

PREGNANT BODIES, FERTILE MINDS

**Gender, Race, and the Schooling
of Pregnant Teens**

WENDY LUTTRELL

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Figure 8
This is a picture of me and my boyfriend at his house in his yard. I'm in his yard chilling. I like being over there with him because it's a lot of fun. He makes me feel comfortable. The tree is where we like to be during the day.

Self-Portraits: From Girlhood to Motherhood

Introduction

"Hello Ms. Wendy, what fun are we having today?" Kaela's unbounded energy fills the room.

"You artists are going to make self-portraits," I pause for the laughter this evokes. "You are going to illustrate and write a book about yourselves—it will include everyone's self-portrait and written description. You can draw yourselves or make pictures from the paste paper.¹ We'll make color Xerox copies of everyone's portrait and bind them altogether. Robert will come in and show you how to do the bookbinding and make the covers. You'll each get your own copy of the book," I explained.

"How many pieces of paper do we get?"

"Can I take some home?"

"I want that purple one," Sonya reaches over Tara to grab the paste paper; she runs her fingers over the paper as if it were silk.

"I'm going to make a picture of me in the future, when I'm eighteen. I'll be married, a singer maybe," says Sonya.

"I'm not getting married until I finish school," announces Tara.

"I'll have my high school diploma when I'm eighteen," says Sonya sounding exasperated.

"I'm talking about finishing *college* [emphasizing this word] before I get married," Tara retorts.

"And how you goin' to do that?" Ebony asks while laughing and poking Tara in the ribs. Tara doesn't reply.

Silence hangs in the room.²

"Can we turn on the radio?" asks Kaela. She knows playing music is against school rules.

"Okay, but keep it low," I reluctantly agree.

"This is going to be some book once *we* get through with it" [her emphasis]. Kaela laughs as she starts to sing along with the music.

This chapter is about what we can learn about the girls' self- and identity-making from their self-portraits and texts made into collaborative books, and from the lively, and at times intense, conversations that were sparked by a girl's self-representation. It is difficult to collapse the vitality of these self-portraits into an analytic framework. Because for each self-portrait there is a story. Fifty self-portraits and fifty stories, each one distinct in its making and meaning. A girl might go through several iterations before she discovered what—or settled on how—she wanted to represent herself. These self-portraits also evoked a range of viewer responses from schoolmates, boyfriends, teachers, and family members, some of whom attended the "book signing" parties held at the end of each school year.

The group conversation that surrounded the making of the self-portraits, including my questions, often spurred a girl to see what she had made in a different light. After each girl finished her portrait we would talk about it and I would ask both the "artist" and her "viewers" what they saw (see Appendix 1). Then I would ask a series of questions specifically related to the image; some were "aesthetic" questions about color choices, features of design, and perspective; others were anatomical questions about missing body parts or the varying size of body parts; and others were "autobiographical" questions about the people or places depicted in a picture.³ I always made a point to ask at least one question about a unique detail provided in a portrait. It wasn't long before the girls would anticipate and imitate my questioning style with light-hearted laughter: "You know, Ms. Wendy is about to ask you about your picture, you better be ready."

Knowing that they were producing a collaborative book in which everyone's work would be included meant that the girls often took on the role of "critic" of each other's illustrations or texts. On a few occasions classmates suggested that a girl needed to "work" more on her art form if she wanted it included in the book. But most often the girls asked for help from their classmates: "Who can make me shoes that will look right?" I actively encouraged and listened carefully to this group "critique" process and the debates it generated as a means to understand the girls' struggles over self-representation.

Throughout this chapter I try to feature both the idiosyncratic and the culturally patterned nature of these self-portraits. Several themes related to the self- and identity-making process can be traced throughout the girls'

self-portraits and in their conversations: (1) changing *self- and body images* (about which there is very scant research [Stenberg and Blinn 1993]);⁴ (2) reflecting on their *self-worth and value* (i.e., what they have or don't have in life and what they are looking forward to); (3) managing *conflicting emotions* (in relation to their mothers, their soon-to-be-born babies, and themselves); and (4) expressing a desire to control their surroundings, which for now I will call *agency*.

I have organized my presentation of these self-portraits according to how the girls placed themselves in time and place, and through which we gain insight into their social worlds and their class, race, and gendered meanings of selfhood. At the end of the chapter, I consider how the self-portraits also provide a glimpse of a girl's coming into new awareness about herself and her soon-to-be-born baby, what Joan Raphael-Leff (1995) would call the "inside story" of pregnancy.

Time, Place, and Personhood

Most girls portrayed themselves in the present. Twelve of the fifty PPPT girls portrayed themselves as children, ages four to eight (before the onset of puberty). I was struck by the fact that twice as many girls chose to portray themselves in the past, reflecting on their childhoods, compared to those who projected themselves into the future. Only five of the fifty PPPT girls made themselves "grown women" (in Ebony's words); and three of those girls were Mexican American, which I discuss later in the chapter. In light of public discourses that cast pregnant teenagers as those who lack aspirations or a vision of their future or as "babies having babies," I was curious to probe more deeply the meaning of the girls' depictions of themselves in a past time.

In their re-creations of childhood, each girl described herself in the language of ideal girlhood as "innocent," "cute," and "small." Their reflections were nostalgic and evoked a sense of loss about the past.⁵ Their portraits of girlhood also sparked discussion among the black girls about beauty, fashion, femininity (what it means to be a girl), racial identity, and culture within African American communities.

Shannon's picture of herself as a child is a good illustration. (See Figure 1) When I met Shannon she was fourteen, a "bright student," who, according to Ms. Washington, was "going places before she became pregnant." Shannon attended the PPPT program for a brief time—only the last three months of her pregnancy—after which she returned to her "regular" high school. Shannon's self-portrait was unusual in that her paste paper, cutout

figure took up the entire page. Her picture featured an exaggerated head, with bright *blue* eyes (noticed by her classmates), and a hairstyle (with ribbons) that many of the girls recognized as one they had once worn.⁶ The clothes Shannon made for her figure were reminiscent of a midriff fashion many girls remembered wearing when they were “small” or “skinny.” Behind the figure Shannon pasted bright, multicolored stars. She described her picture in this way:

This picture is me when I was four years old. One day I was standing outside and it was dark and the stars were out. My mom told me to stand still and pose, and so I did it. It was a summer night in 1985. I'm glad that she took that picture of me that young because it lets me know how I look back then. When I look and see that old picture I laugh and say in my mind that I look so cute and small. I remember how crazy the clothes were and how things change over time.

The girls were quick to respond to Shannon's portrait and eager to share their own recollections of being cute and small; to express delight in the hairstyles they used to wear, sometimes lamenting the loss of this girlhood ritual. I was especially struck by Kendra's description:

I remember how my momma would set me on the porch every morning before school combing and braiding my hair, for hours it seemed. I'd say, “Let me go, I'm going to be late for school.” But she would be running her fingers through my head saying how tight and curly and BEAUTIFUL my hair was. She'd put ribbons, bows, beads, barrettes, pulling and yanking at my head and when she got finished I looked so cute—“cuter than those white girls,” she'd tell me.

Turning toward me Kendra said, “No offense, Ms. Wendy, but that's what my momma would say.”⁷

The lesson Kendra learned on her mother's porch is part of a long tradition of racial socialization within the African American community where children “learn more than how to listen and speak. They also learn a way of looking at the world—a way of positioning their experiences in opposition or relation to those of the ‘dominant culture’” (Rooks 1996: 286). Indeed, Kendra (and many other PPPT girls) spoke reverently about the practice of braiding hair, as if she were paying homage to a time when she felt cared for, valued, and made mindful of her beauty in relation to white girls.

The girls' portraits of childhood sparked many conversations about gender and racial socialization within their families and community.

Childhood experiences of hairstyling were associated with feelings of “closeness, comfort and community,” racial pride, and maternal care.⁸ Perhaps in this way, the girls' portraits of childhood are not only about the past, but also about the anticipation of the future world of motherhood, including its rituals of caretaking and racial socialization.

There was a liveliness and immediacy about the PPPT girls' attention to hairstyling—both in everyday life and in their self-portraits. Without a doubt, the most consistent and recurring topic of conversation among the black PPPT girls was about hair. And inasmuch as there was joyfulness, there was also angst associated with having or not having “good” hair.

Triumphant tales of “fixing” their own or another's hair—getting the right texture, curl, or color—were told as often and with as much detail and delight as were the failed efforts. These conversations, whether critical or congratulatory, seemed to serve as a means of girlhood bonding where both creativity and conformity was endorsed.

The girls' focus on hair would not have surprised black feminist author Lisa Jones (1994) who writes about hair and hairstyling in African American communities as an emotional and political battleground. She opens her book with a glimpse into the emotional meaning of hair for one of her interviewees:

When I was a little girl, about thirteen or so, they told me a woman's pride and glory was her hair. Then they told me mine wasn't any good. I guess I went to war to absolve myself of this grief. (11)

To understand current trends in hair fashion and politics, Jones draws links between African American diaspora hairstyling practices and traditional African cultures, arguing that it is “not the naturalness of the braids, it's the idea of construction. Hair in both traditions suggests spectacle and pageantry. It's always handled and adorned; hair is never left ‘as is.’ Hair exists to be *worked*” (297). The PPPT girls' art forms and conversations about hair resonate with both this idea of “construction” and establishing a sense of one's own “style” and “attitude.”

Creating one's own, distinctive style was not always easy. Stories of being teased or teasing another about hairstyle decisions peppered informal conversations. In one case a girl told about an experience where she had been called into the (black) principal's office at her “regular” school for wearing a hairstyle he described as “a distraction to students who are here to learn not to make fashion statements.”⁹

The girls' conversations about hairstyling intermingled several sides of the social world of African American womanhood and motherhood. One is

the side of being valued, cared for, and held within the comfort of community (and perhaps being worried about whether they will be able to do the same for their babies). Another is the side of resentment about being scrutinized, including by members of their own community for “looking too black or not black enough” (a statement attributed to their peers) or for looking in a way that is “unbecoming” (a statement attributed to their elders).

Still another side is the girls’ struggle to create their “own look” amid multiple and competing tastes and expectations, sometimes expressed as resistance to dominant white standards of beauty and sometimes as assent. This was a salient theme in the girls’ self-portraits as well as their media collages (see chapter 4).

The Hardness of Life

The girls’ portraits of childhood also speak to a sense of disillusionment about their impending womanhood. Clarise’s self-portrait is a case in point (see Figure 2). Clarise was fifteen when I met her. She was admired by her classmates for her quick wit and honesty. She had the best “fashion sense” according to Star, her friend in the PPPT Program. Clarise often spoke about arguments she and her mother were having, and how she regretted not having “listened better to her warnings about boys and how they only want one thing.” Clarise described herself as “independent” and “a good friend to have” but “not a good student” because she hates following rules.

Clarise first assembled a frame of colorful (reds, purples, blues) and textured pieces of paste paper around the edge of her paper. In the center she pasted a black piece of construction paper onto which she pasted pieces of a torso—a blue neck, green shirt, brown arms and hands, purple pants, and green shoes “to match the shirt,” she explained. Above the neck floated bright red lips, a blue nose, and green eyes; the traditional border outlining a face was missing (an example of disconnected body parts that was found in many of the portraits). Instead, what bordered the facial features was an elaborate hairstyle. Clarise took days to carefully cut, place, paste, and bend layers of colorful strips of paste paper, which she braided, into place. When she was finished and I held it up for the class to observe, the girls exploded with applause and shouts of joy—“I love those lips, I want those big lips.” “That hairstyle is CRAZY!” Clarise seemed to appreciate the attention her picture was drawing, as she broke into a smile and threw back her head with laughter. To the next session Clarise brought two pieces of writing to share with the class. The first was about her portrait:

My picture is of me in a thought. A thought of a colorful, magic, genie-like person, me. I’m in my own little world. Life is unreal, crimeless, and bright in this dream world. I’m alone but not lonely. Peaceful. Happy as a child on her birthday. If somebody touched me and made me come alive, I would probably be a cartoon figure dancing the robot.

The second is a poem she had written and wanted to read aloud:

Life

My life is moving so fast
when I get older I doubt if I have much to tell
bout the past.
First it was pubic hairs
then it was breasts
then it was a period
and then it was sex.
Now it’s pregnancy
Motherhood will be here soon.
I wonder what’s next
Growing up is hard
especially when you’re a girl.
Life is so misunderstood
it’s just one big swirl.

Clarise’s picture and writings hold multiple truths and express mixed feelings about growing up hard and fast.¹⁰ Her picture is colorful and imaginative; she made it with great ease and zest. Her two writings were read soberly and expressed divided emotions about the costs of growing up as a girl. One text speaks in terms of magic, wishes, and a crimeless, dream world (in which somebody touches her and makes her come alive). Her other text speaks directly about her changing body and life world, things are happening to her and her body—pubic hair, breasts, a period, sex, pregnancy, motherhood—and “life is hard, especially when you are a girl.” She expresses different responses to these changes, from escapism—“I’m in my own little world”; to solitude—“I’m alone but not lonely”; to fantasy—“I would probably be a cartoon figure dancing the robot”; to reflection, “[when] I get older I doubt if I have much to tell about the past.”

Clarise’s writings express a sense of loss of power that is made explicit by many female characters in coming-of-age stories.¹¹ As so many feminist

literary critics have noted, initiation into the sexual and political realities of womanhood comes in many forms depending on one's class, racial, religious, and regional background. Clarise's stark presentation of the realities of womanhood that she has come to understand, remind me of Paulette Childress White's (1984) autobiographical coming-of-age story, "Getting the Facts of Life." The main character, Minerva, describes her initiation into black womanhood in a similar tone. "And the facts of life, fixed in our minds like the sun in the sky were no burning mysteries" (140).

Some of the research literature on girls' development characterizes adolescence as a time of inner restlessness, anxious concern, and sense of imminent danger associated with changing bodies and blossoming female sexuality.¹² Girls' "voices" and sense of value are said to be driven underground or at least weakened in the face of social pressures and demands. Meanwhile, there are psychodynamic conflicts associated with adolescence. According to psychoanalyst Louise Kaplan:

This period of life is concerned with the profiling of gender identity, because both inner sexual tensions and outer social demands pressure the young person in the direction of gendered growing up. What does it mean to be a grown woman or man? What desires are there room for—and at what costs? (cited in Nielsen and Rudberg 1994: 93)

It would seem that Clarise is considering the costs of becoming a grown woman and what desires there are room for, costs that are both social and personal.

Particularly striking is Clarise's reference to a world that is "hard," a view of the world shared by the PPPT girls. To survive in a hard world requires a string of qualities that the PPPT girls referenced throughout their conversations. "Standing alone"; "making it on my own"; "facing the world by myself"; being "tough and independent"; "not taking shit"; "depending only on myself"; "not letting anyone walk over me"; "not letting anyone get into my business"—these were all qualities admired by the PPPT girls and were often traits they used to describe themselves.

Cultural anthropologist Adrie Kusserow's work on class-based notions of "hard" and "soft" individualism within American culture is useful in thinking about the meanings of selfhood upon which so many of the PPPT girls seem to draw.¹³ Kusserow observed and interviewed parents and teachers in two working-class communities (one more prosperous than the other) and in one professional, upper-middle-class community in New York (1996, 1999) about their views and practices regarding selfhood, child-

rearing, and concepts of individualism.¹⁴ The working-class parents and teachers she interviewed held Clarise's version of the world as a difficult place, full of hardships. Being able to survive against great odds (financial instability, gang violence, drugs, dangerous life on the street) is a necessary trait among working-class children who are raised to have "tough" and "thickened" boundaries of the self (1999: 229). Kusserow observed that the working-class parents in her study used childrearing strategies that encouraged developing a thick skin and independence. Unlike the upper-middle-class parents in her study, the working-class parents felt there "should be limits on praise so that the child doesn't become too dependent on it or become too 'full or himself' or 'puffed up'" (1999: 218). Being tough, not crying over spilt milk, getting on with one's life regardless of loss and disappointment are important traits that the working-class parents whom Kusserow interviewed wanted to pass on to their children. "The word tough was often part of a constellation of other words and phrases such as 'isn't a pushover,' 'speaks her own mind,' 'is her own person' which portrayed a solidity to the self of which the parent was quite proud" (1999: 218). Meanwhile, tough expressions of discipline and harsh phrases said in the presence of the child were used without worrying that these would hurt the child's feelings or damage his or her esteem. These parents wanted their children to be tough enough to take whatever hardships might lie ahead. Kusserow contrasts this model of the self as a "barricade" against the world, to the middle-class model of the self as a "flower" opening up to the world and a sense of "soft" individualism born of a life of comfort and greater opportunities for self-expression.

