

The Embodiment of Friendship, Power, and Marginalization in a Multi-Ethnic, Multi-class Preadolescent U.S. Girls' Peer Group

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ABSTRACT

Making use of videotaped interactions of lunchtime conversations among multi-ethnic preadolescent peers (based on three years of fieldwork in LA) this ethnographically based study investigates the embodied language practices through which girls construct friendship alliances as well as relationships of power and exclusion. Girls display "best friend" relations not only through roles they select in dramatic play, such as twins married to twins in "house," but also through embraces and celebratory handclaps that affirm alliances. Older (sixth grade) girls assert their power with respect to younger fourth grade girls through intrusive activities such as grabbing food from lunchboxes, insults, and instigating gossip; younger girls boldly resist such actions through fully embodied stances. Relations of exclusion are visible not only in seating arrangements of a marginalized "tagalong" girl with respect to the friendship clique, but also highlighted in the ways she is differentially treated when an implicit social norm is violated.

KEYWORDS

peer relations, sociology of childhood, multimodality, girl culture, social aggression, stance



Introduction

A number of studies of female psychology and social organization in the social sciences have argued that understanding how girls experience social relationships is central to comprehending girls' culture. Interviewing girls from first grade through high school of differing economic, racial and geographic backgrounds in the United States, psychologist Lyn Mikel Brown (2003: 94) writes, "I've listened most intently to the ways girls of different ages draw attention to the quality of relationships between people and how deeply such concerns affect them and



influence what they value and how they act in the world." Based on an ethnographic study of gender roles among nursery school children in Norway, social anthropologist Sigurd Berentzen (1984: 131) found that while boys give primary value to objects as a resource for successful interactions, girls attach value to each other, and the alliances they form. He argues, "having an intimate relationship with another girl at all times, and by expressing a superior attitude toward other girls, is the easiest way for a girl to stress her own value" (Berentzen 1984: 132). Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2006:109) similarly argue that "growing up as a girl has traditionally been defined first and foremost via the ability to create close and lasting personal relationships" (2006: 109).

Studies of girls' peer groups have discussed elaborate practices for evaluating moral behavior—within African American (Goodwin 1990; Morgan 2002) and multi-ethnic (Shuman 1986; Goodwin 2002; 2006) U.S. peer groups, among Midwestern U.S. European American working class (Eder 1995) adolescents, as well as multi-ethnic Swedish (Evaldsson 2007) preadolescent girls. Through gossip commentary girls form alliances to sanction those who position themselves above others. In her examination of a multi-ethnic working class Swedish girls' peer group, Evaldsson (2007) examines forms of collaborative judgmental work, including complaints, accounts, and forms of negative person descriptors. Such actions are used "to define and redefine the significance of offensive behavior and to hold one another accountable for the actions." Among African American working class girls (ages 8 to 12) I studied in an urban Philadelphia neighborhood (Goodwin 1990), as well as girls of mixed ethnicity and social class studied more recently in a "progressive" Los Angeles elementary school (Goodwin 2006) and discussed in this article, I observed that a major activity consists of monitoring the actions of peers and sanctioning violators of local social norms who put themselves above others or act like they "think they cute."

Methodology

My concern as a linguistic anthropologist is with documenting how talk is used to construct social organization within face-to-face interaction. Critical to this work is examining the embodied practices through which participants in interaction build their local activities. I consider

it crucial to document how talk, intonation, and the body mutually elaborate one another in the construction of action among the people I am studying, and to that end make use of video recordings in my work. This is because I wish to describe rigorously, systematically, and empirically the array of resources utilized by participants to build their ongoing social organization as the situated product of interactive practices. By using video recordings (with images altered to protect the anonymity of participants) I make available to other researchers the data my descriptions of interactive practices are based upon.

In the late nineties over a three-year period I observed and videotaped a friendship group of preadolescent girls on the playground at a "progressive" school in Southern California, which I will call Hanley School. Children of diverse ethnicities and social classes attend the school, whose mission is to promote inter-ethnic and inter-class understanding. The children I studied at Hanley differed both in age and social class from children who are subjects of other ethnographic studies, which often feature working class adolescent peer groups who actively resist the official school culture of middle class norms and beliefs (McRobbie 1978; Willis 1981; Eckert 1987; Lees 1993; Griffiths 1995). In the late 1990s the parents of third through fifth grade children at Hanley School made incomes between \$7,5000 (9.2%) and \$250,000 (22%). Hanley school children wanted to excel in school, were engaged with their teachers and often talked with them after class. For three years I followed a particular multi-ethnic clique of girls at the school as they went from fourth to sixth grade. The group of five fourth grade girls and one fifth grade girl had known each other since pre-kindergarten at the school and were regarded by many as the most popular group in the school. These girls played games such as jump rope, softball, and volleyball, occasionally with boys, but primarily with themselves, and enjoyed talking among themselves at lunchtime. They were successful in fifth grade in negotiating access for girls to the soccer field, territory typically colonized by boys, and their actions generated a school-wide policy of gender equity that provided for the rotation of players on the soccer field. Hanley girls' active participation in sports as well as their actions challenging the status quo thus contrasts what other researchers such as Thorne (1993) and Eckert (1996) have described for similar age groups. In line with notions advanced by Aapola, Conick and Harris (2006: 159) in their discussion of the importance of young women's

challenging gender restrictions in physical exercise and sports in recent years, "while girls' bodies may still often be objects of the gaze of others ... they are also an increasingly important source of their own pleasure."

