As the Body Unfolds:
Examining Girls’ Changing Experiences with the Socially Constructed Labels
‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’

by

Robyn Barbara Legge

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Graduate Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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This study explored the lived experiences of girls with the socially constructed labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. Using a prospective, life history, qualitative methodology, girls between the ages of nine to fourteen years old were interviewed up to four times over five years for an extensive embodiment project. The present study investigated girls’ narratives of the ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’ dichotomy to deepen an understanding of how gender discourses affect how girls learn to live in their bodies. A total of 87 interviews were collected from 27 girls representing diverse social and cultural backgrounds as well as different urban and rural Canadian locations. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes using the constant comparison method from Grounded Theory. Examining the data from a feminist poststructuralist theoretical approach, three main dimensions emerged that described these girls’ experiences of living with these labels from childhood through adolescence. The first dimension described the shared cultural stereotypes of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. The second dimension delineated the social outcomes in terms of the privileges and consequences associated with each label in childhood and in adolescence. The third dimension highlighted girls own negotiated self experiences and identities in relation to this gender dichotomy. Through its prospective design, this research uniquely delineated the complex range of experiences girls have within gender discourses and explored how labels work to control and restrict girls’ freedom to stay connected to their self and body.
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DEDICATION

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Introduction

As girls transition from childhood into adolescence, there is an increased pressure from their socio-cultural context to conform to a more strict and rigid definition of femininity. This definition of femininity is rife with rules about how to ‘appropriately’ be a girl and woman – including rules on body shape and size, appearance, social power, subordinate relationships to and with boys and men, limitations on physical and mental freedoms, and ‘appropriate’ gender roles in and outside of the home. The damaging effects of these patriarchally defined limitations on women’s lived experience in their bodies and social world is extensive and widespread – from gender-targeted violence inflicted by others, such as partner abuse and sexual violence, to self-inflicted responses such as poor body image, disordered eating patterns, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviour, or cosmetic surgeries. Multiple qualitative and quantitative research studies evidence the disrupted relationship girls experience with their bodies most especially as they enter through puberty and into adolescence. This is the time when girls are pummelled with harsh lessons on what is acceptable versus not in their expression and embodiment of femininity. When de Beauvoir (1974) stated, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 301), she was speaking to this very process of socialization girls experience as they enter adolescence and are prepared for how to ideally ‘become a woman’.

Williams (2002) highlighted the importance of researching the development of femininity in stating, “there remains a deeper structure of gender identity glimpsed but for the most part untouched by empirical analysis: gender construction is deeply entrenched in patriarchy” (p. 47). Smith (1988) discussed femininity through two conceptions: the first suggesting that femininity is a set of ‘public texts’ organized and controlled by men, but which largely control and influence women’s embodiment of femininity; the second conception states that femininity is the way in which women actively apply their skills and work into these ‘texts’.

1
In other words, Smith (1988) has emphasized that women are not passive objects produced by socialization but rather that in terms of the rules of femininity, women “use, play with, break with, and oppose them” (p. 53). What women have available to make use of in their embodiment of femininity is controlled by very restricted and narrow constructs as defined by the larger patriarchal culture.

The journey from childhood into adolescence is a particularly challenging and critical period for girls. It is a period marked by drastic changes within their bodies as well as often first experiences of body objectification from their social world. Many girls begin to feel less confidence in their sense of self, their position as an individual, and most certainly in what it means to be a ‘girl’ in this newly charted context of adolescence. Gilligan and Brown (1992) described a shift for girls as they enter adolescence, where girls experience more stress, depression and a drop in self-esteem. Pipher (1994) described girls’ adolescence as a time when girls lose their competent and optimistic preadolescent selves and become fragmented in their sense of self, often submitting to the demands and pressures of adult femininity. Piran and colleagues (2002) documented, through retrospective accounts from a qualitative study done with adult women, that growing up in a girl’s body indicated a clear shift from a connected way of being in their bodies to a disconnection with their bodies entering adolescence. Studies such as the AAUW report (1991) and Piran’s (2001) study with girls in a dance school have demonstrated that the onset of puberty is a huge marker in the drop in girls’ self-esteem, as well as the increased preoccupation with body weight and shape. Researchers such as Gilligan (1993), Brown (1998), Piran (2001) and others, have been drawing much needed attention to the necessity, importance and relevance of recognizing adolescence as a critical time for girls.

There is recognition that feminist research is needed that focuses on the lives and experiences of women (Gilligan, 1993; Sherman, 2005). To extend on this plea, what is
especially needed is feminist research that focuses on the lives and experiences of girls in order to better understand the process of becoming a woman. Here, we can understand more comprehensively the early experiences that shape and influence girls’ later embodiment as women. By taking a critical perspective on the social context of girls’ lives, one can examine how power, language and discourse implicate particularly rigid moulds of femininity of which girls are expected and pressured to embody. Through examining the context of girls’ lives from a feminist perspective, we can move beyond problematizing girls and their experiences to contextualizing the problematic experience of growing up as a girl within a patriarchal social discourse.

While there are a plethora of discourses affecting girls and their feelings towards their bodies as they develop into women, it is particularly girls’ experiences with labels of femininity on their changing bodies that will be explored in this study. I am interested in examining how young girls moving into and through adolescence submit to, negotiate, make sense of, and resist patriarchal notions and definitions of femininity. These negotiations, submissions, understandings and resistances contribute to the current discursive field surrounding notions of femininity available to girls. I will be focusing particularly on labels that are directed at girls in late childhood and examining what happens to these labels as girls enter and move through adolescence. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the embodiment of gender roles with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. I will examine how girls are affected by and how they position themselves in multiple and complex ways along this continuum of expressions of femininity and the discourses regarding these labels. I will examine how their discourses and experiences are affected by pressures to conform to a narrow definition of femininity; how their positionings as gendered beings are restricted and constrained; and how these girls make use of the ‘set of public texts’ (Smith, 1988) defining the socially preferred embodiments of femininity. Smith
(1988) emphasizes that femininity as public discourse is used by those who are acting as agents of patriarchy and by those who resist it. I would like to examine the ways in which adolescent girls are living that both perpetuate and resist patriarchy’s definition of femininity.
CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

Post-Structuralism

Post-structuralism refers to a connected set of ideas or concepts regarding meaning and how it is produced, the way it circulates, the impact it has, and finally its connections with power (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1994). As various institutional, cultural, social, and linguistic factors come together meaning and power shift and change. Post-structuralism emphasizes the discourses and texts which make up social institutions and cultural products (Kenway et al., 1994). Foucault (1979) described discourse as referring to a socially constructed system of statements. This system includes language, interpretations, meanings, and evaluations, and it is this discourse that informs social practice. By engaging in social practices, the practice itself in turn becomes a part of and is situated within the discourse (Smith, 1988). Malson (1998) described discourse as,

Systematically constituting the objects, the individuals, the bodies, the experiences of which they speak. That is, from a poststructuralist perspective, discourses do not simply reflect some reality existing elsewhere: they actively and systematically construct particular versions of the world, of objects, events, experiences and identities, they construct particular power relations, particular regimes of Truth by which we live (p. 6).

A set of discourses is referred to as ‘discursive fields’ which consist of, “competing ways of giving meaning to the world and organizing social institutions and processes. They offer the individual a range of modes of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1987, p. 35). Discourse manifests meaning and through this human subjects are produced and power relations are both maintained and changed (Kenway et al., 1994). An individual’s identity, then, is “the on-going result of the discourses that have shaped her/his history and which shape her/his world and the
moment; it is constituted and reconstituted daily” (Kenway et al., 1994, p. 192). Discursive fields shape identity and continually constrain and enable individual thought and action. Individuals and groups are located within a complex web of discourses which offer many different ways of seeing and being themselves with many positions available to occupy. Responses to these discourses will depend on the ways the individual or group’s history and present come together – that is, they will draw on their discursive history and in differing ways consciously or unconsciously choose to take up or reject the current position offered (Kenway et al., 1994).

In examining labels of femininity, relevant concepts from post-structural theory are ‘positioning’ and ‘subjectivity’. Discourses produce ‘identities’ – that is a variety of subject positions – from which a person can speak or be addressed (Foucault, 1972). When an individual thinks, they are already placing or ‘positioning’ themselves within one or more of a number of historically created discourses (Weedon, 1987). In placing ourselves, we are creating a ‘subject position’ which is available to us within a discourse which is part of the overarching discursive fields. Subjectivity refers to “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). Post-structural theories on subjectivity can be described as capturing, “the active process of taking up certain subject positions in an ongoing process of becoming – rather than merely being in the world” (Jackson, 2004, p.673). Currie (1999) noted that post-structuralism, “through systems of signification and attendant processes of meaning-making, replaces the humanist Subject with notions of ‘subjectivity’” (p.287). It is important to note that these subjectivities are not necessarily unified, but rather often involve contradictory positions depending on the situation and environment (Leahy, 1994). Post-structural theories of power relations and discourse illustrate the construction of subjectivity as a constant, ongoing practice.
that is never complete (Jackson, 2004). Furthermore, our subjectivity is formed based on all of our various subject positions.

Currie (1999) discussed post-structuralism’s identification of language as the site of construction for our sense of self. Weedon (1987) highlighted the importance of language in post-structural theory when she stated,

As we acquire language, we learn to give voice – meaning – to our experience and to understanding it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity (p.33).

Language or discourse does not exist independently; rather it relies on its daily reproduction making it forever changeable (Hollway, 1992). Expanding on this idea, Malson (1998) stated,

“language can be understood both as an established system that pre-exists the individual and as a historically evolving system that changes because of its continual use” (p.26). This view implies that language does not simply convey already established meaning, but rather it involves “the more active labour of making things mean” (Hall, 1982, p. 64). This is particularly relevant to examining the concept of labels and how they are used within the current language of adolescent girls and their social context.

Foucault (1979) emphasized the importance of examining, not who has power, but rather how power operates and the consequences of those operations. Kenway et al., (1994) further explained,

These technologies of power/knowledge or discourses, seek to form ‘the subjects about which they speak’, their purpose is to regulate, to discipline, to define what is normal and what is deviant, what is desirable and what is not and so to divide people from each other and within themselves (p. 198).
A post-structural framework provides an understanding of how power is always implicated in social practices and in the discursive production of different forms of knowledge. Discourses, in constructing particular truths, realities and subjectivities, are therefore re-producing particular power relations (Malson, 1998).

**Feminist Post-structuralism**

Feminists have been critical of Foucault’s lack of attention to how women and men are differently positioned, disciplined and regulated (McNay, 1992). Butler (1990) suggested that it is through using a feminist post-structural framework that we can examine language and power structures that contribute to our understanding of how what it means to be a ‘woman’ has largely been constrained by traditional and patriarchal thought. Grogan (1996) described feminist post-structuralism as, “a combination of the espousal of social change fundamental to feminist critical theory and the focus on language and discourse offered by post-structuralism” (p.26). Kenway et al., (1994), stated,

> There is nothing particularly feminist about the view of post-structuralism… it becomes feminist, firstly, when matters of femaleness and maleness and the differences and dominations between and within them are made a central figure of analysis, and secondly, when analysis implies a challenge of some sort to any inequitable relationships of power which involve gender or sexuality (p. 190).