People can hold and use two, even contradictory orientations toward the self at once, for example, in the ways in which ethnicity is used by Americans to fulfill a need to feel unique, as well as a need to belong to something larger than themselves, a community (Waters 1990). The girls' self-portraits speak to both modes of individualism; their claims to uniqueness and creativity as well as their attachment to community. But it was the hardness of life as a girl—the coping with life's gendered hardships—that begs for more attention.

British feminist historian Carolyn Steedman, in her autobiographical account of working-class childhood, argues that the effects of life's hardness—a sense of exclusion, envy, and longing for "the good life"—are unexplored in terms of the psychological development of working-class youth.¹⁵ She writes:

Working-class autobiography and people's history have been developed as forms that allow the individual and collective expression of

thoughts, feelings and desires about class societies and the effect of class structures on individuals and communities. But as forms of analysis and writing, people's history and working-class autobiography are relatively innocent of psychological theory, and there has been little space within them to discuss the development of class consciousness (as opposed to its expression), nor for understanding of it as a *learned* position, learned in childhood, and often through the exigencies of difficult and lonely lives. (1986: 13)

The black (working-class and poor) PPPT girls' self-portraits spoke to a sorrow associated with growing up "hard." And there are hints about the psychological effects of social injuries, for example, difficulties managing grief or being unable to acknowledge loss and disappointment, what Morgan (1999) refers to as the "strong black woman" syndrome. Anne Cheng (2002) notes that a psychological effect of racism is losing one's capacity for "affective discrimination"—the ability to recognize and distinguish one's feelings, such as envy or longing. Another way of putting this is that the PPPT girls' self-portraits suggest that at the heart of personal conflicts are social divisions—gendered, racial, and class-based divisions through which girls filter their wide range of feelings about the hardships of life, from exclusion, to envy, to defensiveness.

Tara's self-portrait highlights a constellation of feelings that was common among the PPPT girls. Tara was the tallest and most full-bodied girl among her classmates. Her presence was at times regal; "the queen," one classmate referred to her. Tara spoke with a deep, scratchy voice and had earned the respect of her classmates for her poetry writing, which she often shared in class sessions. When I met Tara she was living with her maternal aunt because she had recently lost her mother. Her father had died in a car accident when she was a child, and her mother had died of cancer. She spoke openly about her grief during class sessions, including how she was seeing a counselor whom her aunt had arranged. Tara described what had happened when her aunt had learned of her pregnancy as she made her self-portrait:

My aunt cried and cried when she found out I was pregnant. She just couldn't stop crying. My aunt is overly sensitive and emotional; my mother used to say that about her, that she was too soft for the world. Anyway, if my mother was alive I wouldn't be having the baby. You know, how when a family member dies and you get pregnant as a way to deal with it? My mother died in November and I got pregnant in November so I needed to keep the baby [it is April].

I always wanted to have a baby, but not so soon, and since my mother isn't alive I went ahead and decided to have it. You know she [her mother] told me not to cry at her funeral, so I didn't cry. I didn't cry except on my birthday. I can't cry.

"Why can't you cry?" demanded Shadra. Tara avoided answering and said, "My half sister cries all the time and my half-brother, well he's crazy."

"But you might feel better if you could cry," offered Kaela.

"Yeah, that's what my counselor says. But I need to get on with my life. I can't be crying all the time, and besides, there's always somebody worse off than you, you can't spend your life feeling sorry for yourself."

Tara selected a dark blue sheet of construction paper for her background, saying, "This won't take long. I know just what to make to show how I feel." From a piece of bright purplish red paste paper, Tara cut a large round ball, which she pasted in the center of the page. (See Figure 3)

"Finished," she announced. "I'll do the writing now and maybe a poem later." Here is what she wrote:

This picture represents the way I feel. I feel like a big, heavy ball that can't move. I can't pick up things—I can't do what I usually would do, like go out. People look at me as if they've never been feeling like this before. I have nothing to say to them as long as they say nothing to me. The reason for my purple color is because I feel independent. I'm going to have to be independent because nobody is going to do anything for me.

Tara's image embodies, among many things, her feelings about her changing body, that it is big, heavy, motionless, unable to do what she is used to doing (like pick up things or go out). Speaking as if her body is betraying her or is at least a separate entity from her self reflects a kind of division that was common among the PPPT girls. The girls talked about being eager to "get my body back" and being able to fit into clothes they wore before pregnancy and they spoke of their bodies sending them "signals" or "messages" about what "it" needed. In chapter 5, I discuss this disconnection between self and body, especially as it relates to the medicalization of pregnancy.

In light of the conversation that surrounded the making of her portrait, I see Tara's purple ball as also reflecting a bound-up, toughened sense of self that she has had to develop to cope with unspeakable grief and hardship—her "you can't be crying all the time" stance toward the world. As Tara read her piece aloud she spoke with great force about being the object of others' gaze. She raised her voice as she said, "People look at me as if they've

never been feeling like this before.” Tara’s them-me formulation, her defensive stance (“I have nothing to say to them as long as they say nothing to me”) suggests pain or at least concern about what others see, think, or have to say to her. These views of what “others/they” have to say might also reflect her own negative feelings about herself and her body, which she attributes to others, feelings that are hard for her to recognize as her own.

The girls’ reaction to Tara’s picture drew my attention to how much the girls wrestled with the force of social divisions in making their self-representations. Shadra complimented Tara on her text, “It sounds just like you.” Nonetheless, Shadra thought the picture needed some work. “We aren’t going to have a big purple circle sitting on a page in the middle of the book. It doesn’t look finished,” Shadra stated firmly.

Ebony disagreed, “Well, if that is how Tara feels, we can’t expect her to change it. Besides, she’s talking about feeling like everyone’s looking at her, just like in the picture where we’re just looking at the ball.”

“That’s my picture—if you don’t like it, you can change it yourself,” Tara said defiantly, shaking her head and shrugging her shoulders.

A heated debate followed and the PPPT girls were split over the decision. The debate was in part about the perils of representation. Given the disparaging image of pregnant teenagers, what would viewers think about Tara from her picture? How might they judge her? Those who argued that viewers “might make some wrong assumptions about Tara, like that she is lazy or doesn’t care” finally convinced the others. Tara reluctantly agreed to let Shadra add some “scenery.” (As far as Tara was concerned, she was finished with her picture.)

The struggle to find a way to represent themselves and their pregnancies so as to break the gaze¹⁶ of those who would judge or belittle them galvanized the PPPT girls’ discussions. This struggle was not limited to Tara’s self-portrait; rather, the perils of representation persisted throughout each activity where the PPPT girls were called upon to portray themselves and their lives.

The girls’ debates, especially when they engaged and talked back to dominant representations, feature what I have come to call their “body-smarts”—their dual awareness that they and their pregnant bodies are being viewed and scrutinized by others. The term “body-smarts” is meant to convey the grief and the insight the girls express about their difference (Massey 1996).¹⁷ On the one hand, the girls express their growing awareness that others are seeing them as “depressed,” as “irresponsible,” as “babies having babies,” as “lazy.” And this hurts or smarts. On the other hand, as the girls become more self-aware and express their mixed feelings and

fears—from feeling miserable or immobilized, to being in awe of their changing bodies—they become more aware (they become smart) about their power and possibilities as women.

I also want to suggest that the girls’ “body-smarts,” expressed by their self-portraits and the group conversations, bespeak a wide range of complicated, conflicting emotions about their bodies. Especially striking to me was how much sadness (Anne Cheng [2002] calls it melancholy) was associated with the making of these self-portraits. (Interestingly, this sadness was less pronounced in the making of the “Who am I?” collages and in the pregnancy performances as I will show in the next chapters.) Tara’s self-representation is a case in point. She moves between several emotions, from talking about not being able to cry about her mother’s death, to mourning the body she used to have, to resisting the objectified gaze of others, to a somewhat sorrowful self-affirmation (“I’m going to be independent because nobody is going to do anything for me”). Anne Cheng (2002) suggests that we do not know enough about how “racialized people as complex psychical beings deal with the objecthood thrust upon them. . . . Within the reductive notion of ‘internalization’ lies a world of relations that is as much about surviving grief as embodying it” (20). I suggest that the PPPT girls’ self-representations provide a glimpse into this inner world of objecthood, resistance, and grief.

Kaela’s self-portrait of childhood is another poignant example. Remember that Kaela is the girl who asked, “What fun are we having today?”—her characteristic stance toward the creative activities. Among her PPPT classmates she tended to be the first to agree to do an activity and was both eager and willing to help with the art supplies and cleanup. Kaela was quick to joke around with others and was admired for her “in your face” attitude. When I met Kaela she was living with her retired paternal grandmother who used to work as a housekeeper at a local college. Kaela is the oldest of four children, but only her brother stays with her and her grandmother. Kaela doesn’t talk much about her family life, but from what I could glean (from teachers, school records) she has faced difficulties, including moving between schools and living for a brief time in foster care. In her journal she writes about her dreams of becoming a doctor, what it feels like to be in love, how she wishes for an end to street violence and racial discrimination.

Kaela selected a dark blue piece of construction paper for the background. Unlike the other girls who were preoccupied with finding pieces of paste paper, Kaela took a piece of bright yellow construction paper. “This is for the sun,” she remarked. Kaela took her time cutting and pasting strips

of this yellow paper to make rays of sunshine. She did this activity quietly, meditatively, almost solemnly, as if she were in some far-off place, a demeanor that was unusual for her. She took her time cutting out a doll-like figure with a blue dress, which she put on the middle of the page, saying she remembered having a dress like the one in the picture.

In the next several sessions, Kaela added very specific details to the face, including cut-out ears and eyes; she used a black marker to draw in a nose, a smiling mouth, fingernails and toenails, and, finally, a distinctive hairstyle. She placed a long strip of green paste paper at the base of the picture (grass), added a tree to the left, a round blue object to the right of the figure and announced she was finished. Kaela handed it to me to hold up “for questioning.”

“What do you see?” I asked my standard opening question.

“My legs look skinny and bow-legged—that’s what people used to say about me as a child.”

The girls start talking about who was and wasn’t skinny and bow-legged as a child. There were comments about her “cute” hairstyle.

“What do you notice about the colors?” I asked.

“Everything is blue, except for the yellow sun,” Tara remarked.

“Does the color blue have any special meaning to you, Kaela?” I asked.

“No, not especially, except for feeling blue, the blues, yeah, singing the blues,” she replied haltingly.

The next day Kaela brought a written text about her portrait to class:

This picture represents me as I was a young child. I was seven years old. I was in MacDonald Terrace [a housing project]. It was 5:30 in the afternoon and it was very hot outside. I was getting ready to go the store for some five cent candy with no shoes on. I’ve always had a good attitude. I don’t pick at people, I speak to everyone who speaks to me. I’m not stuck up on myself, and I speak my mind.

Tara offered her opinion, “What you say is true; you are not stuck up on yourself.”

Kaela smiled and said that she would never think she was better than anyone else if she had “nice clothes, jewelry, and stuff. That’s the way a lot of people are, but not me.”

The girls exchanged names of peers who they believed “looked down” on others, who “bragged” about their possessions. As this conversation died down, I asked Kaela, “Why don’t you have shoes on?”

She pondered this question, “Because my shoes didn’t fit and they made my feet hot. I kept begging my mother (she lived with us then) for new shoes but she said, ‘You’re too hard on your shoes, you always need

new shoes, now go on and get you some candy.’ It was such a hot day—hotter than any day I can remember.”

“And what do you have to say when you speak your mind?” I asked.

“I don’t let anybody take advantage of me. I stand on my own.”

Two girls laughed and said, “Well, it’s true that you always speak your mind.”

References to her toughness, “hard” individualism, and to her grief (expressed through her association with the blues and a time when she lived with her mother) are woven into Kaela’s representation of growing up. And there are references to her efforts to be in control of her surroundings. There is her ability to speak her mind, her unwillingness to let others “take advantage” of her, her “good attitude” and treatment of others, her desire for new shoes, her acknowledgment of envy (and being envied) for having nice clothes, jewelry, and stuff.

Kaela’s pensive demeanor while making her self-portrait compared to her usual liveliness lingered in my mind as I went back through her writing and the transcription of the class conversation. I noted a break in the story she had begun to tell about her picture. At our next session, I said to Kaela, “I forgot to ask you something about your story. You said you were on your way to the candy store, but you stopped telling us the story and started telling us about yourself. I was wondering what happened—did you go to the store; are you going to put that part in your piece?”

Kaela looked away, something about her reaction made me think she was upset.

“There’s a lot that happened at that candy store but I don’t want to say.”

Kaela’s self-representation of childhood referenced an experience about which she did not want or was not yet ready to tell. One of her reasons is that she needs to “move on” despite her feelings, feelings upon which Kaela doesn’t like to dwell. Over the course of the year I would learn more about the candy store and the violence that occurred there. But Kaela wished not to speak about it (or for me to write about it); rather, she prefers to talk about her life now—her positive attitude and her ability to stand up for herself. Kaela is wary of people getting “into her business” and making judgments. Kaela’s survival of her “hard” growing up strikes me as a central feature of her agency.

Grief and Longing for a Place

The three Mexican American girls presented themselves in the future, as grown up and in their maternal roles. While on the surface, these self-representations were about the future, they were also about the girls’ past

lives in Mexico and their efforts to manage strong emotions related to physically, socially, and psychologically adjusting to their relocation.¹⁸ All three girls wrote and spoke about missing Mexico: Eliza reflects, "Today I have been thinking so much. I am sad and feeling lonely wishing I could be in Mexico with my father or my godmother." While making her self-portrait, Teresa spoke about her wish to return to Mexico to have her baby. She reminisced about the beauty of the landscape and her feelings of confinement in the city. Upon completing her self-portrait, her baby in her arms, Teresa remarked, "My baby looks happy so I am happy." "I hope my baby does not go through the same things I went through, feeling lonely and longing to see the countryside" (see Figure 4). These self-portraits, and the self- and identity-making processes they suggest, are best understood within the context of immigration, a sense of a traditional, extended family, and a cultural world of womanhood that idealizes Catholic iconic images of motherhood.¹⁹

Marisa's self-representation illustrates all of these, coupled with her sense of agency. When I first met Marisa, she was fifteen and living with her boyfriend in her parents' home. Marisa's father had migrated to this country from Mexico five years earlier, with the rest of the family joining him three years later. Her father works on subcontracted construction crews (part of a growing labor practice in this region of the country), and her mother "stays at home—she can't drive." Marisa talked about her experience as she was making her self-portrait:

I was going out with my boyfriend and we had run away during the summer together, so my mother figured I was having sex and I didn't think she would be so surprised. . . . I told my mom that me and my boyfriend were going to move in together, that we couldn't stay at the house. But my mother said it wasn't safe. Something could happen to me while I was alone and it wasn't good for me or the baby. She said my boyfriend should move in. So at home we have my mom, dad, my brother and his girlfriend who is expecting twins (my mother is very excited about this); my younger sister who is nine. She keeps saying, "What am I going to do with three babies coming?"

Marisa often came to class with stories about her overcrowded but lively household, including the squabbles and feelings of jealousy she had with her brother's girlfriend, who she believed received more of her mother's attention than she did. To make her self-portrait, Marisa chose a burgundy colored sheet of construction paper. First she made a landscape of sun, clouds, rain drops, and a waterfall flowing from the sun to a rock.

Then she began assembling her figures. She cut out a female figure (with dress) and added brown legs, feet/shoes, and hands, which held a small oval shape ("My baby," she said). Immediately to the right she pasted a cutout male figure with pants, brown feet/shoes, and large green hands reaching over toward her and the baby. These figures stand to the left of the waterfall and on top of ground that is cut with points, which she explained, were mountains. Here is what she wrote about her picture:

This picture is in my mind everyday because I can't wait for my baby to come. I am excited and long to be happy with my boyfriend and my baby like a loving family, joyful and united. I see us in a beautiful place, sunny, raining with a waterfall. My baby, my boyfriend, and I are hoping and waiting, never to be separated.

Marisa's picture and writing speak to the tension between her wishes "to be happy with my boyfriend and my baby like a loving family, joyful and united" and the demands of her immigration experience, which include separation and loss (e.g., "My baby, my boyfriend and I are hoping and waiting, never to be separated"). Indeed, many of Marisa's journal entries focus on how much she misses family members still in Mexico, most especially her maternal grandmother who visits every summer.

Marisa's classmates were interested in her beautiful landscape. "But how can it be sunny and raining at the same time?" asked Charmine. Marisa explained that it was a soft, gentle rain, like the rain that sometimes falls in the mountains where she used to live. I asked if the waterfall was imaginary or an actual place she had been in Mexico. In response, she told the following story:

A few years ago I went on a camping trip with a bunch of kids, including my boyfriend. The guides asked me if I wanted to hike to the top of the mountain where I would see a waterfall, go swimming, and whatever. It was all there. I told them I don't like to walk (even before getting pregnant I didn't like walking). But I decided to go along. The hike up the mountain was long and tiring, but when I got to the top I could see the waterfall and how very beautiful it all was.

