,

Kim: Well, it’s called “Bye, Bye, Bye.” (OK) And it’s by N'Sync. And I know mostly all the words. (OK) And I like this song.
Pam: OK, what makes it a good song?
Kim: Well I like the words to it and how it sounds. And the music in the background.
Pam: OK. Do you think that other girls your age would like this song? (yep) How do you know this?
Kim: They've told me and we listen to it a lot and they know the words.
Pam: Okay. Do other girls your age like this song?
Vanecia: Yeah.
Pam: How do you know they like it?
Vanecia: Should I mention names?
Pam: It's entirely up to you. You can mention names if you want to.
Vanecia: My friend Nathasia likes it... I mostly listen well, I live with her and when we listen to it, she is usually with me so I know she likes it because she sings along and dances with it and stuff. And we have lots (inaudible)

Knowing the words was also connected to their pleasure when performing the music—when they knew the words this seemed to enhance their experiences particularly when they were performing with others. When I asked Kim if there was any part of the song *Bye, Bye, Bye* that she liked the best, she responded “just the parts that I know.”

Vanecia also discussed the importance of knowing the words when she listened.

Pam: Do you find listening to this song helpful to you? Or useful?
Vanecia: Oh... well, it makes me happy.
Pam: Why do you think it makes you happy?
Vanecia: Because it makes me happy, I think it makes me happy because when I'm down and then I hear someone like singing and they can sing good, it makes me happy.
Pam: So it doesn't have to just be this song. It could be any song.
Vanecia: Yeah, it could be any song. Singing that I can understand it's better if I know the words. I know what they're singing.

Tracey also talked about the social importance of “knowing the words” and being able to sing along with others.

Tracey: Um, when I was in 3rd grade, all we used to do was listen to TLC's “No Scrubs.” And, we knew the whole song “No scrubs”. Like, we wouldn’t even mess up. We knew every single part, except for
Pam Who is we? Who knew it?
Tracey: My old friends I got in my old school... Parkland, a ghetto school.

During the peer group interviews and in the lunchroom, occasionally there was a battle over who knew the words to the songs and who didn’t. Clearly knowing the words
by heart and being able to perform them in line with the music was important for establishing a certain amount of social status. Of course, the value of this knowledge differed based on how your social identities were perceived in relationship to the music. For example, when the boys sang to their music, the fact that they knew the words suggested that they actually liked the music despite their public displays of disgust when the girls’ music was played in the cafeteria or in the classroom. The following excerpt from one of the peer group interviews represents the importance of knowing the words.

Tracey: I'm T'Boz. I know half of the song by heart.
Teresa: I know the whole song by heart.
Tracey: I didn't say I don't know the song by heart. I said I know half of the dance by heart.
Teresa: Oh, I've got to look up this other song. It got the b (Bitch) word in it and they say it a lot too.
Vanecia: Hold on, let me see.

Teaching Each Other

The girls also expressed their knowledge about popular music when they either tried to teach each other important practices such as how to dance properly, or how to memorize the words to a song. In addition, the girls communicated that they valued their knowledge about popular music when they saw this as an opportunity to teach their teachers about the social significance of their music.

Symbolic Representations

The girls also expressed their knowledge about what they perceived to be acceptable/unacceptable and undesirable/desirable ways of performing music and self through their symbolic representation during the interviews. These representations helped them convey what they know and how they construct meaning.
Central Girls and Their Popular Music Knowledge

"I know it by heart."

Their knowledge about music groups/singers, the meaning of lyrics, and music production varied across the participants. In expressing what they knew, they actively drew upon their experiences and a variety of resources to make sense of popular music. In this next section, I provide examples of the girls’ meaning construction process and how they come to know or make sense out of what they know about music groups, lyrics, and music production in relationship to their own lives. As they construct meaning, the girls sometimes make connections between their own experiences, build on what others tell them to be true, and rely uncritically on what they learn from media sources. In addition, they communicate the importance of what they know and the breadth of their knowledge as valued literacies for confirming their social beliefs, building relationships, establishing status, and enhancing pleasure.

Embedded in his concept of articulation, Hall (1991) argues that knowledge is produced and reproduced in the wedding of a variety of discourses. Intertextuality, the social, cultural, and economic reciprocity among a variety of cultural artifacts, works to re-produce particular ideologies, to privilege particular ways of knowing, to parody, and to create fandom. In the case of the Central girls and popular music, the meaning of these “texts” is understood in the intertextual relationship between a variety of cultural practices < -- > commodities including CDs, music videos, TV shows, websites, fashion, hairstyles, and cosmetics. The girls’ knowledge about the relationship among popular music, other popular cultural products and images and their everyday lives was evident in
their symbolic representation of themselves and others. For example, an integral part of
their popular music experiences involved understanding the corresponding fashion
accessories—the crop shirts, the ponytail, the high heel shoes, and the makeup.

Intertextuality also works through media’s constant referential to and reliance
upon other media sources and products to distribute knowledge for informational,
external marketing and ideological purposes (Meehan, 1991). During the interview, I
asked the girls if they sought out additional information about the bands and/or meaning
of song lyrics. The girls talked about seeking more information from teen magazines and
other media sources such as MTV interviews and Disney Channel specials and regular
programming. They did not question their knowledge sources in terms of truthfulness.

Pam: Do you ever try to find out more about the song or the group?
Vanecia: What do you mean by find out?
Pam: Like do you ever go to like internet or do you look at magazine.
Vanecia: Oh, I look at magazines.
Pam: Which magazines?
Vanecia: Well, there’s like pop magazines and stuff like that and it has like... 'N
Sync on the front of it or something and then you know that 'N
Sync is in there. See like on this, they make Justin stand up front.
Then J.C., Lance, Chris and Joey. That’s how they usually stand. And
they make Justin usually in the front because he’s usually the first one
who sings...who starts the songs.
Pam: So in pop magazines you find out more about them?
Vanecia: Yeah.
Pam: Any place else?
Vanecia: Yeah. Also, in special In My Pocket books and it has information like on
Justin. What’s his full name, his height, his hobbies, sports, and it has the
same thing for Joey and the rest of them.”

In an excerpt from Kim’s interview, she revealed some of the sources she
used to find out more about N’Sync.

Pam: Do you ever try to find out more about N’Sync?
Kim: Yeah. I look through magazines and buy them if I have to. And, I watch
their videos all the time. I never used to watch these shows or anything.
(But) they were on "All That" (Nickelodeon cable network show) and they were doing this cute commercial, but it was sort of dorky, they had to make a little jingle of buying a hamburger at Burger King. Except Lance did a split. And, then his pants ripped open.

Pam: Do you think this was planned?
Kim: No, he freaked. I thought it was funny.

Heather talked about knowing about Macy Gray from a variety of sources. For example, she learned about Macy Gray from her mother's friend, Susan, and gained more information from a friend who claimed to have met Macy Gray.

Pam: OK. Now you said that you found out the story, that Stephanie told you the story about that she wasn't planned to sing her songs. Did you ever try to find out more about Macy Gray? Have you tried to?
Heather: Well, I mean, mostly where you hear stuff about singers or rumors is MTV news which I watch MTV a lot. And the radio. And since N'Sync put out their songs, it's like all N'Sync and Bye, Bye, Bye. So there's really not anything else. I mean there's not even things about Cisco, the Thong Song which is a really popular song.

Pam: What makes it (Macy Gray's I Try) a sad song?
Heather: It's just like slow and moving and just kind of telling, like in some points she's trying to tell the person that she likes that this, but then in some ways it doesn't seem like that. It seems like she's telling a friend. Like the chorus, she's like trying to tell a friend or something. Like the video had this man in it, and that's where I got my idea.

Pam: That's where you, the video is how you figured out what the song was about?
Heather: Yeah.

They frequently made reference to music videos as a source of knowledge about the meaning of the lyrics and as evidence that they knew more than others about particular music groups. In addition, music videos provided information about "tight" fashion and presented images of sexuality and gender.

Pam: Are we getting to your favorite part here soon? Now who's singing this, do you know?
Emily: Well, I know most of the parts, this is all of them. This is Justin. That's my other favorite part. That's my other favorite part of the video when he goes bye and he goes and he turns around. I can picture the video in my head when I listen to this.

Pam: OK. What were you thinking and feeling as you were listening to it?

Emily: Well, I was thinking about the music video. (OK) Yes,

Pam: What about the music video, what were you thinking?

Emily: I was just kind of picturing in my head going through it.

Pam: OK.

Emily: Like I was picturing when JC goes baby, I was picturing that part in my head of the music video.

The girls also referred to other popular culture images, when they talked about the meaning of lyrics, how they used music, and what they thought about themselves and others.

Maria: This really fits Emily. She has the Daisy Duke shorts on and they're as tight as ever. (Although it seemed that Maria was joking, Emily was not happy about the image constructed.)

Pam: How do you know about Daisy Duke? Do you watch Dukes of Hazard?

April: I watched a movie that was on... that girl, her pants were like up to here. She was in a movie...

In reference to Destiny's Child's "Say My Name," the girls construct together the meaning behind the lyrics. April draws upon her interpretation of the Fresh Prince of Bel Air as confirmation of her interpretation of *Say My Name* and as evidence that "girls are better than boys."

Pam: ...So you think it talks about how girls are better than boys, that they think more than boys do before they do stuff...

April: And like boys... how they always find another girl or something. And then they just leave them. Because on Fresh Prince of Bel Air, Will, he has a girlfriend, and he thinks Dana is one of her friends. That's a girl but it's a boy. And since he did that, he just decided and they were just friends, they had nothing going on... and so he looks at "the list" and that's the girl list and calls like all the girls and then he just... but then they get back together.
During her individual interview, Shaquilla frequently made connections between 702’s “Where My Girls At” and other popular culture texts. In particular, she talked about the similarities between 702 and the cartoon series PowerPuff Girls. This show is one of her favorites and she frequently wore PowerPuff Girls shirt to school. When asked what characters or images come to her mind when she listened to 702, Shaquilla responded that

they’re sort of like this group. They’re called the Power Puff girls...they’re girls and they act (pause) seems like they fight...and the Power Puff girls and 702, I don’t think they are sisters or the Power Puff girls...well, sometimes the Power Puff girls, they sing and they...sometimes they have the same beat.

She says that she thinks about PowerPuff Girls when she is listening to music particularly all-female bands.

Tracey draws on another media icon when she listens to and sings and dances to her music. I was surprised by the reference to Lucille Ball. In this case, her connection to I Love Lucy hinted at the power of *Nick at Night* or other forms of retro-television practices to re-create television legends as fresh cultural references for a new generation. When asked how she listens to Destiny’s Child’s *Jumpin’ Jumpin’*, Tracey describes her invocation of Lucille Ball as inspiration for “getting the Lucy’s out” when she relaxes to music.

Pam: What do you do first?
Tracey: I first put on some comfortable clothes. I first lay down on the couch, get comfortable on there. Lay down, sit up, lay down, whatever I got to do. Then I start and then I first get all my emotions out and then I get my Lucy’s out.

Pam: What’s that mean?
Tracey: Um I go (she moves her arms all around and twists in her seat)
Pam: Oh, you shake out.
Tracey: And, I say, “Lucy I’m home.” And then after that, I, I listen to it. Because if I drop it that’s the end of it.
Pam Sounds like it. OK, let’s, you said you get comfortable when you listen to it. And you shake the Lucy’s, get the Lucy’s out.

Tracey; I usually say “Lucy I’m home.” Because I watch Lucy like Saturday’s. I watched every episode of Lucy.

Pam I Love Lucy?

Tracey Uh huh. I love Lucy too.

I don’t want to overemphasize the significance of drawing on a variety of popular cultural texts as resources for performing and understanding their music. I do believe that it is important to pay attention to the ways that media and popular culture products and practices are called upon to explain, to interpret, and to legitimize knowledge construction and everyday practices. “Getting the Lucy’s out” “Daisy Duke’s shorts,” and the PowerPuff Girls are indications of the flow of popular culture texts as interpretive resources for making sense out of media experiences.

Music Group/Singer Life Styles

Both solicited and unsolicited, the girls communicated their understandings of the everyday and performative lives of their favorite singers and bands. When asked how they came to know this information, they offered a variety of explanations.

Tracey: Well, they (Destiny’s Child), they work together, they don’t get into fights like sometimes we do when we have clubs. They don’t break up the club every single second...

Pam: How did you find this out, like how they work together?

Tracey: It’s just the way they sing, you can tell that they really like to work together. And, sometimes you hear it on like MTV news or if they interview them like once when they were interviewed.

I am not sure if Tracey was aware of the fact that Destiny’s Child has, over the past few years, replaced band members several times. Nevertheless, Tracey’s
belief that “you can tell that they really like to work together” is mediated by her desire for peace among her peer group. She explained further what Destiny’s Child means to her.

Pam: Then let’s do one (a symbol) for Destiny’s Child. (OK)
You said it was your favorite group. So. [pause - drawing]
Tracey: Like they always say a circle never ends. (Tracey drew a circle)
Pam: They always say what?
Tracey: The circle that never ends.
Pam: Destiny’s Child says that?

Tracey: Yeah. I always get that like from my friends and stuff. And they always say a circle never ends. So that’s a circle that never ends.
Pam: And this says Destiny’s Child too? Why? How is that connected?
Tracey: Because their circle never ends either.
Pam: What does it mean, the circle that never ends?
Tracey: Uh, never thought of this before. It means that your friendship last, like last forever and like they always are very good friends. It is forever. And it never ends so that means . . .

By reflecting on her friendships in relationship to her perceptions of Destiny’s Child as an all female-group, Tracey discussed her understanding of what it means to be a good friend. Beyond the interview context, Tracey revealed the importance of getting along with her friends. She frequently set up activities for the Room 2 girls to participate in—including the dance group, jump roping, and informal choir practices. In addition, she offered comfort to girls who were in fights with each other. The fact that she perceived Destiny’s Child as friends that work together—a practice that confirms her own desires—seems to enhance her experiences with their music. As discussed in the previous chapter, Maria expressed a similar preference for getting along with others and working together to ensure cooperation and being yourself. Although she interprets Destiny’s Child differently than Tracey, Maria perceived this difference < -- > sameness.
element of TLC’s group performances as not only desirable, but also confirming of her belief about the relationship between self < -- > other. She explained:

Pam: How about doing a symbol for TLC. That’s TLC? (Maria drew a picture of three females all wearing different colored shirts and pants)

Maria: Yeah. It all, like Destiny’s Child, I like them but sometimes it seems like one of them does more than the other and the other ones are kind of just, she’s like the best and every other ones are just left out. Because she’s like the main singer.

Pam: So TLC, they all do the same thing. They all sing equally?

Maria: Yeah. And they all, they all do things. They don’t wear the same things... And they go their own way and sometimes they get questionable (she questions if they should wear what they wear) and what they should wear, but they’re still pretty. And they listen and think before they say things.

Unfortunately, I did not ask Maria how she came to know this about TLC and Destiny’s Child. However, she consistently made references to her own experiences with other girls who try to be what others want them to be. The song UnPretty and TLC’s actions as group members reinforced her belief that people should and can be themselves despite what others think.

In constructing her knowledge about Macy Gray, Heather relied on both local sources and mediated sources to convey what she knew about this singer.

Heather: Because one day there was this lady who was supposed to sing I Try and couple other songs from the CD, and she, the lady never showed up and the music guy was there just hanging out or doing something and they said well would you want to sing this song? She says “well fine”. And then after they heard her sing it, they said you’re going to sing the songs, nobody else. So she wasn’t, it really wasn’t planned for her to be on her album.

Pam Do you like that, that it wasn’t planned? Do you like that story?

Heather Yeah.

Pam How did you find out about that?

Heather Well, I was on the way to my mom’s friend, Susan. She has the tape and she loves this song. It’s like one of her favorite songs. And she heard it on the radio.
Pam: She heard this story on the radio?
Heather: And so she told it to me.

Later in the interview, she explained Macy Gray’s career. Heather visited her dad in Seattle and talked a great deal about her fondness for the city. It is not surprising then that her experiences might have influenced her appreciation and partiality for Macy Gray.

Heather: She’s more popular in Seattle though. Because my friend Julia somehow ran into her you know right after she like did that producing with the songs before she had her single out. And then she was like “oh I’m Macy Gray” and stuff like that. And she told her about her single coming out, so she bought the single, Julia did. And she told her friends “buy this, buy this” and stuff. So they bought it and now they do all this voting and stuff on the internet for MTV and they always vote for her, so it’s more popular in Seattle than it is here.

Pam: OK. Is that where you first, well did Stephanie first introduce you to it?
Heather: Yeah. Well, I knew the song and then she introduced me to the story and then I got really interested in her and then I asked Julia if she knew anything about her and she just told me that story.

Kim exhibited the most fluent and prolific knowledge about a variety of music groups, particularly N’Sync. She also claimed to have spent time with the band backstage and “on the road.” She told me several weeks after I first started the first research project and again during her interview that her cousin worked with N’Sync “on the road,” and he introduced her to them “when I was little.” Whether or not she is telling the truth, Kim valued her insider knowledge, and, interestingly enough did not share this with the other girls. She explained that she didn’t “want them (the girls) asking for favors like to meet Justin or something.” I am less interested in whether or not she is telling the truth as I am in the perceived importance of knowing as much as she could about this band.
Pam: Is this group, like any other group that you know of?
Kim: Sort of like BackStreet Boys and sort of like LFO. Because...and Fifth Vision...it's a new band that was with Christina Aguilera on...called a 2 hour tour. Fifth Vision sort of copied their moves... (Bye, Bye, Bye) is sorta...like a Backstreet Boy's song “I Want It Thata Way”...its sort of like the song is saying “bye.”

When making symbols for the band members, Kim told me about the different N'Sync band members' likes and dislikes and connected them to the symbols she was making.

Kim: “Joey likes Superman...Chris likes.. Justin likes girls, Lance likes kittens. And JC likes...I don’t know what JC likes...(later in the interview)...I think I know what JC likes..JC likes dancing.”

The girls used their knowledge of the music videos to make sense out of the song lyrics and to explain why they were so drawn to particular songs. In doing so, they also communicate the fluency of their knowledge about their favorite groups and songs. In addition, their knowledge about the video details communicated, at the very least, the level of interest they had for these groups and songs.

Kim: I like the video...it's real like, they’re acting like they’re puppets hanging on strings and when the girl cuts the string they land on something like, Joey and Chris land on the train and then they run from the girl. And, Justin landed on this little dark place, like a dungeon. And JC and Lance landed in a car and that girl was chasing after them....it’s better than the Backstreet Boys video, some of them. Its sort of better than the other videos, not really, but sort of...because it has more...background other stuff...more action and more background...”

Pam: What do you think the video means? What do you think they are trying to say?
Kim: I think they’re trying to say Bye, Bye, Bye to ...its just like they are saying they are leaving or something, I don’t know...leaving their girlfriends or something. I don’t know. I’m too young to be...

Kim: Well, you know how the puppets when they have that little song at the beginning where they are just staying there. It starts like that and then the music goes on and then JC starts and then Justin makes a funny face. You should watch the whole video.

Pam: When do they (Disney channel) play it.
Kim: Between shows. In the afternoons. I forget 4 or 5.
Pam: Do you watch the “Great Pretenders” (Lip Sync show)
Kim: Yeah...it’s on the Family Channel...and Fox family show...and oh, they’re on this one...Justin was on this one show called Model Be Hater? And Lance in on Seventh Heaven...It was like hew was on the show because he was kissing the one girl and Justin was kissing the other girl.
Pam: Did you know they were going to be on there.
Kim: Yep.

Kim along with Emily and April took pride in having information about the video and knowing the details of what happens. Kim said “I even know the dance” and Emily exclaimed “I know exactly when Justin stops in the music video.” April explained that she knew about the changes in the original N’Sync Bye, Bye, Bye video. “First, they did it without stopping the music, so he would laugh and he just fell and he just smiled. And, then they stopped the music for about 20 seconds so he could laugh. So they changed it.” She offered this information unsolicited.

In their quest for more information and in their demonstrations of what they knew about their favorite groups, the Central girls revealed the ways that a variety of knowledge sources converge together to create understanding. In addition, by paying attention to particular elements of the singers’ lives, the girls communicated what was particularly salient to them. The salience of working together, the importance of knowing details about videos, and the excitement of becoming famous by accident give hints to what is important to some of the Central girls.