Feminist post-structuralism insists that the individual is always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. Currie (1999) explained further,

> Subjectivity is historically changing along with the various, sometimes competing, discursive fields which constitute subjectivity. Feminist post-structuralism offers an understanding of how our experiences as women have specific meanings, particularly our experiences of oppression (p.286).
This approach allows one to explore the ways the socio-cultural control of dominant groups are formed and challenged; it acknowledges the complex ways that institutions, meaning, power, subjectivity, and gender come together (Kenway et al., 1994). Malson (1998) explained feminist post-structuralism as the analysis of “ways in which women’s subjectivities, experiences and desires are discursively constituted and regulated and with elucidating the socio-historical specificities of gender power/knowledges” (p.39). Examining the politics of gender means, as Weedon (1987) stated, “recognizing the political implications of particular ways of fixing identity and meaning” (p.173) and “not taking established meanings, values and power relations for granted” (p. 175).

Of particular interest to this study is feminist post-structuralism’s focus on a woman’s body as a “site of political struggle” (Bordo, 1993, p.16). The idea of the body is central to Foucault’s (1979) theorization of power and knowledge – he argued that discourses “discipline the body” through “a multiplicity of minor processes of domination” (p.138). He conceptualized the body as the location where power relations most concretely manifest themselves (Foucault, 1979). Kenway et al., (1994) stated, “the body is a prime site for regulation” (p.203). Bordo (1993) discussed how feminist theorists initiated the dialogue critiquing patriarchy and its social construction of the body as well as the way women’s bodies are used in the struggle over power. She stated,

Feminists first began to develop a critique of the ‘politics of the body’, however not in terms of the body as represented…, but in terms of the material body as a site of political struggle…what Marx and later Foucault had in mind in focusing on the ‘direct grip’ that culture has on our bodies, through practices and bodily habits of everyday life (p. 16).
The body is historically and culturally a specific entity that has been and is being shaped and reshaped in different discourses and discursive practices and it is only possible to know the body in discourse, as it will always have been inscribed within social practices and power relations (McNay, 1992). Foucault (1979) emphasized that discourses are not only producing docile useful bodies but that there is also resistance; as one body can never be totally and completely subjected to one inscription, rather the body sustains a multiplicity of meanings. Malson (1998) stated,

Post-structural theory offers an account of subjectivity and the body, as produced in and regulated by discourses, which constitutes a useful framework for feminist analyses of many aspects of women’s experiences and of social reality more generally (p.31).

In politicizing the discourse of women and their bodies, Weitz (1998) stated,

The social construction of women’s bodies is the process through which ideas (including scientific ideas) about women’s bodies develop and become socially accepted. This is a political process, which reflects, reinforces, or challenges the distribution of power between men and women. Like all political processes, the social construction of women’s bodies develops through battles between groups with competing political interests and with differential access to power and resources (p. ix).

This study will examine in particular the ways in which the discourses surrounding concepts and labels of femininity shape and control girls’ lived experiences in their bodies.

In specifically looking at the benefits of this theoretical approach in researching lives of girls, it is suggested that,

Post-structuralism offers an understanding of girls which is able to accommodate
the complex qualities of girlhood. Rather than insisting that girls are one thing or another, it recognizes that they are all the above at different moments and in different circumstances. It recognizes girls as subjects who are variously ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ and acknowledges their commonalities and their many differences. It indicates that girls are productions and producers of themselves and their times (Kenway et al., 1994).

Feminist post-structuralism offers a way to examine how ideal girlhood and the rules of femininity are produced, circulated, and consumed within the context of real girls’ lived experiences (Adams & Bettis, 2003). It is important to hold a strong critical perspective of the rigid and narrowly defined discourses made available for adolescent girls to choose from.

Currie (1999) highlighted this in stating,

> While women actively make meanings through which they bring themselves, through subjectivity into being, they do so under conditions that are not their doing. These conditions can become conscious ‘objects’ of analysis only through cultural study which takes as its task demystification of both the social and cultural world and their making (p.310).

As social practice, discourses have powerful effects in that they regulate and normalize our behaviours and actions and define what is normal versus abnormal (Walkerdine, 1986). I am interested in pursuing further an understanding of how adolescent girls form and negotiate both contradictory and complementary subjectivities in terms of their positions within discourses of femininity. Of interest is examining how girls, as agents taking up subject positions, make choices about their femininity within the constraining discursive fields made available.

Feminist post-structural discussions of discourse and subjectivity present a useful and
productive position from which to analyze labels of femininity because of its acknowledgement of discourses and practices of both struggle and resistance (Kenway et al., 1994).

**Literature Review**

**Discourses of Gender**

Growing up as a girl continues to be an incredibly confusing, restrictive, and challenging journey. The pressures of femininity increase and are felt with more intensity as girls’ progress into adolescence. Girls must constantly be searching for ways to negotiate a gendered identity within the narrow definitions provided by patriarchal society. Adams and Bettis (2003) expressed,

> As ideal femininity has shifted, girls in the 21st century are faced with the problem of how far they can go in displaying femininity and masculinity, in what context such displays are appropriate and to what degree (p. 88).

Discourses about being a girl and being ‘appropriately’ feminine are found in all realms of a young girl’s life. Discourses about femininity “weave their way” (Kenway et al., 1994, p. 198) through other discourses such as how to be a good daughter; a successful student; about being social and having friends; about romantic relationships; about appearance, body, weight and shape; and about growing up as a woman. It becomes virtually impossible for girls to exist within discourses that do not also hold the rules of femininity – therefore restricting their sense of freedom within their bodies and limiting the possibilities for their developing self.

This study will take a critical perspective on the binary of femininity/masculinity as ‘normal’ or ‘natural’. Valocchi (2005) warned,

> By taking these categories as givens or as reified, we do not fully consider the ways that inequalities are constructed by the categories in the first place. These categories exert power over individuals, especially for those who do not fit neatly
within their normative alignments (p.752).

Rather, feminist theory emphasizes the importance of naming the ways that cultural practices and ideologies associated with femininity reflect a gendered power structure in which women are subordinate to men (Cole & Zucker, 2007). Collins (2004) identified five elements of dominant femininity in western culture: beauty, demeanour, marriage/family arrangements, sexuality and (White) race. This hegemonic femininity helps to maintain inequality through persuading subordinated people – those who do not quite match up to this form of femininity – that ideologies favourable to the dominant group are natural or common sense (Collins, 2004). Toner and colleagues (2011) developed the Gender Role Socialization Scale addressing how the internalization of prescribed gender role messages can affect women’s overall well-being. Two recent qualitative studies examined women’s engagement with hegemonic femininity and both studies found that women, regardless of whether they accept these rules of femininity, devote extensive time and energy thinking and worrying about these ideals (Krane, Choi, Baird, Aimar, & Kauer, 2004; Rubin, Nemeroff, & Russo, 2004).

In critically examining gender reform in education, Kenway et al., (1994) uncovered the presence of the notion of ‘normal’ girls. The authors stated that this is, “usually seen to be middle-class and Anglo. Such girls are positioned positively; their culture is made central. They receive an education couched in their own values” (p.199) Kenway et al., (1994) illustrated how the girls who do not fall under this definition of ‘normal’ are then positioned as ‘special’ or ‘at risk’. The authors suggested that this is then understood as due to “some sort of dysfunction in their family background” (p. 199) rather than understood as being positioned through a hegemonic definition of what is a ‘normal girl’. Brown (2003) emphasized this similarly when she stated, “girls are too often educated in a femininity stripped of color and texture, a kind of one-size-fits-all notion of girlhood” (p.59). Brown (2003) discussed how this
kind of hegemonic femininity only encourages girls to police one another, to exclude and reject girls who do not meet this norm; ensuring the continuation of this dominant cultural view of femininity.

Feminist post-structuralism suggests that discourses of femininity and masculinity are fluid and will change depending on the historical conditions. Therefore, really, there is no concrete, fixed meaning of what it means to be a ‘girl’, or the ‘ideal girl’, but instead this is constantly changing. Although the meaning of the ‘ideal girl’ is really a symbol, rather than a reality, it becomes positioned as truth about what makes up a ‘normal’ adolescent girl (Adams & Bettis, 2003). That which makes us feminine (or masculine) is not our female (or male) bodies, but rather the interpretations of our bodies and the social and psychological meanings that we attribute to our bodies (Malson, 1998). Femininity, from this theoretical perspective, is best understood as an empty category that takes on a variety of historically defined shapes within different discourses (Wetherell, 1986). Meaning is only fixed for the short term and is far from the realities of most girls’ lives, but this temporary location has definite and important social implications for all girls (Weedon, 1987).

Girls’ identities then, “are shifting and fragmented, multiple and contradictory, displaced and positioned as they are across the various discourses which historically and currently constitute their lives” (Kenway et al., 1994, p.192). Girls learn about discourses of femininity – those that are acceptable versus those that are not – and, come to define various normal, natural and preferable ways of being male and female, which construct identities in gendered ways and in multiple shifting, yet patterned, relationships of dominance and subordination (Kenway et al., 1994, p.198).
Malson (1998) encouraged a re-theorization of ‘woman’ as a multiplicity of various and often contradictory ‘femininities’. Femininity needs to be considered not as a coherent, unified form, but rather as arising through various discourses of versions of femininity (Leahy, 1994). These discourses do not always provide a concept of femininity that comes together neatly, but rather that, “individually they provide a range of subject positions which may well contradict each other in a particular situation” (Leahy, 1994, p.49). Butler (1996) described identity categories as “sites of necessary trouble” (p.372) – that in embodying one identity in a particular context, a women is then also silencing, erasing, or hiding – to herself and others – other expressions of her identity. Certain identities are more normalized and accepted than others and in response become taken up more often, demonstrating how responses to context acts to regulate available discourses. As a girl negotiates within the available discursive fields of femininity, she has to choose which expressions of her identity are safe to outwardly embody and put forth, therefore, inevitably silencing other parts of herself that might be considered more socially dangerous to express.

Rigid ideas of femininity influence women in many ways, and one particularly challenging world for women to break into has been the world of sport. Presently, we are seeing more involvement and acceptance of women in sports and we have seen an increase in recognition of girls and women participating in traditionally male-dominated sports. Unfortunately, in spite of these successes in sport, there is still a strongly entrenched notion of what is acceptable and encouraged for being an ‘appropriate girl’. So long as there are these limitations and expectations, there is a severe effect on the extent to which women can truly be seen as rightful participants and agents in sport.

Choi (2000) discussed the challenge of female athletes in stating,
Today, the female athlete is celebrated, but traditional notions of gender are still influencing how she is viewed and indeed, how she might view herself. If a girl or woman wants to play the masculine game of sport she must do so in conformity with the patriarchal rules that ensure she is first and foremost recognized as a heterosexual feminine being (p. 8).

Girls are therefore forced to continuously struggle with how their desires to be physically active affect their potential of meeting social demands and expectations of how to be appropriately feminine.

Ussher (1997) has proposed that there are at least four ‘performances’ or roles that women can take up in their negotiations of femininity: ‘doing girl’, ‘being girl’, ‘resisting girl’, and ‘subverting girl’ (with the term ‘girl’ being the conventional idea of perfect femininity). She describes these four roles as follows, ‘being girl’ is the role of being the archetypal feminine woman who believes in the differences between men and women as natural; ‘doing girl’ is when the woman chooses to follow the script of the archetypal femininity when it is considered to be, and only for as long as it is, to her advantage; ‘resisting girl’ is when the woman chooses to resist or ignore the archetypal script; and ‘subverting girl’ is when women challenge femininity and publicly and openly parody traditional scripts of gender.