While the composition of the particular group of friends I studied was somewhat fluid, in the fourth grade members of the group included an African American middle class girl (Aretha), two European American girls (Janis and Sarah, the only working class girl in the clique), two Japanese American middle class girls (Emi and Melissa), and one South Asian girl (Lisa), a fifth grader. In a plea for an examination of the powerful role of class in social life, cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1991) warns against the tendency to "ethnicize" groups under study and bell hooks (2000) laments that "both Whites and Blacks have been told that race supersedes issues of class." While it is possible to specify the ethnicity of the girls in my study, this feature of the girls' identity was rarely made salient in their interaction with each other. By way of contrast, the girls constantly indexed activities of the upper middle class in their talk among each other. As Bourdieu (1984: 57) argues, "Objectively and subjectively aesthetic stances adopted in matters such as cosmetics, clothing or home decoration are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld or a distance to be kept." Girls in the clique I studied compared how many houses their families owned, what kinds of cars they had, how many airplane trips to foreign countries or ski resorts they had taken during a year, what brands of clothing they bought, or what types of elite sports they participated in. They embraced the values of consumerism of the local Los Angeles culture, heavily influenced by Hollywood values. As expressed by Janis during lunchtime talk, "Bad place to raise kids. People are so caught up with like—caught up with like—stars. And everything. Every single child, every single like—little kid wants to be actors or actresses or models. A lot more. Like ninety per cent." During the fieldwork period the girls made use of many "Valley girl" verbal expressions ("Whatever!") and gestures from the film *Clueless*, a 1995 comedy set in a Beverly Hills high school, which features two hip, popular, attractive, rich, and fashion-obsessed teenage girls.

As an ethnographer trained in conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff et al. 1974) I was concerned with the documentation of the lived practices used by the children to constitute their social relations with

one another. I collected over 80 hours of videotape and 20 hours of audiotape as the children ate lunch and played during recess. (For a more complete discussion of methodology see Goodwin 2006: 3–5). The methodology of extended ethnographic fieldwork, coupled with close analysis of children's talk, allows for the explication of the dynamics of interaction within children's groups in particular contexts of use. The data used in the present article are drawn from my ethnographic investigation of the preadolescent children's peer group I observed at Hanley School.

Challenging Stereotypical Portraits of Girls

In the 1990s (Leaper 1994; Maccoby 1998), and even during this century (Leaper and Smith 2004), psychologists and sociologists (Adler and Adler 1998) promoted the notion of "separate worlds"—the view that boys are competitive while girls are felt to be cooperative. For example, in the conclusion of their discussion of competitive status display activities involved in creating popularity among preadolescent girls, Adler and Adler (1998: 55) argued that boys "gain status from competitive and aggressive achievement-oriented activities," while girls value "social and nurturing roles." More recent work in psychology on aggression (Crick and Grotpeter 1995; Brown 2003; Underwood 2003) in the 2000s provides similar dichotomies: boys are characterized as physically aggressive while girls are seen to be socially or relationally aggressive. As argued by Gonick (2004: 395) the "vulnerable girl has recently been replaced by the 'mean girl' in public consciousness." Ringrose (2006) provides important historical perspective on the discourse of the new universal "mean girl," which she argues provides a universalizing and essentializing model of girlhood.

Within linguistic anthropology (Maltz and Borker 1982) as well as sociolinguistics (Coates 1994) the dual cultures or separate worlds concept (Kyratzis 2001) was powerful as a model for gender research of the 1980s and 1990s. Ethnographic studies of children's language (Kyratzis and Guo 1996; Farris 2000; Goodwin 2001; Kyratzis 2001; Nakamura 2001), however, challenged the notion that girls and boys inhabit totally separate worlds or that they are as gender-segregated as Maltz and Borker (1982) proposed. Studies of the language practices

used by preadolescent girls in Russia (Griswold 2007) as well as preschool (Kyratzis 2007) and preadolescent (Goodwin 2002) girls in the U. S. during play demonstrate how girls build asymmetrical relations of power, thus contradicting the notion that girls' primary concern is maintaining egalitarian relations with others.