**Lyrical Meanings**

During each interview, I asked the girls to describe the song they selected. The responses varied—they referred to the meaning of the lyrics, the rhythm and beat, and/or why the song was their favorite. The importance of the lyrics and the relevance to their
everyday lives also varied. April, Emily, Kim, and Vanecia all selected a song by N’Sync for their individual interviews. When asked to describe the song, all of them referred to the rhythm and beat. In particular, April, Vanecia, and Emily talked about the value of the music for helping them when they are “tired,” or “mad or sad.” Emily stated that “I don’t really listen to the words.” Nevertheless, as observed during the interview and on several occasions in school, Emily sang to the music lip syncing every word verbatim, perhaps her statement that she “doesn’t really listen to the words” means that she doesn’t think about what they mean to her. The lyrics were also not as important to Kim, like April, Vanecia, and Emily she found pleasure in the rhythm and beat. She explained further that the lyrics did not relate to her life because she was “too young to know” about or to have experienced what is happening in the video and in the song. For Heather, the lyrics of I Try were not as important as the image and sound of difference that Gray represented. While she knew that the song was about “Well, she likes somebody and she that person doesn’t like them or something like that.” She quickly moved on and talked about her preference for Macy Gray because “she is different.” Shaquilla explained that she doesn’t know what the song means only that “it’s a song that 3 girls sing and they sing, “Where my girls at,” and I don't know what they mean by that.” She explained later that she thought “they don’t like boys that much,” although she is confused by this because in other parts of the song she said that they are talking about their boyfriends. For Shaquilla, the importance of this song is related not to the lyrics, but to the ways her friends perform the music during recess and at lunch and these performances are evidence that they are familiar and like the same songs that she does.
Maria, on the other hand, paid close attention to the lyrics when she listened to TLC’s UnPretty and other songs such as Britney Spear’s “Lucky,” and Destiny’s Child’s “Say My Name.” The lyrics both confirmed her personal truths and influenced how she interacted with and constructed others. In addition, the interpretive relevance of the lyrics in her life was mediated by her mother’s life lessons. As will be discussed later, Maria made clear that the use of “cuss words” as lyrics created particular “impressions” about those who choose to engage with this music. In her interpretations of the meaning of UnPretty, Maria connected what she knew from experience to legitimate the message presented in the song.

Maria: Maybe in the song (UnPretty) people (TLC) are singing are thinking that they are stupid because they did what somebody else wanted them to do. So they could get the girlfriend or something.

Pam OK. Did what someone else wanted them to do?

Maria Well, like sometimes the kids in our class, they go, “well if you’re this person’s friend, then you can’t play with us” and maybe like if you have this color of lipstick, you can’t (be their friends.)

During Tracey’s interview and again in the peer group interviews with Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa and April, Emily, and Maria, the girls discussed the relevance of the lyrics for understanding what it will mean to be older particularly in reference to future relationships with boys/men. As previously mentioned, the all girls’ groups communicated particular constructions of boyhood/manhood. These representations were critical of boys/men and seemed to serve as warnings for as April, Emily, and Maria explained “girls who were boy crazy.”

The relationship between the sexual politics in feminist hip-hop and rap music and the girls’ interpretations of the lyrics and music videos is important to consider.
According to Rose (1994)

Black women rappers interpret and articulate the fears, pleasures, and promises of young black women whose voices have been relegated to the margins of public discourse. They are integral and resistant voices in rap music and in popular music in general who sustain an ongoing dialogue with their audiences and with male rappers about sexual promiscuity, emotional commitment, infidelity, the drug trade, racial politics, and black cultural history (p. 146).

As I considered the importance of using music for political agendas, I reflected on the following questions. What happens when pre-teen girls make sense of these lyrics? What resources do they draw from to make connections to their own lives? The girls’ interpretations of the lyrical meanings cannot be separated from their experiences with this music and the multiple sociocultural resources they relied on to construct their understandings. The Central girls have few personal experiential resources to draw from when they construct the meaning of these songs for their everyday lives. I would be surprised if any one of them had ever kissed a boy let alone engaged in some of the sexual and emotional activities talked about in their favorite songs. If they don’t have their own personal immediate experiences to draw from, how do they make sense of the lyrics and the life lessons embedded in them? For Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa, the song’s messages about the hazards of heterosexual relationships are confirmed, on many occasions, with what their mothers and other significant women in their lives say is the truth. For this trio, the meaning of these lyrics are mediated by the life lessons communicated to them by other African American women in their lives. What if girls’ are not aware of the sexual politics or have not considered these politics? How might their interpretations alter the intended messages? And, how might these re-workings
impact how they construct gendered <--- > racial distinctions? As I move through my interpretations of the girls’ music experiences, I will attend to these questions.

**Media production**

When asked questions about who created the song, how decisions were made about lyrics, and what the producers think of when they write the songs, most of the girls relied primarily on guesswork and the little bit of information they gathered from other media sources. Most girls simply stated “I don’t know, I have never thought about it before” when they were first asked. Both Kim and Heather claimed to know about the production process because of their personal interactions with the bands (Kim) or information they gained from others personal interactions with the singer (Heather).

The girls who did respond communicated some understanding about how the process unfolds. When I asked April, who created the song, *Bye, Bye, Bye* she claimed to not know, nevertheless, she offered her own theory of how popular music is created. She explained that “they didn’t make up their own song…most groups don’t make up their own song unless they got a really good idea.”

Pam: Ever think about who that person is?
April: I don’t really know who it could be?
Pam: Do you have an image in your mind or have you ever . . .
April: No. Must be someone really smart or something.
Pam: What do you think this person does, if you can imagine whoever writes this. What do you think they do?
April: I think they brainstorm ideas. (um hm) For titles, maybe. And then so they came up with *Bye, Bye, Bye*. And then they think of maybe what could be the main part of the song. (OK) And think of what they’re going to be singing about. And they make up some words for it.
Pam: How do you think they make decisions about what to put in a song? How do you think they decide?
April: Well, maybe N’Sync might give them some ideas.
In this discussion about music production, April described a process that was almost arbitrary and conducted in isolation. She attributed decision-making regarding lyrics to "personality, like they really wouldn't want to sing to something about Barney or something." She did say that the creators 'probably think about it'd be a good thing for people to like our songs." But, they are really not thinking about any age group in particular. She does think that a boy wrote this song, because N'Sync are "boys and I don't think a girl would come up with a song about a girl." When asked to construct a symbolic representation of the music "author," April drew a picture of a young man "wearing fun clothes, and boots, with good ideas and very smart." During her symbol movement and subsequent discussion later in the interview, April communicated a more complex understanding of how N'Sync's music is created. For example, she explained that

he thinks of people with N'Sync. He thinks of people dancing to N'Sync and singing with N'Sync and people that would like and younger people and older people who would like it. And then, he thinks of the song. Of friends that he met. And, he asks them to think about it (the song and the audience). And, think about people who would like it which would be me...he has thinking power. He probably has more money than me because he can buy more stuff.

Heather also explained how she thought LFO and other all boy music groups created and re-created their music referring specifically to the information she gathered from MTV, a network with music related programming.

Pam: Do you ever think about who wrote this song or who created it?
Heather: Well, not really. I mean I don’t even know who created it. But, a lot of Macy Gray songs she writes. Most like most of the songs that I know or are familiar with, she’s written. But, she didn’t write this song, I know that.
Pam: Yeah, because you said that somebody else had already written it. How do you think that, if you can imagine the person who made this, how do you think they make decisions about what to put in songs and all that stuff?
Heather: Well, I saw this thing yesterday, so I kind of know. (OK) They like they'll write words to it and they'll get the person or people all ready and when they do re-mixes or they make the song, they people sing, the group or person will sing it and the person will, people or person will sing it and then they'll change it around with their, they have a lot of machines. And they'll just like change it around like LFO's song of the kiss or something like that or give me a kiss or whatever, when they're doing a re-mix, they use the recording that they sang the regular song and they changed it with their machines like the volume and the beat and the tone like. Like, like one person from the group would go kiss for a long time. They would shorten that out with their machines.

Pam: Where did you see this?
Heather: MTV.

When describing the similarities between N'Sync and the BackStreet Boys,

Vanecia described in detail the stage arrangements in relationship to the performer's physical appearance.

Vanecia: Yeah. The whole group does the same movement. Like if ... but sometimes... usually people say the first person, the most person.... they have like one person up here on stage. They have 2 people here and 2 people here (she is diagramming this on a sheet of paper). And then it's like ... and then people think this person here.. well, this person here is usually cuter than these 2 people and these 2 people. But that's what people usually think like in the Backstreet Boys. People think Brian is the cutest one so Brian is up here, A.J., Nick, Howie, and I forget his other name. And like 'N Sync, it's Justin, J.C., and that's like the second cutest boy, and there's Joey, and then it's Chris and Lance.

Pam: So Justin is up front.
Vanecia: Yes.

Pam: Do you think they put the cutest one up front or do you think that people think the person up front is just cuter. Do you think that they mean too?
Vanecia: I don't know. I don't think they mean to. I think it's like the person... who, is cuter because the person up front here, let's say, they can might have more parts and that's why they are the lead singer or they might start all of the songs or something. That's why I think they're in front so they mostly sing him singing. And sometimes they switch, like Joey would be, not Joey but Justin would be singing and J.C. would be over here. And then when J.C. has his solo, Justin moves over here and J.C. is up front. So they like move to different spots.

Vanecia's understandings of the similarities between both boy groups' production processes opens up a space for more critical discussion about the relationship between appearance and "being upfront." In addition, her recognition of the parallels is fodder for more deliberation about the social implications of reproducing "sameness."

In this excerpt, Maria hinted at her understanding of marketing processes.

Pam: What do you think they think about you as a listener? What do you think they want you to know? What do you think they want you to feel about the song?

Maria: Maybe [p] maybe like sometimes people walk around the schools to see other kids and that could give them ideas on what to put in the songs and see what they like more. Like you don't want to just put out underwear with TLC on it. You might want to see if they like if everyone likes hats, then they would put them on hats.

Pam: OK. So they might go around to like a school and see what girls are wearing, see what boys are wearing, see what people like. And then use that to make up their clothing or decide on what to sing. OK. If you could ask whoever wrote this song anything, what would you ask?

Maria: Where do they get the ideas and if or does TLC just tell them like what they want the song to be about and work with the words.

Girls need to know more about how popular culture is produced. And, these girls know more than I anticipated. They claimed "that no one has ever asked me this before," and I think they need to "be asked" more often. It seemed that they obtained most of
their information from other media sources. And, while MTV may be a valuable resource for them, these outlets might not provide critiques of media production processes.

**Building and Communicating Literacies**

According to Enciso (1994), “students draw on a vast storehouse of cultural knowledge as they explore and declare who they are and how they want to be seen as members of a classroom and community” (p. 524). Relying on their experiences, parental life lessons and experiences, and school sanctioned literacies, the Central girls constructed, both consciously and unknowingly, assumptions about “others,” about “appropriate” behaviors, and about their embodied struggles to make sense out of the multitude of competing discourses in their lives. Their everyday theories of self other were evident in their discussions about how the music was helpful to them or others and what they learned through their musical experiences. In the following sections, I discuss how girls expressed and constructed/re-constructed literacies about race, gender, and the relationship between popular culture and learning.

**Gendered Roles**

**Being a Good Girl**

Through their use of and discussions about popular music, the girls communicated a collaborative, tacit understanding of what it means to be a girl as represented in their music, as practiced at Central Alternative and in the privacy of their own homes. As is often the case (Enciso, 1998; McCracken, 1993; Tolman, 1996), the image and/or representation of the good girl is often juxtaposed to the bad girl. In her study with 4
adolescent girls readings of the Sweet Valley pre-teen romance novels, Enciso (1998) argues that the girls drew upon their own experiences in reference to the ideological construction of good girl and bad girl to define what it meant for them to take on these ideological positionings. According to Tolman and Higgins (1996), “the ‘good-girl’/’bad-girl’ dichotomy organizes sexuality for young women” (p. 206). Embedded in these constructions of good girl/bad girl are life lessons for how to perform femininity.

In their discussions and performances of popular music, the Central girls construct their own images and beliefs about what it means to be a good girl. In doing so, they sort through a variety of discourses including official school rules, parental rules, their own experiences, their desires, and the representations of femininity presented to them in music lyrics and video texts. At the very least, they actively negotiate their understandings of the following gender constructions: good girls don’t cuss and don’t listen to music with cussing; good girl don’t wear “skanky” clothes, and good girls don’t date or talk or know about sex, yet.

GOOD GIRLS DON’T CUSS

It is community knowledge that songs with “cussing” or “swear words” in them would not be played in the lunchroom or anywhere else on the school grounds (including the bus). In addition, as indicated on their questionnaires, the only reason girls were not allowed to listen to certain types of music was because of cussing. Cussing in general was considered taboo at Central, and for some of the girls definitely not condoned at home as well.
Emily: Like Julie’s mom and Sandy’s mom, they don’t care if they shut up in front of her or something.

Maria: They're allowed to cuss. In front of her dad... she said shut up you dumb A. Sandy’s sister did in front of her dad and I went “ahh” and her dad just walked out of the room. Didn't even care. I would get so in trouble...

From my own experiences at Central, there was an incredible power of conformity that lurked in the hallways, on the playground, and in the classroom. I remember on one occasion I was talking to Isabella during lunch, and I casually and unknowingly said “damn.” Because students were sitting in close proximity to where I was standing, Isabella raised her eyebrows and nonverbally communicated to me what I had done.

During independent reading, I watched Erin anxiously trying to get Mary attention. Because she was engaged in guided reading with a group of students, Mary asked Erin “if what she had to tell her was important.” Erin exclaimed “yes.” She explained to Mary that while reading Roald Dahl’s Charlie and the Chocolate Factory she found an “inappropriate word.” Later she came over and showed me the sentence—Willy Wonka referred to the someone as “silly ass.”

I explore in this section the meaning of performing and listening to music with “cuss words.” In particular, I argue that the girls’ knowledge about the prescribed “inappropriateness” of this music contributed to their construction of and challenge to particular ways of being a girl. Boys, of course, are not allowed to cuss, but I am less certain about the consequences for them. The girls primarily talked about other girls in relationship to cussing.

During one lunch period, “Love me do” by the Beatles was playing on the CD player. I asked the kids sitting around me if they knew what song was playing. Many of
them said “no.” The girls explained to me that the teachers decide on the music during lunch. Sometimes “we can bring in CDs and they will play our stuff.” I asked them if there was any music that the teachers won’t play. “Rap music like DMX that has swear words in it...they play Destiny’s Child and Lil Sammy, sometimes.” This practice eliminated many of the rap and hip-hop songs that the boys (and, some of the girls) preferred and would like to have listened to during the school day. The omission of certain music genres because of the cussing rule raises questions about the implications of this practice in terms of sociocultural relations. What does it mean for some music to be banned? How does this banning stretch beyond prohibition to social and ideological work—particularly if rap and hip-hop music is singled out? After lunch I talked to Isabella and Peter about how they selected lunchtime music. Isabella explained that they bring in music and if its appropriate we will play it or if we have something we will play it. It used to be quite wild, but we had to calm it down, because it was not as much fun. So, we did silent lunch for punishment and kids came up and said that they also had good music for quiet time (laughs).

I asked her what she would consider “inappropriate” and she explained that this included “violent lyrics or songs with swearing in them.” Tracey and April communicated their understandings of these rules in the following excerpt.

Tracey: If we ask Mary to play it for us, she’ll play it for exactly top choice, like she did Bye, Bye, Bye like this is a song that doesn’t have cuss words on it, then she’ll play it, she’ll ask if you, if it has cuss words in it. If so, she’d say well I can’t play it, or she’ll play her own piece.

Pam: What about Mary? What do you think she’d say to them (Destiny’s Child)?

Tracey: It’s good for the kids to be listening to something that doesn’t have cussing in it or anything. Like some music helps you learn ugly stuff... Thank you for helping like a lot of kids from not listening to music that have cuss words in it or anything.
Pam: What about your mom? What do you think she’d say to a group like TLC?

Tracey: Uh, change that, probably change that word about screw up because you know, you know, cut that old “scrub” out or something like that because you know.

Pam: Now, would Pete and Isabella play Korn and some other CDs that they (the boys) like?

April: No. Because they have cuss words in them.

Pam: What do you think about that, them not playing CDs with cuss words?

April: I think it’s fine. Some of the songs I like have cuss words in them though.

While she understands and perhaps even agrees with the rules against songs with cuss words, April struggled with trying to reconcile her liking songs with cuss words in them. Her position represents the quandary that the girls find themselves in when they try to navigate the competing discourses in their lives. While we were discussing who knows “the whole song by heart,” Vanecia and Teresa demonstrate that they know lyrical “cuss” words are taboo and they use the interview and the CD I provided as access to these words.

Teresa: Oh, Oh, I’ve got to look up this other song. (She is holding the CD insert and looking through it). It got the b (Bitch) word in it and they say it a lot, too.

Vanecia: Hold on, let me see.

Despite the fact that she once said that they skip over the bad words, Maria reported that once she and April listened to a Destiny’s Child several times trying to determine if they say the “D” word.

Heather made distinctions between listening to the music and performing the music arguing that her mother says that she can “listen to things with bad words, but as long as I don’t sing.” Her knowledge of the consequences of listening to lyrical cussing seeps into the individual interview context.

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Heather: Can you see the case? Because there’s a song in here that has bad words on it. I don’t know what number it is.

Pam: Oh, it has bad words in it?

Heather: Yeah, it’s this one.

Pam: OK. Now did you want to skip over that because you didn’t want to hear it or because you know you’re not supposed to hear it?

Heather: Well, I didn’t know if you wanted it recorded or not. With bad words, recording. I’m allowed to listen to things with bad words in it, but as long as I don’t sing.

Pam: OK. Yeah, I don’t, it doesn’t bother me any.

Heather: OK, because I didn’t know if you wanted (oh, OK, I see) to record bad words or not. Of course that song really doesn’t have a meaning to it. It’s called, it’s a really weird name, too. It’s called “Sex-o-matic.”

In their group discussion about other girls behaviors, Maria, April, and Emily made implicit judgments about girls who cussed and their families that “let them” do this.

Emily: Like Julie’s mom and Sandy’s mom, they don’t care if they cuss up in front of her or something.

Maria: They’re allowed to cuss. In front of her dad... she said shut up you dumb A. Sandy’s sister did in front of her dad and I went “ahh” and her dad just walked out of the room. Didn't even care. I would get so in trouble...

This trio talked about Julie previously identifying her as a girl who doesn’t act her age or appropriately because she “wears short skirts.” Solidified with their comment about Julie’s cussing, she is represented as the image of the “bad girl.”

With Maria, I had the most extensive discussions of the social implications of listening to and performing music with cussing. She articulated clearly that girls who are aware of cuss words and who still cuss or listen to cussing will create a negative impression and transform “perfect little angel” into a bad girl. April and Emily reiterated the negative connotations of cussing.

Emily: She's... I just don't think she realizes that she's being mean sometimes, cause I have gotten offended many times by her. She says things bad about my parents... she says like cuss.

April: Yeah, the cussing is annoying.
Pam: Is there anything about the song or the group that you don’t like?
Maria: Well, they could put some of their words differently. Like instead of
cussing.
Pam: So instead of cuss words, maybe something else? What is it about the
cuss words that you don’t like?
Maria: Well, ... if we knew that they were (cuss words), if they didn’t know they
were bad words then it probably wouldn’t really mean that much. But
since we know the bad words, we . . .
Pam: OK. Maybe they would, you would repeat them? or maybe . . .
Maria: No, maybe if we didn’t know they were cuss words, then they wouldn’t be
such a problem. But since we know they’re cuss words, then we know not
to say them. But like if my sister didn’t know that was a cuss word, she
just walked around saying it, probably but she wouldn’t know it was a
cuss word. So if no one knew it was a cuss word and they just thought it
was a word they made up, they probably wouldn’t be a problem.

Later in the interview, we revisited “cuss words” when she was constructing her symbolic
representations.

Maria: The only thing I can think of is good/bad words to him is bad and good
words to him is like please, thank you. (note that she won’t even write a
bad word)
Pam: You said he, did you mean, were you thinking about boys here?
Maria: I think I was just thinking of like. I’m used to saying she so I did he. Just
anybody. Even though in our neighborhood it seems like girls, like girls
cuss more.
Pam: Girls cuss more than boys your age.
Maria: Especially (other female classmate) when she says she doesn’t.

During her interview, Maria said that Mary, her teacher, might use TLC in the
classroom as example of how to behave and act appropriately.

Pam: Could you imagine your teacher using this song in the classroom?
Maria: Maybe for example, what to do and not to do. But I don’t know if she
would like, yeah I guess.
Pam: So it could teach, you could see may be Mary using it to teach kids
about . . .
Maria: Yeah, I guess, like if someone kept on doing something and one of the songs had like an example in it, she could use that or something. Because she’s saying, “no it’d be better if you listen to something else, even if you don’t say it (cuss words in song), if you listen to them (people will think something about you) because she said something like that before. Even if you don’t (say the cuss words), it’s kind of better and that makes you look better if you listen to something that doesn’t have cussing in it, even if you don’t repeat it. Like, if April’s a perfect little angel, even if she listens to it, maybe like some people might go “ooh.” Because I’ve done it before. Because like (she’s listening to it) yeah like she’ll do it, my sister will.