In a qualitative study with adolescent girls, Brown (1998) looked at the changes in girls’ voices as they developed through adolescence. Discussions with the girls suggested that they learn through their interactions with parents, teachers, friends and boys; and that there is a dominant cultural context invested in reinforcing an image of conventional femininity that silences girls’ voices and expressions of thoughts and feelings. It was found that many girls silence their voices after having experienced negative consequences for speaking up or speaking out. Brown (1998) described the changes in girls’ voices as “ventriloquating conventionally
desirable images of femininity” (p.110) where she found that girls voices actually become “breathy, whispery, and higher pitched before puberty; that is before there is actually any physiological basis for such changes” (p.110), as though these girls were preparing for the silencing that was expected of them in adolescence to fit a particular socially desirable form of femininity.

In describing one particular participant who resists taking on traditional feminine roles, Brown (1998) discussed how this participant engaged in a very critical analysis of the girls around her who fit these more socially sanctioned ‘girl roles’. Brown (1998) commented that, through her criticisms, this participant is not actually interrupting the classifications of girls, but rather perpetuating them. She stated,

Her rejection entails a kind of ‘ventriloquistic cross-dressing’ – she is an adolescent girl speaking a patriarchal discourse about appropriate behaviour for girls and women. Speaking through masculinized voices about ideal femininity, she unwittingly contributes to the stability of narrow feminine ideals and categories; inadvertently she participates in the regulation of girls – and thus of her own – voices, desires, and behaviours (p.114).

By learning to define oneself as a girl by rejecting and going against other girls, this still limits and narrows girls’ experiences of their bodies and selves, while also forcing girls to participate in a larger discourse of women that is misogynistic, patriarchal, and limiting.

In examining the process of how adolescent girls ‘try on’ the rules and norms of gender, Williams (2002) conducted a prospective qualitative study that began with a group of girls in grade eight. Based on the girls’ narratives, Williams (2002) described the girls as being between the safe insulation of childhood and the strict demands of womanhood. The author described a process occurring where this group of girls are stepping in and out of the socially
defined discourse of femininity, in that, “they considered, talked, and laughed about dieting and dating, and then postponed enacting such activities for a more grown-up time” (p.30). Williams (2002) described this process as ‘trying-on-gender’, distinguishing this from the process of ‘doing-gender’ in that the former better captures the adolescent developmental and contextual process of the many phases of gendering. Williams (2002) stated,

Development involves change and transitions, and the trying-on-gender concept captures an interval of gendering: the experimentation and tentativeness that occurs at the critical transition from girl to woman (p.31).

The author conceptualized trying-on-gender as a segment or phase of the more general doing-gender process.

Narratives from this group of adolescent girls illustrated that the process of trying-on-gender is expressed through three characteristics: 1) as tenuous and relatively unstable; 2) as resistance; and 3) as exaggerated or subordinated femininity. Across the four-year study, the visibility of this process emerged more clearly as the girls progressed through adolescence. The first characteristic of being tenuous and unstable was expressed through the way the girls tried on gender by “hesitating then exploring, anticipating and reacting, and observing and making choices” (p.35). The second characteristic was found to be most strongly evident at the age of thirteen where girls actively resisted ideas of traditional gender norms. This was expressed through showing resistance to the thinness norm, experimenting with traditionally masculine roles, and an active denial of the relevance of speaking to gender. The third characteristic of exaggerated or subordinated femininity suggested that despite resistance at many levels, the trying-on-gender process generally promotes culturally prescribed feminine ideals centered on being attractive, compliant, and attached to men. Williams (2002) stated,
During the trying-on process, girls began to adjust their evaluation of gender characteristics and of themselves in terms of lived experiences. These girls began to adopt feminine standards of thinness and attractiveness and to base their own worth relative to those standards (p.36).

Prospectively, this study encountered that further into adolescence, such as in early high school; the girls struggled with feelings about their bodies and appearance in ways that they had previously dismissed or were not apparent in their narratives.

Examined more closely in this prospective study was how the intersection of class affects the expression of trying-on-gender. Williams (2002) looked at two communities distinguished by different socioeconomic levels – middle class and working class. While girls from both communities increasingly accepted the ideas of womanhood characteristic of gender stereotypes, there was difference as well. The girls from the middle class town began to build a discourse about womanhood that included characteristics such as: the importance of looking good, making themselves desirable to men, choosing compliance; while also stating that women can be assertive, play sports, ask for equal access and resources, and value competition. Williams (2002) stated,

Trying on gender in this community elicits a specific kind of conundrum. Relatively abundant resources encourage participation and competition, and the young women’s denial of gender inequality promotes a sense of immediate empowerment…However, even as these girls observe gender inequities, they explain them away as individual exceptions. Confidence is ultimately weakened because incidents are defined as separate and unconnected to any broader context (p.42).

In the working class community, girls closely linked the trying-on-gender process to sexuality and traditional gender roles. With fewer options and less access to resources, girls
from this community acted out sexuality more openly. Common beliefs included, that attracting boys requires an exaggerated expression of femininity, a girl’s identity was described as tied to boys and a boy’s status, and that sex was equated with maturity. Williams (2002) stated,

The girls in this community are certainly more open to talking about sex, and they suggest that teenage sex is very common, even expected. Sexuality provides mechanism for agency but also exacts cost. The overwhelming visibility of sexuality and attending circumstances in this community, such as abortion, pregnancy, and teen motherhood, seems to limit other options and encourages traditional gender roles (p.44).

Similar to the girls from the middle class community, these girls tried on gender within the discourse provided by their lived social context. Attached to the concept of ‘being a woman’ were those same aspects of a focus on appearance, an attachment to men and compliance with the current gender norms. While the girls from the working class community were more assertive in seeking male attention, they did not channel that assertiveness towards voicing demands for equal resources as did the girls from the middle class community.

This author contributed to the findings that early adolescence is a tenuous time for girls. This research described the ‘trying-on gender’ process as particularly important during this developmental stage. Demonstrated in the results is that,

Early adolescence is surprisingly mutable and open to a range of femininities.

However, the window of opportunity for shaping alternatives to the dominant emphasized femininity may be fairly narrow (p.47).

This study found that the first year of high school was a particularly salient time of influence for defining a limited version of femininity including attractiveness, attachment to men, and compliance. The author found that in the process of ‘trying on’ gender, eventually the large majority of girls adopted and espoused a version of traditional white heterosexual femininity.
Williams (2002) intersected class within the discourse of femininity providing a more enriched understanding of the pressures placed on the embodied experiences of adolescent girls.

Expressions of femininity more often than not involve ‘disciplinary practices’ on girls’ and women’s bodies. Practicing femininity is necessary in the maintenance of the current gender institution. Yancey Martin (2003) discussed this process in stating,

Gendered practices are learned and enacted in childhood and in every major site of social behaviour over the life course…In time, like riding a bicycle, gendering practices become almost automatic. They sustain gendered relationships and, in turn, reconstitute the gender institution (p.352).

This practicing involves instructions and lessons and repetitions from and within our social world to gain familiarity and competence with our role of femininity and over time the practices are second nature (Yancey Martin, 2003). Butler (1993) addressed the engagement of these disciplinary practices as the ‘performativity’ of femininity. She states, “Performativity is construed as that power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (p.20). Butler (1993) emphasized the body as the site where these practices are most often produced. Labels of femininity act as a disciplining practice for how girls should or should not live in their bodies. Bartky (1988) pointed out that there are a vast array of institutionalized and non-institutionalized ‘disciplines’ which “produce a mode of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (p.63). Bartky (1988) documented the disciplinary regime of femininity producing the female body as a spectacle. Sawicki (1991) explained disciplinary practices aim to,

Render the individual both more powerful productive and useful and docile. They are located within institutions…but also at the micro level of society in the everyday activities and habits of individuals. They secure their hold not through their use of violence or force but rather by creating desires, attaching individuals to specific
identities and establishing norms against which individuals and their behaviours and bodies are judged and against which they police themselves (pp. 67-68).

These practices involve extreme self-criticism on the body and this takes an incredible toll on girls’ developing sense of self. In a discussion on disciplinary body practices, Rice (1988) stated,

Virtually all women in our culture are socialized to associate self worth with appearance. We learn to shave, paint, pluck, camouflage, colour, curl, trim, tuck, tighten, diet, and exercise before we begin to seek answers to other questions, like who we are and what we hope to do with our lives. These pressures to conform to society’s standards of beauty and femininity cause us to become profoundly insecure about our bodies. Insecurity gives way to hate, as we come to realize how unattainable the ideals really are (p.1).

Greer (1999) highlighted this association between self worth and appearance when she stated, “Preoccupation about her appearance goes some way towards ruining some part of every woman’s day” (p.26). A study with adolescent girls in a high school setting expressed concerns about what a focus on appearance teaches girls,

What [the girls’ program] did not do was offer them any sense of themselves beyond their own image and others’ gaze. They were implicitly taught that girls (as opposed to boys) must be concerned about managing and constructing others’ impressions of them through the way they look (Kenway et al., 1994, p.205).

As girls become women, the rules of femininity are well entrenched as cultural norms. Without a critique of these cultural norms,
Many women self-blame and internalize a sense of private bodily failure, embarking on fitness routines, plastic surgery, and dieting practices to rectify anxieties about bodily lack (Dworkin & Wachs, 2004, p. 612).

A major driving force for the self-imposed disciplinary practices arises from what Malson (1998) described as the “normalizing gaze” (p. 173). She stated,

Surveillance (or its possibility) and the normalizing gaze are techniques of individualization and control. It is by being visible that one is constituted as a (disciplined) individual (p. 173).

In looking at girls’ and women’s focus on their diet, body shape and weight, we see a perfect example of this discipline in action – a form of normalizing gaze or critical self-examination. These disciplinary practices arise from self-surveillance, measurement and comparison with an ‘ideal’ norm of femininity (Malson, 1998). Young girls’ emerging interest and enthusiasm for the world around them and finding their place in that world is too often high jacked by these disciplinary practices of femininity as girls enter adolescence. This study will explore how girls negotiate and police their own lived experience in their bodies within this discursive field of how to ‘appropriately’ embody femininity.

Labels of Femininity. The use of labels allows one to categorize and define complex identities into simplified terms. Labels are often used to help clarify what might otherwise confuse and mystify in its ambiguity. While we use labels to make meaning of the world around us, labels also control and discipline expressions of identity. As Brown (2003) stated, “Labelling people gives the illusion of control and order in the midst of chaos” (p. 103). The need for labels defining gender norms grows out of a culture determined to maintain a discourse suggesting a natural inequality between the sexes. Valocchi (2005) discussed the cultural influence on identity in stating,
One way that socially constructed identities become shaped and stabilized is through their institutionalization in social structure and culture. In this way, the learning and enactment of these identities are partly constrained by the social scripts, social labelling, and material resources associated with various identities and by the force of externally imposed political meaning (p. 755).

In order to control identity formation and expression, labels are powerfully used to control the way one lives in their body. In our society, this form of social control is particularly targeted at controlling the way women live in their bodies. Paechter (2010) discussed, “embodiment is particularly salient to the co-construction of tomboy and girly girl identities” (p. 222). Labels constructed on expressions of femininity arise from and are defined from a patriarchal location, they are “male definitions of the female self” (Jack, 1991, p. 104). The concepts surrounding gender stereotypes arise from a discourse of femininity that implies women’s place is subordinate to men.