Marisa has this picture (and narrative) "in her mind everyday" as she waits for her baby to come. Her picture and narrative take us inside both her cultural and her inner worlds. Above all, Marisa misses Mexico. Besides her family and her attachment to the land itself (the mountains, light, and waterfalls), Marisa laments her lost freedom of movement. "You can't do

much here—you can't walk to do or see things. Here it is only the mall or maybe a lake, but you need transportation to do that." Her story about climbing the mountain strikes me as a particularly telling representation of how she sees and feels about her pregnancy. Marisa's story is about being taken somewhere and asked for her preferences about what she wants to do. She decides to climb the mountain (despite her reservations that she wouldn't have the energy). Her story expresses a sense of accomplishment and has a happy, beautiful ending. The story includes her boyfriend, just as her picture portrays him as part of her future traditional family.

Just as some of the black PPPT girls' self-portraits referenced a world of community and comfort and expressed nostalgia for this time in their lives, the Mexican American girls' self-portraits also referenced a lost world of community and comfort for which they longed. This sense of longing, which is also characteristic of art and artistry, could be felt across the girls' self-representations.

Yearning for the Future

Remember that Sonya was the girl in the opening scene of the chapter who said she was going to make herself in the future, as a singer. When I met Sonya she was living with her mother who worked at a local hospital as a blood technician. Sonya was quiet and studious in her PPPT classes and in our sessions. She was short, had a small frame, and wore stylish clothes that often earned her praise from her classmates. Sonya lived in a part of town that had recently been redistricted, which meant that she would attend the "flagship" high school after delivering her baby. The teachers referred to her as one of the best PPPT students.

Sonya's self-representation speaks not of a hard growing up, but of a yearning for an idealized future:

This picture is about me in the future relaxing in the Jamaican islands. I am around twenty years of age. I am happy that I finally made it to the islands. I have a young boy, Malcolm, as a son. His loving father is my husband. They are both a joy to have in my life. During the time that I was pregnant with Malcolm I felt all types of emotions: happy, sad, funny, glad, angry, and mad. But most of all I felt a whole lot of love for my baby.

This self-portrait sparked a heated debate about racial representation and identification (see Figure 5). Sonya's artfully designed picture, but especially the shapely hourglass, Barbie-doll-like figure earned her praise

from classmates. They "ooohed" and "aahhed" at the picture—"that girl has style"—and she quickly became the resident artist from whom other girls sought advice and help. When she added the black wavy hair and black eyes, Ebony said, "That makes you look Chinese." Moreover, Ebony added, the figure didn't look like Sonya who is "dark-skinned." From Ebony's perspective, the figure "looked white or Asian—because of the eyes." Tracey said, "I know black people who look Asian," to which Ebony replied, "we are not talking about whether this could be a black person, we are talking about whether this could be Sonya. There's nothing that looks like Sonya here—not the skin, not the hair, certainly not the eyes." The girls were talking all at once. Once again, the problems of race, representation, and "black looks" preoccupied the girls. Meanwhile, Sonya seemed unfazed by the debate; she offered no response or defense for her picture.

I was interested to know how Sonya, who was born and raised in Centerville, was connected to "the islands." I asked her about Jamaica—had she been there before? What was the special appeal of Jamaica to her? She reminded me of her desire to be a singer—"Reggae music, that's my music; I love to sing and dance to it. I used to sing gospel, I was part of my church choir, but that's not where my heart is." She said she hoped to "travel the world" in her future.

Like the others, Sonya's picture and text defies any simple interpretation regarding her pregnancy, her changing sense of self and body image, her femininity, or her racial identification. She writes about what she hopes to have in life—a son, a loving husband, relaxation in an ideal environment. She also speaks of managing "all types of" emotions, which for some of the girls were harder to acknowledge.

Gone Missing

Alice was one of the two white girls enrolled at the PPPT during my five years there. She was part of the cohort of girls mentioned in the opening scene of this chapter. As her classmates put it, Alice "went missing" from the program. In her fifth month, she elected to enroll in the "homebound" tutoring program available to pregnant teens.

When I met Alice she was living with her mother, who works as an unskilled manual worker at a dry cleaning store, and her father, who is on disability because of an injury suffered while operating a machine in a textile mill. She is the youngest of three daughters and has "always made my parents proud of me and my good grades." Alice was quiet and often sat by herself doing her homework while her classmates ate lunch in the kitchen.

She said she didn't care for the school lunches and brought dinner leftovers her mother packed for her in plastic containers. One of the first things Alice told me about herself was that getting pregnant was "one of the best things that has ever happened to me."

A lot of people talk about the problem of babies having babies, but what they don't know is having a baby is one of the best things that could happen to me. I'm already more responsible and realistic since I got pregnant. Having a baby is settling me down.

Alice said she was not "any good at arts and crafts." She took her time selecting a bright yellow piece of construction paper for the background. Then she cut a big round red circle for her face and placed it in the middle of the page. She cut out equally round blue circles for eyes. She gracefully encircled her face with long strands of yellow paste paper hair, for which she received several compliments from classmates.

After penciling in eyebrows and a nose and adding light red lips, Alice said she was finished. (See Figure 6) "That really looks like you, Alice," said Sonya. Others agreed that she had achieved an amazing likeness. Clarise said she liked the bright colors Alice had chosen, including her red face. "All that yellow reminds me of sunshine. It makes me wonder why you aren't smiling in the picture." Alice didn't reply.

Alice missed the next few weeks of school because she was put on bed rest but sent in the following text about her self-portrait so it could be included in the book. This is what she wrote:

My name is Alice. I am fourteen years old. I have blonde hair and blue eyes and I have braces. I stand about 5'3" and weigh about 142 pounds. I am going to have a baby in August. I don't like going to school. I don't like to be mean to other people. I like to be nice and sweet to other people. I have a great personality when I am around my friends and family. Now you know about the unknown girl.

What questions are being asked and what conversations are taking place between the lines of Alice's text and her picture? And what does her self-representation suggest about her self- and identity-making process?

Alice's text opens with conventional details of her physical self, as if she were filling out a form—name, age, hair and eye (but not skin) color, height, weight, and one distinguishing feature—having braces. She references the world of family and friends, a world in which she feels she has a "great personality." She also references the world of school, which she does not like. Alice's text makes me think she felt misrecognized by her classmates. "I don't

like going to school"; "I don't like to be mean to other people." (Does she think she is perceived by her classmates as "mean" or is she perhaps saying, but not saying that others have been mean to her?) "I like to be nice and sweet to other people." (Is this how she wishes to be perceived but feels in some way thwarted?) "I have a great personality when I am around my friends and family." (She seems to be suggesting that she is not "herself" when she is not around friends and family.) Finally, speaking to a generalized "you" (me? the PPPT girls? the public?) she characterizes herself as the "unknown girl." In what ways does she feel unknown, and to whom?

I suspect that the effects of America's racial and class divisions lie at the heart of Alice's self-representation. Of course we cannot know with any certainty, as neither I nor the PPPT girls could ask Alice to elaborate. Alice is like other white working-class girls who have "gone missing" from public representations about the "problem" of teenage pregnancy. To the question of how it feels to be a "problem," Alice has answered with "seldom a word," she is the *unknown girl*.

Individual "Inside Stories" of Pregnancy

You recall that in chapter 1 I referred to what Joan Raphael-Leff calls the profoundly unique and emotionally laden *inside story* of pregnancy. She notes the particularly "strange union" of "two bodies, one inside the other" and suggests that each woman responds to this experience, in part, based on her own relational history and with unique stakes in "making her pregnancy her own" (1995: 8). In this section I consider two girls—Michelle and Twana—and what their self-portraits suggest about their particular *inside stories* of pregnancy.

Michelle was one of the two (out of fifty) PPPT girls who portrayed herself as pregnant in her portrait. (See Figure 7) This simple fact struck me as remarkable; that so few girls represented their bodies in a pregnant state.²⁰ Before meeting her, I was told Michelle was "difficult"—a "handful"—she was having lots of "personal problems." She might not even want to participate; "So don't take it personally," Ms. Nelson forewarned. In any case, "Don't let her sleep in class because she will put her head down on the desk and not pull it up again," she advised.

When I met Michelle she was living with her mother and younger sister who has epilepsy. Michelle's mother works as a clerk at the townhall and has been raising her girls on her own for as long as Michelle can remember. Michelle was born "up north" but her mother moved back to raise her daughter in the company of family and extended kin. She was usually quiet

during class and often didn't participate in the girls' joking banter with one another. Michelle was most engaged in the journal writing activity, reflecting about her emotions and mood swings ("Yesterday I felt as if everyone was on my back and that I couldn't do anything right but today everything is looking up"). She wrote about her goals of getting a job and moving out of her mother's home, as well as worries about who would care for her sister when she left. Her boyfriend said he wanted to stay involved with her and the baby, but Michelle expressed doubt that he "would keep his promise. Besides, I don't want to get overly dependent on him or anybody." Other girls in the PPPT talked behind Michelle's back, saying that she was "spoiled" by her mother, meaning that they thought Michelle was overly sensitive and "whined" too much about her problems. "Michelle thinks she is the only person going through hard times," complained Ebony one day when Michelle was not in class.

Michelle was eight months pregnant, more visibly so than any of the other girls, and attended class less regularly than most. She began by asking for a black piece of paper to use as the background.

"Why don't you pick a nice color for the background?" Kaela asked.

Michelle didn't reply and Kaela said, "She's in a dark mood I guess."

Michelle took several days to make two pregnant figures facing each other—one she called her "happy" and the other, her "angry" side. Once finished, she held it up, frowned, and said, "There's too much emptiness—I need something to fill me, I mean this space up."

I noticed her slip and wondered if she did as well. I considered asking her about it, but decided against it (a good example of a time I held myself back from making interpretations). Instead I asked if I could hold up her portrait for her to view from a bit of a distance.

"What do you see?" I asked.

"It's too dark, too empty, too much space in between the two figures," replied Michelle. "I'll fix it later."

The next day Michelle returned with a written statement to accompany her picture. I had not seen her appear so enthusiastic and energetic. She asked me to read what she had written and "correct" it:²¹

This is a picture of me. I'm seventeen years old and so miserable. All I can do is think of the things I used to do and will do after I have my lovely baby. I only smile when I want to or if somebody makes me laugh. The funny feeling about being pregnant is feeling something move inside you. I'll never hold hatred toward my baby because I know it's my fault and not my baby's. I have more problems

on me than usual. But now I have somebody to really love and care for—somebody who's a piece of my heart.

As I was reading her statement aloud, Michelle stopped me on the phrase; "I'll never hold hatred toward my baby because I know it's my fault and not my baby's." At this point in hearing me read her statement, Michelle said, "I know what I need to do," and she picked up pieces of paper and started cutting out hearts that she placed in the empty space. Perhaps the hearts—symbols of love—were substitutes for Michelle's feelings of hatred or aggression because these feelings were too painful or difficult to abide.²² Some viewers will see Michelle's picture and notice the hearts, unaware that at first there was an empty space. Interpreting the symbolic meaning of these hearts is complicated given competing discourses about teenage pregnancy. On the one hand, one could interpret the hearts as illustrating Michelle's "looking for love"—a popular psychological explanation often offered to explain girls' motivations for getting pregnant. On the other hand, one could speculate that the hearts are symbols of acceptable, traditional femininity upon which Michelle might be drawing to defend herself against the "war on teenage pregnancy" and its stigma.

All three of the above interpretations are plausible, but what the art-making process and our conversation suggests is that Michelle was coming into consciousness about her conflicted feelings, that she would "hold hatred toward her baby," and this made her want to change (in her words "fix") how she feels and sees herself. In making her portrait, Michelle notices or becomes more self-aware of several things about herself and her life: her feelings of "emptiness" set next to "feeling something move inside you"; her fears of holding hatred toward her baby held alongside deep feelings of love; and her conflicting sense of her own value as both "miserable" and as worth "having somebody to really love and care for."²³

Michelle's self-portrait sheds light on her relational inner world, an "empty space" that could be interpreted in several ways. Perhaps the empty space represents the distance she feels between herself and her baby, or between the opposing sides of herself, or a reverberation of a much earlier, primal sense of loss from her own mother. In any case, Michelle's desire to close the gap, to feel connected, to recuperate her losses, reveals her unique drama of change and growth.

There are additional observations that could be made and interpretations that could be offered about Michelle's self- and identity-making process from her self-portrait. First, she is missing hands, something about

which I asked her. She replied, "I didn't want to mess up my picture by putting on hands; I just couldn't make hands that looked good." Second, her classmates argued that her "happy side" didn't look especially happy, to which Michelle said, "I tried to make a cut-out smile—you don't think it looks like a smile?" These both signify what I consider "technical" difficulties Michelle claimed to have with her artistic abilities, and thus I downplay their significance to Michelle (a therapist might disagree). Finally, Michelle chose white paper for her body and made herself a "straight" hairstyle (her classmates' words), which could be said to reflect social issues regarding race and representation as well as her own feelings regarding racial identification.

Twana's self-portrait provides another distinctive example of a girl coming into consciousness about her changing body, self, and identity. When I met Twana she was fourteen and living with an aunt who had recently moved back to town after living "up north." Twana took care of her aunt's four young children in exchange for living with her. I gathered from school records that Twana had lived in foster care for most of her life. When she was eight, she had been assigned a guardian ad litem by the court, whom she liked and continued to see regularly. She had attended several schools during the course of childhood and, in her words, had been "held back because it took me so long to read good." Twana was eager to join in her classmates' jokes and playful banter, especially when it came to play-acting events that had occurred over the weekend or at school. She had never mentioned having a boyfriend before making her self-portrait, and thus, it came as a surprise to her classmates, "You never told about a boyfriend—where does he stay at?—how old is he?" The questions came much more quickly than Twana could answer, and in the end, she said, "Shut up, do you think I want you all to know my business?"

Twana cut out and pasted two adjoining circular shapes that she said stood for her and her boyfriend's faces. She added a "straight hairstyle" that her classmates observed was unlike any they had seen her wear. Then she added eyes, nose, and lips to her face and a hat, eyes, nose, and lips to her boyfriend's face. Twana completed her picture by cutting out and pasting a tree to the far left of the page, a sun in the upper lefthand corner, and a border of grass at the bottom. (See Figure 8) She wrote the following, and asked me to read it out loud before I held her picture up for her classmates to view:

This is a picture of me and my boyfriend at his house in his yard. I'm in his yard chilling. I like being over there with him because it's a lot of fun. He makes me feel comfortable. The tree is where we like to be during the day.

In writing about her picture Twana reflects on what she has in life—a boyfriend who makes her "feel comfortable." When I asked how her boyfriend makes her feel comfortable, she replied, "comfortable with myself, you know how I mean." She explained that she doesn't like being around people who make her feel "big" or "ugly" or who give her "looks." All the while Twana does not acknowledge her pregnancy until later when questioned by her classmates who, among other things, asked why she had made her boyfriend's head so much smaller than hers. Looking at her picture again, Twana turned it on its side and reflected anew on what she had made. "Look at this, this is me, pregnant." Moving her finger along the outlines of the merged circles that, from this new angle, looked like a pregnant figure, she said, "This is all one big, round belly." Twana's new perspective on her self-portrait speaks to her growing awareness of the uncanny fact of her "two-in-one" body. What she first envisioned as being two separate parts (in this case two "heads") comes to be viewed as one whole. Twana's self-portrait sheds light on her relational inner world—what for Michelle was construed as an "empty space," for Twana is construed as a merged, undifferentiated space, perhaps evoking feelings about herself in relation to her baby, or feelings about a form of relationship that she has internalized, which like her boyfriend, makes her "feel comfortable with herself." In any case, what I want to stress is Twana's own surprise about what she had made. This coming into a different awareness speaks to the importance of the critique sessions that enabled the girls to reflect anew on their self-image and representations.²⁴

Again, there are other observations and interpretations to be made about Twana's picture, including why she made "only heads," an observation made by her classmates that led to the question about the differential size of each head. Twana did not have an answer. Again, it is her new view of herself that I wish to feature, despite whatever other meanings might be being conveyed by her picture.

The girls' self-portraits illustrate their struggles to express multiple feelings and truths about their changing sense of self and identity. The girls speak about these truths in fragmented ways, and at times elusively. But it is their readiness to and the facility with which they represent themselves and their lives to others that I stress. Each of the PPPT girls' self-representation, in one way or another, and with more or less expression of personal conflict, engages a dialogue between the self (*Who am I?*) and society (*Who do others think I am?*). This dialogue also takes place in the girls' media collages, to which I now turn.

Making the “Self-Which-I-Might-Be”

Introduction

“How many of you have ever made a collage out of pictures from magazines?” Everyone raises her hand. I had placed an array of magazines in the middle of the table, and a stack of 8x11 sheets of colored construction paper for each girl to choose from.