While recent studies of girls' cliques have attended to descriptions of the language practices employed in the orchestration of social organization, we have far fewer studies of the role that the body plays in such interactions. Exceptions include Mendoza-Denton's (2008) fascinating account of Bay Area Chicana "homegirls" whose styles were comprised of an amalgam of linguistic practices, gestures, make-up, clothing, and the body, and Miller's work on Japanese Kogals (2004) and Bucholtz's (1999) work on "nerd girls." Feminist scholar Grosz (1994: vii) has argued that "Feminist theory, with its commonly close relation to psychoanalytic theory and to various forms of phenomenology, has tended, with some notable exceptions, to remain uninterested in or unconvinced about the relevance of refocusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivity." In this article, rather than being concerned with individual subjective expressions of the body, I want to look at instead at how multiple bodies intersubjectively and dynamically constitute each other in moment-to-moment interaction; girls construct friendship alliances, as well as relationships of power (Henley and LaFrance 1984) and exclusion. Asymmetrical arrangements of bodies in alignment with one another like ritualized gestures of submission performed through language provide visible portraits of social organization. Collaborative supportive rituals display symmetrical relations. As an anthropologist I am concerned with recovering not only children's "voice" (James 2007); in addition I seek to document girls' affective alignments with other girls, which are made visible through bodily displays as well as talk in the midst of the ongoing flow of social interaction.

The Dynamics of Friendship

In fieldwork among children I have observed that girls who are friends can engage in continual practices of disputing, as well as expressions of solidarity. Whether in the midst of playing games or in evaluative commentary (Goodwin 2007), I have observed that across a range of groups

(Latina, African-American as well as multi-ethnic cliques (Goodwin 2006)) elementary school girls can display through their bodies as well as their words strong oppositional stances. Girls point directly at a violator as they indicate a mistake in a game of hop scotch (Goodwin 2006: 41–54) or jump rope. With arms akimbo, constructing iconic displays of dominance, they preface no-nonsense oppositional moves (Goodwin 2006: 69). Disagreement can occur without serious rupture to their relationships. This counters Lever's research (1976: 482); making use of interview rather than ethnographic data, Lever argues that girls are incapable of handling conflict without disruption of the ongoing activity. Several ethnographically based studies have documented how girls formulate the expression of opposition in the midst of girls' games (Goodwin 1990; 2006; Evaldsson in press) as a normal course of events.

In the following example (Example 1) I examine how the affective valence of a friendship relationship (among two Hanley School elementary school girls) can shift dramatically from opposition to embodied displays of affection within a short period of time. I wish to illustrate how, through attending to the precise ways that girls sequence their talk in an argument, we have access not only to the dynamics of friendship relationships, but also girls' practices of adjudication. We can view the formulation of friendship as an active social process.

While playing house at Hanley School during recess two "best friends" (Thorne 1993: 94; Aapola, Gonick et al. 2006: 110), Lisa and Janis, argued continuously. In Example 1 below, as Lisa and Janis both stake claims to a classmate, Jason, as their husband in the game of house, there are continuous moves of opposition until Lisa (line 20) proposes that Jason has a twin, and the twin is Janis's boyfriend. At first this idea is not treated as a viable possibility, and the girls argue for multiple turns. Data are transcribed according to the system developed by Gail Jefferson for use by conversation analysts and described in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson¹ (1974: 731–733).

Example 1

- 1 Lisa: *I'm married.*
 2 Janis: *NO:: I AM.*
 3 Lisa: *NO!*
 4 Lisa: *I called it.*

- 5 Janis: *I called it.*
 6 Nichole: *Ruth is the teenage mother.*
 7 *She had us when she was young.*
 8 Lisa: *I called it first.*
 9 Janis: *I'm married to him.*
 10 Sarah: *How little were you.*
 11 Lisa: *Yeah. I'm married to him.*
 12 *You're married to his brother.*
 13 Janis: *They're exactly the same.*
 14 Nichole: *YOU GUYS!*
 15 Janis: *Jason's my boyfriend. ((chanting))*
 16 *Jason 's my [boyfriend!]*
 17 Lisa: *[NO::!]*
 18 Janis: *Jason's my boyfriend.*
 19 Ruth: *Jason's right behind you.*
 20 Lisa: *That- his- his twin brother's your boyfriend.*
 21 Janis: *No. He's my boyfriend.*
 22 Lisa: *No. He is. I called it.*
 23 Nichole: *You guys. Time out.*
 24 Lisa: *I called it.*
 25 Janis: *No. He is my boyfriend.*
 26 Lisa: *All right. ((stomping feet))*

In their turn taking Lisa and Janis take up oppositional moves that display close attention to prior moves of their opponent, with strong displays of polarity ("NO!") expressed right in the beginning of the turn (lines 2–3, 4–5, 9 and 11, 7, 21–22). As the following dialogue (Example 2) shows, Lisa and Janis extend their dispute over several turns (lines 29–32; 36–38), even when Sarah proposes a form of resolution: "There's *two twins*. Okay?" (line 27):

Example 2

- 27 Sarah: *There's two twins. Okay?*
 28 *And there's-*
 29 Janis: *I got the real one.*
 30 *I got the real one.*
 31 Lisa: *No I do Janis.*
 32 *I called it before.*

- 33 Sarah: They're *both real*.
 34 They both have everything on their body,
 35 Okay? that's real.
 36 Janis: But I want the one that goes to this *school*!
 37 Lisa: No!
 38 Janis: Yeah!