Pam: So Mary might use TLC as an example of what you might not want to listen to because someone might think...

Maria: Yeah because it could put some kind of different impression on you because actually we don’t like that music and think it’s horrible. Which I don’t.

Maria understood the rules and may have even believed that girls should not cuss, but she disagreed that the music is “horrible.” Nevertheless, she said that she (along with April and other friends) sometimes re-write the lyrics and/or skip over the bad words.

Pam: How does skipping to the bad words connect to your life? Or skipping the bad words, not skipping to the bad words.

Maria: Well it makes you look bad. Like if my cousins would always be cussing then me and my family would probably go early (to visit them). So it kind of makes you look bad and at the people who like walk around with baggy jeans to teachers class. If they to have different language, maybe people would play with them more. Instead of just a certain group of people who act the same way.

In her statement about the consequences of cussing, she utilized a cluster of images to bolster her claim. Her use of “baggy jeans,” “different language,” and “a certain group of people” are hints of sociocultural identifications of hip-hop read African American/Black males.

Implied in their discussions about others who “cuss,” is an understanding of how behaviors deemed not favorable by the school and their parents represent being bad.

Sharp distinctions are created when girls listen to “lyrics with cussing” and these
distinctions impact perceptions of others serving as guidelines to determine who is, to a certain extent, a desirable student, friend, and classmate.

In more private encounters, during interviews and situations away from teachers, Teresa, in particular, found ways to be and was often constructed as a “bad girl.” She proudly stated during the peer group interview that “my mom doesn't care if I listen to cuss words because she cusses and it's nothing new to me if I hear her cuss and I can't hear the CD. Tracey responded with an incredulous “For real?” Teresa also cussed in front of me, much to the disgust of the other girls, and did so in the classroom, on the playground, and in the lunchroom. Toward the end of the year, I would say that Teresa struggled like I did with the fluency of cuss words that surprisingly entered our sentences. When I first started field research, Mary described Teresa as “a girl who was going to have problems later in life.” Teresa, however, described her position in relationship to Mary’s expectations a bit differently. When asked if Mary would use TLC’s No Scrubs in the classroom, Teresa said

Mary wouldn't dare play it. Cause Mary she's that type of person that needs to loosen up. I mean she 'cause she like so uptight. She doesn't like to play music. She yells too much and she just doesn't give people chances. Like when she's... cause at first I didn't know my facts, and then after awhile, a week I learned them, and then she kept saying, if you knew your facts, you would have knew it...and she keeps... she hasn't even given me a fact test in a long time so she doesn't even know if I know my facts now... So she keeps saying, well, if you knew the facts Teresa... then you would get it like that (she snaps her fingers).

Teresa was visibly upset at Mary’s misrepresentation of her knowledge, and subsequently what she perceived to be Mary’s judgment of her as a person. I observed that, at the beginning of the school year, Teresa seemed to be at the center of attention when it came
to "being bad" as defined locally. She was frequently chastised by her peers for openly cussing and for starting disagreements with other girls. When I observed her interactions with her classmates, she appeared to be forthright in her opinions and honest in her assessment of other's behaviors. Her voice was louder than others and her laugh boisterous and hardy. While I occasionally appreciated others' frustrations with her loud voice, I was worried that the construction of her "badness" was saturated with both gender and racial assumptions about appropriate behavior. I would argue that while she didn't openly cuss, Shaquilla, another African American girl, represented for some of the Central girls, a girl who "hated everything" and was often "mean" to others. Teresa moments of being a bad girl and the subsequent responses to her behavior hinted at the possibility that not all bodies and not all girls are interpreted in the same ways. The relationship between cussing, being mean, and being good or desirable needs to be explored further in reference to both gender and racial identities.

GOOD GIRLS DON'T WEAR SKANKY CLOTHES

"Girl, go home and put on a regular T-shirt. Stop think that you are all that. And don't be wearing dresses or shorts that are too tight for you." (Tracey)

In her description of what she thinks her mother would say to the girl who thinks she is "all that," Tracey communicated her knowledge about the relationship between girls' bodies, fashion, and being good. She continued her discussion by stating that Mary and her dad would both say that the "all that" girl doesn't value her education.

Pam: What would your dad say?
Tracey: I think, you're just like you need to be smart, and you're just throwing your education away. You're still, you're all that, but you know that if you think you're all that, you're really not.
Pam OK. What do you think Mary would say?
Tracey: I think she would say, go and get an education if you ain't got one. And if you were in my classroom, you should see some of the girls that are in my classroom. They don't even think, they don't even act like they're all that. They learn and they don't just say “oh I'm all that, I'm perfect, I'm smart and I don't go.”

During the field observation, I spent several days eating lunch with the Room 2 students. During one such occasion, the girls talked about how hot it was getting outside. Shaquilla said “I am going to wear a tank top one day.” One of the girls said in reply “you’re not supposed to,” and Shaquilla replied with “that’s not fair, look what the younger kids get to wear.” In anticipation of my question, she explained “Ms. Miller said no skanky clothes only.” I asked her “what kind of clothes?” And, she said, “you know, skanky.” Erin piped in “you know, low neck (she demonstrated by pulling the front of her shirt down) or real, short skirts.” I said, “oh, well, what do you think about this rule.” And, they say in unison “it is not fair.” Several of the girls elaborated saying “we should be able to wear what we want to.”

Dress codes are one way in which official knowledge about appearance and gender are communicated. While the girls disagreed with the school rules about wearing “skanky clothes,” they actively colluded with the construction of the bad girl when they critiqued their classmates for participating in these behaviors. During their peer group interviews, the importance of getting the fashion right was essential in communicating the correct representation of each other. Maria’s construction of Emily in “Daisy Duke” shorts communicated the their understanding that these “short” shorts were signified negative and inappropriate. While Maria meant this as a playful insult, the meaning was clear and Emily was not please with the way she was being constructed. Conversely,
they created images of themselves in the interviews as behaving in direct opposition to what was deemed age and gender appropriate by their teachers and other authority members. They also practiced this “literate underlife” when they secretly (and during regular classtime) affixed homemade tattoos to their bodies, and when they created fashion drawings (again, when they were not supposed to) of girls. In their day to day lives at Central; however, the girls adhered to the dress codes.

April, Emily, and Maria frequently used “Julie” stories when they wanted to provide evidence of someone who was not following the “rules.” Julie became a metaphor for all inappropriate and “bad” behaviors. Julie wore short skirts, Julie liked Barney (I question whether this is truthful or whether “Barney” is being used to criticize her), Julie’s mom let her cuss and Julie seemed to take pride in this cussing. I never did meet Julie, and, in fact, didn’t ask the girls to point her out—it felt voyeuristic, so I cannot confirm the girls’ representations of Julie. Nevertheless, similar to the “marijuana smoking girl” (see Tracy, 1994), Julie was the walking and talking embodiment of a bad girl according to this trio.

The girls’ most popular pop and hip-hop stars (TLC, Destiny’s Child, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera) typically wear clothes that are tight fitting and revealing. Their outfits usually include short crop shirts, tight shorts, high heeled boots or shoes, short skirts made of leather or other shiny fabrics, lots of make-up—fashion statements that would be deemed “skanky” by the administration and some of the girls at Central. As indicated in their symbolic representations, these girls desired a current self or at least imagined an older self who could wear these clothes. In direct opposition, to what they
know to be taboo behaviors, girls constructed self and other in interviews that embraced that which is considered to be “bad girl” presentation of self. In addition, I observed that the girls did not wear makeup during school, but applied these representations of the bad girl/older girl when they performed during the winter and spring school concerts. At these moments, their play with being older and being “bad” was acceptable.

I found similar patterns of interpretation in my previous research with adolescent girls and the images in teen magazines. Both communities of girls knew through their experiences that if they wore the clothing displayed in the various forms of popular culture and media they would “make a negative impression.” And, this “negative impression” would significantly impact how they were perceived as a student, friend, and daughter. While wearing these “skanky clothes” might challenge official school rules, the cost is too high. “Being a bad girl” as understood in relationship to wearing revealing and provocative clothing is only available to the girls in the symbolic and play realms. In the meantime, the Central girls public condemnation and private celebrations of “skanky clothes” communicated a particular contextual literacy—their embodied notions of “appropriate” presentations of self.

Destiny’s Child, TLC, and Britney Spear’s fashion represented constructions of what older girls look like and desire. And, in this sense, the Central girls do not critique the “reality” or potential limitations/opportunities offered by this style of dress. Instead they seemed to embrace the possibilities of this older self. Again, in relationship to
Destiny’s Child, TLC, and 702, we need to consider the sexual politics embedded in female rap, hip-hop and R&B music. In her discussion of the “bad sistas” of rap and hip-hop, Rose (1994) argues that

Black women rappers’ public displays of physical and sexual freedom often challenge male notions of female sexuality and pleasure... (an) irreverence toward the morally based sexual constrictions placed on them as women... focus(ing) directly on the sexual desirably and beauty of black women’s bodies” (p. 166-167).

She recognizes that the celebration of Black women’s bodies through sexually explicit gestures, lyrics, and clothing is controversial. However, Rose challenges “white feminists” in particular to consider “the history of silence” that “has surrounded African-American women’s sexuality... either black women are creatures of male possession, or they are reified into the status of nonbeing... in much of the video work by female rappers, black women’s bodies are centered, possessed by women, and are explicitly sexual” (p. 168). In terms of media reception, we need to continue to ask questions concerning meaning construction and social implications. How do girls who are not aware of the sexual politics embedded in this music construct meaning about Black women’s sexuality? In turn, how might their “mis-understandings” inform their interactions with and construction of “other”? And, finally, knowing the possibilities of socially and culturally situated readings, what are our responsibilities in terms of creating the conditions for more critical assessments of music, sexuality, and power? How do we incorporate an understanding of the racial < -- > gendered histories performed in popular music in the classroom?
GOOD GIRLS DON'T KNOW ABOUT SEX, YET

At a local up-scale restaurant, I entered the bathroom and heard a white woman singing *Say My Name* by Destiny’s Child. I joined in, and she laughed saying “hey, you know that song too. What does it say.” I sang to her the rest of the chorus. We both laughed, and, I told her “I spend time with a group of girls and this song is one of their favorites.” She said, “well, they can’t know what this is about. Isn’t it about some guy saying some other girl’s name while they are having sex.” I say, “yeah, I guess you could see it that way.” She continued, quite seriously now, “well, they can’t know that it means that.” I say, “well, they do say they know what it means that is about a guy cheating on a girl.” She said with a raised eyebrow, “Who are these girls that you are talking to.” I hesitated sensing the judgment in her tone and said “well, girls in an elementary school” purposely being vague so as not to encourage her unspoken judgment. She replied with “well, Gentry girls don’t know what this means.” Gentry is an upper class suburb outside of Central. I exited saying “well, they just might.” In this brief conversation, this woman communicated assumptions about girls who knew too much about the sexuality embedded in music lyrics. Her presumptions are indicative of what the girls’ know about how adults in their lives conceptualize this forbidden knowledge.

One, two, three, four, five, everybody in the car so come on let's ride.....
To the liquor store around the corner.
The boys say they want some gin and juice but I really don't wanna.
Beerbust like I had last week.
I must stay deep 'cause talk is cheap.
I like Angela, Pamela, Sandra and Rita.
And as I continue, you know they're getting sweeter.
So what can I do? I really beg you my Lord.
To me flirting is just like a sport.
Anything fly, it's all good let me dump it.
Please set it in the trumpet.
A little bit of Monica in my life,
A little bit of Erica by my side.
A little bit of Rita's all I need,
A little bit of Tina's all I see.
A little bit of Sandra in the sun,
A little bit of Mary all night long.
A little bit of Jessica here I am,
A little bit of you makes me your man!!!!!!!(partial lyrics to Lou Bega’s Mambo #5)

During one lunch period, Pete put on Lou Bega’s *Mambo #5*, and I asked the students (Maria, Malcolm, Erin) sitting next to me if they liked the song. They all say, “yes.” I asked them what they think the song is about and Malcolm said it is about “someone who lives in America.” Erin looked at him in disgust and said, “no it isn’t, I know what that is about, but I don’t think I should say it here.” And, I said “well, it is okay with me.” And, she said “well, I’ll spell it backwards, xes.” Malcolm responded with a resounding “yuck.” I asked her if she figured this out on her own or if someone told her. And, she said matter-of-factly, “well, it is not hard to figure it out if you listen to the words, I figured it out on my own.”

In their interpretations of music lyrics as they relate to their everyday lives, the girls re-produced particular understandings about what it means to be a good girl in relationship to sexuality. The girls confirmed several times that it was inappropriate for girls their age to “get their groove on” and to date several boys in a short period of time. Thus, despite the presence of Mambo #5 and other songs that discussed sexuality, they understood that it was not appropriate for them to participate in these sexual behaviors. Their teachers’ beliefs and their parents’ rules mediated their interpretations of the relevance of music for their lives. They did believe that is was okay for girls to like boys...
and boys to like girls, but acting on their behaviors physically in any public or private way warranted punishment.

Tracey: We are just like them. The boys like us, we like them. Then all of a sudden we go off and get our groove on when we get older.

Vanecia: Getting our groove on? I'm not getting my groove on till I'm old enough to get my groove on.

Tracey: I said, when we get older we get our groove on, you know.

Vanecia: My mom would slap me upside the head if I ever got my groove on.

Tracey: For real though.

The girls also felt that the songs’ lyrics could warn girls about boys and the perils of dating boys.

Pam: Do you think it’s (Destiny’s Child’s Say My Name) is helpful to other girls?

April: People that are boy crazy. Like Kathleen.

Emily: Maybe they will know to watch out and be careful because some people are total idiots. Like him (man/boy referred to in the song) for instance.

April, Emily, and Maria use Tiffany, a white girl from another classroom, as an example of a girl who isn’t “acting her age” and “needs to be careful” about the reputation she is creating. Tiffany dates too many boys and always acts “boy crazy.”

The girls describe how this behavior is considered taboo among their parents and frowned upon by other classmates. The girls are drawing on their parents’ beliefs and quite possibly their interpretation of the unofficial “policy” on dating at Central. The girls said that “couples are not allowed to hold hands” and “are usually not taken seriously by the teachers.” I spoke to Mary about whether or not she knows if kids date and what she thinks about this. She commented by confirming April, Emily, and Maria assessment that these behaviors are not condoned and that they all know it will be “much worse in middle school.”
The belief that dating in the fourth grade is inappropriate was shared and circulated among many members of the Central community. In their interviews, the girls communicated an understanding that heterosexual dating will happen later in life and, for now, they seemed content with “liking” a certain boy—feelings that most of them preferred to be kept private. Very few of the girls said that they “liked” a particular boy, Heather and Tracey confessed to “going with” or having a boyfriend, and Erin openly expressed her fondness for one of the boys in her classroom. The music they listened to, however, is riddled with references to dating, sexuality, and being sexual active. While they don’t necessarily relate to these narrative at this point in their lives, the girls are learning about what may happen “when we are older.”

Insight into their future? Constructing “bad boys”

Seems like they don’t like boys that much... Well because, at the beginning of the song they talk about not trusting boys or something... but sometimes it seems like they do because in the middle of the song they talking about (other girls) taking their boyfriends and stuff. (Shaquilla)

Music lyrics and videos bombard girls with messages that encourage animosity, and the very least fundamental differences, between girls and boys. Their music speaks loudly to the importance of girls’ standing up for what they believe and standing up against boys who treat them badly. And, as articulated in several of the interviews, the representations of “girl power” are interpreted to mean that “girls are better than boys” and that boys cannot be trusted. In their interpretations of these lyrics, the girls seemed to rely on this mediated knowledge as truth about boys/men. Of course, my assessment of this is only partial and based on what they revealed to me in their interviews and during my field observations. I can’t be sure if other influences other than the ones revealed by
the girls impact their interpretation of what is means to be a boy—it would be a
methodological mistake to assume that they told me everything about their sexualities. In
their discussions about “bad boys,” the girls called upon their mothers’ experiences and
life lessons, their observations of their peers in relationships, and a variety of media texts,
including music videos and television to construct an understanding of boys as,
essentially, the enemy. In this sense, boys “cheat on girls,” “boys don’t have as many
feelings,” “they just walk off one day,” and think they are in charge of the relationship.
The following excerpts from several of the interviews are evidence of the girls’ co-
constructions of “boyhood.”

**VANECIA, TERESA, TRACEY: WE DON’T WANT NO SCRUBS**

Pam: Okay, let's start about this song. Can you describe this song, anyone?
Vanecia: It's about three girls who talking about boys who don't wash up...It's
saying that boys...
Teresa: That we’re not good enough for them. We don't love them that much.

Pam: What's a scrub?
Teresa: It's a man who don't know how to act right, put it that way.
Pam: Is this song connected to your life in any way?
Tracey: Okay, I had a boyfriend right. He wasn't really my boyfriend. He's
like we used to like each other a lot. But anyway... he likes me and he
also turned out to be a scrub because he likes some of my other friends.
A boy that cheated on me.

Teresa: Well it kind of it is because... well, no pigeons... while that they
heard the songs they go around those pigeons and now every boy in my
neighborhood knows that song and they call all of the girls pigeons..

Pam: What do you do when boys call you pigeon.
Vanecia: I turn around and kick their butt and call them scrubs.
Teresa: I kick em... I slap in the head...
Pam: Do the boys at school do that?
All: Yep.
Teresa: Just about all of the boys. Carl tried to ... hit me in the butt.
Vanecia: They be hitting you in the butt..
Tracey: There are a lot of boys that go like this and go "whoo cha" and
Pam: What does that mean?
Tracey: That means they like you. If they pick on you a lot, that means they like you.
Pam: Where do they learn that from.
Teresa: I have no clue. Like we learn this from the body thing... we don't know where we learned it...
Pam: The poppin...
Vanecia: During the music videos.
Pam: They get it from music? From song?
Vanecia: Yes.
Teresa: Yes, because they be seeing the music videos.
Pam: How about the boys in your classroom? Are there boys in your classroom who do this?
All: Yes.. Daniel, Mark...

Vanecia: We're going to ask you (Pam) some questions. It's our turn.
Teresa: Well, tell us about boy media first.
Pam: Boy media? What is boy media? I don't know much about...
Tracey: Oooh, I can tell you a little bit... boys like girls, boys want to do it with girls, and ...
Vanecia: No, that's a little too much Tracey.
Tracey: Boys and girls want to go out with each other. Boys want to say I love you... they be boyfriend and girlfriend...
Vanecia: Next thing you know they dump you.
Tracey: Then all of a sudden you find another boy when you're at high school and they say, "let's go to the prom with each other..."
Pam: This is what boy's music says?
Tracey: No,... I'm saying this... What I'm saying is I'm doing no pigeons. Or... And it goes on. When you go to college, the boys say I love you, I want to do it with you and then it goes on.
Pam: Where did you learn this?
Tracey: Our mom and dad tells us that when we get older. Well, not all of them.

EMILY, APRIL, MARIA: THEY ALWAYS FIND ANOTHER GIRL

Pam: How does it make you feel? What are you thinking about when you are listening to it?
Emily: Somebody is very bad.
Pam: Who's very bad?
Emily: Her boyfriend. Cause he's cheating on her. She's very mad.
Pam: So you told me that the song is, when you think about it you think about a boyfriend being bad cheating. What else do you think the song is about?
April: Might feel a little left out or something and kind of upset because she's ... and jealous maybe.
Emily: Jealousy. I was about to use that word.

Pam: Does this song, what do you think it says about girls?
April: That they're cool.
Emily: That girls are better than boys.
Maria: They don't have as many feelings and they don't think as much or something. And they don't just walk off one day.
Emily: It's kind of like the song on Britney Spears, number six.
Maria: Lucky?
April: And like boys... how they always find another girl or something. And then they just leave them. Because on Fresh Prince of Bel Air, Will, he has a girlfriend, and he thinks Dana is one of her friends. That's a girl but it's a boy. And since he did that, he just decided and they were just friends, they had nothing going on... and so he looks at "the list" and that's the girl list and calls like all the girls and then he just... but then they get back together.

Pam: Do you see this happening like at school or with people in your neighborhood?
Maria: Well, there's like messengers for like Tiffany and them. They go out with each other for like not even half a week and then instead of telling Tiffany, like one of the other boys just walks up and says, "hey how you doing babe, I'm your new girlfriend." (she meant boyfriend)

Pam: So this happens on the videos. It happens on the movies and TV. and stuff like that. Do you think it happens in real life like that too?
April: Yes.
Pam: Besides Tiffany and her boyfriends?
April: Probably a lot. Not to be rude or anything, no offense, but probably more black people too.