“*Ebony, Essence, People, YM, . . .*”—these are good magazines, and they are this month’s!” Charlene exclaims gleefully.

The girls start talking all at once.

“Can we take them home?”

“*Teen Voices*, what magazine is that? I’ve never seen it,” says Alisha grabbing it from Sara’s hands.¹

“How much did all these cost, Ms. Wendy? You got all the ones we told you we read.”

“There’s a box of old magazines in the closet like *Redbook, Glamour, National Geographic*, we can ask Ms. Pepper if we can cut them up too,” suggests Sara.

I start passing out scissors, a small tub of glue, and a brush to each girl.

“In this activity I am asking you to consider the question, ‘Who am I?’ Look through these magazines and pick any pictures, words, sentences that represent who you are. I’ve also brought alphabet stamp sets and ink pads for you to write your own words or phrases, if you wish, and markers in case you want to draw your own images.”

“Can we make more than one collage? I want to make one for my room.”²

“How much did these stamp sets cost? Can I have one?”

Alisha is the first to take an alphabet stamp set and a red ink pad. She prints across the top of her construction paper the phrase, BLACK, STRONG, WOMAN! “Okay, now I will look for pictures,” she says.

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Tanya has been leafing quickly through *Ebony* and selects a picture of a woman wearing a light blue blouse, black stretch pants, and sneakers. Her straight black hair is pulled back in a ponytail. She is bending over to pick up a toddler.

Alisha asks, "Is that woman black?"

This question sparks a lively debate among the girls about skin color; about who is light and who is dark; about people they know who look white, but are "black," and vice versa, people who are "black" but "act white." Celia, who is white, and Teresa, who is Mexican American, are quiet during this discussion.

Tanya ends the argument by saying, "If she says she is black then that's what she is." Pasting her picture into the center of the paper Tanya declares, "This is me—an independent mother."

The debate starts all over again. "It can't be you, that woman is light skinned and you're dark," argues Violet.

"That's not the point. She *represents* me and how I carry myself, [her emphasis]" says Tanya raising her voice. "She's making it on her own."

Tracey throws the *Essence* magazine she has been looking through onto the table, saying, "There is nobody who represents me in this magazine." Teresa agrees, saying the same. Sara hands Tracey her copy of the *Ebony* she has been thumbing through and says, "Here, have a look at this one."

Tracey eventually finds a picture she likes—it is another light-skinned, black woman wearing peach silk pajamas reclining in bed, surrounded by a mound of white fluffy pillows. She is holding a baby up in the air. There is a look of joyful recognition between magazine mom and baby as they rub noses together. Tracey holds the picture up in the air just like the magazine mom and says, "That's me. That's my style. But now I need to find me some food—I need some food."

She finds two pictures: one of waffles, sliced fruits, and muffins and the other, a shapely red apple that glistens with droplets of water. She places the apple in the center of her collage.

Tanya licks her lips and says, "Who's going to help find me a burger?—it needs to have cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickles. . . ."

"Don't let's start on pickles," laughs Charlene.

Sara finds Tanya a four-layer chicken sandwich with everything she listed but the beef. "How about chicken?"

Tanya smiles broadly. She thanks Sara and proceeds to paste the sandwich next to the toddler. The sandwich turns out to be taller than the toddler. Then she takes the alphabet stamp set and black ink and prints the word "importance" going vertically down the right side of the page. She

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adds the words, "of a" at the bottom of the page, and then prints in vertical letters "men" going down the right side of the page. I am struck that she frames her collage with the phrase, "importance of a men" as she has just emphasized being independent and making it on her own. But Tanya is not finished yet, and by the time her collage is complete, a picture of a black girl in a white graduation cap and gown covers part of the word "importance" and a picture of a football player covers the letter M in men. Her viewers can no longer make out the meaning of her phrase, which she says does not concern her. "I had to have that graduation picture and there was no space left for it. And my boyfriend plays football and he needed to be there." (See Figure 4.1) Then she asks the group, "Why is it that famous people always go with other famous people? Why can't they ever go out with people like us?" The conversation (including Teresa and Celia) stays on celebrities for the rest of the class period as the girls continue cutting, pasting, taking off, and putting on their words and images.

This class session illustrates the way the PPPT girls typically engaged the media collage activity. This same flow of conversation occurred from group to group, moving seamlessly from debates about racial identity and representation, to food, to celebrity figures.³ Typically, at least one girl would express difficulty or frustration about not finding herself represented in the magazines, and references to "style," either in terms of clothes, hairdo, or general look—what the girls called "attitude"—animated session after session.

The girls were engrossed with images of food and talked about food cravings and eating binges ("You won't believe how much I ate last night for dinner. . . . I went to Shoney's on Sunday morning, to the-all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet. I stuffed myself with a plate of sausages, pancakes, eggs, grits. My momma said I was going to make myself sick with too much food. It was too good."). At times they helped one another find their favorite foods, as "girlfriends do for each other." There was a tipsy silliness with which the girls expressed their desires for food. I wondered what role these images of and conversations about food were playing in the activity sessions. On one level, I could recall with great detail my own food cravings during each of my three pregnancies.⁴ Perhaps this was the case with the girls, and the magazine images of food prompted them to express their distinct cravings. But, on another level, I was struck by the playfulness of these conversations about food and how they referenced a female world full of nourishment and delight. The girls relished one another's descriptions of mothers, aunts, and grandmothers preparing pies, biscuits, ham hocks and

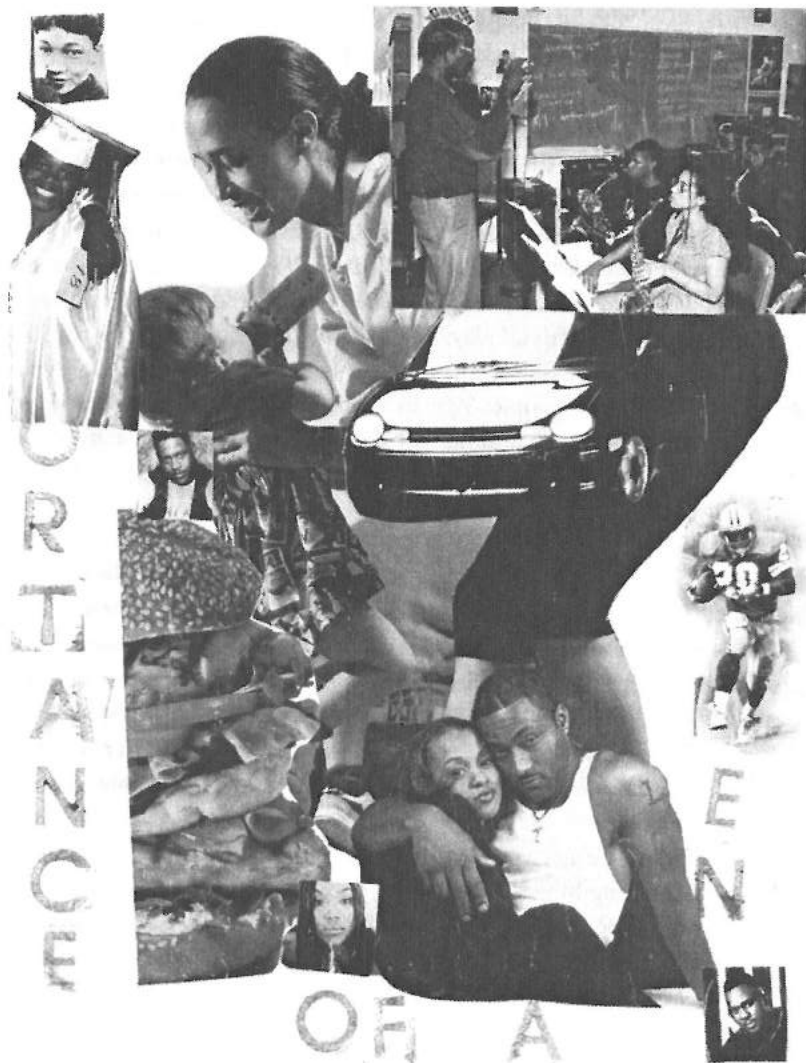


Figure 4.1: Tanya's collage

collard greens, fried chicken, and vats of potato salad for church picnics and family reunions. On yet another level, I was struck by the eroticism of the food images some girls selected (for example, Tracey's picture of the red glistening apple and Vaquan's sleek, hour-glass-shaped flask full of orange juice that even the girls teased her about for, in their words, "looking sexy"). I wondered in what ways these images and the girls' reactions might

be reflecting inner conflicts about their changing bodies, but particularly their passage into adult sexuality, conflicts that were also expressed in some of the girls' self-portraits. For example, readers will recall Clarise's poem lamenting her fast-moving bodily changes: first pubic hairs, then breasts, a period, and then sex; and Tara who expressed resentment toward people who gave her full body "looks," which indicated her conflicts about what others think of her.

On yet another level, I was struck by the contrast between the food items the girls selected and those they routinely (but secretly) brought into the classroom. Items like soda, chips, and candy bars were contraband that served as social glue between the girls. These food items were exchanged with both a playful and a more serious nose-thumbing at the powers that be. Nonetheless, it was not these everyday food items that showed up in the collages; rather, the collage food items were more "healthy" (fresh fruit rather than chips), more "sensuous" and "luxurious" (piles of pancakes with butter and syrup dripping down the sides), and undoubtedly more expensive and beyond the girls' daily reach. The point is that there was a quality about the food items and the girls' conversations about them that invited entry into multiple worlds—a female world of nourishment and sexuality and a consumer world of riches.⁵

But it was conversations about famous people—especially musicians—that tended to dominate discussion. Making these media collages were occasions when girls swapped their knowledge of the "stars," most especially a celebrity's lifestyle and troubles as reported by the press. Stories about redemption and respect—how a star overcame hardship or addiction or was able to rise against the odds—were told with special detail and enthusiasm. I wondered in what ways the girls' empathy for and/or harsh criticism of a celebrity reflected a girl's own self-appraisal or wishes for herself. A media star earned the girls' instant respect when she was able to "hold her head high" amid disparaging media attention—when the media "talked shit about her," as some girls put it.⁶ Hard, protective individualist values and models of selfhood like those I described in the previous chapter—being tough and self-reliant, having a thick skin, and refusing to be "beaten down" by the press—were woven into these conversations about the celebrities. The PPPT girls held in highest esteem those celebrities who defined the meaning of "style" and "attitude" as an "I don't care what people think of me" stance toward the world.

After each girl completed her collage, she presented it to her viewers, providing an explanation for the images and words she had selected. What I have to say about the collages is based on both sets of conversations—those that took place during the making and those that took place during

each girl's presentation. These collages, like the self-portraits, hold multiple meanings. But, by comparison to the self-portrait activity, there was more commonality and at times predictability in the girls' discussions and explanations of the collages. Put slightly differently, the media-based collage activity highlighted converging elements and continuities of meaning in the girls' social worlds, especially how they perceived themselves being "addressed by" and "answering to" these worlds. Still, like their self-portraits, the media collages convey an individual girl's creativity and agency.

In this activity the girls critically engaged and appropriated media images, not as passive consumers, but in active dialogue with how these images speak to their self-image and self-presentation. ("This is my style"; "This is me, an independent mother.") The girls' conversations reflect much that has been written about the power of advertising images to both create and respond to viewers' desires.⁷ These images are said to be less about *reflecting* viewers' wants or wishes than they are about *addressing* the viewer. According to John Berger's classic analysis of advertising, *Ways of Seeing*, "We are now so accustomed to being addressed by these images that we scarcely notice their total impact" (1972: 130). Berger continues on to explain that advertising images offer the viewer "an image of himself [*sic*] made glamorous by the product, making the viewer 'envious of himself as he might be.' Yet what makes this self-which-he-might-be enviable? The envy of others" (132).

Judith Williamson (1978) explains that advertisements "hail" the viewer as someone who is already the person in the ad—someone who would naturally consume the product because of the kind of person she is. A girl's media collage, and her resonance with certain advertising images, could be understood in a similar way, as insight into her narrative of "self-which-I-might-be," "what I think might make me the envy of others," or "who I am because I consume (or wish to consume) this or that product."

As with the self-portrait activity, this media-based activity engaged the girls in a dialogue between self (Who am I?) and society (Who do others think I am?). These media collages extend this dialogue, drawing specifically on images and discourses that define or are associated with *social* identity (i.e., "I am a black, Mexican American or white girl and such girls are like this or that." "I am becoming a full grown, sexual woman and women are like this or that." "I am becoming a mother and mothers are like this or that"). As the debate about who "looked and didn't look black" in the dialogue at the start of this chapter suggests, images about racial identity and representation are not fixed; rather they are fluid and based on specific contexts. A girl's answer to the question, "Who am I as a black or

Mexican American or white girl?" is contingent. African American writer and anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston made this contingency ever so clear in her classic essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." Her reply to such a question included the following statements: "Compared to what? As of when? Who is asking? In what context? For what purpose? With what interests and presuppositions?" (quoted in Johnson 1987: 178). But, as I will argue in this chapter, the girls' answers to the questions of who they are as mothers were much less fluid and contingent—indeed, they were idealized.

Self- and Identity-Making and Social Worlds

Money Talk and Money Talks

I'll start at the top of the page—money talks—I put this picture of money and these words because I like money. I want to have money so I can live in this house [pointing to the picture of a spacious, two story suburban house with a circular driveway in front] and have this car [pointing to a black Lincoln Navigator SUV], because you need to have transportation. I picked out the phrase "very serious" and "important," because money is very serious, you need to have it in order to have these things. I have a diamond here because I am loved. And this is me and my style in the corner" [pointing to a black woman with a pasley shirt and styled hair looking seductively into the camera]. (See Figure 4.2)

For Alisha, like many of her PPPT classmates, "money talks." She "likes" money; it is "serious" and "important." The vast majority of PPPT girls would seem to agree—the most prevalent image used in these collages is money (including credit cards) with food and cars being not even close seconds. Forty-five out of fifty girls made collages with images of money. (See Figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5)

If John Berger is correct, that advertising images work upon anxiety—anxieties about how we look, whether we are likable or desirable to others—then having money to purchase whatever is being sold is crucial. Berger writes:

The sum of everything is money, to get money is to overcome anxiety. Money is life. Not in the sense that without money you starve. . . . But in the sense that money is the token of, and the key to, every human capacity. The power to spend money is the power to live. (1972: 143)

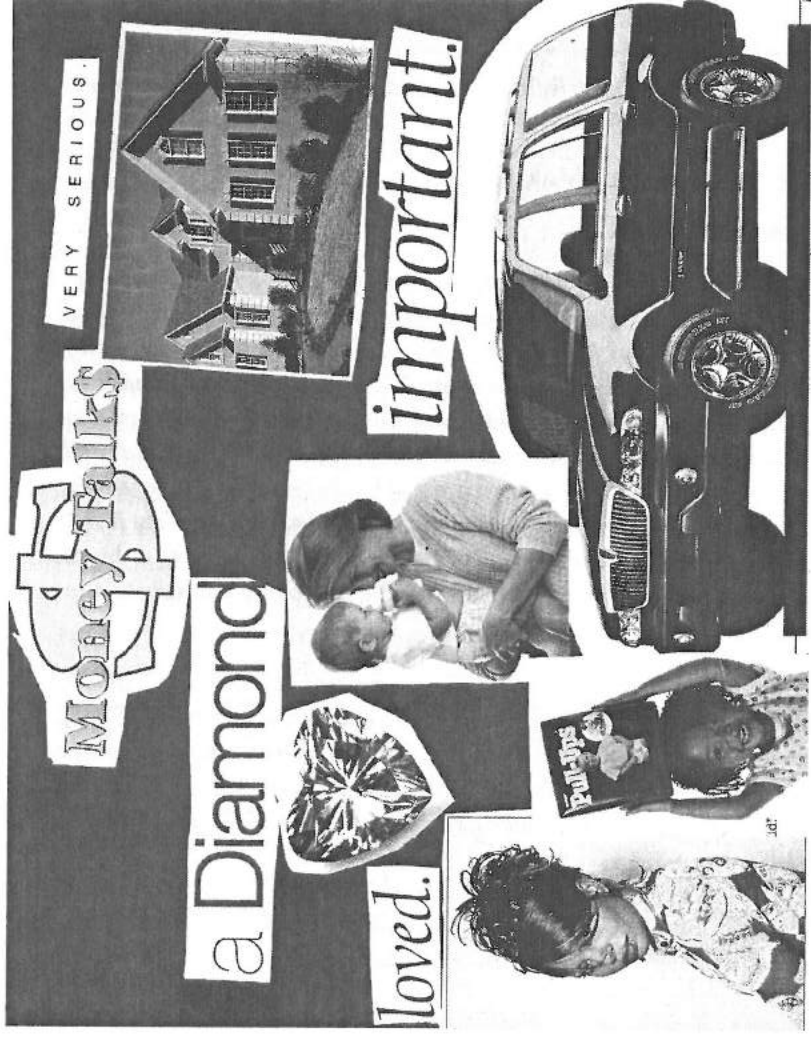


Figure 4.2: Alisha's collage



Figure 4.3: In Figures 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 "Forty-five out of fifty girls made collages with images of money."