The girls make use of adjudication to resolve the dilemma. They decide that Sarah (a non-participant in the dispute) will think of a number, and the person who selects a number closest to the one she whispers in a bystander's ear will get to have Jason as her boy friend. Janis selects the number ten, the closest number to the one Sarah picks (which is fifteen). Exuberantly Janis lifts up her arms to the level of her shoulders in a celebratory gesture, pushes her palm into Lisa's face and states triumphantly, "In your face." The dispute does not end there; Lisa continuously argues that she should get to have Jason as her boyfriend because she "called it" first (line 32).

Example 3

- 25 Sarah: Ten? You're the closest. ((*pointing to Janis*))
 26 It was fifteen.
 27 Janis: Uhm! ((*gesture of triumph, arms spread to the sides of her body bent up at the elbows*))
 28 In your face!! ((*puts palm into Lisa's face*))
 29 I got Jason. ((*chanting*))
 30 Sarah: You got the *real* one and she has
 31 [the fake one.
 32 Lisa: [No but I called it way before you Janis.
 33 Janis: So:: it doesn't matter.
 34 Sarah: It doesn't matter. They're *both real*.
 35 They both have everything in
 36 their bodies. ((*singing*))

Moments later, after extensive arguing, the girls terminate the dispute, and celebrate their status as "best friends" in an embodied way, by giving one another a ritual high-five hand slap, a gesture used by both boys and girls to display solidarity by invoking the frame of a sports victory. Then, linking arms with Lisa, Janis affirms her friendship alliance with

Lisa, stating, "We're both twins and we have boyfriends that are twins." Figure 1, a line drawing from a videotape frame grab, demonstrates the embodied expression of this alliance, as the two girls embrace one another. Thorne (1993: 94) in her study of U.S. elementary school children on the playground has argued that "touch among boys is rarely relaxed and affectionate; they express solidarity through the ritual handslap of 'giving five,' friendly teasing, and through the guise of mock violence."

The Hanley School girls formulate expressions of friendship by displaying to one another that they share a common worldview or stance (Goodwin 2006) with respect to some object or experience of value they are assessing. This stance is achieved through prosody and embodied action, as well as talk. Within the context of a game, for example, when play-

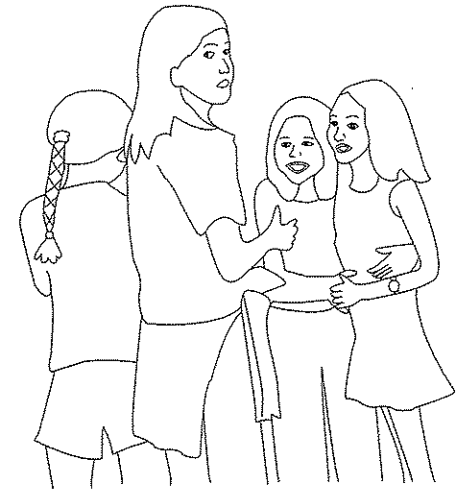


Figure 1

ers win a round of a contest, they celebrate their joy by providing high five hand slaps. This occurred during a contest of jump rope between fourth grade girls and boys. When the girls won a round of the contest, they would high five one another (slapping their right palms together), while with a high-pitched voice they yelled, "Yay! The girls are winning!"

High fives and fist poundings also occurred when girls congratulated themselves for sharing a similar perspective on an event. In the following (see Figure 2 below), three girls, Aretha (an African American middle class girl), Sarah (a working class European American girl), and Angela (a working class African American girl), celebrate through fist pounding their collective stance of delight in their common sense of righteous indignation regarding Janis. When Janis's fifth grade boyfriend Sean organized a softball game, Sean told Janis she could pick only two girls to be part of the team, because with the boys already on the field, there were too many players. When Janis (a middle class European American girl) picked Emi and Melissa (two Japanese American middle class