I want to call attention to April's comment that "probably more black people" date and "dump" girls more often. While I don't want to impose too much on her comment, I think that it at least begs the question of which boys/men they are referring to particularly because the all-female groups they listen to are primarily African American/Black women. And, despite the sexual politics embedded in female rap and hip-hop music, April and other girls may not be aware of the important gendered and racial politics when they interpret the meaning of these lyrics. And, while it is possible that they are referring
to a generic male, I think it necessary to call attention to the possibility that these songs, corresponding media, and the girls interpretations of other sociocultural discourses are contributing to an image of non-white males as representative of the “bad boys” described in these lyrics.

**TRACEY: KEEPING MARK “IN CHECK”**

During our discussion about the girls’ “dance group,” Tracey explained why they are careful about letting boys join their group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tracey</th>
<th>Because those boys are selfish.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>All of them? Or like would you work with Daniel and Mark?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Nope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Nope, not with this (organizing the dancing group). What do you mean they’re selfish? How are they selfish?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>They like “no I want to do this and this” and like they rule us. Like we’re not the people that, we’re not like big and they’re big. They’re really small.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>So they treat you like you’re lower than them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Yep. And Daniel is like, we’re like “you need to stop doing that Daniel. Because my mom always says one day the girl is going to come back on you and get you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Your mom says that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Yeah. Because my mom and his mom really check it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>What do you think your mom means when she says that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>Um, . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Like would she say to you, “you got to watch it because a boy’s going to,” or does she just say that about boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey;</td>
<td>She says that to boys, “now watch what you’re doing because something, some time the boys will, or the girls will turn right back on you that’s so scared of you today.” So I think that she means “like you better watch out for yourself” . . . Mark, then he finally learned, because I almost broke a scooter this one day and he kept messing with me. I threw the scooter almost all the way back. “I said you stop messing with me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>So how does he mess with you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>He make me mad and stuff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>So you think your mom would tell him you better watch it. Girl’s going to come back. Do you think she’d say that to every boy, or a lot of boys?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tracey</td>
<td>That mess with me. See, Mark, he knew better. We got him in check.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pam: You got what?
Tracey: Mark in check. So he was sitting right there and I was going back to the spot saying "Mark get up and go." He say "OK."

Tracey's attempted to keep Mark "in check" illustrated her insistence on her belief that "girls are as strong as boys." She called upon the lessons taught by her mom and grandma in sorting out her relationships with her male classmates. I have witnessed Tracey keeping Mark "in check" when she quite loudly told him one day to "quit acting like a fool," and when she told him on our bus trip to the bookstore to "stop flirting with all of the girls." The other girls acted on their beliefs about boys as enemy when they refused to sit on the sofa with any boy, when they denied the boys access to the loft, when they criticized the boys for not doing their part in the literacy groups, and when they frequently made fun of them for performing their music in the lunchroom. These behaviors do not, of course, preclude the notion that they were simultaneously and privately developing an interest in boys as relationship partners.

What are the social, cultural, and political implications of girls' co-constructions of "boys as the enemy"? I do believe that girls need to be aware of the perils of heterosexual dating and the power relations that traditionally frame these relationships. The real dangers of sexual power are realized in very painful ways for many girls and women. I think that empowering girls to be strong and to articulate their needs and beliefs is an important movement toward gender equality and opening up a range of possibilities of female sexuality. And, I believe that because gender relationships are practiced amidst other discourses of race, sexuality, and class, there is a danger of reproducing particular stereotypical relationships. Rose (1994) points out that it would
be a misnomer to understand the politics of both female and male rap music as only gender antagonism. Instead, she argues that the complexities of these performances must be understood within the context of long-standing power struggles among black men and women who are positioned in a white hegemonic culture. Nevertheless, I think we need to explore further, the implications of these politicized performances when interpreted in the day to day lives of children. Because interpretation is a social and cultural phenomenon, it is possible that the presumption and reinforcement that girls and boys should be understood in opposition to each other may serve to reify particular dichotomous constructions of gender equating masculinity with boy and femininity with girl. In addition, these gender constructions may dismiss the ways in which boys and girls bond through race and class relations. And, these practices can serve to divide and conquer leaving little room for collaborative cross-gendered resistance necessary to challenge some power relations.

**Constructing Difference: Underground Conflicts and Racial Distinctions**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the experiential concept of “acting your own color” and how their knowledge about how to “be yourself” and other was made present in their talk about and performances of popular music. Within the context of these communicative practices, the Central girls constructed meanings and sociocultural literacies about why people believe and act the ways that they do. This meaning construction is situated, in part, within the local contexts of their elementary school and their family interactions. And, their knowledge about difference is constructed in coordination with social discourses including media representations. The girls make
present their knowledge about race through the assumptions about others embedded in their talk about difference, and in their hesitations to discuss issues surrounding negotiating differences.

Talking about Race

I know what I want to say but I don't know...I know what I think, but I don't know how to put it into words. I don't want to be rude or anything. I also might think this because my dad has gone out with lots of African American girls. He had gone out with one white girl in his whole life besides my mother. (Maria)

In their talk about “acting black” and continued discussions about the relationship between music genres and identity, the Central girls hesitated, apologized, sought to legitimize, and shifted uncomfortably in their chairs—not unlike behaviors exhibited by adults. Their uses of these linguistic practices could indicate a variety of things including

1. their desire to not offend
2. their understanding that talking about race will offend
3. their worries about sounding racist
4. their indecisions about how they feel
5. their lack of experience in discussing race related issues
6. their appropriations of the utterances and linguistic practices of others
7. their perception of how this race talk could be perceived by their teachers, parents, me.
8. their concern for their friendships
9. the fear of making people mad
10. the fear of people having to take sides

I cannot, from the data, argue definitively for any one or all of these explanations.

Nevertheless, their use of particular utterances is important to consider in terms how they construct and interpret difference. In my nine months at Central and specifically in Room 2, students were encouraged to celebrate diversity. Particular event and multicultural practices included (but, were not limited to) school-wide concerts which always included a multi-cultural/ethnic/religious blend of songs, and curriculum designed to
celebrate African American History Month and Martin Luther King’s birthday. In Room 2, Mary frequently talked about the importance of “accepting others.” However, there was a sense that race needed to be entered into the discussion instead of the recognition that social and cultural identities were always present and active. In fairness, I was not in the classroom 8 hours everyday; I can only attest to the time I spent observing and interacting with the students and teachers. In addition, I think that it is important to explore more structurally the institutional practices that help and/or hinder the possibility of making sociocultural issues visible throughout and integral to the curriculum and school day. With the school district demands in terms of last minute curriculum changes and proficiency and target teach testing joined with the already existing “too much to do and not enough time” reality of education, in Room 2 there seemed to be a general “pressed for time” energy hovering around classroom activities. All of these factors contributed to what I would call missed opportunities. During group work, read aloud time, general discussions about student projects, and during student presentations discussions about difference and sociocultural relations where initiated by the students, but not engaged. It is possible that the students picked up on this absence, and these practices influenced their negotiations of and talk about differences.

The following excerpts illustrate the girls’ uses of particular linguistic utterances when talking about race.

April, Emily, and Maria

Pam: When you think about all of this stuff about the song, what does it tell you about you? Do you learn about yourself? As you think about African American people singing this song, the words, what you have been saying here...do you think anything about yourself?
During this discussion, the girls might have been relying on a repertoire of familiar utterances for constructing difference and their place in these discourses. For example, Emily communicated the importance of all of us knowing that one of her “best friends is African-American.” And, at this moment, she may have been trying to establish legitimacy as a speaker and/or communicating her concern for betraying her friend. In addition, she also invoked a common reference that “we are not that much different,” an expression that Maria used in another part of the interview. Also, it is important to point out that Maria offers an explanation grounded in her dad’s experiences as reasoning behind her beliefs. Again, I can only speculate about the motivations behind their utterances, so I want to be careful not to create particularly unfair or too generous explanations.
Tracey, Vanecia, and Teresa

It is quite possible that the girls disrupted their talk with “no offense” because of their relationship with me as a white women and someone who they liked. If they were worried about me not liking them or being upset about what they were saying, what would this mean if the girls discussed this in the classroom or in front of other adults who they had to spend everyday with and who, unlike me, were considered disciplinarians and responsible for distributing grades? How is it possible to create the conditions for discussion like these? They certainly seemed to be forthright in their interactions with the other girls particularly when they accused them of “acting black.” Teresa’s concern that the tape player was still on communicates her apprehension about other hearing what she is saying.

Pam: What does it mean to act white?
Vanecia: No offense to you or anything (directed at Pam)...
Tracey: Okay, it's my turn to say something. For one, some white people, no offense (directed at Pam) some white people, once the black person say something... (interrupted by Vanecia)
Vanecia: No offense to me either Tracey, um...
Tracey: then white people go off and they say (the same things).
Pam: The black person is saying this to the white person?
Teresa: Just say it. (I believe that she was directing this at Tracey encouraging her to say what is on her mind and not worry about what I will think or say)
Pam: So, what do you think about him acting like a black boy?
Teresa: I think of him as an idiot and why can’t you just be yourself?
Vanecia: I think he is...
Teresa: Oh, my gosh, the tape is on. I forgot.

Vanecia: I'm like, “oh yeah,” and say, “totally” and stuff like that cause I know how to act like that (note here that Vanecia is referring to Valley girl talk)
Tracey: I can't see why they do that.
Vanecia: Like so totally... like so dude...
Teresa: Totally dude...
Pam: Who does that? Who does the “like totally”.
Vanecia: I'm saying white girls. God. (note here her visible frustration with me)
Personalizing the Political

During their peer group interview, I asked Maria, April, and Emily whether or not their teachers talked about race related issues like “acting your color.”

Maria: When we have black history sometimes she talks about like, don’t judge each other based on your color (unclear) We tell Shaquilla “you don’t have to be a certain color to like a certain (unclear),” but she still does what she does (accusing us of acting black).

Pam: How do you think Mary would respond if she knew this (the girls disagreements about “acting your color”) was going on? What would she say?

Maria: From the way she reacts to certain things, like she doesn’t like it when we argue...she would probably, she wouldn’t be truly happy. She would be kinda disappointed and stuff.

Pam: What do you think Desiree (another teacher they interact with often) would say?

Maria: I think Desiree it might go farther for her because she's been in both of our classrooms longer and she knows us more so she might think it's going to be hard to take sides. And she doesn't want to take sides because she is that color and she might be a little upset... she probably would have a lot to say and she also wouldn't want to get mad at anyone because we've been. (unclear). I think there would be a big difference between what Mary and Desiree said because we've only been with Mary a little long and Desiree was younger so we played with her more and she like more of our music cause she listened to Back Street Boys every day. And Ricky Martin every day last year. But this year, like Mary, she's more into old music.

Maria communicates in this excerpt her understandings of the consequences of talking to the teachers and she, once again, calls on her knowledge of relationship histories to explain why she thinks Desiree “wouldn’t want to get mad at anyone.” Interestingly enough, the girls' relationship with Desiree is tied to the collaborative use of popular music. What is particularly important in this discussion is Maria’s focus (nonverbally during the interview the other girls nodded in agreement) on teachers being mad and choosing sides. This fear of rejection and judgment seems to hinder her willingness to
discuss race related issues in public and this fear is certainly not unique to this group of girls. It could very well be the case that the teachers and administration communicate through both overt and implicit means that racial conflict is taboo at Central. And, Maria’s assessment could also reflect parental and more societal level apprehensions about public discussions about differences.

In many ways, the girls seem to be left to their own devices when trying to develop communicative practices to talk about their differences and the meaning of these differences in their everyday lives. What is potentially troubling about this is that the girls seem to be personalizing these very political issues. Specifically, Teresa, Vanecia, and Shaquilla are constructed as “being mean,” “being rude,” and “hurting” when they confront the non-black girls about not “acting their own color.”

Emily: She's... I just don't think she realizes that she's being mean sometimes, cause I have gotten offended many times by her. She says things bad about my parents... she says like cuss.. she tries to get me in trouble. I think she doesn't realize that she's mad. She's been friends with everyone in the class a ton of times. I think she's just going with what other people say. Cause she doesn't want to hurt anyone else's feelings so she just... like if Teresa is being mean to me, then she'll probably jump over to that group and start being mean.

Pam: Do you talk about this stuff (acting black) at school or do you think they should talk about this stuff at school?

April: I don't know.

Maria: I think maybe if... they would record (what they say) and then... or maybe if they were to realize how mean they are being or what they are saying, they might quit a little because they can be really rude... if they were to realize how rude they were being sometimes, then maybe they would quit. But I don't think it's nice for them to say (acting black) so period.

Emily: Sometimes they think they're cooler than others. Saying...

Pam: Who is they?

Maria: Like, Shaquilla once again, and sometimes Vanecia is in it...

Emily: Vanecia was a lot nicer last year when she was with us but now I think that she is in Renee’s class and that has to do with it...
The consequences of personalizing what is political, in this case, naming Teresa, Vanecia, and Shaquilla as mean and girls with an attitude, are important to consider. I would argue that while we need to provide space for girls' to talk about their personal experiences and frustrations, we also need to be wary of literacies based on personal experiences. And, pedagogically this is a tricky task (Giroux, 1994). Nevertheless, the Central girls constructions of each other is a social and political issue and requires attention. And, the ways that these discussions are connected to their popular music experiences may offer an opening.

Creating Racial Distinctions

In their talk about acting black, popular music, and identity, the Central girls used specific local neighborhoods, fashion lingo, and references to stereotypical bodies as a means to convey their understandings of difference. I want to point out that although they engaged in particular representations of self < -- > other, they also, through the SRI, tried to process why they thought the way that they did and why others acted in certain ways. In this next section, I first want to provide examples of this embodied knowledge at work. I argue that the girls are drawing from a variety of discourse and experiences including their familial belief systems, their immediate experiences, and race-talk in school and popular culture to try to make sense out of their popular music experiences.

"Being White"

As discussed in the previous chapter, during their peer group interview, Vanecia, Teresa, and Tracey constructed an image of “white people” as desiring “being black.” In addition, they communicated their beliefs that “white people” don’t understand the
politics of blacks using the word "nigger," and that "white people are not happy with
their color." The "people" they were talking about were their peers and other white
people in their immediate experiences. When I asked them if they thought N'Sync was
"acting black," Tracey responded "they don't act black. They act like theirselves. They
act so cute. I'll probably want to get married, even if Justin is older than me, I'll want to
get married with Justin." It seemed then, for Tracey, N'Sync, a non-black boy band, is
beyond reproach when they perform signature hip-hop moves. One image of whiteness
was the Valley Girl. The Valley Girl was predominantly a 1980's popular culture
construction of white, upper middle class, suburban girls. Valley Girls shopped all the
time, used their parent’s credit cards, dressed in trendy clothing, and always filled in their
sentences with "well, like, you know," and "whatever." There was a particular intonation
that sounded a bit whiny and nasally. In their peer group interview, Vanecia portrayed
the Valley Girl and talked about using this impression in front of Emily in order to make
fun of her whiteness. This is evident later in the conversation, when Tracey comments
that Vanecia needs to act her color instead of being like a Valley Girl. This is an
interesting comment considering Tracey’s frequent performances of the Valley Girl. I
think that Tracey’s performances of the Valley Girl is less strategic than the one talked
about my Vanecia in the following excerpt.

Vanecia: They say who they are. When we do this and stuff, we do clubs and all of
that other junk and then Emily, she goes, “okay like you know” and she be
acting all black and all hard like (Vanecia is snapping her fingers and
moving her head back and forth) this no offense, Tracey, but she acting all
black and hard and other things like that. And I be like “Emily, no,” and
she be like, “oh no,” and sometimes I be playing with her and I be acting
like I'm a different color...

Tracey: And then she go out and get a attitude...
Vanecia: I'm like, "oh yeah," and say, "totally" and stuff like that cause I know how to act like that (note here that Vanecia is referring to Valley girl talk)

Tracey: I can't see why they do that.

Vanecia: "Like so totally"... "like so dude"...

Teresa: "Totally dude"...

Pam: Who does that? Who does the "like totally".

Vanecia: I'm saying white girls. God.

During art class while they were working on their projects, Emily and Tracey were singing and Tracey begins using a Valley girl voice “well, like you know.” Emily said “there you go with that Valley Girl voice again. On the Hughley’s (an African-American sitcom) the other night, he was saying “hey, you are acting like a Valley Girl” and she said back “no, I am not.” After the girls were done talking about the Valley Girl, I asked them how they knew about the Valley Girl stuff. And, Emily said “I don’t know.” I asked “do girls act like Valley Girls?” And, she said “I don’t know, Tracey uses a lot of different voices sometimes, its funny.” The interaction took place before the peer group interview; therefore I was not aware of the potential local sociocultural significance of the Valley Girl. I suspect that in the Hughley’s sitcom, the use of the Valley Girl was intended to make fun of or at least express their disdain for the Valley Girl. And, I think that Tracey’s use of the Valley Girl talk here was perhaps more performative rather than political. Nevertheless, the Valley Girl can be signified as “acting white.” and Vanecia’s use during the interview and in front of Emily and April on the playground and at parties was a move to make fun and represent “whiteness.”
In their talk about “acting black,” this trio communicated a sense of “Black pride” and concern for “white people” who are “not happy with their own color.” At the same time that they were frustrated with white people who acted black, Teresa conveyed concern for her peers.

Vanecia: Well, what I’m trying to say is I can’t see why white people act white, black people act black, it would be fine.
Teresa: I know. When white people try to act like black people, it seems like they’re not happy with their own color. Or when they try to be like black...
Vanecia: So people will let them fit in.
Pam: So you do listen to this song with other girls. What happens when you are listening to it and Emily is trying to act black, do you still keep on listening to it? Do you stop?
Vanecia: I listen to it and I tell her to stop.
Tracey: Because you’re black you need to learn to act your own color.
Teresa: I know, because it gets on my nerves when she tries to act like black people.
Vanecia: You forgot to say, Yo Yo open up your mind...
Teresa: Because it’s like, why can’t they just be happy with their color? Don’t try to be like other people. If you don’t fit into something, just let somebody know and try to be you instead.
Pam: If Emily or other white girls who are acting black, just decided they weren’t going to act black anymore, it would be okay? They could still dance with you doing TLC and all of that stuff?
All: Yep.

As previously mentioned in the peer group interview with April, Emily, and Maria, whiteness was not discussed explicitly. However, in their talk about “being black,” the girls by comparison constructed images of whiteness. For example, Britney Spears, N’Sync, and Christina Aguilera are also beyond reproach in reference to their gendered<---> racial performances. During the interview, I asked Emily, April, and Maria if they believed that these performers sing about relationships in the same way that they said that Destiny’s Child, TLC, and other African American groups do. Emily
argued that they didn’t. Of course, in reviewing their lyrics, it is evident that they do, in fact, sing a great deal about troubled relationships. Given this, Emily’s comment and Maria’s nonverbal agreement is interesting in terms of how they make connections between race, gender, and relationships.

Emily: I think we think that because it's like when we've seen a lot of music videos maybe and because African American people are singing it, maybe that's why I think that.

Pam: What about with like Britney Spears or Christina Aguilera or N’Sync?
Emily: Well, they don't have that much... they don't really talk about their girlfriends or boyfriends and stuff so... and they don’t talk about Britney Spears’ boyfriends and stuff.

‘Being black”

The girls frequently referred to different representations of “neighborhood” when they constructed “being black.” More importantly, no one questioned the use of these geographical distinctions. They seemed to share a tacit knowledge or sociocultural literacy about the meaning of these locations.

Vanecia: Well, what I'm trying to say is how black people act like gangsters. And then white people try and go and live on Second Avenue and try acting like gangsters.

Emily: Your dad probably doesn’t like you listening to... (read: Black music)
Maria: No, I said maybe I think this because my dad is always going out with African American people and (unclear). He works for a mental health place now. So he goes out of town a lot. But, he used to work for Caldwell Banker and his name was like on signs and stuff and he’s a real estater and he cleaned up houses and all that stuff. And, all of the neighborhoods that he was in, they all had the radios up real loud and all these little kids ran out without shoes and stuff. Emily: And, they like rap and stuff. April: They like rap more. Maria: And, they’re like in gangs and stuff. April: More than white people. I don’t know why, it just seems like that.
Emily: Me and April were singing it once and she’s like “No Emily, no April.”
Pam: Do you think its important to her...why do you think she would respond that way? What do you think is going on?

Maria: She has older brothers and stuff and I think maybe that has to do with it...she sees a lot, and she lives next to a BP (a gas station), maybe she sees other people’s attitudes and tries to... (unclear).

Pam: Other white people’s attitudes, you mean?

Maria: Or just other people’s attitudes like in her neighborhood or how her brothers act. She kinda gets that influence and thinks that its cool or something ‘cause one of her brothers is a lot older.

Neighborhoods are saturated with negative connotations including “radios up loud,” rap music, gangs, and attitude and these images signified “being black” for many of the girls.

In relationship to their popular music experiences, the girls, in these discussions, seemed to making evaluative judgments connecting rap music to chaotic and undesirable neighborhoods establishing a relationship between sociocultural identities and music genres.