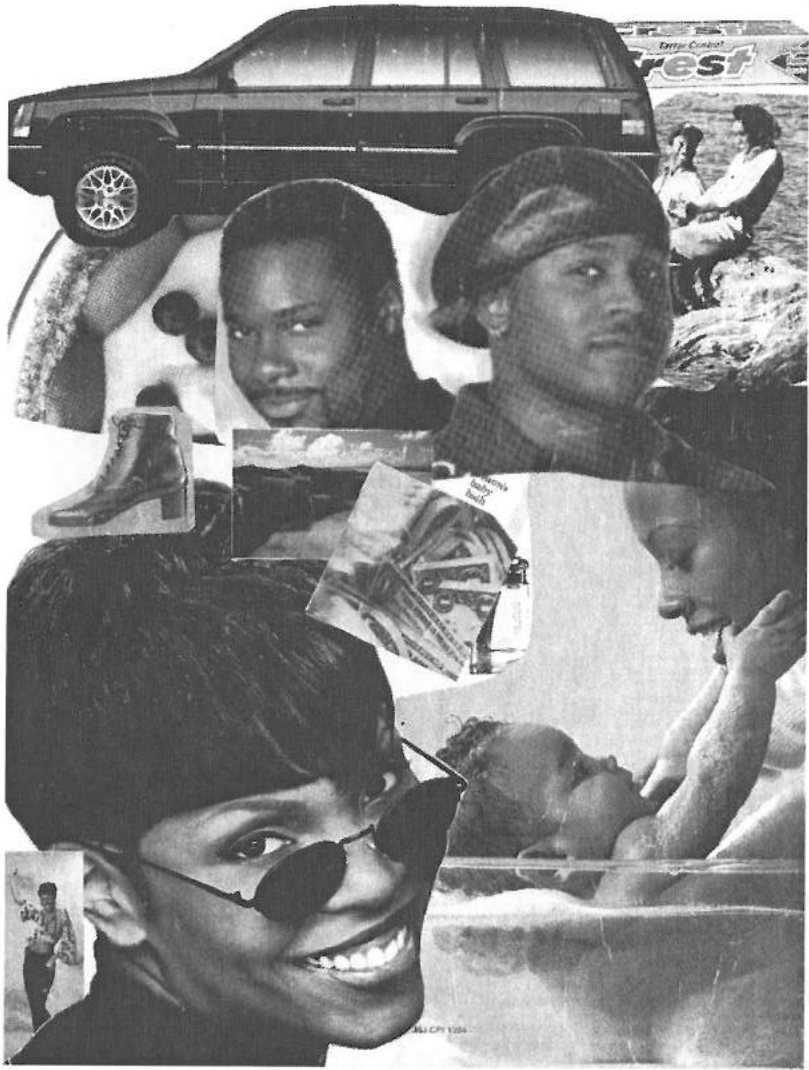


Figure 4.4

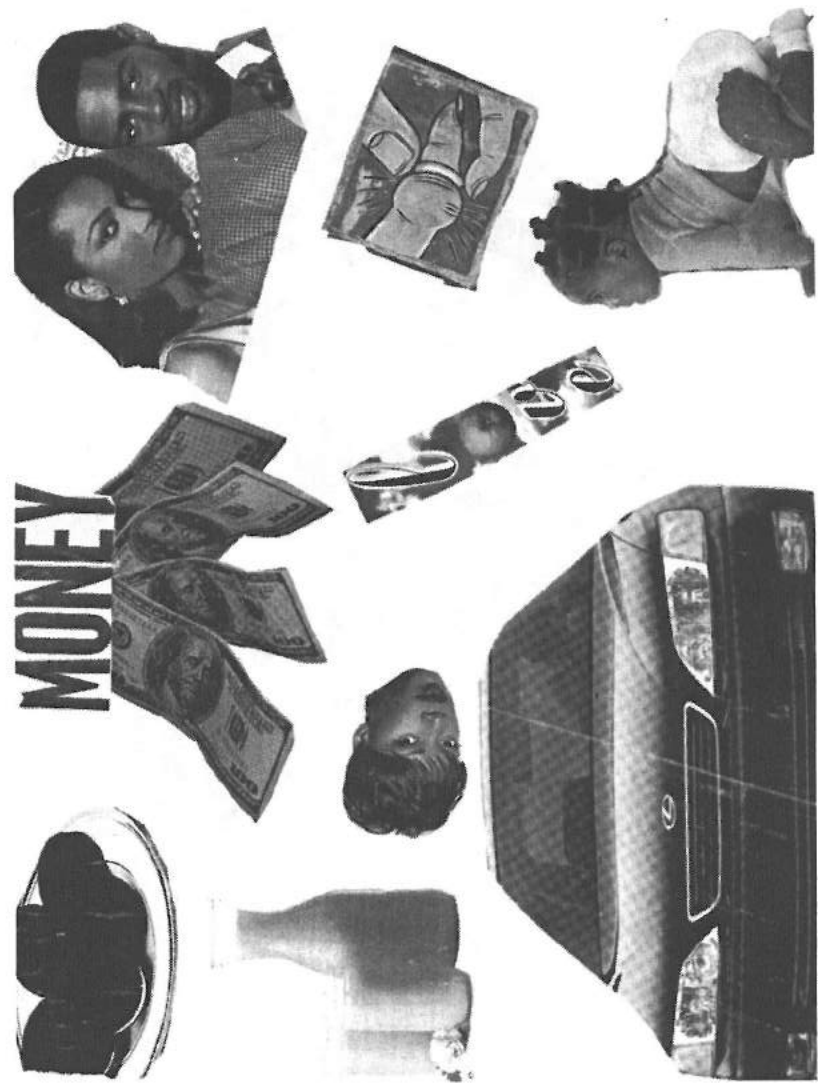


Figure 4.5



Figure 4.6: Charmine's collage

Charmine echoed this view of money when explaining her collage (see Figure 4.6):

At the top is my baby—she is My Greatest Creation [pointing to a picture of a baby and the words, greatest creation, clipped from a magazine]. And I am proud to be a Capricorn; I'm proud to be

black, I'm dark and lovely with roots that are African [pointing to these words she has clipped out and placed on the collage]. And I have style, beauty, and I'm lovable [again pointing to these words clipped from a magazine]. But it's money that makes the difference—[pointing to the pictures of dollar bills, change, two credit cards, American Express and Visa] I mean *Millions* [said with great emphasis in her voice].

Charmine's explanation of her "Who am I?" collage, her narrative of self and identity, highlights the dialogue between self and society, the intermingling of personal and cultural meanings. Her greatest *creation* (her baby as an extension of herself) is at the top, the pinnacle. Underneath is her *self* ("I am proud to be a Capricorn" [birth sign]), and *racial identity* ("I'm proud to be black; I'm dark and lovely with roots that are African"). A string of qualities regarding how she "carries herself" with style, beauty, and love fill out her collage, which above all, identifies money as "making all the difference." Not just enough money to survive, but "millions."

I was struck by the preponderance of phrases, images, and references to money in the PPPT girls' collages and wondered in what ways these images provided insight into the girls' engagement in consumer culture. I had been made acutely aware of the consumer *environments* (local groceries, downtown clothing shops compared to stores in local malls) in which the girls were treated (and mistreated) according to their race, class, and gender. The PPPT girls routinely reported on (and reenacted through performance) their weekend shopping experiences as being fraught with tension. I heard about being thrown out of the mall for inappropriate dress, being falsely accused of shoplifting, and being asked to leave backpacks with a salesperson while "white girls strolled through the store with pocketbooks the size of suitcases." But what did these references to and images of money mean to the girls?⁸

According to Elizabeth Chin (2001), ethnographer and author of *Purchasing Power: Black Kids and American Consumer Culture*, we don't know enough about American children's distinctive race, class, and gender-based experiences of the consumer world. Chin spent two years documenting the consumption patterns of poor and working-class black youth in New Haven, patterns that highlight "intimate and complex terrains of obligation, reciprocity, need, and desire" (18). In part, these young people enter a consumer world with acute awareness of the economic "nuts and bolts of daily living." Unlike their middle-class counterparts who are "shielded from mysteries like rent, grocery budgets, and the cost of clothes," the youth in her study were savvy about "how much their needs cost the family

and are expected at a young age to use their own money to buy socks, underwear, and other necessities" (5). Meanwhile, there were high demands and expectations for sharing, reciprocity, and mutual obligation placed on the three girls (and their families) whom she followed intensively. These demands hindered the range of and possibilities for the girls' consumptive activities; "whether eating, making purchases, asking for clothes, school supplies, toys, or treats," they were "fettered by material deprivation and social demands" (5–6). Yet, despite this, Chin shows how vibrantly and intensely the girls engaged with consumer culture, which resonates with the spirited way in which the PPPT girls engaged the media images. Equally important, Chin's study challenges popular, disparaging images of poor and working-class black youth as being overly immersed in consumer culture, stereotyped as "crazed and brand-addicted inner city youth willing to kill for the items they want" (3)—a stereotype that I would not want viewers to hold of the PPPT girls' collages.⁹ I join Chin in wanting to change the terms of debate about consumerism from its focus on flawed, consumeristic *individuals*, and instead, turning attention to the gender-, class-, and race-based *conditions* within which young people engage the consumer world.

From this perspective, perhaps, the preponderance of images of money within the PPPT girls' collages illustrates not only their awareness of how much money it takes to have material comforts, but how out of reach this world is. People who have more can underemphasize the role that money and material comforts play in having a "good life."¹⁰ At the same time, I was struck by the extent to which discussions about money and how much things cost were woven into everyday conversations at the PPPT (not just the collages). My reactions to the girls' preoccupation with money offers yet another layer of interpretation.

There was always at least one girl in the group who would initiate a conversation about money with the question, "How much did this or that cost?" Markers, paper, magazines, books, writing journals, folders, pens, handpainted-paper, tape, scissors, food stuffs, whatever I brought along, they wanted to know how much I had paid for it and whether they could take it home. The same held for some of my personal possessions: How much did my shoes cost, my earrings, my tape recorder, the video camera (I explained it wasn't mine)? They didn't ask if they could have these things, however. The girls' questions about money unnerved me; I worried that they might see me as a bearer of goods and/or as withholding goods (see chapter 6 for more discussion of this). Meanwhile, I noticed that the girls also asked these same questions of each other—"how much did your hair

braiding cost, where did you buy that necklace, how much were those earrings, can I have them?"

But I was most surprised by the girls' reactions to what I had paid for things—it was often much less than what they had expected. They tended not to believe me—"Those shoes couldn't cost twenty dollars. I know those shoes are leather, how could they cost twenty dollars? I could buy those shoes. Where did you get those shoes?" It was as if the girls were surprised that a certain item they thought was beyond their reach was not. This happened so often that I began to wonder whether the girls' "money talk" was, among other things, a forum for them to figure out the value of things, including their own social value in relation to mine.

Neil Altman's (1995) discussion of the role of social class in public clinic work, described in his book, *The Analyst in the Inner City*, helped me untangle my feelings and better understand the girls' "money talk." Altman is interested in how class dynamics shape the psychoanalytic encounter, and his insights can be applied to ethnographic encounters as well. He refers to the work of Muriel Dimen (1993, 1994), who writes about how economically advantaged psychoanalysts, subject to envy and resentment by their less well-off clients, can experience anxieties and conflicts about their wealth, including guilt and a false sense of security. Because many professionals have nothing more tangible by way of capital than their credentials and expertise, some members of this class can feel anxious about holding on to their knowledge and expertise (Altman 1995: 81). Indeed, Barbarara Ehrenreich (1989) makes a strong case, in her book *Fear of Falling*, that personal conflict and insecurity are inextricably tied to and stem from middle-class efforts to maintain their (unearned) advantages within society. One's awareness that his or her "credentials" are born of exclusionary practices and not simply one's own "merit" can lead to torn feelings about middle-classness, and a gap between how one is perceived (as a bearer of status and power) and how one experiences her- or himself (as vulnerable). I certainly identify with these torn feelings and have written about them elsewhere.¹¹ Dimen (1994) puts it even more boldly, stating that middle-class professionals can experience a sense of "fraudulence and looming loss" (79). From this perspective, the girls' "money talk" and my discomfort about it reveals two distinct class-based "structures of feeling";¹² a distinct middle-class constellation of guilt, insecurity, and fears about "falling"¹³ set next to a poor/working-class constellation of envy, resentment, exclusion, and fears about survival.

There is yet another layer of emotion to consider. In my work with the PPPT girls I was unequivocally positioned as a mother. And insofar as I was

viewed as a maternal figure by the PPPT girls, their “money talk” may relate to feelings of exclusion in two senses—materially and maternally (see chapter 6 where I describe a fieldwork encounter that led me to see my maternal role in a new light). According to child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1995), a child’s first sense of loss/separation from mother is felt as an exclusion and it is this feeling (and the anger and destructiveness toward mother that arise as a result) that must be repaired over the course of development. Perhaps part of what animated the girls’ focus on money echoed back to earlier experiences of separation and loss in relation to their own mothers and was being replayed in our relationship. My point is that within this ethnographic context, the girls’ “money talk” may reflect our respective class-based structures of feeling (my middle-class-based sense of guilt and fear of falling, and the girls’ poor/working-class-based sense of envy and of exclusion), and may also be wrapped with deep seated and ambivalent feelings about maternal-child bonds (Klein 1975). I will discuss the nature of maternal-child bonds more in the next chapter, but here I want to stress the overlapping sources of anxiety (my own and the girls’) regarding the salience of money.

Glamour and Style

Just as I was surprised by the consistent and recurring images of money, I was also taken with the consistency in consumer items the girls selected for their collages. Brand name items, cars, fashion, jewelry (diamonds mostly), and perfume topped the list. What I see linking these consumer items is their common reference to style and glamour (understood through a racial and class lens). The way the PPPT girls spoke of the images and words they selected sheds light on their definitions of and values about femininity. For the black girls, femininity seemed to incorporate three main things: strength (e.g., “strong, black woman”); alternative standards of beauty (e.g., style with an attitude); and respectability.

“Strong,” “black,” and “woman” were strung together in many of the girls’ explanations of their collages, as if these were linked characteristics. Interestingly, “strongblackwoman” is a one-word phrase that Joan Morgan (1999: 72) describes as a “syndrome” from which many black women are unable to escape. She argues that this congealed identity is a burden; it places an unrealistic expectation upon black women that they will always appear unflappable, whatever the hardship or pain. Morgan worries that the “strongblackwoman” identity works to deny black women a complex

psychology. Indeed, Morgan sees this image as a stereotype that has been turned into an acceptable identity at great cost to black women.

In describing how the images they selected represented themselves or their style, the girls articulated a definition of beauty that resists white standards. Much of the girls’ conversation about hairstyles and fashion indicated that “looking good” meant projecting an attitude of self confidence and control. “Looking good” was less about adhering to an ideal type of beauty, and more about making “what you got work for you,” including one’s personality. How one “carries” oneself seemed more key to being beautiful, than having an ideal body type.¹⁴

The girls’ explanations of the fashion images they selected emphasized respectability. Stylish fashion selections were often described as “sexy, but not too sexy.” These “sexy, but not too sexy” outfits were marked by class distinctions. Rather than the understated “little black dress” denoting the classic style of the rich (Davis 1992) the girls chose more glamorous clothes—short red dresses; sleek and bust-revealing business suits; long body-clinging gowns, to name a few.

The girls’ discussion of style and glamour reminded me of something British sociologist Beverly Skeggs (1997) wrote:

Glamour . . . is a way of holding together sexuality and respectability, but it is difficult to achieve. . . . Glamour is the mechanism by which the marks of middle-class respectability are transposed onto the sexual body, a way in which recognition of value is achieved. (110)

Skeggs grounds her discussion of glamour in interviews she conducted with white working-class women, whom she claims seek to be glamorous because it “gives agency, strength and worth back to women and is not restricted to youth. They do glamour with style. Glamour is about a performance of femininity with strength” (111).

Performances of femininity are always deeply class- and race-based, reflections not only of one’s beauty and taste, but of one’s social position and value.¹⁵ I see the girls’ conversations about style, attitude, and deportment as being tied to their conflicts over social distinctions about who is and is not valued (which they are also trying to figure out through their money talk, for example, how much are things worth and can they get these things). Being glamorous, like having access to money, is a way to signal to others that one has value. It was not as if the girls seemed to expect that they would be valued or respected, rather they seemed to view their value as something to be achieved (through “attitude,” style, respectability). The

girls' references to struggles for respectability include their discussions about celebrities. In the conversation that opens this chapter Tanya asked, "Why is it that famous people always go out with other famous people? Why don't they ever go out with people like us?" Tanya's question was greeted with laughter by her classmates because everyone knows that this would be improbable. The difference between "famous people" and "people like us" is not simply about fame, beauty, taste, or style (because those can be "achieved" with money); it is about social position and respect. Indeed, it was a celebrity's ability to command respect against great odds, to be recognized and treated as valued despite whatever might have tarnished her or his reputation, that galvanized the girls' interest. The girls noted different strategies that celebrities used to garner respect—from "speaking her mind" to "holding her head up high" to seeking redemption through religion/spirituality. But the goal was the same—getting respect.

