Girls "Falling Off"

Therapeutic Practices that Matter

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Dr. C. Camargo Borges
Dr. J.L. Meyer

For Andrea and all my girls……

…..may you always ride in balance -

with confidence, direction, and purpose.

Appreciations

I present this dissertation not as a work of "mine," but as a polyphony. I feel more like the orchestra conductor than the composer. While I have fashioned the arrangement and drawn together the authors, writers, advisers, interviewees, scholars, clients, editors, practitioners and thinkers, it is through our joining this work has been performed.

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How I Came to this Work

I have many questions about what is happening to countless girls today. I feel bewildered as I observe girls in my counselling practice with low self-image, low confidence, challenged by social acceptance and self-acceptance. I witnessed my friends' daughters journeying from childhood to adolescence, transforming from happy, confident, audacious girls to girls with low confidence and fear. Even my own daughter refused to attend school in grade 6 and found herself influenced by anxiety and panic. Many of my friends and I struggled with daughters hampered by anxiety, taking medications and seeing therapists. These girls were from two parent, middle class families. Involved with our children, we ate dinner at 6:00 and took family vacations. Our daughters had all the benefits of greater equality and visibility than we did growing up, but as adolescents we were not disposed to cut ourselves or contemplate suicide. I could not understand what was happening, how to help or how to move forward. How do we help our daughters? Why are so many girls *"Falling off?"*

Thinking back on my own childhood, I remember in grade seven doing a speech on women's rights. The trendy slogan for Canadian women was "Why Not?" Feminists in my generation fought hard to promote women to a new place of equality, but somehow women simultaneously were succumbing to a sexualized and treacherous culture. On one hand, women were achieving equality, finding more opportunity and believing they could do anything a man could do; yet at the same time women were succumbing to a cultural enchantment which generated feelings of inadequacy, imperfection, and self-judgement. I soon became aware of what Mary Pipher calls "girl poisoning culture" (2001, p.12). My daughter was a tween during the "reign" of the Spice Girls. While their message promoted "Girl Power," I became appalled at how easily mothers accepted their sexualized look as a role model for their girls. This was not benign fun. The images were daring, and we found our girls under the spell of highly sexualized music, movies, and advertisements, with an unrelenting promotion of a consumerist culture. In my opinion, the sexualisation of media is only a symptom of a deeper and more damaging cultural myth, the cultural *"myth of perfect."* The myth of perfect is grounded in rampant individualism. It suggests that we as individuals must prove our own significance. It invites constant comparison. Ultimately, it disrupts relational connections. Girls that fall under this spell face a relational crisis

profoundly impacting the social construction of their identities. With these thoughts, I am embarking on this business of making sense of the struggle and ultimately adding to the conversation. How do we as therapists/practitioners help girls thrive?

Girls "Falling Off" – Failure to Thrive

How do we name what happens to girls? Research through the 1990's suggests that as girls mature from childhood to adolescence, they face a crisis (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). In our society, we tend to use the term low self-esteem or lost self-esteem. By using the term self-esteem, we are making assumptions that what is happening to girls is a problem of an essential self. So I chose not to use this terminology, although I suspect girls and mothers might. Rather, I refer to girls *"falling off."* This metaphor is one based on girls riding their bikes full of freedom and fun, and then apparently some girls without cause lose balance and begin to fall. Successfully riding a bike takes coordination, balance, confidence and safe roads. When one or the other is compromised, girls lose balance and begin to fall. I like this metaphor because riding a bike is a terrifically "girl" thing to do. It denotes childhood, freedom, fun, and healthiness. It also indicates the change from girlhood to adolescence; when girls enter adolescence many surrender their bikes. They walk, take a bus, or eventually drive. The metaphor offers a sense of empowerment*; "I can get back on my bike. I can learn to balance. I can begin to ride."* Yet, there is a note of caution; it seems the metaphor places a lot of emphasis on individual agency. Perhaps there needs to be some emphasis on the road and safety conditions provided? Ultimately, my interest is in how we get those girls back in balance, riding with confidence, direction, and purpose. So what is *"Falling off"? "Falling off"* is losing balance, failing to thrive. It encompasses losing voice, losing confidence, the influence of depression and anxiety, or doing self-harm. I have been careful not to position "*falling off*" from a deficit perspective. I use the metaphor of the bike to pull us away from the idea that we need to "fix the girl." I am not studying anxiety, depression, anorexia, or self-harm. I am suggesting often these are variations on the theme, or simply varied performances related to the same theme. They are all "*falling off*."

The Study of "Girls" from the 1990's

The 1990's brought a new interest into the field of academic women's studies focusing on the psychological development of girls. Following the publication of the seminal work, *In a Different Voice,* (1982) Harvard Psychologist Carol Gilligan's and her colleagues Lyn Mikel Brown and Annie Rogers began to trace women's psychological development back in time through adolescence and then into childhood to uncover possible connections between childhood and women's experience of losing "voice." This journey became a five year study of girls ages seven to eighteen. The researchers were curious about what they heard as a distinct shift in girls' voices and observed that this change in voice coincided with the changes in girls' relationships and their sense of themselves. Their publication, *Meeting at the Crossroads: Women's Psychology and Girls' Development* (1992), found primarily middle-class girls at the crossroads of childhood and adolescence were finding themselves struggling to be themselves. At this crossroads, girls begin to edit their feelings and contain their thoughts, fearing their honesty might be hurtful or relationally destructive leading to disconnection, isolation, and abandonment (Brown & Gilligan., 1992). In the course of this struggle girls begin to lose themselves, forget what they know, and teeter on the brink of "*falling off*." The authors point to this crossroad as the *"central paradox"* of girls' development, the *"giving up of relationship for the sake of relationships"* (p. 7). For Carol Gilligan, the solution to loss of voice will be found in the building of relationships between women and girls (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004). This meeting of girls and women at the crossroads holds the potential key for societal and cultural change since with this *woman to girl* relationship that patriarchal culture begins to lose its grip on girls (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

During this period, the American Association of University Women published an encompassing study of 3000 boys and girls in elementary and high school. The report, *How Schools Shortchange Girls* (AAUW, 1992), became the initial scholarship linking girls' social and academic experiences in schools with biased practices in the classroom (Ward & Benjamin, 2004). Important to my study, the AAUW also recognized the general loss of self-esteem girls faced at the transition of

childhood to adolescence (AAUW, 1992). Peggy Orenstein in *School Girls; Young Women, Self-Esteem and the Confidence Gap* wrote about the outcomes of this survey;

> *The results confirmed something that many women already knew too well. For a girl, the passage into adolescence is not just marked by menarche or a few new curves. It is marked by a loss of confidence in herself and her abilities, especially in math and science. It is marked by a scathingly critical attitude toward her body and a blossoming sense of personal inadequacy*. (1994, p.7)

Orenstein's own research shines a light on girls' struggles with self-esteem, identity development and finding voice especially as it relates to the education system. Her book, popular and widely read in the United States provoked a substantial level of reflection and discussion about women's educational and psychosocial losses. Orenstein writes about the disservice we do girls if we do not target the cultural narratives and discourses that make them feel valueless, including awareness of the subtle or unconscious messages about girls' worth relative to that of boys within the classroom and at home.

In the field of psychotherapy, Mary Pipher (2001) published *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. Pipher communicates "stories from the front lines" of her clinical therapy practice. Her book is full of rich, thick descriptions of girls' lives and struggles describing the intensification of pressure culture places on girls despite the advances in women's educational and vocational expectations. While in the past women fought against being invisible, Pipher's stories describe how girls have moved from being invisible to desperately vulnerable[1]. Girls today are growing up in a culture adult women can barely comprehend. For Pipher girls are growing up in a "girl poisoning culture."

> *Girls today are much more oppressed. They are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized, and media-saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior high means using chemicals and being sexual. As they navigate a more dangerous world, girls are less protected* (2001, p. 12).

[1] Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards describe the transition from invisible to vulnerable as part of second wave feminism. (2004).

Pipher argues we need to strengthen and build girls' resiliency and toughness. We need to help girls fight to protect themselves from the enchantments of culture, but most importantly we need to change the culture. Her comments clearly reflect my own heartfelt feelings:

> *We need to change society if we are to produce healthy young women. But I can't single-handedly change the culture, and neither can the families I see. I try to help families understand some of their daughters' behavior as a reaction to a misogynistic culture and its manifestation at home, with friends, in school and in the larger community.* (2001, p. 253)

The challenge is to construct a culture which is more nurturing, less violent, and less sexualized, in which all children can flourish and thrive. In addition, Pipher looks to girls developing inner tools of resiliency such as separating thoughts from feelings, knowing their values, and knowing their own voice versus the voices of others. While much of the book suggests the ways we can work toward building girls' resiliency she concludes with an emphasis on the greater culture;

> *What do we do to help them? We need to strengthen girls so that they will be ready. We can encourage emotional toughness and self-protection. We can support and guide them. But most important we need to change our culture. We can work together to build a culture that is less complicated and more nurturing, less violent and sexualized and more growth-producing. Our daughters deserve a society in which all their gifts can be developed and appreciated.* (2001, p. 13)

Another storyline that began to emerge in the literature emphasized changing the individual or parents (Ward & Benjamin 2004). Books such as *Odd Girl Out* (Simmons, 2002), and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* (Wiseman, 2002) examined the relationships girls have with girls. The authors propose that, since girls' anger is unacceptable out in the open, they push their anger underground using furtive relational aggression as a primary weapon. Having supressed outward anger girls use relationships as weapons to punish or hurt. Therefore the crisis girls' face becomes primarily a relational crisis. Simmons promotes the development of healthier ways of dealing with conflict through socialization at home and in school. Schools, she recommends, should prohibit female forms of bullying such as *"rumor spreading, alliance building, secret telling, and severe episodes of nonverbal aggression."* (2002, Kobo Edition Ch.9) In *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity*, Ward and Benjamin share Carol Tavris' lament,

> *Psychological and punitive solutions are appealing in today's conservative times, when people don't want to think about what it would take to create a 'tending society' or make schools more appealing places to attend* (2004, p. 19)

In a critical review of American girls' studies, Ward and Benjamin (2004) mark six shifts in girlhood research since the publication of these primary books, including some apprehensions they have regarding the research itself. The first shift marked the transition from institutional or cultural locus of change to an individual locus of change. Initial research on girlhood began within the *context* of women's psychology, to support academic understanding of the experiences of women. However, the lens of study soon rotated toward a more *individual psychologizing* framework suggesting the answers lay within the individual rather than in the culture or social context. This produced a "fix the girl" approach and the psychologizing of girls' problems reflects abandonment of an adult responsibility to stand up to negative cultural influences on girls' development. The second shift brought a narrowing of studies from girls in general to focus on discrete concerns such as eating disorders, relational aggression, teen pregnancy, the achievement gap in education. Third was a concern that girls as research subjects were prominently white, middle class girls. The fourth stage suggested emphasizing individual girls' narratives, but had researchers losing sight of the ubiquity of popular culture and its effects on all girls. Fifth, girls became the centre of "girl power" initiatives that were primarily market driven. Finally, while initial research highlighted the alliance between girls and women research has now tended toward addressing the needs of girls as separate. Ward and Benjamin call for a renewal of political engagement. One which takes into account the multicultural nation, the impact a prejudiced and harmful culture has on women and girls, and the idea this common cultural experience has the potential to bring the focus back on the joining of women and girls as a concentration for research. More recent girlhood research has examined many ideas grounded in **feminism and post feminism** (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004; Gonick, 2006a; Gonick, 2009; Jackson, 2013; McRobbie, 2004) **sexuality and identity** (APA, 2010; Gleeson, 2004; Kehily, 2004; Tolman, 2012; Veldhuis, Konijn, Seidell, 2014) **popular constructions of girlhood** (Chesney-Lind, 2004; Rysst, 2010), **consumerism** (Hains, 2009; Harris A. , 2004; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Pilcher, 2011), and **education** (Gonick, 2006b; Jones, 201; Kehily, 2004; Lesko, Quarshie, 2004;), **aggression and bullying** (Malove, 2014; Sciberras, Ohan, & Anderson, 2012).

Invitation to Ride

I invite you to wheel alongside and join me on a journey. We are not looking for causal relationships, but in essence mapping the geography between girlhood and adolescence, looking for helpful ways of talking and intersections between, culture, peers, parents, self, identity, and thriving. In order to pull away from individualizing discourses, I have engaged a resourceful guide - Social Construction. At critical junctures, our Social Construction Guide will propose new ways of understanding, and at times challenge our "taken for granted truths" while opening fresh vistas from which we may view *girls*, *"falling off"* and *therapeutic practices*. As a philosophic response to individualism, social construction will lead us into the postmodern neighbourhood, guiding us toward an understanding that all that we are, and all that we know are the result of relational connections. Consequently, reality, meaning, and identity are not generated within the human mind but constructed through social and relational interactions. In straightforward terms, social construction promotes an understanding of the world through the lens of "we."

What importance does it have if we understand self, society, and the world as socially constructed through ongoing interrelationships? What is the significance of understanding reality and identity as socially embedded? What does it matter if we are not self-constructed, but constructed relationally? Social constructionism moves us toward a relational posture, as opposed to an individualistic posture of understanding (Gergen, 2009b; McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Through this awareness, we can embrace a "mindful"[2] understanding of how we are in this world. With this in mind it can serve as a form of social "mindfulness." For many of us, social constructionism leads to a way of understanding which informs our talking and directs our actions; we purposely look with new eyes, speak with new words, and find new ways of being together. Accordingly, what does therapy look like when grounded in social construction philosophy and ideas? How do we work with an individual girl[3] in the room while simultaneously taking note of societal forces

[2] Being "mindful" is a practice of observation and acceptance without judgement.

[3] My focus is on girls 11-19 years old who present in my practice as "Falling Off.". The girls are predominantly middle class Canadian girls presenting with challenges to their functioning and seeking support through therapy.

at work? How do we infuse these ideas into our practice with girls? Finally, how do therapist/practitioners whose work is informed by social construction find paths in therapy to support girls' balance?

Along with our guide, Social Construction, our itinerary wheels us through various neighbourhoods, deepening our understanding of girls, thriving and therapeutic practices.[4] Along the path, we will encounter several signposts regarding identity, agency, consciousness, relationship, and society, which surface and resurface as motifs woven throughout the text, informing and inviting us to take notice of the geography, to look beyond the individual girl to relational and societal practices, culture, and context. Along the ride I personally welcome four cyclists, exemplary therapists/practitioners/scholars whose work is informed by social constructionism, to wheel with us toward therapeutic practices that matter. Additionally, weaving in my own insights by filling the text with vignettes and reflections from my own life and practice, we will begin to experience praxis. Together we are navigating ways this social philosophy transforms both therapy and therapist.

Ultimately my aim is to bring to light meaningful ways in therapy we can get girls back on their "bikes" to begin to ride.

[4] **Thriving**: growth and positive development, or in the language of this work…*balance.*

Chapter 1: Wheeling through the Geography of Girlhood

Four Eclectic Neighbourhoods

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Girls Enchanted-Loss of Voice

Morality and Consciousness

Relational Attachment

Socio-Cultural Factors

Four Eclectic Neighbourhoods

There is a widely accepted discourse that girls face a transitional crisis between girlhood and adolescence in their attempt to develop "self." (AAUW, 1992; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Pipher, 2001). My aim is to offer insight into this transitional crisis. By navigating away from viewing "*falling off*" through the traditional lens of disorder, (anxiety, depression, anorexia) we are compelled to look through a complex and wider lens. To begin our journey we will wheel through an eclectic set of outlying neighbourhoods. The neighbourhoods offer conceptualizations, points of view, and ways of describing *identity, agency, consciousness, relationship* and *society,* and thus speak to girls "*falling off*." I am drawn to the following discussions of societal and relational practices which support or destabilize girls' functioning;

- *Girls Enchanted - Loss Of Voice*
- *Moral Development And Consciousness*
- *Relational Attachment*
- *Socio-Cultural Factors*

These neighbourhoods (concepts or schools of thought) are well-travelled by practitioners working with children and adolescents and therefore relevant to the research. The initial authors, while not proclaimed constructionists, are positioned to propose varied and relevant concepts regarding the geography of girlhood. That said, our Social Construction guide offers a word of caution as we wheel down these roads. A few of the neighbourhoods (particularly child development and attachment) circulate within a world view which may be considered individualizing or deterministic. Yet, I believe these same neighbourhoods offer helpful relational language and ideas which we can repeat forward in new ways, as we search for newer paradigms of understanding. Our Social Construction Guide will grant valuable commentary, steering us away from individualizing stances toward more postmodern understandings.

Our itinerary will begin with girls enchanted and loss of voice. Harvard Psychologist Carol Gilligan holds a noticeable position in the field of women' studies, conceptualizing "*falling off*" as *"loss of voice."* Girls lose their resistance and authentic voice when they engage with cultural requirements regarding femininity, or what it means to be a girl (Brown & Gilligan, 1992).

Developmental psychology offers another frame which asserts that human growth and change move through qualitatively different phases over time. It is challenging to talk about children without paying attention to cognitive, social, and moral development. Robert Kegan, a *constructive-developmental* psychologist, offers a framework for the development of a person's meaning making system or consciousness, which I believe will offer insight into possibilities for understanding girls "*falling off*" and set our ideas in motion for how to support girls in therapy. He proposes modern life requires a new consciousness in both parents and adolescents in order to negotiate successfully within our complex western society. Others privilege a*ttachment theory*. The ideas of attachment speaks to a fundamental need for relatedness, confirming our focus on *social/relational construction* of identity. Imbricated in the mix are modernity and the transition from a "solid" to a "liquid" modernity as coined by Zygmunt Bauman (2005). Social and political institutions are no longer "solid" and fail to offer control, certainty, and frames of reference in society. In "liquid" modernity individuals must find their own way and create their own life in the midst of endemic uncertainty. While Bauman does not directly address the impact of liquid modernity on girls' experience, I appreciate this as another worthy aspect of the geography of girls' construction of identity. Finally, in Chapter 3 we will further explore the terrain of *identity* and *agency* through the ideas of post-structural feminism. Some feminists offer a way of understanding girls' formation of identity influenced and created by various discourses, especially discourses of gender. We need to *"know the terrain,"* as understanding the geography of girlhood will lead us toward answering our question - *How do therapist/practitioners find paths in therapy to support girls' balance?*

Girls Enchanted - Loss of Voice

In the novel Ella Enchanted (Levine, 1997), Ella Frell falls victim to a powerful enchantment, the enchantment of obedience. In the richly charming novel Ella, destined to obey any order demanded, finds herself in a series of amusing difficulties, running from Ogres and dealing with her obnoxious stepsisters. Ella must obey any order given to her such as handing over her money or kissing a bird! Ella soon realizes the enchantment is a curse. The commanding spell prevents her from being herself, continually succumbing to the wishes of others. Essentially, Ella

has lost "voice." Being a self-assured and strong willed girl, she determines to stand up to the enchantment, beginning a quest to break the spell and claim her own voice. Carol Gilligan and her colleagues' are responsible for the popular idea that girls lose their resistance and authentic voice when they begin to engage with cultural requirements to shape their identities to be in line with dominant femininities (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Harris, 2004;). Like Ella, girls fall under a cultural enchantment causing them to lose voice, and self in the process. Gilligan addresses the concept of voice, "*To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act"* (1982, p.xvi). Dana Jack, in *Silencing the Self* (1991), reports women, regardless of age or education, use the term "loss of self" to depict their experience of a self in an intimate relationship. In her research, Belenky (1986) detects the centrality of "voice" metaphors commonly used by women themselves, voice being intricately interwoven with mind and self. Central to loss of voice, women report conforming to an image they feel is required by intimate others and society, or to be "the way the other wants me to be rather than the way that I am" (Jack, 2010). "Loss of self" corresponds with "loss of voice" in relationship, and ultimately "loss of voice" is the loss of relational connection. Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan define losing voice as the "selfless" position in relationships.

Inquiring into the lives of one hundred girls regarding the passage out of girlhood into adolescence, the researchers describe a journey into "silence and disconnection," a troubled time *at the crossroads* when girls often experience a cultural enchantment and lose voice. To understand girls' development Brown and Gilligan (1992) ask the research question, "*What, on the way to womanhood, does a girl give up?"* Gilligan and Brown's research describes young girls' voices, ages 7-10, full of strength, courage, and healthy resistance even in the midst of relationship. Young girls feel free to disagree openly, share their strong feelings, and express conflict as part of their everyday living. Entering adolescence many girls (even boys) begin to lose confidence in their own voice, lose confidence in what they know and misplace the courage they once had. The authors point to the phrase, *"I don't know"* filling the girls' language during interviews conducted with the researchers (p. 4). Girls in my practice confess; *"I am constantly trying to please." "I don't say what I think, no one listens anyway," "You have to watch yourself," "I just want to be*

liked," and *"Being nice is the most important."* These are girls' words, spoken regarding social encounters, high school, and their social world.

> *At 12 years old Cassie[5] lived through her parent's separation and divorce. Confused and scared she shared with me strong feelings about the divorce and her mom's new boyfriend. "I feel bad saying this, but I don't really like him. I don't like who my mom is when she is with him."*
>
> *I asked Cassie, "Can you share with mom your concerns?"*
>
> *"No way, I might hurt her. She'll say, 'don't you want me to be happy?' She always says that."*
>
> *Over and over again in our conversations, Cassie fears her adverse feelings and what the honesty of her feelings might do to her mother. Protecting relationship, Cassie has taken a "self-less" position.*
>
> *She has learned silence. She has learned to alter her voice in answer to the contradiction between what she believes her experience should be, and what it truly is.*
>
> *She tells me, "I'll be okay."*

Self-silencing ensures love and approval. Within this silence girls limit the possibility of resistance, creativity or change, finding themselves disillusioned, disconnected, and ultimately "*falling off*." Brown and Gilligan state, "*Girls at this time….lose their vitality, their resilience, their immunity to depression, their sense of themselves and their character"* (1992, p.2). Many girls find themselves under a powerful enchantment. Real-ationship (authentic and honest), which is at the very heart of girls' and women's psychology and moral development remains sacrificed. For some girls entering the world of adolescence, the loss of voice, "*falling off*," becomes a paradox; girls sacrificing authentic real-ationship for relationship. Gilligan pronounces that "on the way to womanhood" a girl gives up *self.*

In addition, for Gilligan, the enchantment of lost voice is a result of reacting or withdrawing under

[5] I am using stories from my practice to bring concepts and ideas to a "praxis level." They reflect my own experience and serve illustrative purposes only. The names of the girls are pseudonyms.

social and cultural pressure as girls seem either to conform, "fall off" or both;

> *The dissociation of girls' voices from girls' experiences in adolescence, so that girls are not saying what they know and eventually not knowing it as well, is a prefiguring of many women's sense of having the rug of experience pulled out from under them, or of coming to experience their feelings and thoughts not as real, but as a fabrication.* (1982, p.12)

Girls who conform to cultural definitions of femininity, perfection or idealism, hide the "self." Imitating ideals, they become like "Stepford"[6] girls, compliant in look with little ability to say what they feel or know what they think. Mary Pipher suggests girls have limited choice to respond,

> *Girls have four general ways in which they can react to the cultural pressures to abandon the self. They can conform, withdraw, be depressed or get angry. Whether girls feel, depression or anger is a matter of attribution—those who blame themselves feel depressed while those who blame others feel angry. Generally they blame their parents.* (2001, p. 43)

Pipher describes girls splitting themselves into two; one side socially acceptable or "culturally scripted," acting according to expectations, and the other self a carefully guarded more authentic self. When girls voice their true feelings and thoughts they risk jeopardizing relationship, so they keep powerful feelings, and contrary thoughts silenced for the sake of maintaining connection. So what does it mean to have voice? One group of authors defines voice as *"self-knowledge, creativity, and self-worth"* (Baumgardner & Richards, 2004). Pipher (2001) designates authentic voice is an "owning" of all experiences, including all the emotions one feels and the thoughts one thinks, even when it pushes past being socially acceptable.[7] Girls with voice may be considered selfish, bossy or *"big mouths"* (McLean, Gilligan & Sullivan, 1996).

At this juncture our Guide interjects, *"What does it mean to give up self, to lose voice? Are we suggesting a girl's actions are her own? Are there outside forces at work?"* Our Constructionist Guide proposes the silencing of a girl's voice is not the action of a solitary girl, acting on her own, but is a cultural process arising socially and relationally (Weingarten, 1995). Our faithful Guide continues to steer us away from individualizing frames as we cycle forward on our journey. *"Are*

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[6] This is a reference to the 1975 movie the Stepford Wives. The term "Stepford" is often used in popular culture to denote a submissive and feminine housewife.

[7] Interestingly some girls have qualitatively different experiences of adolescence, and research has shown that African American girls are able to maintain a stronger sense of "self" through adolescence as they are more inclined to use their voices (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995).

we holding girls responsible for not speaking? Do girls have agency? Can girls control their own identity?" I begin to wonder, *"Should our lens focus on the girl constructing self, or should our emphasis be creating zones of safety for them to speak their own voice?"* Meeting girls at the crossroads Brown and Gilligan conclude adult women themselves must break the silence, wise women must open space for girls' voices by stepping up to serve as role models. Listening to girls and validating girls' experiences women themselves become guiding lights for change. Wheeling through the geography of girlhood, we note Gilligan and her colleagues have placed a prominent road sign - **Safety Zone: Girls Speaking Their Truth.**

Morality and Consciousness

Socio-emotional developmental maturity has been described by various scholars. Kohlberg (1981) focused on cognitive or rational thinking, Gilligan (1982) relational position, and Kegan (1994) on levels of subject/object awareness. Robert Kegan a *constructive-developmental* psychologist, proposes a framework for the development of a person's meaning making system or consciousness, in his book, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (1994). I believe this offers insight for our study. Much like constructionists, *constructivists* trust the world is not out there to be discovered, but that in essence humans actively create the world through our interactions and interfaces with it. In addition, both personal and social realities are co-constructed with other individuals through a level of interdependence, moving beyond an understanding of the "individual" as sole producer of her life. Constructivists propose life, self, and reality are produced in joint action with others and relation with the physical environment. (Peavy, 1997). Our Constructionist Guide is familiar with its *constructivist cousin*, a fellow philosopher attentive to how we make meaning (McNamee, 2004.) [8] While constructionism does not traditionally emphasize development I believe the developmental neighbourhood will prove invaluable for the journey. As we continue our expansive tour we would be amiss not to reflect upon the consciousness and moral development of girls.

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[8] According to McNamee (2004) *"...constructivism – whose focus is on internal, cognitive processes of individuals, the other – social constructionism – whose focus is on discourse or the joint (social) activities that transpire between people. At best, the two are viewed as similar because of their focus on meaning- making processes."*

As a developmental psychologist, Robert Kegan theorizes beyond Jean Piaget's stages of development generating a more comprehensive model. For Kegan development is not only cognitive, but social and moral as well (Dombeck, 2007). He recognises individuals navigate several phases of consciousness over time, from childhood through mid-life, with each phase incorporating more complex levels than the previous phase. Consciousness refers to "how we know" or how we make meaning. Kegan argues the demands of modern day culture exceed the capacity for adolescents, to meet with those demands, arguing modern life requires a complex level of consciousness. In particular, adolescents require a level of consciousness which goes beyond thinking, feeling and behaving. Kegan claims adolescents need a whole new way of *knowing* or a whole new *complexity of consciousness*. He states what needs to change is, "*Not just the way he behaves, not just the way he feels, but the way he knows – not just what he knows but the way he knows"* (1994, p.5). He clarifies;

> *This kind of knowing, this work of the mind, is not about cognition alone, if what we mean by cognition is thinking divorced from feeling and social relating. It is about the organizing principle we bring our thinking and our feelings and our relation to other and or relating to part of ourselves* (1994, p. 29).

A person's meaning-organization or meaning-constructive capacities include the selective, interpretive, and executive, capacities psychologists have traditionally associated with the ego or self. However, unlike physical development, consciousness development is not simply a matter of "nature taking its course," but can be facilitated or delayed through social and relational life experiences (Garvey, 2006); consequently meaning-constructive capacities become social achievements.

Generally these ideas have been understood using the concepts of *subject* and *object*. When something is experienced subjectively it is experienced as part of the self (feelings and thoughts), but when experienced objectively it is something outside of the self (Sato, 2003). Early in life an infant experiences everything as subjective as the developmental progress through life continues to more and more objective levels of consciousness.

> *Erin was "crazy" about Kyle. Their relationship was a rollercoaster of emotion. Erin from a Waldorf[9] school background had entered public high school in grade 9. Kyle seemed pretty cool, not at all like the boys from Waldorf. Erin quickly became enamoured with Kyle. Kyle often treated her badly and Erin's friends and family viewed him to be an inappropriate match. His behaviours and choices often utterly contradicted her own voiced values, but she became unable to reflect upon his behavior without giving up her own point of view and embedded feelings for him.*
>
> *Erin could not hold onto her feelings and opinion and at the same time view the opinions of her friends and family. Unable to feel or think critically about the relationship, she failed to recognize herself as a separate "self" in the relationship.*
>
> *The boyfriend, Kyle, was subject, and she did not view him as object.*
>
> *Embedded within the relationship, she may not exist without him.*

As a person functions from a place of being subjectively embedded in their own perspective, like Erin in the example, she cannot appreciate what it might be like to see herself from another's point of view. Dombeck summarizes,

> *Being unable to understand what you look like to someone else is the essence and definition of what it means to be subjective about yourself. And appreciating from many different perspectives, the essence of what it means to be relatively objective*. (retrieved from http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=11433)

Here, our Constructionist Guide interjects; *"Could we create a new language of understanding reaching beyond the individualizing language of subject/object dichotomy? What if we understand this from the perspective of relational process?"* Our Guide recommends we lean toward the concept of reflexivity. Personal reflexivity is an action of self-reference including a consciousness of how others impact or "bend back on" the self. Thus, reflexive action takes into account the influences, actions, and impacts of the social "other" through acts of self-examination and reflection. Essentially social reflexivity is the capacity to recognize relational and social influences

[9] Waldorf is an alternative education model based on a humanist pedagogy.

and how these forces impact self-understanding. In Erin's case, a limited reflexivity results in Erin being shaped largely by her environment (boyfriend). A high level of social reflexivity would be defined by Erin shaping her own understandings, opinions, norms, tastes, desires. As Erin functions from a limited reflexivity, or embedded in her own perspective, she cannot appreciate what it might be like to see herself from another's point of view. When we move toward more complexity in consciousness and greater reflexivity, we come to comprehend the social world more abstractly - as constructive of the self. When Erin begins to develop a life of her own by getting a job or joining a peer group, she begins to garner a reflexivity about "boyfriend." Her consciousness expands to gain awareness of herself as distinctive from Kyle. This narrative describes the shift toward a more complex order of consciousness as Erin becomes aware of herself, the dance of relational process and the relational influence of "boyfriend." Ultimately, her transformation affects more than feelings or behaviours, but the way she *makes sense* of her experience; not just *what* she knows, but the ***way*** *she knows* (Kegan, 1994).

The transformational place adolescents hold between childhood and adulthood is not only confusing for teens, but for parents, as well. Most of us have experienced the tumultuous emotional life of the teenager. One minute she is pleasant and compliant and the next reeling out of control, making outlandish decisions and blaming the world. Developmentally the period between twelve and twenty is the period of transition through orders of consciousness.

At 15 Morgan was what I call a "spitfire." She was full of life and lively performances. She was a girl who acted on impulse, reeling up and down on a rollercoaster of emotion. Never pausing to consider the consequences of her behavior, even to herself, she constructed her position in dualistic me/you terms. Morgan had only two choices; she could obey her own impulses and do whatever she felt like doing, or she could give in to the directives of authority and do what her mom or teachers wanted. Together Morgan and I learned a new way, the way of "pause."

The way of "pause" allowed her to "make her own choices" while still considering her mother's needs. "Pause" helped Morgan hold her own feelings, but also gave her time to weigh things, consider the options, think about what her mom might be thinking and then make her decision.

When functioning from the eyes of "me," adolescents have a hard time holding their own point of view and simultaneously understanding another point of view (parents). They look out through the mirror, but not *at* the mirror to see their own reflection. They struggle to consider how things outside themselves, such as cultural narratives, peer expectations, and societal pressures, have influence over their behaviours and choices. Transitioning in levels of consciousness, teens begin to learn to "exist" outside self and reflect on how or why self does what self does, to be reflective, and to stand outside of "self" able to take a "bird's eye view." In other words, the more we mature the more we are able to step outside ourselves and see ourselves from an objective place (Sato, 2003). "Reflection" is vital in many forms of "talk therapy," but accordingly this may pose an interesting challenge for some girls. I suggest we keep this in mind as we move toward therapeutic practices that matter. Nonetheless, reflective orders of consciousness offer the ability to think abstractly, to reflect on why we do what we do, and to devote to a group of people or set of ideas beyond the self. It is this kind of consciousness which provisions us to live relationally supporting girls to remain in balance. Accordingly this brings a greater level of responsibility for our actions and for how we relate to the world, compelling us to live in more harmonious ways. These ideas will become more important as we move toward exploring postmodern ideas regarding the social and relational construction of identity.

What do adolescents need to make these transitions successfully? According to Kegan, teens need a social environment which includes two things: support and challenge. With too much challenge and not enough support, teens implode with anxiety or act out with uncontrolled behaviours. With too much support and not enough challenge, adolescents become passive and unmotivated. Support and challenge become genuine concerns in my practice. I have always found it interesting that so many of my girls are high level scholars, All Star hockey players, national class figure skaters or talented musicians. I wonder if the pressures associated with these high levels of challenge may tip the balance for some children, causing them to "fall off." I like the idea of "challenge" the researchers at the University of Michigan call "sparks." The researchers defined "sparks" for teens as,

> *…interests or talents you have that you are really passionate about. When you are involved with those sparks, you have joy and energy. You are not bored, and you might lose track*

> *of time because you are so involved in what you are doing. A spark is a really important part of your life that gives you a sense of purpose or focus."* (Scales, 2010, p. 25)

On the other hand, we may not be offering the right type of support. In the past, the church and extended family provided support with clearly defined values, ideals, and norms. In the modern world these values, ideals and norms seem less collective and more individual in nature. Adolescents find themselves caught between parents, media and peers to construct a worldview, with few touchstones, boundaries, or foundations. Many adolescents have little sense of feeling grounded or sustained. For children and teens there is a need to feel secure, to feel someone is in charge, to trust someone is going to provide support. Kegan expects parents to be leaders, to take charge, assume responsibility, embody a set of values, and use competent executive functioning, so children have a sense there is security (Kegan, 1994). Kegan is advising consciousness levels are social and relational projects. He argues a parent's level of emotional health and understanding of their own feelings and thoughts will have a profound impact on a child's level of thriving. In other words, the way a parent interacts with the world, the way a parent deals with problems and stresses, the way a parent makes sense of life, and the way a parent engages in relationships profoundly impact a child's thriving. Consequently, a parent's own consciousness acts as a touchstone for their child's developmental growth and construction of a preferred identity. Our Social Construction Guide is like minded - reminding us children's levels of consciousness are not personal achievements. The healthy development of children relies on social context and relational connections.