The girls communicated their knowledge of particular social, cultural, and political constructions of “being black” when they offered stereotypical images of African American/Blacks bodies and lifestyles. Being black is tied to unruly and potentially irresponsible behaviors such as “kids ran out without shoes and stuff.”

Emily and April engaged in a lengthy conversation about the stylistic flexibility of what they called “black hair.” According to April, “they can do anything with it...you can make rows and braids.” Emily responded with “they put grease in it, April.” The girls mutual constructed of “they” despite their everyday friendship and interactions with African America/Black children and teachers is an important issue to consider.

In addition, Maria relied on stereotypical images when she constructed a connection between Emily and April’s statement that “blacks like rap more,” “you are not
a rapper unless you are black”—information courtesy of Emily’s brother, and her own claim that “maybe it’s because they are from Africa and stuff so they are more used to going free and jumping more.” She again reiterates her point later when she says “like rapper, they’re like, it seems like they are more active and jumpy sometimes.” While Maria’s comments about “being from Africa” were not representative of what the other girls were communicating, I argue that they are important to consider in light of the fact that they all of the girls were hesitant about talking about race. It may be the case that these beliefs are circulated among the girls yet unspoken. Also, it may be that they understand what is deemed appropriate to say and not say in public. Or, it may be that they don’t believe these stereotypes to be true or they haven’t considered them before.

The girls offered contextual explanations for their beliefs. Maria extended as a form of experiential proof her dad’s narratives and her interpretation of his experiences.

Maria: No, I said maybe I think this because my dad is always going out with African American people and (unclear). He works for a mental health place now. So he goes out of town a lot. But, he used to work for Caldwell Banker and his name was like on signs and stuff and he’s a real estater and he cleaned up houses and all that stuff. And, all of the neighborhoods that he was in, they all had the radios up real loud and all these little kids ran out without shoes and stuff.

Again, Shaquilla is described as “having an attitude” and developing this attitude from her older brothers or other people who live near the BP station.

Maria: She has older brothers and stuff and I think maybe that has to do with it...she sees a lot, and she lives next to a BP, maybe she sees other people’s attitudes and tries to... (unclear).

Pam: Other white people’s attitudes, you mean?

Maria: Or just other people’s attitudes like in her neighborhood or how her brothers act. She kinda gets that influence and thinks that its cool or something ‘cause one of her brothers is a lot older.
April offered a different kind of explanation, one that hints at the notion that “acting black” may be perceived as racist behavior. She explains that Shaquilla may see their actions as “prejudice.” Following up on April’s comment, Maria says that Shaquilla is proud of her race, but she concludes with a statement that indicates her frustration with being told not to “act black” again placing the onus on Teresa, Vanecia, and Shaquilla.

April: They might be doing that because they’re scared that we might do something bad to them like in prejudice, you know. It might have to do with the different skin color and they might be scared of us.

Maria: She (Shaquilla) doesn’t like when people act like they’re her color because she is proud that she’s that color and maybe that has to do with it because she doesn’t like when people copy off of her or anything. Maybe she’s copying off of us too. I still don’t see how or why. It’s still not okay (for her to say these don’t act black).

Pam: She has told you this before? That she doesn’t like when people act her color?

Maria: I've been in her class since second grade too.

Emily: Me too. I've been in Teresa’s class since first grade.

Pam: Do you talk about this stuff at school or do you think they should talk about this stuff at school?

April: I don't know.

Maria: I think maybe if... they would record (what they say) and then... or maybe if they were to realize how mean they are being or what they are saying, they might quit a little because they can be really rude... if they were to realize how rude they were being sometimes, then maybe they would quit. But I don't think it's nice for them to say (acting black) so period.

Finally, the Emily offered a pop cultural explanation for why the trio might construct “being black” in these particular ways.

Emily: I think we think that because it's like when we've seen a lot of music videos maybe and because African American people are singing it, maybe that's why I think that.

While the girls’ engaged in stereotypical talk, their moments of insight could be important starting points in terms of talking about popular music and difference in the classroom. Enciso (1994) argues that “without the kinds of conversations that encourage
skepticism and raise challenges to stereotyped interpretations of characters, children have only mainstream culture to refer to as a source of explanation for the fictional and actual events they encounter” (p. 527). While I do see their performances of race and difference to be particular understandings of what might be considered appropriate within the realm of their home and school environment, I would add that without critical engagement, the girls may be left to their own personal truths and interpretive devices. And, as evidenced in their talk about differences, this is a particularly difficult process for all of them.

Constructing Legitimate Knowledge and Appropriate Subjects of Inquiry

The teachers probably think that it's bad and you'll get hooked up on it and stop like... think only about magazines and listening to music. (Kim)

During the interviews, I asked the girls to talk about how “the people who made rules for them” impacted their experiences with popular music. The girls professed that they seldom thought about these people (usually parents, teachers, older siblings) when they listened to the music. These authority figures did influence which music they could listen to, when they listened, and how they listened to the music. In addition, in the interview, I imposed a question that addressed their understandings of authority figures’ perceptions of N’Sync, Destiny’s Child, TLC, 702, and Macy Gray. Essentially, I was trying to understand how the girls perceived others assessment of their music and how their interpretations might influence the girls musical experiences. In this section, I draw upon the girls’ understandings of their teachers’ and school administration’s perceptions of their music particularly in reference to the music’s relevancy for learning. I offer as exemplars, the girls belief that music “is not really about learning,” their perceptions of the biography assignment, and the girls ideas about how their music could be
incorporated into the curriculum. I argue that in their discussions about music, learning, and schooling, the girls are communicating and learning about the perceived and practiced legitimacy of popular culture in education. Finally, I discuss the implications of the official construction of popular culture in light of the girls’ experiences.

Before I begin, I want to review how popular music is made present at Central Alternative. The most visible and consistent use of the girls’ music is in the lunchroom. During field observations and as reported by the girls “almost every time we eat,” Isabella and Pete played a variety of music for the students’ to listen to, dance to, and group sing to. In addition, Mary occasionally played their music during free time on Fridays. When appropriate, Isabella played their music during dance class. In addition to the official uses of music, the girls performed music in the hallways, on the playground, during class time, and in-between scheduled activities.

In terms of popular culture and media in general, in their classroom, Mary was always cautious about the students’ use of popular culture, and she warned kids about the dangers of watching too much TV and seeing R-rated movies. Mary’s opinion about “too much” media was exemplified in her selection of “Library Lil” for the celebrity read-a-thon. As mentioned earlier Library Lil is a children’s book about a librarian who tries to wean her community from watching television. The students’ experiences with media and popular culture were not discussed in any systematic way nor were they present in any informal way during regular class time. For example, Mary did not ask the students how television shows, movies, and/or music was connected to the course material. The students occasionally initiated these discussions, but I did not observe that they
encouraged to make connections. The kids were not allowed to read teen magazines or other consumer magazines in the classroom. During one independent reading period, Mary caught a group of boys with a *Pokemon* magazine and reminded the class that “magazines like these are not appropriate.” When girls brought in teen magazines, they usually went to the loft or other out of sight spaces to read with each other. During my second month in their classroom, I walked into the coatroom and asked a group of girls (Teresa, Nathasia, and Vanecia) what they were reading. And, Nathasia said covering the magazine, “nothing.” Later in the research project when the Scholastic book orders arrived and I would have a “Smackers” girl’s magazines or other popular music related book, Emily, Kim, and Vanecia would huddle around me and ask to read the texts during independent reading. I asked them if they were allowed to and they said, “well, Mary doesn’t usually like us too.” Of course, they all smiled at me and asked if they could read anyway. I said that they would have to ask Mary, but if they wanted to look at them during free time or recess they could. Of course, they never asked Mary. These are a few examples of the general climate surrounding the use and presence of popular culture in the classroom. In this description, I don’t mean to advocate that, for example, teen magazines should be part of the girls’ reading lists during their independent readings. I do believe, however, that the absence of any discussion about the relationship between youth popular culture and their engagement with literature, biographical writing, and other curriculum needs to be explored in terms of knowledge production and legitimizing particular kinds of literacy.
Popular Music and Learning: "It’s about having fun."

In specific references to schooling and learning, I asked the girls if they thought that their teachers would use this music in the classroom or if the girls connected this music to learning in any way. For most of the girls, their music “was not really about learning” “its just a part of having fun”. When asked if they could imagine Mary using their music in the classroom, most of the girls said that she played their music during freetime, but really didn’t see her using it for learning.

When I asked Tracey how Destiny’s Child was connected to learning, she interpreted “learning” in a more general sense and not connected to schooling. She said

Because “Sweet Sixteen” is like don’t go off by yourself, stay with your peers or if like they tell you to go get your own apartment or something like that, you stay there, but don’t go and have a baby already.

Nevertheless, for the other girls, the possibility of using their music in the classroom for purposes other than entertainment was remote. When they considered using music in the curriculum, they offered the following ideas. According to Kim, popular music in the classroom could be used as a catalyst for legitimizing their music and for stimulating discussion about the problems of judging others. She suggested a “singers group” which would include students studying a particular music group and presenting their research to the rest of the class. When I asked her how this would help, she said

Kim: This would teach people, you know how some people don’t like N’Sync. Teach ‘em, you can’t judge others by how you look at them or how they sing or their color or anything.

Pam: What do you mean by judging people?
Kim: By stuff. Because its sort of rude but if people like judging by their color and stuff like that.
Pam: Do you mean skin color?
Kim: Yeah.

Kim doesn’t make explicit why she moves back and forth between N’Sync and judging others by their color. Perhaps this is another instance of the hesitancies of talking about race. Nevertheless, Kim makes it clear that she wants to inform Mary and other teachers about the importance of popular music in their lives.

Kim: I would want to share it with Mary.
Pam: Why with Mary?
Kim: Because, I just want to show her what kids like not just what grown ups like. She always puts on her songs.

Several times in the interview, Kim revealed the importance of teachers taking their music seriously and her belief that they do not do so. She constructed a fictitious event where teachers and other adults are on the school grounds picketing “we hate N’Sync.” She explained

Kim: I came back. I saw the teachers screaming, we hate N’Sync and making signs.
Pam: What were you feeling at this time?
Kim: I was feeling pissed off.

Maria discussed how she thought Mary could use popular culture in the curriculum.

Maria: Maybe for what to do and what not to do.
Pam: So you could see Mary using it to teach kids about...
Maria Yeah, I guess, like if someone kept on doing something and one of the songs had like an example in it, she could use that or something.

Vanecia offered as a suggestion, Mary incorporating the students’ music preferences to construct a graph during math lessons.

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Based on the interviews, the girls did not easily imagine situations when their music could be used for structured learning purposes. However, we know that they are learning a great deal when they listen, sing, and dance to music. And, that there performances of music makes up a substantial part of their school day possibly seeping in unknown ways into the curriculum and their performances as students. What are the implications of keeping separate girls’ and boys’ popular culture literacies from sanctioned literacies? How can we come to know how their popular culture literacies inform their engagement with the curriculum? How might incorporating popular music/culture into the curriculum enhance their learning experiences? These questions have developed over the course of this research project and while I can’t answer them at this point in time, they serve as fodder for future research.

The popular culture climate in this school is an example of theory-in-practice. And, in the arbitrary and sometimes near absence of popular culture, Mary and other teachers might have communicated a lack of interest and/or a fear about the consequences of taking kids' uses of media and other forms of popular culture seriously. While Mary, the girls' teacher, often warned students about watching too much TV, expressed concern for the movies and music they listened, and rarely used popular culture in her classroom, Isabella, the girl's dance teacher and lunchroom monitor, regularly played "their" music during lunch and during her dance class. When asked how they felt about their music being played in the lunchroom, April commented that she “felt special.” Erin and Maria both confessed that they believed Pete played their music “because he likes it and wants to act cool.” Nevertheless, the students seemed to
appreciate Pete and Isabella’s recognition of what was important to them. However, I would argue that the Central girls would not consider the lunchroom a space for learning—it is not the same as their classroom. And, when music is played in their classroom it is during recreation time only. I think that the girls’ awareness of the social and pedagogical differences communicated through physical space and the activities that take place contributes to their understanding that their music is not about learning.

**Building Biographies**

Mary said we couldn’t do biographies on singers. If I was doing a biography...either 702, Destiny’s Child, or TLC...they sing songs that I know and most other singers like those old people songs aren’t about what I know. (Shaquilla)

During data collection, the girls were working on their biography projects. They had to create a timeline including references to significant events in the person’s life, write a report, and construct art work based on their written biographies. Initially, the students were allowed to choose their own subjects of inquiry. However, as indicated by several of the girls during their interviews, Mary placed restrictions on their choices. According to the girls, Mary didn’t want them to do “singers” like N’Sync, Britney Spears, Destiny’s Child, and TLC because “there’s not a lot of factual books on them,” there’s not a lot of information on them,” and according to Kim, “because the biographies were supposed to be about like Elvis and stuff or Amelia Earhart, because they were back then. There’s not really a new biography about N’Sync or anything...they’re like new people...because you don’t really know much about them unless you have a whole room full of posters and magazines.” April expanded on this point during her interview.

Pam: Would Mary let you, do you know?
April: No, she said we couldn’t do any singers except Elvis.
Pam: How come no singers?
April: Because she said there wouldn’t be much on them, but I wanted to do Britney Spears, but I mean there’s a lot of stuff on her. But, she just said we couldn’t do singers.
Pam: OK. What do you think about that? Would you like to have done singers?
April: Yes, very much... Well, it’d be much funner... And it would be interesting, and I could learn more about what I like.

In December when I went to a local children’s bookstore to help Mary and Desiree pick out their “free” books, they talked about which people were appropriate for biographical writing. While they were looking at books about different celebrities and sport stars, they concluded that popular culture stars like Will Smith and Michael Jordan were too ephemeral and “not lasting.” Their interpretation of the transience of their popularity disqualified them from being good sources for a biography. They both seemed to agree that there was something shallow or unimportant about these people.

Nevertheless, Mary permitted Teresa and Vanecia to research Whitney Houston, Shaquilla to study the baseball player Ken Griffey, Jr., Todd to research George Lucas, a major motion picture and film producer, and Kyle to construct his biography on the white male, young comedian, Adam Sandler. The arbitrariness of her decisions was confusing to me and the exclusion of their popular music icon’s suspicious. While it most likely the case that the resources available for studying N’Sync and Britney Spears are commercially produced; it is not the case that there a “not a lot of information on them.” Also, I find it hard to believe that the biographical resources on Adam Sandler are any more “official” and “factual” based. Nevertheless, while frustrated, the girls seem to accept Mary’s explanation and did not challenge her. In the process, I wondered to what extent Mary’s construction of appropriate topics in coordination with her frequent
warnings about popular culture impacted the girls’ perceptions of what is considered legitimate subjects of inquiry for learning. If they believe that what is important to them and a resource that they use for constructing their world and negotiating relationships is not considered important how might this impact their relationships in the classroom and their understanding of self as a learner?

**Implications for Pedagogy**

As demonstrated in this chapter, the girls’ pleasurable experiences with popular music are saturated with gendered, racial, sexual, and age related relationships. And, these experiences in turn help to frame how they think about difference, power, and identities. In some instances, girls relied heavily on their personal “truths,” based on their experiences and their interpretations of other’s experiences to make sense of musical lyrics and to interpret the relationship among music genre, social identities, and appropriateness. In articulation with and sometimes opposition to a variety of discourses, they constructed and communicated particular understandings or literacies that informed their everyday lives and how they conceptualized self ↔ other.

According to Patricia Thandi Hicks Harper, President and CEO of the Youth Popular Culture Institute, popular music such as hip-hop contributes to youth’s construction of self ↔ other and their place in the world. Therefore, she argues that it is imperative for those who work with youth to seriously explore and consider the potential effectiveness of using youth popular culture...for effective communication...it is important to move beyond society’s and professionals negative associations with this culture and to explicate how its characteristics and attributes can best be utilized in the interest of those who are captivated by it on a daily basis. At the same time, we know we must clarify that we are not implying that anyone should give his or her blessing to all aspects of youth popular culture or that anyone should encourage an unexamined conformism by young people. (Hicks Harper, 2000, p. 19)
Abod (1998) posits that teachers need to “strengthen our ability to urge our students toward an understanding of multiple knowledge and multiple subjectivities and to increase our own capacities for seeing multiple perspectives” (p. 3). And, reflecting on her own teaching practices, she sees incorporating popular music in the curriculum by drawing “attention to historical and political contexts surrounding the emergence and popularity of particular kinds of musical genres” as a path to opening up dialogues about difference, identity, and power. In the case of the Central girls, popular music literacies are important to them and can be grounds for critical discussions. In addition, understanding girls’ literacies surrounding not only popular culture/music, but also their interpretations of the relationship between popular culture and learning can help us understand our own roles in constructing particular interpretations of self < -- > other and knowledge production.

The Central girls are learning a great deal as they listen, dance, and sing to music. And, their passion for popular music and popular culture is integral to their everyday lives and will most likely continue throughout their adolescence (Durham, 1999). I argue that there is a great deal to be learned from their experiences, and it is from these complex places that media pedagogy can be developed. I find hope in scholars and teachers who advocate for a critical media literacy and pedagogy. Alvermann (1999) defines critical media literacy as practices that provide individuals access to understanding how print and nonprint texts that are part of everyday life help to construct their knowledge of the world and the various social, economic, and political positions they occupy within it. Critical media literacy is also about creating communities of active readers and writers who can be expected to exercise some degree of agency in deciding what textual positioning they will assume or resist as they interact in complex social and cultural contexts. (p. 1-2)
Buckingham and Sexton-Green (1994) echo this and argue that we need to continue to pay attention to student’s knowledges and “how that connects to what we might want to teach (p. 214). The aim of critical media pedagogy is to both provide students with new knowledges about popular culture and media, and “to encourage students to make explicit, to reformulate, and to question the knowledge which they already possess” (p. 164). Grace and Tobin (1998) and Luke (1997) insist that popular culture should be incorporated into school curriculum as early as primary school age. Grace and Tobin argue that because school privileges the written word, the knowledge children bring to school about plots, characters, and genres is often underestimated in the classroom. Including children’s knowledge of popular culture in the curriculum provides another avenue for children to enter school literacy” (p. 46).

And, I think that the Central girls would agree.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I review major findings and discuss possibilities for future research. In doing so, I want to remind the reader of the central research questions that helped to frame this study.

1. How do pre-teen girls experience popular music?
   a) How do they use popular music?
   b) How do they interact with the music?
   c) What is the value of this music in their lives?
   d) How do they see themselves in relationship to the music and their experiences with the music?
   e) What are the immediate listening/performing/etc. conditions? (when, where, why, how, with whom?)

2. How do these experiences impact their everyday lives?
   a) How do the music (as text or performance) connect to their lives?
   b) How is the ‘use of,’ ‘performance of,’ etc. this music connected to their relationship with others
   c) How are their experiences with this music connected to learning and/or schooling?
   d) How do others’ perceptions of popular music and/or their use of popular music impact their experiences?

3. What can be learned from pre-adolescent girls’ popular music experiences to help develop theories about girls’ and media?

4. What can be learned from pre-adolescent girls’ popular music experiences to help develop media pedagogical practices?

The Importance of Context

Popular music is omnipresent in the Central girls’ lives. Music is made present when they are listening to it, when they are talking about it, when they are re-creating through singing and dancing when the music is not playing, and when they use their
interpretations of music to bolster and/or create assumptions about self < -- > other. Perhaps one of the most important findings illustrated that the songs they listened to at which times and places were always dependent on their needs, their readings of the appropriateness of engaging with the genre, who they were with, and what else was going on around them. How often they listened to their music was connected to where they were, who they were with, and whether or not they had access to the music. In addition, how they listened to music and for what purposes all varied dependent on these factors as well.

Before discussing how they use music, I want to highlight which singers/groups and genres they find most appealing recognizing. In their questionnaires, the girls indicated that they listened to a wider variety of music than demonstrated in field research and talked about in their interviews. And, given the constraints on which genres they could listen to at school and the limitation of the interview to attend to one song, this made sense. They reported listening to pop music songs performed by all boy bands such as N’Sync, Backstreet Boys, LFO, and 98 Degrees. In addition, they also listened to female pop stars such as Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears, and female hip-hop, R&B singers/groups such as Destiny’s Child, TLC, Macy Gray, and 702. And, some of the girls reported listening to hip-hop and rap groups/singers such as Sisqo, Lil’ Sammy, DMX, and Juvenile.