My point is that the girls' "Who am I?" media collages and explanations are about much more than their engagement in consumer worlds. These forms of self-representation also speak to the powerful role that money and commodities play in the girls' notions of femininity. Their media collages also provide a glimpse of the girls' insights and conflicts about social relations of respect that shape the self- and identity-making process.

Ideal Motherhood

In Alisha's "money talks" collage, there was one image she did not reference in her explanation to the class. It is a picture of a white, blond-haired woman holding a white baby.

"Tell us about this image," I asked.

"It is there because it is a look of love between a mother and her baby, like I feel for my baby." Alisha stops, then continues, "All I want is for my baby to be happy, to feel loved."

Alisha does not see herself as the mother in this image. Recall that she pointed to a black woman with a stylish hairstyle and said, "This is me and my style." Rather, this mother-child image is *addressing* her as a mother and the feeling she has, or ought to have, for her baby.

Tarisha's collage has three "look of love" images placed side-by-side. (See Figure 4.7) The first is an image of Victorian romance—a white man in a white linen suit wearing a top hat holds his beloved's face tenderly in his hands. The white woman, dressed in white lace and a bonnet, gazes up into her man's eyes (it is an image from the movie, *Little Women*, with

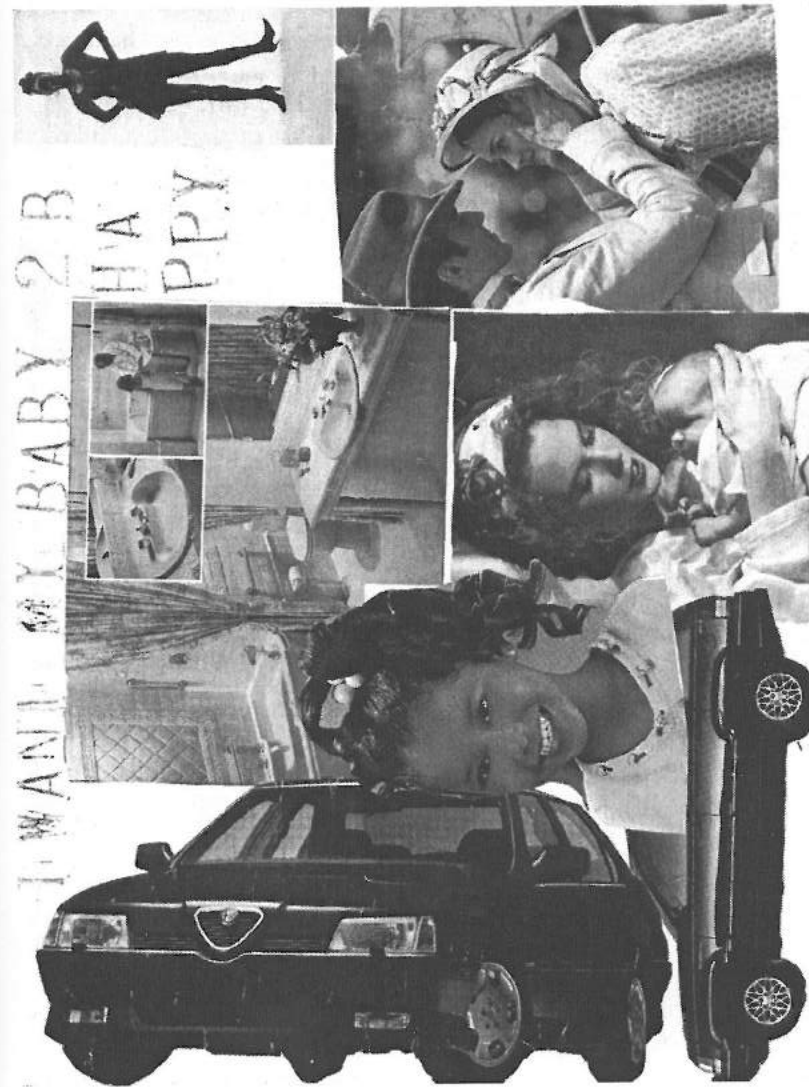


Figure 4.7: Tarisha's collage

media stars Winona Ryder and Daniel Day Lewis, although this was not mentioned by Tarisha in her explanation). The second is a picture of a white woman with a full head of long, red curls (who looks to be the film star Nicole Kidman) holding an infant in her arms, carefully protecting his or her head with her hand and gazing into the baby's face. Above these two images Tarisha pastes a picture of an elegant spacious pink-tiled bathroom adorned with gold hardware and floral curtains. There is an inset with a white woman helping a white child into the bathtub. Tarisha explains that all three images are "beautiful; they show being loved and living a whole new way of life. Like living in a mansion or something." Berger might suggest that the first two "look of love" images speak to personal transformation (romance, maternal love), and the third speaks to transformation of class relationships through a general atmosphere of assembled products that creates a sense that one is well-off. But what is striking to me is that these images are linked in Tarisha's mind, that the mansion and bathroom are settings in which love (both adult, romantic love and maternal love) can flourish.

In the top right corner of Tarisha's collage there is a picture of a black woman wearing a very short red dress. Tarisha points to it and says, "Here I am standing tall, tough. This is my style." At the top of the collage Tarisha has used the alphabet stamp set to print the phrase, "I want my baby 2 B Happy." Tarisha says (pointing to the picture of the black woman in the red dress), "This is me and these are the things I want for my baby. But more than anything else, I want my baby to be happy, to feel special. I want to make it feel loved." Again, the image, that Tarisha says is her, is the glamorous black woman wearing a short red dress, "standing tall, tough." Indeed, a not-mother figure is "who I am" for Tarisha (and for Alisha). But what do these other images—images shot through with whiteness—mean for Tarisha and Alisha?

One answer is that these white images of love reveal a belief (conscious or otherwise) that whiteness is enviable.¹⁶ Perhaps, but this is not how I would interpret it. Rather, I see the girls drawing upon these images as part of a larger convergence of cultural symbols that tie the "good" life to a life without hardship. That these images also tied the good life to ideal motherhood and by extension to the ideal child is key.

Not all the PPPT girls selected white images of maternal-child love. Recall that Tracey found a light-skinned black woman wearing silk pajamas who is exchanging a playful and loving gaze with her baby. (See Figure 4.8) And there were abundant images of smiling black mothers holding smiling black babies

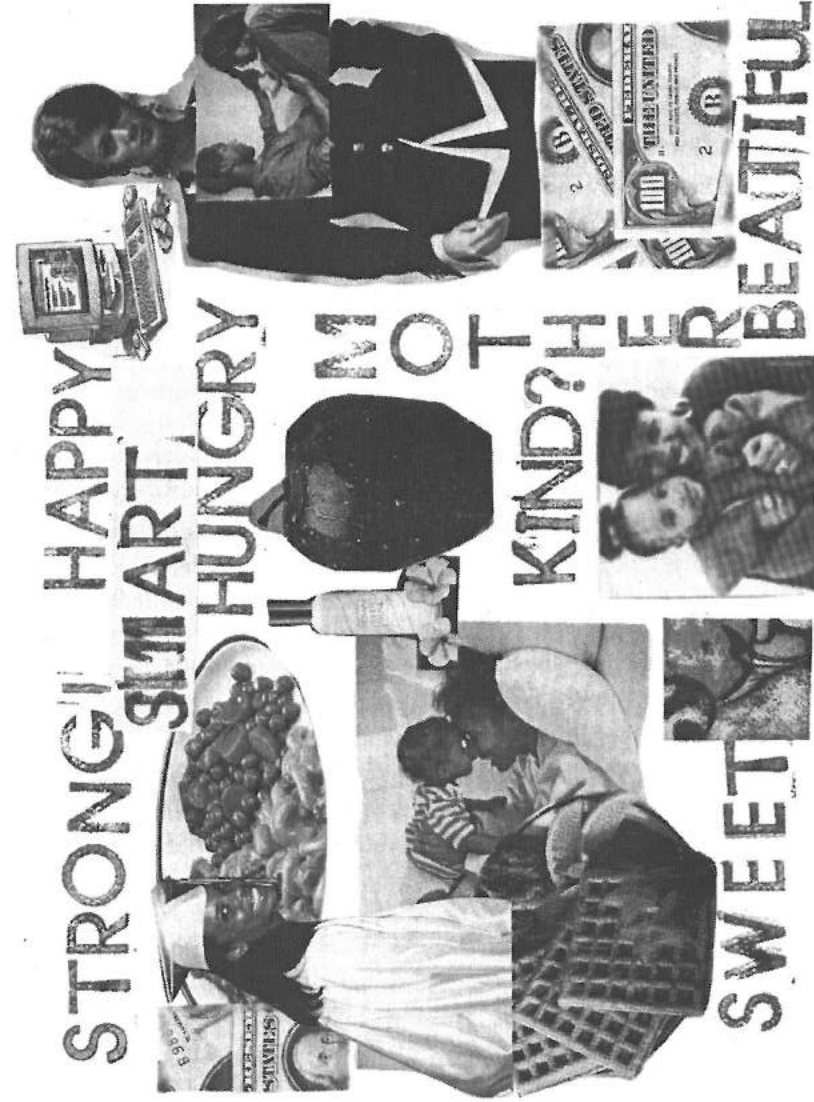


Figure 4.8: Tracey's collage

looking directly into the camera (more than half the collages contained such mother-child images). Both sets of images were explained in a patterned way—that a girl wished for her baby’s happiness, that her baby would come to know how much it is loved. “Whatever people may tell her, I want my baby to know she was not a mistake, that she is loved,” explained Louise as she described the mother-child image she had selected for her collage.

“Whatever people may tell her” (and “whatever I may tell myself”) is the internal dialogue, underlying the appeal and promise of these magazine/ advertising images. In part, the PPPT girls’ images and statements about maternal love are their way of talking back to dominant cultural discourses about teenage pregnancy. To those who would say their babies were “unwanted,” “unplanned,” or a “mistake” (including critical voices in their own heads), the girls’ replies were unwavering—their soon-to-be-born babies are worthy and valuable. In this way, these images of maternal love are to motherhood what the images of glamour are to womanhood, a performance of femininity with strength, respectability, and value.

There is power and strength in the steadfast, unconditional love that “good” mothers provide children, especially children who must rise above hardship. “Being there” for their babies through life’s inevitable struggles—maternal protection—was the most prevalent quality indexed by the PPPT girls in their discussions about motherhood. “Being there” was part of a constellation of qualities, including “facing the consequences of” their pregnancies and “being responsible for,” and “not letting down,” and “starting life over with” their babies. Shadra and Michelle respectively echoed the sentiments of many of the PPPT girls:

I don’t ever want my child to feel as if the world is coming down on her because that’s just how the world does everybody. And that’s something that she will learn to be true as she gets older. I would give her the world if I could and the moon and the stars too, if I could. I want her to know she will always have someone to talk to, someone who will always be there for her.

I wish the best for my baby and that I will always be with him. I mostly wish an easier life for my baby and that he will know that he is loved.

The girls’ explanations of their maternal love images and their discussions about motherhood reveal the complicated connections between material conditions and maternal love. On one level, the girls’ images may be

speaking to their fears about not being able to love/care for their children through material goods. On another level, these images may be speaking to the girls’ own personal longings for the ideal maternal caregiver, someone who will “be there” against all odds, what some feminist critics have called the “myth of maternal omnipotence” (Chodorow and Contratto 1982). I have written elsewhere about the tenacious hold of this myth (Luttrell 1997), but my work with the PPPT girls has made me even more aware of its grip.

Briefly put, the myth of maternal omnipotence has to do with a false perception of mothers, a view that the sole reason for a mother’s existence is to gratify her children’s wants and needs *and* that she has the power to do so. But these perceptions don’t simply exist in the world as notions swirling around our heads. Rather, deeply held personal feelings of love, hate, dependency, and resentment toward our early caregivers (predominantly women) get fused with and fuel such cultural perceptions and beliefs. This illusion about mother love (and its power), this false perception of a mother’s command of her child’s life and development, is problematic in at least three ways. First, it sets up social expectations about maternal practices, that mothers have “natural” instincts or propensities for caregiving and self-sacrifice. Second, it ignores the extent to which social forces and the environment shape the conditions under which children are raised and develop. And third, it masks a mother’s own subjectivity, her distinct range of feelings, motivations, needs, and wants as a person. The myth of maternal omnipotence holds up a standard for mothering and maternal-child bonds that is impossible to achieve.

Elements of this myth are infused throughout the girls’ art forms and in their informal conversations about their hopes for their babies. I am especially struck by their all-encompassing wishes for an ideal world for their soon-to-be-born babies, how the girls’ vision of maternal love is not simply about the provision of goods, but about the creation of a more perfect world, at best the “world, moon, and stars” but at the least, an “easier life.” This idealized view of mother-child relationships is child-centered, a view that dominates both psychological theory and popular discourse about the nature of mother-child bonds, so it should not surprise us that this view comes across in the girls’ collages. At the same time, the girls’ emphasis on maternal love also speaks to their class-based expectations that life is a struggle (“the world comes down on people and that’s just how the world does everybody”) and that maternal love is a powerful antidote (hardship can be survived if someone is “there for you”). On still another level, the black girls may be answering to what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls racial “controlling images” of the

“black matriarchy,” where black women are simultaneously exalted for their sacrifices and support of black families and disparaged for their undue control over black men and children (another version of the “strongblack-woman” image and the myth of maternal omnipotence).

But what seems especially pernicious about the idealization of maternal love is how it is tied to and draws upon the cherished American value of individualism and self-reliance—that individuals (i.e., mothers) rather than collective entities (i.e., communities, the state) should be able to provide for their children’s needs (as well as other dependents like the elderly). This cultural emphasis on individual self-reliance, which feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin (1988) argues includes “contempt for the needy and dependent” and a rejection of “social forms of providing nurturance,” rests upon yet another set of tenacious cultural beliefs and personal meanings—gender polarities. These polarities, according to Benjamin “pit freedom against nurturance: either we differentiate or remain dependent; either we stand alone or are weak; either we relinquish autonomy or renounce the need for love” (171–172). These polarities are gendered insofar as freedom and autonomy get idealized and culturally associated with men and masculinity, while the capacities for nurturance and dependency are split off, denigrated, and culturally associated with women and femininity. I suggest that these maternal love images are especially hard for the girls themselves to unpack, which becomes clearer if we compare the girls’ discussion of maternal love with their discussion of heterosexual adult love.

Heterosexual Romance

While most of the girls drew on idealized images of maternal love, less than a third of the collages contained images of heterosexual romance. I was surprised that there were as few images of heterosexual romance as there were, especially given contemporary discussions about teenage girls’ preoccupation with romance. There were images of black couples playing ball in a field; walking arm and arm under a tree; water skiing together; sitting on the floor embracing each other; snuggled together on a couch watching television, and so forth. In explaining these images, most girls talked about “having a man in my life.” Charlene drew laughter and nods of agreement from her viewers when she explained, “I want a man in my life. I’m not saying he has to be a husband or anything, but I’m looking for a man.”

Tracey selected a picture of a black couple that she said showed the kind of relationship she hoped for. The image proved to be controversial, sparking debate among the girls as to whether the image represented love or whether it was a scene about domestic violence. The girls constructed sev-

eral stories to explain what was going on in the picture, which depicts a man and a woman sitting across from each other. The man’s knee is bent and he is holding the woman’s arm, which she has lifted to her forehead. The picture is not in color, but in brownish hues, making it all the more ominous, or romantic, depending upon your viewpoint. (See Figure 4.8) Tracey listened attentively to her classmates spin different tales about this man’s violent behavior, “He hits her up the side of her head when he goes off. . . . No, no, no, he’s the type that comes home and if he sees that everything’s calm and quiet, he has to make trouble, so he starts hitting her.” “She’s holding her head after being hit, and he is trying to say he’s sorry.” Tracey finally put an end to the discussion by saying that even if the man had just hit his girlfriend and he was apologizing, promising that he’d never do it again, in that case, it was still a “picture of love.” Her statement generated further debate among the girls as to whether the picture could be about “love” if it involved violence or abuse. In the end, Tracey said she was keeping the picture on her collage; her classmates could see what they wanted in her picture. For her, it still symbolized “love and happiness.”