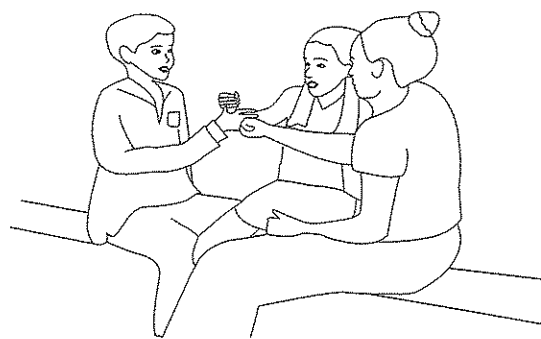


Figure 2

girls), Aretha (an African American middle class girl), Sarah (a working class European American girl) and Angela (a working class African American girl) felt they had been excluded them from a baseball game. This embodiment of a common stance terminates a sequence of moves in which girls criticize the offending party, Janis's, behavior. In Example 4 the sequence begins with Aretha critiquing Janis for acting as if she assumes she's better than the others (thinking she's "the most popular," lines 1–3; being obsessive about Spice Girls objects, lines 4–5; and having to wear the trendiest clothing, line 6). Both Sarah (lines 7–9) and Angela (line 10) argue against such values, saying that they don't even care about being trendy. Using the affectionate term "Girlfriend!" in line 14 Sarah asks Aretha for some love, saying, "Gimme some sugah." While taking up this stance against Janis, Sarah bodily displays her friendship with Aretha by draping her arm around her (see Figure 3 below) in a close embrace, while assuming a glamour girl pose in lines 14–15 (emblematic of the high regard the girls in this group hold for models and movie stars). In response Aretha asks Sarah to "Gimme some dap" (short for "dignity and pride"), meaning "Gimme some skin," expressions used in African American culture, and part of both Sarah and Aretha's verbal repertoire.

Example 4

- 1 Aretha: No, you know what?
 2 Janis thinks she's popular
 3 Because she stays up to date.
 4 She likes the Spice Girls,
 5 She has Spice Girls everywhere. *hh
 6 She- [*wears the most popular clothes*]
 7 Sarah: [Look! You see this shirt?
 8 I GOT THIS *THREE YEARS* AGO.
 9 I don't really care. (*looking at Angela*)

- 10 Angela: Neither do I. (*looks down at her shirt*)
 11 I had this last year. And *I* don't really care about it.
 12 Sarah: BECAUSE *I AM NOT TREN DY*::: (*taps Aretha's knee*)
 13 People like me for *who* I am and *not* how I look.
 14 Girlfriend! Gimme some- (*arm around Aretha*)
 15 (*assumes glamour girl pose, hand behind head*)
 16 Gimme some sugah.
 17 Aretha: Gimme some- Gimme some dap!
 18 (*Aretha and Sarah execute a 3-beat hand clap game*)
 19 Sarah: Here's the sugar.
 20 Here's the su[gar]! eh heh-heh!
 21 Angela: [Woe woe! Woe woe! (*A and A clap*)]
 22 Woe- woe-Ow!
 23 Aretha: eh heh heh!!
 24 Sarah: Neh neh! [ow:::!] (*Angela and Sarah clap*)
 25 Angela: [Ow:::!]!
 26 Aretha: [Eh heh-heh! heh-heh!]

What the sequential organization of this fragment makes visible is that Sarah and Aretha align very closely with one another. Sarah calls Aretha, rather than Angela "girlfriend" (line 14) and it is Aretha around whom Sarah drapes her body.

Only after Aretha has invited Sarah to begin a hand-clap with "Gimme some dap." (line 18) and Sarah reciprocates with "Here's the sugar." (line 20) does Angela feel entitled to join in with "Woe, woe." (line 22) While all three girls align against Janis, who has offended the girls by excluding them from a ball game, differential forms of participation make visible gradations of affiliation. Moments later, however, the girls provide another vivid sign of their close alliance of the moment. Angela shoulders the weight of Sarah and Aretha as they ride on Angela's back, and another more distant friend looks on. Angela,

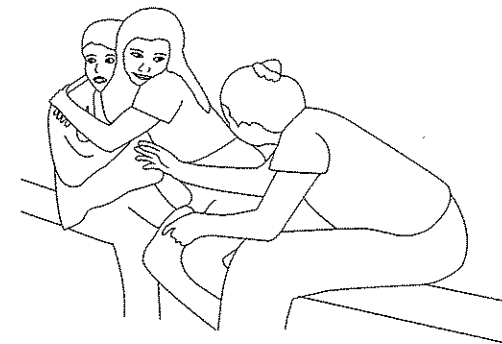


Figure 3

rather than the other middle class girl (Aretha) or European American working class girl (Sarah) must bear the burden of carrying the other girls.

Such body positioning, embraces, high fives, and fist poundings all provide visible signs of girls' alliances. Girls who share a common perspective on events display for others, through the use of the body, how they position themselves with respect to others with whom they are in oppositional relationships. Degrees of closeness in alliances become visible in a range of ways: through address terms, such as "girlfriend," which index close gendered relationships, positioning of bodies vis-à-vis one another, as well by observing who sequences talk and embodied action to whom and in what order.