The demands our disordered society places on adolescents places them in a precarious position. As some adolescents struggle to expand their levels of consciousness they risk becoming "in over their heads," unbalanced and "*falling off*." In order to negotiate within this complex world it is apparent adolescents require a favourable context, conducive to transitioning to a self-reflective order of consciousness. Kegan calls on parents, schools, and youth organizations, to create a supportive environment to allow for expanding levels of consciousness in children (Kegan,1994). As therapists how do we support girls' development? How do we work with girls in transitional places of consciousness? As parents, teachers, therapists, and coaches we must find ways to walk

adolescents through this chaotic world while they move and expand to a self-reflective level of development. Developmentalists have mounted a sign to read - **Work Zone Ahead - Developing Perspective Taking Consciousness.**

Relational Attachment

Attachment theory is a theory of relatedness holding to the primacy of relationship in the healthy development of individuals. Through the work of John Bowlby[10], attachment theory brought to psychology a whole new paradigm of human interaction. Bowlby proposed a child needs a reliable constant attachment to a primary caregiver in order to achieve successful social development. While attachment theory has become a dominant theory of early social development in young children, with interest to our study is the idea of attachment from the vantage point of the adolescent (Allen & Manning, 2007; Carlivati & Collins A.W., 2007; Kobak, Rosenthal, Zajac, Madsen, 2007; Kobak & Sceery, 1988; Neufeld, & Maté, 2005; Scharf, & Mayseless, 2007). By exploring girls' relationships, in particular with peers and with parents, we gain insight into the geography of girlhood, paying particular attention to how these ideas may support our understanding of the relational construction of identity. As a caveat, feminist researchers hold the field of attachment with misgiving by speculating that attachment theorists concern themselves primarily with mother and child relationships, failing to address the impact of the environment on women's ability to provide secure attachment or to parent (Buchanan, 2008). However, being grounded in postmodern ideals we garner the ability to sit with contradiction; on the one hand noting ideas or concepts that do not fit squarely into our world view, while on the other hand simultaneously holding points of promise and possibility. While attachment theory is realized from an individualizing world view, I propose we embrace its central focus on the primacy

[10]Bowlby J (1969). *Attachment*. Attachment and Loss (vol. 1), Bowlby J (1973). *Separation: Anxiety & Anger*. Attachment and Loss (vol. 2), Bowlby J (1980). *Loss: Sadness & Depression*. Attachment and Loss (vol. 3)

of trusting relationship. Therefore, let us carefully venture forth while ensuring these ideas remain social/relational and do not promote individualizing or blaming discourses.

As Constructionists, we value the primacy of relationship and its impact on the construction of identity. A ***secure attachment*** to a primary caregiver contributes to a positive view of the self, guiding the processing of information about self-concept (Dykas & Cassidy, 2007). Allen and Manning (2001) surmise the attachment system in infancy is decidedly more like a "river" which flows into the larger waters of emotional regulation capacities as development progresses. Anthony Giddens in *Modernity and self-identity: self and society in the late modern age*, states,

> *Trust established between and infant and its caretakers provides an inoculation which screens off potential threats and dangers that even the most mundane activities of the day-to-day life contain. Trust is this sense is basic to a "protective cocoon" which stand guard over the self in its dealings with everyday reality.* (1991, p.39-41)

Consequently, a child's early relational experiences become significant contributors to the relational construction of self. A trusting parent/child relationship or indeed a trusting adult/child relationship offers "*unconditional love and acceptance, the desire to nurture, the ability to extend oneself for the sake of the other, the willingness to sacrifice for the growth and development of the other"* (Neufeld & Maté, 2005, p. 11). Likewise, when parents successfully respond to their teen's needs, a teen is likely to find a level of security and confidence in their parents' availability and support. Thus, a parent becomes an internal voice of safety for a child, providing what some call *a secure base script* (Dykas & Cassidy, 2007). A secure base script may sound like, *"When I am sad I can go to my mother, and she gives me comfort."* Our Guide suggests some may refer to this as an inner relational voice or relational resource. Inner relational resources may include the voices of not only parents, but therapists, coaches, teachers or family members. The inner relational resources provide support to adolescents as they move socially and emotionally away from their parents. Constructing secure scripts, adolescents use parents and others as a sheltered base to return to in a time of distress or necessity. This affirming intimate connection grows from a deep quality of relationship.

Allen and Manning, (2007) report securely attached adolescents find more success in both social and emotional development, more positive social experiences and better developed social skills. The characteristics of adolescents with primary ***secure attachments*** parallel with what we would consider *girls riding in balance* (Kobak, et al, 2007; Scharf & Mayseless, 2007). These characteristics are associated with:

- Capacity to balance autonomy and relatedness in the relationship with parents
- Positive qualities of friendship
- Competence in dealing with various stressors
- Better learning dispositions
- Greater resilience and less anxiety
- Increased levels of social skill
- Finding the developmental path through adolescence; coping better with developmental tasks of adolescence
- Positive social experiences
- Competence with peers
- More popularity

Nevertheless, in my practice I see many girls "*falling off*" with what could be described as the characteristics of compromised ***insecure attachments***:

- Higher incidents of depression
- Thoughts of suicide
- More interpersonal difficulties
- Had more contact with parents
- More fear of failure
- Less ego resilience and more anxiety
- High levels of personal stress
- Lower levels of well-being,
- Malfunctioning and highest levels of social problems

Here, my intent is to highlight the importance of the *quality* of primary relationship and consequential impact on the social construction of identity. Additionally, while some girls struggle with garnering a positive view of self and emotional regulation, our Guide is offering a note of caution about categories or polarities, and causality. I am not suggesting that insecure attachment *causes* girls to *"fall off,"* but essentially stressing the crucial need to build strong primary relationships in order to keep girls riding in balance. In other words, the quality of primary

relationships matter to the construction of a girl's identity and the quality of parental relationship provides an important focus in therapy with girls.

While many of the girls in my practice have positive, engaged and attuned relationships with their parents, I have noticed some of the girls who find themselves entrenched in the *"fallen off"* identity have a parent who is positioned as disengaged, dealing with their own levels of anger, depression, or alcoholism.

> *Julie's parents came to me after Julie "went crazy" at school. The family shared it was a difficult year. Ryan, the eldest son, had attempted suicide, was cutting, and involved with drugs. Removed from the home, he was living in a nearby group home. Dad himself named depression as one of his own influences. Dad, a middle school teacher, told me, "I have no idea how to interact with a 12-year-old girl."*
>
> *….so he had remained absent.*
>
> *However, following Julie's meltdown, it was time… he was willing to try.*
>
> *As Julie and I began to work together, Julie used a gratitude journal to record some of the "rainbows" in her life and about herself. At the close of our session, Julie read her journal entries to her parents. I invited her parents to keep the same journal, sharing their gratitudes, joys, and appreciations.*
>
> *A few weeks ago Julie shared, "This brought me joy…Dad and I spent a whole day together, and we baked cookies."*
>
> *Julie's Dad voiced from his journal, "This brought me joy…Julie told me she loved me."*

Here the focus becomes finding ways to shape or build relationships with parents. In other words, the quality of parental relationship matter to the construction of a girl's identity.

Understanding the need for a quality relationship with parents, some authors warn of the transference of primary attachments from parents to peers during adolescence. Neufeld and Maté in, *Hold onto Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than their Peers* contend that in the modern world children and young adults have "lost their moorings."

> *The disorder*[11] *affecting the generations of young children and adolescents now heading toward adulthood is rooted in the loss of orientation of children toward nurturing adults in their lives*. (2005, p. 7)

The authors insist that the transference of *primary* attachment to peers is powerful and detrimental. Children with powerful outside attachments which compete with their parents prevent their parents from parenting effectively. This result is children who are no longer taking their cues from supportive adults. Neufeld and Maté refer to this as "peer orientation." The authors are not suggesting peers are not vital, they are pointing to a dominant cultural narrative of "peer orientation" or peers becoming *more influential* to adolescents than supportive parents; arguing that it remains difficult for children's identities to be constructed in healthy ways when they are being "brought up by each other." Patricia Hersch in her book, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, on the sociology of adolescence in America describes the "tribalism of teens,"

> *America's own adolescents have become strangers. They are a tribe apart, remote, mysterious, vaguely threatening. The tribal notion is so commonplace it is hard to know whether it derives from the kids or from the adults, but the result is that somewhere in the transition from twelve to thirteen, our nations' children slip into a netherworld of adolescents that too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of estrangement.* (1998, p. 14)

Hersch describes children unconnected to parents and teachers and without the maturity to form satisfying relationships, "tribing" together to satisfy their instinctive needs for connection. The strong discourse of peer importance, or a girl's drive to belong to a peer group with an intense need to fit in and conform, can lead to compromises in parental relationships. Neufeld and Maté argue, peer oriented attachment seldom provides the stability and quality of support nurturing parents give their children. They contend that children cannot hold both figures/influences at the same time, but orient toward one letting the other go. This is reminiscent of Kegan's levels of consciousness, proposing many teens have not developed a level of consciousness allowing them simultaneously to hold two points of view (Kegan, 1985). However, Kobak et al. (2007) make a valid point, describing adolescents as holding various attachments, some only serving as "ad hoc" attachments without becoming full attachment figures. This allows for teens to seek attachment

[11] The authors use the word "disorder" to mean a "disruption of the natural order of things."

figures based upon present need or situation and may prove a healthy style of attachment for teens. Scharf and Mayseless state;

> *The weakening of investment in parents does not normatively lead to investment in peers as full-blown attachment figures. Rather it appears to lead to a diversification of emotional investment to various sources: the self as a source of security, relationships with friends with some attachment properties, actual or symbolic relationships with nonparental adults such as a coach or an idol, and relationships with romantic partners. These processes are construed here as developmental tasks of adolescence with regard to the attachment system* (2007, p. 8).

Although peers are an important "step" in the process, peer attachments generally prove more transient and are less stable than primary parental attachments. Teens themselves who reported higher levels of attachment security were more likely to name parents as their primary attachment figures, while insecure teens were likely to name peers as primary attachments (Kobak et al., 2007).

Our discussion highlights the importance of secure attachments or generative primary relationships for children and adolescents. I believe mothers, fathers, peers, therapists, coaches hold responsibility for co-constructing our girls in positive, life-giving ways. Regardless, we do find some girls discovering themselves in a precarious position with increased levels of anxiety and loneliness, potentially losing balance and "*falling off*." Further along on the journey we will begin to explore the constructionist understanding of self as dynamic, fluid and changeable - searching for positive ways to construct the "self." At this juncture, we note a valid warning - **Slow Down - Attune to your Kids!**

Socio-Cultural Factors

In our earlier conversation we noted Robert Kegan's discussion of the complexities of modern life and the challenge these complexities pose for adolescents. In particular, Zygmunt Bauman (2005) offers perceptive reflection and analysis regarding the state of society and modern living, essentially the socio-cultural geography of girlhood. Insightful and hard hitting, Bauman generates a vision of a runaway locomotive careening off track, while his unyielding

analysis prevents readers from looking away. By using the metaphor "solid" modernity to "liquid" modernity he describes the shift in western society. "Solid" modernity provided people structure, certainty, and stability while "liquid" modernity has created an ever shifting society, balanced between uncertainty and risk; "*liquid life is a precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty*" (Bauman, 2005, Kindle Location 50). Giddens also reflects on the personal impacts of modernity;

> *Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact. However, these are not only extensional transformations: modernity radically alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our experience.* (1991, Kindle Locations 42-45)

Perceptions regarding Western society seem pertinent to our understanding of girls "*falling off*" when we consider the profound challenge girls face inhabiting a "liquid" world. Instead of confidently racing their two wheelers down a breezy country road, girls find themselves navigating the speeding traffic of a four lane freeway.

Liquidity is not stable. Once solid, institutions such as the family, work, and education, are now continually shifting throughout the span of an individual's life making it extremely difficult to construct a coherent life-narrative. Levels of fear and doubt combined with a widespread lack of collective assurance, find families and their children attempting to manage and develop personal strategies to ensure stability and wellbeing. Bauman (2007) states, *Fear has settled, saturating our daily routines,* and I will add "saturating our girls." I have had many adolescent clients admit, *"I am afraid to grow up."* Fear perpetuates in "liquid life" drawing fuel from what Bauman calls "existential tremors" which draw energy from the notion individuals have discharged God as the "caretaker" of life while duly appointing "self" in command (Kindle Location 171). "Existential tremors" leave individuals without a stable sense of who they are or where they belong, resulting in amplified feelings of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. Giddens states, "*Personal meaninglessness – the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer – becomes a fundamental psychic problem in circumstances of later modernity"* (1991, p.9). Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning,* refers to "man" in an existential vacuum;

> *No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do; sometimes he does not even know what he wishes to do. Instead, he either wishes to do what other people do (conformism) or he does what other people wish him to do (totalitarians).* (2006, p.106)

In order to grasp some measure of control, for Bauman (2000) Westerners take refuge in individualism - being exceedingly focused on financial security, frenzied about health and fitness, and living within an ever shrinking social circle. Purpose in life becomes about self-development and preservation, guarding against illness, age, or slip in status, losing any desire to delve into the deeper questions about what it means to be human and how we find fulfillment. For girls, identities become fragmented and transitory, based on fashion, music, interests, and possessions, as young women attempt to control the production of their own identity (Gergen, 2000).

To find stability, to fill up and seek fulfillment, Westerners, including our girls, are seduced by a culture of consumerism. Consumerism is particularly intriguing in the light of our study of girls and identity. Messages of materialism and "status values" emanate through culture persistently proclaiming wealth, possessions, and status as quintessential life goals with money as the *scorecard for success* (Kasser, 2014). Daily life spent shopping, sustaining and continually transforming one's self through the inescapable culture of consumerism has a profound influence on girls who are targeted by marketers as easy prey. Bauman (2005) discerns consumerism as not simply about acquiring or gathering, but about the continual reinvention of "self." With continual reinvention humans hope to find significance; nonetheless never wholly satisfied they forage along the consumerist path with much of western individual identity is purchased off the rack. Sławomir Mroek, a Polish writer comments,

> *…a market stall filled with fancy dresses and surrounded by crowds seeking their 'selves' … One can change dresses without end, so what a wondrous liberty the seekers enjoy. … Let's go on searching for our real selves, it's smashing fun – on condition that the real self will be never found. Because if it were, the fun would end …* (as cited in Bauman, 2008, Kindle Location, 113)

The consumerist culture cleverly defines the set of needs by which girls believe their identity will be formed, yet subversively breeds dissatisfaction in order to maintain the consumerist revolving door (Bauman, 2000). The impact of individualism and understanding how identity is constructed in late modernity will become central to our discussions offering key insights into what girls need to thrive.

Additionally, teen culture itself presents a significant challenge to the healthy development of identity. School, family, social media, sex and drugs create a world of disconcerting contradictions. At earlier ages adolescents engage in risky behaviours including sex, drugs, underachievement, depression, suicide and crime (Hersch, 1998). Journalist, Patricia Hersch spent one full year researching teen culture from inside the high schools of upper-middle class Reston, Virginia. She reported,

> *The underage drinking, the occasional stashes of pot, the coed sleepovers have somehow become part of the normal aggravations for today's parents, or perhaps part of the parents' strong denial that their child's life could include such activities.* (Hersch, 1998, Kindle Location, 361)

I listen to my clients' stories, sharing how other kids' parents support this lifestyle as acceptable, offer their homes for teen parties and provide the alcohol to underage partiers.

Added to teen culture is the overlay of social media, where privacy is high-jacked and identity must be meticulously branded. In researching ideas relevant to adolescents, we must pay attention to the impact of social media. While social media works to create connection, to build our network of "friends," it seems not all roads of social connection are equal. Preteens who spent five days at a nature camp without access to screens performed significantly better on tests of reading nonverbal emotion cues (Uhls, Michikyan, Morris, Garcia, Small Zgourou, and Greenfield, 2014). This suggests we may not want to equate Facebook "friends" with real-time friends. Additionally the threat to teens is not simply a dissolution of privacy perpetuated by social media, or disconnection from face to face interactions; according to some social media is a platform for normalizing this hazardous culture. Steiner-Adair states,

> *Our children are growing up immersed in a culture where it is cool to be cruel, where media influences encourage it and social networking facilitates it…Parents and teachers describe a disturbing new presence of sarcasm and meanness across age groups.* (2013, p. 49)

Referring to social media a distraught father said to me today, *"…this is dangerous. They are never saying nice things. Kids just don't have the social skills to be dealing with this stuff. "* Further research in the area of social media influences on adolescent development and social networks is badly needed.

For some girls the adolescent road navigated is nothing short of treacherous. So how do our girls cope? How do girls begin to develop identities resilient enough to thrive in this liquid world? Exploring more supportive ways of identity development will be central to our discussions of girls and therapy. What is the way forward? Bauman (2000) argues in order to find peace, humans require a society rooted in community, rather than individualism and self-aggrandizing ways of creating an identity.

> *In the movie David, eleven year-old Daud is the son of the Imam of the local Brooklyn mosque. Daud begins to question the rigid expectations of his Father and notice his feelings of separation from the world around him. In the park one day a group of Jewish boys inadvertently leave their "book" on the park bench, and through an act of good faith Daud returns the book to the local orthodox school in the neighboring Jewish community. Mistaken by the Rabbi as a student he surreptitiously attends the Jewish yeshiva each week. A genuine friendship grows between Daud (known as David to the boys) and Yoav, one of the Jewish boys until the mix up is exposed and the friendship ends.*

Viewing this movie with my husband one Saturday evening we were both struck by the sense of belonging the boys experienced within their respective communities. These boys had a place to belong in the world, touchstones for how to live, and rituals to mark passage through life. However, bounded by culture, belief and history these two boys were unable to remain friends. While providing relational connection their faith groups were also responsible for relational disconnection, boundedness, and isolation. While groups offer a sense of community and a place to belong, they simultaneously may build walls of credence leaning into individualizing dialogues and critical stances (Gergen, 2009a). This can present a dilemma. I am somewhat disillusioned with going forward, yet turning the clock back to a society grounded in unyielding traditional, patriarchal requirements will not serve girls either. A way forward is needed, and one that promotes connections of acceptance and belonging. With this caveat, we continue to hold to relationships which provide a sense of belonging as primary, and relationships situated around local communities as crucial to build meaning and connection for humans in society.

Amidst the dark discourse, we find a sliver of light. Humans find peace and freedom and a sense of "who they truly are" when they find belonging, certainty, stability, security, and safety. We are relational beings, hardwired to connect, and deeply interdependent. Despite the discourse presented by our modernist critics, many of us, including our Constructionist Guide, relentlessly continue along the high wire of hope, balancing on relationships and moments that matter. Dana Jack states,

> *In honoring connections—our real need for one another—and in valuing the development of kindness, compassion, and profound respect, we create hope. The more we can spread the message of the power of connection, the more safe the world will be. And the more we will all find creative and life-affirming voices and action*. (2010, p. 104).

Ultimately what is required is a culture which offers girls a stable sense of who they are, where they belong, and a meaning beyond themselves. Even though he is short on answers, Bauman, with his "macro" level analysis, highlights the need to move beyond individualism. As we continue our journey, moving beyond individualism will become key to our understanding of how to support girls. At this juncture, Bauman constructs a roadblock - **Caution Bridge Out - Stable Society under Construction.**

Having toured through these eclectic neighbourhoods, we found many intersections between, culture, peers, parents, self, identity, and thriving which may help us understand girls' experiences in contemporary society. However, while these popular notions have energy and currency, our Social Construction Guide has drawn our attention to several drawbacks including individualizing discourses, blaming postures, or reliance on categorizing. Fortunately, we have not come to the end of the road, but only to a crucial detour through a construction zone, the **Social Construction Zone.** By wheeling our way through promising postmodern ideas and concepts, we will fill a deep pool from which to draw our therapeutic practices that matter.

Chapter 2: The Social Construction Zone

Modernism: God to I

Postmodernism: Moving from I to We

Social Constructionism

Discourse of "We" Relational, Social, Narrative

What does it Matter?

Why are we taking this detour?

The word 'theory' derives from the Greek 'theorein', which means 'to look at'. Theorein is built upon 'to theion' (the divine) or 'ta theia' (divine things) and 'orao' (I see), i.e. 'contemplate the divine'. The ancient Greeks understood Divine as harmony and order (or logos) permeating the real world surrounding us.[12] *Theory provides an overlay of harmony, order and balance to our real world practice. In order to be a therapist versus simply a counselling technician, I propose we need a deep pool of theory - one which seeps into our pores influencing our very being.*

In this work social construction becomes the pool of theory, saturating our understanding of identity, agency, relationship, and society, as well as informing our conceptions about girls, thriving and therapeutic practice. Given social constructionism is a theory of how we make meaning, its impact is ontological. In other words, social construction influences my way of being in the world. Accordingly, social construction informs my way of being, and my way of being informs my therapy. That said, I invite you through the Social Construction Zone as we begin to fill our work with promising ideas.

[12] Retrieved from orgtheory.net

I excitedly tell my friends, colleagues and family members, "I have just enrolled in a Ph.D. program."

I hear their response, "Oh, congratulations! A Ph.D. in what?"

"Social construction" I meekly state. My inner fear is truly about the next question, "What in the world is social construction?"

I know they want the short answer, the one or two sentences that will enlighten them as to what will consume the next few years of my life. I also want to be clear enough to give a short answer. If I can explain it in a few sentences, I probably will understand it myself. I know I will not have their attention for long…. I need an elevator speech….

"Social construction is a philosophic response to individualism. It suggests an understanding of the world through the lens of "we." Philosophically it advocates meaning, knowledge, identity, and reality are social agreements built together through our relational and dialogic interactions. This idea has profound implications for the posture we hold in this world."

……I think I have lost them with that one. I'll try again.

"Social constructionism is a bit like the story of the Wizard of Oz…

Dorothy, Lion, Tin Man, and Scarecrow, isolated along the Yellow Brick Road, find themselves immobilized by their individual fears and deficiencies; Dorothy has no home, Lion no courage, Tin Man no heart and Scarecrow no brain, until joining together along the Yellow Brick Road.

Joining together as fellow travellers they co-construct new thriving identities, author a new empowering narrative, and envision a bright future…. primarily the story speaks about moving from a posture of "I am" to a posture of "we are."

In my research, I want to find ways therapists can co-construct with girls identities resilient enough to thrive in this disordered world.

Now for the long version…

At this juncture our Social Construction Guide invites us to wheel down "History Lane" to gain a fuller understanding of the nature of this philosophical movement as it marks a departure from generally accepted ideas about how we make meaning and how we view reality, self, identity, and truth (Gergen, 2009a). In the past, there have been few fundamental shifts in frames for understanding ourselves and the world around us. Historically in the Western world we perceived reality as imparted through Divine revelation, and more directly through religious doctrine and the institutions of religion. People embraced an unquestioning faith in God and an unquestioning allegiance to the church. In their minds the world unfolded through God's plan. At the heart of this understanding was an essential certainty; meaning and truth transmit through "revelation" and truth is the prerogative of the church. I characterize this frame of understanding as *divine/revelational/institutional*. As new ideas formulated meaning came to be perceived as generated within the individual mind rather than revealed by God. Through science and empirical discovery the individual rational mind could understand and make sense of the world. The modernistic paradigm, characterized by what is *scientific/rational/individualistic,* supplanted the *divine/revelational/institutional* frame. Today newer philosophies are formulating which are challenging the *scientific/rational/individualistic,* conveying us to a place of postmodernism. In the postmodern frame, meaning emerges from social contexts. Meaning, reality, self and identity characterize what is *relational/narrative/social*. In simple terms, three words may describe these fundamental shifts in how we make meaning: moving from "God" to "I" to "we."

Modernism: God to I

One cannot really argue with a mathematical theorem. Stephen Hawking

Henri Franfurt and his wife Henrietta Antonia Franfurt defined a "mythopoeic" stage in society in which humans perceived each event as an act of the will of a greater God, Gods, or Spirits. Myths revealed understandings of the world in order to explain life (Franfurt, 1977). Mythopoeic societies used the process of myth making to describe their reality. The ancients of Greece were essentially mythopoeic. An exception to this occurred within a small

philosophical group of scholars in Athens. These scholars are worth mention as their eventual impact on reason and thought was profound. Socrates challenged his students to use their minds to find truth and wisdom. His ideas, counter-culture and impious, threatened the traditional faith in the ancient Gods. Socrates' ideas were such an anathema, that for his impiety he received sentencing to drink the fatal hemlock. Plato, Socrates's disciple, argued knowledge is present within the human mind at birth and just needs to be "pulled from the mind" (Kries, 2009). In contrast, Aristotle, the pupil of Plato, argued knowledge comes "from experience," more in keeping with the eventual ideas of empiricism which trusts in the capacity of the individual mind to explain and understand the world (Kries, 2009). However at the time this line of thinking was fairly localized. The Athenian philosophies were but a glimmer of what was to come more than a millennium later.

During the Roman period, in the reign of the Emperor Constantine, Christianity gained tremendous influence in the Empire (4th Century) supporting theological revelation as the basis for knowing; "truth" is revealed through the institution of the Church and doctrine. The dominant paradigm of understanding of reality and self was through divine revelation (mythopoeic) as dictated by the Christian church. It was not an individual's mandate to discover truth or decide upon morality as the Church was the sole determiner of truth and life, as well as the expounder of morality. People understood the world to be defined and directed by a divine God, revealed through the institution of the Church and its agents. Therefore, this paradigm of understanding can be characterized as *divine/revelational/institutional*. Eventually, the *scholasticism* of Saint Thomas Aquinas (13th Century) married theology with the classical philosophies of Aristotle; injecting theology with the ideas of reason and intellect. Aquinas stated,

> *Hence we must say that for the knowledge of any truth whatsoever, man needs divine help that the intellect may be moved by God to its act. But he does not need a new light added to his natural light, in order to know the truth in all things, but only in some that surpasses his natural knowledge.* (Summa Theologica of the Second Part)

"Wonder" to "curiosity" is how Phillip Ball in his lecture at the *Perimeter Institute in Waterloo Ontario* (2012), describes this shift. During the ecclesiastical period[13] people approached the

[13] Ecclesiastical Period 20-1648 A.D.

world with a posture of "wonder" or awe for God and his works, while "curiosity" about the world had low intellectual value. Gradually as various developments in thought took place, "curiosity" replaced "wonder" as the privileged approach. This shift in position represents the onset of modern science, a time that encompasses the lives of Galileo and Isaac Newton (mid 16th to 17th century). In addition, 17th century philosophers made a striking departure from dominant theological views by bringing the ideals of rationalism forth. Turning away from the Divine as the sole source of knowledge and truth, reason emerged as the dominant theme of the 17th century Enlightenment or "age of reason." [14]

Descartes' renowned statement, *"Cogito ergo sum"* or "*I think therefore I am,"* turned the eyes of man away from God as the only source of truth and knowledge, toward "man" himself as a source of knowledge. For Descartes, the act of thinking was the central locus of knowing. This was not a form of atheism; just "man" had a mind to act upon the world separately from God. Rather than accepting truth as revealed by the Devine (top down) Descartes flipped the process upside down. He suggested "doubt" as the starting point, thus truth revealed through reason (bottom up) (Caputo, 2013). The Age of Reason initiated the individual into a rational being, with a predictable,

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[14] Rationalist thinkers include;

Rene Descartes *(1596-1650)*
First Meditation*: refuted the Scholastic views of Aristotle and Aquinas about knowledge derived from senses - since senses can deceive. Therefore, all things known must be called into doubt.*

He formulated ideas about the dualism of mind and body "R*es Extensa*" and the mind or soul "R*es Cogitans.*"

Second Meditation*: "Cogito, ergo sum" In the Second Meditation, Descartes discusses his infamous construct "I think, therefore I am." Descartes comes to terms with the truth of "I exist." In the previous meditation, finding all sensory beliefs unreliable. So "I must finally conclude that the proposition, 'I am,' 'I exist,' is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind" Descartes suggested the mere fact "I am thinking," regardless of whether or not what I am thinking is reliable, implies there must be something engaged in the activity, namely an "I." Thus, "I exist" is an unquestionable and serves as a truism from which other absolutely certain truisms can be deduced.* (Skirry, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/)

Baruch Spinoza *(1632-1677) God is no longer the supreme creator of the universe who rules it via providence and revelation, but humans are a part of a system of nature which is infinite, profound, and deterministic system. Humans find happiness only through a rational understanding of this system and their place within it.* (Dutton, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/)

Gottfried Leibniz (*1646-1716) He developed ideas on free will and introduced his principle of pre-established harmony to explain apparent causality in the world.* (Burnham, 2009, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/)

objective, and external reality. Foundational to the framework was *reason* serving as the singular basis of knowledge, with science and mathematics at the fulcrum. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) furthered these ideals with his moto *sapere aude!* – have the courage to use your own understanding (Burr, 2003). The profound shift away from God as external "revealer" resulted in the individual becoming a central autonomous "creator of knowledge" and agent of his own destiny. Now a thinking *self* could be understood as separate, and could thus reason independently from God or Church doctrines. Within this line of thinking individuals essentially became "self-contained," separate from each other, and isolated within the social context (Gergen, 2009b; Sampson, 2008). Edward Sampson states;

> *We first need to think of the self as a kind of bounded container, separate from other similarly bounded containers and in possession or ownership of its own capacities and abilities. In order to ensure this container's integrity we need to think of whatever lies outside its boundaries as potentially threatening and dangerous, and whatever lies inside as sufficiently worthy to protect. These beliefs establish a possessively individualistic view of the person and the assumption of a negative relation between the self and other, both of which understandings permeate much of western civilization.* (p. 31)

The idea of the modern self as a bounded individual is born.

Modernism rests upon uncovering "knowledge" through the rational and the objective. The approach is linear and mechanistic with a problem-solution dynamic, where solutions are available to any problem through empirical discovery and rationality. It is diagnostic and evidence based, and measurement is foundational. Information is the fuel of knowledge. We can think about modernism in terms of symptoms, causes, examination, predictions, measurement, conclusions and action plans. In a therapeutic or medical environment it concentrates the problem "within" the individual, often without considering the intricate systems of which the individual is a part. Modernism holds to a mind-body duality treating the body as a separate entity from the mind. Doctors take care of physical pain and counsellors emotional pain. Modernism leans toward perfection; to be better, to know more, to have more, to master more. The undercurrents draw us into a consumerist lifestyle of accumulation of goods, resources, and knowledge. Rationalist and individualistic assumptions underpinning modernism produced an accepted body of knowledge and a way of understanding the world.

Ultimately, modernism elevates the individual. With this distinctive shift toward the individual, society began to value concepts of individual rights, advance in laws, and expand democratic thought (Gergen, 2009a).[15] The influence of individualism becomes core to my inquiry concerning "*falling off*" and the idea develops in Chapter 4 as we explore the discourses and practices shaped by this metanarrative. I have characterized this modernistic frame of understanding as *individual/rational/scientific.* In light of this conventional paradigm, social constructionists are asking questions, "Does this view of the world benefit us? Does it serve us well?" It seems new ideas are brewing.

Postmodernism: Moving from "I" to "We"

Postmodernism is a response to the ideals of modernism. Postmodernism is not so much a philosophy, but a point of view, generating a dialogue which transports us beyond modernism, rationalism and individualism. Its thinkers include Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, and Jean Francois Lyotard.[16] Lyotard (1992), the French champion of postmodernism, suggests postmodernism requires a posture of suspicion regarding

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[15] The impact of this has never been more profound as I sit here writing this text in the light of the Sandy Hood Elementary School shooting in the United States. We are at a place where the individual's right to bear arms rests above society's right to safety.

[16] **Martin Heidegger** (1889-1976) *mainly interested the study of being (ontology). He went through a profound change in his thinking ("the turn") in which he came to place an* ***emphasis on language*** *as the vehicle through which the question of being unfolds. He was critical of positivism* [16] (Korab-Karpowicz, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/).

Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) *Deconstructionism for Derrida presented via an analysis of specific written texts. It seeks to expose various binaries subverted to dominant ways of thinking—presence/absence, speech/writing, and so forth. He focused on* ***language as a system of differences*** (Reynolds, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/).

Michael Foucault (1926-1984) *His main focus was on* ***what power is and how it works****, as well as the way in which it controls knowledge and vice versa, and how it becomes as a form of social control. He refers to discourse as a conversation, or information. For Foucault,* ***discourse creates truth, morality, and meanings****. It is also through discourse we are created* (Kelly, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/,).

Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) *Best known for his highly influential formulation of postmodernism in The Postmodern Condition. Focus on* ***overarching meta-narratives****, which influence society, and perceptions of reality* (Woodward, 2013, retrieved from http://www.iep.utm.edu/).

overarching cultural narratives. Some of these surface as cultural "meta-narratives" or grand theories such as Marxism, Christianity or Freudianism. Meta-narratives are considered ultimate truths. Groups "plug" themselves into a meta-narrative as their "source of truth." For example, some Christians plug into the metanarrative of the truth of their scripture to establish their social world, ideas, opinions and even politics. Postmodernism rejects the idea that the world is tethered to these meta-narratives, but rather stresses the co-existence of a variety of contexts and ways of life (Wittgenstein, 1953). Postmodernism is twofold, offering both scepticism (challenge to dominant views) and re-invention (new vision, innovation) propelling us forward.

The emphasis of scepticism leads to two paramount underpinnings of postmodern thought:

1. ***Postmodernism refers to an attention to "the other," "the marginalized."***

While modernism is the voice of the dominant culture, postmodernism finds the voice of the non-dominant culture, the marginalized, and the excluded politically, economically, and socially. Post-modernists take a "bottom up" view as opposed to "top down" view. The disenfranchised, women, gays and the poor, all appear in the postmodernist consciousness. Postmodernism illuminates how dominant societal discourses empower or benefit some and marginalize others, revealing that at the base of almost every truth claim are underlying narratives privileging certain groups and side-lining others. Claims to truth are in essence a play for power or an attempt to impose one's own narrative in the guise of absolute truth (Crouch, 2000). From this perspective, power creates the opportunity to define reality and determine what constitutes "true" knowledge. Postmodern thinking challenges us to re-view common beliefs of a dominant set of value laden narratives. How do these narratives reinforce the values of the "main" culture? How do these values perpetuate self-interest and create injustice? This ideological critique opens space to hear the voices of all, moving away from individualism and toward a social perspective.

2. ***Postmodernists have a deep skepticism toward the modernist assumptions about objectivity, reason, and scientific knowledge.***

While the term "modernism" refers to a way of understanding the world from a place of reason and objectivity, "postmodern" represents a counter view to objectivity, reason and scientific

knowledge. In *An Invitation to Social Construction (2009a)*, Kenneth Gergen tackles the three main foundations of modernist thinking: objectivity, reason, and scientific knowledge.

> ***Objectivity:*** As we make claims, for example in science or medicine, to being "objective" these claims can only really be supposed claims. Ultimately, objective assertions are floating on a current of underlying beliefs and values. As a counsellor, I can "objectively" describe a client as depressed or anxious, yet my descriptions come from a particular "way of seeing the world;" however there are "other ways" of seeing the world. Any "objective" description rides on a current of ideology, floating above a value laden undercurrent. Thus, objectivity is in the eye of the beholder.
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> ***Reason:*** In the western world we have a strong inclination to privilege one point of view over another. Rationality supersedes all other forms of thinking, and truth flows directly from rationality. Views, which are not outwardly rational, become disregarded or held in contempt. My sister, a nurse by profession, is studying to become a *homeopath*. Homeopathy is a form of alternative medicine developed by Samuel Hahnemann (1796). He formulated his doctrine with the underlying assumption "like cures like." Hahnemann proposes that a substance that causes the symptoms of a disease in healthy people, will cure similar symptoms in sick people. For example, *belladonna* an herb when ingested by a healthy person would produce a whopping headache, while when taken for a headache *belladonna* alleviates the symptom. Residing outside accepted rationality these ideas make little sense using traditional forms of logic. Gergen (2009a) offers another example. Solely focused on the material world science inadvertently marginalizes the non-material world or spiritual world. The world of "spirit" is unspoken and without presence. On this level, rationality tends toward being one sided, valuing the material world while suppressing the non-material world.
>
> ***Scientific Knowledge:*** Modernists elevate science to the "omniscient." In the past people trusted Divine revelation and today many trust scientific knowledge in much the same way, without reflection. Gergen argues that scientific knowledge needs to be placed under more

> scrutiny, not so much for its conclusions, but to examine how its conclusions propagate within social groups adhering to certain shared assumptions, values and accepted truths. Essentially all science becomes only one *way* of describing truth or reality. Additionally, scientific studies rely on underlying economic determiners (funders) and this reliance flies in the face of pure curiosity. Held hostage to the intentions of research funders, science is never about pure curiosity. (Phillip Ball, *Perimeter Institute Lecture*, December 2012).