Early on in childhood, there is a distinction made between girls who are ‘girly’ and girls who are ‘tomboys’. These labels were constructed based on norms and expectations for how girls should live in their female bodies and what is appropriate in terms of play, interests, dress, activity, and relationships. When girls deviate from what has been socially defined as appropriate, they are seen as deviating from what is being a girl and are therefore acting like what is appropriate for being a boy. This deviation has disturbed patriarchal preferences that maintain girls and boys are not only different, but that girls are subordinate to boys. Girls deviating from the norm were categorized with a label suggesting quasi-boy, the label ‘tomboy’. Conversely, girls who emphasize an ideal femininity are given an emphasized status as girl, a ‘girly-girl’. In a case study of an elementary classroom, Reay (2001) was introduced to four different labels for girls: the ‘nice girls’, the ‘girlies’, the ‘spice girls’, and the ‘tomboys’. The
‘nice girls’ were defined as those who were hardworking, well-behaved, and feminine; the ‘girlies’ were those who were also feminine but in the most emphasized way and who were known for their flirtatious focus on the boys; the ‘spice girls’ were those who were seen by teachers and other students as ‘bad’ because of their assertive and disruptive behaviour, while the girls themselves insist they are simply demonstrating ‘girl power’; and the ‘tomboys’ were those girls who rejected all things feminine and adopted mannerisms, behaviour and interests similar to the boys (Reay, 2001).

This categorization of girls from a young age has numerous consequences on their freedom to explore their identities and lived experiences in their bodies. Paechter (2010) problematized this in stating, “constructing tomboy and girly girl as oppositional Others thus perpetuates strongly stereotyped identities” (p. 226). Brown (2003) stated,

A culture that constantly refracts individual differences through narrow gender stereotypes makes it harder and harder for girls to stay with the reality of their everyday experiences and to stay connected with each other in a way that’s fluid, open, and responsive. It’s very hard to hold onto the other parts of yourself when at seven years old you’re labelled a ‘delicate girly girl’ for liking dresses or for being calm, or when you’re considered a tomboy if you’re bold and don’t mind getting your pants dirty (p.64).

What is clear from the labels used on girls’ expressions of femininity is that it begins from a place that is male-owned, male-defined, and male-controlled. Girls and women are defined in relation to what is a patriarchal perspective on how girls and women should behave in order to maintain a long lived state of male privilege. Brown (2003) highlighted this in stating,

Girls are quick to learn about power – who has it and how to get it – by watching,
getting close to, imitating, and pleasing those upon whom it has been conferred
‘naturally’…to be female in a culture so invested in boys and girls being different, while
at the same time privileging qualities associated with maleness, offers a girl limited
options. The fiction is repeated so frequently as to become reality: she can identify with
boys or she can act in ways that boys find pleasing and desirable (p.30).

Brown (2003) problematized these labels of femininity in stating,

While she can attempt to gender pass – copying boys’ behaviour and endorsing
boys’ interests and values and judgments about girls – of course a girl can never really
be a boy. Signs of her assertiveness, individuality, and competitiveness will be read
differently and responded to differently – she’s too bossy, rude or mean. And by trying
to be a girl boys desire, she can never really be or know herself (p.31).

Behind these constraining labels of femininity lies a patriarchal culture that thrives on the
denigration, subordination, and victimization of young girls, giving girls “every good reason to
either embrace or disconnect from those qualities that make one traditionally feminine,
conventionally a girl” (Brown, 2003, p.132).

A further exploration into the literature on each label will follow. Yancey Martin (2003)
encouraged a careful analysis of the concepts of masculinity and femininity, emphasizing the
multiple ways these concepts are practiced depending on positioning of class, race/ethnicity,
sexual orientation, and other social statuses. Choi (2000) also emphasized recognizing the
limitations on how girls and women perform gender, stating,

Gender is a performance that all women take part in, but it is also a performance that is
influenced by the woman’s sociocultural context and representations of femininity that
are available at the time. Sometimes, this does not give the woman complete freedom to
choose the positions she would most prefer. (p.44)
The feminist poststructuralist approach emphasizes the need to look not only at the label but to examine the discourses in which those labels are situated. Exploring the ways that socially constructed labels work to control and maintain the status quo of diminishing women and femininity helps us understand the complex nature of how girls learn to live in their bodies. This will be explored further by examining each of these labels separately through both empirical and theoretical literature.

‘Tomboy’. The discourse surrounding the label ‘tomboy’ is one that arises in early childhood and is applied to girls who step outside of the norm of ideal femininity in their dress, play and behaviour. This is evident even from a simple examination of the definition found in the Oxford English Dictionary: a girl who enjoys rough, noisy activities traditionally associated with boys. Within the literature, the discourse about ‘tomboys’ regularly situates girls based on what is considered ‘natural’ and ‘ideal’ for girls and therefore positions them as borrowing from what is ‘natural’ and ‘ideal’ for boys. Research studies have also demonstrated that the label ‘tomboy’ is consistently associated with traditionally male qualities and activities (Burn, O’Neil & Nederand, 1996; Carr, 1998; Legge, 2005; Morgan, 1998; Paechter & Clark, 2007; Safir, Rosenmann, & Kloner, 2003; Van Volkom, 2003). Morgan (1998) conducted a quantitative study which asked participants to define ‘tomboy’ behaviour. The results indicated that involvement in sports, rough and tumble play, outdoor play (such as climbing trees, getting dirty, playing war games, etc), interest in ‘boy toys’ (described as trucks, action figures, bikes, skateboards, etc), having mostly male friends, wearing ‘boy clothes’, and role playing as boys, were all listed as behaviour leading to labelling a girl as a ‘tomboy’. Halberstam (1998) described ‘tomboyism’ as “an extended period of female masculinity” (p.5). Plumb and Cowan (1984) defined ‘tomboys’ as girls who do not limit their preferences for activities along gender lines and feel comfortable playing games traditionally reserved for boys. There is ambiguity in
the literature on ‘tomboys’, in that some argue that ‘tomboyism’ is a case of cross-gender or masculine identification (e.g. Burn et al., 1996), while others assert that ‘tomboys’ should be categorized as ‘androgynous’ as they are performing both masculinity and femininity (Plumb & Cowan, 1984). Safir et al., (2003) stated, “the ubiquity of tomboyism is the lack of clear guidelines for what is normative, appropriate behaviour for preteen girls” (p.402). Jones (1999) linked the label ‘tomboy’ with femininity in stating,

Girls get labelled ‘tomboys’ as if such ‘natural’ activities and the female were incompatible…that in order to partake, they often had to become a quasi, honorary boy. These attempts to break out of the tightly constructed identities available to the female child end up taking refuge in the symbolic spaces of male childhood because linking ‘natural’ childhood with femininity is so problematic. (p. 125-126).

This discourse of femininity that created the label of ‘tomboy’ is challenging for girls and women on many levels. It suggests that girls and women do not naturally have desires to be physically engaged with their bodies, to move and play in the outdoors, to be involved in sports, to be competitive, to be loud and boisterous, and to have cross-gender friends. Those girls and women who do have these desires are seen as the ‘quasi-boy’ described by Jones (1999) and are seen as deviant girls, or girls who are merely borrowing from what is seen as rightfully male territory. Adams, Schmitke, and Franklin, (2005) commented,

The cultural meaning of the female body and how it is regulated and controlled takes on a particular meaning when discussing women’s participation in sports because athletic endeavours require women to engage their bodies in practices that are typically associated with masculinity…sports play a powerful role in the reproduction of patriarchal gender regimes (p. 19).
It is risking social exclusion and mockery to become too involved in sports as a woman. Cockburn and Clarke (2002) found that adolescent girls recognized that to be socially acceptable as an appropriate teenage girl, they must not take part in sport, particularly ‘boys’ sports’, nor exert themselves physically in any other way. Throughout history, as women have entered more and more into the masculine domain of sport, this domain became carefully monitored and protected as a rightfully patriarchal space. This patriarchal space is maintained through the increasing attacks on female athletes’ bodies as gender deviant (Cahn, 1994).

Adams et al., (2005) described,

Female athletes still reside outside the parameters of normative femininity, particularly those who play competitive ‘male’ sports or who appear to resist compulsory heterosexuality. Mainstream society continues to be troubled by the athletic, muscular, makeup-free, jewellery-free, sweaty female body (p.20).

In taking a critical perspective on the way in which women are treated as athletes, we cannot ignore the ways that dominant discourses of femininity have regulated the bodies of girls and women to construct a ‘natural’ female body as one that is passive, inactive, and inert (Adams et al., 2005).

A study examining ‘tomboy’ behaviours in childhood and relating it to adult gender roles also found that ‘tomboyism’ was related to masculine qualities and not related to feminine qualities in adulthood (Van Volkom, 2003). This study found that participation in stereotypically defined masculine activities as well as neutral activities in childhood was related to ‘tomboyism’. Specifically women who participated in basketball, baseball, soccer, and wrestling were more likely to be ‘tomboys’, as well as were women who participated in the neutral activities of running, swimming, and tennis. Whereas those women who played a musical instrument (defined in this study as a ‘feminine’ activity) as a child were less likely to
be seen as ‘tomboys’. This analysis demonstrated the perpetuation of norms surrounding the concepts of who ‘naturally’ would want to play sports. Girls are seen as merely crossing gender lines by participating in sports. Adams et al., (2005) emphasized this when they stated,

With the exception of the military, sports is the most masculine, male-identified institution, and from its inception, it has been a closely cultivated arena for males to demonstrate their privilege and power. Unsurprisingly, the entrance of women into this sacred sphere has been carefully monitored and regulated (p.17).

In this study by Van Volkom, (2003), the author felt that the general activity level of the child is more important in determining ‘tomboyish’ behaviour than the specific activities that are divided along gender lines. The author suggested,

It may be that an active child who participates in a number of sports and games, regardless of whether they are traditionally masculine, feminine, or gender neutral, should be defined as a tomboy (p. 613).

What is particularly concerning in this statement and the conclusions of this study is the lack of critical perspective on the incessant and pervasive need to label behaviour seen as acting out of the norm. Rather than concluding that because women are reporting a high participation level in sport and physical activity in childhood we must reconsider the necessity of labelling this behaviour as deviating from gender norms, the authors perpetuate the gender stereotypes and suggest that we should merely be widening the definition of ‘tomboy’ to be more inclusive and therefore conclude the existence of a higher number of ‘deviant girls’. As stated by Adams et al., (2005), “cracking patriarchy may involve more than simply allowing girls to enter the playing field” (p.18). This form of interpretation and theorization simply maintains the patriarchal division of what are appropriate gender roles for girls and boys and men and women.
In an exploratory study of ‘tomboy’ identities, Paechter and Clark (2007) and Paechter (2010) discussed their case studies on children aged nine to eleven at two schools in Britain. The researchers found that while parents and peers would identify certain girls as ‘tomboys’, those girls themselves rarely identified entirely and unproblematically as ‘tomboys’. They reported that many of the girls described themselves as ‘a bit tomboy’. Their results demonstrated that teachers tended to hold a more black-and-white view of what is a ‘tomboy’. The teachers focused on two main characteristics of girls in identifying them as ‘tomboys’, and that was being physically active and being determined or a ‘go-getter’. The girls who self-described as ‘a bit tomboy’, described their parents as generally accepting their ‘tomboy’ behaviour. Although the girls from the working-class school complained more of feeling pressure from parents to be more ‘girly’, particularly in their style of dress. The researchers found that the children themselves had complex and thoughtful views about what it means to be a ‘tomboy’ and saw this identity in less black-and-white terms than teachers or parents. There were clear ideas from the children about what a ‘tomboy’ looks like. They described traditionally masculine styles in clothing and hair style. The most common attribute named by the children for ‘tomboys’ was related to clothing, where they stated that ‘tomboys’ did not like to wear skirts and did not like wearing pink. Another marker was if a girl chose to wear pants at an event where girls would usually dress up; this was seen as a sign of ‘tomboyism’. They also described ‘tomboys’ as not minding getting dirty or messy in their appearance. ‘Tomboys’ were seen to wear messy hair and resist parental attempts to tidy their hair (Paechter & Clark, 2007). The researchers found that much of what defines a ‘tomboy’ is similar to what would define a ‘masculine boy’. Paechter (2010) stated,
Particularly with regard to their dislike of feminine clothing, some tomboys are, in rejecting what girls do, simultaneously embracing what boys do: that is, they are embracing the expulsion of the feminine (p. 231).