The music they listened to at school and the music they re-created in their singing and dancing in the hallways, classrooms, and during recess did not include some of their “favorite” selections represented in their questionnaires. In terms of sanctioned use, Pete,
their art teacher, and Isabella, their dance teacher, both also serving as their lunchroom
supervisors, played some of their music during lunchtime. The teachers—acting
sometimes on students’ recommendations—decided which music was “appropriate.”
Music with “cussing,” and violent lyrics was not permitted—limiting some of the hip-hop
and rap selections indicated in girls’ questionnaires. More typically, the teachers played
Destiny’s Child, N’Sync, Backstreet Boys, Britney Spears, and “older music” such as
Village People’s YMCA, The Electric Slide, The Beatles, Downtown, and Roberta Flack.
When their music was played the girls danced and sang in their seats. When Pete and
Isabella played YMCA and The Electric Slide, most of the students left their seats and
performed the dance movements together—this was a special event and didn’t happen
often. In unison and visible through their shared performances, the girls seem to connect
across the lunchroom when N’Sync and Destiny’s Child was played. The boys often
covered their ears and verbally protested when the teachers acquiesced to the girls’
requests for N’Sync or any other “boy band.” In their classroom, the girls listened to
popular music during freetime and during class parties. The girls’ usually won the battles
over which music to listen to and they seemed to be the more involved in bringing in CDs
and managing the music than the boys were. In addition to listening to music on the
classroom CD player, the girls used the Internet to access N’Sync’s website downloading
the song “Bye, Bye, Bye,” to listen to during freetime.

Listening to their music during class work time, during recess, in the hallways,
and on the school bus was prohibited. Nevertheless, their music quite frequently seeped
into these spaces in the form of individual and group re-creations through singing,
dancing, and talking about the lyrics. The girls sang Destiny’s Child, TLC, Britney Spears, and N’Sync regularly when they made transitions from one scheduled activity to another. In addition, girls sang in hushed tones during moments in their days when they were supposed to be doing work—Independent reading and math time in particular. These moments of disruption seemed to be both conscious and visceral—performing to misbehave and connect with other girls and as visceral or embodied response—almost a soothing behavior to help them complete their task.

Outside of the school context, girls’ were also bound by particular rules governing which music was appropriate to listen to, whether or not they had direct access to the music, and their readings of when they could listen to and perform their music. More specifically, listening to music was dependent on their parents’ perception of the value of their music, whether or not they had the CD, and who they were with and where they were when listening or requesting to listen. For example, Maria discussed not being able to listen to TLC when she was with her father because he didn’t like this music. Heather is limited to listening to Macy Gray’s “I Try,” on the radio. April sometimes confined herself to the basement to listen to Destiny’s Child in order to have some privacy and also to avoid her older brother’s taunting about her listening to the “stupid music.” The girls’ experiences with music in terms of how they “listened” varied across contexts as well. Embedded in gendered and racial sociocultural relations, some girls were granted entitlement to perform certain genres of music more so than others.

The Central girls used music for a variety of purposes. For example, they listened to music to help them “go from feeling sad to feeling happy,” and to relieve their
boredom, to annoy their siblings and the boys in their classroom, to help them create their own lyrics and dances, and to make-up with friends. They also used music as background to compliment and/or enhance their experiences when they were participating in sport activities, playing on the computer, cleaning the house, and partying with their friends.

**Popular Music as an Intertextual Experience**

In addition, to owning and displaying popular music related paraphernalia including posters, T-shirts, stickers, bookbags, and pens/pencils, the Central girls incorporated a variety of popular cultural texts, images and practices into their popular music experiences. In doing so, they used these texts purposely to provide explanation, to relate to their musical experiences, and to stimulate discussion. In addition, they used particular texts such as Barney as metaphors for describing girls' who didn’t act their age and who listened to the wrong music.

Through their symbolic representations of self < -- > other, the girls communicated their understanding of the relationship between music, fashion, consumption, and fitting in. They incorporated into their drawings images of “tight” (read cool) fashion that, while not deemed appropriate in school, is to these girls desirable in other contexts. The intertextuality of their music experiences demonstrates the insidious of external marketing and the potential success of the recent eruption in corporate and advertiser’s attention to pre-teen girls as profitable consumers.

Nevertheless, as noted in Cowman and Kaloski (1998), owning music group related “stuff” was not necessarily the mark of an avid fan. And, this seemed to be the case with
the Central girls. While they took pride in owning N'Sync related “stuff,” they didn’t talk a great deal about this nor did they consistently bring these items (pens/pencils, T-shirts, stickers) to school. This absence could be attributed to not having the money to buy these associated products and their knowledge that some of these items were prohibited at school.

**Performing Identities**

When the Central girls talked about popular music, sang and danced in the lunchroom and on the playground, they communicated not only pleasure, but also their racial < --- > gendered < --- > age-related identities. During these performances, the girls constructed a sense of self < --- > other that was shifting and sometimes contingent on contextual conditions, their understandings of sociocultural relationships, and their interpretation of the what it means to be “me.” I identified three different kinds of identity performances: “acting your age,” “acting your color,” and gendered allegiances.

In terms of “acting your age,” the girls demonstrated in their talk about self < --- > other’s uses of music, the importance of performing an age-appropriate self. When they performed music, girls and boys expressed their embodied beliefs about what it meant to be in the fourth grade and what it means to be gendered masculine and feminine. One of the findings was that younger boys (up to 3rd grade) could participate in performing N'Sync music without a threat to their masculinity; however, it was considered inappropriate for older boys in the 4th and 5th grades to engage with this genre of music. In addition, girls used their understanding of “acting your age” to interpret the connections between the musical lyrics and fashion in relationship to their everyday lives.
For example, the lyrics related to sexuality in several of their favorite songs and the corresponding body hugging fashions were deemed not appropriate for "girls their age," but indications of what will be accepted when they are older. Thus, girls' uses of music today are informing their involvement later as adolescent and adult consumers. And, the tension between "acting your age" and "being older" was evident in the clothing they wore to school particularly in relationship to their passion for sexually explicit and "older girl" music. For example, I was always surprised to see some of the Central girls dancing and singing Destiny's Child dressed in Winnie-the-Pooh overalls. Girls who publicly displayed the representation of the older girl by wearing "skanky" clothes were often deemed to be "bad girls" or girls who didn't follow the rules. Also, related to "acting your age," is the taboo of dating too many boys in a short period of time, talking about sex, and engaging in any related behaviors—kissing, holding hands, in particular. Again, girls who violated these tacit rules were constructed as "being boy crazy," and being inappropriate.

While listening, singing, and dancing to African-American/Black female rap and hip-hop, girls actively constructed who was entitled to perform this music. In doing so, the African-American/Black girls criticized their "white" peers for "acting black" because they not only listened to this music, but sang, danced, and mimicked signature hip-hop moves. Their constructions of "acting black" hinted at the ways that the relationship between genre, identity, and politics are interconnected. Findings indicate, however, that friendship histories and the situational importance of forming gendered allegiances impacted their musical experiences in ways that disrupted this genre—
identity relationship. Thus, while their racial and gendered identities were always present, the girls shifted their identification with others, at time, based on the exigency of the moment and the intensity of their relationships.

Through their mutual admiration for particular singers and their shared experiences engaging with their music, the girls created moments and often long-standing unplanned and strategic gendered allegiances. These gendered allegiances consisted of relating to each other because they were girls who shared musical and fashion interests and making conscious efforts through shared musical performances and strategies to form coalitions against the boys. The girls communicated their gendered allegiances through their similar symbolic representations of self < -- > other wearing almost identical fashions. The most predominant images was of a girl with pigtails wearing a short crop shirt cut at the belly button and either long flared pants or a short skirt. They also performed their gendered identities through collective resistance against the boys. The girls banded together to form “girls only” dances groups, they collaborated in making fun of boys who performed their music, and they helped each other thwart off boys teasing. I argue that these gendered allegiances and public performances of “girl power” are, in part, framed by song lyrics, the presence of all girl music groups, and the omnipresence of “girl power” themes embedded in their everyday experiences. Because of the contextual nature of their popular music experiences, there were moments of cross-gendered alliances when girls and boys challenged teachers. The practice of performing identities revealed how the meaning of songs was contingent on the time and space of the performances. Their identity performances disrupted genre—identity fusion;
communicated the importance of understanding identity as process; demonstrated their sociocultural literacies, and created space for self-expression and group cohesion.

**Building and Communicating Literacies**

Through their musical experiences and their talk about their interpretations of musical lyrics and their uses of music with others, the Central girls’ communicated and build upon their sociocultural literacies. I argue that girls’ experiences with popular music are learning experiences that build on particular social and ideological understandings about their social worlds. In particular, the Central girls demonstrated their understandings of 1) racial distinctions, 2) gendered roles, 3) what is considered legitimate knowledge. Findings indicate that girls’ rely upon a variety of discourses to make sense of their popular music experiences and to construct self <--> other. For example, parental constructions of racial and gendered relationships influence their interpretation of and performance of gendered and racial conflicts and their understandings of music lyrics. The impact of popular music in their everyday lives is mediated and conceived through the interaction between the music, the girls’ interpretations of the text, their experiences in relationship to these interpretations, and the sociocultural and structural relations that permeate their lives.

In terms of interpreting musical lyrics, the Central girls constructed meaning reflecting on their own experiences and, in part, the repetition of “men/boys are bad” themes omnipresent in their music. In this sense, the lyrics validated what they already believed and/or they made sense of lyrics based on their own experiences, and/or they were not sure what they lyrics meant because they hadn’t experienced what was being
sung. While some of the music lyrics might not pertain to their lives right now (particularly lyrics related to sexuality), the girls indicated that the messages about dating are serving as instructions for the future. Findings indicate that researchers need to attend carefully to the gendered racial relations embedded in meaning making processes particularly in relationship to audiences' interpretation of music lyrics. For example, most of the girls did not take into consideration the intended gendered racial politics present in female hip-hop and rap. Given this, the category of sexually promiscuous bad boys and men may be reduced to African-American/Black men contributing to particular negative stereotypes.

In their discussions and performances of popular music, the girls communicated a shared tacit understanding of what it means to be a good girl. Findings indicated that the Central girls understood and actively negotiated their understandings of the following gender constructions: good girl don't cuss; good girls don’t wear provocative clothes, and good girls are not promiscuous. These lessons impact how they construct self other and serve to mediate the ways in which they interpret sexually explicit music and corresponding fashions. In addition, their negotiations of the competing discourse of popular music representations of girls/women and sanctioned knowledge represented in school practices illustrates the complexities of girls’ meaning construction and their knowledge about the importance of reading context when engaging with music and presenting self.

In addition to communicating a sense of gendered relations, the Central demonstrated their understanding of race relations. Findings indicate that the girls are
reluctant to talk about race, rely on familiar utterances, borrow from their parents' experiences and quite possibly pick up on unofficial school practices to interpret the relationship among popular music, race, and "appropriateness." In doing so, the non-black girls tended to personalize their peers' charges of whites "acting black" by naming these behaviors as being mean, having an attitude, and taking sides. In addition, the girls relied on unquestioned stereotypical representations of others.

Findings indicate that the girls do not perceive their uses of popular music to be connected to their official learning experiences. While not conclusive, data indicated that they picked up on their teachers and the administrative negative perception of popular music and culture in general. Based on the findings that girls are, in fact, learning a great deal from their popular music experiences, I argue that incorporating popular music into school curriculum could be advantageous in terms of encouraging reflection on how children construct their sense of self and other.

**Underground Activity**

While girls' perform popular music in public spaces—in this case, the school lunchroom and in the classroom, a great deal of the "impact" of their experiences is happening out of the sight of teachers and parents. Their negotiations of gendered race relations represented in their conflicts about "acting your own color" and their discussions about sexuality are part of their "underlife" and not shared with authority members. The notion that children/youth do not share potentially "rule-breaking" experiences with adults is not a recent invention. Nevertheless, it is important for teachers and youth to understand the ways that music experiences are integral to their

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constructions of self — constructions that may help or hinder their involvement as learners. In addition, the ways in which their experiences with popular music impact their construction of sociocultural distinctions particularly gendered and racial differences may significantly inform their everyday interactions with others. In addition to illustrating the complexities of girls’ media experiences, knowledge of girls’ underground activities might give educators and parents insight into the ways that we help co-construct meaning.

**Constructing “Girlhood”**

Girls engage with popular music by negotiating a variety of discourses in relationship to their own experiences. Far from being fixed lenses from which girls’ interpret lyrics and make decisions about which music to engage with, sociocultural identities such as gender, race, and age are interconnected and are mobilized during these experiences.

**Pedagogical Implications**

As I write this the Central girls are getting ready to march out of their elementary school for the last time—they start middle school in the fall. As I reflect on this project and their next educational journey, I feel a sense of urgency. Now knowing the sociocultural work that happens “underground”—the importance of incorporating popular culture/music into curriculum seems imperative. Following in suit with Dyson (1997); Buckingham & Sefton-Green (1994); Alvermann (2000), and Durham (1999), findings indicate that popular culture is omnipresent in children’s lives and informs their everyday lives in school. Based on my interpretations of the Central girls’ experiences,
incorporating popular music into curriculum requires attention to peer groups, a recognition of the ways that girls’ practice sociocultural relations “underground,” and an understanding that context and other intervening conditions may impact girls’ interpretations and uses of popular music—perhaps more so, then fixed identity categories. Also, educators might benefit from developing practices that first seek to understand what children already know about popular culture and music.

**Future Directions**

When I first imagined this project, I did not anticipate the ways that girls’ popular music experiences informed their everyday lives including how they both thought about and interacted with others. In particular, our understandings of girls’ popular music experiences could be enhanced by focusing specifically on the relationship among gender, race, and popular music. In addition, future research could interrogate the relationship between girls’ popular music experiences and their engagement with school curriculum. For example, how might girls’ popular music experiences impact how they engage with literature? What knowledge do they bring to bear when they construct a sense of self as learner? Finally, I would like to continue with my research focusing on ways to incorporate popular music into the school curriculum. Time constraints may not allow for a full media/popular culture curriculum; nevertheless, methods such as the SRI could be used to make connections between school-sanctioned literacies and girl’s media experiences.
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1 I use the symbol < --- > to represent the dialectical and inter-related nature of the two terms. This representation is useful in terms of communicating the ways in which terms, which appear to be oppositional, actually exist in continuous relationship to each other.

2 Free time is typically Friday afternoons from 230-315pm. If the students have completed their in-class work and have behaved throughout the week, they are given the opportunity to play board games, internet games, or other activities (in the classroom) during this time. Independent reading is time allotted for students to read approved literature on their own or if permitted in pairs.

3 I have tried to reflect carefully on how I am representing the girls’ talk. And, this has been a particularly difficult process. In my attempt to interpret and represent how they communicated their beliefs and assumptions about race and gender, I struggled with making visible utterances that the girls would not want to be public knowledge. Of course, their names have been changed. But, this is a small sample size and it is possible that people will be able to discern who is saying what. I do find it interesting that I struggled so much with presenting in full their constructions of race. I think that this is both a methodological and sociocultural issue that I need to tease out. I am willing to leave open the possibility that several things could be happening. I do feel responsible for not betraying their trust in this project and in me. I also do not want to participate in what I have critiqued—constructing pre-teens and adolescents in personalized and individualized ways. I also leave open the possibility that as a White woman I am unconsciously and inadvertently not wanting to “air the dirty laundry” of the stereotypical constructions of racial distinctions so active today. And, it may also be the case that this project represents a case study of one particular school and the experiences of a group of 14 girls. I want to be careful not to communicate through my representations that these girls represent for better and for words what is happening in other contexts—this seems like an enormous onus to place on the participants.

I offer this advice to the reader. During the peer group interviews, the dialogue was fast paced and the girls frequently talked over each other. Imagine, if you will, the pace of a Destiny’s Child’s song. In print, the dialogue reads more clearly and perhaps more abruptly than what happened in real time. IN YOUR FIRST READ THROUGH, READ THE EXCERPTS QUICKLY. Feel free, of course, to go back and analyze more slowly.

4 Read-aloud took place directly after lunch. At this time, Mary would read to the students.
Pokemon or pocket monsters began in 1998 as a Nintendo Game Boy video game, then became a television cartoon, trading cards, and toys. Pokemon revolves around a fantasy world created by Japanese animators with the main character, Ash, who wants to be a master Pokemon trainer and in order to do so he must capture all 151 Pokemon creatures.

This was an interesting situation for me. After the invitation, I spoke with Maria’s mother to get a sense of what she was thinking. I told her that while I was happy the girls asked me; but I wanted to be sure they still felt comfortable changing their minds and inviting another girl. So, we agreed that we would encourage them to invite another girl if they wanted to. I communicated this to Maria and Emily—they assured me that they wanted me to go. Not wanting to insult them, I said that I would go, but that if someone else wanted to go that was fine with me. Maria called me 1 week prior to the concert inviting me again. We met at the concert.

I want to thank Dr. Pat Enciso for the troupe “playing girl. In the process of organizing a panel for the National Reading Conference, Pat suggested that the methodological quandary I was experiencing had to do with the practice of “playing girl.”

The three categories “acting your age,” “acting black,” and gendered allegiances were generated from the interview and field observation data (e.g. their interactions, comments, and clothing). Issues related to the concept of “acting your age” were observed among all of the 9 key participants and discussed by all in the interviews. As previously mentioned, “acting black” or “acting your color” was discussed in the peer group interviews by all 6 participants, but was not observed explicitly during field observation. During the field observations, while the girls didn’t call certain behaviors not “acting your own color,” in retrospect (based on their comments in the interviews) it became evident that some of their opinions and judgments about other girls and boys were implicitly about race, identity, and music. Gendered allegiances in the form of both strategic and implied connectedness (we are connected because we are girls) were observed daily and reoccurred several times in all of the interviews.

Tweety Bird is a cartoon bird.

I address, in particular, the following questions all in reference to their use of and talk about popular music:
1. How do they see themselves and others in relationship to the music “text”—the lyrics, singers, the rhythm, and the videos?
2. What do they know about popular music? And, what do they think about it?
3. How are their experiences with this music connected to learning and/or schooling? What do they learn from music and their experiences with music?
4. How do others’ perceptions of popular music and/or their use of popular music impact their experiences? Who influences their uses of and understanding of popular music?
5. What is the value of their musical experiences in their everyday lives?
6. How do they express their knowledge about music, identity, and schooling?
Part of understanding how girls' experience popular music is exploring what they know about music, how they construct meaning, and how their everyday lives impact and are impacted by these experiences. In reference to my research questions, I was interested in understanding how girls' musical experiences were connected to their everyday lives, and I conducted this research in a school environment. Within this context, questions surrounding the relationship between their musical experiences, knowledge and learning became important to consider. As I collected and analyzed the data, I was mindful of these relationships. During my first cursory review of the data, I was surprised to see how frequently instances related to what the girls knew, what they say they didn’t know, how they learned about “stuff,” and what the songs taught them were evident in both solicited and unsolicited events. In addition, as indicated in my literature review, I entered this project assuming that, at the very least, through their experiences, girls embodied and practiced their understandings about their social worlds—including knowledge about media. This assumption, my research questions, the contextual nature of the study, and the girls expressions of what they knew framed my analysis. I will explain further how the individual categories were selected as significant in terms of the girls’ musical experiences.

The category “gendered roles” was the most prevalent in the data. All of the girls talked about defining boys as “bad” or the enemy in their interview and frequently during field observations. The consistency of their opinions crossed these two contexts. All of the girls talked about the “no cussing rule” in their interview. And, as noted in my observation records, the no cussing rule was discussed and observed frequently. In terms of the no “skanky clothes” rule and the girls interpretation of this rule (in school and out-of-school), of the key informants, Shaquilla, April, Maria, Tracey, and Emily discussed this in their interviews. And, as will be noted in the upcoming discussion, their lunchroom talk about the rule and other observations revealed the relevance of this rule for constructing “girlness.” In terms of dating and sexuality, all of the girls, with the exception of Heather and Shaquilla, discussed the perils of early dating.

The category “racial distinctions” was less empirically present during data collection. Race was only talked about explicitly in the group interviews. However, as will be demonstrated the absence of this “race talk” in other moments of data collection, is not necessarily indicative of the importance of their negotiation of these differences in their everyday lives. It was through these group interviews that I was able to reflect back on other significant events during field research and note “unspoken” race talk. The importance of the category is perhaps best demonstrated in the absence of it in the data. Furthermore, the category is significant because of the importance of hip-hop and R&B music across all participants.

The third category “popular music and learning” was constructed from solicited responses to the following interview questions
- Do you find this use of music/song/group in school helpful/useful?
- Does this music/song/group connect to learning for you?
- Can you imagine your teacher using this music/song/group in the classroom?

All three questions are tied to my research questions. In addition, the girls also offered unsolicited information regarding their opinions about the use of music in their school.
Other categories surfaced in the analysis, but were not included because they did not seem to be representative of the girls' musical experiences. For example, Tracey, Shaquilla, and Heather talked briefly about listening, singing, and dancing to music while cleaning with their mothers. I had considered constructing a category concerning performing gendered roles, popular music, and bonding with mom, but decided that the data did not support a major category. Instead, I used this instance as descriptive data in terms of general media use. Under the major category, performing gendered roles, Tracey, Emily, April, and Jordan talked briefly about good girls as good students. Girls were talked about in terms of being “Miss Education” or “all that” because they thought they were perfect or studied too much or not enough. However, this was not discussed by other girls and did not seem to be pervasive in their everyday interactions, at least, as this was represented in the data collected. I decided to include Tracey’s talk about the “all that” girl as it was tied to constructing “bad girls” as girls who not only wore “skanky” clothes, but who also didn’t value their education. In addition, Tracey talked at length about her fears of “middle school” and being a “teenager,” again this was not represented in other interviews.