While "scepticism" is the left hand of postmodernism, "re-invention" becomes its right. The resolve of postmodern thinkers is to reach beyond the breakdown of repressive and stagnant models, to champion the recasting of the oppressive into the promising. The prescient and insightful hold a core place in postmodern philosophy; however the underlying shift regards the essence of meaning. For postmodernism, meaning is not stable, essential, fixed eternal truth, but meaning is fluid, changing, and transforming. Reaching beyond innovation or fresh ideas, postmodernism is about finding completely novel, even audacious ways of understanding. Derrida refers to this process as "deconstruction" (Caputo, 1997), Lyotard (1992) as "paralogy." Lois Shawver (2001) proposes, postmodernism is more than simply tasting a new kind of cake, it is comparable to tasting ice cream for the very first time when we have never even imagined ice cream.

The Social Construction Zone

In the play, "The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe," Trudy the discerning bag lady explains, "What is reality anyway? …nothin' but a collective hunch." Jane Wagner

While much emphasis is placed on understanding "postmodernism" in contrast to "modernism," the overarching impact is not what it is counter to, but the assumptions it generates. Social constructionism is a point of view or set of assumptions which has grown from the soil of postmodernism. At its core social constructionism

is a counter response to individualism. It moves the core centre of reality from within the individual to the social realm. While social constructionism has its roots in postmodern thought, it is not the creation of any single individual, and a definitive definition is somewhat illusive. Social constructionism is metaphorically more like a syndrome than a disease. It constitutes a group of signs and characteristics that form a recognizable pattern, as opposed to a clearly defined philosophy. Gergen proposes social constructionism is more of a dialogue than a philosophy. Some of the main scholarly participants in the dialogue include Berger and Luckmann (1966), Burr (2003), Gergen (1985; 2009a), and Shotter & Gergen, (1989). Burr (1995) submits that each of the thinkers in the field is linked by a type of "family resemblance." There is no one characteristic defining the family, but a set of similar characteristics which includes these four (Burr, 2003):

1. *A Critical Stance Toward "Taken For Granted Knowledge."*

   Is the category of "depression" always useful? Is it helpful to be defined in this way? How does it benefit us? What are the costs to categorizing people in this particular way? In our social worlds we hold to a large body of "agreed upon knowledge." This "knowledge" guides our perceptions of the world, describing our reality, including our understandings of self. "Knowledge" is spoken using labels we put on reality; "My anxiety," "He has ADHD," "Well behaved child." We label and sort concepts, ideas, and even people – beautiful girl, self-esteem, depression, victim, learning disabled, urban poor – placing them in "boxes" or agreed upon categories. This translates into a relentless tendency toward comparison and judging - popular or unpopular, fat or thin, in or out. While we inevitably judge, sort, label, and categorize; our judgements may serve to marginalize and place people into "other" or sidelining categories. Social construction requires us to critically reflect upon the many labels and categories we fabricate to explain the world.

2. *Historical and Cultural Specificity*

   The categories, labels, language, and concepts we generate are fixed in an historical place and time, and are bounded by culture. For example, the conception of "adolescence" is a relatively modern creation. "Adolescence" was not a concept in the Victorian era, nor is it in many non-western cultures. What about "midlife crisis?" Is there something organic about mid-life that plunges us into questions about the purpose of life or is this a social invention of this current

time? Accordingly, ideas cannot be taken "for all time truth" since times change. Reality is fluid and in motion.

3. *Knowledge is Sustained by Social Processes*

   Knowledge is not something that we gain, accumulate or hold in the head. We co-create knowledge between people and through interactions, creating an intricate weave of "oral" tradition, agreed upon understanding, and reality. Common ways of understanding the world, or constructions, are products of ongoing engagement and dialogue. Consequently, knowledge is never mine alone, but builds between us with language as its dynamic energy. This dissertation in actuality is a "group effort." It is the co-construction of writers, philosophers, theologians, advisors, interviewees, girls, editors, friendly readers, scholarly readers….all participants in the creation of meaning and knowledge. This dissertation is a social process with a long list of authors.

4. *Knowledge And Social Action Go Together*

   Each social construction invites an action or response from people in society. Burr offers the example of drunkenness. Drunkenness understood as a crime in previous generations would result in the social action of incarceration. In our contemporary understanding, drunkenness is considered an addiction or an illness which requires the social action of treatment. Some of my girls, influenced by anxiety or depression, find themselves at family doctors or psychiatrists. The collective medical "action" is physicians prescribing medication. In fact, Canada is among the world's major consumers of antidepressant prescriptions, with as many as 9% of the population medicated.[17]

Gergen states social construction is "*...principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live"* (1985, p. 267). All this suggests that social construction points to truth, reality, and knowledge as socially rooted, favouring the role language plays in their creation.

[17] Retrieved from OECD Library: http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/;jsessionid=3sk9burvdtjiv.x-oecd-live-02

Discourse of "We" - Relational, Social, Narrative

> *He, Akbar, had never referred to himself as I, not even in private, not even in anger or in dreams. He was –what else could he be – we. He was the definition, the incarnation of the "we." He had been born into plurality. When he said, "we" he naturally and truly meant himself, as an incarnation of all his subjects, of all the cities and lands and waters and lakes….*
>
> *The Enchantress of Florence,* Solomon Rushdie

Social constructionism at its core promotes a way of understanding reality, self and identity, characterized by what is *relational/narrative /social.* McNamee and Hosking (2012) have further styled social construction as "relational constructionism" since it draws our attention to the relational processes which construct our world and the generate meaning within relationships through language. It holds the view that the world is not so much "out there" to be explored and understood, but the world is co-created and agreed upon between us; therefore, all reality, self, and identity find life through our social exchanges, narratives and relationships (Gergen, 2009a).

Relational: We Are Deeply Inter-Connected

Gergen in *An Invitation to Social Construction* provides this simple explanation, "*What we take to be the world importantly depends on how we approach it, and how we approach it depends on the social relationships of which we are a part"* (2009, p.2). He constructs this idea more fully. An infant looking at the world with unknowing eyes learns about the world from knowing others. A tree becomes a tree when her parents offer this meaning to her. The infant with "unknowing" learns about the world through the relationships of which she is a part. She learns through others. At first, she learns about simple realities like a tree or dog, and as she grows she moves to understandings of kindness, responsibility, fairness, etc. Her understanding of the world guides her relationships. Engaging and joining in verbal and non-verbal transactions with those around her, she builds a world of knowledge, core beliefs, assumptions, traditions and norms. What she understands the world to be is largely contingent on the relationships of which she is a part.

Relationships with family, playmates, teachers, leaders, develop her knowledge about the world and herself. Her own *identity co-constructs* as she develops a sense of "self" through this ongoing interrelatedness (Gergen, 2009a). So with this duality of "languaging" and relationship there evolves a "socially constructed" agreed upon self and world. Therefore, on this level what is *real* is personal and what is *real* differs from person to person depending on one's circumstances and relationships. The *real-ness* of "mother" will be decidedly different if one experiences a loving and nurturing "mother" versus a discounting and neglectful mother. In other words, self, identity, and understanding of the world do not depend solely on objective reality or facts, but on a personal interpretation of reality which encompasses a kaleidoscope of beliefs, life influences, experiences and social context. The realities that we take for granted are actually the realities constructed around us since birth. This suggests our lives are not as self-created as we might assume, and together we are in the process of forming ourselves from a set of socio-cultural blueprints (Kidd, 1996).

Constructionists suggest we do not construct reality in an individualistic sense; we need others to play roles.[18] Reality is analogous to a play with scenes filled with actors on the stage. Each of the actors is in a relationship to the other and gains his/her reality and identity from the others. As an actor on the stage of life one of the roles I personally play is a "Child and Family Counsellor." However, I am only a counsellor when "you" are the client. I gain my identity together with "you." You define me at this moment. With this dynamic performance, the meaning understood by each character depends upon the other characters in the play. McNamee submits, "*regardless of an actor's intentions, meaning only emerges the moment the other responds to that person's actions,*

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[18]***Erving Goffman*** *developed the idea of dramaturgy; the concept that life is like an ongoing play in which people are the actors. At birth we enter onto a stage called everyday life, and our socialization involves learning how to play our assigned roles. We enact our roles together with others, who in turn enact their roles in connection with us. Goffman believed we are playing out our role on the stage of life.*

"All the world is a stage and all the men and women merely play their parts." William Shakespeare, As You Like it.

for it is through connection to another's response that performance takes shape" (1996, p. 9). Together construction is possible. We need each other to proclaim who we are.

Identity then is a consequence of relationships, rather than a consequence of an essential self or mind. To constructionists, individuals are not containers of an inner, stable, essential nature, but identity or self is fluidly created through a process of social interaction, dialogue and conversation within the social world (Sampson, 2008). Personal identity, personality, self, become socially constituted through dialogues and interactions. What we think, how we know, and what we understand, fundamentally form, sustain, and transform through dialogue and ongoing exchanges with others. Therefore, the "other" becomes a vital co-creator of "self." Sampson states, "*without the other, we are mindless, selfless and society-less*" (p. 109). In essence, we are the merger of all of the social encounters we have had. Rather than the single-voiced sense of identity which is a story of the encapsulated self and hallmark of contemporary western culture we have a multi-voiced sense of identity. All relational partners we have known (parents, siblings, teachers, friends) are contributors to this sense of identity. The process is more than a process of reflection, simply others reflecting back to me who I am; it is a process of creation, with me adjusting "my-self" as we dance and interact. In addition, this is the dance that never ends. It is an ongoing life dance. Fundamentally, reality and identity are agreements, nothing is real unless people agree that it is, so what we take to be true and real births from relationship (Gergen, 2009a). This has profound implications for how we understand "*falling off*," not as a disorder of the self or personal failure, but as a relational consequence.

Social: Language Constructs…

> *God said, "Let there be light," and there was light (Genesis 1:3). In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1). The Word gave life to everything that was created (John 1:4).*

Within a modernist perspective, we perceive ourselves as separately bounded individuals capable of individual thought and reason (Gergen, 2009b; Sampson, 2008). Capacity for reason is a central component of being human, and language is understood as a unique capacity of human expression

of the mind (Gergen,1985). Language is an exceedingly complex form of communication. The complexity of language conveys what is "on my mind" or "in my mind," and labels internal and external worlds, including thoughts, feelings, and images. Conventional understanding submits we use language to think, label and describe what we know and make sense of the experiences we have. We communicate and reflect experience to ourselves and others. A modernist view of language proposes a one to one correspondence in which each object in the outer world can be described in the inner world through words and internal representations, understood as being accurate depictions of reality. We label the outer world, and labels represent depictions of reality. This is a "man gave names to all the animals approach." [19] What matters is each animal has a label which is a representation of the animal. However, social constructionism challenges this simple *descriptive or representational* view of language. Austrian, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), a central figure in the constructionists' understanding of language challenged the "picture" view, wherein words produce and express pictures of reality e.g. Zebra. Wittgenstein replaces the "picture" metaphor with the idea language is a multiplicity of "games" or goings-on which govern ways of speaking. "Language games" consist of held values, and accepted truths central to certain spheres such as psychology or physics, or smaller spheres such as high school (Caputo, 2013; Wittgenstein, 1953).

For Wittgenstein words are like chess pieces in the language game (1953, 1:31). Separate from the game the pieces have no intrinsic meaning, but within the game they gain identity and significance with use (Gergen, 2009a). For example, the words "diagnosis" and "treatment" in psychotherapy are part of a therapeutic language game. These words offer a way of describing which finds meaning in the "game of therapy." Essentially, Wittgenstein proposes words themselves have no fabric; they do not mean anything in themselves or hold any essence, but only become meaningful within a social context or within the game. *Words gain their meaning, not through their capacity to picture reality, but through their use in social interchange… within the 'language games' of the culture*" (Gergen, 2009a, McNamee & Gergen, 1992, p 177). Wittgenstein's view provides leverage for a major shift in understanding language. If words are

[19] (Genesis 2:20) The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

more than descriptions or representations of reality, but gain sense within the flow of an ongoing interchange, language becomes a living, creating dynamism. For constructionists, language also includes words, tone, phrasing, facial expression, body language, and gestures. Constructionists move beyond "man simply giving names to the animals" to the animals gaining *reality* through negotiation, comparison, agreement, opinion and coordination fashioning the reality of "animals."

Constructionism recognizes language not as a passive but an active, dynamic, constructive force constructing reality and social worlds. People socially generate sense and truth together through the performance of language. As we co-ordinate our dialogue our ways and patterns of living together begin to emerge. Wittgenstein refers to these ways as "forms of life" (1953, 1:23). For Wittgenstein, the "language games"[20] of culture create "forms of life" or social worlds and processes in which we participate. My husband Steve had the experience a dissimilar "form of life" while teaching a business class to a group of young people.

There was Tea by Tim, The Confetti Factory - a party planning service by Leticia, and a plan for Duran to import diamonds….although daunting, my husband Steve was acting as a "business coach" to an animated group of "at risk youth," primarily of Caribbean descent, comprised of young adults in their 20's moving away from gang life and lives of crime to building their own small businesses.

The lesson that afternoon was on "Identifying Your Target Market…."

Steve a small business owner himself, operates a learning centre which offers a Little Readers preschool program for 3-6 year olds.

Steve explained, "Our target market for Little Readers is primarily women ages 32-40, as women start careers prior to having children and are having children later in life."

As Steve talked a look of bewilderment swept the room…. He continued, "We also have some concerns about this program, the enrollment has been dropping in the last few years."

[20] See previous discussion in Chapter 2

> *There was silence… "Sir?…what do you mean women are having children later in life? Women aren't having children later."*
>
> *Duran in the dark sunglasses brought his wisdom to the table…"It depends on what world you're coming from….that's a different world."*
>
> *Leticia added, "I think the enrollment is dropping because people aren't really into to education anymore….most kids don't even finish high school."*
>
> *…..Two forms of life…in the experience of this form of life women had their children in their teens.*

We co-create our forms of life to include rituals, rules, outlooks, standards of behaviour, and corresponding beliefs and values and these forms of life are created through language. Constructionists understand language emerging from interrelationships between people is the result of negotiations, comparisons, agreements, opinions and coordination (Gergen, 2009a).

Furthermore, language is not simply external but is also an "internal" practice. Bakhtin suggests language is dialogue with somebody else, even when "*that someone else is one's own inner addressee*" (Bakhtin, 1987, Kindle Location, 130). We use language as the basis for thought, or to build and construct thoughts, which in turn builds reality. The greater the pool of words from which we draw, the more complex thoughts we create and the more complex the reality. A toddler, with a small pool, is limited to a simple reality - mommy, daddy, blankie, up, down. A university professor with a vast pool generates a complex reality leading to the extremely sophisticated invention of the Large Hadron Collider.[21] Wittgenstein states, "*the limits of my language mean the limits of my world"* (1953, 5.6). On many levels, internally and externally, constructionists understand language to be constructive; not simply a "describer" of reality, truth, and knowledge, but the "builder." In other words, inner language is not something we use, it is something we do together to create meaning and reality. This metaphor envisions language as action, bringing things, ideas, and thoughts to life, creating a powerful shift in how we look at the world and those around us. This suggest as our language changes we change. Thus, the influence of language has implications for therapeutic practices as we join with girls by means of the creative energy of

[21] The **Large Hadron Collider** (**LHC**) is the highest-energy particle collider made and is considered as "one of the great engineering milestones of mankind."

language. We do not simply name reality, create, analyze or gather facts, but we construct meaning and reality together.

If language is constructive, language has real consequences (Burr, 2003). This has tremendous implications in therapy. If I change the word "victim" to the word "survivor" or "fighter," so do "I" change. Change, whether it is a belief, feeling, or self-concept, involves a change in language (Taylor, 2001). One illustrative example of the impact language has on constructing experience is the mind and body dualism of Descartes. As Westerners, we have wholly embraced this construction, and have embedded it deeply into language and thought with profound implications for how we view reality and the world. For example, today I have a migraine headache. I understand this as an experience of my body or perhaps I could understand it as an experience of my mind as a subconscious mental release of inner pain. If I deal with my emotional pain, will my migraines pass? Using this dualistic way of dividing reality leads to a particular understanding of life experience (Gergen, 2009b). Thus, language has created my reality. My reality is structured by a mind/body duality I take as for all time truth.

Another example of the consequential nature of language is something I see in my counselling practice. Parents tell me, *"My daughter is anxious,"* or *"My son is full of anger."* Language places the problem within the child, and we come to believe this as reality. If we opened up the child could we see the anxiety? Is depression in her heart? It leads us to the conclusion my child is "broken," or needs to be "fixed." What if we choose different language? *"My daughter struggles with the challenge of anxiety," "My child can often be tricked by worry,"* or *"My daughter is finding ways to deal with a sadness cloud."* As we choose different language, we choose a different reality. Constructionists then ask, *"Is this an advantageous way to describe our reality?" "How may it benefit us?" "How may it limit us?"* As we move into the discussion about girls "*falling off*," language becomes a central construction site of change. Burr further elaborates on the consequential nature of language. She states,

> *"The meanings carried by language are never fixed, always open to question, always contestable, always temporary—is fundamental to post structuralism and has major*

> *implications for our understanding of the person, their identity and the possibilities for personal and social change."* (2003, p. 53)

The fluid properties of language have consequences for understanding of self and identity. This is to propose that what we take as "self" is changeable. What we understand as personality, desires, opinions, strengths, motivations is not essential to the inner nature, but through language are ways of describing, conceptualizing or structuring our world. Language provides the system and categories for dividing up experience and giving meaning so that our very selves become products of language. Founded on the understanding that language structures and creates experience and self, we embrace the grand possibility of alternative constructions of the self, of events in our lives and the world. This notion has a critical impact on our understanding of therapy. We are in the process of constructing and there is a myriad of possibilities.

Narrative: The Power of Story

> *In a way humans are not made of skin and bone, we are made of stories. Sue Monk Kidd*
> *Stories are not material to be analysed; they are relationships to be entered. Arthur W. Frank*
> *The narrative holds the blueprint for what it means to be human at our very core. Gloria DeGatano*

While we create our reality through language, we pass reality on through story (Taylor, 2001). The narrative metaphor is a core feature of constructionism and fundamental to the constructionist understanding of meaning. To the constructionist stories are "fictions" which provide the material of lived reality, unlike story in the modernist vein which constitutes facts, and versions of events occurring in the real world (Davies, 2000). For the constructionist, the difference lies in the fact the story is *one way* of describing, organizing, or understanding as opposed to *the way* of describing, organizing or understanding. Story is a way of describing or an agreement, as opposed to what is conclusive or factual. Influencing the beliefs we hold and the ways we participate in life are larger stories, or dominant narratives, which include assumptions about gender, education, femininity, and success. Life is multi-storied with components which are cultural, relational and historical in origin (White, 1990). Cultural and family narratives are the "stories" which flow

through families and schools offering our most basic understandings of the world, reality, and culture. Many of our cultural narratives reside in subtle channels below the surface.

> *I was sitting in the backseat of the car with my 4½ year old niece Olivia and my not yet 6 year old daughter Andrea when they entered into a very serious conversation. Olivia turns to Andrea,*
>
> *"Did you come out that way?"*
>
> *Confused Andrea requests an explanation.*
>
> *Olivia restates, "When you were born, were you white and pink like that?"*
>
> *Andrea not deterred assures her she is pretty sure she was white when she was born.*
>
> *Olivia replies very matter of fact, "You're lucky."*
>
> *Cousins….. Olivia is a beautiful brown haired, brown eyed child (her father is Mexican) and Andrea, a beautiful contrast of white skin, blue eyes, and golden blonde hair.*
> *Setting….. San Antonio, Texas*
>
> *……narratives reside in subtle channels below the surface.*

Troublingly, some assumptions solidify as stereotypes of certain groups or individuals. Constructionism challenges the power of dominant narratives. By challenging limiting narratives and the meanings and realities they create, possibilities may be generated for alternative more empowering descriptions.

Much like stories written in literature, lived stories consist of many layers, storylines or themes. There are stories about what it means to be female, or the expectations of a teen girl, or how girls express anger. These stories become absorbed and taken for granted, without necessarily being overtly heard. For example, "What it means to be a girl" is part of a lived narrative or storyline. Girls play "girl" games and dress in "girl" clothes and have "girl" interests and inhabit an essential "girl" nature. These discourses, our ways of talking, shape the idea of "girl." Could we recognize a girl "*falling off*" as result of cultural narratives about what it means to be a girl? By bringing these limiting narratives and their corresponding discourses into the forefront, they become more fully experienced and possibilities for change emerge. As girls evaluate the benefits or costs of

certain discourses, could they begin an active resistance to limiting narratives, allowing them to take initiatives which are harmonious with what they value?

We are all "*story-makers; making and remaking the stories of our own and other's lives"* (Weingarten, 1995, Kindle location 234). The birth story, the marriage story, or the victim story become overarching life narratives about the place we hold in the world or how we fit. We make story every day; *"I am angry," "School is boring," "The game was amazing!"* - small accounts full of story. Daniel Taylor offers we are the co-authors of personal stories as well as characters within the story. He proposes we have creative force in the narratives of life, for good or ill. Taylor states,

The more conscious we are about our stories, and our roles as characters in them, the more clarity we have about how we are and why we are here and how we should act in the world" (2001; p. 2).

Stories do not only serve to help us make sense of our lives, but they are what makes it possible for us to imagine possibilities for the future (Taylor, 2001). Stories are pro-creative. The "pro-creative" story is the power to envision what is possible and at the same time create it. I imagined a story of studying for a Ph.D. and through my imaginative narrative the story begins forming my reality. My client Anastasia and I imagined a story of her building friendships, forming connections, and being a part of a friendship group in school. Anastasia's imagining became the path. Her imagined story began to inform her reality. She was on her way toward building a relational place at school. As people become story creators, possibilities open as they perceive and imagine what does not yet exist.

Theodore Sarbin (1983) views narrative as the dominant organizing principle of an individual's psychology, meaning we understand ourselves through the stories we tell. A "story" refers to the narrative form a girl, in our case, gives to her thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences (Weingarten, 1995).

Fully engaged in the character of the "the depressed girl" 12 year old Julie wore her story on her arms. She described to me how when she had too much emotional pain she would cut herself and that would let the pain out, "It's like

> *the physical pain releases the emotional pain. It is kinda addictive." Julie and I worked together for several months and had many conversations about emotion and story. As she found a level of balance she stopped cutting.*
>
> *Later, I asked Julie, "What would you tell kids that want to cut, other kids? What is your wisdom?" "First I would tell them not to cut just because they think it's cool. Some kids do it to show it off, they have no idea. I would tell them to pay attention to their stories, the stories they spin in their heads, the stories that feed the pain, and I would tell them to say what the emotion is and maybe write it down, without telling the dark story."*

The fashion in which we narrate our lives gives shape to our thoughts, feelings, beliefs and experiences. Framing our experiences through the stories we tell ourselves and others, permits us to explain who we are to self and others (Sampson, 2008). It is through stories that we come to recognize and understand ourselves and form a sense of identity. This grants us order, coherence and meaning. The Gergens advise the stories we tell about ourselves actually function as vehicles for rendering our "selves intelligible" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Thus, therapeutic sanctuary becomes a place for story understanding and story-making as girls make the "self intelligible."

What Does This Matter? Seeing the World through the Lens of We

Social constructionism invites us to see the constructed world is one standpoint, one version of reality, one narrative. Reality is the story *we* tell.[22] Reality is the meaning *we* assign. Social constructionism moves us toward a relational posture, as opposed to an individualistic posture of understanding (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 2009b). Through this awareness, we embrace a "mindful"[23] understanding of how we are in this world. This understanding allows us to view constructions as constructions, opens the possibility of seeing differently, and allows others their own constructions

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[22] Friedrich Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense" (1873). Interestingly in an essay of Nietzsche's he is understood to make the claim that there is no truth, that all of the "truths" we tell each other are just agreements by social convention. *"What is truth? A moveable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms; in short a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which after long usage, seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding."*

[23] Being "mindful" is a practice of observation and acceptance without judgement.

without judgement or resistance (Gergen, 2009a), a kind of *live and let live posture* (Shawver, 2006). It is indeed a form of social "mindfulness." Social construction opens us to seeing the world through the lens of "we." This has profound implications for how we begin to conceptualize "*falling off*;" no longer a disorder of the self, personal failure, or psychological weakness. We are invited to look beyond the individual girl to relational and societal practices, culture, and context.

It is in this place I believe the ideas offered by post structural feminist scholars will be invaluable. Let us invite the feminists to continue alongside us on the journey.

Chapter 3: Danger Falling Rock – Post Structural Feminists

Beyond "Problematizing" Girls

The "Ideal Girl"

"Falling Off"

Gaining Balance

Beyond "Problematizing" Girls

In the field of mainstream psychology, psychologists conceptualize girls "*falling off*" through the lens of internalized disorders such as anxiety, depression or low self-esteem. This framework emphasizes underlying psychological attributes which pose a challenge to girls functioning. Post-structuralists express concern that traditional psychological understandings view girls themselves as the "problem." Alternatively, post-structuralists regard the "problem" as the consequence of societal discourses hindering or obstructing girls' functioning. Thus, they do not recognize the locus of the problem as being *within* the individual or as part of an *essential nature* (Oliver, Hamzeh & McCaughtry, 2009). Further, post structural feminism gives particular emphasis to gender discourses and their influences. Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie, state post structuralism becomes feminism;

> *...firstly, when matters of femaleness and maleness and the difference and dominations between and within them are made a central feature of analysis, and secondly, when analysis implies a challenge of some sort to any inequitable relationship of power which involve gender or sexuality.* (1994, p. 190)

Post structural feminism opens up new conceptualizations of girls "falling off" as we look beyond the girl to the gender discourses and practices influencing the way a girl understands herself as an individual. As Legge suggests,

> *"Through examining the context of girls' lives from a feminist perspective (post-structural), we can move beyond problematizing girls and their experiences to contextualizing the problematic experience of growing up as girl within a patriarchal social discourse.* (2001, p. 3)

To further understand post structural feminism and what it brings to our understanding of "*falling off*," we will review the concept of discourse, the process of subjectification, the discourse of the "ideal girl," and agency.

Discourse

Central to post structuralism is the idea of *discourse* as developed through the work of Foucault. Iara Lessa offers these comments;

> *Discourse is a…."systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak. Foucault traces the role of discourses in wider social processes of legitimating and power, emphasizing the construction of current truths, how they are maintained and what power relations they carry with them."* (2006, p. 286)

Some discourses are dominant, some secondary and some insouciantly co-existing. While there are competing and multiple discourses, certain ones garner greater authority and assume the attribute of truth (Foucault, 1972). In particular, post structural feminists scrutinize the discourses of gender, working to expose the power and influence gender dialogues exercise in society. Weedon (1987) accounts for the three most common sources of discourse; science, God, and common sense. For post structural feminists, each of these sources carries with it a patriarchal discourse intended to conserve patriarchal interests. Further, post structural feminists boldly question the taken for granted understanding of gender, by holding to the philosophy that gender roles and gender itself are not part of an essential or biological nature, but gender is constructed through social and cultural discourses. From this perspective, girls learn to negotiate their identities based on society's discourse of femininity, as well as other categories of social differentiation such as race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity (Aapola, Gonick & Harris, 2005). It is important to note, discourse is not just "out there" influencing, but fills our conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions, our sense of ourselves in the world, and our ways of understanding. All identity is constituted through language and discourse (Weedon, 1987).

Subjectivity

The ideas of subjectivity and position are central to post-structural feminist understandings. Subjectivity is who we take ourselves to be, who we are as a people, our sense of self. Our thoughts, feelings, memories, dreams, and emotions create our subjectivity. Weedon describes subjectivity as, "*The name given to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world*" (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). Davies and Harré (1990 p.90) outline four processes in the development of subjectification. They propose,

,

1. We learn **categories**. E.g. Male/female mother/daughter
2. We participate in various **discursive practices** or ways in which we produce social and psychological realities. E.g. Youth culture, family, pleasure, romance, body image
3. We **choose positions** within the categories or storylines e.g. sporty girl versus girly girl
4. We embrace the characteristics that place us in a certain class or category. The development of a sense of oneself and belonging in the world come from seeing the world from the **perspective of that position**; for example, high school student, daughter, athlete.

Subjectivity is like a never quite finished self-portrait. Discourse, knowledge and experience, together with emotion and thought are like a palette of coloured "paints" available, serving to create our subjectivity (portrait). The process of subjectification becomes the "painting" of our portrait via the choices we make or the available colours. A continuously changing and complex palette of knowledges and discourses becomes accessible to us through contexts such as family, school, fashion, pop culture, and media. Consequently, the process of subjectification is fluid, not fixed, not stable. Moment by moment we reinvent the "self" socially, cognitively and physically, and thus identity develops as an ongoing consequence of the influences shaping and creating us in specific ways. Consequently, there is no stable, rational, or essential self, but a self that is in-creation and in-process. With reference to girls, we begin to understand girls' identities are "*shifting and fragmented, multiple and contradictory, displaced and positioned"* as varied discourses constitute their lives (Kenway et al., 1994, p. 192). In the same fashion girlhood, itself, is socially constructed; not merely a developmental stage based on biological or psychological factors. Rather, girlhood is both individually and collectively achieved (Legge, 2001). Informed by specific discursive practices[24] or "knowledges" such as youth culture, pleasure, romance, and body image, girlhood is fashioned

24 Discursive Practice: "This term refers to a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing different forms of knowledge. (The ways in which we as people produce social and psychological realities). It is not a matter of external determinations being imposed on people's thought, rather it is a matter of rules which, a bit like the grammar of a language, allow certain statements to be made." (Retrieved from www.michel-foucault.com/concepts).

through varied contexts such as school, family, social class, and friendship groups. For a girl, a tension is created between her sense of being a person (subject or portrait) and at the same time exposure to the *"meanings inherent in the discourses through which one becomes a subject"* (Davies, 2000, p. 27). "*Falling off*" suggests the difficulty girls have in taking up a coherent self aware subject by smoothly negotiating a preferred self-portrait.

The concept of "position" is a central organizing principle for post structural feminism. Subjectivity is constituted through the adoption of various subject positions, or ways of being an individual (Leahy, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Davies and Harré comment;

> *Once having a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts that are made relevant within the particular discursive practices in which they are positioned*. (1990, p. 53)

Unlike the theory of "role," in which one maintains a defined script or way of talking, "position" suggests that talking and listening are what constitute or create the person. Position is discursively constituted through language and relationship (Davies, 2000). Thus, language does not simply flow from the person, but in effect language *creates* the person, *"Who I am potentially shifts with each speaking, each moment of being positioned within this or that discourse in this or that way"* (Davies & Harré, 1990).

Elementary school was amazing. Confident and full of voice I played competitive softball, was the valedictorian of our graduating class and was first string on the volleyball team winning the city championship.

Then I began high school. I was now swimming in what felt like an ocean rather than a backyard pool.

Feeling fairly confident about my athletic ability, I tried out for the school volleyball team. Girls of all shapes and sizes swarmed the gym. Each of us hoping to be included, to feel important and achieve a coveted spot on the team. The whistle blew, and the ball was served, arcing in front of me I clasped my hands and with ease bumped the ball back over the net. The whistle blew again, and the tryout was over.

> *Eagerly checking the postings the next day, I was crushed. My name was not on the list. I had been cut. …Confused and bewildered, I felt like I misplaced myself.*
>
> *What was my position?*
>
> *I was the sporty girl.*
>
> *Now what was I?*

Thus, identity finds shape, newly constituted each day and in each moment as we speak and are spoken by others into existence.

While experiencing their own sense of being or their own self-portrait, girls lay open to the underlying powers and meanings flowing through cultural and historic discourses of femininity (Aapola, 2005; Currie, 1997; Kenway et al., 1994). These discourses influencing subject positions, can vary, be contradictory, non-complementary or even in conflict (Davies, 2000). For example, a scan of teen magazines offers a variety of positions available to girls, from romantic partner, to sexual object, to girlfriend, to fashionista, to independent and self-determined girl. The various and contradictory positions are constructed in and through advertisements, images, and texts, all of which relentlessly influence the everyday performances of girls (Weedon, 1987). In such cases, the individual subject can become the intersection of conflicting subjectifications when choosing to resist positions determined not desirable; for example an adolescent girl resisting the position of "dependent" within the family circle. This juncture also provides the intersection for a girl "*falling off*," as a girl, with a limited sense of agency over who or what speaks her into existence, struggles with countless contradictory and demanding discourses.

The "Ideal Girl"

Women continue to be side-lined and denied voice in the highest levels of education, government and business; yet life is remarkably different for women today than 50 years ago. For the first time in history, more female first year medical students gained admission to the University of Toronto in 2010, and more female medical students overall occupy places at McMaster University in Hamilton (Abraham, 2010). Girls today have

opportunities and possibilities won by waves of feminism. However, we have incongruently moved into a powerfully sexualized modern society as discourses about beauty, thinness, and desirability permeate understandings and subjectivities. One of the roles of discourse is to normalize and regulate the functions of society, or give direction to agreed upon normative behaviours (Foucault, 1972). The discourse of "ideal girl" serves this function, to normalize and regulate girls' behaviours. This influences all girls, even those who consciously resist normative femininities (Adams & Bettis, 2003).

So how do we understand normative femininity in our modern world? Some authors suggest a shift away from a femininity of quiet, docile, passive, and nurturing as the dominant indicators to a more self-assured discourse which includes assertiveness, individuality, sexuality and self-determination (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Budgeon, 1998; Currie, 1997). Notably, researchers propose one non-negotiable marker of ideal feminism in Western society is appearance. As one research participant vocalized, *"A girl can be anything as long as she is pretty*" (Lemish, 1998, p. 155) Appearance is the currency of girlhood (Adams and Bettis, 2003). It brings status and admiration. Williams (2002) in her article, *Trying on Gender,* describes three stereotypical gender standards which emerge from her research. These include; attractiveness, attachment to men, and compliance. She relates that girls base their sense of worth on standards of thinness and attractiveness, that boys "hold the key to success" and self-esteem. Compliance is necessary to justify positions of control over girls, including parental controls, as well controls for physical and sexual safety. Douglas' comments on the geography of contemporary girlhood,

> *Girls today are being urged simultaneously, to be independent, assertive, and achievement oriented yet also demure, attractive, soft-spoken, fifteen pounds underweight, and deferential to men.* (1997, p. 21)

The "ideal girl" of today is a girl who embodies beauty, strength, independence and success. Receiving discursive messages which are equally inconsistent and contradictory, girls may find themselves unsure, unbalanced, and "*falling off*."

"Falling Off"

Brown (2003) proposes that when girls and women buy into traditional understandings of femininity they hold less respect within culture. The paradox: as women have become more powerful externally in the social fabric of society, they have also become more disparaged and subject to internalized oppression. Brown points to women themselves assimilating and taking ownership of these disparaging discursive practices;

> *This process of assimilation into and personal ownership of a culture that denigrates the feminine is referred to as internalized oppression—when those victimized by oppression and stereotypes assimilate the dominant views and "freely" control themselves and others like themselves.* (2003, p. 32)

Correspondingly, as a girl takes up the subject position of "girl" she positions herself and is positioned within the sexualizing discourse. Essentially, many girls are not stepping outside of culture to create an alternative identity of independence and self-assurance, but are imitating performances observed in and through fashion magazines and media. Tension mounts between a girl's access to specificity (her own values and ideas of self) and her membership in the socially constructed category of "girl" which includes the internalized oppressions and sexualisation of femininity. For example, a girl's growing sense of independence conflicts with the expectations of ideal femininity, including passivity (Williams, 2002). While girls enjoy a world full of possibilities pertaining to career and education, internalized oppression regarding femininity speaks her into a sexualized existence. She has few alternative discursive practices with which to resist. The anxieties she experiences around how she is spoken into existence by discourses of femininity create tension, fear of marginalization and the possibility of "*falling off*."