I found it interesting that these images of heterosexual romance were so often accompanied by stories like the one above. It was as if the images called upon the girls to create a narrative about characters, events, things that had preceded this or that interaction (e.g., “The couple is on their honeymoon, water skiing”; “The man has just asked the woman to marry him,” “He has just hit her and is begging her forgiveness,” and so forth). And I was surprised by how much these stories articulated both a sense of danger or violence, as well as being a wellspring of fantasies about the “man of my dreams.”

The girls’ discussions of the images of heterosexual romance they had selected, as well as their commentary on celebrities’ successful and failed romances, reveal their tacit knowledge of what makes a typical or successful romantic relationship. Through these discussions, the girls showed their knowledge of the scripts and scenarios within the world of heterosexual romance. For example, while making her collage, Ebony found an article about Wesley Snipes, which sparked the following conversation.

“Look here, what he says. He says that everybody wants his time and energy, and they always want his money. Ohh, . . . and then he says, ‘good sex is hard to come by,’ ‘good sex can make you happy; you come away feeling happy.’”¹⁷

“You know he dates white women,” Shannon announced.

“Give me that, he doesn’t say that,” Tara grabbed the article from Ebony.

“It says he dates white women?”

The girls start talking all at once about “famous people” and the things they can say and do, who they can date, and how much easier it is for celebrities to cross the color line in romance than it is for people they know.

Meanwhile, the script most often discussed by the PPPT girls had to do with men and women who were “players”—who “knew how to play the game and not get hurt.” The idea was not to let on that you liked a man because you would soon find out that he was “playing you”—that he had a string of girls and you were just one among many. The girls seemed to especially enjoy telling stories about how a girlfriend, or in some instances, they themselves, had “played” someone “at his own game.” Sociologist Greg Dimitriadis found the same script among youth in a small Midwestern city where he ran a weekly program in a community center for African American youth. The program focused on engaging young people in discussions about popular culture, “African American vernacular culture (generally) and hip hop or rap music (specifically)” (Dimitriadis 2001a: 32). Through these discussions, Dimitriadis learned about, among other things, a “local ethic” that borrowed on themes in Southern rap music; this ethic included “playing, respect, friendship, and community” (46). Dimitriadis describes the world of heterosexual romance that he observed as being a site of “intense anxiety” for both young men and women who worried about getting hurt and losing a sense of self in relationships. “In the face of uncertainty and contingency, loss of autonomy and hurt, these young people drew upon an ethic of invulnerability and mutual manipulation” (45).

Anthropologist Dorothy Holland and her co-authors (1998) offer another way to understand the girls’ images and talk about heterosexual romance as conveying their knowledge of the “figured world of romance,” within which girls fashion a sense of self and learn the “rules” that govern male-female relationships, love, and sex. In the figured world of romance there are scripts about romantic encounters, conduct, and motivations, including different “types” of men and women and their place in a hierarchy (Holland and Eisenhart 1990). For example, a “hunk” (an attractive man) would be less likely to date a “dog” (an unattractive woman); and if he did, he could more likely expect sexual favors from her than from a girl who is attractive or has as much prestige as he. Similarly, a “jerk” (an insensitive or stupid man) doesn’t know how to show a woman that he appreciates her or that she is unique, and thus is unsuccessful in his romantic relationships. The same elements of the figured world of romance noted by Holland and Eisenhart—attractiveness, prestige, how to know one is valued by one’s partner—were evident in the PPPT girls’ conversations and especially in their stories about “playing and being played.”

Not everyone referenced having a man as part of her collage, but it was striking how often the black girls referenced their love of black men.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the girls did not speak about their own romances much in the classroom setting. There were times when a girl would refuse to answer her classmates’ questions about a boyfriend for fear that this information might get used against her.¹⁹ As Malika replied:

I’m not saying anything. Last time I told my girlfriends about how much I like Malcom—he’s my baby’s daddy—they were all over him. Yeah, that’s what I say, don’t be talking about your man because that will be the end of it.

But what struck me most about these stories of romantic love is how much less idealized, more elaborated, more grounded in personal experience and expertise they were compared to those regarding maternal love. The girls reflected on the world of romance with cynicism (“I know what that guy is after”) and doubt (“They’re happy now, but that will end in no time at all”) and at times resistance, as with the picture some girls refused to see as “romantic” because of what they saw as its violent edges. But the images of maternal love were discussed less critically. It was as if these images spoke for themselves, as if maternal love was a more “natural” and intrinsically motivating activity, whereas heterosexual love was more storied and social. The motivations connected to heterosexual love were understood to be complex and mutually reinforcing (even if dangerous, unequal, or cause for pain). These relationships were understood to provide something for both the man and the woman (e.g., the validation that one is attractive or has prestige or value or can “play the game”). But the more or less unspoken motivations connected to maternal love were not mutual. To make a child know she is special, to realize that one is not alone in the world, that there is someone who will always “be there,” is a one-sided version of the meaning of maternal love. This is the child’s side, the side that does not acknowledge the subjectivity of the mother who is doing the loving or “being there.” It is a love so ideal that it cannot be fully realized by any *real* mother (or person). And if this reality is set aside, if mothers are seen as omnipotent, fearsome, and/or perfect, then the possibility for experiencing mutuality in the relationship is cut off. Compared to the more elaborated cultural scripts and scenarios defining the “rules of the game” for heterosexual romance (including skepticism), the cultural script for maternal-child love seems underdeveloped, cast in oversimplified and idealized terms—the perfect mother and the “special” baby. Without the means for social instruction and peer group culture that would prepare girls to see themselves as

subjects in the figured world of motherhood (i.e., people who have mixed feelings, intentions, and goals, including maternal ambivalence), it is all the easier for them to accept myths of maternal omnipotence and idealized notions of motherhood that dominate the culture.²⁰

Another way of seeing the distinctive scripts and scenarios for these two worlds—heterosexual romance and motherhood—is that both are sites of anxiety. But the strategies for managing anxiety are different; in the world of heterosexual romance, the way one protects oneself against loss and disappointment is to be invulnerable and skeptical, wary of all versions of “the game.” In the world of motherhood, one protects oneself against loss and disappointment by splitting the mother (and baby) into two types: the ideal and the denigrated.

The girls’ collages shed light on how they are being addressed by and answering to different social worlds that are anxiety-ridden and evoke different responses. There is the world of consumer culture that promises social respect but is based upon social inequities (especially racial discrimination in the case of the black PPPT girls) to which the girls must answer; there is the world of womanhood divided by class and race to which the girls answer with strength and respectability expressed through glamour; there is the anxiety-provoking lure of heterosexual romance to which the girls answer with varied strategies of self-protection; and there is the soon-to-be-experienced world of motherhood and the attendant worries about maternal protection and provision, to which the girls answer through idealization.

At the same time, each girl’s collage takes us inside her own world, confirming her unique mark, creativity, and agency amid what critics consider a barrage of deadening media images.

Answering Questions that Are Not Their Own

Adolescent Female Sexuality

Remember Kaela from the previous chapter, who portrayed herself at age seven on her way to the candy store. Kaela engaged in the “Who am I?” collage activity with the same energetic fashion. After pasting a constellation of common consumer items (car, perfume, money, and mansion-like house), she added a picture of a grandmother and baby caught in a look of love. Kaela explained that her mother was getting more and more excited about having a grandchild; Kaela said her baby “was sure to be loved.” She used the alphabet stamp set to print the words “I love Black Men.” Then Kaela pasted the word virgin? (cut from a magazine) at the center top of the page. (See Figure 4.9) Without missing a beat, one girl asked her why she



Figure 4.9: Kaela's collage

had the question mark after the word virgin: "You are pregnant, aren't you? I mean you are showing, there's no mistaking it." Before Kaela could respond, another girl said she could understand why someone might have questions about whether or not she was still a virgin: "What about girls who are raped or sexually abused?" A heated debate ensued and there was no consensus about what makes a girl a virgin, what makes her "pure" in the eyes of others or in her own eyes. Kaela then announced to the group that she wished she was still a virgin, and that, if she had it to do over again, she would wait to have sex. At least two other girls nodded in agreement, until Tara interrupted, "Well, how long would you wait before you had sex?" "How old do you think a girl should be before she has sex?" Before Kaela could answer, another lively discussion erupted with some girls arguing for abstinence before marriage and others saying this wasn't practical because their boyfriends "wouldn't stand for it." In this discussion, there were no girls who acknowledged their own desires for sexual activity.²¹

The girls' discussion reflects what Michelle Fine (1988) calls the "blanketing" of female sexual subjectivity—the muting and suppression of a discourse of female sexual desire. Fine points out that female desire and pleasure is not openly discussed; the prevailing framework for discussing sex "allows girls one primary decision—to say yes or no to a question not necessarily their own" (34). This results in a process of subjectivity—called splitting—through which girls' bodies and sexualities get divided along an artificially constructed set of opposites: a set of opposites that Jessica Benjamin refers to as splits between "subject and object, good and bad, doer and done-to" (1988: 222). We can see the girls struggling to answer a question not necessarily their own when Tara asks, "How long would you wait?" The question is not, "What is your pleasure," but "When will you say yes or no?" By framing and embracing the question in this divided, yes or no way, it precludes the necessity for girls to deal with contradictory tendencies within themselves about what they desire.

What does it mean to be a virgin? Is Kaela a pregnant girl trying to answer to her social world where she must account for her sexual activity in ways not required of boys? Or of some girls? As Zora Neal Hurston (1928) would ask, "Compared to what? As of when? Who is asking? In what context? For what purpose? With what interests and presuppositions?" The contemporary context of a *missing* discourse of female desire and pleasure makes it especially difficult for girls to answer what it means to be a virgin. And it is not as if the PPPT girls can find a voice or fashion a self-representation that is independent of the varied and competing discourses that define teenage sexuality, including the sexual double standard by which boys and girls continue

to be judged according to different criteria and face different consequences for their sexual activity. Rather, the girls must find a voice by taking a stance toward these discourses.

From this perspective, Kaela is taking up her own *questioning* stance toward sex and female desire. Indeed, when speaking about sex the PPPT girls took up many different stances, including three stances identified by Greenburg et al. (1993) in their work on the effect of media images of teenage girls' views about sexuality—"uninterested, intrigued, and resistant" (180). I will elaborate on this further in the next chapter, but here I want to emphasize Kaela's agency, her answer, which is to question the *meaning* of virginity, and to consider, even if tentatively, how she defines her own desires.

Racial Socialization

Sara's collage was made up completely of words and phrases she clipped out of the magazines; it contained no media images, it did not engage consumer culture, nor did it present a life-as-I-might-want, full of luxury items.

When I met Sara she was fifteen and held a job at a local fast food chain. She liked having a job because she could use her wages to buy clothes, see movies, and go partying, all of which she otherwise would have been unable to enjoy.²² She moved between living with her grandmother, who was a retired nurse's assistant, and her mother, whose employment was not stable. Sara was an eager participant in the sessions and attended class more regularly than most. She had earned the reputation of being a good student because she turned her assignments in on time and with accuracy.

Sara kept cutting out words and phrases, making a pile in front of her. It wasn't until the next session that she started to winnow through her pile, placing the following constellation of words and phrases onto her piece of construction paper: (See Figure 4.10)

Smart; Tone your thighs with squats; one on one
As Good As New
Cool Down
Love to Spare; Power Up
Bright Lights, Big Mouth
Take Control
Dance fever; God's Gift; Beautiful
Wise Wisdom

This was how she explained the meaning of her collage:



Figure 4.10: Sara's collage

I was told to cool down when me and my teacher were fussing. This is how it started. I was in Ms. Little's room when I was supposed to be in Ms. Pepper's room and Ms. Little came into the room and started yelling at me. I started yelling at her (I don't let anybody yell at me). She told me that I needed to cool down and go to my right class. I was mad and angry. I wanted to hit her and just leave

school—not see her face anymore. But I got through it by talking to my grandmother and then talking to Ms. Little and my grandmother in a conference. When I get angry it is hard for me to hold myself back but I got to learn to deal with things better and not get so angry. So that's who I am.

Many of the words/phrases included in her collage had to do with what she needed to do to “get through it” (i.e., her feelings of anger). “One on one” referred to her grandmother's advice: “It isn't good to bottle up your emotions, but you should find a way to express yourself one on one. She says you don't want to give people ammunition to say you are acting colored.”

She said both Ms. Little and her grandmother told her to “cool down,” to “not let people get the better of you, you got to take control of yourself.” Sara explained that during the conference she had complained that Ms. Little was “too hard on” and sometimes “spoke down to” her and the other girls. Ms. Little acknowledged that maybe sometimes she is harsh, but this is “for the girls' own good” because they need to “toughen up” if they are going to survive in an even harsher world outside, a view of the world that Sara and her grandmother easily embrace. Ms. Little says her philosophy of “tough love” rests on “never forgetting who you are and where you come from.” Sara explained that “Bright Lights, Big Mouth” was how her teachers and her grandmother see her, that she is smart but “can't keep her big mouth shut.”

“As Good as New” refers to her body, that after giving birth, she plans to “tone my thighs” and get in shape. “Love to Spare” and “Power Up” represent Sara's emotional capacities—her abundant and intense love for herself and her baby. “God's Gift” refers to Sara's soon-to-be-born baby, whom Sara hopes will be able to enjoy life without “a care in the world.” She put the phrase “Dance Fever” on the collage to represent one of life's greatest pleasures, dancing. “Beautiful, wise, and wisdom” denote the qualities she admires in herself that she hopes to pass down to her child.

Sara's collage references several themes that are threaded throughout the girls' self-representations: class-based understandings about life's hardships and the value of toughness and a thick-skinned self; a performance of femininity with strength and maternal love; and racial identification and affiliation. Sara's explanation of her collage also takes us inside a world of black womanhood where racial socialization is a point of tension and connection, where important black women in Sara's life hope to guide her through the maze of her feelings and the realities of her world.

Sara's description of this world reminded me of two forms of resistance, what Robinson and Ward (1991) have called “resistance for survival”

and “resistance for liberation,” strategies that black adolescent females adopt in their struggles against life’s hardships and negative judgments. The first strategy, “resistance for survival,” is “oriented toward quick fixes that offer short term solutions” (Ward 1996: 60), such as “mouthing off” when mistreated by authorities. The second strategy “offers confirmation of positive self conceptions as well as strengthening connections to the broader African American community” (60). Sara’s experience of racial socialization illustrates both.

By suggesting that she wants Sara to avoid “acting colored,” Sara’s grandmother is drawing on the same stereotypical conception of blackness that she is preparing Sara to reject. This is part of a mixed message embedded in racial codes of conduct that require black children to answer to a question not necessarily their own. Writing about her own experience of these mixed messages, Karla Holloway (1995), tells a story about a mother who admonishes her child about not behaving well in public by saying, “Act your age, not your color.” Holloway writes that “Those words, whispered with an intensity only a black child understands, initiate a public behavior firmly attached to a conviction that our places in line are easily jeopardized” (4). I would add that those words are part of a process of subjectivity through which black children’s sense of selfhood gets divided along artificially constructed opposites that associate badness with blackness and goodness with whiteness.

Meanwhile, mixed into their warning to Sara, both her teacher and her grandmother affirm Sara’s intelligence, her quick wit and “bright lights,” as crucial abilities that Sara holds to deal with the world around her. These two black elders acknowledge the existence and reality of life’s hardships and racial divisions against which Sara must fight. By encouraging Sara to identify and name her anger and to confront issues one-on-one, these two women are promoting a strategy of liberation.

Racial Selfhood and Identity

Celia, a white girl, “went missing” like Alice, whom I mentioned in the previous chapter. Both opted for the “homebound” program—Celia in her eighth month of pregnancy and Alice in her fifth. Celia’s collage presents a dialogue she is having between herself and her social world, and how she must answer to questions that are not necessarily her own.

When I first met Celia she was already having complications with her pregnancy—she was in her fifth month. Celia was living with her parents

and two sisters, both of whom had also gotten pregnant as teenagers. Celia described her parents as “hard working” and as “Christians.” Her father works as a mechanic and her mother works as a supermarket clerk. Celia was quiet during most of the sessions.

At the center of her collage Celia pasted the word “American,” which she had cut out of a magazine. At the top, in larger bold black letters she placed the word, GOOD. Into the o’s of “good” Celia added her own details—a smiling face and a frowning face, indicating, “How I feel some days happy, sometimes sad.” To the left of the word, GOOD, she pasted colorful, different-sized letters to spell NICE. She artfully constructed the word, “nice,” including a border, which took her the better part of the session. The next day Celia wrote in smaller, red marker letters the phrase, “Fair Person” at the very top of her collage. She added several other phrases—“treats everyone equal,” is “against violence,” is a “friendly person!” and a “good friend.” She used markers to make a pastel colored banner around the phrase, “treats everyone equal.” (See Figure 4.11)

Celia spoke quietly and softly as she explained her collage to her classmates, saying, “This is who I am. This is what people who know me would say about me.” The room grew quiet and I sensed tension in the room (my own? Celia’s? Celia’s classmates’?). I wasn’t sure how to interpret this because Celia was friendly with Alisha, a black classmate with whom she rode the bus to school, and she was often included by the other girls in informal conversation and planning for out-of-school activities. It seemed to me at the time as if the girls were reluctant or unwilling to enter Celia’s framing of her self and identity—they were not “having it,” so to speak.²³ Breaking the silence, I asked Celia, “I notice you have a banner around ‘treats everyone equal’; can you tell us about this?” she replied:

Well, to me, everyone is human and it doesn’t matter if you are black or white. You shouldn’t look at people and say, “Oh I don’t like them,” you should be nice to everyone. I believe everyone should be considered for who they are as a human being and not for the color of their skin. Underneath, everyone is good. So I try to treat everyone equal. I’m not prejudiced.