The researchers (Paechter & Clark, 2007) reported debate amongst the students at both schools as to whether playing football was a necessary or sufficient condition for being a ‘tomboy’. Many of the children added that along with playing football, a girl who was passionate about football, played particularly well, was competitive and took winning seriously were added components indicating a ‘tomboy’ identity in a girl. The researchers noted that all the girls who were named by peers as ‘tomboys’ or who took that identity themselves were physically confident and took sports seriously. Other qualities the children listed as ‘tomboy’ indicators included enjoying play fighting or fighting-related sports, and willingness to stand up for themselves physically or fight back. They also found that children described ‘tomboys’ as behaving like boys and being interested in ‘boy stuff’ (Paechter 2010; Paechter & Clark, 2007).

A qualitative, life-history study with fourteen adult women who self-identified as ‘tomboys’ demonstrated further the ways in which women are considered to be crossing gender lines (Carr, 1998). Emerging from this analysis was first a theme showing avoidance of stereotypically feminine activities and preference for masculine ones. Many of the women felt that traditionally masculine activities and interests were more enjoyable than traditionally feminine ones. Secondly, a theme emerged surrounding the dislike of feminine roles and female role models. The women endorsed patriarchal values in which femininity is less rewarded, appreciated, and is seen as subordinate to masculinity. The third theme suggested these women expressed a perceived need for emotional and physical protection from men. A fourth theme demonstrated an awareness and longing for the advantages of masculinity. Through reminiscing on their childhood, many of the women remembered recognizing that boys had more activities
available to them and had more freedom and power than the girls. A final theme identified was
the desire for the attentions of male role models. Many women stated they remembered noticing
as children that boys received more attention than girls, especially from fathers or other male
role models. The researcher took these themes and organized them into two main categories:
the rejection of femininity and the choice of masculinity (Carr, 1998). The idea of rejecting
femininity is discussed by Brown (2003),

Given the choice, they distance themselves from the victim position – the girly
girl who screams or falls when people chase her – in favour of ‘boys’ stuff. Of the two
stereotypes girly girl and tomboy – this at least provides them some self-
respect…Approximating a masculine ideal can buy respect and distance from weak or

When we examine the label of ‘tomboy’ from a body perspective, it is clear that
‘tomboys’ are connected to their bodies and experience their bodies as efficacious and useful.
They are connected to the value of their bodies as a useful and powerful tool in exploring and
appreciating the physical world around them. In Carr’s (1998) interviews with women, she
illuminated this concept,

Respondents’ gender identities were not mere cognitive abstractions but embodied
practices. Active resisters were not merely playing at tomboyism but became tomboys
through routinized practice. Tomboys did not merely act tough but experienced their
embodied selves as such. While individuals may not perform identificatory practices
merely of their choosing, it is through their daily external and internalized (embodied)
practices of resistance and conformity that gender identities are created and maintained
(p.549).
Harris (2000) also discussed the importance of connection to the body in the identification with the ‘tomboy’ label in stating,

> The concept of mastery came to have a highly physical cathexis for me. I felt in possession of a body image formed and streamlined away from the objectifying male gaze that stains and maintains so much in female subjectivity. Body image and self-state were focused and delineated by the impact of flesh on flesh, muscle to muscle, the body mix-up and shocks that do not usually arrive for women outside the funhouse or the bedroom (p.225).

Identification with the ‘tomboy’ label seems to give girls more freedom to roam, explore, get messy, exert strength, run, play sports and have fun within their body. Morgan (1998) found the following positively related to being a ‘tomboy’: more choice in activities and less gender directed preferences for the future. Also, being a ‘tomboy’ appeared to be related to developing qualities such as assertiveness and self-reliance. Results from two studies suggested that being a ‘tomboy’ increases a girl’s likeness and popularity amongst her peers (Hemmer & Kleiber, 1981; Reay, 2001), while in another study, being a ‘tomboy’ was linked to low popularity (Lobel, Slone, & Winch, 1997). McGuffey and Rich (1999) found that girls in childhood who took on ‘tomboy’ traits were not stigmatized by their peers. It is generally more acceptable amongst both parents and peers for a girl to take on the ‘tomboy’ role than it is for boys to display ‘girlish traits and behaviour’. This can be understood by examining how our patriarchal society rewards masculine traits and behaviour while devaluing feminine traits and behaviour (Burn et al., 1996). In discussing ‘tomboys’, Brown (2003) expressed,

> In a culture that values masculinity and the characteristics that go with it, separating from other girls – separating from an inferior, weak femininity so incapable of attaining real power and control – is the way to gain the power of maleness for themselves (p.31).
Halberstam (1998) conceptualized ‘tomboyism’ as a girl’s desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys. So long as ‘tomboyism’ is linked to a stable sense of a girl identity, Halberstam (1998) states that it can be a sign of independence and self-motivation. Therefore, one could see the role of ‘tomboy’ as liberating for a girl – to be free from the constraints of traditional femininity on the body, to be a ‘subject in the body’ rather than an ‘object of the body’.

This idea of a ‘tomboy’ identity providing girls with more freedom and liberation must be examined more closely and with greater depth. A further inquiry and deconstruction of the label suggests this might be overlooking the misogynistic implications underlying the need for a ‘tomboy’ label. The very label of ‘tomboy’ is derogatory, implying that the girl has deviated from her appropriate gender role. It may also leave the girl feeling limited to and embedded in the stereotype (Harris, 2000). It seems that as women challenge traditional gender roles, and traditionally assumed gender expectations through evidence of athletic competence, ability, and strength; the larger patriarchal system intervenes by devaluing and objectifying the body with notions of strict expectations of traditional femininity, thereby maintaining the diminished position of women in our society. The idea of ‘tomboys’ depends on very stereotypical concepts of what personality traits, behaviours, and attitudes are feminine and masculine.

Therefore, tomboys are associated with “both the subversion of gender roles and the perpetuation of an oppressive, dichotomous gender system” (Carr, 1998, p.531). Harris (2000) touches on this in stating, “A tomboy can appear simultaneously to refuse conventions and gender coherences and swallow them whole – gender conformist and gender outlaw” (p.224). A ‘tomboy’ could also be seen as an example of the ways in which girls are ‘ventriloquising’ the dominant culture’s belittling of femininity and can serve to disconnect them from other girls (Brown, 1998). Reay (2001) stated, “Even a tomboy’s performance of a surrogate masculinity
works to cement rather than transform the gender divide” (p.163). Renold (2006) spoke to this in discussing results on her study with children that found that “a strong component of ‘being a tomboy’ was the denigration of her ‘girly’ peers’ preoccupation with fashion and romance” (p. 503). Reay (2001) further expressed,

On the one hand, [tomboys] could be viewed as a budding masculinised new woman at ease with male attributes. Yet, her rejection of all things feminine could also be seen to suggest a degree of shame and fear of femininity…Implicit in the concept of ‘tomboy’ is a devaluing of traditional notions of femininity, a railing against the perceived limitations of being female (p. 162).

Brown (2003) also identified similar problems arising from the identification with this label in stating,

Girls who want to be boys – or want to have the power and freedom boys have – pick up more than skills. Because the boy role is defined by and gains power through its opposition to and denigration and rejection of the girl role, girls pick up value judgments about other girls that are deeply divisive (p.42).

Brown (2003) identified precisely the problem with requiring girls to fit rigid definitions of femininity when she expressed,

What this move to reject other girls’ experiences for boys’ construction of reality yields, of course, is not real power. All the posturing in the world doesn’t give a girl the cultural currency of a boy…it just gives her the status of a male ‘mini-me’. In the meantime, she’s cut herself off from herself and other girls – the real source of her power (p. 120).
In this manner, no matter how much power a girl derives from identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label, she unintentionally participates in a larger patriarchal discourse that devalues girls and women.

While this identification with the ‘tomboy’ label is tolerated and even at times encouraged in childhood, there is the expectation and associated pressure that a girl will conform to more traditional concepts of femininity as she enters adolescence. Jones (1999) described it in stating, “Girls are ‘make shift boys’ hanging around until puberty could provide them with a role” (p.128). Halberstam (1998) also recognized this shift in acceptance of the ‘tomboy’ role,

Tomboyism is punished, however, when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence. Teenage tomboyism presents a problem and tends to be subject to the most severe efforts to reorient (p.6).

Morgan (1998) suggested that it is not clear whether girls actually do stop the behaviour or just stop claiming the label. In other words, perhaps the girls, in recognition of the disapproval of ‘tomboy’ behaviours, begin to mask and hide their preferred ‘tomboy’ characteristics and behaviour as a way of fitting in more as a girl. A quantitative study had participants from three cohorts (college-age, middle-age, and seniors) answer questions about their childhood, and of the sixty-seven percent who described themselves as ‘tomboys’ during childhood, the average age of onset of ‘tomboy’ behaviour was five years old and the average age for the cessation of ‘tomboy’ behaviour was twelve years old. The five most commonly cited sources for who influenced cessation of ‘tomboy’ behaviour included: peers, interest in boys, growing up (maturation), family, and change in school (Morgan, 1998).

In examining what it is about entering adolescence that calls for an end to ‘tomboy’ behaviours, the inquiry from the body perspective makes it clearly apparent that the pressure to
relinquish the ‘tomboy’ self comes with the pubertal changes in the body. As a girl’s body starts growing into a woman’s body, the rules and constrictions of ‘being feminine’ come into play with full force. As Jones (1999) claimed, “the problematic relationship between femaleness and childhood is evident in the way that the development of female sexuality is seen as ending a child’s childhood” (p.132). The women interviewed in Carr’s (1998) study recalled that parents, peers, and teachers tolerated their ‘tomboyish’ ways in early childhood, but that there was an increasing pressure to conform to stereotypical femininity as they grew. They reported pressure in early adolescence to cease playing with boys and start playing with girls, as well as to start dressing, sitting, and acting more feminine. Many of the women reported eventually conforming to these pressures at some point in their teenage years by actively engaging in more ‘feminine behaviours’ such as, adopting a feminine appearance through clothes, makeup and posture; discontinuing athletic or other active pursuits, participating in girls’ peer groups; and flirting, dating, and having sex with boys. For some of the women, these ‘feminine practices’ would continue into adulthood, therefore supporting common cultural beliefs that ‘tomboyism’ is something that girls eventually ‘grow out of’, while for others the feminine conformity was short-lived (Carr, 1998). This abandonment of ‘tomboy’ characteristics in adolescence has been found in other studies as well (Burn et al., 1996; Gilligan & Brown, 1992; Legge, 2005; Morgan, 1998). Halberstam (1998) suggested,

We could say that tomboyism is tolerated as long as the child remains prepubescent; as soon as puberty begins, however, the full force of gender conformity descends on the girl. If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage and ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodelled into compliant forms of femininity (p.6).
A study by Cockburn and Clarke (2002) examined the dilemma of girls’ reduced participation in sport and physical activity, in particular with participation in gym class. In discussing the girls who continued to participate, they stated,

Girls who resist the forces of the gender order by ‘getting on with PE’ or ‘doing sport in spite of the hassle’ have a constant struggle to maintain this attitude and behaviour because the influence of the dominant forces that shape emphasized femininity are so powerful, compelling, and menacing. This is especially so during adolescence when identities are experienced as precarious and definitions of ‘male’ and ‘female’ become more salient, and girls are expected to grow out of any ‘tomboy’ tendencies (p.656).