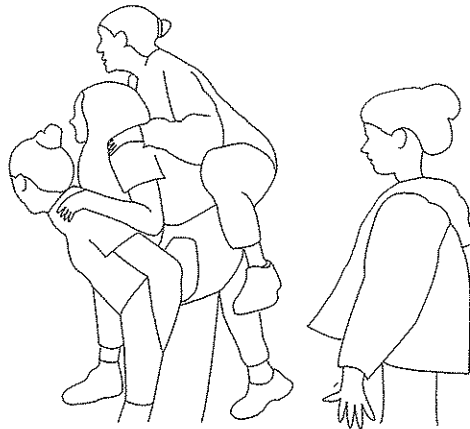


Figure 4

Sanctioning Behavior and Relations of Exclusion among Peers

With Example 4 we observed forms of sanction that occur when girls in one's cohort, such as Janis, act as if they are better than other members of the group. Another censure of Janis occurred when she came from Student Council to eat lunch in the schoolyard, and began to talk about Student Council in an implicit brag ("The worst Student Council meeting I have we have ever *been* to.") In response Janis's best friend, Lisa, began to comment nonvocally to her friend Ruth about Janis by making faces. Ruth subsequently compared the behavior of Janis and other Student Council members to that of wild animals ("And you're jumping on tables and chairs? And it looked act like lions and tigers in a zoo.") Janis ignored both the collusive gestures and critiques of her behavior made by Ruth. At other points Lisa critiqued Janis for being overly dramatic in her storytelling, when she used exaggerated

head tilts and multiple introductions of quotations, using the quotative marker "all going," as in "so he's all going—so he's all—so she's all going—so she's all going." This is a stylistic form for reporting speech associated with being "hip" (Bucholtz 2005) used by California youth in the late 1990s. In response to these displays, Lisa summoned Aretha and provided silent commentaries through imitations of Janis by tilting her head, and making dramatic hand movements while tossing her hair. In response, when Janis asked "What are you guys doing." Aretha said nothing and Lisa ignored the question.

The critiques Lisa made of Janis were constructed covertly, as collusive commentaries through gesture. By way of contrast, critiques of Angela (an African American working class girl) were quite overt. Angela was treated as someone who was marginal to the clique. On the same day that Angela, Aretha, and Sarah were excluded from playing baseball, Sarah made Angela publicly confess her identity as someone who followed the clique but never belonged. As the girls were sitting and complaining about Janis, the following occurred.

Example 5

- 1 Angela: *I-* I mean like- *you* guys are like-
- 2 I don't *judge anybody* because you guys know,
- 3 that like I just, you know, follow you guys.
- 4 ((*shoulder moves in time with words*))
- 5 [wherever you guys go, but um,
- 6 Sarah: [You're like a *tag*. You tag along. ((*left palm*
- 7 *extended with arm bent towards Angela*))
- 8 Basically- [Angela tags along.=
- 9 Angela: [So,
- 10 Sarah: That's it.=right?
- 11 Angela: So li [ke- Yeah. ((*shoulder shrug*))
- 12 Sarah: [Right Angela? Admit it. eh heh heh!
- 13 Angela: Yeah like- [whatever.
- 14 Sarah: [ADMIT IT ANGELA!
- 15 Sarah: [ADMIT IT! ((*extends arms palm up to Angela*))
- 16 Angela: [OKAY! ((*leaning towards Sarah*))
- 17 Sarah: Say it. "You:: (.) are:: (.) I: am a: (.)"
- 18 ((*using hands as if conducting on each beat*
- 19 *then extends hands palm up towards Angela*

- 20 *as if asking her to complete the utterance*)
 21 Angela: I'M A TAG-ALONG °girl! ((jerks body in
 22 *direction of Sarah*)
 (0.4)
 23 Sarah: Good girl! eh heh!
 24 Angela: °°I'm gonna get you! ((play fight))
 25 Sarah: heh-heh Oka(hh)y.
 26 heh-heh [hnh-hnh-hnh-hnh-hnh!
 27 Angela: [Okay!

Here Sarah provides the explicit frame (Say it. "You: (.) are: (.) I: am a: (.)") that Angela is required to repeat to describe herself as a "tag-along girl." Moreover, with the evaluative commentary "Good girl!" Sarah speaks to Angela as one would a pet or pesky child. Angela's only rebuttal is a softly spoken "°°I'm gonna get you!" produced with play-fight gestures.

While on this occasion the negative commentary is initiated by a European American girl, on other occasions Aretha (a middle class African American girl) joins Lisa (a South Asian middle class girl) and Janis is proclaiming that Angela cannot join in playing jump rope because she is "not even here."

Example 6

Girls are sitting at the lunch table

- 1 Lisa: I'm gonna go get the jump ropes.
 2 Janis: °You're last. ((to Angela))
 3 Angela: I'm first.
 4 Lisa: No.
 5 Janis: NO::
 6 Lisa: [You're not here.
 7 Aretha: [You're not even here!
 8 Angela: °Go:d.

Rather than being hidden and deniable forms of action, negative commentaries were performed as direct confrontation. Moreover, they frequently occurred in the absence of a triggering offensive action, or something warranting negative commentary by girls of color as well as European American girls.

In addition to being the target of the confrontational stances, Angela was frequently treated as someone who was marginal to the group by being prohibited from joining games. If we examine how she was physically positioned vis-à-vis others in the group, we can see how spatial organization played a major role in defining her position. For example, during lunchtime inside the classroom, as girls were configured in a tight circle of friends around a table, she was seated at the periphery, atop a table, looking onto the interaction. When she made bids to have some potato chips that were being passed around, she was ignored and never offered any.