Finally, in my discussions of how they come to know and how they put their interpretations into action, I am not trying to establish a cause and effect relationship. My interpretations here are wedded to the data and the methods used to understand their popular music experiences. Beyond this, I have no way of knowing other factors that impact their meaning construction process.

12 I hesitated to mention this encounter with girls because it took place one year after my official data collection, but I thought it was important. During one of my visits, Erin wore a shirt (a tight fitting tube top) to school that revealed her navel, she had another looser shirt over this one. I was in the classroom talking to Erin, and Emily and Shaquilla came over and Emily said while moving Erin’s over shirt to the side, “hey, Pam don’t you think this is inappropriate for school.” Erin replied, “well, Mrs. Miller saw me with it on and didn’t say anything.” Shaquilla responded “I bet she didn’t see it or she would have said something.” I said, “hey, you know I was writing about this, one year ago, you all said you should be able to wear what you want to wear, what’s up”? Shaquilla replied with “well, it’s the rules and Erin knows better.” Emily nodded her head. And, Erin said “I don’t care.” Since official data collection, I visited the Central girls during lunch and recess and witnessed a significant shift in Erin’s behavior and self-presentation—at the end of data collection, she had only begun to show an interest in boys and to talk about wearing makeup and fashion. She now wears nail polish, is what the Central girls would call “boy crazy,” and seems to be searching for ways to rebel. In addition, she exhibited on many occasions a desire to be “like Tiffany.” I think given the girls’ interpretations of the “bad girl,” Erin would now be constructed in this way. And, I think that Emily and Shaquilla’s response to her “skanky” clothes is a reflection of both their adherence to the official school rules and their responses to Erin’s transformation over the past year.

13 In reference to my comment earlier about which music is played at Central Alternative, Lou Bega’s Mambo #5 is an example of a song with no cussing, but lots of other talk that might be considered inappropriate for children to listen to. The fact that this song along
with others that have sexual explicit lyrics are played during lunch may indicate that the teachers and administration are not as concerned about sexually explicit lyrical influences and/or they are not as concerned about children’s sexuality at this age. Or perhaps it is the case that they, like the women in my narrative above, don’t think that students will understand what is being talked about in the song.
REFERENCES


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Date: 4/14/00

Time: 1100-200

Topic: Whitney Houston, Destiny’s Child at lunch

1100am Julia is wearing her “Sailor Moon” shirt again today. I ask her if she watches the show and she says yes. She hurries on to work on her biography project. I NEED TO ASK HER MORE ABOUT THIS. I spent some time talking with Teresa, and Tracey about Teresa and Vanecia’s Whitney Houston project. I asked Teresa if she got more information about what others are saying about Whitney Houston and her use of drugs. And, she said no, but “thanks, to Mrs. Miller (the principal) she gave me information about Whitney Houston and drug abuse.” I ask her if she thinks this is true—that Whitney Houston uses drugs. And, she says “yes.” I ask her what she thinks about it. She says that she thinks that “someone once offered her (Whitney Houston) a beer and that she liked it... and she has to pull her life together.” Tracey, who is sitting behind us at a round table under the loft, leans over the back of the sofa and says in response, “I didn’t know Whitney Houston did that stuff...my mom told me about it the other day.”

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN IN TERMS OF WHO DEFINES “TRUTH” AND WHAT
ARE THE IMPLICATIONS IN TERMS OF COMMUNICATING PARTICULAR (NEGATIVE?) INTERPRETATIONS OF POPULAR CULTURE/MUSIC?

12:30 LUNCH

Pete, without solicitation from the students, put on the song *Bills, Bills, Bills* by Destiny’s Child. Shaquilla says to me “hey, Pam this is the music that we like to listen to.” Desiree’s room is really getting into the song. All of the girls are looking at each singing full voiced to the music (as if they are performing for each other) and dancing in their seats. Some of the boys are singing to the song. I am sitting with Room 2 and the girls around me (Teresa, Vanecia, Tracey, April, Emily, and Nathasia) are singing to the music. With the students dancing and singing in their seats, the whole lunchroom seems to be participating. The energy is contagious and I can’t help but be affected by the performances. Both Pete and Isabella are singing to the music as they circulate around the lunchroom—still monitoring. Erin leans over toward me and tells me rolling her eyes a bit, that “Pete plays that song because he really likes it.” I ask her what she thinks about him playing the music and she says “well, I like it.” INTERESTING THAT SHE CAN SEEMS TO FEEL BOTH HAPPY THAT HE PLAYS THEIR MUSIC AND A BIT FRUSTRATED THAT HE IS PARTICIPATING.

Maria is watching Desiree’s room at their table and says “Tiffany never used to do stuff like that at the beginning of the year.” I ask her what she means. She says that Tiffany didn’t sing or dance to the music during lunch and now she does. She says that she thinks that she didn’t because her mom is deaf and maybe she didn’t listen to this music and “now she is dancing and stuff… I think the girls in her room didn’t know her
at first.” Maria also points at the boys who are singing and moving to the music and says “they say they don’t like it, but look at them.” Erin agrees. I ask her why she thinks they say those things and she says “they will be embarrassed if they say they like it.” I ask her why and she says “I don’t know.” WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? IT SEEMS THAT THE GIRLS ARE CALLING THE BOYS ON THEIR CONTRADICTORY RESPONSES TO THEIR MUSIC. ALSO, I WONDER WHY MARIA WANTED ME TO KNOW THIS ABOUT TIFFANY? WHAT DO THESE TWO INTERACTIONS SAY ABOUT WHO CAN USE THEIR MUSIC?

Julia tells me that she heard “that song Waterfalls” the other day. During a class party last year, I brought Keillor to school and they were playing music and I told them that he liked TLC (the R&B/hip-hop group who sings “waterfalls”). I ask her if she listens to TLC. She says “not really.” I ask her if the teachers play it in the lunchroom. And, she says “no….other TLC songs are nasty and about bad things like kissing.” The lunch bell rings and amazingly and all at once, the music is turned off and the students quiet down, some raising their two fingers—the signal that everyone should be quiet. Pete and Isabella dismiss those students who are sitting quietly, fingers raised, and food gathered.

After lunch I talked to Isabella and Pete about how they select music to play during lunch. Isabella says “they bring in and if its appropriate we will play it or if we have something we will play it. It used to be quite wild, but we had to calm it down, because it was not as much fun. So, we did silent lunch for punishment and kids came up and said that they had good music for quiet time.” She laughs and explains that what
they thought was punishment, the kids didn’t mind and actually suggested that they use quiet music during this time. I ask her what she would consider “inappropriate” and she explained that this included “violent lyrics or songs with swearing in them.” THE GIRLS TALK ABOUT CUSSING AS BEING FORBIDDEN AND IT SEEMS THAT THIS EXTENDS TO WHICH MUSIC GENRES THEY CAN LISTEN TO AT LUNCH.

MUSIC RESTRICTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS?

1:10PM READ ALOUD

Before read aloud, Nathasia reads an apology that she wrote for the class. Apparently, she cut Tracey’s hair as a joke yesterday. Jason asks “what was her mistake?” He wasn’t in class that day. Mary says “Nathasia, do you want to tell?” Nathasia puts her head down and says “no.” Mary says “well, I think that he should know” and continues to tell him in front of the class. Last year, when I first starting observing in this classroom, I was surprised by Nathasia’s behavior. She often ignored Mary’s requests and rarely seemed to be paying attention or doing what she was supposed to be doing. When she was punished she showed no emotion and really didn’t seem to care. At that time, I struggled with my interpretation of her behavior—she wasn’t behaving “like a girl this age.” I was uncomfortable with my positioning of her. I later learned through my own experiences that Nathasia will lie to get attention—her grandmother being murdered and later her grandmother dying again. As much as Nathasia can be disruptive and exaggerate… she does push the limits of what is expected of girls. She is the only girl that I have observed so far talking about kissing boys and exhibiting sexual behaviors. Last year during math, she was acting out a sexually explicit scene from “Austin Powers”
She also showed me her diary where she wrote that she “French kissed” with her boyfriend. At this time, as she faces the class and is being forced to tell her “bad girl” story again, I feel uncomfortable and not sure if I agree that she should tell her story again. She hesitantly tells what she did to Tracey—UGH! Tracey seems okay with what happened the day before and doesn’t seem to be particularly upset with Nathasia. During read aloud, Tracey is dancing in her seat and singing some song—I can’t hear her. She does this often. I often observe her dancing and singing—in the hallways, during class time, in the lunchroom, and at recess. Mary is now reading aloud to the kids and the word phonograph comes up. She stops and says “I bet you don’t know what a record player is.” The kids yell “yes, we do.” And, someone says “you put records in them and they are black and bigger than CDs.”

Winnie the Pooh seems to be popular with some of the girls. Tigger and Pooh are written on the schedule of the day, Shaquilla has a pooh notebook, Erin. is wearing a pooh shirt, and Ginny shows me her pooh socks. I don’t have an opportunity right now to ask them what’s going on. NEED TO ASK ABOUT WINNIE-THE-POOH.

During Independent reading, Tracey and Vanecia are sitting with their arms around each other reading “Shaq and The Beanstalk” to each other. Emily is reading a book “Kids, say don’t smoke.” and Erin. is reading a Roald Dahl book. Girls in the coatroom (Teresa, Nathasia, and Maria.) are playing a game made by Nathasia based on the book “Holes.” I go into the coatroom and sit with them while they play the board
game. Nathasia says proudly that she illustrated and made the game. After finishing the book, Holes, as a class, each student was asked to do a project based on the book. They sit playing the game until independent reading is done.
APPENDIX B

SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Materials: video camera
tape recorder
colored construction paper
scissors
envelopes for cut-outs
Student’s selected music
CD player, computer
paper for notes
copy of interview
post-its for notes on texts

INTRODUCTION:
We’re going to be working together with a music/song/group that you have chosen because you consider it to be your favorite or just one that you really like. I’d like you to try hard to tell me about what you’re thinking and feeling and wondering while you listen today. Whatever you say or do will not be graded and whatever you say or think is okay and will be confidential. You are the only one who can say what it is like for you when you are reading. I’ll be asking you questions, but you can interrupt, decide not to answer, and say whatever you need to say. You can also stop the interview at any time.

We will be listening to this music/song/group together, but you will be telling me about the music/song/group. And, you will cut out some shapes and move them to show characters and other things related to the music/song/group. It will take about two hours total, but we will be doing this in two one-hour sessions on different days. If you want to break, if you get tired or thirsty or something, just let me know, I don’t mind.

So you’re going to be helping me learn more about how you listen to this music/song/group. Do you want to participate in this interview? Any questions? The interview will be broken down into two parts. In Part I we will be talking about the music you brought in today and what happens when you listen to it. In Part II, we will be actually listening to the music/song/group together and discussing your responses.
PART I:
About this text: (listen together and discussion)

Could you describe this music/song/group to me?
Why did you choose this music/song/group to bring in today?
   What is it about it that you like?
   Is there anything that you dislike?
Would you change anything about this?
Do you find this music/song/group helpful/useful in any way?
Do you think that other girls your age would like this?
Is this music/song/group like any others?
Is this music/song/group connected to other things that you know or own?
   If yes, can you bring this in for our next interview?
Do you ever try to find out more about this music/song/group?
Do you see this music/song/group being used in school? If yes, how?
Do you find this use of music/song/group in school helpful/useful?
Does this music/song/group connect to learning for you?
Can you imagine your teacher using this music/song/group in the classroom?

About the act of reading: (discussion)

When do you usually listen to this music/song/group?
Is there any time that you wouldn’t listen to this music/song/group?
Where do you usually listen to this music/song/group?
Is there anyplace that you wouldn’t listen to this music/song/group?
Do you listen alone? or with others? who?
Is there anyone you wouldn’t listen with?
At school, who do you share this music/song/group with?
Is there anyone you would really like to share this music/song/group with?
Can you tell me how you listen to this music/song/group?
Is listening this music/song/group similar to listening any other music/song/group?
How often do you listen to this music/song/group?

(While the participant is telling me this information, I will be making a list of her explanations for use in making symbols later)

“About this text” and “the act of listening” (symbol making)

Now, we will make pictures that stand for what you have told me so far.
Let’s look at some of the things you told me about this music/song/group and how you listen to it. (I will show list of responses to #1 & 2 above).
Okay, now using construction paper and markers can you make a picture or symbol of what this word means to you? Why this choice of shape and color?

**Self as audience/reader/listener (symbol making)**

Now, make a symbol of who you are when you listen this music/song/group. Why this choice of shape and color?

**Authority figure symbols (symbol making)**

Can you make symbols for me of people who you think make rules for you? Why this choice of shape and color?

**Interaction of self, text, and act of reading (symbol moving)**

Can you think about when you listen to this music/song/group last or tell me about your most memorable time?
Using the symbols you created can you talk through what was happening?

What were you thinking about? What were you feeling?
How is this connected to your life?
Where are you (using symbol) now?
Are authority figures present? Is anyone else present?

**Probes (as needed and appropriate)**

Tell me more about that.
What is happening now?
How is this connected to your life?

**Meta-awareness of the interview process: (discussion)**

What is it like for you to do this so far?
To talk about your experiences?
Any worries?
Wondering about anything—you want to ask me?
What will you tell others about this interview?

**PART II: SECOND HOUR—DIFFERENT DAY**

**Immediate Introspective Recall (listening and discussion)**

(At this next stage of the interview, girls will be asked to both talk with me about their immediate reading experiences and make symbols that represent these experiences particularly in relationship to characters, themselves as readers, and the “author.”)
Can you show me your most favorite or memorable part of the music/song/group?
We will listen together and then, I will be asking you some questions about what you are thinking and feeling as you listen.
As you were listening to this music/song/group, what were you thinking and feeling? Can you tell me more?
Did you have any questions? worries? thoughts?

(While the participant is telling me this information, I will be making a list for use in making symbols later)

**Character Representations (symbol making and discussion)**

When you are listening or thinking about this music/song/group, what characters and/or images come to mind? Let’s list those.
Why these characters?
Now, can you make a symbol that represents what you think these characters are about or look like?
Why this choice of shape and color?

**Interaction of self and characters (symbol moving and listen together)**

I want to go back to the symbol of you as someone who listens this music/song/group.
Now, I would like you to continue to listen to the music/song/group, and as you do, move the characters shapes to show what they seem to be like in your mind.
Also move this shape (you, the reader) to show what it seems to be like for you when you are listening.
Could you explain this back to me?

Are there any authority figures present?
Can you show me what they seem to be like in your mind?
Also move the shape of you as the reader and show me what it seems like to be you?

**Probes (as needed and appropriate)**

Tell me more about that.
What is happening now?
How is this connected to your life?
Reader’s privileges: (discussion)

If you could say something to the characters what would it be?
Do the characters/images seem familiar to you? Like people you know?
Do they seem different? How so?

Authority Figure privileges: (discussion)

What do you think the authority figures thinks about the music/song/group?
What do you think the authority figure thinks about you listening to this music/song/group?
What do you think the authority figure would say to the characters?
Do you think about this when you are listening?

Author representation (symbol making)

You said earlier that music/song/group was ___________.
Do you ever think about whom created this music/song/group?
Who do you think these people are?
What do you think this person does?
How do you think this person makes decisions about what to put in the music/song/group? How do you come to know about this?

Now choose a color and cut out a shape to show (the author). Why this choice of shape and color?

Interaction of self and “author” (symbol moving and listening together)

As you listen think about who (the author) may be?
Move the characters and reader shapes and think about (the author).
How do you think (the author) see the characters?
What do you think they know about the reader?
What does (the author) hope you will feel?

Meta-awareness of the interview process: (discussion)

What is it like for you to do this so far?
To talk about your experiences?
Any worries?
Wondering about anything—you want to ask me?
What will you tell others about this interview?
**Probes** (as needed and appropriate)

Tell me more about that.
What is happening now?
How is this connected to your life?

**Author’s privileges: (discussion)**

Could you tell me what special powers (the author) seems to have?
Could you show me with the shapes?
Where do you move when the author comes in?

**Reader’s privileges: (discussion)**

If you could ask (the author) anything what would it be?
Do you think (the author) is correct in terms of what they think about the reader, listened, viewer?
What changes would you ask (the author) to make?
What would you say you like and should stay the same?

**Authority figure privileges: (discussion)**

What do you think the authority figure thinks about (the author)?
What do you think the authority figure would say to (the author)?

**Meta-awareness of the interview process: (discussion)**

What is it like for you to do this so far?
To talk about your experiences?
Any worries?
Wondering about anything—you want to ask me?
What will you tell others about this interview?

**Final listening: (symbol moving and listening together)**

Okay, lets just listen a bit more.
I just want to let you talk about all of this... the characters, the author, the authority figures and you, the reader.
I won’t be asking you anything in particular.
Go ahead and move things, too.

**Final probes: (discussion)**

Is there anything you would like to add to what you have told me?
Any changes you would like to make?
APPENDIX C

PEER GROUP SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Materials: video camera
tape recorder
colored construction paper
scissors
envelopes for cut-outs
Student’s selected music
CD player, computer
paper for notes
copy of interview
post-its for notes on texts

INTRODUCTION:
We’re going to be working together with a music/song/group that the three of you have chosen because you consider it to be your favorite or just one that you really like—but, definitely one that is connected to your friendship. Like the individual interviews that you all have participated in, I’d like you to try hard to tell me about what you’re thinking and feeling and wondering while you listen today. Whatever you say or do will not be graded and whatever you say or think is okay and will be confidential. You are the only ones who can say what it is like for you when you are reading. I’ll be asking you questions, but you can interrupt, decide not to answer, and say whatever you need to say. You can also stop the interview at any time.

We will be listening to this music/song/group together, but you will be telling me about the music/song/group. And, you will cut out some shapes and move them to show characters and other things related to the music/song/group. Unlike the other interview, we only have one hour to complete this one—so it won’t be as long as the individual interview, and we won’t cover as much stuff as before.

So you’re going to be helping me learn more about how you listen to this music/song/group. Do you want to participate in this interview? Any questions?
PART I:
About this text: (listen together and discussion)

Could you describe this music/song/group to me?
Why did you choose this music/song/group to bring in today?
   What is it about it that you like?
   Is there anything that you dislike?
Do you find this music/song/group helpful/useful in any way?
Do you think that other girls your age would like this?
Do you see this music/song/group being used in school? If yes, how?
Do you find this use of music/song/group in school helpful/useful?
Does this music/song/group connect to learning for you?
Can you imagine your teacher using this music/song/group in the classroom?

(As the girls are responding, I will make sure that each participant is represented)

About the act of reading: (discussion)

   When do you usually listen to this music/song/group?
   Where do you usually listen to this music/song/group?
   Do you listen alone? or with others? who?

(While the participants are telling me this information, I will be making a list of their explanations for use in making symbols later)

“About this text” and “the act of listening” (symbol making)

Now, we will make pictures that stand for what you have told me so far.
Let’s look at some of the things you told me about this music/song/group and how you listen to it. (I will show list of responses to #1 & 2 above).
Okay, now using construction paper and markers can you make a picture or symbol of what this word means to you? Why this choice of shape and color?

Self as audience/reader/listener (symbol making)

Now, make a symbol of who you are when you listen this music/song/group. Why this choice of shape and color?

Constructing each other (symbol-making)

Now, make a symbol of how you see each other when you listen to this music/song/group. Why this choice of shape and color?
Authority figure symbols (symbol making)

Can you make symbols for me of people who you think make rules for you? Why this choice of shape and color?

Interaction of self, text, and act of reading (symbol moving)

Can you think about when you all listened to this music/song/group last or tell me about your most memorable time when you listened together? Using the symbols you created can you talk through what was happening?

What were you thinking about? what were you feeling?
How is this connected to your life?
Where are you (using symbol) now? Where do you see each other?
Are authority figures present? Is anyone else present?

Probes (as needed and appropriate)

Tell me more about that.
What is happening now?
How is this connected to your life?

Meta-awareness of the interview process: (discussion)

What is it like for you to do this so far?
To talk about your experiences?
Any worries?
Wondering about anything—you want to ask me?
What will you tell others about this interview?

PART II:
Immediate Introspective Recall (listening and discussion)
(At this next stage of the interview, the girls will be asked to both talk with me about their immediate reading experiences and make symbols that represent these experiences particularly in relationship to characters, themselves as readers, and the "author.")