Results analyzed in a qualitative, life history study (Legge 2005) found similarly that as girls enter adolescence, a clear and strong presence of the rules of femininity emerged. All girls expressed feeling pressure, from family, peers, boys, and the media, to be more ‘girly’ as they moved into adolescence. The girls expressed that during childhood they felt more freedom to ‘be themselves’; that there was more acceptance for diversity in appearance while also less focus overall on appearance; and more of a connection between their internal interests and needs and how they expressed those externally in appearance and behaviour. With the onset of adolescence, the girls expressed feeling more pressure to fit a homogenous idea of what a girl should look and act like. In adolescence, there were simultaneously stricter rules for fitting the norm and more desire to do so. The spectrum between the two gender labels of ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ shortened in adolescence, with the shortening taking place on the ‘tomboy’ end. Girls were expected to more appropriately fit their role as feminine young women. The girls who identified more on the ‘tomboy’ end described a phenomenon in which they began to masquerade their ‘tomboy’ self in order to keep up with that shrinking gender continuum. They
began to hide their ‘tomboy’ self more and more inward, thus increasing the likelihood of losing that self completely.

Empirical research has predominately demonstrated that the majority of North American women recall being ‘tomboys’ in childhood, suggesting that ‘tomboyism’ appears to be a normal and significant part of most women’s childhood (Bem, 1996; Burn et al, 1996; Carr, 1998; Gottschalk, 2003; Morgan, 1998; Plumb & Cowan, 1984; Phillips & Over, 1995; Van Volkom, 2003; Van Volkom, 2009). This evidence comes up against the discourse of ‘tomboyism’ that suggests the opposite, that these behaviours are deviant and not a normal part of being a girl. If the majority of North American women recall being ‘tomboys’ as children, it begs the question as to why these behaviours are necessarily seen as girls acting like boys or girls doing boy things. We must ask why this behaviour is not seen as acceptable girl behaviour as well, as a normal part of any childhood regardless of gender. The feminist poststructuralist framework provides a lens with which to examine this question, a way of understanding how socially constructed labels maintain a form of social control and order. In labelling these particular behaviours and desires as being a ‘tomboy’, there is maintenance and perpetuation of a social order reinforcing the patriarchal, dichotomous gender hierarchy that situates men above women.

‘Girly girl’. When girls engage in behaviours or put forth appearances that emphasize current ideals of femininity, they are given the label ‘girly girl’, a label that emphasizes their status as a socially appropriate girl. Taking on the ‘girly girl’ label has been referred to as “emphasized femininity” (Leahy, 1994). Cockburn and Clarke (2002) described this as, “a femininity that accommodates the interests and desires of men” (p.652). Adolescent girls described the pressures to conform to emphasized femininity as meaning, “to be traditionally pretty, to appear conventionally fashionable, and to pay constant attention to their appearance”
(Cockburn & Clarke, 2002, p. 653). Brown (2003) described girls who take on this label as knowing that, “there is power available to those who buy into cultural ideals and notions of good girlness” (p.64). The mainstream discourse surrounding ideal femininity suggests that identification with this ‘girly girl’ label is normal, appropriate, and rewarded with powerful social currencies. Brown (2003) identified this in stating,

Girls see that masking what they want and what they know to be true can buy them attention from adults and also friendships with other girls who desire that same feeling of power. Approximating a feminine ideal promises adoration and love (p.64).

Identified here is the illusion of power that is presented to girls if they choose to follow the socially preferred expression in being a girl and this emphasized femininity. What is not presented to girls is the tenuousness of that power, the challenges that will arise in staying connected to their own self and sense of positive embodiment. It is necessary that a further examination of this label take place in order to understand more fully how girls may suffer loss in their sense of self and their connection to their body through living this label. As Gilligan (1993) has shown, the loss of ‘voice’, self-esteem, and confidence from childhood to adolescence is most pronounced in the most conventionally feminine girls. As Brown (1998) has stated, ‘girlies’ and ‘nice girls’ sum up the limited and limiting discourse of conventional femininity. De Beauvoir (1974) recognized that there is the occurrence of conditioning into passivity and the straitjacket of ‘femininity’ that starts from the beginning of a girl’s childhood. She stated,

Up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them. If, well before puberty and sometimes even from early infancy, she seems to us to be already sexually determined, this is not because mysterious instincts directly doom
her to passivity, coquetry, maternity; it is because the influence of others upon the child is a factor almost from the start, and thus she is indoctrinated with her vocation from her earliest years (p.302).

De Beauvoir (1974) is naming the socialization that takes place demanding girls fit a strict ideal of femininity and how this messaging is even more strongly enforced at puberty. Brown (2003) also recognized early adolescence as a time when “gender-related expectations are intensified – boys are pressed to be traditionally masculine, girls to be conventionally feminine” (p.102).

In a study looking at femininity and physical education, teenage girls were asked to differentiate between someone who is ‘feminine’ and someone who is ‘unfeminine’ (Cockerill & Hardy, 1987). Their responses provided three categories. First, the feminine girl is one who is concerned with her appearance, she is slim, wears jewellery and makeup; while the unfeminine girl is one who is scruffy, wears no makeup or jewellery, and wears pants the majority of the time. Second, the feminine girl is sensitive, caring, weak, fragile, lady-like, and proper; while the unfeminine girl is rude, disorderly, and loud. Third, the feminine girl has little interests in sport, dislikes getting messy, prefers to be indoors and is inactive and unenergetic; while the unfeminine girl is sporty, enjoys being outdoors and does not mind getting messy. These interpretations of what it means to be feminine came from adolescent girls themselves, raising the question about what it is like for girls to have to negotiate between the socially desirable feminine ideal and maintaining a connection to aspects of themselves and activities they enjoy that they know are considered ‘unfeminine’ and therefore contrary to what is seen as being a ‘good girl’. Tolman (2002) named this when she stated, “girls face demands to conform to norms of femininity essentially becoming socialized into their proper place as women in a patriarchal system” (p.53). This study by Cockerill and Hardy (1987) illustrated how pervasively clear these norms of femininity are to young adolescent girls.
Cockburn and Clarke’s (2002) study on girls’ participation in gym class also emphasized the difficulties girls face in matching femininity with being physically active. They emphasized how the traditional and stereotypical rituals in gym class contradicted the notions of acceptable and desirable feminine appearance, therefore causing conflict for girls forcing them to choose between participation in gym and fitting the idealized norms of femininity. Participating effectively and successfully in gym class was found to be incongruent with meeting the demands of idealized femininity.

In a qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of adolescent girls who participate as school cheerleaders, Adams and Bettis (2003) found that “cheerleading was appealing to these girls because it offered them a space to revel in what they called being a ‘girly girl’” (p.83). The authors located this practice within an athletic framework that allowed these girls to participate in a sport that remains firmly entrenched within a traditional feminine discourse. The stories related by the girls in this study suggested that cheerleading offers them,

A critical space for certain girls to take risks, to try on different personas, to delight in the physicality of their bodies, and to control and revel in their own power and desire…In many ways, these girls have embraced cheerleading as a way of accommodating the contradictions of constructing oneself as a feminine subject (p.87).

The authors suggested that their findings acknowledge that these girls are not passive objects of femininity, but rather that they play an active role in reconstituting ideal femininity. The authors stated that the girls’ stories illustrated how cheerleading allowed these girls the opportunity to engage in the ‘masculine’ world of strength and athleticism and therefore feel connected with the physicality of their bodies, but without risking the questioning of their femininity or their sexual identity. This statement in itself points out the dilemma for girls – in order to be active and physical in their bodies and remain socially acceptable, they must find a
way to engage that does not disrupt conventional ideals of femininity. Adams et al., (2005) highlighted this dilemma with female athletes,

Like all females who play sports, the girls in our study are constantly involved in a balancing act to prove that yes, they are athletes, but they are also ‘girly girls’. On the playing field, being a girly girl is a challenge because being sweaty and physical is not typically associated with ideal femininity. Hence, feminine markers become significant in exuding femininity even while one is engaged in hitting, catching, kicking, and slam dunking. Having long hair, tying ribbons around one’s ponytail, and wearing makeup at practices and games were often cited ways to accentuate femininity (p.23).

Despite the requirements for strength, agility and athleticism, cheerleading remains deeply entrenched in ideal femininity and assumed heterosexuality. Adams and Bettis (2003) suggested that the girls have found ways through cheerleading to resist, rethink, and re-envision who they want to be as gendered individuals. It could instead also be conceptualized that the girls have found ways to negotiate their desire to be active with the desire to fit into ideal femininity without disrupting the status quo. The authors commented on this in stating,

Cheerleaders, for all their athleticism, toughness and risk taking, do not disrupt twenty-first century, taken-for-granted notions of normative femininity and masculinity. They ultimately do not challenge the status quo by transgressing gendered boundaries (p.88).

This is evident through the hyper-feminized appearance of cheerleaders, the emphasized and over-the-top expressions of exuberance, and the blatant sexist positioning so often found in cheerleading – that is, girls on the side lines cheering for the boys who are the ‘real athletes’ playing the ‘real sports’. Defining a gendered identity through this medium of cheerleading emphasizes the extent to which femininity and masculinity are still controlled, constrained, and restricted by the larger systemic institutions and patriarchal discourses.
Paechter (2010) discussed the results of a case study with children in Britain, ages 9-11, looking at children’s experiences with the label ‘girly girl’. The characteristics described by these children for the ‘girly girl’ label included liking the color pink, crying more than other girls, finding football dull, and preferring skirts and dresses to pants. They found that at the beginning of the study, when the children were nine or ten years old, the term ‘girly girl’ was associated with babyishness and there was an emphasis on a ‘girly girl’s niceness. However, as the girls turned eleven years old, near the end of the study, more girls were self-describing as ‘girly girls’ and idealized this as a valued identity. They found that even girls who had been predominantly identifying as ‘tomboys’ were now moving to predominantly ‘girly girl’ identities. At 11 years old, the girls associated a more heterosexualized identity to the ‘girly girl’ label and discussed looking forward to an adolescent sexualized femininity (Paechter, 2010).

In Reay’s (2001) study of a children’s classroom, she discusses the different groups of girls as identified and labelled by the children themselves. Both boys and girls generally described the ‘nice girls’ and the ‘girlies’ in a derogatory way. Reay (2001) described the ‘nice girls’ as,

Seen by everyone, including themselves, as hardworking and well-behaved, exemplifying the constraints of a gendered and classed discourse which afforded them the benefits of culture, taste, and cleverness, but little freedom. The constraints were evident in the ‘nice girls’ self-surveillant, hypercritical attitudes which were less apparent amongst other girls in the class (p.158).