The underlying questions becomes firstly, how do girls' create sustaining subjectivities as they live in a world full of various and challenging social and cultural practices and historical constructs? Secondly, when girls become aware of particular discursive practices, can they choose to resist discourses that do not benefit their subjectivity? (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001) (Davies, 2000) Davies talks about the challenge of childhood being the "*simultaneous struggle to be seamlessly meshed in the social fabric and to know and to signal oneself as being with specificity"* (p. 22). Driscoll proposes the very definition of adolescent is the "*demonstration of*

the difficulty of becoming a subject" (2002, p. 7). For Davies, a girl must create "continuity of being" through a coherent narrative, or story about "Who I am." This story "knits the details of existence" together and places "me" as the subject of my own narrative, but also within the life narratives of others. Through narrative, we constitute each other as beings or selves with specificity, as Bernard Williams states, *"And the lesson is, we need each other in order to be anybody"* (Williams, 2002, p. 200). Oliver, Hamzeh, and McCaughtry (2009) in their article regarding girls' physical activity, argue we need to begin to shift away from postures of blame, attending to "what is" happening to girls, to an exploration of "what can be." In order to begin to meet the needs of girls the authors recommend we pay attention to the "intersectionality of normative discourses." As we begin to recognize how norms function in the lives of girls and as we begin to seriously assert the fact these normative discourses can be challenged, disrupted, and acted upon, new possibilities and new words can be created. Language becomes a key in the shift toward "what can be" as girls themselves begin exploring possibilities for change. We are called to;

> *…hold the adults in girls' environments accountable for providing girls with experience and opportunities for them to understand, to engage with, and to potentially transform what limits and harms them – so that they can develop strategies of "resistance for liberation"* (Debold, Brown, Weseen, & Brookins, 1999, pp. 181-204).

We ultimately realize the struggle is not within the girl, but between the girl and "her world." Therefore agency from a feminist perspective becomes central to girls finding balance.

Gaining Balance

Traditional definitions of agency would include the ideas of freedom, autonomy, rationality, and authority. Post structural feminist theory offers a distinctly different understanding. For Davies agency is;

> *…the discursive constitution of a particular individual as having presence (rather than absence), as having access to a subject position in which they have the right to speak and be heard…author of their own multiple meanings and desires…one who can go beyond the given meaning in any one discourse to forge something new.. Through imagining not what is but what might be*. (2000, p. 66)

Further, considering the idea of "subject" gives us some insight into the definition of agency post-structuralists' offer. One definition submits; "*The subject itself is the effect of a production, caught in the mutually constitutive web of social practices, discourses and subjectivity; its reality is the tissue of social relations"* (Henriques, 1984, p. 117). This boldly understands "self" with no fundamental essential core, but "self" as spoken into existence within and through social relations and practices. We are multiple rather than unitary "selves," constituted by the varied discourses and relationships of which we are a part. The self-portrait is never truly complete, but in a constant process of formation. This implies agency is the continuous state of mutual formation and shaping (Leahy, 1994). For Davies agency of the girl is the ability to recognize the influence and authority of discourse, language, relationship and,

> *…to resist, subvert, and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted. It is freedom to recognize multiple readings such that no discursive practice, or positioning within it by powerful others, can capture and control one's identity* (2000, p. 67).

Consequently for these feminist scholars agency is not freedom to control, but to *be not* controlled by overpowering discursive practices. While the limitations of prevailing discourses constrain choices, people are not simply passive in the taking up of subject positions, but actively choose positions. Weedon offers this insight,

> *Although the subject… is socially constructed in discursive practices, she none the less exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices. She is also subject able to reflect upon the discursive relations which constitute her and the society in which she lives, and able to choose from the options available* (1987, p. 121).

Leahy (1994) describes the social construction of femininity as the compliance or resistance to *patriarchal* power or discourse. In this case, agency is to resist the message of patriarchal discourse and the various positions within that discourse. "*Resistance is understood then as discursive practices that manage to break away from the hegemony of dominant discourses*" (Lessa, 2006, p. 286). In the language of this work agency brings "balance." For girls, balancing is discovering ways and directions to chart a journey, allowing for the voicing of a sense of self by speaking their own truths which are authentic to their own experience. Balancing is speaking new words and shifting marginalizing discourses toward something more empowering for all.

Can our girls find balance? Is agency compromised when girls "*fall off?"* Davies' (2000) definition echoes Carol Gilligan's metaphor of "voice; " freely expressing thoughts, feelings and ideas, taking position, not sacrificing self for relationship, having presence and not absence. Similarly, recall Kegan's levels of consciousness requiring teens to be able to take perspective, go beyond any one meaning in a discourse and adopt a wider lens of understanding. Identity development is the theme of the post structural feminists, as girls have presence, stand positions that allow them to be heard, and garner agency to create subjectivities which embody a coherent narrative and continuity of being. What we hope for each girl is the agency requisite to create a preferred self-portrait drawn from the many and varied experiences, knowledges, discourses and practices available to her. What we hope for each girl is to "capture and control" her own identity through the ability to recognize, resist, and evaluate discourse as beneficial or silencing (Driscoll, 2002). The post structural feminists have erected an enormous billboard, **Danger Falling Rock: Agency and Coherence Required**.

At this juncture I advise caution. The next leg of our journey is somewhat dangerous. It is a journey through the enchanted forest of individualism and across the powerful river of the myth of perfect. However, remain confident, winding our way along this circuitous route we will begin to notice bi-ways to safety.

Chapter 4: Identity Construction in a Disordered World

The Spell of Individualism

Who is the I behind the Pronoun?

The Myth of Perfect

The Relational Self - It's a Matter of Being

The Spell of Individualism

Hence we believe that for us there can be no peace except in a life filled up with movement and activity, with speech, news, communication, recreation, distraction. We seek the meaning of our life in activity for its own sake, activity without objective, efficacy without fruit, scientism, the cult of unlimited power, the service of the machine as an end in itself. …The life of frantic activity is invested with the noblest of qualities as if it were the whole end and happiness of man, but rather the life of man had no inherent meaning whatever and that it had to be given a meaning from some external source, from a society engaged in a gigantic communal effort to raise man above himself. Thomas Merton

How dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to be greater than his nature will allow. Mary Shelley, Frankenstein

Fueled by the philosophies of modernism, Western civilisation has propelled itself to reach astounding places in technology, science, education, and medicine, and has pushed the boundaries of civilized life beyond what our ancestors would hope or imagine. Holding the tiller of advancement steady is the hand of "individualism." Modernism has cast a powerful spell, breathing life into the "individual," fashioning the fabric of being, encoding thoughts, and guiding actions. The individual knows more, masters more and has more. Irrespective of this remarkable reaching, the by-product is a bounded, isolated, alienated creature – the "self." Cushman calls this creature "empty self," (Cushman, 1995) and Gergen describes its "bounded being" (Gergen, 2009b). I believe it is the bounded, empty self that influences and deceives girls into "*falling off*." We may say, *"She's having an identity crisis,"* or *"She's trying to find herself."* In many ways, this may be grounded in truth. However, I suggest this is not an *individual* crisis, but societal, as the means available in a late-modernist society to construct identity and self are seriously failing children and teens. In order to survey further "*falling off*," I believe it is necessary to gain some insight into the "spell of individualism" and the isolated self the spell has cast. By understanding the composition of the late modern self, including the forces and discourses that have come to shape it, we can gain a greater understanding of the consequences of comprising a self in this manner, principally the consequences for girls.

The ideas of constructing the self will become key to our emphasis on therapeutic practices that matter.

Self as Part of a Greater Cosmic Order

The investigation begins with a conversation about "self" within the *divine/revelational/institutional* paradigm. In this paradigm, God was the centre of meaning, and the "self" understood its place as part of a greater cosmic or spiritual order. Describing the self of pre-modern times Charles Guignon states; "*It was possible to have a fairly strong sense of life's meaning – an ability to feel oneself to be a part of some overarching scheme of things that ultimately (if not evidently at any particular moment) made sense*" (2004, p. 13). Julian of Norwich (14th Century church mother) expressed in her writing, *I saw that, in God our nature is complete* (Norwich, 1966, p. 163). To know "self" was to face life's inhere existence, as all things connected to the underlying Being, both divine and natural in characteristic. God's will determined "who you were" and "what you should be" with life's purpose being to live out God's will (Gergen, 2000). This early self, connected to a spiritual or nonmaterial existence, was more porous, less defined in its boundaries and the nature of social embeddedness conferred a remarkably strong sense of belonging (Guignon, 2004). In this sense, God was the stabilizer of self, bringing a sense of security, with God ultimately in control. God was all powerful, omniscient and omnipresent. Ultimately one could say, *"God is in charge. God has a plan which includes me."* Other identity stabilizers offered within the divine framework included the concepts of grace (unmerited benevolence), forgiveness (a mechanism for freedom from unhealthy pain, anger and shame), reverence (for something greater than self) and original sin or humility (imperfection is the shared starting point for all humans). Required of the individual was virtue and goodness to please God. These traditional sources of identity formation were direct and easily accessible.

Individualism and the Inner/Outer Dichotomy

Change to the understanding of "self" began to develop with the construction of the inner/outer dichotomy of self. As early as the 14th century an English Christian mystic (Anonymous) author of *The Could of Unknowing* directed his young student to turn inward, to contemplate and connect with God. He advised, *"Whenever you come across the word yourself in spiritual books, remember that it refers to your soul, not to your body"* (Anonymous, 2011). Early Christian thinkers fostered ideas regarding the inner/outer dichotomy of self. The inner self connected to God as the outer self remained exposed to the dangers and temptations of the world. "*Chief among those background ideas is the sharp distinction between inner and outer that enables us to think of the true self as something that lies within while the false self is something outer"* (Guignon, 2004, p. 7). Looking to Augustine, John Caputo (2013) advises the direction of self was inward, "in the inward man dwells truth" and "go in as to go up."

A few crucial events furthered the discourse of individualism through the inner/outer dichotomy of self (Guignon, 2004). The first was an undercurrent in Christianity itself as the new interpretations of the 16th Century Christian reform movements caught hold. Martin Luther's formidable supposition, we are saved by faith alone, not as a result of works, or *sola fide*, exchanged the emphasis of faith from an external action to an internal personal salvation forwarding the concept of religious individualism. "The Kingdom of God is within you" remained the foremost organizing principle of the Reformist movement, promoting the reflexive action of turning inward to find God, guidance, and truth.[25] With a more defined focus on the inner self, the modern person came to understand the "inner self" as the true self, and that "behind the eyes" exists the essential "me" that is private to me and unavailable to you (Gergen, 2009b). For the

[25] *"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17: 20-21*

Romantics, the meaningful and spiritual were accessed by turning inward to the voice of nature. This has influenced the central understanding of our time. Guignon states,

> *…like Rousseau, many of us assume that gaining access to the inner self will get us in touch with something of profound significance. The innermost self is experienced as a doorway to a context of meaning that is greater than either the social world or the passing psychological occurrences within us. The turn inward is supposed to lead us to a dimension of the self that transcends our particularity* (2013, p. 31-32).

The field of Psychoanalysis brought a further emphasis on the inner/outer binary of self. Jung described the "collective unconscious," [26] and Freud divided the self into three separate personas: the Ego (outer self), the Id (true inner self), and the Superego (conscience)[27]. Another interesting emphasis toward an inner self came in the form of "popular psychology" in the 1960's. Hierarchical ways of living and the value of traditional roles such as mother or spouse were being challenged by the desire for individual fulfillment and freedom of expression. Studying the changes in the content of *Marie Claire* (an international women's magazine), Alain Ehrenberg notes the emerging focus on inner life. She writes, "*…a discourse of inner life, in which everything was a relationship between self and self, or the self and another, and that invited the reader to question his or her psychic conflicts, gradually gained the upper hand."* (2011, p. 112). The 60's, noted as a decade of shifting personal philosophies, found consumer magazines populated with a new language of self awareness and introspective personal psychologies.

Theocentric to Anthropocentric

I think computer viruses should count as life. I think it says something about human nature that the only form of life we have created so far is purely destructive. We've created life in our own image. Stephen Hawking

In addition to the inner/outer understanding of self, was the rise of modern science and technology. As we have previously noted the 17th century brought a change to a *rational/scientific/individualist*

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[26] See C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London 1996).

[27] See Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1960).

frame of reference, characterized by a shift from religious to scientific, agricultural to industrial, rural to urban, and ultimately from communal to individual subject (Cushman, 1990). Sarbin and Scheibe (1983) relate how identity forms within historical and political context. Social and political forces, associated with industrialization, urbanization and secularization worked to disengage the individual from community, tradition, and shared meaning, while sources of identity construction became tethered to economy (consumerism) and politics (dominant discourse) (Bauman, 2000; Cushman, 1990). Society progressed from a *theocentric* to an *anthropocentric* frame as the individual gained position as a rational subject, master over nature and detached from the external world. Through science and rationalism the "self" stepped forward as a sovereign observer, knower, and manipulator of the world and all that is in it. These constituting forces cast a powerful spell, and as this "spell of individualism" gained traction the potential for understanding the "self" as an encapsulated individual unfolded. In this position life becomes daunting for the individual, and especially our girls who feel overwhelmed and fearful in this precarious place. However our continued exploration of the *construction of self* will inform therapeutic ways we can support girls to thrive.

Who is the I behind the Pronoun?

Gergen describes the late modern self as a "*bounded being*," (Gergen, 2009b). Understanding individuals through the unrelenting discourse of individualism we live fundamentally isolated and separate from each other with boundaries constructed around "self." He argues these boundaries which are of our own making, serve as "a prison," bearing a tremendous cost to living together on this planet (Gergen, 2009b, p. 5). Boundedness creates levels of separation and isolation and consequently the need for self protection (Sampson, 2008). This results in playing the game of "who's right," increasing levels of aggression, divorce, and bullying as we determine to clasp to our individual rights and private determinations. Personal anguish includes feelings of loneliness, loss of meaning, and an enduring sense of inadequacy or shame through ongoing comparisons of appearance, wealth, popularity, school success and career success (Gergen, 2009b). In a world where others' regard is always

conditional, it becomes challenging to generate a sense of worth or balance. The bounded self presents a formidable challenge, and makes the preoccupation with identity, self-esteem, authenticity, and self-help comprehensible.

Cushman argues the absence of community, tradition and shared meaning creates the "*empty self,*"

> *…a self that experiences these social absences and their consequences 'interiorly' as a lack of personal conviction and worth; a self that embodies the absences, loneliness, and disappointments of life as a chronic, undifferentiated emotional hunger*. (1995, p. 79)

The empty self experiences its social detachment as an internal aloneness, unable to differentiate between life's struggles and self. Cushman understands the forces constructing the empty self to be influenced by the primary psychological philosophy of our time; "self-contained individualism," or the "spell of individualism." Otherwise known as "*falling off*," the self is experienced as absence and emptiness expressed as;

> *… low self-esteem (the absence of a sense of personal worth), values confusion (the absence of a sense of personal convictions), eating disorders (the compulsion to fill the emptiness with food, or to embody the emptiness by refusing food), drug abuse (the compulsion to fill the emptiness with chemically induced emotional experiences), and chronic consumerism (the compulsion to fill the emptiness with consumer items and the experience of "receiving" something from the world). It may also take the form of an absence of personal meaning.* (1990, p. 604)

Recalling Bauman's "existential tremors," we find individuals without a stable sense of who they are or where they belong, resulting in amplified feelings of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. In dealing with its emptiness, the self seeks to "fill up" through consumerism (Bauman, 2005; Giddens, 1991) and forms of psychology or self-help (Sampson, 2008) Our *consumerismatic* culture seduces us to "fill up" to gain a sense of belonging by having the latest gadget or style, and define our very selves through the purchases we make. *Consumerismatic* is not about acquiring or gathering, but the continual reinvention of the "self." This is true of girls whose style becomes like a "social skin functioning as a significant form of embodied subjectivity" (Pomerantz, 2006, p. 189) Shopping and psychotherapy become the sources of salvation for the empty self, nonetheless only momentarily filling one up (Cushman, 1990). Paradoxically, relying on the

identity stabilizers of consumerism, psychotherapy, or self-help often serve to create a deeper vacancy by reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and insufficiency.

Further evidence of the spell of individualism flows through the current societal discourse of narcissism (Cushman, 1990) or as Sampson (2008) calls it the *self celebratory cultural belief* (p.42). Twenge (2006), critical of society's narcissistic "Me first" epidemic, maintains the effects on children and youth are that they *simply take it for granted that we should all feel good about ourselves, we are all special, and we all deserve to follow our dreams.* Epplin (2013), in his article for Atlantic Monthly *"You Can Do Anything, Must Every Kids' Movie Reinforce the Cult of Self Esteem,"* exposes the spell of individualism through what he terms the "magic feather." Movie characters must "*relinquish the crutch of the magic feather or, more generally, surmount their biggest fears--and believe that their greatness comes from within."* In this vein, my son received guidance coaching as he was in the process of choosing a university program. His coach asked him, *"What do you do that is amazing?"* My son, a fairly reserved teen was quiet for a while and then replied, *"Nothing."* The idea that every child encapsulates greatness only sets him up for a grand sense of inadequacy.[28] Self-esteem and interior feelings have become the barometer of happiness and wellbeing. The pre-modern "self" understood the benefits of cultivating feelings in order to live the right way, while "that great movement of internalization[29]" has elevated feelings to a glorified position, with "how I feel" becoming the fulcrum of life and happiness (Guignon, 2004). With this solipsistic posture we no longer attune our feelings to direct our behaviours; we direct our behaviours, relationships and experiences to serve our own feelings. I share the experience of therapist Lori Gottlieb. She describes young people presenting with low self-esteem, anxieties, or depression, but who have successful lives with loving, attuned parents. Children are loved; family is involved; parenting is clearly attuned, and yet young people are "*falling off*." In her article for Atlantic Monthly, Gottlieb hypothesizes, *"What if they (parents) are too attuned?"* (Gottlieb, 2011). Essentially with every need provided this hyper attuning constructs a form of narcissism. I assert it is not merely the hyper attuning which creates the narcissistic tendency, but

[28] Of course I think Logan is amazing….he is now an Engineering student at McMaster University studying Mechatronics.
[29] C.S. Lewis

also our failure to instil in children the disposition to attune to others as a foundational social practice. As children become overly focused on self and feelings, their inward turning only uncovers a self which is quite empty. Swiss Psychologist Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: the Search for the True Self*, describes working with individuals who are extremely successful in their worlds and exude a genuine sense of competence, but who live with a deep form of emptiness and depression. Miller records,

> *Behind all this lurks depression, a feeling of emptiness and self-alienation, and a sense that life has no meaning. These dark feelings will come to the fore as soon as the drug of grandiosity fails, as soon as they are not 'on top' .... Then they are plagued by anxiety or deep feelings of guilt and shame."* (1991, p. 5)

Late modernism privileges a type of inner greatness. However, as individuals turn inward to gain a sense of meaning and find true self, the grandiosity fails, and they come face to face with a core sense of vacancy. In other words, "I am supposed to be amazing, but I know that I am not."

It is crucial here to refocus the discussion. This discussion has engaged us in ideas regarding the construction of self in late-modernism through the spell of individualism. The spell, constructed and created in context, is an individualism of society's own making. The bounded empty self is not the creation of the individual herself, inadequate and deficient, but of an individualism born of modernism. We have witnessed how the bounded empty self does not serve us well, or our girls. This view of "self" leads us to understand the characteristics of "*falling off*," anxiety, depression, and cutting, as individual deficiencies or disorders. Secondly, the stabilizers for the modern self are illusive. Traditional sources of identity formation are not as easily attainable or available (Buckingham, 2008). Without social tradition and sound shared meanings, and with no mechanisms for forgiveness, dealing with imperfection, or receiving unconditional acceptance the modern "self" sinks into a core sense of inadequacy, not knowing how to feel worthy, not possessing a sense of purpose. The traditional view of the soul finds its replacement in conscious reason (Gergen, 2009b) with no authoritative source of direction or insight to grant guidance for "how we should then live."[30] As Bauman argues we have discharged God as the "caretaker" of

[30] How We Should Then Live is the title of the classic Christian work by Francis A. Schaeffer on the rise and decline of Western culture.

life while duly appointing "self" in command (2007). When the guide of life is "self" with no defined understanding of how one should live or by what account, life becomes somewhat precarious and "self" is prone to lose balance and *"fall off."* We have contracted a terminal condition of *anthrotheosis*[31]. It is from this precipice girls become vulnerable to the myth of perfect.

The Myth of Perfect

In contemporary life, we are judged against our peers through competitive sports or activities, school success, and university entrance. We compare our clothing, our homes, and our looks against the "cultural" standard. We compare ourselves up, "I am not as good as…," and we compare ourselves down, "I am better than…." (Bauman, 2008; Gergen, 2009b). Media images, peers, and family dictate what it means to be beautiful, what it means to be a girl, what creates success, and what is "normal." Our society dictates a myth of perfection and draws us into a way of being as girls try to fit their normal peg into a glamorous hole. MacDonald in *Representing Women: Myth of Femininity in the Popular Media* discusses Roland Barthes[32] notion of myth,

> *…myths are ways of conceptualizing a subject that is widely accepted within a specific culture and historical period, despite having little necessary connection to reality…the diverse and multifaceted qualities of reality are flattened into routine ways of thinking and talking…by posing as 'natural' and 'common-sensical', myths obscure their ideological role in helping to shore up systems of belief that sustain the power of the powerful.* (1995, pp. 1-2)

This morning I checked email on my iPad, text messages on my iPhone, talked with my daughter in Korea over Skype, and purchased a lovely crocheted top from a store in Seattle, Washington, USA, which will arrive at my door in Canada this week. The world is at our fingertips. We have virtually instantaneous access to prodigious quantities of information, images, and goods. We

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[31] Anthro (man) theosis (God) or Man is God

[32] See Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*: *The Complete Edition in New Translation*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2012

believe we are "the deciders" of what to buy and what to think and how to feel; however, we live in a milieu of pop culture, mainstream media, advertising and politics where there are underlying codes, symbols and messages that direct our choices. These cultural encryptions express myths of success, well-being, and happiness (Barthes, 2012). For Barthes, we develop an understanding of the world through these powerful myths and with our understandings they come to be reified or taken for all time truths. Immanent myths govern our engagement with the world, how we enter into it and how we make meaning of ourselves and one another (Curcio, 2011; Maine, 2005). These myths must be carefully exposed and brought to light, deconstructed. The focus of this light is on the "myth of perfect," and the societal and relational processes by which this myth perpetuates itself.

The myth of perfect suggests there is an ideal identity. The myth of perfect is a story which intersects self, other, and cultural myth. It is a story of how identities are constituted through discourse (myth of perfect), relationship (peers and family), and experience (including media and education). The culture of the myth of perfect organizes around **ideal appearance** (Driscoll, 2002; Pipher, 2001; Wolf, 1991) **social acceptance** (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Raby, 2006; Williams, 2002), and **achievement** (academic, athletic) (Cooky,2009; Eccles, Barber, Jozefowicz, Malenhuk and Vida 1999; Oliver, 2009.). The myth is constructed and preserved through **media** (Kearney, 2011; Wald, 1998) **family** (Garbarino, 1982), **school**, (Bettis & Adams., 2005; Kenway, Orenstein, 1994; Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1994; Ward, 2004) and **peers (**Chesney-Lind, 2004; Brown, 1999; Brown, 2003; Mueller, 2010**).** In order to more fully understand "*falling off*" and lead us toward therapeutic practices that matter, we need to appreciate how myth has a constitutive effect on social experience and, in turn, identity.

Virtue to Perfection

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. Proverbs 31:10

In the past grounded in a religious paradigm boundaries and expectations were set and clear. Prohibitions provided boundaries and securities within the cognitive frame of "allowed/forbidden" or "virtuous/immoral." A girl was called to be "virtuous." Virtue and goodness were a girl's

essential markers of character with the underlying response for transgression being guilt. Failure was externalized; "I did something wrong." God's forgiveness offered grace. The noticeable shift for girls in contemporary society has been to a "perfect/imperfect" dichotomy grounded in a humanist paradigm. Perfection is the new purity. "Perfect" girls conform to a socially constructed ideal based on appearance, social acceptance, and achievement.

> *My daughter Andrea is her own person. She insisted on picking out her own clothing at 1 ½ years old. She was very against "buttons" so none of her clothing could don a single button. Rather than enter into world war, I recruited my Dutch friend Jenny, a talented seamstress, to make Andrea "buttonless" clothing. By Andrea's early tween years, she had pink hair and high cut pink Doc Martin boots. In her teens, she graduated to what you might call "early Hallowe'en." She is now 24 and has just moved beyond the "shaved head" look. Andrea has also been influenced by anxiety and panic. In her own way, she thwarted the myth of perfect, but I asked her one day about the story underneath the anxiety. She replied, "I just never felt like I fit."*

Here in the inner silence we witness the private experience of girls who do not always feel beautiful, struggle deeply with confidence, are not always nice, and often fail. It is in the silence girls feel unaccepted and unacceptable, and say things like, "I just don't fit." Accordingly, the myth is about acceptance and belonging. The myth tells girls the door to acceptance unlocks through perfection. However, to be perfect, to find and create the "perfect identity" is unreachable; to be perfect a myth. Perfection transfers understanding of self beyond "I did something wrong," to "I am wrong" (Brown, 2010). Girls' underlying response is internalized inadequacy. In other words girls' guilt has now been replaced by girls' depression (Ehrenberg, 2010). Unable to create the perfect identity, girls harbour an overwhelming sense of inadequacy, feel small and valueless.

The myth of perfect sustains itself through evaluation. According to the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, in the West we define meaning in terms of binary oppositions, such as white/black, male/female, material/spiritual, in which one of the terms is privileged, and one marginalized, one valued, one devalued (Gergen, 2009b; Guignon, 2004). These binaries undergird our ways of thinking (Reynolds, 2010) and our ways of valuing; for example, thin over

fat, industrious over idle, natural over artificial or masculine over feminine. Cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter (2013) proposed the core of cognition is analogy. This suggests we understand all things through association. Through relentless analogy making, often just under the surface of conscious thought, we come to make meaning and understand the world from the most mundane concepts (small as size: such as small apple or small girl) to the most profound scientific discoveries (light understood as waves). Analogies are reminding events. At the core of meaning is our tendency to take what we perceive and to find resemblances or connections to prior experiences, "*this is like that*."

Out with my son Logan one day we made a short stop at the local Asian grocery store. He gravitated to the drink section to select a can of coke. Retrieving a tall, thin can he asked me what it was. "I don't know, why don't you give it a try?"

Back in the car he snapped open the new can.
"What does it taste like?" I asked.
Logan responded, "I don't know, it's weird, like nothing I have ever tasted."
I tried it. I had the same response. A sense of something not understood, almost confusing came over me.

We began to name several flavours, relentlessly needing to come to terms with "this is like that." We had a great need to compare, to bring our old information to make sense of this new information – "this is like that."
…we eventually decided it was like drinking pepper with nutmeg and fruit.
…it was weird. [33]

Derrida and Hofstadter both point to the idea that through comparison, experience and substance are understood. When we understand the world through binaries and analogies, these become mechanisms for constituting or constructing the "self." I understand "self" in comparison; I am female not male; I am Canadian not Danish; I am competitive not passive; I feel happy not sad; I am like that girl (unpopular) not this other girl (popular). I understand my "self" in comparison to you. Firstly, this indicates identity construction is fluid, not stable, and is an ongoing relational

[33] It was a can of Pocari Sweat, a Japanese sports drink.

process. Secondly, this relational practice sets girls up to be vulnerable to the myth of perfect as girls create subjectivities through comparison to a socially constructed ideal, as well as comparison to each other.

> *Having recently moved from the city of Chicago to live with my sister, Selina her 17 year old niece began school in Ontario. Curious about Selina's life we chatted about high school in the city of Chicago and high school in the Ontario middle class neighbourhood of my childhood. In light of my research, I was particularly inquisitive about what is was like being a teenage girl in Chicago.*
>
> *I asked her, "Do many girls in your circles struggle with influences like depression, anxiety, or self harm? How do you and your friends cope?*
> *She candidly shared with me she struggled in grades 7 and 8 with depression as did many of her friends.*
> *I asked, "How did you make sense of what was happening to you?"*
> *She looked away, then looked me in the eye, "It has to do with being perfect. We think we need to be perfect. We do a lot of comparing; we focus a lot on ourselves."*

The myth of perfect invites constant comparison, where girls find themselves faced with a cultural construction of an ideal identity incongruent with their own reality. The ubiquitous myth creates a profound mismatch between girls' experience, society's ideal, and girls' *personal* construct of "self" advising girls must prove their own significance. At this intersection a tension of vulnerability builds, followed by the passive resistance of "*falling off*."

Ultimately the myth of perfect is not simply about an ideal identity, but a discourse about worth, acceptance, and belonging which has a powerful impact on a girl's capacity to create and sustain a resilient subjectivity, a coherent self-portrait, and satisfying relationships. When girls become aware of the discursive practices of the myth of perfect, can they choose to resist aspects that do not benefit their subjectivity? I will echo the words of Naomi Wolf in the Beauty Myth, "*The woman wins who calls herself beautiful, and challenges the world to change to truly see her"* (1991, p.290). Finally, if one of the intersections of this myth is relationship, how do we move toward shaping nurturing relationships between girls, peers, and family?

The Relational Self - It's a Matter of Being

What makes us human is not our mind, but our heart, not our ability to think, but our ability to love. Henri Nouwen

"Love God, Love your neighbour, and get over yourself."
Jesus (paraphrased)

We understand the late modern self as a bounded individual constructed in the context of late modern society under the spell of individualism. We have duly noted how the spell individualism has shifted the foundations of self and has given us insight into how girls have come to this predicament of "empty," "bounded," and "*falling off*." Despairingly, with this as our sole view of "self" our hope for thriving appears limited. How do we as parents, teachers, and therapists support girls' "balance" as they live in a world in which girls peer into a distorting mirror, privileging a "perfect self" which does not reflect their reality? The task becomes how to negotiate, navigate and remain balanced, holding to safe cul-de-sacs and pathways of safety. In order to begin we need to unlock the bounded self; we need to seize upon a more post-modern view of "self." With a more capacious understanding of self, we can begin to travel toward hopeful outcomes.

For constructionists, the "self" is achieved socially through shared knowledges with an emphasis on language; words, analogy, metaphor, symbols, and images (Hoskins, 2000). In addition, we have noted in the previous chapter language is not simply external but is also an "internal" practice. For Bakhtin language is dialogue between partners, even when *that someone else is one's own inner addressee* (1981, Kindle Location,130). He proposes much of our ordinary experience takes the form of inner dialogue between real or imagined "interlocutors." Mary Gergen refers to these inner conversational partners as "social ghosts" (Gergen, 2001). Accordingly, human existence is not a "monophonic process," but essentially a "polyphonic process" (Sampson, 2008). Kenneth Gergen proposes, "*What we call thinking, experience, memory and creativity are action in relationship. Even in our private reveries, we are in relationship"* (2009b, p. 63).

For better or worse, we come to know who we are through shared and social interactions and through dialogue. Sampson states, the only knowledge we have of ourselves comes through others' responses (2008, p.106). Likewise, John Shotter (1997) says it is in the flow of language and interactions between people in various life situations and experiences, or momentary relational encounters and their dialogic exchanges, that everything of importance happens.

> *This morning I was approaching the nearby university as a black Murano was attempting to merge into my lane. It had stopped its progress unable to join into the flow of traffic. I gently slowed, flashed my lights, and the Murano wheeled into the lane. The driver waved a "thank you" and I waved in return. I acknowledged, and I was acknowledged.*

This is a humble example. We "became" in this simple relational interaction. I gained a sense of my-self, my identity, in this "in between" moment. Social interactions are fundamental to identity formations as identity takes place between us. Sampson draws our attention to the fact,

> *People's lives are characterized by the ongoing conversations and dialogues they carry out in the course of their everyday activities, and therefore the most important thing about people is not what is contained within them, but what transpires between them* (2008, p. 20).

There are three points of emphasis;

1. Relationship is primary: the self cannot separate from relationship systems
2. "Dialogic" is a connected talk between people in the external world. "Dialogic" is connected talk between self and "others" in the internal world
3. Meaning of self and identity emerges within these dialogues

With this comprehensive understanding of self, as dialogic and relational, the lens pivots away from an encapsulated self personally deficient, toward a self "in between" (Shotter &. Gergen, 1989). Accordingly, the emphasis of this investigation and the locus of change balances upon social and relational encounters. Gergen describes these encounters as co-action;

> *We move metaphorically from the movements of individual dancers to the dance, from individual brush strokes to the emerging painting, from individual athletes to playing the*

> *game….all that is meaningful to human beings derives from this process. All that we take to be real, true, valuable, or good finds its origin in coordinated action.* (2009b, p.31)

Generative co-action leads toward a more hopeful ground, creating pro-creative, vital, and thriving selves. Thus, genuine human connection replaces separation (Gergen, 2009b).

Still, we must take caution; ***not all co-action is generative.*** Many forms of co-action serve only to perpetuate relational violence. Generative co-action is the formula with which we break the spell of individualism, but we must move our ideas even further along. Robert Kegan talked about the need for *not* just a new way of "doing" but a new way of "knowing" (Kegan, 1985). Possibly, we need more than a new way of "knowing," we need a whole new way of "being." Gergen terms this "relational being" (Gergen, 2009b).

Recently, my daughter Andrea talked her Dad into participating in a "Tough Mudder" event[34]*. "Tough Mudder," described as a "hard core obstacle course designed to test your all around strength, stamina, mental grit and camaraderie," is a gruelling 5 hour, 17 kilometer event requiring audacious tasks like swimming through ice filled water, hurling over military barriers, traversing uphill through ankle deep mud, and running through fire.*

The underlying knowledge is that no "one" can do Tough Mudder alone. It requires the camaraderie and support of others. One offers a hand, and in turn yours is offered to another. Hand to hand, Tough Mudder is not "all against all," but "all with all." The objective is not merely to master the course; it is to ensure fellow Mudders complete their challenge too.

I find this an inspiring and hopeful metaphor of relational being. Can you imagine the possibilities if we replicated this ethos in our high schools? - Let alone our families, country or our planet?

[34] She clearly knew which parent to corral into this type of "family fun."

Relational being is more of a "way" than a "self," reaching our understanding beyond the container self to the "animation of self as embodied action." This has weighty implications for our world. When we recognize the self as "embodied actions that are fashioned and sustained within relationship" there is potential for transformation, *"all against all"* becomes *"all with all"* (Gergen, 2009b, p. 95, p.493). This new way of "being" forms through inhere relational encounters, breathing life, fashioning the fabric of existence, encoding thoughts, and guiding actions.

So while we have been on a rugged detour, we stand before our final road sign… **Welcome to Hopeful.** This construction of "self" as a relational being brings us toward hopeful outcomes, opening new space for our investigation into girls, identity, and thriving.

Moving ever closer to understanding how to support girls' "balance" it is prudent to pull over and take account…..you are invited to turn here and enter the pit stop

PIT STOP

We have been on a comprehensive journey, and it is prudent to rest here, assemble concepts, and regroup. Placed strategically along the way several road signs have informed our reflections about girls "*falling off*." Let us review the encountered road signs before inviting a team of co-researchers to join our exploration.

ROAD SIGNS:

Safety Zone: Girls Speaking Their Truth - To create safety zones for girls - to use voice to say what they think and feel.