Tanya offered her opinion, “Well, people don’t treat each other equal and that’s how the world is. Subject closed.” Everyone started talking at once, gathering up their belongings because the class session was over.

I planned to begin the next session by asking Celia more questions about her collage. When she did not arrive in class I wondered whether and



Against Violence

Figure 4.11: Celia's collage

how to broach the topic again. I needn't have worried because Tanya remarked, "Celia's not here, and I had a question for her." "Yeah, I had a question too, say, what do you mean you are *American*?" (said with an angry intonation). The girls started talking all at once and it was hard to make out what anyone was saying. The conversation quickly turned to food and who was wanting a hamburger.²⁴

Celia's collage raises questions, some of which I have inadequate information to answer. My focus in this section is on Celia's agency. Like Kaela and Sara, I see Celia trying to answer a question that may not be her own—in Kaela's case it is about the meaning of virginity and mixed feelings about her sexual desires, in Sara's case it is the split meanings of racial codes of conduct, and in Celia's case it is about the complicated meaning of whiteness.

I see Celia trying to answer to her social world as a white girl living in a racially divided town, a white girl who does not want to be seen as prejudiced. I suspect that the question she thinks is being asked of her as a white person is, "Are you or are you not prejudiced?" This question does not leave much room for considering the multitude of feelings and experiences she might have about her racial subjectivity and "difference" as a white girl who is far from well-off and feels far from advantaged; as the single white pregnant girl in her class (just as Alice had been); as a white Christian girl who attends a small, racially mixed Christian evangelical congregation; as a white girl who dated a black youth (who is not her baby's father, but "could just as easily be" according to Celia) and kept this information from her parents. Celia clearly considers the address "American" as unproblematic, a view her classmates do not share with her. From her black classmates' perspective, Celia's claims to being American were annoying, if not offensive.

What does it mean to be American? Zora Neal Hurston (1928) would surely challenge this structure of address, as did some of the PPPT girls in the discussion. "Compared to what? As of when?²⁵ Who is asking? In what context? For what purpose? With what interests and presuppositions?"

Ruth Frankenberg (1993) argues that color and power evasiveness is the dominant language of race in the United States today. For many people, to be caught in the "act of seeing race" is to be caught being "prejudiced." Frankenberg argues that color-blind discourses, like the one Celia draws upon, hold mixed messages. In some cases, color differences are denied—the "I don't see color, I only see human beings" version. In this version, seeing color in people is not a good thing to do, it can even be offensive. In other cases, color differences are noticed but do (or should) not mean anything. As Celia states, "I believe everyone should be considered for who they are as a human being and not for the color of their skin."

Celia draws upon other discourses of race as well; there are Christian overtones in her statements, the language of essential goodness in people (“Underneath, everyone is good”) and the golden rule of being “nice to everyone.” There is a liberal humanist overtone, the belief in “human sameness to which ‘race’ is added as a secondary characteristic” (Frankenberg 1993: 148), as in Celia’s remark, “underneath, everyone is the same.” There is also Celia’s emphasis on American cultural beliefs in equality, fairness, affinity/friendship, and independence.

But, in each instance, Celia is trying to craft a racial identity, without directly acknowledging her privileged place in the racial hierarchy. This is, according to Frankenberg, the appeal of color-evasive and power-evasive ways of thinking through race. These discourses focus on *individuals* and their samenesses and/or differences that should not matter, rather than on social, institutional, or political forces that create and sustain inequality. Frankenberg sees Americans as being trapped within an “essentialist racism” discourse that dates back 500 years, when “race was made into a difference and simultaneously into a rationale for racial inequality. It is in ongoing response to that moment that movements and individuals—for and against the empowerment of people of color—continue to articulate analyses of difference and sameness with respect to race” (1993: 139). The challenge for Celia (and for Americans in general) is to create an acceptable balance between her “entrapment” in essentialist racism and her conscious engagement with it (140). The same trap existed for the black PPPT girls when they struggled over racial representation, arguing over who could and couldn’t claim a “black” identity.

In this chapter I make three related points. First, when asked to answer the question, “Who am I?” the girls crafted responses that engaged multiple social worlds in which they saw themselves as actors—the consumer world, the world of womanhood and motherhood, and heterosexual romance. Each of these worlds is anxiety-ridden and peopled by “types” who have scripted responses to the contingencies and divisions within each world. The “stylish” or “glamorous” independent woman, the idealized mother and the “special” baby, the “players” and romantic couples, all of whom searched, in one way or another, for respect and an enviable position in the world. Second, what the girls had to say about their collages to one another reveals their knowledge of difference, what I am calling their body-smarts, that is full of both pain and wisdom. This knowledge is about how one’s body matters, what it should look like, where it can go, how it will be addressed and received, how it will resist or assent to being labeled as this or that. This knowledge arises from the girls’ engagement in different social

worlds. Mostly the girls’ body-smarts emphasize their increasing awareness that how they are being addressed by their social world is at odds with how they see or would like to see themselves. This awareness can be hurtful, creating a sense of private loss, and it can be liberating, opening up possibilities for change. Finally, each girl’s collage also beckons us to recognize her creative agency in answering to her world, especially answering questions that may not be her own, about love, sexuality, racial identification, and motherhood.

Re-representing Youth Worlds, Identities, and Relationships

Part II has focused on the (oftentimes painful) gap between how the girls saw themselves and how they thought they were seen by others. This knowledge—the girls' body-smarts—was brought into clearer focus through the self-representation activities designed for this research. By inviting the girls to represent themselves to themselves and one another in a group setting, where they benefited from one another's critical eyes and reflected on shared experiences and knowledge, we get a glimpse of their multifaceted social and inner worlds, and the nuances of their self- and identity-making process. I want to summarize key points about this process and its relevance for educators.

The girls' self-representations shed light on how they are being addressed by and answering to their social worlds that are anxiety-ridden and full of hardships. Two related processes of self-making—identificatory struggles and splitting—stand out as means through which the girls learn to place themselves in a gender, race, and class hierarchy and to manage their conflicting feelings. As I have argued, the girls describe their worlds as being peopled with different "types"—people who engage specific scripts (sometimes resisting and sometimes assenting to whatever these scripts might be); who hold certain places within a hierarchy; and who have affiliations with some but not other types of people. Types of people are also divided between those who are "good" (idealized by the culture) and those who are "bad" (denigrated by the culture). The girls' depictions of the worlds of heterosexual romance and motherhood provide two clear examples.

In the uncertain world of heterosexual romance, with its sexual double standard, there were distinct "types" of men, including the "players" who don't commit to any one girl. Women who played the game were divided

among those who did and did not have to defend their sexual reputations. The types of women with whom most of the PPPT girls identified were the “sexy but not too sexy” and the “tough” and “in-your-face” women who were invulnerable to pain. This “type” was careful not to entrust her feelings to men. Importantly, “types” of women in this world were not just different, they were either idealized or denigrated. “Good” girls, who are careful to conceal their sexual desires so as to avoid getting a “bad reputation,” were pitted against the “bad” girls, who acted publically on their desires, “showing” their sexuality in unbecoming ways. “Good” girl types were further divided between those who denied their own sexual desire and those who fell victim to others’ desires, who were taken advantage of by men. These are the “wronged” girls who stand apart from girls who are “wrong”/“bad” because they willingly acknowledge and act upon their sexual desires. And from still another angle, there was the association of sexual feelings with the “body,” which is split off from “self” and “mind,”¹ including the framing of girls’ sexual agency as a simple yes-or-no decision.

Both ways of splitting—the either-or framing of sexual agency and the separation of mind and self from body—can provide girls a safeguard against conflicts about sexuality in adolescence. These processes serve as a self-protective shield against social demands such as the barrage of sexual imagery that eroticizes young girls or the sexual double standard. These processes also enable girls to reconcile possible personal desires with social demands. But there is a cost that was expressed in the girls’ self-representations, particularly in their portraits of and discussions about childhood, which spoke to their sense of loss and pain about no longer feeling “pure,” “cute,” “small,” and “innocent.”

What strikes me as especially important is how the girls’ insights into the world of heterosexual romance (in the cultural dramas they presented) speak to a much more complicated set of issues than is usually entertained either by researchers or by educators of youth.² For the most part, research on adolescent sexuality has looked at rates of sexual intercourse, pregnancy, contraceptive use, and safe sex practices, narrowly defining adolescent sexuality as initiation into sexual intercourse. This research has tended to equate sex with deviance, not development. But the PPPT girls’ self-representations clearly show that adolescent sexuality is far more encompassing than the timing of sexual intercourse. It is not only about sexual practices, but also about what young people know and believe about sex, what they think is natural, proper, or desirable, and in what ways they think they are and are not measuring up to sexual norms. Sexuality and its links

to social relationships of power, but particularly the imbalance of power between men and women, were hinted at in the PPPT girls’ conversations (see chapter 4). And the links between sexuality, identity, and self-understandings, including whether one is “good” or “bad,” was of particular concern to the girls. And yet, these multivariated and complex meanings, ideas, and values that constitute sexuality are eclipsed in schools and, where it exists in sex education. Developmentally speaking, rather than focusing on the “whole person” and how sexual feelings and actions get incorporated into adolescent identities and relationships, sex education is highly fragmented, often focusing solely on health-related behaviors and risks. Sociologically speaking, by not directly addressing the contradictory pressure girls face about how to act as women, sex education mistakes as “personal” what is also a deeply cultural and social conflict regarding gender, race, and class relations of power. This does a disservice to youth, but especially to girls.

As the PPPT girls’ self-representations illustrate, the question posed to young women is one that is not necessarily their own, saying yes or no to desires they may not have yet even discovered or declared for themselves. Framing female sexuality in terms of either-or; who is and who is not a virgin; or how long one should wait to “give in” to another’s sexual demands does not help girls confront either the developmental or the social task ahead of them. Rather than having sexual feelings split off—denied, banished, or punished—adolescent girls need opportunities to contemplate these mixed sexual feelings, desires, and behaviors and move toward integrating their sexual desires into their identities. Insofar as girls are discouraged from actively thinking about and expressing the power of their sexual feelings, they are left unprepared to cope with a key task of adolescent identity and development—reconciling personal desires with social demands.

Research and education on adolescent sexuality and identity needs to foster integration rather than splitting. This means first disentangling sexuality from pregnancy and deviance. Second, it means being as concerned about the costs of denying sexuality for adolescent development as we are about the costs of early childbearing. Third, it means promoting a more personally reflexive approach to sex education that encourages young women and men to ask themselves: “How do I know what I want or desire sexually”; and, “In what contexts can I act on my own feelings?”

The girls’ self-representations referencing the world of pregnancy and motherhood offer yet another example of identificatory struggles and splitting in self- and identity-making. The girls’ portrayals of the *public* world of pregnancy and motherhood were peopled by two opposing

"types" of women: those who were idealized/"good" and those who were blaming or scornful "bad." The *interpersonal* world of pregnancy and motherhood was peopled with mothers and daughters who were more complicated and complete. The drama of this world was marked by its characters' sense of agency—mothers and daughters' efforts to affect their environments, to seek recognition for their *own* feelings, and to search for some kind of fit (no matter how imperfect) between their own feelings (including the feelings a girl might have for her soon-to-born baby) and those of another.

The overall drama of the girls' self-representations highlight the pivotal role that the ideology of motherhood plays in shaping understandings of the self- and identity-making process. This ideology, which includes equating women with nurturance and self-sacrifice, pitting "good" against "bad" maternal figures, and squelching mothers' own subjectivities, has a tenacious hold on individuals. It imbues philosophies of childrearing in which it is the child who is seen as the "subject" of development whose needs are to be met by the maternal "object." Regrettably, this ideology of motherhood holds sway on many levels within the educational system—from school's continued invisible dependence on individual mothers' work in preparing children for the school day (Luttrell 1997); to the gendering of teaching as a "women's" profession; to the suppression of a maternal voice among teachers (Grumet 1988); to the "educated motherhood" curricula (Burdell 1998, Luttrell 1996, McDade 1992) that asks mothers (young and old) to put aside their own needs and interests in favor of their children—the philosophy reflected in, "If you don't do it for yourself, do it for your child."

In an even bigger sense, the ideology of motherhood limits an understanding of intersubjective relatedness—how we learn to recognize and appreciate another's subjectivity. It keeps researchers and educators from asking the following crucial questions about development:

How does a child develop into a person, who, as a parent, is able to recognize her or his own child? What are the internal processes, the psychic landmarks, of such development? Where is the theory that tracks the development of the child's responsiveness, empathy, and concern, and not just the parent's sufficiency or failure? (Benjamin 1995: 32)

In light of the grip of the ideology of motherhood and an underdeveloped theory of development, I think the PPPT girls' self-representations

are especially provocative. As I argued in chapter 4, the girls held complex views and feelings about the world of heterosexual romance (including cynicism and ambivalence). But they held idealized and lopsided views about the world of motherhood, especially when drawing from media images and popular culture. Their cultural and emotional scripts for maternal-child love in the "Who am I?" media collages were split (i.e., the perfect or imperfect mother and the "special" or unwanted baby). On the other hand, the girls' self-portraits and role plays told a different story. Expressions of fear about "holding hatred toward their babies" (see chapter 3) and signs of recognition that mothers hold their own strong and conflicting view and feelings when faced with the news of their daughters' pregnancies (chapter 5) could be said to illustrate a more complete picture of motherhood, including some acknowledgment of maternal ambivalence on the part of the PPPT girls.

In a culture that glorifies and idealizes the maternal role when it is self-sacrificing and demonizes those individuals who don't measure up, being able to acknowledge and tolerate maternal conflicts and ambivalence should be viewed as an *achievement* (Parker 1995).³ As I have argued, what is missing in current thinking about childrearing and child development is an understanding of mothers' own contradictory needs, wishes, and desires, all of which create anxiety, and from which mothers seek relief. Feminist scholar and analyst Roszika Parker (1995) suggests that we should consider mothers' development as being parallel to babies' development:

Then we can see that the mother's achievement of ambivalence—the awareness of her co-existing love and hate for the baby—can promote a sense of concern and responsibility towards, and differentiation of self from, the baby. Maternal ambivalence signifies the mother's capacity to know herself and to tolerate traits in herself she may consider less than admirable—and to hold a more complete image of her baby. (17)

Rather than denying the reality of maternal conflicts and ambivalence that so many of the PPPT girls expressed, educators and concerned adults could encourage pregnant girls to explore and express their mixed feelings. For it is facing these mixed feelings that lead to growth and development, and they should be tapped rather than ignored in the schooling of pregnant girls.

I would argue that one of the most important educational interventions that adults could offer pregnant girls is encouragement to develop

and hold more complete images of themselves and their soon-to-born babies. This means helping girls face and wrestle with the ways they see themselves and think they are seen by others. This is where the self-representation activities and the framework for analyzing them that I propose in this book can prove most fruitful.

Finally, the girls' self-representations speak to the crucial role that adults play (as teachers, parents, youth workers, researchers) in influencing the girls' body-smarts. Readers may recall Sara's media collage, which illustrated how her teacher and her grandmother (chapter 4) passed on to Sara a knowledge of her difference that was both helpful and hurtful. Sara's story is not idiosyncratic or uncommon, as too many students in urban high schools will report. Even the best-intentioned adults can unwittingly play a dual role. Adults can be perpetrators of pain when we collude with racial, gender, and class codes of conduct and neglect to examine our own assumptions about this or that "type" of student. Adults can also be fonts of wisdom when we challenge unspoken assumptions, resist such codes of conduct, and name injustices when we see them. In light of a barrage of media images and popular discourse that cast urban youth of color in a negative light, adults who are willing and equipped to connect with and confront young people's body-smarts cannot be underestimated. Admittedly this is a daunting task for many adults, especially for the disproportionate numbers of white teachers who do not share the same racial, class, or gender background as their students and have limited time and support, for engaging their students' knowledge of difference and lack a repertoire for doing so. But this is a necessary task if schooling is to help young people make and revise themselves in their own images rather than turning their self-definitions over to others.

PART III

NOTES TO AND FROM THE FIELD