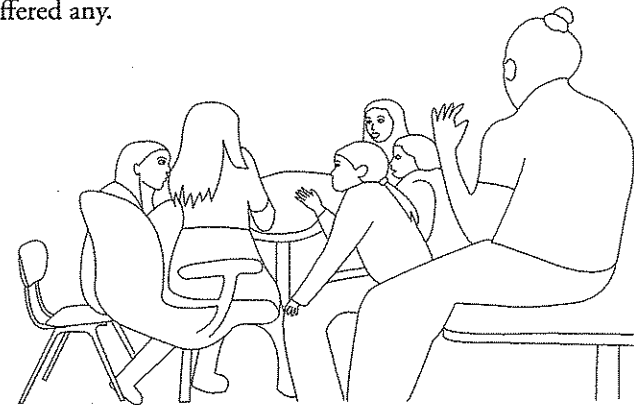


Figure 5

Angela's social position of marginality became a theme in a story that Janis told about her. Angela became the principal character in a story about a girl with no friends who followed a bunch of other girls.

Example 7

- 1 Emi: Why do you always follow us.
 2 I saw you just a few moments ago
 3 Walk into that other yard.
 4 Janis: I was gonna tell you a story about a little girl
 5 Who followed a bunch of other girls,
 6 And didn't make friends,
 7 And was no fun at all.
 8 They had already established their friends.
 9 So why doesn't the girl
 10 Who followed the friend

- 11 Go find *another* friend.
 12 Angela: Why don't *you* shut up!
 13 Janis: eh heh-heh -eh!
 14 Angela: Janis that's really not- *so* not fair.
 15 (*(shaking head, speaking softly)*)
 16 Janis: I just said it as a *joke*.
 17 Angela: I don't *care*.
 18 Janis: *So*?
 19 (*(Angela walks away)*)
 20 Melissa: Angela, come back! (*(walks off)*)

While this negative portrayal is delivered as a story, at other times Angela was told in no uncertain terms to go away. In Example 8 below, when Angela approaches the clique of girls, Ruth puts up her hand in the shape of a stop sign and says, "*Hi Angela! Bye Angela!*" (line 3 of Example 8 below.) Subsequently (line 4) Angela is told to "*Shoo shoo shoo,*" much in the same way one would dismiss a pest. In response Angela quickly runs away (line 11).

Example 8

(Angela approaches the group as girls are discussing an upcoming fight between two friends.)

- 1 Ruth: A- much (.) worse (.) fight.
 2 Janis: What did she say.
 3 Ruth: *Hi Angela! Bye Angela!* (*(holding palm like a stop sign)*)
 4 Lisa: Shoo shoo *shoo*! :!
 5 (*(Angela does not move)*)
 6 Janis: What did she say.
 7 Ruth: *Hi*. Eh heh heh! (*(to Angela)*)
 8 Aretha: Nothing.
 9 Melissa: She was angry at me first.
 10 Lisa: She was?
 11 (*(Angela goes away running)*)

While the girls in the inner circle of the clique critique one another indirectly, with actions that are primarily done collusively through facial expressions, here Angela is told in no uncertain terms to her face to

leave the group. In response she runs away, distancing herself spatially from the clique.

Embodied Talk in a Girls' Peer Group

These examples demonstrate ways in which the body as well as talk is critical to the expression of girls' friendships and alliances. The body makes evident expressive demonstrations of affective alignments towards one's addressee or the target of the talk. Celebratory handclaps, high fives, embraces, and gestures of affection involving body proximity not observed among boys, demonstrate friendship alliances (Figures 1–3). By way of contrast, a position of marginality can be signaled through the delivery of accusations, insults, dismissive actions and gestures to a target, as well as through limiting access of the target to the ecological huddle of the primary group.

Among members of the Hanley School clique, girls comment on attempts at one-upmanship through collusive gestures and eyeball rolls, or through mimicking the actions of the offending party. They also sanction a girl who is considered a marginal group member, Angela, even when she has committed no seeable offense. Employing negative commentary, insults, and rituals of degradation (such as making Angela confess a "tagalong" identity (Example 5), or producing normally supportive rituals of "hi" and "bye" in quick succession (Example 8), as well as gestures which amplify such moves (providing an exaggerated and prolonged hand wave), Angela is constructed as occupying a position of marginality. When alliances change, however, she can momentarily become a member of the group and join in the negative commentary about other girls; in Example 4 she collaborates in gossip about offending parties who have excluded several girls from playing in a baseball game. However, frame grabs of how her body is aligned with bodies of two other girls during those encounters (such as Figure 3) reveal how she is positioned as a less than fully ratified group member. Caanan's (1987:394) notion that girls' alliances "fluctuate like a merry-go-round," is exemplified by the varying ways in which Angela is treated at different moments in time.