Work Zone Ahead - Developing Perspective Taking Consciousness - To nurture consciousness including devotion to a group of people or set of ideas beyond the self and to help girls find "sparks" of purpose and meaning.

Slow Down - Attune to your Kids!" - To focus on the primacy of solid attachment relationships, principally with parents, and secure scripts for the development of adolescents' resilience and security.

Caution Bridge Out - Stable Society Under Construction - To develop a safe and stable society; offering girls a stable sense of who they are and a strong sense of belonging, while moving beyond individualism and the relentless pursuit of identity through consumerism.

Danger Falling Rock: Agency and Coherence Required – To provide safety tools for girls to develop agency and a coherent self-portrait.

Welcome to Hopeful - To make way for more hopeful ways to construct self, a construction of self as a relational being.

Gathering prominent scholars' perceptions and applying a social construction lens to "*falling off*" we have moved away from the modernist construction of "healing" or "fixing" the girl. This navigating has provided us with an understanding of societal and relational practices, and given us insight into practices vital for girls to thrive,[35] or in keeping with our metaphor; to "balance" ride

[35] **Resilience**: the capacity to weather and recover quickly from difficulties; to keep from "*falling off*."

Thriving: growth and positive development, or in the language of this work…*balance.*

with confidence, with direction, and purpose. This begs the question; *How do therapists/practitioners (whose work is informed by social construction) find paths in therapy to support girls' balance*?

Our next assignment is to find ways these hopeful practices can inform therapy with girls. With this in mind I offer a brief road guide to postmodern therapy.

Chapter 5 Brief Road Guide to Postmodern Therapy

Individual to Relational

The Posture of the Therapist

Postmodern Assumptions

The Action of Therapy

Individual to Relational

The practice of psychotherapy is quite a modern phenomenon, beginning as we know it with Sigmund Freud and his "talking cure" in the late 19th century Vienna. Various psychotherapies grew from this inception ground, framed within the modernist paradigm and concentrating on the functioning of the individual. When we consider traditional therapies, such as Freud's psychoanalytic therapy with the concept of "ego functioning," Roger's humanistic ideas of self-development, Jung's various concepts of personality, and Beck's self-talk, we notice how modern therapy has embraced the grand cultural narrative about "self" (Neimeyer, 2003). These therapies privilege *the individualistic, singular, essential, stable, and knowable self,* with the underlying assumption that we are encapsulated beings. The focus of therapeutic transformation becomes the inner working mind of the individual. In addition, traditional therapies hold to a standard of normality. As part of the therapeutic process, the level of *abnormality* of an individual is assessed based on agreed upon characteristics. The goal of traditional therapy has been to remediate pathology and bring the client into the range of normal functioning. McNamee states,

> *Psychotherapy as a series of authoritative technical procedures to bring about self-change would focus chiefly on disorders of individuals that impair adaptation and then treat them in such a way as to enhance the client's self-actualization, self-control, self-efficacy, and the like. (*1996, pp. 141-155)

The standard for clinical diagnosis in therapy is the DSM-5, the catalogue of all abnormalities which details *associated features, culture, age, and gender features, prevalence, course, and familial pattern of mental disorders*, and is referred to as *the essential diagnostic tool for disorders used to promote effective diagnosis, treatment, and quality of care*.[36] The DSM, which Dr. Karl Tomm M.D. (1990) critically refers to as the "Bible of Psychiatry," explicitly holds a strong individualistic bias. Each of the disorders or syndromes occurs within the individual, with no perspective taken on the influence of social phenomena. Individuals evaluated based on diagnostic criteria receive prescribed therapy with the goal of treatment to bring the individual into the arena

[36] Retrieved from: http://www.amazon.co.uk/DSM-IV-TR-Diagnostic-Statistical-Manual-Disorders/dp/0890420254

of "normal" functioning. This medical style model places pathology solely with the individual (e.g. Schizophrenia, ADHD, depression.) without the social context considered. Tomm writes,

> *The authors seemed oblivious to the theoretical significance of their individualistic presuppositions. There was no mention of the possibility of another point of view. They simply ignored the body of knowledge based on an alternative assumption, namely that the human behavior, the mind, and its disorders may be more fundamentally grounded in social phenomena than individual phenomena.* (1990, p.2)

In addition, Tomm states, *My major concern is that there is so little cognizance of the fact that the DSM has evolved to become such an authoritative document for classifying and labelling persons with mental problems* (1990, p. 2). Allen Frances M.D., chair of the DSM-IV task force, in his recent book, *Saving Normal: An Insider's Revolt Against Out-Of-Control Psychiatric Diagnosis, DSM-5, Big Pharma, And The Medicalization Of Ordinary Life* (2013) reflects on the impact of the DSM-IV,

> *We failed to predict or prevent three new false epidemics of mental disorders in children, autism, ADHD, and bipolar disorder. And we did nothing to contain the rampant diagnostic inflation that was already expanding the boundary of psychiatry far beyond its competence. If a cautiously and generally well done, DSM-IV had resulted in more harm than good what are the likely negative effects of the DSM-5 driven by its grand, but quixotic ambition to be "paradigm shifting.* (2013, p. xiv)

Neufeld and Maté describe unprecedented numbers of children and adolescents receiving diagnosis and corresponding prescriptions to treat depression, anxiety, or a host of other diagnosis. They feel what is so objectionable is the reducing of "*childhood problems to medical diagnoses and treatments to the exclusion of the many psychological, emotional, and social factors that contribute to how the problems arise"* (2005, p. 56). Subsequently, the challenge in working with children/girls is the temptation to pathologize and label, training the focus of therapists and counsellors toward levels of inadequacy rather than toward areas for growth and development. For example, the labelling of ADHD has become somewhat epidemic (Mark L. Wolraich, 2013). On the website[37] for the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention a timeline outlines ADHD

[37] For information see: http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/features/key-findings-adhd72013.html

diagnostic criteria, prevalence and treatment over time. The Centre cites studies reporting the number of children in the USA with a diagnosis of ADHD is increasing and reports that 10-16% of the child population been diagnosed with ADHD.

> *The first national survey that asked parents about ADHD was completed in 1999. Since that time, there has been a clear upward trend in national estimates of parent-reported ADHD diagnoses. It is not possible to tell whether this increase represents a change in the number of children who have ADHD, or a change in the number of children who were diagnosed. Perhaps relatedly, the number of FDA-approved ADHD medications increased noticeably since the 1990s, after the introduction of long-acting formulations.* [38] (retrieved from : http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/timeline.html

Widely accepted, the DSM represents only a form of reality and is essentially only one way of understanding. Postmodernists challenge whether this authoritative way of understanding is beneficial, and challenge the DSM being accorded such gravity (Frances, 2013; McNamee, 1992; Tomm, 1990). McNamee, (2002) argues diagnosis is never value neutral. Labelling has a significant price. Once labelled with ADHD, a child may never be treated the same again. Teachers and parents begin to view a child through a certain set of lenses with certain kinds of expectations about behaviours and abilities. In addition, the child will never see herself in just the same way. This price to pay for diagnosis and labelling becomes "*identity defining*" (Tomm, 1990). The postmodern approach is to steer away from labelling, pathologizing, and measuring, by honouring the individual as distinct from a collection of symptoms.

Postmodern Assumptions

Given the ideas of this work are situated in postmodernism and social constructionism in particular, it is important to explore the assumptions and understandings of postmodern therapeutic practice in order to inform therapeutic practices that matter. Niemeyer and Bridges (2009) propose the unifying theme linking postmodern forms of therapy is found in its epistemology or ideas regarding how we know. For postmodernists, the world and self are not coherent entities, but all human "realities" are linguistic personal and social constructs.

[38] The question is not only whether diagnosis are increasing as we move toward a more labelling posture in therapy and medicine, but also the political implication of so many new drugs being developed to support these children.

Postmodern therapists emphasize the *nuances in how people construct the world* or how people interpret the world as the therapy itself becomes an *intervening in meaning* (p. 274). Consider there are always at least two stories pertaining to how we construct reality. One story is prevailing on the surface while another flows underneath connecting meaning and values. Postmodern therapy seeks to uncover meaning, and in turn to interpose and construct new meaning, thus altering the prevailing story. It is not a specific "kind" of therapy, but a lens used by therapists which serves to inform therapeutic practices and relationships. This particular lens covers an array of relational therapies, such as *Narrative Therapy* (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000, White, 1990), *Solution Focused Therapy* (Insoo Kim Berg, and Steve deShazer: Brief Family Therapy Centre), *Collaborative Therapy* (Anderson, 1997; 2012; Anderson & Gehart, 2007) and other strength based modalities. Anderson (2012) explores postmodern practice through **six key assumptions** and offers a distinctive form of thinking and language in the practice of discursive post-modern therapy.

- *Meta-narratives and knowledge are not fundamental and definitive*: To challenge critically grand or meta-narratives.
- *Generalizing dominant discourses, meta-narratives and universal truths is seductive and risky*: To approach each person as unique, and to refrain from using meta-narratives to place people in categories.
- *Knowledge and language are relational, generative, and social processes*: Language is creative. It is part of the participatory process of understanding, and transformation generates through language.
- *Local knowledge is privileged:* Each person or group is sustained through local values, customs, and language.
- *Dialogue, knowledge, and language are inherently transforming:* Since language is pro-creative, dialogue between individuals, as well as inner dialogue are transformative.
- *Self is a relational-dialogical concept:* Each person thinks and acts as multiplicity of voices. The self is not a static core, but unfolds through the dialogue itself.

Gerta Mehta in *Deconstruction in Psychotherapy* refers to these same therapies as *deconstructive therapies*. Deconstructive dialogues work toward creating new meanings and ways of being which are found outside of problem saturated discourses. Mehta states,

> *Therapy is a practice to help abolish concern-oriented memberships and transform them into solution-oriented connections. The hope is that it brings openness and even newness in relationships and conversation* (2005, p. 8).

Deconstructive therapies have no fixed method, but rather a philosophical stance and way of interacting. Mehta outlines several styles of interacting which are of interest:

- Listening carefully to words that are filled with complexity and meaning in order to explore ideas for deconstruction.
- Creating situations and atmospheres where people re-think, practice, and learn new ways of being.
- Talking about what is possible, bringing the future toward the client while the future becomes more concrete, more touchable.
- Honouring the client as an expert on her life; the therapist becomes a tool a client may choose to use or not use.
- Paying attention to key words which open doors, signal shifts, and bring new direction.

Postmodern therapies assume a philosophical posture rather than following a set of maps, techniques, or structures of interpretation. Anderson speaks of a posture of profound respect, as the therapist becomes a "guest" in the client's life (2007, p. 45) and the action of therapy becomes an exploration of meaning or an unfolding of interpretation. This creates new language and new ways of undertaking life, rather than analysis or mining for truth. Mehta includes the term "deconstructioning" as psychotherapy, which describes a certain style of inquiry,

> *The therapist and clients can try to comprehend the role of patterns of power and rules and norms and their impact on themselves. They can locate the problem formation and the problem development in certain cultural practices and biographies. Often it becomes helpful to ask about the organizing and orienting principles of visions, values, traditions, and norms*. (2005, p. 14)

As in postmodern thought, postmodern therapy honours multiplicity, contradictions and competing perspectives in people's lives and narratives. Anderson (2012) suggests the word "transformation" is a more indicative word than "change" to describe the action of postmodern therapy. Transformation is more organic and fluid, more of a natural phenomenon (Mehta, 2005). While therapeutic practice is between the practitioner and client/family, many postmodern therapeutic practices draw attention to the social, relational and macro level discourses powerfully in the "room."

The Posture of the Therapist

The posture of the therapist in traditional therapy is that of knowing expert. To contrast the difference between traditional and postmodern therapy McNamee (1996) distinguishes between a monologue approach and a dialogue approach. She suggests that one way to understand this is to view a "monological" as locating the therapeutic investigation within the client, understanding that any attempt to assess or adjust identity focuses on the self-contained individual. The combination of focus on the individual with the knowing expert produces an *I-It posture*[39]. The client objectified becomes the object to be studied, fixed, or supported. The very existence of the DSM indicates the client is an "object" to be diagnosed and treated, not a conversational participant. In contrast, *I –Thou* relating offers a distinctive quality of contact. This distinctly sacred relating encourages therapists to turn toward and confirm the client being candid, but not unreserved, and ultimately listening with a silent mind. Dialogism is a position which focuses the investigation in patterns of relationship, paying attention to the processes rather than the individual (McNamee, 1996). For Sampson, the centre of dialogism is not so much what happens within individuals, but what transpires between them (Sampson, 2008). Shotter (1997) submits, our inner lives are not actually *hidden inside* us, but *displayed* outwardly as unfolding, living encounters naturally occurring between us and others as we live out our lives." In summary, the core of a dialogic therapy is the conversations, language and narrative "between," rather than the inner thoughts and workings of the individual.

So what does this difference look like in therapy? In a "monologue" based therapy, the therapist takes the stance of an objective observer, expert and assessor. Postmodernist practitioners garner much angst about the "*expert position*." For me the difference in not expertise, but posture. The question is not whether I as the therapist am an expert, but whether I hold the posture of being at the helm, in control, objective, dominant. The switch is in posture. *I-Tho*u of dialogic conversation is relational. It embraces all that is respectful, collaborative, participatory, magnanimous, inclusive, and grace-full and can include expertise. Conversely, a dialogic approach seats the

[39] The I – It an I – Thou terminologies are the constructs of theologian Buber, Martin, *I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.

therapist in conversation with the client. There is no evaluation or diagnosis regarding the client or situation. The therapist proposes a way of talking with the client about the situation which brings novelty, new words, and new means of conversation. A dialogic approach moves the locus of therapy from the *individual* to the *relationship*. Moving from a *locus of individual* to a *locus of relationship* generates counselling from a place of honour, respect and regard, or *I – Thou* approach. Therapy does not balance upon the practitioner having the right method, diagnosing the right problem, saying the right things or asking the finest questions, but upon a fully-connected relationship with the client. This relationship provides a grounding and sanctuary to co-construct a new empowering narrative or intelligible subjectivity.

Dialogic not only informs the posture of a conversation between the client/therapist, but also incorporates all of the client's relational encounters and influences. In other words, the client enters the room, not as a singular individual voice, but a chorus of relationships. This is to understand the self as constituted of a choir of voices, singing a "composition" of coordinated relationships, ideas, beliefs, and understandings. Thus, one's "composition" is not singular, but in actuality is drawn from, inspired by, and influenced by others. Similarly, McNamee refers to "resource-oriented" conversations, as ones that call on "other voices" which may serve as helpful resources. Gergen (2009a) suggests therapists invite clients to search for accessible alternative voices which may convey new possibilities or more generative understandings, "*When individuals begin to talk about their problems, the therapist might ask them if they can locate another voice within, a voice that would construct the world in a different light or with different possibilities"* (p. 179). Essentially this moves the primary focus of therapy from self/emotions/mental states to a relational focus. Gergen describes the shift into post-modern therapy as a shift from "mind repair" to relational transformation, "*...the primary concern of therapy should be the viability of the client's participation in relationships, past, present, and future"* (2009, p. 277). McNamee (1996) underscores three essential aspects of dialogic therapies:

1. The relational creating of identity through dialogic conversation
2. The therapeutic relationship
3. Client's personal narrative.

Fundamentally, post-modern therapies are attentive to relational practices and the narrative creation of meaning.

The Action of Therapy

Gergen (2009b) highlights three specific tasks of effective counselling: affirmation, reality suspension, and reality replacement.

Affirmation:

In a world where affirmation comes with conditions, therapists uphold the client as a valid participant in life. Therapists provide a safe place, unconditional acceptance, and emotional nurturing for clients to escape the impact of isolation and boundedness. In postmodern therapy, affirmation involves joining with the client by holding a posture of collaboration, listening "into" the story, offering unconditional regard and participating as a witness in the client's story. It is non-pathologizing. Affirmation sees the client as an expert on themselves, with wisdom about their own life situation. Affirmation includes the idea of *I –Thou* relating, and thus offers a distinct quality of contact. This is truly special relating. The therapist becomes a mooring post in the sometimes treacherous waters of life.

Reality Suspension

Postmodern therapeutic practices work toward dislodging self protective and degenerative relational patterns. Relational focused therapies reorient therapeutic practice from a deficit locus, or analysis of what is lacking in self or life, by shifting and reinterpreting meanings to "what needs to grow." For example, if one is angry, how do we grow calmness, peace, accord? The practice in narrative therapy of "externalizing the problem" works as such a tool to dislodge reality by understanding a problem as external to the individual; thus it opens a more empowering way to

combat the problematic. Another example is mindfulness practice.[40] Grounded in non-striving, non-judging, trust, and patience as foundational attributes the teaching develops reflexivity and acceptance (self, others and life). Mindfulness practices allow emotion to be experienced, while at the same time being detached from debilitating thoughts or interpretations.

Reality Replacement

For a constructionist, reality is what we choose. A girl can choose to understand her imperfection as a personal defect, or she can understand her self loathing as one response to hegemonic or bullying societal discourses about value, beauty, and success. In choosing an alternative frame of reality, she constructs a new narrative and the possibility of a different response; i.e. stand up to the blasphemy propagated by media and peers. Reality replacement is the process of challenging a single "truth" and constructing sustainable alternatives. Clients by capitalizing on strengths, resources and possibilities receive invitation to create new and more empowering narratives, frames and interpretations.

While many therapies incorporate these components, Gergen cites a new array of "relational" therapies offering possibilities for meeting these challenges: systemic therapy, narrative therapy, strength-based therapy, brief therapies, collaborative therapy, neo-analytic therapy, constructive therapies, post-modern therapy, social therapy, meditative practices of Buddhist practitioners (Gergen, 2009b, p. 283). Gathering together ideas and assumptions, postmodern therapy informed by social constructionism pays attention to:

Social Discourses

- Societal, family and personal discourses "in the room."

Dialogic/Relational Resources and Relational Practices

- Multiplicity of voices, private and public, make up dialogic encounters.
- Client and Therapist as conversational partners.
- Dialogic - the conversation is the intervention
- A Relational focus (not psychological or behavioural)

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[40] See: Zinn, Jon. *Full catastrophe living: using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York, N.Y.: Pub. by Dell Pub., a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub. Group, 19911990.

Creating Subjectivities

- Identity is not static, but dynamic developing through language and relationships
- The continual creating of a never quite finished self-portrait (subjectivity, sense of self)
- An exploration into the many possibilities of self, not an exercise of "knowing self."

Possibility, Strengths and Resources

- The person is not the problem. The problem is the problem.
- Uses language of possibility
- Searches for wisdom and strength in the client

Finally moving beyond the literature, I invite exemplary therapist/practitioners/scholars (whose work is informed by social construction ideas) to join the journey and add to the conversation.

Chapter 6 Dialogues in Motion I

Invisible, Sticky Expectations and Requirements: Dialogue with Karen Young M.S.W.

Down on Street Level: Dialogue with Christine Dennstedt

I invite you to cycle along with me as we are joined by an impressive band of co-navigators. We will begin by moving alongside our fellow cyclists, entering into conversation, and exploring directions and various lines of thinking. I will disrupt the conversational flow by pausing, responding and interacting, thus carefully unthreading strands of meaning and leading further along the pathway toward therapeutic practices that matter.

Invisible, Sticky Expectations and Requirements - Dialogue with Karen Young M.S.W

Karen Young is a therapist who has 27 years of experience working with children and families. She is the Manager of the Centre of Learning at Reach Out Centre for Kids in Oakville, Ontario, and is a faculty with the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute in Toronto. With a great deal of passion and excitement for narrative ideas and practices, Karen is regarded as a teacher and author who conveys these ways of thinking and being in very clear and useable ways."*41* Karen situates her therapeutic conversations within narrative therapy and its practices. Narrative therapy springs from the historical, philosophical and ideological aspects of social constructionism. Narrative practices include locating the "problem" within the social context and not within the individual; opening conversations to develop alternative stories about the problem or situation and developing these stories in thick and rich ways (Freedman, 1996).

Visibility Lenses: Externalizing and Deconstructing Conversations

The ideas of Michael Foucault have been a tremendous influence on Karen's work as a narrative therapist.

> ***So when I find myself sitting here with a girl in my office and probably with her mother, I notice myself thinking about Foucauldian ideas. I am drawn to his notions about***

---

[41] *Karen Young is a faculty member with Brief Therapy Training Centres International (a division of the Hincks-Dellcrest Institute) teaching in the Institute's Narrative Therapy Training Program and in the year-long clinical extern program in Brief and Narrative Therapy. She is the Manager of Clinical Services at Reach Out Centre for Kids in Burlington where she provides narrative supervision to staff and single session therapy services at the walk-in therapy clinic.*

> ***categorizing people, the many ways the culture supports dividing people into; well or ill, success or failure, good or bad, okay or not okay; the ways people are marginalized, how they are "othered" by cultural practices. The many ways the question of 'Am I good enough' is ever present.***
>
> ***So I am very connected with those ideas, all of these unspoken, invisible requirements about how to be are right there in the room with us when I am talking with these girls. I can almost see and hear them, feel them in the room. But they're invisible (to the girls and mothers).***
>
> ***So I circulate those ideas in my mind when I am talking; a little light bulb or an electric snap goes off for me. And I think - "here we are again" in this invisibility of the incredibly powerful social, cultural, personhood expectations that are unnamed, unseen, but are incredibly effective in their effects on the girls.***

Foucault's primary concentration is on the way modern ideas create dominating and oppressive systems of power and how these influential discourses are primarily subliminal, indiscernible and discreet, molding behaviours and ways of being (Foucault, 1972). For Foucault, the modern "subject" (person) is in "subjection to" (under the control and dependence of) hegemonic discourses. The etymological meaning of "subject" is "that which underlies" or "is thrown under" (Guignon, 2004). Girls as "subjects" are "thrown under" heavy modernistic societal requirements or are in "subjection to" socio-cultural discourses. This dissertation scrutinizes many of these discourses, such as the *"myth of perfect"* (how identities constitute ideal appearance, social acceptance and achievement); the *"spell of individualism"* (a construction of "self" grounded in society's privileging individualism over connection); and the "*enchantment of lost voice*" (imitating societal ideals, girls are compliant with little ability to say what they feel and know what they think).

> ***I am thinking that what they are getting in touch with is the social expectations, the social requirements for personhood, for girlhood, and womanhood, how to be successful, what you have to do to be good enough; this is the comparison culture.***

For Karen, "comparison culture" throws girls under crushing expectations, generating the need for constant surveillance and struggle to be "normal." I connect with Karen's "invisibility" metaphor, making these invisible discourses visible. When a girl comes to therapy, she is often blind to what is swirling around her unseen. She arrives feeling disconnected and broken, looking to find help,

to be "fixed." Even if she does have insight into this "enchantment" of cultural expectations, a girl feels powerless to break the spell. Wondering about this, I asked one of my own clients (12 years old) whether she thought most girls knew about the voice of culture; did they recognize what she and I called the "packaging problem?" *"No,"* she told me, *"I don't think that most girls see it. Some do….but if they do they don't know what to do about it."* Speaking with an older girl (15 years old) she shared, *"Yes, we all know it is there, but we really don't ever talk about it."*

So I ask Karen, "Do these invisible expectations ever become visible while you are talking?"

> ***That is my task to make them visible. When the "snap" goes off for me, I see them; they become visible to me. I won't be doing enough if I don't make them visible – and this helps me to stay away from that idea you talked about of not wanting to "fix" the girl. I don't think it is about fixing the girl in the situation; it is about making these expectations visible, and inviting whoever is in the room - her, her mom, sister, family whoever else is here - into a conversation that starts to make those things visible…***
>
> ***…what is immensely important to me in those moments is the powerfulness of these invisible, ever present, sticky expectations and requirements.***

In essence, Karen offers girls (and parents) a pair of *visibility lenses*, powerful enough to make the invisible social expectations visible. She does this by holding a position of curiosity:

> ***My position is one of curiosity. I am staying deliberately in a position of deconstructing, a particular kind of curiosity. I think deconstruction practices in therapy are incredibly useful with these issues, and they came from Foucault really. I think Foucault taught Michael (White) about deconstruction of ideas - situating an idea in its historical development and its context, and unpacking its effects. For me what I want to do is to get curious and start asking questions that move us all toward making these things visible in the room.***

I am somewhat "curious" about Karen's use of the position of curiosity. Her curiosity may be sparked by how powerful discourses of femininity are manifesting in a particular girl's life, however, Karen has a clear schema and agenda. Therefore, I am not sure I would describe the position as curious, or not knowing. Using a deconstructive conversation learned from Michael White, (virtually a Socratic practice), and offering a set of *visibility lenses,* Karen exposes the invisible social discourses. Michael White describes the deconstructive process as follows:

…deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: these so-called 'truths' that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production; those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices; and those familiar practices of self and relationship that are subjugating of persons' lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them. (1992, p. 121)

Nylund and Ceske also use deconstructing conversations or visibility lenses to,

> *..unmask, identify, and externalize the discourse that leaves them (girls) vulnerable to depression. These dialogues help counter the privatization of problems by locating depression in a cultural and sociopolitical context.* (1997, p. 357)

While these descriptions are apt, I believe the essence of deconstruction goes beyond the dislodging of reality. Caputo offers;

> *To "deconstruct" is on the one hand to analyze and criticize but also, on the other hand, and more importantly, to feel about for what is living and stirring within a thing that is feeling for the event that stirs within the deconstructible structure in order to release it, to set it free, to give it a new life, a new being, a future.* (2007, Kindle Location, 1049)

Deconstruction is viewing a thing, a topic, a discourse, or an idea from a novel perspective or camera angle; opening and expanding ideas or discourses, ultimately exposing new and often surprising possibilities. For Caputo, the "nutshell" cracks and new possibilities for growth and transformation release (Caputo, 1997). Karen deconstructs the facets of a girl's world by exposing the **hidden powerfulness of the sticky expectations and requirements**, helping girls understand the problem is not "in me," but is located in the context of the powerful messages of society. Externalization of the problem through visibility lenses serves as a powerful tool in therapeutic practice. We recall Gergen's three features of therapy; affirmation, reality suspension, and reality affirmation. Deconstructive practices work as tools to dislodge or suspend reality by understanding a problem as external to the individual, and by opening up a more empowering way to combat the problematic (Gergen, 2009a). ***For the girl a new way of seeing the problem, external from herself and through her "visibility lenses" opens new possibilities and new positions.***

Safe Pathways and Cultural Resiliency

Using the deconstructive conversation Karen has a definite course in mind;

> ***So what I am hoping for is not only new knowledge or new awareness - I am hoping to invite a move toward protest. I am looking for knowledge and concept development in conversation, but I am also looking for repositioning of the girl in relationship to the expectations.***

Karen's guiding course is that of protest. She uses the word "protest" not less than 11 times in our one hour conversation. Karen and I recognize that girls are already making significant *protest* by being anxious, depressed and immobilized in the first place. In an underground way a girl's anxiety and depression loudly state, *"I don't like these expectations (of culture and femininity). I cannot cope with this. This is not okay with me!"*

> ***…they don't recognize their protest (anxiety, depression)…***
>
> ***They recognize it storied as a pathology, as a failure, as a weakness, instead of a "this is not sitting okay with me" position.***

Anxiety, depression, cutting, and anorexia become symptoms of girls protesting against the hidden powerfulness of the "myth of perfect," as girls feel the heavy burden of not belonging, of not being worthy, and being thrown under the bus of "comparison culture." Bernandez suggests as clinicians, we need to be acutely aware of how girls speak resistance and protest through such symptoms. She encourages practitioners to be responsive by "*acknowledging out loud…girls' and women's oppression both in their families and by culture*" (1991, p. 221). In order to garner a response to the hidden powerfulness of the myth of perfect Karen wants to know if the position is "sitting okay,"

> ***I might ask a question like, "Is something about this not sitting o.k. with you?"***
>
> ***That is often a useful question.***
>
> ***"This isn't sitting ok with me,"***
>
> ***"Why is this not sitting okay with you?"***
>
> ***… The conversation can create a sense of outrage.***

Karen is moving girls from "symptom resistance" to what Kathy Weingarten (1995) refers to as "cultural resistance," or even more boldly "political resistance." Gilligan (1992) refers to "healthy

resistance," constituting a form of courage leading girls to take action against the heavy discourses and cultural requirements which seduce them to disconnect from themselves and others. Karen describes how she draws girls toward protest and a new position;

> ***I'll ask them questions to do with image and metaphor.***
>
> ***…two images: one image of "it," or being under "its" influence, and another image of what it looks like away from "its" influence, what she looks like when she is … standing up to it, an image of protest, refusal, not getting captured by its tricks.***
>
> ***Does she have an image of something when she is doing that? …over here in the new position, to be more powerful than this (other) image, so she can stand up to it.***
>
> ***Then I try to help connect her with ideas she might have by asking her to imagine a friend in a similar situation: I might talk to her about "What could you do in those situations that would help your friend (stand up)? What could you imagine saying? What would different words be that move away from success/failure, good/not good comparisons?***
>
> ***And they often come up with things they could say to their friend. This is her stepping tentatively at first, through the 'as if" into "protest" and stepping into how she can actually begin to influence the culture around her.***

An alternative story forms which represents the process of change in narrative therapy. This story is about a girl captivated by ***invisible, ever present, sticky expectations and requirements*** standing up in **protest** (new position), finding supportive allies and in turn influencing culture. This is a powerful alternative story with the narrative signifying "Girl as Superhero." However, my apprehension stirs when I think of such a weighty responsibility resting clearly upon the girl; to become aware, stand up, protest, influence her friends and influence a cultural narrative the size of a gorilla. Has this become an individualizing battle? We understand the problem is the gorilla and not the girl, but do we send her into battle mounted upon her two wheeler, donning her visibility lenses (and perhaps a tiny slingshot borrowed from David) hoping she will slay the giant? It is here we therapists experience the tension between understanding this as an issue of social context; a tension between a gorilla of societal requirements on a rampage outside the therapy room and ourselves inside preparing the girl for battle. I find myself asking, are visibility lenses enough? Can we expect them to break the powerful spell?

We may need to keep in mind the wisdom of Robert Kegan (1994)[42] and his levels of consciousness. As girls become embedded in cultural requirements, unable to feel or think critically about the discourses of society, they fail to recognize themselves as separate "selves" in relationship to these discourses. Remember the example of the boyfriend;

> *When the boyfriend treats her (Erin) badly, her friends and family view him to be an inappropriate match. His behaviours and choices may utterly contradict her own voiced values, but she is unable to reflect upon his behavior without giving up her own point of view and embedded feelings for him.*

In much the same manner, a girl needs to be a part of society, to feel like she belongs and to simultaneously hold on to her held values, beliefs, knowledges and abilities. The societal expectations are subject (part of her, an enchantment), and she cannot view them as object. Embedded within this relationship, she may not exist without them. Drumming up "protest" or even resistance may be a steeper challenge than otherwise thought. The demands of culture are far greater than the capacity for girls to successfully resist or protest alone.

Due to the nature of my work as a child and family counsellor, as well as my engagement in this research, I find myself in many of informal conversations with mothers, fathers, teachers, grandparents, friends, and girls themselves; all begin to tell me of "a girl…" someone they know, a granddaughter, a friend's daughter; all confide they know a girl *"fallen off."* When I talk with women, they immediately connect. They get it. They have felt it. During these conversations we rage about media, we feel alarmed by teenage culture, we long toward deeper values, and together we experience a shroud of powerlessness. Here I deeply listen to Karen:

> ***So I feel stumped at times about that, how to address that bigger culture itself.***
>
> ***That is the most difficult part for me, knowing that "this girl" is going back out into that….onto the unsafe road if you will…***
>
> ***So I feel unsure with what can "I" do about the culture at school, and I believe there are things to do about it - but how do I do that? When you start to talk about social discourse there is a sense of failure for me….I am not doing enough. I am not responding enough in a broader way in these matters. So how do I do that?***

[42] see chapter 1

At this point I appreciate Karen for her candid honesty, for this point of frustration and disenchantment. She is a skilled therapist, but like all of us she comes to this place with wavering levels of hope. Shouting into the wind, she is feeling the powerfulness of the heavy opposition of culture and her inability to respond on a meaningful scale. Karen is required to deal with this tempestuous situation, be helpful, have answers, - be agentic. I feel Karen's compassion for girls, and like many of us women working with girls, her struggle is deeply personal,

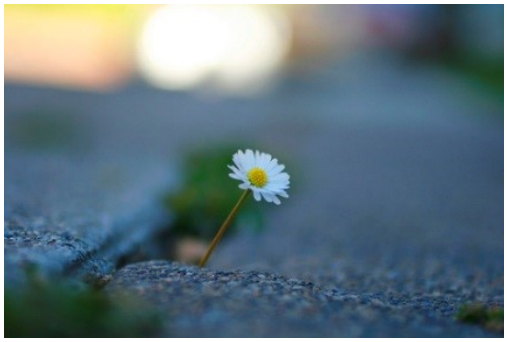
> ***This is why I came to this work - if somebody traced my history back it was about the school culture, and what wasn't o.k. with me, and what I felt subjected to in school, and this has a lot to do with why I am here. It is an area I am pretty passionate about, and that is why I said yes. When I read your proposal; I said she is really onto something; I really like this, and I like this metaphor of "falling off."***

The focus has clearly moved from fixing the girl. However, have we chosen the most hopeful emphasis? Are we now just trying to "fix" society with continued attention on just another problem saturated discourse? We are becoming overwhelmed by the task at hand. I wonder, can we move from these "revolutionary" vocabularies to more hopeful supportive ideas? I would like to travel from protest and resistance to safe pathways, conceivably to a *cultural resiliency* which nurtures thriving identities within a complex social context. Traditional definitions of resiliency suggest a personal ability to "weather adversely stressful conditions," or the ability to "bounce back" after facing adversity (Southwick, 2012, p. 6). Research on resilience in children attends to the psychological and relational internal and external resources which serve to protect children and adolescents in the face of stress or adverse conditions (McLean,Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1996). [43] Dr. Michael Ungar, Principal Investigator with the Resilience Research Centre, has suggested that we can understand resilience as follows:

> *In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural, and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided in culturally meaningful ways.* (Ungar, 2013, retrieved from http://www.resilienceproject.org/)

[43] The Resiliency Scale for Children and Adolescents assesses the attributes of mastery, relatedness and emotional reactivity (Southwick, 2012).

Ungar moves the definition of resilience from an individual ability to a culturally embedded understanding of wellbeing. A definition of resiliency more in keeping with social constructionism is one which finds resiliency as socially created, unfolding dialogically through a multiplicity of both inner voices and others' voices. *Cultural resiliency* becomes a thriving performance in the midst of disempowering cultural discourses, much like a bright flower growing up through a crack in my sidewalk, or in keeping with our metaphor, like a girl remaining in *balance,* locating *safe pathways* from harsh and dangerous road conditions. This performance of resiliency does not rest upon a personal capacity, but relational connection. Our understanding of self as inextricably connected to the social context suggests cultural resiliency is social, hand to hand, and all with all. Thus, *"balancing"* can only be achieved through finding safe pathways, key generative relationships within the social context in which we find ourselves. Key generative relationships serve as one of the most significant factors in mitigating the effects of stress or "unsafe roads" (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan comment;



> *Their experience (girls who weathered the storm) leads us to suggest some of the resources that seem to be essential: strong connections with others-including mothers, other family members, or friends-in which girls can speak about the range of their experience and feelings and trust that they will be heard; relationships with women other than their mothers in which girls feel valued, understood, and that they make a difference to women, too; and a healthy critical perspective of limiting expectations or stereotypes, a perspective that is supported and encouraged by others, frequently other women* (1996, p. 73).