Reay (2001) described the group of girls known as the ‘girlies’ as those most emphasizing femininity as well as those who participated in the heterosexist discourse surrounding them,
The girlies were intensely active in the work of maintaining conventional heterosexual relationships through the writing of love letters, flirting and engaging in regular discussions of who was going out with whom. They were far more active in such maintenance work than the boys (p. 159).

This introduces the dilemma of being a ‘girly girl’. While there is social currency in this role through the praise and approval received for fitting the ideal of femininity, there is also a price to pay. Girls find out that for all that they do to fit this rigid idealized expression of femininity, they are then left to be ridiculed for exactly the same reason – for being too much of a girl. The definition of ‘girly’ that appears in the Oxford English Dictionary illustrates the confusing messages arising from this label. The first definition: like or characteristic of a girl; is followed with the second definition (with the notation that it is often used derogatorily): depicting nude or partially nude young women in erotic poses. These two definitions demonstrate so precisely how difficult it is to be an appropriate girl – one step too far from what has been described as ideal and normal and you are at risk of objectification and sexualisation of your feminine body. These are not the only risks taken in assuming the ‘girly girl’ label. While often seen as the popular choice, being too ‘girly’ can also risk teasing because patriarchy does not value feminine traits and characteristics. Brown (2003) stated,

For those who take on feminine notions of girlness, there is a ready-made and convincing language of judgment and criticism...calling other girls ‘sissies’, ‘crybabies’, or ‘wusses’, refracts girls anger or disappointment through a culture that denigrates the feminine – we all know such names refer to non-boy or ‘girly girl’ traits (p.87-88).

In Reay’s (2001) study, comments made from the other students (both boys and girls) about ‘nice girls’ included, ‘they’re too boring’ and ‘no one wants to be a nice girl’. The comments made about ‘girlies’ included, ‘they’re stupid’ and ‘they’re dumb’. Within this group of
students, sexual harassment (which included both uninvited touching and sexualized name-calling) was directed mostly at the ‘girlies’ (Reay, 2001). Bartky (1988) also identified this dilemma for girls who fit idealized femininity in stating,

To succeed in the provision of a beautiful or sexy body gains a woman attention and some admiration but little real respect and rarely any social power. A woman’s effort to master feminine body discipline will lack importance just because she does it: Her activity partakes of the general depreciation of everything female (p. 141).

In feminist research, the position ‘being nice’ is found to be specific to the formulation of White, middle class femininity (Jones, 1993). Reay (2001) found that the majority of the working class girls in her study did not adhere to this ‘nice girl’ persona, as it lacked the tough attitude they aspired to, and likely required for survival. This demonstrates how expression of girlhood is largely affected by social class. The characteristic of ‘being nice’ may only serve those who are of a certain social class, while being a disadvantage to those living in a more working-class neighbourhood. Brown (2003) identified this for girls in stating,

Girls who resist or don’t match up run the risk of being cut off from other girls – labelled bad, bossy, or mean. The alternative is to embrace the ideals, at least publicly, and to protect yourself by being the arbiter of good and bad (p.65).

While the expression of being a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ girl is different between classes, Bartky (1988) insisted that the ideal appearance of femininity sweeps across social class. She states,

Normative femininity is coming more and more to be centered on women’s body – not its duties and obligations or even its capacity to bear children, but its sexuality, more precisely, its presumed heterosexuality and its appearance. New, too, is the spread of this discipline to all classes of women and its deployment throughout the life cycle (p.149).
While the physical expression of this normative femininity may vary across class and age levels, the requirement that women attend to their appearance and body as a disciplinary practice of femininity is universal. Bartky (1988) discussed the ‘invisibility’ and yet the potency of the demands of these disciplinary practices in stating,

The disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular…insofar as the disciplinary practices of femininity produce a ‘subjected and practiced’, an inferiorized body, they must be understood as aspects of a far larger discipline, an oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination (p.142-143).

One powerful medium through which the ideals of femininity are dispersed to young girls and women is through advertisements and portrayals of girl- and womanhood in television and movies as well as other media messaging. Milkie (2002) emphasized, “These ideals about what women should do, be like, or look like are powerful yet subtle vehicles through which women are controlled” (p.839). Milkie (2002) described this as being a central technique in creating and maintaining women’s disadvantage to men. That is, through using cultural beliefs and stereotypes about women that are more narrow, distorted, and harmful. Smith (1990) discussed how these images become major defining aspects of the discourse of femininity and how the practices associated with these images become entrenched in our everyday practices. Through the everyday negotiation of femininity and masculinity, the powerful texts and images help to ensure our practices both create and sustain gender stratification (Smith, 1990). Cockburn and Clarke (2002) expressed,

Powerful covert (and often indeed overt) messages are transmitted to young people portraying emphasized heterosexual femininity as the only socially sanctioned option for teenage girls and young women. It is widely recognized that popular discourses such as
these offer only limited identities and invite only strictly conforming and traditionally acceptable behaviour (p.653).

Bartky (1988) stated, “femininity as spectacle is something in which virtually every woman is required to participate” (p. 140), emphasizing the appearance-based focus of ideal femininity. Through extensive research examining the influence of magazines on girls and women, Currie (1999) emphasized that, “as social texts, women’s magazines mediate discourses of femininity” (p.309). In analyzing advertisements in the teen magazine, Seventeen, Currie (1999) found that between 1951 and 1991, the number of advertisements for makeup doubled, and the number of advertisements for hair products tripled. During the same time period, the advertising for fashion clothing actually decreased. Currie (1999) stated,

Femininity is increasingly presented through advertising as a bodily characteristic. The primary message of ads is beautification of the female body, which is presented as an object of intervention and improvement. This intervention requires the discursive and pictorial separation of the female body into discrete, isolated parts (p.120).

Currie (1999) found that by the early nineties, close to 70% of advertisements are for products having to do with enhancing the aesthetics of the body. She stated,

Two types of messages can be found in beauty ads: messages which act to give meaning to the cultural construction ‘woman’, and messages which give meaning to the bodily practices associated with the accomplishment of womanhood (p.120).

Magazines, through text and images, act as yet another form of social control in this discourse of femininity that works to ensure that both girls and women internalize these messages representing particular scripts of femininity.

It is clear that the ‘girly girl’ label, this hyper emphasized femininity, serves patriarchal dominance by insisting on passivity and subordination from girls and women. This discourse
surrounds girls and women in all areas of their lives, insisting on a strict monitoring and disciplining of the female body. Labels are used to institute social control. These two labels of ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ act as powerful mediums in maintaining a status quo that limits and restricts girls and women’s freedom.

**Rationale for the Current Study**

Through interviewing girls who are going through puberty or just post-pubescent, rather than seeking an adult woman’s retrospective account, this study seeks to understand experiences of the body as they unfold. This is a vantage point that has not previously been explored in the body domain. To date, the literature reports few qualitative studies completed with adolescent girls. The literature demonstrates a lack of qualitative studies with a life history approach completed with children and adolescents, in particular in the area of body image. This study aims to provide information and insight into previously uncharted territory, therefore enriching and cultivating our understanding of the contributing factors affecting a girl’s body image. The present study seeks to expand on the research completed with adolescent girls and specifically to critically analyze through a feminist poststructuralist framework the discourse of femininity as experienced by twenty-seven adolescent girls. The present study will include girls who were prepubescent and post pubescent at the time of the first interview and who are four years older at the time of the fourth set of interviews. This will allow a more comprehensive analysis of the transition into and through puberty and the context affecting girls’ experiences within certain discourses of femininity.

Of particular interest for this research study is examining girls’ experiences of their bodies in relation to discourses of femininity as they progress from childhood into adolescence. Gilligan (1993) and others (Brown, 1998) have completed extensive research in the area of girls’ sense of identity and relational qualities prior to, during, and after puberty. It is the area of
girls’ and women’s experiences with their bodies over time, in particular during that transition from girlhood to womanhood, where research has been severely lacking (Piran, Carter, Thompson, & Pajouhandeh, 2002). de Beauvoir (1974) recognized the vulnerability of a girl’s experience with her body during puberty when she stated, “she feels her body is getting away from her, it is no longer the straightforward expression of her individuality; at the same time she becomes for others a thing” (p.346). The idea that the body is political, that it is linked to a person’s social power, value, their rights and privileges has long been philosophically explored (Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Foucault, 1979; Rich, 1986).

My aim is to explore these discourses of femininity surrounding the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ as experienced in girls’ narratives about femininity and embodiment over a four year prospective qualitative analysis. I would like to examine how adolescent girls construct meanings and identities within the discourses of femininity provided in their social context. I would like to look at this discourse in particular through examination of the gendered labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. I would like to uncover sources of oppression that arise from the use of these labels and other rules of femininity. I will further examine this discourse of femininity as experienced by these adolescent girls and how this affects their connection to their body and self. Foucault (1979) stated that a main function of discourse is that it controls and regulates our definition of ‘normal’ behaviour. Therefore, from this understanding, the discourse of femininity made available to young adolescent girls operates to control and regulate expressions of being a girl. I would like to examine how girls position themselves within this rigid discursive field of femininity. I am interested in the complexities, multiplicities, and contradictions that define these locations and the ways that girls are subjected to restricted practices and pressures of how to ‘appropriately’ be a girl. Other studies that have examined the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ have done so at one point in time – in childhood (Paechter,
2010; Paechter & Clark, 2007; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2006), in adolescence (Adams & Bettis, 2003; Adams et al., 2005; Cockburn & Clarke, 2002) and in retrospective adult studies (Burn et al., 1996; Carr, 1998; Morgan, 1998; Van Volkom, 2003; Van Volkom, 2009). To date, no study has followed girls from childhood into adolescence to examine what happens to these labels over time. This study seeks to explore the ways that the meaning of, the use of, and the identification with these labels shifts and changes as girls progress through puberty and into adolescent years. This study will use interviews with 27 girls, of which the age span at the first interview is nine years old to fourteen years old. The data analyzed will include up to another three interviews across the next four years, with the final age span of this group of girls ranging from thirteen to eighteen years old. This data collection is unique in the possibilities for prospective analysis of a specific group of girls’ lived experiences in their bodies through puberty and adolescence. Specifically for the purpose of this study is the unique opportunity to examine how the discourse surrounding these labels of femininity will shift and change as girls move into adolescence. Through its attention to power, meaning, and language within discourses, I believe that examining this data from a feminist poststructuralist perspective provides a powerful medium to give voice to these girls’ lived experiences in their bodies.
CHAPTER TWO

Methodology

Qualitative Research

The purpose of the research study was to explore the lived experiences of girls, from childhood through adolescence, with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. Qualitative approaches to research acknowledge the importance of meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences within a broader context. No known research studies exist that have investigated girls’ own experiences with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ as they move from childhood through adolescence; therefore a qualitative inquiry is warranted.