Through seating positions, touch, and rituals of various sorts, Hanley girls create visual portraits of who is best friends with whom, as

well as who they consider to be a marginal group member. Within this girls' group an array of affective relationships is made visible when we examine how the body is positioned vis-à-vis those of others in a social group. As girls police their local social order, they take up stances towards those who commit violations of their social code. Celebrating similar positions with respect to an offending party or competitor provides opportunities for formulating alliances, and indexing friendship. Indeed Eder and Enke (1988) consider gossip a primary means for strengthening social bonds in (adolescent) girls' groups.

Taken together, the examples discussed in this article demonstrate the importance of evaluative commentary for the formulation of friendship alliances and the maintenance of boundaries of the inner circle of a social group. Through their talk assessing the actions of their peers, girls in the clique make evident for one another how they are positioned with respect to others, in terms of their own criteria for judging behavior. As I found in a two-year ethnographic study (1970–1971) of a working class urban African-American preadolescent children's neighborhood group (Goodwin 1990) in their interactions with one another apart from adults, girls actively monitor their social landscape and create social organization in the process. They collaborate in judging others who they deem offenders of the social order in elaborate he-said-she-said confrontations. Ethnographic study of a group over time finds that alliances are anything but static; rather they shift, depending upon local emergent identities of offending and offended parties.

Ridicule of violators of the social order occurred in the two groups of girls I studied. What differs is the cultural content in terms of which evaluations are made. Working class African American preadolescent girls I studied in the 1970s only minimally used criteria such as wealth (for example who could afford to buy new clothing) to index differences in their assessments of one another. They were concerned about being a member of a valued alliance and sanctioned age-mates who bragged about forms of relationships with neighborhood women and boys or skipping a grade in school. (This stood in contrast to the criteria of rank in games that the boys in the neighborhood used to differentiate one another.) By way of contrast, members of the multi-ethnic mostly middle class Hanley School girls' clique, in the consumer-obsessed society of Los Angeles in the late twentieth century, constantly compared one another with reference to access to material wealth, as indexed by

the brand names they wore, foreign travel, participation in Cotillion dance classes or elite sports such as tennis and skiing, private music lessons, expensive cars, or acreage of their grandparents' estates. They fully embraced a world in which people were ranked in terms of wealth and prestige.

Oppositional moves occur across a range of contexts examined in this article. Even best friends engage in extended disputes, adjudicated in terms of local practices of fairness (Example 1). Following the dispute, girls can reaffirm their friendship alignments, without serious rupture to their relationships. By way of contrast, practices of exclusion can lead to marginalization of individuals deemed unworthy of clique membership, and provide demonstrations of girls' capacity for creating a social order built upon asymmetrical relationships rather than an egalitarian ethos.

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Note

1. Colons indicate that the sound immediately proceeding has been noticeably lengthened. A dash marks a sudden cut-off of the current sound. Italics indicate some form of emphasis. Capitals indicate increased volume. A left bracket marks the point at which the current talk is overlapped by other talk. Intonation symbols are used to mark intonation changes, rather than as grammatical symbols. A period indicates a falling contour; a question mark indicates a rising contour, and a comma indicates a falling-rising contour. Double parentheses enclose material that is not part of the talk

being transcribed, indicating that the talk was spoken in some special way, or nonvocal movements that accompany the speech. An h in parentheses (h) indicates plosive aspiration, which could result from laughter. An h preceded by an asterisk (*h) indicates an outbreak of air.

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The Scholar Recalls the Child The Difference Girlhood Studies Makes

Megan Sullivan



ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze fiction and non-fiction using the critical lens or methodology of Girlhood Studies. I re-examine my published writing on Irish writer Mary Beckett and Irish-American author Lucy Grealy to demonstrate how feminist scholars can read differently. I argue that in my initial readings of the aforementioned texts I neglected the girl in the story, because I was concerned about the woman the female character would become. Finally, I also argue that feminist scholars should mine their own childhood experiences for insight into the study of girls. I provide an excerpt from my memoir in progress to demonstrate how this might be accomplished.

KEYWORDS

Illness, childhood, Mary Beckett, Lucy Grealy, fiction and non-fiction, class, gender, literary criticism

Introduction

In the mid 1990s I was puzzling a conundrum that would later be explained by Girlhood Studies. I was writing a book about literature by women in Northern Ireland, and I wanted to articulate what I intuitively felt: women wrote about their female characters' childhoods to explain the classed and gendered adults they would become, and to reveal the positions of young females in particular times and places. I would later discover that narratives of girls also provide readers with an opportunity to deconstruct gender as a category and a lived experience, and that the practice of Girlhood Studies could benefit from a scholar's reflection upon her childhood.

Yet in the mid 1990s, I did not have the critical apparatus of Girlhood Studies, and so I reverted to what I knew: I analyzed female characters, whether girls or women, in terms of gender, class, and history. As a result, I understood the female child in Irish author Mary Beckett's 1987 novel *Give Them Stones* primarily as a narrative tool, or as a fictional device to get to the *real* point: the woman in the story. Later,