Required are relational resources for girls to navigate through adverse conditions. Brown writes a girl cannot "*alone protest against the available fiction of female becoming"* (1991, p 71-86). She cannot resist all by herself. She alone cannot create alternative text and stories; rather, new stories between women (girls, mothers, teachers, therapists) need to be created. Cultural resilience involves standing with "balancers" in the midst; being "okay" in the midst of adverse conditions. Thriving in the midst of culture, she grasps the possible, an *event* of growth through the crack in the sidewalk.

Dialogue on Agency

If a girl cannot resist alone, we also need to unpack the idea of individual agency. Within social construction one of the greatest tensions is the idea of personal agency. Being socially and relationally constituted, how do we account for agency? What measure of agency is achievable for a girl within the context of ***invisible, ever present, sticky expectations and requirements*** proliferated through a media saturated world? Karen and I begin to converse about agency;

> ***For me, a lack of agency speaks to a sense of not being able to influence; having to be a passive recipient to something….***
>
> ***So if I can build stories with her in therapy conversation - noticing ways she has already demonstrated agency….ways she has already had responses. She won't think they were responses; refusal to go to school, that was a response.***
>
> ***So if we can construct stories that she has already been responsive, then we can construct more stories about how she can continue to respond.***
>
> ***It is expanding her sense of agency. Her ability to respond differently and her ability to see what she is doing as a response.***

Do girls have "agency" to construct themselves in the midst of these hegemonic influences or treacherous road conditions? Do girls have agency over who speaks them into existence? Do girls have agency *...to resist, subvert, and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted?* (Davies, 2000, p.18). When agency is as an "ability" to respond or to have personal influence, it primarily functions as a personal capacity. This way of talking places the locus of agency acutely within the embodiment of the girl. Understanding agency as personal ability, I become disheartened by the steep task to resist, subvert, and influence cultural discourse. In keeping with a constructionist framework, it is prudent to move the locus of agency from an individual ability to a relational enactment. I understand agency in girls in relation to three spheres;

1. *To be present and not absent relationally (a voice in the chorus).*
2. *To respond rather than react.*
3. *The construction of "self."*

Agency: A Voice in the Chorus

*In the Swedish movie, **As it is in Heaven**, an internationally renowned conductor returns to his home village. Daniel, the conductor, taking on the role of cantor in the parish church assumes the task of directing the villagers' modest choir. Daniel begins by instilling in each of his choristers the importance of singing their own note in relation to others as part of a greater harmony. Thus, as each note blends into a harmony, harmony blends into a chorus, no longer a collection of bounded individual notes functioning in isolation and alienation. Simultaneously, the members begin finding "harmony" within themselves, which has a resounding impact on their lives.*

The relational harmony of the choir induced each to find a "voice" of agency in their own life; one leaving an abusive husband, one proclaiming his love for his childhood sweetheart, one speaking up about relentless teasing, and Daniel, the conductor finding the courage to love. The relational chorus supported members to be vulnerable, breaking down the walls of bounded being or single notes.

Agency is performed when we connect in harmonic ways that matter.

We are beginning to understand agency is a relational task. Martin Buber states;

> *We must continually point out that human inwardness is in origin a polyphony in which no voice can be "reduced" to another, and in which the unity cannot be grasped analytically, but only heard in the present harmony.* (2004, p. 101)

Underneath Karen has been pointing to the supporters, the parents, friends and teachers that can stand with the girl in the midst of culture. It is in these moments of real-ationship girls experience not simply the occurrence of meanings, but also their construction (Gergen, 2009a) Karen gives us insight into what matters;

> ***I agree with you, it is extremely precarious. You know your metaphor about the safety of road conditions struck me as key, yeah, as we leave the therapy room and go back out onto unsafe roads. I think it is part of the therapist's responsibility to build in increasing safety for her, but obviously I am not able to change the culture. If we build in support people - who else might be like-minded? Who else would join her in these understandings?***
>
> ***…Start to build more like-minded others…bring some of her friends in and have these conversations with them. Create a network, because she is up against a lot….And I ask, what would you call this network, group, or team?***

> ***But what I really want to do… is build connections with others. It might be appreciation or paying attention to what I like about myself, what I like about others. Helping her to find what she and others share in common.***
>
> ***It is important to not do this work in isolation, because it won't stick, so that is where bringing other people in, parents friends is so useful…I can't tell you how many times in my work there are parents, friends, teachers, aunts, uncles, grandparents neighbours, people that can be included and recruited as a support team.***

Karen works toward bringing forth a "relational chorus" of supporters, balancers. ***Girls build thriving subjectivities by keeping to safe pathways, and connecting to supportive real-ationships which support balancing on her values, beliefs, knowledges and abilities.***

Additionally, the role of the therapist is to move in alongside supporting a girl to balance holding onto the back of the bike while she starts to ride. Steering away from problems, protest and resistance, the therapist's role is one of riding alongside girls in the midst of culture, joining with parents, teachers, and practitioners; surrounding girls in our care by upholding their presence and worth. Ultimately, agency becomes a relational endeavour, through relationships, experiences, and inner relational voices. As a girl comes to us battered and bruised, helmet askew, unsure about the contradictions of the world and her own existence, she reaches out for someone to "help her up," for support and guidance to ride confidently again. In order to be successful she will require relational partners. I suggest the therapist functions as one such relational partner, moving in alongside a girl, essentially "holding the back of the bike" as together they generate balance and co-construct coherence. Our goal is for a girls to balance on their own while riding sturdily through the contradictions of life. A counsellor as a relational partner joins in alongside, meeting her with the best of knowledge and attuned consciousness. ***A girl may borrow the consciousness of her counsellor as one who is sturdier and wiser with ideas about how to find safety.***

Agency: Girls in Response

Karen talked of the girls already showing response;

> ***She has already had responses, but she won't think they were responses - refusal to go to school, that was a response.***

I think it is helpful for us to distinguish between *response* and reaction. Girls "fallen off" have shown reaction, to the **hidden powerfulness of the sticky expectations and requirements** but have not shown *response*. *Reaction* is an impulse of self-protection while *response* is forward and considered, riding with confidence, direction, and purpose. *Response* for girls does not contain reaction (school refusal, anxiety, depression), but is a performance of thriving. Ceske and Nyland (1997) in "*Voices of political resistance*" narrate an interview much like mine with Karen, in which therapists counselled girls (influenced by depression) to "unmask" discourses and fight the pressures to conform to societal expectations. Beyond the "unmasking" or using their *visibility lenses,* the girls reported finding a way out of depression by *being "selfish"* (stating thoughts and needs and making self a priority, finding voice), *choosing friends that support goals* (relational chorus), and *discovering a spirituality* (meaning greater than self). We can understand an agentic response to include hope, optimism, meaning and connection outside the self, as girls find purpose, direction and paths of safety born through connecting to what genuinely matters.

Agency: The "Self" Portrait

Karen states;

> ***I always think that when I am in conversation with someone we are in an identity project, in the moment. So that this conversation we are having is already starting to affect stories of identity. As we are talking, value positions are emerging that are connecting up to "Who I am stories". So it is in process all the time. To me that speaks to agency.***
>
> ***We don't have to be completely just subjects to the way that culture might try to shape us as individuals. That we can bring things like values and preferences into our awareness; we can take positions on matters. We can get connected up to what is important to us.***

Recall the "self-portrait" of subjectivity is never truly complete, but in a constant process, mutual formation and shaping (see Chapter 3). The portrait fashions from an expansive palate of thoughts, experiences, beliefs, stories, and feelings that we understand are not private, but relationally fashioned. The portrait is a mutual formation and shaping of identity from the varied and fragmented pallet of life while agency is the artistic semblance of coherence. Agency includes making sense of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and knowledges (including cultural narratives,

family and peer expectations). The portrait finds profile through the stories a girl tells herself, the relationships, knowledges, and metaphors she embraces. It is the artistry of "self" as she is painted into being. What we want for a girl is to participate in the artistry by becoming mindfully aware of her stories, beliefs and inner relational voices. Participating in the artistry of the portrait works toward developing coherence and meaning. *"How I make meaning*" or *"How I know"* harkens back to Keegan's level of consciousness or even mindfulness. "*How I know"* influences the fashioning of the portrait. Agency is affected by more than feelings or behaviours, but also by the ways we *make sense* of experience; not just *what* we know, but the ***way*** *we know* (Kegan, 1994). There seems to be more needed than just a hand up; Kegan contends girls need to "know differently." According to Kegan this level of mindful consciousness begins developing in adolescence.

Ultimately, our conversation turns toward ideas about identity formation, or what Karen refers to as the "identity project."

> ***I like to create a document in the session. I sometimes think of it as a "Who am I document."***
>
> ***What I am interested in doing is asking questions that keep connecting …so what does this say about you? What does this tell you about yourself that is important to know? What does this illuminate that really matters to you?***
>
> ***Together we develop a coherent narrative about "Who am I? That's what I like to do as part of the therapeutic process. We create this document and build in audience to this – this helps the storyline to have stickability. …really developing a rich narrative about self.***

Listening to Karen I want to unravel the idea of coherence. We have both used this word in our dialogue. Karen refers to a coherent narrative. The narrative metaphor is a core feature of constructionism and fundamental to the constructionist understanding of meaning. While our lives are full of "stories," and narrative is a core feature of how we tell about ourselves, our lives and stories are rather random. Talking about "self" as a coherent narrative, which suggests a linear trajectory and organized construction, does not seem sufficient to describe the many and fragmented elements that make up the self (Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008). With that thought, I want to further explore the postmodern ideas of multiplicity of self and polyphony of voice. Sampson writes,

> *…we are asked to consider, each of us, to be composed of a rather thoroughgoing multiplicity, but not in the case of several integrated personalities. Dialogic multiplicity refers to the diversity of voices with which we are constituted, no one of which or combination of which marks a real, fundamental, real, central integrated us*. (2008, p. 114)

McNamee and Hosking elaborate,

> *… identity, and the assumed characteristics of entities are theorized (a) as by-products of relational interchange and so (b) multiple and variable (different realities in different self-other relations), and (c) as performed rather than possessed in local-cultural-historical networks of ongoing forms of relating. In other words, relational processes are "reality-constituting practice(s)."* (2012, Kindle location 1064-1065)

Postmodernism speaks of multiplicity, discontinuity, contradiction, and juxtaposition. How do we truly understand this? Am I a collection of diverse, disjointed selves and voices? Am I "book club self" with my book club friends, and "mother self" with my children? Being comprised of these various multiplicities, constructions, identities, voices, selves, we must ask the question, is there a coherence, a pattern, or a balance between the selves that brings a sense of constancy? The modernist view of identity formation forwards the concept of an integrated, relatively homogenous self (Schachter, 2005). Erikson's classic identity theory, while considering social context, fixes on *sameness and continuity* to constitute a healthy identity structure (Erikson, 1975). However, some have challenged the idea of a stable self, and challenged whether this identity structure is possible in the ever changing social context of postmodernism. Gergen argues that the variable context of postmodernism creates a "self" inconstant (Gergen, 2000). Thus, a multiple and flexible identity structure may, in fact, be required to cope with the shifting foundations of society and the flux of life.

Thinking of multiplicity, and the challenges of multiplicity I recall from my theological studies the council of Nicaea[44] and the struggle of the early Christian Bishops. How were they to find a way to talk about the multiplicity of a monotheistic God? In coming to terms with this paradox of multiplicity and unity of Being, the early Church used the term *co-inherent*. To coinhere is *to exist*

---

44 A council of Christian bishops convened in Nicaea in Bithynia by the Roman Emperor Constantine I and AD 325. This was the ecumenical council convened to attain consensus in the Church through an assembly representing all of Christendom.

together as one substance; referring to the Trinitarian nature of God: Father – Son - Spirit, or God - Logos (word) - Sophia (wisdom)[45]. Coinhere describes the achievement of co-relationship, togetherness, cooperation. I believe we can borrow this way of talking about the "self" as a co-inherent multi-self. To c*oinhere* highlights action, connecting, balancing and harmonizing while and at the same time embraces complexity and multiplicity.[46] As relational interactions constitute identity, the *co-inherent "*self" becomes a dance, with each "self" not an integrated personality, but rather a co-inherence of voices and relational responses which serve to render us meaningful. I am the "royal we." Mahoney positions,

> *…the self is in process, not an entity. And the self is not separated or in isolation. The self is a fluid coherence of perspective from which we experience, but the sense of self emerges and changes primarily in relation to others*. (2006, p. 7)

It is not unlike Poincare's great shake up "*....like the molecules of gas in the kinematic theory of gases. Then their mutual impacts may produce new combinations"* (1946, Kindle Location 6340). The self is also like the great "shake up" in which voice and relationship produce a self in ever transforming combination.

In addition, the relational dance softens boundaries between "self" and "other." "I am" when "we are." This articulates a "way of being" more than a "self," expanding our understanding beyond the bounded self to *relational being* (Gergen, 2009b) which describes the animation of self in motion. My way of being creates my reality. "I am" balances multiplicities, constructions, identities, voices, selves, as "I" and "I with other." Buber (2004) refers to the connection "I with other" as the primary word, *I-Thou* which can only be spoken with the whole being and Sampson (2008) as *celebrating the other*. We understand the self performs as a co-inherent multiplicity, a vocal polyphony harmonising in the chorus of relational life. What has been the operative question

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[45] Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc

[46] This idea makes me think of the co-inherent self as a yoga posture, flexible but in balance.

for girls of "Who am I?" now takes a new turn, a new direction. ***With the understanding of the "self" as the action of a verb (way), and not the stasis of a noun (self) the focus of therapeutic practices that matter moves beyond "Who am I?" to "How do I be?"***

Riding in Balance

How do "I" perform as a harmonic polyphony of embodied action? How do "I" accomplish a co-inherent self, a sense of steadiness and balance? Moving to a more hopeful construction of self brings us again to coherence, or the "balancers" which allow us to function co-inherently. What are the stabilizers or balancers of self? Guignon discusses the ideas of Bernard Williams;

> *So it seems that what steadies and stabilizes the inner life cannot itself be something within the inner life, any more than what holds the beads on a necklace together can itself be just another bead…….Williams' answer to this question is that the steadiness of the inner life can be achieved only through our interactions with others within the social context in which we find ourselves.* (2004, p. 78)

The steadiness required to balance achieves through meaningful and generative connections with others - through positive, life giving interactions that matter. Balancing, by "*finding momentary spaces through lasting connections*" – is itself an expression of the agentic capacity of girls (Jiwani, 2006, p. xiii). We have noted the importance the "relational chorus." We have also discussed the importance of strong foundational attachments, which hold to the primacy of relationship in the healthy development of individuals. Victor Frankl in his classic work, *Man's Search for Meaning*, speaks about how meaning in life cannot be discovered within the psyche, but must be created outside of the self. He states;

> *I have termed this constitutive characteristic "the self-transcendence of human existence." It denotes the fact that being human always points and is directed, to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter.* (2010, p. 110)

The stabilizers or balancers of the self rest upon affirmative relationships in a positive social context. However in contrast, we noted the modern self is void of stable anchors to hold a co-inherent subjectivity in place. We previously acknowledged several identity stabilizers of the pre-modern self: grace (unmerited benevolence), forgiveness (a mechanism for freedom from unhealthy pain, anger and shame), reverence (for something greater than self, sense of wonder)

and original sin/imperfection (sanctuary for imperfection, comfort with vulnerability, where we embrace a shared starting point for all humans). This question begs an answer, what *identity stabilizers* are available to the postmodern relational self? I will propose the answer is the same - these same identity stabilizers become accessible to us in the relational self. I will augment with more contemporary words: gratefulness, empathy, compassion, tolerance, unconditional acceptance of self and others, and meaning beyond the self. All of these stabilizers are relational. All happen "between people" conveying us beyond being mere placeholders in social interaction to agentic relational beings. I am not suggesting that we revert to a pre-modern confessional religion, but that there is something promising in these relational appurtenances which bear repetition or re-actualization. Drawing from Heidegger, Caputo in *Truth: Philosophy in Transit* says:

> *To repeat the possible, which is a true repetition, is by contrast to produce a new work that draws from the energies and sources, the tendency and possibilities of the past, the underlying event of truth harboured by the past…..repetition is the mode of moving forward, repeating forward, repeating what has been up to now but in a new way* (2013, p. 96).

The repeating forward of these sacred graces which breathe goodness, propels us to a new way of relational being. Gergen (2009b) points out, when our actions are actions of coordination rather than alienation we engage in a *sacred practice.* Thus as I have stated, this new way of "Being" "forms through coinhere relational encounters, breathing life, fashioning the fabric of existence, encoding thoughts, and guiding actions." What does this mean in the real life context of therapy with girls? My practice as therapist becomes to assist girls along pathways of safety, offering support to enhance the performance of a co-inherent identity full of multiplicity and complexity, simultaneously in balance and harmony. ***The emphasis of therapeutic practice that matters becomes ways and means of balancing self and self-other relationship, enhancing becoming, engaging identity stabilizers, and offering resources to grow a thriving performance.*** As therapists we have the honour of moving in alongside, "holding the back of the bike" while supporting girls balance and aiding girls to thrive in the midst. As our next cyclist joins our ride she will bring us down to street level - to real life practices with girls.

Down on Street Level: Dialogue with Christine Dennstedt Ph.D.

Christine Dennstedt, Ph.D., is a registered clinical counsellor living and working in Whistler, BC. She has worked in a variety of settings, including: as a Family Therapist at Peak House, working with young people and assisting them in finding freedom from drugs and alcohol; and as a counsellor at Vista, a residential program for women struggling with eating disorders. She also teaches in Vancouver's City University in the Counselling Skills program.[47] Christine brings us to street level, making many of our ideas and philosophies current and meaningful, as we co-construct insights into one of the guiding questions, *How can therapy (with girls) move from an exercise in language to building skills for thriving given the ever shifting demands of relating with others and to self?*[48]

Along the path, we have noted the therapist acting as a "knowing other." Paul L. Harris in *Trusting What You're Told: How Children Learn from Others* describes "the testimony of others" as an integral part of children's learning;

> *A moment's reflection shows that there are profound limits to the role that first-hand experience can play in cognitive development. In many domains, children cannot gather the relevant data for themselves. The objects or processes in question are remote or invisible so that children have to depend on what other people tell them. Admittedly, in the course of development, children would do well to exercise their autonomous judgment by sifting and reinterpreting what they are told—just as they sift and reinterpret their own firsthand experience. Still, the testimony of other people is likely to be just as important as firsthand experience for setting such reflection in motion* (2012, Kindle 21%).

In this dissertation, we have considered Vygotsky's *zones of proximal development* and the powerful role a "knowing other" can play. Learning is an intensely social endeavour. As well, I have stated "*girls need more than conversation; they need 'know how.'"* Girls need to "know

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[47] Christine recently completed her PhD dissertation for the Taos/Tilburg program titled *The Interplay of Substance Misuse and Disordered Eating Practices in The Lives of Young Women: Implications for Narrative Therapeutic Practice*.

[48] This question was based on a "tweet" from Dr. Ken Gergen July 7, 2012 "How can therapy move from an exercise in language to building skills for thriving in the ever shifting demands of relating."

how" to deal with "big" emotions, contrary voices, degenerative discourses, and defeating personal stories. I believe there is a benefit in making our practice transparent for girls as we teach them to ask powerful questions activating a mindful awareness of inner voices, discourses and stories. I am suggesting we consider providing girls skills or "know hows" to be used to cope when life feels wobbly.

While I have used the word "skill" in the interviews, I believe I need a more capacious description. "Skill" suggests the ability to do something well, gained through training or experience; but I believe what we want for girls is something beyond "skill" and beyond training or preparation. ***What we want for girls is "know how" grounded in wisdom.*** Essentially, girls need "practical wisdom." Practical wisdom contains the discernment of what is ultimately important, and is comprised of responsiveness, receptiveness and awareness allowing a girl to "practically" make sense of her experience, to create meaning, to take perspective, to call on supportive resources, and to generate a thriving identity. Here, Christine is helpful. My conversation with Christine shines light on some of the ***"practical wisdoms"*** a girl may carry in her "basket." I simply want to frame some of Christine's ideas as ***"Practical Wisdoms for Girls"*** tying them to our understanding of how we help girls thrive. These wisdoms she may employ on the street.

WISDOM TO NOTICE HOW THE PROBLEM WORKS

Christine speaks of the problem as separate from the individual. This gives perspective. Problems are not essential to our nature, inside us, or defects we need to correct. As a narrative practitioner Christine's language is naturally externalizing; the problem has a "self" of its own. By understanding the problem as external to the individual, she opens a more empowering way to combat the problematic.

> ***The more people know about how the problem works in their life, the better able they are to deal with it. Such as, "When are times it is most likely to show up? Okay, when you are in a situation what are the things you need to be paying attention to? Who are the people you need to have around?"***

We have reflected on how *externalizing conversations* used in narrative practice can be a powerful way of breaking the enchantment, as a girl takes on a new way of seeing a problem as external from herself - through ***visibility lenses***. "Know how" develops for a girl as she borrows this practice from the therapist and begins to employ the language of externals. Speaking changes from *"my depression"* to *"the depression problem,"* or to metaphors like *"the sadness cloud."* However, Christine is also sensitive to the struggle for some girls to let go of a well-worn identity label.

> ***I think the biggest thing I have encountered is when people have really taken in the society meaning of what it means to be depressed or what it means to be an anxious person, and people have really attached those identities to themselves. This is what society taught them, "I am this; I am this" and so people really internalize those ideas. There can be some resistance or it just can be a really difficult way to imagine seeing yourself as separate from something, "What do you mean I am not "this?" Trying to create some space from anorexia, people have a really hard time identifying with anything other than that.***

At times, I have found it helpful to make the process of externalizing transparent. I may naturally add into a conversation; *"I like it when you refer to the problem as outside yourself….what you are up against, and not something broken within you. What are you learning about problems?"* As the problem becomes external to self, a girl can begin to notice how the problem works. Christine assists a girl to explore the working of the problem;

> ***…..Can we talk about anxiety and then break down what happens so we can have a sense of how it works together?***
>
> ***… How did you get this idea about anxiety? How did you begin talking about yourself as this?***

Christine proposes,

> ***….paying attention to person's language versus problem language. Listening for when the problem is talking, rather than the person talking …***

Dickerson writes, *"Identifying and naming the problem will help you become clear of it. Once you take a half step back and notice how the problem is affecting you, you are already reducing its power over you."* (2004, p. 214). Calling upon her "wisdom" a girl catches herself, "Oh, that's the problem talking."

WISDOM TO NOTICE WHAT ABILITIES and STRENGTHS I ALREADY HAVE TO GET THROUGH THE PROBLEM

Christine discusses the notion found in more traditional therapies of "therapist as a problem solver," She states;

> ***…in traditional therapy it is "my job*** *(the therapist's)* ***to solve this problem."***

Conversely, Christine will say to a girl,

> ***"It is nicer and easier if you and I are in this together, and we're going to get through this together and I know some things about helping people get through some problems. You know some things about your life that are going to help us figure out what is going to work best for you in your life."***
>
> And Christine continues to share with me;
>
> ***…and (as a therapist) you are hearing stories of pain and suffering, but you are also hearing these beautiful stories of knowledge and knowing and strength and knowing ways of getting through the problem. See we understand how they got through the problem, and all the life skills that are going to help them get through life.***

Christine holds a core belief a girl is an expert in her own life, emphasizing her knowledge and knowing position. She holds to the belief **meaning is created together**. Thus, Christine is not solely a "practitioner," but a collaborator in meaning. Given a girl holds a knowing position, or is he "expert"[49] on her own life, I often use questions from the narrative tradition to expose strengths and knowledge;

When was a time you were able to push through the anxiety troubling you? How did you do that? What/Who did you access that helped you be successful? What were you telling yourself? What does this tell me about you?

This develops a full and rich story, accessing clues and strengths to be named;

…from where I sit you seem to be … very aware, persistent, brave, thoughtful, a good problem solver…does that sound like you? Who else would see this in you?

Additionally I mine for "know hows;"

[49] In working with girls I am not convinced they are "experts" in life but I understand they have an expertise we honour.

It seems like you pushed the anxiety away when you noticed it early. You did not let it get hold over you. How could you do that again? What would you call this skill? When may you employ this approach again?

Girls using this kind of positive and amplified feedback begin to take hold of their own strengths or expertise, gaining access to the story of knowing, skill, and success. Christine adds;

> ***When we** (therapists) **throw out compliments, they can easily be dismissed, but when they are connected to someone's experience and join history they are not as easy to forget.***

WISDOM TO EVALUATE INNER RELATIONAL VOICES AND REACH FOR VOICES OF LIGHT

> ***…think of the problem as being with someone and beating down on them all the time. The problem can be really good at erasing any skills or abilities that don't fit with what the problem is wanting people to see. So when you are working one on one, it is really helpful to bring in other people that might speak against what the problem, such as depression is trying to convince someone of.***

The Gergens write, *"In our view, one of the most challenging problems confronting contemporary therapy is that of linking the face-to-face conversation with the client to the off-stage scenarios"* (2012, p. 78). How do we bring a girl's internal or "off-stage" voices into the therapy room? As a girl gains an awareness, she learns to listen carefully to the off-stage voices and to the voice of the problem. Learning to appraise the voices she carries with her, she begins to listen for voices of light, developing a form of mindfulness. In my practice girls learn to ask themselves metacognitive or mindful questions, *"Whose voice is this? What am I believing? Where did I learn this? What is the story underneath?*" Girls then turn toward helpful voices, which bring affirmation and wisdom. "*What voice would serve me better? What would my friend Lisa say to me?"*

> ***It is important to connect up to not just themselves, but is there someone else in your life that might know something about that? Who might see you in that way? If they were here what might they say? What would your best friend know about how you handled things like this? What would your mother know? What would your father know? What would your dog know?***
>
> ***I have had young people come back and say, "Every time I say that I cannot, I think of what my best friend would say."***

In this inner landscape of dialogue, a girl may find the courage to stand up to disempowering inner voices and embrace a language borrowed from supportive relational others. The therapist may also join as a relational voice of hope and subsequently become an inner voice of hope for a girl. Our trajectory is toward girls developing a level of consciousness, a mindful eye, to take notice of and evaluate inner relational voices, to learn to protest and challenge voices of despair or shame, and in turn to reach for a new language of faith, confidence and hope. Voice has played a prominent theme in our discussions. We understand using voice is not the action of a solitary girl. Rather, as therapists we can encourage girls to pull out the tool of courage; courage to speak and share, say what they think and feel in relationship. As a girl begins to *speak her own voice* and to bring forth her presence by holding to affirmative voices, new stories and performances begin to have "street value."

WISDOM TO CALL IN OTHERS WHO SUPPORT ME OR BRING WISDOM

I think it is about taking people away from the individual and connecting them on to the community with people that mean something to them. It is funny because therapy is individual, but it is to connect them up to other people and let them know they are not alone. There are other people who experience this, and that really helps people step out of the problems.

It has become apparent *"balancing"* can only be achieved through finding safe pathways, key generative relationships within the social context in which we find ourselves. We have learned key generative relationships are some of the most significant factors in mitigating the effects of "unsafe roads." Girls learn to reach toward strong connections with safe others (mothers, sisters, friends, therapists, teachers, or coaches) with whom girls feel they can be heard and valued. An important wisdom for girls is to identify safe others and reach out when the road seems bumpy or the way uncertain. I ask my girls, *"Who are you going to reach for when you feel like cutting?" "Is there a go-to friend who makes you laugh when you feel the sadness coming?" "Who can you ask to help you through this situation?"* A practical wisdom for girls is the "know how" to reach for key others in order to find safety.

WISDOM TO SIT WITH EMOTION

Sometimes it really is helping them develop new skills, like ways to sit through anxiety. I think there are some really important things we can do to help people have those skills because then they don't have to use drugs. They don't have to cut, they know they can tolerate a feeling and it's not going to kill them.

Emotion is not something often addressed in post-modern therapeutic practice. However, anyone working with girls will understand emotion plays an impactful role in their lives. Gergen (2009b) refers to emotions as relational performance, as "doing" an emotion. Sometimes it is helpful for girls to understand that these feelings are not embedded inside the head or heart (although it does feel this way), rather emotions can be described as performance we "do." We *do* sadness; we *do* joy; we *do* embarrassment, and we *do* fear. When we *do* an emotion such as fear, sadness, shame or guilt, we are playing out a performance in life of anxiety, depression, self harm or anger. For example, anxiety becomes a performance of fear, or anger a performance of feeling small.

Beneficial for girls is the recognition that the fullness of life consists of a complete range of emotions, and that while sometimes feelings seem overwhelming or unbearable, they are just feelings. Tolerating a feeling or sitting with emotion suggests it is useful to deal with powerful feelings by noticing them. Rather than trying to understand the meaning of an experience it can be helpful for a girl to concentrate on its effects, paying attention to the resulting emotion of agitation, worry, sadness, concern or uncertainty. In my work, I invite girls to take some time to be quiet and just let the feeling be - not pushing the feeling away or spinning an inner story about the feeling; in essence separating the feeling from the story. A girl can tell herself, *"I am going to be ok." "This will not last forever." "This too shall pass."* Another helpful practice is mindfulness and mindfulness meditation (Salzberg, 2011; Zinn, 1990). Grounded in non-striving, non-judging, trust, and patience as foundational attributes, the teaching develops reflexivity and acceptance (of self, others and life). Mindfulness practice allows girls to experience emotion without attaching to debilitating thoughts or interpretations. Mindfulness meditating has also been supportive for many of my clients. Thriving for girls is not simply gaining happiness and joy, but

also living in a way which allows her to cope when darkness comes rather than being consumed by it.

Gratitude is an additional aspect of emotion which is a powerful element to thriving. Robert Emmons, editor-in-chief of the Journal of Positive Psychology, reports there are scientific findings pointing to the substantial benefits of gratitude. Studies indicate recording gratitude in a journal every day, or even every week, has a statistically significant impact on feelings of happiness in the research participants. Emmons (2007) found people who regularly practice grateful thinking can increase their "set point" for happiness. This recommends the practice of appreciation and gratitude a more than a healthy activity; it actually improves levels of wellbeing and satisfaction in life. In my work, I published a small gratitude journal which I invite girls to keep (Crump, 2012). Each week they record*: I am grateful for… This brought me joy…. A challenge I overcame…. Something I appreciate about myself… Something I did for another…. and "Angel thoughts," or positive, helpful, meaningful, thoughts*. With the affirmative journaling girls learn to lean toward what is going well and what is working, and to appreciate those around them.

WISDOM TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF AND KNOW MY AIDS TO THRIVE - SELF CARE

Christine points toward self care as another key "wisdom" for girls;

Helping people to slow down and take care of themselves ....

Texting, Tumblr, Snapchat, FaceTime, Instagram, without an unconnected moment modern adolescents live life at the speed of light. For teen girls, disconnection is comparable to free fall. I have had many girls cringe at the idea of "time alone" or confess, *"When I am alone I feel depressed."* How does one find time to grow a relationship with self, to be reflective, to grow a sense of *being* without spending time unplugged, slowing down and breathing? Dickerson writes, "*Self reflection is an acquired wisdom"* (2004, p.217). Slowing down helps girls connect to what they value and believe, to trust their own sensibility. Intuition has a soft voice. Slowing down, reflecting, and listening to intuition supports girls' knowledge regarding "*what I need to thrive*." Girls in my practice name *eating well, exercising, listening to my body, meditative practices, and*

sleeping as core to self care. They begin to tune into themselves and their own needs. We have also uncovered the necessity for "sparks" (passions) or a spirituality (meaning outside the self) to bring a sense of purpose and meaning to life.

I asked one of my girls yesterday, "What has helped? What is different?" She answered, *"It's the fact I now have ways to cope. I have things I can do that I never knew how to do before."* Christine's reflections bring some of our concepts to street level, as therapists and practitioners stand with girls as "knowing others" fostering the growth of practical wisdoms. While we understand therapy provides much more than "know hows" we also note leaving the therapeutic sanctuary with a basket of ***"Practical Wisdoms"*** serves as an ongoing resource for girls.

Chapter 7 Dialogues in Motion II

A Voice in the Room: Dialogue with Harlene Anderson PhD

Riding with Relational Consciousness: Dialogue with Ken Gergen PhD

A Voice in the Room - Dialogue with Harlene Anderson Ph.D.

Harlene Anderson Ph.D., cofounder of the Houston Galveston Institute and one of the co-founders of the TAOS Institute,[50]is a leader in the development of postmodern philosophy and collaborative practices in therapy, supervision, teaching, and business consultation. I invited Harlene to add to the conversation.

"How do you make sense of girls *falling off*?"

> ***Well, I guess my answer to that will be much simpler than you had imagined, and that is I think the most important thing is to ask the girls….Because if you start thinking from the therapist's perspective, I think that really narrows your vision. It really closes down your ears to really hear what they want you to hear. So I would always want to start with how they make sense of where they are and how they got to where they are.***

"And how do they describe that for you?"

> ***Well, I am not sure they could say how they would describe that for me because I have not asked the particular question, I think each girl would have a very different perspective in terms of what her ideology of*** **falling off** ***would be. …they can attribute it to their own experiences, their own history, they could attribute it to authority figures, parents or teachers, they could attribute it to cultural, political or economic circumstances. They could attribute it to friends; they could attribute it to "I don't care", and not only authority figures in terms of parents but a particular habit that a parent might have….if the parent is abusive or using alcohol.***
>
> ***So therefore my parents neglected me or they didn't really care, or a sense of never being loved. So I think girls can have a lot of different perspectives on how they got to where they are.***

In speaking with Harlene, it appears we have found a different emphasis. While Karen's perspective was wide and encompassing, more like a telescope scanning for macro level discourses masking as invisible, ever-present, and sticky expectations, Harlene's gaze intensely focuses upon the girl in the room. Harlene's discursive approach has a micro focus in which meaning emerges

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[50] Harlene Anderson is the author of *Conversation, Language, and Possibilities: A Postmodern Approach to Therapy* (1997) and *Collaborative, Relationhips and Dialogic Conversations: Ideas for a Relationally Responsive Practice* (2012)

from the interaction between two people in conversation (in our case therapist and girl). While Karen's narrative ideas draw attention to making visible ***invisible ever present, sticky expectations and requirements*** or the deconstruction of dominant discourses, Harlene's approach emphasizes the person by attending to what emerges from the relationship and dialogue between the client and therapist.

> ***Well, I am not excluding societal discourses. What I am trying to emphasize is the person's voice that I am working with, whether that is a girl in the category falling off, or whether that is a woman, or a couple or whoever it might be that I am working with. I want to start with their voice and their perspective, and their reality.***

Does a girl have a voice?

For Harlene, a personal voice is the focus, but we have noted the challenges girls face in using their voices. Gilligan addresses the concept of voice; *to have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act* (1982, Kindle Location 111). We have reflected upon "voice" already in this study. At the crossroads to adolescence girls begin to lose confidence in their own voice, lose assurance in what they know and misplace the bravery they once had. Brown and Gilligan point to the phrase, "I don't know" filling girls' language during the interviews conducted in their research;

> *The dissociation of girls' voices from girls' experiences in adolescence, so that girls are not saying what they know and eventually not knowing it as well, is a prefiguring of many women's sense of having the rug of experience pulled out from under them, or of coming to experience their feelings and thoughts not as real but as a fabrication* (1992, p. 197).

I have experienced this "not knowing" in the therapy room.