We will listen together and then, I will be asking you some questions about what you are thinking and feeling as you listen.
As you were listening to this music/song/group. what were you thinking and feeling? Can you tell me more?
(While the participants are telling me this information, I will be making a list for use in making symbols later)
Character Representations (symbol making and discussion)

When you are listening or thinking about this music/song/group, what characters and/or images come to mind? Let’s list those.
Why these characters?
Now, can you make a symbol that represents what you think these characters are about or look like?
Why this choice of shape and color?

Interaction of self and characters (symbol moving and listen together)

I want to go back to the symbol of you as someone who listens this music/song/group.
Now, I would like you to continue to listen to the music/song/group, and as you do, move the characters shapes to show what they seem to be like in your mind.
Also move this shape (you, the reader) to show what it seems to be like for you when you are listening.
Could you explain this back to me?

Are there any authority figures present?
Can you show me what they seem to be like in your mind?
Also move the shape of you as the reader and show me what it seems like to be you?

Probes (as needed and appropriate)

Tell me more about that.
What is happening now?
How is this connected to your life?

Final listening: (symbol moving and listening together)

Okay, lets just listen a bit more.
I just want to let you talk about all of this… the characters, the author, the authority figures and you, the reader.
I won’t be asking you anything in particular.
Go ahead and move things, too. Let’s start with one person than move around the circle.

Final probes: (discussion)

Is there anything you would like to add to what you have told me?
APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE

In this questionnaire you will be asked some questions about you, your family, and your activities in and out of school. Please fill out all of the questions. If you need help filling out some of the questions, feel free to ask for help. PLEASE USE YOUR BEST HANDWRITING SO I CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU HAVE WRITTEN.

Name: ________________________________
Pretend Name: __________________________

Address: ______________________________
Phone Number: __________________________
Pretend Name: _____________________

1. What is your age? ________

2. What is your race? Please check as many as you need to.
   _____ African-American       _____ White/Caucasian
   _____ American Indian        _____ Asian or Pacific Islander
   _____ Other (please describe) ____________________________

3. What kind of job does your mother/guardian have and where does she/he work?
   Job: ______________________  Where does she/he work: ______________________

4. What kind of job does your father/guardian have and where does she/he work?
   Job: ______________________  Where does she/he work: ______________________

5. What is your mother/guardian's schooling?
   _____ less than high school   _____ finished high school
   _____ some college            _____ associate degree
   _____ bachelor degree         _____ graduate degree
   _____ technical degree        _____ other

6. What is your father/guardian's schooling?
   _____ less than high school   _____ finished high school
   _____ some college            _____ associate degree
   _____ bachelor degree         _____ graduate degree
   _____ technical degree        _____ other

7. How many brothers and/or sisters do you have? If none, skip to question 9.
   how many brothers_____        how many sisters_____ 

8. What are their ages?
   brothers ______________________
   sisters ______________________

9. How do you get your spending money?
   _____ allowance
   _____ job
   _____ other

10. How much money do you have to spend in one week?
    _____ no money
    _____ $1.00-$10.00
    _____ $11.00-$20.00
    _____ $21.00-$30.00
    _____ $31.00-$40.00
    _____ $41.00 and higher
11. During the week (Monday morning to Friday after school), how many hours of television do you watch each day?
- ____ I don't watch TV
- ____ less than 1 hour
- ____ 1-4 hours
- ____ 5-8 hours
- ____ 9-12 hours
- ____ 13-16 hours
- ____ 17-20 hours
- ____ 21 or more

12. During the weekend (Friday night to Sunday night), how many hours of television do you watch each day?
- ____ I don't watch TV
- ____ less than 1 hour
- ____ 1-4 hours
- ____ 5-8 hours
- ____ 9-12 hours
- ____ 13-16 hours
- ____ 17-20 hours
- ____ 21 or more

13. Do you read magazines? ____ YES  ____ NO
14. If you do read magazines, which ones do you read? Please list below and circle how often you read the magazine.
Name of magazine _______________  How often? everyday  sometimes  hardly ever
Name of magazine _______________  How often? everyday  sometimes  hardly ever
Name of magazine _______________  How often? everyday  sometimes  hardly ever
Name of magazine _______________  How often? everyday  sometimes  hardly ever
Name of magazine _______________  How often? everyday  sometimes  hardly ever

15. Do you go to the movies? ____ YES  ____ NO
16. If you do go to the movies, list the last 5 movies you went to.
Name of Movie ___________________
Name of Movie ___________________
Name of Movie ___________________
Name of Movie ___________________
Name of Movie ___________________

17. Do you have a computer at home? ____ YES  ____ NO
18. If you have a computer at home how many hours during the week (Monday morning to Friday Afterschool) do you use it each day?
   ___ I don't use the computer
   ___ less than 1 hour
   ___ 1-4 hours
   ___ 5-8 hours
   ___ 9-12 hours
   ___ 13-16 hours
   ___ 18-20 hours
   ___ 21 or more

19. If you have a computer at home how many hours during the week (Monday morning to Friday Afterschool) do you use it each day?
   ___ I don't use the computer
   ___ less than 1 hour
   ___ 1-4 hours
   ___ 5-8 hours
   ___ 9-12 hours
   ___ 13-16 hours
   ___ 18-20 hours
   ___ 21 or more

20. If you use the computer at home what do you do with it? (Check as many as you need to)
   ___ go to websites  ___ e-mail  ___ buy things  ___ go to chat rooms
   ___ do homework  ___ type letters  ___ play games
   ___ other stuff (please tell me about it) ________________________

21. How often during the week (Monday morning to Friday afterschool) do you listen to music each day?
   ___ I don't listen to music
   ___ less than 1 hour
   ___ 1-4 hours
   ___ 5-8 hours
   ___ 9-12 hours
   ___ 13-16 hours
   ___ 18-20 hours
   ___ 21 or more
21. How often during the weekend (Friday night to Sunday night) do you listen to music each day?
   ____ I don’t listen to music
   ____ less than 1 hour
   ____ 1-4 hours
   ____ 5-8 hours
   ____ 9-12 hours
   ____ 13-16 hours
   ____ 18-20 hours
   ____ 21 or more

22. What music do you listen to the most? (list 5 or less)

23. What music, if any, are you unable to listen to, but would like to? (list 5 or less)
    ______________ Why are you unable to listen to it? ______________
    ______________ Why are you unable to listen to it? ______________
    ______________ Why are you unable to listen to it? ______________
    ______________ Why are you unable to listen to it? ______________
    ______________ Why are you unable to listen to it? ______________
APPENDIX E

MEDIA JOURNAL ENTRY FORM

DATE (MONTH & DATE) ______________ WHAT DAY IS IT? (CIRCLE ONE):
Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

WHAT TIME DID YOU START? _______ WHAT IS IT? (CIRCLE ONE) MORNING?
AFTERNOON? NIGHT?

WHAT TIME DID YOU GET DONE? _______ WHEN IS IT? (CIRCLE ONE)
MORNING? AFTERNOON? NIGHT?

WAS IT? (CIRCLE AS MANY AS YOU NEED TO FOR THIS SESSION)
TELEVISION  NEWSPAPER  RADIO  MAGAZINE  MOVIE  @THEATRE  INTERNET
CD/ CASSETTE PLAYER

WHAT WAS IT YOU WATCHED OR LISTENED TO OR READ? PLEASE NAME IT HERE ______________________________________________________

PLEASE DESCRIBE IT/TELL ME ABOUT IT:


WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO WATCH OR LISTEN TO OR READ THIS?


HAVE YOU WATCHED OR LISTENED TO OR READ THIS BEFORE? YES  NO

WHERE DID YOU WATCH OR LISTEN TO OR READ THIS?

WAS ANYONE WITH YOU? YES  NO
WHO WAS THERE AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING? (CIRCLE AS MANY PEOPLE AS NEEDED AND TELL ME WHAT THEY WERE DOING)

MOTHER______________________________________ FATHER____________________________________
SISTER_______________________________________ BROTHER_____________________________ FRIEND____________________________

SOMEONE ELSE (WHO IS IT AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING)

SOMEONE ELSE (WHO IS IT AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING)
SOMEONE ELSE (WHO IS IT AND WHAT WERE THEY DOING)

WERE YOU DOING ANYTHING ELSE AT THIS TIME? YES NO IF YES, WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

DO YOU WANT TO TELL ME ANYTHING ELSE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WATCHING OR READING OR LISTENING?
APPENDIX F

INITIAL NODE LIST

QSR N5 Full version, revision 5.0.
Licensee: Pamela Tracy.
REPORT ON NODES FROM Tree Nodes '----'
Depth: ALL
Restriction on coding data: NONE

(A) //Document Annotations
(F) //Free Nodes
(F 144) //Free Nodes/"badness", constructing--bad things
(F 59) //Free Nodes/"badness", constructing--cussing
(F 2) //Free Nodes/age--thoughts about being older/the future
(F 132) //Free Nodes/appropriation--boys appropriating girls' music
(F 3) //Free Nodes/authenticity--being yourself
(F 93) //Free Nodes/authenticity--saying what you feel
(F 80) //Free Nodes/authenticity--singers' everyday lives
(F 95) //Free Nodes/authority figure life lessons
(F 160) //Free Nodes/authority figure pop culture restrictions
(F 128) //Free Nodes/authority figures and race
(F 57) //Free Nodes/authority figures' interpretations
(F 56) //Free Nodes/authority members' influence
(F 14) //Free Nodes/authority music tastes
(F 150) //Free Nodes/authority--girls on dress rules
(F 74) //Free Nodes/authority--how rules are made
(F 30) //Free Nodes/authority--media restrictions--history--defining
(F 28) //Free Nodes/authority--music restrictions
(F 140) //Free Nodes/authority--popular culture use in school
(F 7) //Free Nodes/boys' music tastes
(F 39) //Free Nodes/constructing fictional events
(F 100) //Free Nodes/difference----types of girls
(F 113) //Free Nodes/difference--against the popular choice
(F 89) //Free Nodes/difference--boy vs. girl
(F 81) //Free Nodes/difference--equality
(F 157) //Free Nodes/difference--gender differences
//Free Nodes/difference—importance of differences among music
(F 114)
(F 32)  //Free Nodes/difference—judging others
(F 78)  //Free Nodes/difference—similarity among music groups
(F 70)  //Free Nodes/difference—unspoken race
(F 16)  //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge
(F 142) //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge--kids knowledge about media
(F 20)  //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge--meaning/lyrics
(F 33)  //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge--personal knowledge about band,
(F 60)  //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge: age--being a pre-teen
(F 12)  //Free Nodes/fake
(F 116) //Free Nodes/fashion--fashion and music
(F 143) //Free Nodes/fashion--girls' "dress" and pop culture
(F 13)  //Free Nodes/friends
(F 149) //Free Nodes/gender theorizing--girls' popular culture
(F 91)  //Free Nodes/gender--girl power
(F 44)  //Free Nodes/gender--girl-centered
(F 135) //Free Nodes/gender--knowing gender/sex--may keep
(F 105) //Free Nodes/gender--theorizing
(F 54)  //Free Nodes/girl--beauty standards
(F 101) //Free Nodes/girl--being "all that"
(F 42)  //Free Nodes/girl--being a nice girl
(F 92)  //Free Nodes/girl--being strong
(F 119) //Free Nodes/girl--boy crazy
(F 158) //Free Nodes/girl--girls use of popular culture products
(F 18)  //Free Nodes/intertextuality--music videos
(F 25)  //Free Nodes/Intertextuality--other media
(F 24)  //Free Nodes/intertextuality--related products
(F 26)  //Free Nodes/learning--gathering information
(F 29)  //Free Nodes/learning--music--learning relationship
(F 71)  //Free Nodes/listening and doing other things
(F 73)  //Free Nodes/listening and space
(F 6)   //Free Nodes/listening and space--creating privacy
(F 111) //Free Nodes/listening--radio listening
(F 97)  //Free Nodes/listening--when listen
(F 75)  //Free Nodes/listening--who with matters
(F 79)  //Free Nodes/lyrics and meanings
(F 130) //Free Nodes/lyrics and meanings--boys/men--descriptions of
(F 63)  //Free Nodes/lyrics validating beliefs
(F 84)  //Free Nodes/making connections to self--comparing
        group/lyrics/video to own life
(F 109) //Free Nodes/making connections to self--taking critiques of bands to
        heart
(F 99)  //Free Nodes/making connections--connecting to boys
(F 45)  //Free Nodes/making connections--connecting to others
(F 41)  //Free Nodes/making connections--how see self/where see self
Free Nodes/making connections--music not connected
Free Nodes/making connections--not connected to life
Free Nodes/making connections--part of the group
Free Nodes/making connections--singers are familiar
Free Nodes/media impact--girls theorizing about
Free Nodes/media/technology use--internet use
Free Nodes/media/technology--internet use and music
Free Nodes/methodology
Free Nodes/methodology--boys attitudes about study
Free Nodes/methodology--consumption
Free Nodes/methodology--girls as reporters
Free Nodes/methodology--girls asking questions
Free Nodes/methodology--girls attitude about study
Free Nodes/methodology--method reflections--mine
Free Nodes/methodology--performing music during interview
Free Nodes/methodology--researcher-participant relationship
Free Nodes/methodology--summary information
Free Nodes/methodology--symbol-making
Free Nodes/music and emotions
Free Nodes/music and the body
Free Nodes/music genres
Free Nodes/music preference--about what I know
Free Nodes/music preference--creating negative impressions
Free Nodes/music preference--gender
Free Nodes/music preference--rhythm and beat
Free Nodes/music preferences--music tastes related to other media use
Free Nodes/music preferences--other girls' music tastes
Free Nodes/music production
Free Nodes/music use--access to music
Free Nodes/music use--how often listen to song/group
Free Nodes/music use--using music to bother others
Free Nodes/music use--using music with authority figures
Free Nodes/music use--using music with other adults
Free Nodes/music use--using music with other girls
Free Nodes/performing identities--acting black
Free Nodes/performing identities--acting black/different race--celebrities
Free Nodes/performing identities--acting white
Free Nodes/performing identities: boys make fun
Free Nodes/performing identities: age--age and other media
Free Nodes/performing identities: age--music preferences
Free Nodes/performing identity: age--age appropriateness
Free Nodes/performing knowledge--knowing how as important
Free Nodes/performing knowledge--knowing words
Free Nodes/performing knowledge--poppin'

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//Free Nodes/performing music
(F 9)

//Free Nodes/performing music and space
(F 76)

//Free Nodes/performing music--changing/transforming music/lyrics
(F 87)

//Free Nodes/performing music--performing singers
(F 129)

//Free Nodes/performing music--singers group/dancing group
(F 40)

//Free Nodes/performing music--teaching others
(F 90)

//Free Nodes/performing music: creating music
(F 11)

//Free Nodes/race
(F 122)

//Free Nodes/race and who can listen/perform
(F 126)

//Free Nodes/race--talking about race
(F 124)

//Free Nodes/relationships--boy/girl relationships--disciplining boys
(F 104)

//Free Nodes/relationships--cooperating
(F 82)

//Free Nodes/relationships--friendship forever
(F 102)

//Free Nodes/relationships--friendship rules
(F 52)

//Free Nodes/relationships--friendship rules and race
(F 127)

//Free Nodes/relationships--friendship troubles
(F 85)

//Free Nodes/relationships--girl-to-girl connecting
(F 88)

//Free Nodes/relationships--influenced by others
(F 51)

//Free Nodes/relationships--maintaining--friendship connections
(F 38)

//Free Nodes/relationships--mother--daughter
(F 68)

//Free Nodes/relationships--music and mending relationships
(F 96)

//Free Nodes/relationships--rules for fitting in
(F 53)

//Free Nodes/school context--attitude toward teachers
(F 37)

//Free Nodes/school context--pop culture displayed in school
(F 156)

//Free Nodes/school context--popular culture legitimacy
(F 31)

//Free Nodes/school context--teachers music attitudes
(F 36)

//Free Nodes/school context-listening to/performing music--dance class
(F 146)

//Free Nodes/school context-listening to/performing music--lunch room
(F 23)

//Free Nodes/school context-listening to/performing music--free time
(F 155)
APPENDIX G

SAMPLE NODE MEMO

QSR N5 Full version, revision 5.0.
REPORT ON NODE (F 16) 'expressing knowledge'
Restriction to document: NONE

(F 16) //Free Nodes/expressing knowledge
*** Description: references to knowledge about song, lyrics, sound, music group, performers, video, related products

*** Memo:

General notes for analysis: the phrase "expressing knowledge" may not completely communicate what I see happening here in terms of girls' knowledge about popular music, when and why they choose to communicate this knowledge. I want to be careful that I am not imposing my own desire to construct girls' as knowers—I don’t want to romanticize.

Girls as Reporters: this is in part connected to methodological discussions of girls acting as reporters to me. Kim and others telling me about what is happening on MTV or in the "music news" about certain groups and group members. In doing so, they serve as co-researchers disrupting the “researchers gaze” by participating in data collection. This is also about communicating knowledge or at least some pride in knowing.

Pride in Knowing???? girls took opportunity to tell me (unsolicited) about what they knew and there seemed to be an enthusiasm about this. As mentioned earlier, during the interview, April shared information with me about N'Sync that was not directly related to the interview question. I am labeling this expressing knowledge because the information she gave me was not a direct response to the question, it seemed like an opportunity for her to tell me about what she knew about N'Sync

April Interview, January 8, 2001, t2/p15, dated 5/3/00
April tells me what she knows about the changes to the N'Sync video in response to what she would to change if anything about N'Sync, their songs, the video, etc. "First, they did it without stopping the music, so he could laugh, and he just fell
and he just smiled. And then they stopped the music for about 20 seconds so he could laugh. So they changed."

**Kim, January 16, 2001, t1/p1-2, dated 5/8/00**

Pam: What is it about the song you like?
Kim: I like the video...it's real like, they're acting like they're puppets hanging on strings and when the girl cuts the string they land on something like, Joey and Chris land on the train and then they run from the girl. And, Justin landed on this little dark place, like a dungeon. And JC and Lance landed in a car and that girl was chasing after them...it's better than the Backstreet Boys video, some of them. It's sort of better than the other videos, not really, but sort of...because it has more...background other stuff...more action and more background...

**Fluid/Fluent Knowledge?? With some of the girls, there seems to be a "off the tip of your tongue" fluency about what they know—this communicated to me the importance of having this knowledge and the importance of the music/group in their everyday lives. At the very least, it communicates amount of time spent or the amount of energy spent engaging with this music.**

**Kim, January 16, 2001, t1/p3, 5/8/00**

P: Is this group, like any other group that you know of?
Kim: Sort of like BackStreet Boys and sort of like LFO. Because...and Fifth Vision...it's a new band that was with Christina Aguilera on...called a 2 hour tour. Fifth Vision sort of copied their moves... (Bye, Bye, Bye) is sorta...like a Backstreet Boy's song "I Want It Thata Way"...its sort of like the song is saying "bye." When making symbols for the band members, Kim tells me about their likes and dislikes and connects them to the symbols she is making. "Joey likes Superman...Chris likes.. Justin likes girls, Lance likes kittens. And JC likes...I don't know what JC likes...(later in the interview)...I think I know what JC likes..JC likes dancing." Kim has lots of information about N'Sync—the names, the video...during my observations this was evident when we played MASH and when she talked with all of us about the group members. How is this fluid/fluent knowledge connected to experiences with this music, this group, this video?
### APPENDIX H

#### SYMBOL ANALYSIS SPREADSHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Cross-Reference</th>
<th>Coding</th>
<th>Coding Notes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>boy/man carrying shopping bags, w/ &quot;toy&quot; on front; green/black striped shirt, wide legged blue pants, smiling, next to pink striped house, light bulb &quot;good ideas&quot; above head</td>
<td>person who made the song</td>
<td>wearing high boots. &quot;I think its probably a boy...with fun clothes and boots..with good ideas, smart..thinking power, more money than me.</td>
<td>intertext fashion</td>
<td>express know--music production</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;April&quot; (red hair, purple crop shirt, black wide legged pants, no shoes, singing), &quot;Emily&quot; (long blond hair, blue crop shirt, blue shorts, dancing), &quot;Maria&quot; (long brown hair, black crop shirt and black shorts, dancing)</td>
<td>making music with friends</td>
<td>She's sticking two feet up in the air...I'm singing and they're dancing. This is me and my friends making up a music video and dancing, and making up a song.</td>
<td>intertext fashion</td>
<td>perform music</td>
<td>tied to how look in peer interview</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>five boys, all different hair colors, hair spiked, mouths open, arms in air</td>
<td>N'Sync singing in the video</td>
<td>&quot;this is the music video...they're dancing</td>
<td>intertext music video</td>
<td>perform music</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blue smiley face</td>
<td>song Bye, Bye, Bye</td>
<td>Well, if I’m sad, it makes me happy</td>
<td>music and emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS SPREADSHEET (PARTIAL)

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<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Race</th>
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<th>Name</th>
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