> *Jana sent inappropriate Snapchat photos of herself to two boys in her school. Concerned Jana's parents asked me to speak with her in order to help her find ways to make better decisions. In chatting with Jana, I asked her if she understood her own decision to send the photos. "I don't really know," she said, "I just did it. I didn't think. I am not sure. The boys just asked for them…so I sent them."*

The "enchantment of lost voice" brings Jana to a place of "not knowing," unable to find or speak a voice which belongs to her. How do we work with a girl's "not knowing?" How do we invite a girl's voice in "talk therapy?" Uncovering a girl's voice may pose a greater challenge than we think. Finding "voice" requires the breaking of *enchantment*. The enchantment can be broken with the development of a reflective consciousness. We have noted that an adolescent's level of consciousness makes self reflection a limited enterprise for many teens.[51] Kegan describes the task of adolescence as gaining the capacity to take perspective by holding another's point of view, and developing a consciousness capacious enough to negotiate a highly complex society. This consciousness goes beyond thinking, feeling and behaving, to a whole new way of knowing, including the ability to think abstractly and to reflect on "why" you do what you do. We have also understood the powerful social discourses which know to be "invisibly" working in Jana's life, curtailing her voice, leaving her absent and not present, and abandoning her in the shadow of the "ideal girl." It becomes exceedingly difficult to be in therapeutic conversation with girls, when voice cloaks in silence, full of doubt, unable to connect to a sense of self. It is here the self is deeply bounded. Within this context, we must move past simply listening to a girl's voice and ask the question, "How do we break the enchantment of lost voice?"

We recall in the article *Voices of political resistance* (Ceske & Nylund, 1997) girls reported finding a way out of depression by being "selfish," which I interpret to mean connecting to thoughts and needs, making self a priority - finding "voice." This becomes a crucial aim of the therapeutic process for girls; "finding voice" is foundational to finding balance. So the task of the therapist is to find ways of breaking the enchantment, or removing the barriers to voice, empowering girls to speak. To increase the capacity of girls' voices therapists may open space for girls to speak by using *mediators of voice*. One example is found in the addiction research of Marie Hoskins and Janet Newbury at the University of Victoria (2010). Giving girls digital cameras the researchers invited five girls' to explore their voices through the use of photographs. Their photos described metaphorical images of themselves. The questions posed to the girls were, *"Who do you think I am at this point in my life?" And "Who do I believe others think I am at this point in my life?"*

[51] See Chapter 1 section on Morality and Consciousness

Participants were invited to take photos and then explore the images through conversation with the researchers. Photography, art, drama, and creative expression are effective as mediators of voice. Bonnie Thomas, in her book *Creative Expression Activities for Teens: Exploring Identity through Art, Craft and Journaling* proposes;

> *Words are not always enough. There are times when people need something more to express their deepest most vulnerable thoughts and feelings. This is where art and creative expression come in— it is the perfect companion for teens. Art and creative expression can unleash a whirlwind of emotion; it can say what words cannot.* (2011, pp. 46-48)

Indeed, at times, language seems more like a series of approximations, compelling us to access mediators of voice such as analogy and metaphor. Wittgenstein wrestled with the limitations we find in language (1953). His aphorism, "*The limits of my language are the limits of my world,"* suggests to me that expanding a girl's language will enlarge her world, her meaning, and her understanding. For girls limited by language and voice, metaphor becomes as a "picture that creates a thousand words" offering another interesting mediator of voice. In my practice, the use of metaphor invites whole new ways of talking. Together my clients and I have explored the "Dark Hole," "Feeding the Pain Gremlin," "Victoria's Secret," "The Pippy Girl vs the Depressed Girl," "The Patience App," "Angel Thoughts and Devil Thoughts." Metaphor unlocks language breaking through the enchantment and providing girls with a voice to speak about self, identity and reality. In addition, I invite girls' voices through the journaling of gratitude and appreciation, poetry, song writing, art, and the writing and publishing of books. One client struggling with alopecia[52] has found her voice in compiling a book about "The Packaging Problem" full of narrative, poetry and art which serves to create her "self-portrait" in a meaningful and transformative way. ***As therapists, we recognize the challenge of relying upon dialogue alone, moving practice toward effective mediators of voice.*** Mary and Ken Gergen write about therapists:

> *Required are capacities to move in narrative, metaphor, exploration, irony, humour, pathos, curiosity, imagination, and much more. Yet, it is not simply the language content that is important. Posture, gaze, tone of voice, facial expression, gait, and so on all contribute to the form and ramifications of relationship. All may be used to unsettle or*

[52] Alopecia is an autoimmune disease which causes a person's hair to fall out.

> *transform the matrix. All may provide the client with models for action outside the therapeutic relationship.* (2012, p. 77)

Listen me into existence

Additionally, helping girls break the enchantment does not consist solely of words in conversation; listening is also essential. A therapist's position in the dialogue begins in listening; allowing space for a girl to utter her own voice by holding a pause of silence in which to hear herself. Lois Shawver (2012) contrasts *"listening to talk"* with *"talking to listen." "Listening to talk"* holds the space of listening only until it is my turn to respond with my ideas. *"Talking to listen"* is a form of deep listening. My words are only used to encourage my partner's words. *"Talking to listen"* may include simple phrases like, *"I'd like to know more about that,"* or *"What are your thoughts about X?"* This listening requires a stance of consciousness; deep listening, listening with a silent mind. Listening with a silent mind is a gift offered by the therapist. The metaphorical story from *Momo, a Fairy-tale* novel by Michael Ende, offers insight;

The Gift of Listening

> *Momo listened in a way that made slow people suddenly have the cleverest ideas. She didn't ask or say anything in particular that would bring them to these thoughts. She merely sat and listened with the utmost attention and sympathy, fixing her large, dark eyes on them. And she listened in such a way that anxious and indecisive people suddenly knew what they wanted. Shy people suddenly felt brave and free. Unhappy and depressed people suddenly became joyful. And when someone thought that his life was a meaningless failure and that he was just one among millions of people who could all be replaced as easily and as quickly as a broken pot, then he would go and explain everything to Momo. Even as he spoke, it would become clear to him, in some mysterious way, that he was fundamentally mistaken, that among all the people in the world there was only one of him and that he was, therefore, important in his own particular way. This was how Momo listened.* (2013, pp. Kindle Locations 176-181)

The enchantment begins to fade with a gift of listening. It is here in the silence girls begin to attune to their own voices. The story is told. The story is witnessed. Girls are gifted a sacred listening space where truth is safe, where girls feel comfortable enough to find and speak their truth, to feel reverenced and heard. As therapists, we do not only "talk" girls into existence; we begin by

listening them into existence. ***A therapeutic practice that matters includes listening with a silent mind and listening to understand, not to be understood.***

Inner Relational Voices

We have learned language is not simply external but is also an "internal" practice. Does the inner "voice" a girl brings to therapy fully belong to her? Can we assume she is using her voice? We know that voice is not singular, but a polyphony, a voice in the choir. We have come to understand the self as *constituted of a polyphonic choir of voices, singing a "composition" of coordinated relationships, ideas, beliefs, and understandings which are not singularly mine, but in actuality a composition drawn from, inspired by, and influenced by others.* These voices are relational connections filled with words which speak us into existence - voices of family, friends and culture. Voice is a deep part of the inner world that draws attention to inner relational voices, social ghosts and relational partners. Inner relational voices and private conversations hold a powerful grip on girls, offering a considerable challenge for therapy. How do we bring a girls inner voices on to the stage of the therapy room?

> *Cynthia described herself as a liar. She incessantly told lies. She lied to her mother, her best friend, and her boyfriend. The lying wedged its way between Cynthia, her friends, and family. The lying began when she was a young child and as she grew into a young woman the lying grew.*
>
> *She wanted the lying to stop.*
>
> *I asked Cynthia, "What is the voice you listen to when you feel compelled to lie?"*
>
> *She answered, "I think it's the voice I give my mother….I cannot displease her."*
>
> *As Cynthia and I unravelled the messages she allocated to this voice, we learned she harboured a fear of her mother's rejection.*
>
> *Adopted at four years old the voice was strong and powerful.*

"Off-stage" voices, beliefs, ideas, and meanings have a powerful influence. Circulating messages of inadequacy the voices whisper, *"Be good and I will love you," "You don't compare," "You*

don't belong;" consequently generating performances of *"falling off"* (Gergen, 2009b). As we have noted, these are often the voices of culture and the hidden powerfulness of the sticky expectations and requirements. We know drumming up "protest" or even resistance is a steep challenge for girls, but here in the inner landscape of dialogue *protest* may find traction. In the inner landscape of dialogue, a girl may exude the courage to stand up to the haunting of culture and the disempowering inner voice whispered by the *myth of perfect*. Therapists and practitioners can offer girls a resource to challenge offstage voices by supporting girls to embrace a new language of inner thought. A reminding "mantra" can be helpful, or learning to counter disparaging "devil thoughts" -- unhelpful thoughts, such as "I don't belong, no one likes me. I hate myself," and generate more promising "angel thoughts" -- helpful thoughts we create, such as "I am fine, I am loved, I have lots of friends." ***What we want for girls is to take notice and evaluate inner relational voices, learn to protest and challenge voices of despair or shame, and in turn reach for voices of faith, confidence and hope.***

Alongside a girl, steadying the back of the bike, a therapist assists her to hold to her deeper values, to challenge disparaging dialogues and to listen for voices of light. Undeniably, it is vital for a girl to learn ways to be mindful and appraise the inner voices she carries with her. The work of the therapist is to assist girls to engage with supportive inner relational voices or interlocutors of wisdom, rather than to be captive by spectres of mental suffering***. Thus, the therapist may serve as a relational voice of wisdom subsequently as an inner voice of wisdom for a girl.*** As a girl begins to find a sense of faith and belief in her "self" and hold to affirmative voices, her new performances begin to have street value.

Is Conversation Enough?

The focus of therapy has traditionally been a form of *treatment* with an emphasis on the inner working of the mind. Placing the locus of therapy within the individual mind or subjectivity as the essential element of the person, we serve to reinforce the individualism that is so limiting to our girls and our world. However, we have long since travelled outside of the *scientific/rational/individualistic* neighbourhood to a postmodernism neighbourhood situated in

the area of social construction. Postmodern therapies, by not concentrating on the individual, have taken on a divergent quality opening to social discourse, dialogue and relationship as focus points of therapy. By embracing fresh thinking regarding language, discourse, agency, and identity we understand that knowledge of the world and creation of meaning is mediated through language within our social world and varied relationships.

Harlene refers to her practice as a ***collaborative dialogue approach.*** This orientation supports the idea that meaning and understanding are created in dialogue. Problems are the result of conversational breakdown or ineffective dialogue. The way a problem is "storied" or the meaning a person attributes to an event or experience, is what makes it a problem. The way a girl tells her story may lead her to think that she *"can do something or not do something*," and new conversations allow for the exploration of varied paths, new ideas, or possibilities (Anderson, 1997). Harlene Anderson and others recognizes it is through "dialogical conversation" problems are not solved, but dissolve (Anderson, 1997; Anderson & Goolishian, 1988; Paré & Sutherland, 2012; Wittgenstein 1954). Anderson writes;

> *Therapy is characterized by conversation/dialogue between (out loud) and within (silent) a client and a therapist. I refer to the process of therapy as dialogical conversation: dialogical conversation is a generative process in which new meanings –different ways of understanding, making sense of, or punctuating one's lived experiences- emerge and are mutually constructed. In turn, the therapy conversation (connected with and informed by conversations outside the therapy room, and vice versa) and the newness that results from it lead to self-agency and problem dissolution.* (1997, p.109)

Additionally, Harlene shares with me…

> ***So it is a very different way of thinking about therapy, it is a way of thinking about conversation or dialogue as inherently transforming.***
>
> Right…so the dialogue itself is the energy of the therapy?
>
> ***The dialogue itself is the energy of the therapy, yes.***
>
> ***I think in terms of the process of therapy as a generative conversation; that it is out of the generativity of the conversation that something new or different comes.***

Remarkably, while the medium of therapy has long been language or conversation there has been little emphasis on the process of conversation itself.

> *It does seem odd that in a discipline devoted to the "talking cure," the emphasis on counseling as conversation has so far been largely absent. Instead, the talk that takes place in the consultation room is typically depicted as a medium for delivering an intervention seen as distinct from the conversation itself. I think it makes more sense to understand the conversation as the intervention: it is the talk itself that is helpful.* (Paré & Sutherland, 2012, p. 179)

Harlene's emphasis on conversation continues to open understanding and inform our postmodern predilections. Rather than a convergent focus on the inner working of the mind, Harlene places the location of the problem *in language* and uses *language* as the locus of therapy.[53] For Harlene, the energy of transformation in therapy centres in a dialogical conversation,

> *Dialogical conversation is distinguished by shared inquiry. Shared inquiry is the mutual process in which participants are in a fluid mode and is characterized by people talking with each other as they seek understanding and generate meanings; it is an in-there-together, two-way, give-and-take, back-and-forth exchange.* (2006, p. 15)

However, this description of dialogical conversation does not sound fundamentally different than any good conversation or therapeutic exchange. I am also wondering about the nature of "meaning" as girls in conversation can often produce convoluted and unsupportive meanings. So we must press forward in order to understand the collaborative approach. I ask Harlene what makes the conversation any different than a chat with a friend. Harlene responds,

> ***Think of a time when you were talking with a good friend about something very dear to you. You had a pain or a decision to make, and you left that conversation feeling like they really didn't hear you. They tried to be encouraging, but it didn't seem very appropriate, and they offered you advice or suggestions which you just didn't think seemed to fit and you had already thought of…this is not the kind of conversation that I am thinking about. Instead think about a conversation when you have had a pain, or a misery or a tough decision, and you have talked to a friend or relative, and you leave that conversation feeling like that person, if they didn't understand, was trying to understand***

[53] Language is understood in the broadest sense: any manner in which a person articulates, expresses or communicates, including spoken words, written symbols and bodily movements.

> ***you, and you had a sense of hope or a sense of freedom. You did not feel judged and that you kind of have some newness bubbling or a sense of possibilities, whatever that might be, however small or large that might be.***

David Paré states, "*I think it makes more sense to understand the conversation as the intervention: it is the talk itself that is helpful"* (2012, p. 180). Collaborative therapy offers no defined structure, maps, formal techniques or underlying presuppositions about content, purpose or direction of therapy; so essentially, the conversation itself becomes the practise (Anderson, 2006). However, language has limits. It can be ambiguous, unsaid, disordered. I wonder, do we need more than conversation with girls? Granted an authentic conversation can leave one feeling heard and award a tremendous sense of hope; however my voice of experience says, "Girls need more than this to survive this world." I ponder. I asked Harlene the question;

> How can therapy (with girls) move from an exercise in language to building skills for thriving in the ever shifting demands of relating and self?
>
> ***…one would think embedded in this question is the idea that a therapist is to help someone learn skills. This is not my perspective. I don't think that I need to help someone build skills, I think that in therapy one can have a shift in meaning, one can have a shift in behaviour, there are many kinds of shifts it is not necessarily a shift in language. And as people develop different meanings they begin to perform those meanings in new or different ways, from, you want to say, their usual ways, performing the old ways. I don't know what kind of skills you might be talking about.***
>
> I think what I am thinking about is when a girl leaves the room, and she does not have the "collaborator" there with her, supporting her, or leaves therapy. Are there things they learn or ways they learn that they can call up again when they are not sitting in there with you, and you are not being there with them?
>
> ***I would say absolutely…that does come out of the conversation…I think of it as dynamic sustainability: what is initiated in the therapy room carries over into the everyday life and is continually adapted to fit the particular circumstances. It is not a fixed, repeatable skill or otherwise.***

Our challenge in therapy is ensuring the *conversation* can have an impact outside the therapeutic sanctuary. In other words, does this conversation have *street value*? Do these encounters impact real life relations and performances in such a way that relationships (with self and between self and others) are *usefully transformed?* (Gergen & Gergen, 2012) The psychologist Karl Weick (1995) likes to ask, "*How can I know who I am until I see what I do? How can I know what I value until I see where I walk?"* Action becomes a performance of self. Performance is a vital to

expressing, giving and receiving self. Without performance the best of intentions fail to be meaningful – if performance is not realized therapeutic conversations remain well-meaning, but fail to generate transformation. Transformation is performed. ***Given we understand the self as a dynamic entity, working with girls it is imperative to grow "know hows,' and practical wisdoms which serve to reify and balance the new performance of "self."***

Generative Conversation

I am not negating conversation, and I become intrigued by Harlene's use of the word *generative.*

> ***…But think in terms of the process of therapy as a generative conversation; that it is out of the generativity of the conversation that something new or different comes….So it is a very different way of thinking about therapy, it is a way of thinking about conversation or dialogue as transformational.***

The dictionary informs us *generative* is:

1. *Capable of producing or creating.* 2. *Pertaining to the production of offspring.*

It seems with our move to conceptualize a self "in between" (between self and self-other relationship) the emphasis of our investigation regarding transformation in therapy balances on understanding dialogic and relational encounters. It is here we will revisit and expand our theoretical ideas about dialogue, language and relationship while beginning to theorize about what makes conversation or dialogue *generative*.

Descriptive Dialogue

John Stewart and Karen Zediker (2000) offer two distinct conceptualizations of dialogue. Dialogue is either *descriptive* or *prescriptive.* Descriptive conceptualizations describe a formative process or a kind of "power" of language to create social worlds, identities, and cultures; while prescriptive versions have more to do with a "way of doing." According to Stewart and Zediker descriptive dialogue is represented by thinkers such as Mikal Bakhtin (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*, while prescriptive is represented by David Bohm (1996), *On Dialogue* and Martin Buber (2004) *I and Thou.*

Descriptive conceptualizations use the term *dialogical,* which we understand as a synonym for what is relational or interactional (Stewart & Zediker, 2000). *Dialogic* comes from the work of the Russian literary philosopher Mikal Bakhtin. Dialogic is responsive. All we ever say is in response to what is said before, and anticipates what will be said in response. Dialogic is grand and encompassing. It moves beyond words spoken in the moment by incorporating the residual of many words and many moments. Consequently, our speaking is not in a vacuum, but populates with endless descriptions, ideas, and relationships.

> *All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions.* (Bakhtin, 1981, Kindle Location 4139)

Given that all language utterances flow from tributaries of relational connection our ideas, talk and writings embody all the social forms of life of which we are a part. The concepts and ideas contained and communicated in our language are not personal and private, but inherently relational or dialogic. Shotter describes the *dialogical* nature of language. He makes the point that what "I say" in conversation is not just a product of "me," but is infused with the actions and experiences of my life in joint action with "you." He claims the act of speaking…

> *.. is influenced by both past and present others at the very moment of its performance, and their influences may be present too….it is located neither within the individual, nor out in society at large, but precisely upon the boundary between the two, in the interactive moment of speaking, as speakers are making connections between themselves and their surroundings.* (1995, p. 67)

Descriptive conceptualizations of dialogue describe a formative process, one which creates and sustains forms of life, social worlds, ways of coordinating actions and experiences of identity. Ludwig Wittgenstein's conceptualizations are also of a descriptive nature. For Wittgenstein "language games"[54] or "life games" create and are in turn informed by "forms of life" or social structures and processes in which we participate. He writes, *"…language-game is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the speaking of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life"*

[54] See previous discussion in Chapter 2

(1953:23). Lois Shawver describes the idea of games; "*...language games are little language within a larger language. It is like a poem within a book of poems. Each poem has its own rules, but some rules are used in multiple poems"* (2001, p. 242). The value of descriptive accounts of dialogue is found in its emphasis on the *narrative/relational/social* construction of knowledge and identity, moving us beyond the *spell of individualism* which has engendered so many complications for the functioning of girls in society. However, we must observe caution. The dialogic process may create and sustain a world or form of life filled with freedom and hope, but could also prove degenerative, promoting structures of enslavement, or processes of ethnic cleansing.

It was the shoes that brought the tears.

More than anything else it was seeing the shoes, the everydayness of the shoes, shoes of fathers and mothers, boys, girls, a bubbe, a zayde.

The shoes lay piled.

On a recent trip to Washington, DC my husband and I toured the Holocaust Memorial Museum. The museum led us on a haunting journey through word, text, and image, engendering within us a silence of horror, shock, and disbelief regarding what it means to be human. We joined fellow mourners on a solemn pace through the exhibits.

It was here, in front of the shoes piled outside the ovens of Auschwitz, my whole being was shaken with the realization - this is a relational construction.

How? Language failed me.

I was rendered wordless by how easily, and seamlessly this "form of life" was constructed.

Dialogic as process of relational and social construction is a *descriptive process* defining the universal human condition as relational (Stewart & Zediker, 2000). In the quest to unpack generative dialogue, it is imperative to look beyond descriptive processes toward *prescriptive* concepts of dialogue which make certain requirements of us.

Prescriptive Dialogue

Stewart and Zediker advocate prescriptive forms of dialogue. These authors, "*...emphasize the need to make principled choices to help the special kind of contact called dialogue to happen, rather than just acknowledging the already given "dialogic" nature of human reality"* (2000, p. 227). Recall Martin Buber for his philosophy of dialogue elaborated in his poetic treatise, *Ich und Du* or *I and Thou*. Note Buber's dialectic is not translated *I – you*, but *I – Thou*. *Thou* is infused with the sacred. Buber contrasts two forms of dialogue. The first comprises an *I-It* approach. *I – it* understands the other in the play of life as an *object* or *it* much like how a scientist would view the world with objectivity. In contrast, *I–Thou* signifies the *Thou* or *other* is sacred and to be met with the fullness of being. Ronald Gregor Smith states in his forward to Buber's book, *I and Thou and I and It*…

> *...are pointers to the human situation, in its intricate interweaving of the personal and the impersonal, of the world to be "used" and the world to be "met." There is one world, which is twofold; but this twofoldness cannot be allocated to (let us say) on the one hand the scientist with a world of It and (let us say) on the other hand the poet with a world of Thou. ...rather, this twofoldness runs through the whole world, through each person, each human activity….* (2004, Kindle Locations 85).

Each human activity and individual Buber calls to the *"hallowing of the everyday,"* by sanctioning each encounter of life to become a vehicle for the eternal *Thou.* He lays a mandate upon his readers calling for a specific human, even theological response. Maurice Freidman states of Buber;

> *I think he never despaired because he was ready to meet the new moment in whatever form it came with all of his being. And that perhaps is the secret, if there is one, of dialogue which can never become a technique or a philosophy, but only a living presence which is present to the present-ness of the situation and calls the other into presence too.* (Retrieved from; http://courses.washington.edu/spcmu/buber/buber95.html)

I believe Harlene touches on this when she states,

> ***So I think in terms of a philosophical stance, in other words, not in terms of techniques or structured steps in therapy, but in terms of ways of being and becoming.***

Generative dialogue is *communion*; a sharing and receiving of self. This particular kind of dialogic presence generates not simply knowledge or meaning, but we can understand *generative* dialogue as a form of dialogue which calls another into presence. From this *"communion"* we call girls into *presence and not absence.* Through this ever present sacred conversation, a place of humanity

with grace, one is acknowledged and made present. Thus, we have moved the locus of therapy from the mind to the *sacred place in between*. ***Generative dialogue is a sacred practice; mindful and present, it produces and creates presence in another while providing a safe holding place for the reality of another's experience.***

Thus, it is insufficient that *I as therapist* perform a **way of being**; generative dialogue *generates* a way of being in our **conversational partner**. The Gergens state, "*The birth of **myself**, lies within relationship*" (Gergen, & Gergen, 2012). Bakhtin takes this idea in a compelling direction. *Dialogic* is existence and "existence is dialogue;" therefore *dialogic* is an ontological term (Stewart & Zediker, 2000). Bakhtin writes, "*The very meaning of man (both internal and external) is the deepest communion. 'To be' means to communicate"* (1994, p. 284). Essentially, what is *dialogic* is core to what makes us human as we "generatively" speak each other into existence. Bakhtin states,

> *…just as the body is formed initially in the mother's womb (body); a person's consciousness awakens in another's consciousness.* (1986, p. 138)
>
> And *...a single consciousness is contradictio en adjecto. Consciousness in essence is multiple. Pluralia tantum***.** (1984, p. 228)

I am suggesting this adds to our quest to understand generative dialogue. Generative dialogue is that which awakens and joins another's consciousness, breaking down bounded being and emerging into relational being – or relational consciousness. The focus is not the client-therapist relationship, as something that exists between bounded self-contained individuals, but rather germination of **relational consciousness**. Updating our previous idea that ***a girl may borrow the consciousness of her counsellor; therapy becomes an emergent process, a practice of breaking down bounded being through consciousness sharing and awakening.*** A girl in therapy captures the words, truths, influences, reverences, and ways of being of her counsellor.

Vygotsky's idea of *Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD)* may support our understanding (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD is the development level a child has not yet reached, but has the

potential to function within given the collaboration of a more capable or knowing other (parent, peer, teacher, or therapist). Holzman and Newman state, "*Children learn and develop, according to Vygotsky, through being related to as beyond themselves, and being supported to play or perform, 'a head taller' than they are"* (2012, p. 186).

My client Belinda shared with me, "My Mother and I do not have a good relationship."

Belinda felt her mother did not "trust" her. This exasperated Belinda since she felt she was worthy of trust and not into "stuff." Belinda protested she had to report to her mother about everything she did; for example if she left Rachel's and went to Ashely's she had to let her mother know. Her mom often messaged Belinda throughout the day to see what she was "up to."

With some curiosity, I (the collaborator in perspective taking) asked Belinda if she knew what led to the lack of trust. Belinda reported there had been an incident in the fall which broke trust, but insisted everything had been "good" since then; she had complied in every way. I understood Belinda as a 15 year old teen was able to take perspective with support, but did not naturally assume this position. We chatted and wondered about mom, uncovering what we understood as mom protecting and perhaps harbouring a sense of fear for Belinda. I shared as a mother how I sometimes felt with my own children. Our collaboration moved Belinda onward; sharing my consciousness she had new eyes for her mother.

Continuing our conversation we pondered what Belinda could do (new performance). Turning over many ideas Belinda decided to experiment with freely offering information about herself, sharing with Mom that she and Rachel had watched a movie, popped popcorn and sat on her bed to talk.

The new performance became known as "opening the door to mom."

This too was a scaffold, lifting Belinda up another level in her consciousness ZPD as she generated further ideas about how she could continue to "open the door."

Belinda said to me today, "I am not the same girl I was four months ago."

We begin to understand, ***generative dialogue in therapy is well beyond positive thinking or creating new behaviours; it is a sharing and growing of consciousness, a transformation of***

"how do I be." Generative dialogue as a sharing of consciousness moves therapy beyond facts, interpretations, and analysis toward growth.

It is part of the human co-existence that teens clash with their parents in their ungraceful attempts to become independent. A friend's daughter had *"fallen off."* The family doctor diagnosed the teen with depression and prescribed medication. In addition, her parents arranged counselling sessions. During the first session, the counsellor concluded the parents expected too much of their daughter and that the girl's response was to seek attention and find some measure of resistance through depression. While intending to be interpretive and offer understanding, in actuality the counsellor's analysis served to create a blaming posture toward the parents. The teen refused to see the counsellor again. Despite good intentions, therapists can easily fall into a degenerative forms of dialogue, increasing blame and problem saturation. On the other hand, generative dialogue is *directional toward growth* rather than being an archeological dig for facts or interpretations. Working generatively the counsellor may have joined the teen to find ways to shape or build relationships with self, parents, and others. Gergen's account of generative suggests that, "*... generative is vital, catalytic, injecting relations with vitality, stimulating the expansion and flow of meaning, important to our future well-being"* (1994, p. 47). In my practice, once a girl has explored, named, and unravelled the problem's threads we often turn toward what needs to grow. When a girl is besieged with feelings of loneliness we look toward growing connection; when beset with anxiety we look toward her growing calmness, mindfulness, balance or voice. While generative dialogue does not offer a problem/solution dichotomy as a result of the *growing,* problems may dissolve. Generative is not a generation of solutions, outcomes, meanings or behaviours, but a growing of being, meaning, and ways of seeing. ***Generative dialogue does not dwell on what needs to be fixed, or stopped, but balances on growth and the creation of what is to come.***

Consequently generative suggests a form of dialogue which is directional, toward potential, rather than being focused on what is. Imagination is the inception of action. As I sit here writing I think about brewing myself a coffee - I have a flash, an imagining of the action prior to my action. On

a grander scale, I am sure the designers of the Large Hadron Collider "imagined" before this modern engineering feat flourished into reality. With a future making orientation, generative dialogue ignites a spark of imagination. Appreciative Inquiry, a process in business consultation and coaching, offers insights into generative dialogue (Cooperrider, 2005). In AI, the positive life giving core is the place of imagining and the vitality of an imagined and desired future (Cooperrider & Sekera, 2003). The *Anticipatory Principle* is one of the core principles of Appreciative Inquiry. It proposes, *what we expect we receive; the images we hold of the future guide our present; what we anticipate in our minds can actually influence the future we create.*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., one of most profound change agents of our time, understood the power of imagining. Dr. King did not become mired in the state of inequality; the ill treatment, suffered by African Americans, the brutal acts of injustice, the fact that Blacks could not use the same washrooms, restaurants, seats on the bus, or attend the same schools as Whites. Dr. King clearly and deliberately turned away from the mire of hatred and inequality and turned toward a dream of equality and possibility. He imagined a country where his children could attend the same schools as white children, where there was fairness, justice and equality for Blacks. Looking toward his *dream* people donned a new set of lenses, believing in new promises ahead. I use this principle in my work with families, inviting them to write an account of how they would like their family to be, a vision of what they dream about. The recorded dream generates a prescience as family members move toward it in profound ways. Gergen states, "*The question is not so much what people are doing, as what could they do otherwise to achieve better or more viable conditions of life? And if this otherwise could be imagined, could it be created?"* (in press). ***As generative dialogue in therapeutic conversation strikes a spark of imagination, a new consciousness germinates.***

Additionally generative dialogue takes us to a place of what "can be" through envisioning, *seeing deeply* or seeing beyond the everyday transactions of life (Quinn, 2000). *Seeing deeply* proposes diving below the surface; diving beneath the transactions of life toward what really matters. In Western society we are seduced by a busy world, living life travelling across the surface "horizontal axis," moving through time and getting things done. Quinn offers a metaphorical

example of seeing deeply describing the transformation of his son's view of a basketball. For his son, the "basketball" an orange and round object, came to be understood as a living way to connect with others, find enjoyment, and generate a level of fulfillment. Seeing deeply, seeing beyond the "basketball," seeing with a form of reverence, generative dialogue leads conversational partners below the transactional world to the world which *matters.* This may mean exploring the story underneath the story. *What is the story underneath the anger? What is the story I am telling myself? What is the story I am believing? Whose story is this?* As a therapist, I move in alongside a girl exploring meaning found below the surface. ***Generative dialogue provides a portal into the "vertical axis" of meaning.***

As a form of prescriptive dialogue generative dialogue interlaces a new relational consciousness with a new performance of self. Here, we are weaving a *prescriptive* kind of dialogical space. We are moving beyond the concrete back and forth of language to intertwined and intermingled relations with each other to a world of dynamic living in which we share consciousness, meaning, and selves (Shotter, 2012). Generative dialogue is a sacred practice, infused with the sacred *I-Thou*, balancing on the germination and growth of relational being. Here at the intersection of "relational being" and "performance" we catch a glimpse of Hopeful. The energy of therapeutic practice becomes a sharing of relational consciousness, moving girls toward "How do I be?" and toward accomplishing a self with a sense of steadiness and balance. Nevertheless, we need to continue to drive our ideas of social, relational, dialogical construction past descriptions or declarative statements to ask - social, relational, and dialogical constructions of what kind?

What does this "relational consciousness" look like? I am suggesting a need to clarify. For this, I need to speak with Dr. Kenneth Gergen. I will also have to ask your patience as we continue our journey through some philosophical territory. You are saying… are we not talking about how to counsel girls? Do you need to keep steering us toward this philosophical neighbourhood? As we have learned *theory informs way of being and way of being informs practice.* I am confident your patience will be rewarded.

Riding with Relational Consciousness - Dialogue with Kenneth J. Gergen Ph.D.

Kenneth J. Gergen, Ph.D. is a founding member and President of the Taos Institute and Chair of the Board, and Senior Research Professor of Psychology at Swarthmore College. He is a key figure in the development of social constructionist theory and its applications to practices of social change.[55] I begin my conversation with Ken diving in to the questions I had previously sent;

> *What does relational consciousness look like? We have come to understand relational consciousness as germinated from relational being, yet it appears we are describing a way that makes no requirements of us. If relational consciousness is to be transformative I have to ask, what kind of relational consciousness? What requirements does it make of us? Describing relational being as "a way," I feel compelled to say, "What kind of way?" There seems to be an underlying agreement about being "relational," but I feel we are failing to describe what this means.*

Ken directs me back to his book Relational Being (2009) where he writes about *generative* and *degenerative* relationship, as well as three chapters on practice (education, therapy and organizational practices) which describe ideas and ways of practice of relational being. He writes; "*I wish to distinguish between relational processes that are ultimately degenerative as opposed to generative. The former are corrosive; they bring co-action to an end. The latter are catalytic; they inject relations with vitality"* (p. 47).

However, he tells me;

> ***That is about as close as I come to a theoretical account, though I do fill this out with examples. I have not brought it together as one. There are inherent problems with this. As soon as we label it we contain it and make it available for judgement.***

He has not named the underlying attributes of relational being; they remain unnamed, and this becomes the focus of our conversation as we struggle together with these ideas. I wonder about a

[55] Dr. Kenneth Gergen also lectures widely on contemporary issues in cultural life, including the self, technology, postmodernism, the civil society, organizational change, developments in psychotherapy, educational practices, aging, and political conflict. Gergen has published over 300 articles in journals, magazines and books, and his major books include Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge, The Saturated Self, Realities and Relationships, and An Invitation to Social Construction, and Relational Being, Beyond Self and Community.

poetics of relationship in keeping with Caputo's (2007) poetics of the kingdom. His poetics rest upon the philosopher Jacques Derrida's thoughts regarding *justice, gift, forgiveness, and hospitality*. So I ask, "Are there attributes of relational consciousness we can name?"

Ken is reluctant;

> ***Let's think about it. If we name "forgiveness" as one, then we stand to judge when someone is not forgiving. By doing this we create what is not relational; it makes someone other. There are other problems too. When I am forgiving, I may set myself up as being morally superior.***

Ken explains naming may prove troublesome. It seems as we set "standards" we become open to judging those standards and categorizing people. Nevertheless, I fear we do this already, even using the word "relational." If I state, "That wasn't very relational," the action of my language closes relationship down, and I am setting myself apart from the "other." Pondering, I begin to realize that it is not the naming that is troubling, but the *judging*; naming reverts to a tool for judgement. It appears relational consciousness can rise and fall on judgement, as judgement becomes the wedge between self and other in relationship. Yet, there are times when judgement is required of us, when we cannot say *"live and let live;"* when a father abuses his child, when schools fail to protect children from harmful interactions, when a dictator wields powers of genocide. – must we not stand apart and judge? Must we not name degenerative?

Continuing, Ken and I surmise trying to pin down relational consciousness is comparable to describing the Sacred. Like the Sacred, it is ineffable. Words cannot contain it. Words put an end to it. Ken shares that as we try to stabilize the meaning of relational consciousness we only serve to close it down. I am reminded of the Ancient Chinese tradition of Taoism which emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao. The term Tao means "road" and translates "way," "path" or "principle." Tao is the process of reality itself; the way things come together while still transforming. In Taoism, however, Tao signifies something that is both the source and the energy behind everything that exists. It is ultimately indescribable; *"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be defined is not the unchanging name*." *(Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching)* As I continue to think about this, I agree, we cannot name, fix the meaning, or define relational consciousness, much like we cannot name the sacred - but can we in some manner speak out loud

the direction to which it points? As a student at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary, I learned that the Bible is not the Gospel; the Bible contains *Gospel*. In the same vein, *empathy, acceptance, love, grace, forgiveness, tolerance,* are not relational consciousness, but they do contain it; they set it in motion; they perform it. Only in speaking its direction do we save ourselves from relativism. Ken has named the direction – *generative*. I say to myself, "Again? The word generative? What does generative look like?" I have written about aspects of generative dialogue; *it is sacred, mindful presence; a sharing and growing of consciousness, striking a spark of what can be, balancing on what needs to grow while diving into the vertical axis of meaning.*

There seems to be a paradox - we are arrested from using language to describe the heart of social construction, which is a philosophy that grounds reality in language. Is there a place beyond word? Are there some things we only sense in deep silence? When I need to go beyond *word* I often reach for an apt metaphor or poetic response. I asked Ken; "Is there a metaphor or poetic that might describe it?"

> ***I like the idea of evocative metaphors in this case, and I discuss a number of possibilities in Relational Being. For example, I am fond of the metaphor of Indra's net.***

Indra's Net is a visual metaphor of the state of inner being. The net extends in all directions, and each knot represents a jewel reflecting the image of all other jewels in the net. The beauty of each jewel contains and expresses the beauty of all. Ken and I continue to struggle with these ideas, to chat and wonder. We wonder about metaphor, poetics, or a family of metaphors. I am sure this conversation will not be our last. I think our conversation has sparked more contemplations than answers.

It seems relational consciousness is like a toy underneath the blanket. For very young children when a toy is placed under the blanket it fails to exist. As a child grows she comes to understand the toy is simply hidden. Being relationally conscious we grow to understand under the blanket of our boundedness we are deeply interconnected relational beings. We see the splendor of being

and the unity of this splendor. With this "vision" we perform in generative ways. Ken suggests one thing we can say; relational consciousness includes **making self available to the relational flow.** In the end, Ken read me a poem:

> *Not so much looking for the shape as being available to any shape that may be summoning itself through me from the self not mine but ours.*
>
> *(From Poetics by A.R. Ammons)*

I am looking for the event of relational consciousness, an impossible description. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, I believe John Caputo's reflections on Derrida may offer some direction. Caputo writes (2007), "*Derrida sometimes describes the event by saying that while the event is possible, it represents a very special kind of 'perhaps'. This is because it is a prayer, not for what is straightforwardly possible but for 'the possibility of the impossible'"* (Kindle Locations 926-928). With a very special kind of perhaps, we say a prayer for *relational consciousness* - for the "possibility of the impossible."

Moses encounters God at the burning bush and asks, *"What is his name? Then what shall I tell them?"*

God says to Moses, *"I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation."* [56]

As a measure of the Sacred, relational consciousness has no name. It can only be spoken as "We Are."

I believe "We Are" on holy ground.

[56] *Exodus 3:14*

Chapter 8 Reflections and Notes from the Road

Rhizomatic Journey

Processes of Thought

Practices of Inquiry

Research as Moral Practice

We have come to the end of the "road." Wandering the landscape of girlhood we have sighted several road signs placed strategically along the way and gained relational perspectives, all while accompanied by our Social Construction Guide. The research itinerary has been a circuitous exploration, finding ways to construct meaning with regard to *identity, agency, consciousness, and relationship.* Engaging fellow travellers we have co-navigated therapeutic practices, while assembling a selection of *"practical wisdoms"* for girls. It is time to reflect upon the research, to explicate the processes of thought and practices of inquiry, and to account for the journey we have shared.

Rhizomatic Journey

When thinking about research a certain language comes to mind; words like cause, effect, variable, hypothesis, research question, and the downright intimidating ones, reliability and validity. This language sets research into a defined frame, a rational and objective frame, resting on a fulcrum of mathematical statistics within the *scientific/rational/individualistic* paradigm. Even many qualitative methods are bracketed by rational controls, such as how many times participants refer to X or Y. This inquiry is situated in the *narrative/relational/social* paradigm, grounded in a social constructionist framework. Veering away from X's and Y's, my exploration opens a way of investigating which is more fluid and organic. Yesterday, on my early morning walk at the cottage, I halted in my tracks spotting an

expansive and intricate spider's web. The web, only visible through the reflection of the low autumn light, was in the true sense of the word, "awesome." It shone in all its glory, intricately woven by a master weaver. My research has been an invitation to explore the elaborate web of girlhood, "*falling off*," identity and therapeutic practice with all their intricacies and nuances as I joined with practitioners whose practice was informed by social constructionism to make connections visible and available to us. Thus, my research was not a methodical search for linear causes, effects or even answers, but a wandering

through varied paths of understanding and meaning, approaching this inquiry, not by reasoning, but metaphor, poetic insight, and vocabularies of hope.

James Geary in *I is Another; The Secret Life Of Metaphor and How it Shapes the Way We See the World* suggests all creativity lies *"in the dance of metaphorical thought."* Metaphor opens us up or unhooks us, and Geary argues metaphor has a way of being impeccably precise,

> *The truth is metaphor is astonishingly precise. Nothing is as exact as an apt metaphor. Even the most mundane metaphors contain finely detailed descriptions, hidden deposits of knowledge that dig into a word's etymology will turn up.* (2011, Kobo Edition: *Chapter 2- Metaphor and Etymology: Language is Fossil Poetry)*

Geary continues by considering Poincaré. In Foundations of Science Poincaré uses the metaphor of hooked atoms to describe the creative mind,

> *During the complete repose of the mind, these atoms are motionless; they are so to speak hooked to the wall… during a period of apparent rest and unconscious work, certain of them are detached from the wall and put in motion. They flash in every direction through the space (I was about to say the room) where they are enclosed, as would, for example, a swarm of gnats or, if you prefer a more learned comparison, like the molecules of gas in the kinematic theory of gases. Then their mutual impacts may produce new combinations.* (1913, Kindle Location 6340)

Metaphor catalyzes this great "shake up," where ingenuity and creativity happen. Thus, I required a bold metaphor, one which propagated connections, entanglements, variations, tangents, digressions and associations. Here, I borrowed Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of "rhizome," not only as an illustration of this non-linear research process, but as a representation of the process of creativity and ingenuity itself.

> *A botanical rhizome is a network root system, which proliferates and runs horizontally as opposed to a vertical taproot. The vast proliferation of its growth allows the rhizome to rupture the earth and create new shoots, new life. The system of networks is vast with multiple entryways, and the beginning or end is indiscernible. So essentially there is no one plant but a myriad or multiplicity of connections.*[57]

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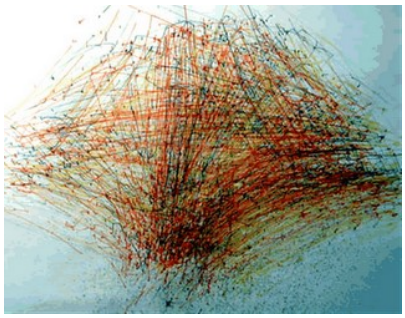
[57] *Retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rhizome.*

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) organize their model of thought around two distinct metaphors, the 'arborescent' and 'Rhizomatic'. The arborescent or root tree model of thought is fixed, stable, and vertical, comparable to a strong tree firmly rooted in the binary thinking of modernism. **Rhizomatic thought** is non-linear, horizontal, and nomadic, connecting living networks, flow, and movement. While arborescent thought suggests stability, rhizomatic thought, postmodern thought, suggests movement. Encompassing multiplicities and wandering in varied directions rhizomatic thought forms countless lines of thinking, acting, and being (Best, 1991). This was not an archeological dig for facts and truth, or an account of the skill of therapists, but my process was one of inquiry best served by understanding it as a rhizomatic journey of meaning. This journey, full of "multiplicity" (unity that is multiple in itself) incorporated rhizomatic **processes of thought** (deconstruction, hermeneutical exegesis and reflexivity), as well as multiple **practices of inquiry** (surveying the landscape of literature; interviewing the co-navigators; writing as inquiry; and reflecting on practice).



Processes of Thought

Rhizomic processes of thought, including deconstruction and hermeneutics became central in my approach. Rhizomatic thought echoes the notion of deconstruction as described by Caputo in *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*,

> *Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. A "meaning" or a "mission " is a way to contain and compact things, like a nutshell, gathering them into a unity, whereas deconstruction bends all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering.* (1997, p. 31)

As a deconstructive process, studying "*falling off*" I unhooked from fixed meanings and established theories about pathology and the essential self; instead I propagated connections, balanced on tensions, got lost in networks, and traversed plateaus, all while noticing ruptures of meaning that served as events of possibility. The very idea was to provide an opening for the invention of what could be, by challenging the "T" truths of pathology and essential self and

opening many "t" truths (Caputo, 2013) regarding *identity, agency, consciousness, and relationship* all while travelling toward therapeutic practices that matter.

So this inquiry has been a process of hermeneutics, which Caputo calls …the *art of negotiating multiple finite, lower-case truths, coping with the shifting tides and circumstances of truth while not allowing any eight-hundred-pound gorillas into the room* (2013, p.13). Hermeneutics, originally used in the exegesis of Biblical texts, is now understood as a kind of exegesis of social, historical and cultural settings. Valuing the importance of the historicity of human understanding I nested my ideas in historical and cultural context; transitioning from God as the source of truth, to reason, to truth being socially and relationally constructed with multiple interpretations of the world. Thus, setting ideas in historical and cultural context we broke through the limitations of specific (gorilla) discourses, such as the "spell of individualism" and "myth of perfect," and by means of interpretive thinking uncovered new and varied possibilities (relational being, the self-portrait, co-inherent self).[58] I did not use interpretative thinking as a tool to discover meaning, but rather interpretation served as a genesis of meaning, an opening to what is promising (St. Pierre, 2007). Accordingly, I intended my inquiry to serve as a genesis, a catalyst for meaning, an offering of ideas, while not making any claims to "T" truth.

Additionally, my inquiry stemmed from an interest in the potential to use social constructionism to understand *girls, "falling off," and therapeutic practices*. Social constructionism provided the road map, offering a way of thinking and an approach to understanding how realities emerge. Constructionist ideas work as a valuable tool to "unhook" us from traditional interpretations, allowing a way to explore the societal and relational discourses influencing girls, identity and agency. By accessing postmodern ideas as an alternative to the prevailing modernist influences of pathology and essential self, we rid ourselves of a heavy gorilla and uncovered more generative concepts - the ones that grant access to *therapeutic practices that matter*. I was not testing the

[58] Retrieved from: http://groups.chass.utoronto.ca/iih/AboutHermeneutics.htm.

validity of social constructionism; I was curious about how to use this theory to generate meaningful forms of life. Thus, I admit this is inquiry "with philosophy." I examined the world through a social construction and relational lens in order to generate awareness of what we know, how we know it and how we might influence (McNamee & Hosking, 2012). Consequently, the process itself was one of reflexivity. As constructionist ideas were imparted and absorbed I reflected on how these ideas influenced practice and myself as a researcher. The meanings generated bubbled up, offering the potential to saturate therapeutic practices and to generatively influence the lives of girls through therapy.

Moreover, I was not attempting to construct a type of therapy, I invited readers to explore how a social construction lens can make a difference with girls. If we saturate our ideas with social constructionism, a *"deep pool of theory,"* can we exchange defeating individualistic assumptions for more empowering ones, and fill our practices with hopeful ways to work with girls? In very simple terms, my purpose was to "help therapists help girls." By helping I do not mean "me helping you;" I mean helping as a co-relational joining (McNamee & Hosking, 2012); "cycling" together - therapists, girls, authors, colleagues, and readers - toward therapeutic practices that matter.

Practices of Inquiry

Gergen states, "*Required is a dynamic process of interpretation, one that remains open, flexible, and empathic…ideally, the qualitative researcher moves then, from 'methods of research' to 'practices of inquiry'"* (2014, p. 51). I have not been concerned with the methodical, but with a multiple of sites of inquiry; not with steps to "figure out" answers, but with the types of places to be explored. This has been a lengthy journey, travelling through various sites of inquiry; exploring a wide array of literature, interviewing therapists and scholars, participating in informal conversations with clients, writing as a catalyst for my thinking, and reflecting on my work with girls. It has been a rhizomatic journey, as we have wandered through these varied landscapes while moving toward meaningful sightlines for practice.

Surveying the Landscape of Literature

I surveyed literature which explored the geography of girlhood. I chose not to zoom my lens in on anxiety, depression, or self harm. I chose the wide angle lens. This served to pull us away from individualizing discourses, while opening our eyes to the various social and relational practices dotting the landscape. So my review was a rhizomatic journey through an eclectic group of neighbourhoods, including girlhood studies, relational attachment, development and socio-cultural context. Expanding my reading to include post-modern and constructionist authors, ideas about *identity, agency, consciousness, relationship, and society* came into focus. I took both a macro and micro sightline, incorporating ideas about discourse (*spell of individualism* and *myth of perfect)* as well as development, self and identity.

Interviewing - The Co-Navigators

In order to begin to co-construct therapeutic practices that matter, I turned toward therapists whose work is situated in social construction practice. The overarching question of the interviews became, *"How do therapist/practitioners (whose work is informed by social construction) find paths in therapy to support girls' balance?"* Moreover, *"How do we move past therapy as an exercise in language to give girls skills to thrive?"* With these questions in mind I moved beyond the literature and written text inviting exemplary therapists to join the journey and add to the conversation. I formulated a series of guiding questions, sending the questions to the interviewees in advance of the conversation.

Guiding Questions:

1. *How do we as therapists whose work is informed by social constructionist ideas make sense of girls "falling off?"*
    - *How do the girls you work with make meaning of falling off?*
    - *How do girls describe themselves? How do they understand themselves?*
2. *How do girls' create thriving identifies (sustaining subjectivities) living in a world full of various and challenging social and relational practices? How do we as therapist practitioners take these SC ideas and work alongside individual girls to create thriving, coherent subjectivities (sense of self)?*
    - *What are the identity stabilizers of the modern self?*
    - *How do we make these available in therapy/practice?*

3. *When girls become aware of particular discursive practices, can they choose to resist discourses that do not benefit their subjectivity?*
    - *How do you understand agency given we are socially constructed without essential self?*
    - *How do SC therapists promote a sense of agency/balance in girls?*
    - *What is the role of the therapist in growing girls' awareness of these discursive practices that may not benefit her subjectivity?*
    - *Individualistic and Social: how do you hold two perspectives at the same time?*
    - *How can therapy (with girls) move from an exercise in language to building skills for thriving given the ever shifting demands of relating with others and to self?*

The questions served as a jumping off point, not a structured interview. The purpose of the interviews was to provide entryways into thought, unravel concepts, look for ruptures or even tensions of meaning while co-navigating paths toward therapeutic practices. I searched not so much for answers; rather I used the questions as sparks to encourage my "fellow cyclists" to offer reflections, tangents, digressions, and wanderings. Originally, I invited a number of therapists to participate in the conversation, and I appreciate Christine Dennstedt Ph.D. for her willingness to spend an hour with me sharing her understanding and passion for narrative practice. Christine's interview offered street value insight regarding how these constructionist ideas surface within the therapeutic context.

Next, I turned toward Karen Young M.S.W., a leader at the Hinks Delcrest Institute in Toronto; Previously, I had attended one of Karen's narrative workshops and enjoyed her style very much so I knew she would be an articulate, conversational partner. In addition, Karen lives locally. Perhaps she would be willing to join in the conversation? Karen was positive and generous, passionate about the topic and supportive of my research. I felt our conversation was collaborative and honest. Karen brought her full self to the interview with an honestly about having struggled with these discourses as a girl.

Having interviewed two "narrative" therapists I sought to invite someone with another perspective. Harlene Anderson, as a developer of collaborative therapy and co-founder of the TAOS Institute, offered an alternative lens. Harlene's intense focus on the "person" questioned my category of

girls "*falling off*" and suggested she did not fit the singular descriptor or "category" of a social constructionist therapist, as her therapy is not situated in social constructionism. Initially, I believed this presented a problem as I was trying to capture the position of social constructionist therapists, but her position as postmodern truly situated her within the neighbourhood, so I retained her interview in the inquiry. I hoped Harlene would elaborate on how collaborative therapy could be helpful, specifically to girls, but she referred me back to her writing, emphasizing that for her it did not matter the client is a "girl" since she focuses on the "person in the room." I re-read sections of her work. Our collaboration continued beyond our interview as the transcribed text allowed me to unthread the hidden colours of meaning. I feel my writing of Harlene's interview generated a collaborative weaving of meaning.

In addition, I found my clients and families became my indirect interviewees. While I did not formally interview my clients, when I struggled with various concepts in my research I turned to my clients to invite their wisdom and input. This became a performance of inquiry. Being relational in my conversations, my clients' voices were forever present alongside me, tethering the theoretical ideals to real life and many times offering profound insights.

It seemed social construction was helpful as a map to move us beyond individualism and toward relational being; however being more descriptive than prescriptive it failed to act as a compass and point in a clear direction. I came to the end of the process with what seemed like insurmountable questions.

> *I understand relational consciousness as germinated from relational being, yet it appears we are describing a way that makes no requirements of us. If relational consciousness is to be transformative I have to ask, what kind of relational consciousness? What requirements does it make of us? Describing relational being as "a way," I feel compelled to say, "What kind of way?"*

With this in mind, I needed to broaden my interview scope by turning to a scholar I hoped could dig me out of the quandary. Ken Gergen, as a leader in social constructionist thought, was generous enough to speak with me. We struggled together with absorbing concepts about the

relational, the sacred, and the "other," but I feel we landed on the same nebulous word: generative. In the end, I needed to garner the ability to move forward without all the answers. The interviews became co-navigational, co-constructive and dialogical encounters. As Karen, Harlene, Christine, and Ken cycled with me, we co-navigated new paths of meaning while adding to the conversations about girls, therapy, and relational being.

Writing as Inquiry

Modernism holds to the understanding that language is representational of reality. Consequently, *writing* within modernist research tradition is understood as a "tool" to describe or mirror reality and form representations of the world. Gergen writes, like a mirror traditional "*... research remains dedicated to 'revealing,' 'illuminating,' 'understanding,' 'reflecting,' a given states of affairs"* (in press). The postmodern turn repositions the understanding of writing in research from a reflecting *mirror* to a method of creating reality, as language is understood as a dynamic generator of meaning. Thus, writing itself is a dynamic *practice of inquiry*, in which researchers, through their writing construct knowledge about people, themselves, and the world. Writing as *method* was introduced to the social sciences by Laurel Richardson (1994) and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2005). St. Pierre (2007) writes, "*Writing is, therefore, not an objectifying practice or a mopping-up activity at the end of a research project, but a creative practice used throughout to make sense of lives and culture, to theorize, and to produce knowledge."* [59] My writing served as a method of inquiry. Following each interview, I transcribed the dialogue into written text. The text became my dialogic partner as I spent hours reflecting and interacting with it, constructing paths of meaning. Initially, I listened to hear what mattered most to the therapists. *On what did they tend to focus? What was the main idea of the conversation?* Then, encouraged by Marie Hoskins, my adviser, I began to "unthread" the text looking for ruptures of meaning, places I felt uncomfortable, confused, or energized:

> *What do we expect of girls? How do we change society? I connect with Karen in feeling powerless. What is agency? How is agency possible if we are relationally constructed?*

[59] Retrieved from: www.sociologyencyclopedia.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/subscriber/

> *My girls don't always have a voice, how can they speak a voice? Why is no one talking about emotion? Why do we use words like generative? What does generative mean? If we are relationally constructed…so what? What does is matter if Harlene has a way of being…how does this matter to her clients? Social construction feels like a movement…toward what? Relationships can so easily be degenerative. Interestingly, Jesus had some pretty good ideas…What is relational consciousness and what does it require of us?*

With all of these questions and thoughts swirling around in my head, I began to write. My writing became my thinking and my thinking my writing. Thoughts became known to me as I wrote them on the page. Ideas grew and changed as I explored the transcripts. My writing became a rhizomatic exploration, not reporting on what my co-navigators said, but holding on to their words as lines of flight that took me away. Each cyclist handed me a baton, and I wrote onward committed to sharing a voice of meaning. The rhizomatic writing provided the connections I may otherwise never have seen, and thoughts I could not have thought in isolation. I travelled back to the literature to bring forward ideas I had explicated in the discussion, while concurrently reflecting on my practice. In addition, I found myself gravitating to metaphors to draw pictures of my thoughts. Reflecting on practice through vignettes and personal stories, I opened windows into complex concepts. Writing itself became central as I made every effort to pen the manuscript in a clear and approachable style.

Richardson (2000) uses four criteria for evaluating the merit of qualitative writing in research. The reader is invited to assess this study with me:

1. ***Substantive contribution:*** *does the account demonstrate a deeply grounded social scientific perspective? Does it seem like a true account of social life? Does it contribute to understanding of social life?*	Grounded in the social construction perspective my inquiry stemmed from interest in the potential to use social constructionism to understand girls, "*falling off*," and therapeutic practices that matter. Constructionist ideas opened a way to explore the societal and relational discourses influencing girls, identity and agency while opening new possibilities for therapeutic practices. The end point: a contribution toward therapeutic practices and practical wisdoms for girls.
2. ***Aesthetic merit:*** *Is this piece aesthetically pleasing? Is it interesting to read? Is it creative on any level? Does it invite interpretive response from the reader? Is it artistic, complex, satisfying, not boring?*	The work has a definite flow and creative story carrying the reader through the text. Cycling through various neighbourhoods, concepts, and historical periods, using metaphor, story vignettes, and added quotes, the work is brought to life. It is an approachable piece of social science writing.
3. ***Reflexivity:*** *How has the author's subjectivity been both producer and produced in this text. Is there a sense of self awareness and self-exposure?*	This work was a journey of discovery for myself and a personal offering for therapists working with girls. The process, a subjective exploration of social constructionism, culminated with genuine philosophical questions regarding relational consciousness and its direction. In the end, I needed to move forward without all the answers.
4. ***Impact:*** *Does this writing affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions? Does it impact my practice or move me to action?*	The story produces an emotional response regarding society, our girls, and what a steep challenge we face as therapists working with girls. At times throughout the text there were points I felt hopeless, however, I believe I offered an underlying hope through social and relational constructionist ideas. For me, the new questions were about relational consciousness and explicating that more fully. These questions, while outside the scope of my dissertation will be carried with me as I go forward. Even though I have written in a "friendly" manner, I am confident this is a deeply academic work. I believe the strength of this work is that it is "practical" but also deeply theoretical. I warrant I have succeeded in marrying the two. Given that it is a dialogical piece of writing it invites a move toward action.

Reflecting on Practice

Viewing my practice alongside the Social Construction Guide brought ideas down to street level. Struggling to understand, and reflecting on how these concepts were evident in the therapy room became one of the most impactful learning experiences. Each day as I encountered clients I garnered new ideas that brought life to my inquiry. I shared these insights through short vignettes from my personal perspective. These were not intended to be transcripts of therapy sessions, but windows into how we understand theory emerging in practice. However, it is not simply to understand how our theory plays out in practice, but essentially to grasp the idea that we "do" theory. Theory is practice.

Research as Moral Practice

Part of my duty as researcher is to explore the idea of "validity," in other words the quality, trustworthiness, and soundness of my research. Lather (1986) writes about four transactions which contribute to the validity of qualitative research design: **triangulation of methods** (multiple data sources, and theories) **reflexive subjectivity** (some documentation of how the researcher's assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data) **face validity** (established by recycling categories, emerging analysis, and conclusions back through at least a subsample of respondents) and **catalytic validity** (some documentation that the research process has led to insight and, ideally, activism on the part of the respondents).

Triangulation of methods, reflexive subjectivity, and catalytic validity are present in this research. Through the rhizomatic process, we experienced strong triangulation or what Richardson (1994) refers to as "crystallization" (since in the postmodern context there are more than three sides) of data sources and processes of inquiry. Data sources included literature, interviews, client stories, writing, and social constructionist philosophy, while processes of thought were comprised of deconstruction, hermeneutics and reflexivity. Reflexive subjectivity speaks to how the "data" or inquiry impacted subjectivity, my thoughts, feelings, ideas, and actions. It required that I reflect; how was I different as a result of this process? I believe this became evident with my struggle to

come to terms with relational consciousness, and as social construction became a living presence in my everyday life. This was also a process of catalytic validity, as the research itself became an experience of praxis or a process that served as an invitation to a moral order.

McNamee and Hosking, in *Research and Social Change, a Relational Constructionist Approach* dileberate about "quality" in research and its catalytic impact on moral orders;

> *...how we might explore, (judge?) the "soundness" and utility of any process of inquiry (any research)—after all we have said that 'not anything goes.' Who decides what counts as good research, on what basis, and on what criteria?* (Kindle Locations 2250-2252),
>
> And
>
> *We felt that the term "quality" addressed our belief that our actions serve as invitations into moral orders (just as they emerge out of local moral orders) and thus they serve as ethical possibilities, the "quality" of which are endlessly unfolding.* (2012, Kindle Locations 2260-2262)

So within the relational construction neighbourhood the authors move the centre of gravity for "sound" qualitative research, from knowledge claims to action and relational practice. Looking beyond the quality of knowledge claims, they suggest what counts impacts moral orders,

> *So, put very broadly, our interest is in the possible worlds that are (not) opened up, the 'new' ways of being in relation that can (not) emerge, and how helpful these are to the different local forms of life that are implicated. This is the context of our reflexive concerns, not the more usual one of examining the quality of our knowledge claims and possible sources of error.* (Kindle Locations 2307-2309)

Essentially quality research is constructed in relational processes, and has a moral impact upon the researcher, the research participants, the research reader, and life worlds. This is a very different kind of rigor. The crux of the research is the relational processes it sets in motion. I suggest my research qualifies under these parameters, setting in motion supportive ways of relational practice for therapists and awakening a new way of being for girls.

Likewise, this work is an endeavour of praxis. Aristotle defined a distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis*. *Poiesis* is a purposeful and rational action with the aim of making a contribution. Like cooking, knitting, or house construction it is a "making action" which is intended to bring a

product into existence (Stewart & Zediker 2000). While *poiesis* is purposeful, p*raxis,* is an action directed toward the achievement of an end. The end is not a product, but a realization (the making real) of some morally worthwhile good (McNamee & Hosking, 2012) such as therapeutic practice or education. Stewart and Zediker write;

> *Praxis cannot be understood as a form of technical expertise because identification of the "good" which constitutes its end is inseparable from a discernment of its mode of expression….its concerns are always with a specific situation in a particular context. It is not "productive" because it does not yield ethically neutral knowledge of effective skills and techniques; rather, its product is morally right action.* (2000, page. 229)

The authors claim as a result of these differences *poiesis* relies on the kind of knowledge that Aristotle termed *techne*, and *praxis* relies on the kind of knowledge that he called *phronesis*, or "practical wisdom" (Stewart, & Zediker, 2000). This inquiry is not an exposition of technical knowledge, but a *phronesis*. It is not the construction of the product (dissertation, book, manual), but is intended as *praxis*, a practical wisdom, a creative act; not a mirror reflecting how constructionist therapists work with girls, but a window looking out toward what is possible.

As readers/therapists bring their own lived experiences and subjectivities to the reading of this text, it becomes their dialogical partner, no longer a static "set of words," but a generative action, producing practices that matter and forms of life. St Pierre writes; "*Writing, then, is not a neutral activity of expression that simply matches word to world. It becomes a task of responsibility as researchers create people, practices, and cultures in the texts they write."* (2007).[60] My role as author becomes to open a genesis for dialogue and my research a dialogic experience of meaning, drawing from literature, reflection, clients and families, interviews and interview texts. So in essence, this work is *dialogical*. It is not a static document about how to "help therapists help girls," but, in fact, is intended to engage therapists and practitioners in a dynamic way they bring

[60] www.sociologyencyclopedia.com.libaccess.lib.mcmaster.ca/subscriber/

their own lived experiences to this text. My dissertation, this writing, serves as a dialogic partner to the reader I have never met. Essentially the text may serve as an ongoing construction zone for therapists dealing with the limitations and influences of modernist individualistic assumptions in practice. Likewise, the "findings" are not "the" therapeutic practices that matter, but an offering, one set of ideas, varied concepts, and posited questions to enhance the practices of therapists. Finally, I believe my research is in keeping with the comments of McNamee and Hosking,

> *We are especially interested in exploring practices that (re)construct soft self-other differentiation—what we have called relationally engaged practices. They seem to involve certain practice orientations: shifting from pathology to potential, entertaining multiplicity, suspending certainty, entertaining possibilities, moving from critique to appreciation, and moving from e-valuation to valuation.* (2012, Kindle Locations 2045-2048)

I have opened the window, offering my "hidden thoughts" and questions, writing in my personal voice, bringing forth a chorus of fellow cyclists while narrating stories from practice. Additionally, I purposefully held an awareness, or what Reason and Rowan (1981) call "objective subjectivity" that I am inviting others into a very specific relational constructionist world, one way of talking and one moral action.

The New Path

I live on the Niagara Escarpment, and the Bruce Trail[61] is accessible from just outside my front door. Several weeks ago on my morning hike along the trail I encountered a large and ancient tree that had fallen blocking the path. Undeterred, I easily ducked under the tree and continued on my way.

Yesterday, when I reached the prostrate tree and attempted to "duck" under, I realized it had shifted, leaving very little room to maneuver underneath…but with newly found agility I scrambled under and continued my hike.

I came upon my little challenge again this morning. However, I noticed something different. Fellow hikers had begun to pioneer a new path through the forest, beyond, up and around the fallen tree. I decided to follow their lead, foraging a new path, following in their newly established footsteps.

Following the *new* path, I am joining postmodern thinkers - pioneering through, beyond, up and around - ridding ourselves of the heavy presuppositions of individualism, challenging the limitations of a bounded identity, and relentlessly seeking hopeful relational practices. It has been a rhizomatic journey, winding past signposts of meaning, up and down concepts of *identity, agency, consciousness, relationship, and society* while experiencing the wide landscape of girlhood, "*falling off*," and therapeutic practices. Together with my fellow cyclists: Karen Young, Christine Dennstedt, Harlene Anderson, Ken Gergen, and our Social Construction Guide we too have co-navigated a promising path. Through captivating conceptions

[61] The Bruce Trail, Canada's oldest and longest marked footpath, provides the only continuous public access to the magnificent Niagara Escarpment a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve. Running along the Escarpment from Niagara to Tobermory, Ontario, it spans more than 890 km of main Trail and over 400 km of associated side trails.

of relational consciousness and generative dialogue we have found promising sightlines for practice.

I recognise the emphasis for our work with girls rests on co-relationally constructing ways and means of balancing self and the self-other relationship, enhancing the self-portrait, engaging identity stabilizers, and offering tools to grow a thriving performance. With the understanding of the "self" as the action of a verb, and not the stasis of a noun, the focus of practice with girls moves toward the development of *"How do I be?"* Working with individual girls, therapists realize this through generative dialogue, a sacred practice which produces and creates presence in another. I think what is most important is understanding therapy with girls as an emergent process, a practice of breaking down bounded being through consciousness sharing and awakening. In addition, my research has served to clarify the "client-therapist relationship," as one which moves beyond a relationship between two bounded selves, toward one which embraces relational consciousness. So ultimately what does it mean to matter? What matters are therapeutic practices grounded in the "deep pool of theory" of social and relational constructionism. Drawing from this theory we know practices matter when we as therapists move in alongside:

- upholding key generative relationships as primary (parents, family, peers, community)
- aiming the trajectory of practice toward growth - of self and self other relationships
- fashioning the self-portrait by amplifying strengths, values, and relational voices
- assisting girls to employ practical wisdoms and identity stabilizers
- accounting for the impact of social discourses, narratives, and messages
- seeking the vertical axis of meaning
- growing voice and presence through awakening and sharing of consciousness

Finally, the surface story has been about girls and therapy but, the leitmotif holds to the importance of a *"deep pool of theory"* - relational consciousness - and its import for life and practice. Although we have not been able to "speak" relational consciousness aloud, there is faith – this is a "way." Social constructionism opens the "way" of understanding which informs our talking and directs our actions - where we purposely look with new eyes, speak with new words, and find new

ways of being together. We have a vision of the world which is transformational, considering the world as perhaps others cannot. We have unique vision. This vision includes a deep sense of those around us, an ear for the concerns and dreams of others, and a deeply "sacred" posture from which to participate in life.

We have reached our end, not with a collection of hard facts or measurable data, but with a scrapbook of expansive ideas, new lenses for understanding and practical wisdoms for girls. I am returning from this journey not only with new knowledge and a deeper understanding of my own practice, but transformed, altered, different than when I began. Social construction has seeped into my pores.

...Ellen

Scrapbook

Road Signs

Safety Zone: Girls Speaking Their Truth - To create safety zones for girls to use voice to say what they think and feel.

Work Zone Ahead - Developing Perspective Taking Consciousness - To nurture consciousness including devotion to a group of people or set of ideas beyond the self. To help girls find "sparks" of purpose and meaning.

Slow Down - Attune to your Kids!" - To focus on the primacy of a solid attachment relationships, principally with parents, and secure scripts for the development of adolescents' resilience and security.

Caution Bridge Out - Stable Society under Construction - To develop a safe and stable society; offering girls a stable sense of who they are and a strong sense of belonging. To move beyond individualism and the relentless pursuit of identity through consumerism.

Danger Falling Rock: Agency and Coherence Required - To provide safety tools for girls to develop agency and a coherent self-portrait.

Welcome to Hopeful - To make way for more hopeful ways to construct self, a construction of self as a relational being.

Therapeutic Practices that Matter

Balance

- ***The emphasis of therapeutic practice that matters becomes ways and means of balancing self and self-other relationship, enhancing becoming, engaging identity stabilizers, and offering resources to grow a thriving performance.***
- ***With the understanding of the "self" as the action of a verb (way), and not the stasis of a noun (self) the focus of therapeutic practices that matter moves beyond "Who am I?" to "How do I be?"***
- ***Given we understand the self as a dynamic entity, working with girls it is imperative to grow "know hows," or practical wisdoms which serve to reify and balance the new performance of "self."***

Direction

- ***Girls build thriving subjectivities by keeping to safe pathways, and connecting to supportive real-ationships which support balancing on her values, beliefs, knowledges and abilities.***
- ***For the girl a new way of seeing the problem, external from herself and through her "visibility lenses" opens new possibilities and new positions.***
- ***What we want for girls is to take notice and evaluate inner relational voices, learn to protest and challenge voices of despair or shame, and in turn reach for voices of faith, confidence and hope.***
- ***As therapists, we recognize the challenge of relying upon dialogue alone, moving practice toward effective mediators of voice.***
- ***A therapeutic practice that matters includes listening with a silent mind and listening to understand, not to be understood.***
- ***The therapist may serve as a relational voice of wisdom subsequently as an inner voice of wisdom for a girl.***
- ***A girl may borrow the consciousness of her counsellor as one who is sturdier and wiser with ideas about how to find safety.***

Purpose

- ***A girl may borrow the consciousness of her counsellor; therapy becomes an emergent process, a practice of breaking down bounded being through consciousness sharing and awakening.***

Generative Dialogue

- ***Generative dialogue is a sacred practice; mindful and present, it produces and creates presence in another while providing a safe holding place for the reality of another's experience.***
- ***Generative dialogue in therapy is well beyond positive thinking or creating new behaviours; it is a sharing and growing of consciousness, a transformation of "How do I be."***
- ***Generative dialogue does not dwell on what needs to be fixed, or stopped, but balances on growth and the creation of what is to come.***
- ***Generative dialogue in therapeutic conversation strikes a spark of imagination, a new consciousness germinates.***
- ***Generative dialogue provides a portal into the "vertical axis" of meaning.***.

Practical Wisdoms for Girls


WISDOM TO NOTICE HOW THE PROBLEM WORKS


WISDOM TO NOTICE WHAT SKILLS and STRENGTHS I ALREADY HAVE TO GET THROUGH THE PROBLEM


WISDOM TO EVALUATE INNER RELATIONAL VOICES AND REACH FOR VOICES OF LIGHT


WISDOM TO CALL ON OTHERS WHO SUPPORT ME OR BRING WISDOM


WISDOM TO SIT WITH EMOTION


WISDOM TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF AND KNOWING MY AIDS TO THRIVE - SELF CARE

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