A life history approach to qualitative inquiry was used to allow for an in depth investigation into girls’ experiences with these labels within the broader social context of girls’ lives. The life history approach puts an emphasis on exploring, through the telling of life stories, an understanding of a participant’s social-contextual factors which allows for the recognition that an individual’s experiences are not lived in complete isolation of the larger social structures (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Life history research emphasizes individuals’ interpretations of their own experiences within various social contexts. The life history approach aims to use individuals’ lived experiences to construct broader contextual meaning. Within the life history approach, the researcher relationship with the participant is viewed as foundational to research quality and knowledge production. Qualities such as empathy and sensitivity are seen as fundamental to building trust and rapport with participants through the interview process. Life history research views the participant as having a collaborative participation, in that elements of the research process are discussed between researcher and participant. For example, the stories shared by the participant are often reflected back through feedback from the researcher. Here, the participant is given the opportunity to clarify any
inaccuracies or misinterpretations of the information collected. Through this participation, the participant is involved in the process of making meaning of their lived experiences.

**Subjectivity of the Researcher**

Researcher subjectivity is inevitably part of the qualitative inquiry process. The researcher brings both their own biases and assumptions to the research process (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Therefore it is important for the researcher to be transparent and forthcoming about their biases and limitations.

My own interest in examining the gender discourse surrounding the socially constructed labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ is grounded in and informed by my feminist theoretical orientation. This inevitably shaped the location from which I inquired and responded to participants’ experiences during the interview process. Grounded in feminist theory and practice, I invited the participants to engage in critical thinking and I questioned phenomena from a feminist perspective. Throughout each interview I conducted, I invited a critical lens into the dialogue with participants.

**Participants**

This study included 27 girls of those 11 were 9-11 yrs old (pre-puberty), and 16 were 13-15 (post-puberty). Fourteen were from low, 10 from middle, and 3 from middle-upper social class. Eleven were from rural geographical sites and 16 from middle-large sized urban centers. Twenty five girls were born in Canada. Four were of Aboriginal heritage, 4 of East European heritage, 2 of Hispanic heritage, 1 of African heritage, 1 of Caribbean heritage, 1 of Roma heritage, and 14 of Anglo- European heritage. Parents of 13 of the girls have separated: 3 were living with their mother and her lesbian partner, 6 with a single parent, 4 with mother and stepfather. Fourteen girls were living with their mother and father.

**Procedure**
Participants were recruited through posted advertisements in diverse urban and rural community settings. Parents of girls interested in participating in a study exploring girls’ relationship with their bodies were asked to contact the researcher. Parental consent and child assent forms were reviewed and completed with all participants and their parent prior to beginning the interview. Participants were interviewed in their home, or on a couple of occasions when this was not available, in a quiet room at a community centre. The interview process started by sharing with participants the main focus of the study: exploring girls’ self and body experiences in relation to their social environment. The first interview centered on early childhood, and up to their current age with regards to feelings and experiences, in particular, in their bodies. After the first interview, a thorough summary organized according to themes was prepared of each interview. The summaries were read and discussed with participants during the second and third interviews exploring for any inaccuracies, and new changes and current experiences. All interviews included an inquiry which focused on their experience of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. The present study focuses on the narratives related to this inquiry. Participants were given $10 gift certificates to a local bookstore in appreciation for participation in the study. This study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the University of Toronto and complied with the ethical principles set out by the American Psychological Association.

The Interview

The analysis is based on 87 interviews conducted by two researchers. Each girl was interviewed by the same interviewer at each interview time. The study involved a process between one and four interviews with each participant, focusing both on the life history of each participant, as well as on their current experiences within their social context. There was an average of three interviews per girl. For two girls, only one interview was available for analysis
due to technical difficulties with the audio taping, and one girl had moved into child protection/welfare agency. The first interview focused more on their current experiences as well as a life history inquiry and the second included an opportunity for participants to review summaries of their first interview for accuracy while also including an exploration of changes and current experiences. The second interview occurred 6 months to one year following the first interview. The third interview occurred approximately two years following the second interview and the fourth interview occurred approximately one year after the third interview. The interviews followed a life history approach (Cole & Knowles, 2001) focusing on the experience of embodiment chronologically throughout these girls’ lives, as well as on significant points of change or transition. Throughout each of the interviews, efforts were made to not assume heterosexuality. While the girls were not asked directly about their sexual orientation, questions about dating or romantic interests were asked as gender neutral as possible to allow and invite the girls to share their own experiences and sexual orientation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study began after each stage of interviewing, therefore allowing the researcher to stay connected as close as possible to the data which then informed the next interview process. The systematic process of coding began most thoroughly once all 87 interviews had been conducted and transcribed. Using methodology from Grounded Theory, the constant comparison method was used to analyze the data. The researcher in the current study began by familiarizing herself with each transcript, developing categories through assigning brief descriptive codes in the margins of the transcripts as she read through each one. This process allowed the researcher to capture the meaning of each individual unit of text. The constant comparison method requires the researcher to stay as close as possible to the data in
order to generate as many themes as possible, which leads to the lower level themes (Glaser, 1994).

Of interest to the researcher was an examination of how the girls’ experiences with these labels change over time from childhood through to adolescence. In order to compare the narratives, the researcher divided the data based on grade level rather than age. It was found that the dominant social environment affected girls’ experiences and possibilities with this dichotomy more than their biological age. Therefore, the narratives were analyzed in two groups: childhood, which was categorized as up to grade six; and adolescence, which was categorized as grade seven and up.

Once the initial generation of themes was created, these were reviewed and validated in consultation with the thesis supervisor. Using the constant comparison method, the next phase of data analysis of deriving higher level categories began. This involved an ongoing process of examining the relationship between different lower level themes and the newly formed higher level categories. Based on the hierarchical category and structure of the underlying themes, the final coding scheme was developed. The interviews were imported into QSR NUD*IST N6, a software program for managing, organizing, and analyzing qualitative data. The transcripts were coded into the final coding scheme. Throughout this process, the researcher was constantly comparing each category in order to revise the coding scheme as needed based on the emergence of new understandings. This process allowed the researcher to integrate various categories in order to more comprehensively describe and represent the data into core dimensions, themes, and subthemes related to the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. The final hierarchical structure of the theme analysis resulted in the development of three main dimensions: Cultural Stereotypes, the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels; Social Outcomes,
Privileges and Consequences for the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels; and Negotiating Self Experiences and Identities in Relation to the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels.

This final structure of dimensions unified and integrated the higher order categories. Based on this final structure of three main dimensions that emerged from the data analysis, results are presented accordingly. The first chapter of the Results section will outline the Cultural Stereotypes of the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels. The second chapter of the Results will outline the Social Outcomes through examining the privileges and consequences identified for each of these labels. The final chapter of the Results section will examine girls’ own process of Negotiating Self Experiences and Identities in Relation to the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels.
CHAPTER THREE

Cultural Stereotypes: The ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels

The ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels, as shared cultural stereotypes, are explored first in childhood and then explored in adolescence. The girls’ narratives are delineated based on grade level, with girls in grade six or below categorized as ‘Childhood’ and girls in grade seven or above categorized as ‘Adolescence’. In childhood and adolescence, their narratives about the stereotypic representations of the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’, were divided into three main themes: Aspects of Appearance, Activities and Interests, and Social Behaviour.

Childhood

The definitions these girls provided both for the ‘tomboy’ and the ‘girly girl’ labels were similar for girls of different ethnicities, geographic locations, socioeconomic status and across different ages in childhood. Each label is explored along three main themes: Aspects of Appearance, Activities and Interests, and Social Behaviours.

The ‘tomboy’ label. The ‘tomboy’ label, as a shared cultural construct, covered multiple aspects of identity delineated amongst three main themes. Aspects of Appearance included the subthemes of stereotypical descriptions of ‘tomboys’ clothing and hair. Activities and Interests were divided into subthemes related to sports, physical activity and being outdoors. Social Behaviours were delineated between the subthemes of interpersonal style and social preferences.

Aspects of appearance. Within the first theme of ‘Aspects of Appearance’ of the ‘tomboy’ stereotype, there were two subthemes that emerged: clothing and hair.

Clothing. Within narratives of a stereotypical ‘tomboy’ appearance, these girls often spoke about a ‘tomboy’s clothing. Narratives included descriptions of baggy or loose clothing and clothing that is often compared to ‘boys’ clothing.
Tomboys like baggier pants and baggier shirts and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys kind of dress like a boy and wear jeans.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

A tomboy is a girl who acts like a boy and wears boy clothes and caps and all that. Q: What are boy clothes? A: Loose pants, I know that, and really long shirts.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Like tomboys never wear really, like frilly pink tops. They wear baggy pants, just any shirts, not the frilly stuff, it doesn’t matter. ‘Cause they wear a lot of baggy clothes, definitely, I think. Like basketball shorts. As long as they look like more of a boy than a girl, ‘cause they don’t want to be all girly girl and stuff.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Hair. The second subtheme of ‘Aspects of Appearance’ was related to stereotypes of ‘tomboys’ hair. As part of a carefree attitude towards appearance, the stereotype of the ‘tomboy’ label was girls who do not discipline or manage their hair; they do not change its natural appearance and they wear it in a way that is comfortable to them.
Tomboys wear their hair any way. Sometimes they wear ponytails or down or in braids.

I don’t really care the way my hair is unless it’s everywhere then I’ll try and push it back.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Yeah, I mostly had my hair at like my chin or shorter. It was more boyish and I didn’t have to worry about brushing it or anything.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys don’t really care what their hair looks like. I had long hair when I was little and then I ended up cutting it off in grade five. Like about chin-length and I liked that better because before my hair was always in a ponytail. I would never wear it down because it would be annoying, so it would always be up in a ponytail. And then in grade five, I cut it pretty short and that was cool.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory of age 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Activities and interests. The girls’ narratives described the Activities and Interests of a ‘tomboy’ along three subthemes: involvement in sport, being physically active, and exploring and playing outdoors.

Sports. A prominent subtheme was girls’ sense that those who take on the ‘tomboy’ identity were participating in sports. Girls talked about tomboys’ passion and love for sports.
Q: So if a tomboy’s body could talk, what do you think it would say? A: Go me! I’m the best! Let’s go me! Like you’re playing soccer, like tomboy girls like to play soccer all the time. I’m gonna win everything, I don’t care what everyone says, I’m just gonna be the best tomboy I can.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

A tomboy is really boyish – you always do sports, whatever team you try out for, you’re the first one to be picked, you’re an athletic rep, everything you do is sports, you wear baggy pants or shorts all the time, you get A’s in gym.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The idea that tomboys seek out opportunities for sport as much as possible, that they love being active and involved in sports was a strong aspect to this stereotype.

Q: How do tomboys feel about their body? A: Probably feel good, because they like being active. Like at recess, tomboys probably want to play sports and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys do a lot of sports. Like some girls, they just garden with their mom or they go swimming, they don’t do like hockey and soccer like I do.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

*Being physically active.* Along with more involvement in organized sport, the girls also discussed how the ‘tomboy’ identity allows girls to feel more freedom to be physically active
and to engage their bodies in physical movement. There was a strong association with being free to be active in one’s body when identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label.

Q: What do you like about your body as a tomboy? A: The way that it moves. Like I like having long legs so I can run fast with them.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys feel good because they like being active and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys are really active. We run around and play tag.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Being outdoors. Some girls discussed how the ‘tomboy’ label offered girls a way to fully explore nature.

Tomboys usually run and might get muddy and everything. We usually play tag or mudball. Like we take the stickiest mud and turn it into balls and then we throw them. Then if we are playing mud baseball you have to slide in all the mud puddles.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

When I was younger, I was like a tomboy. My best friend was a boy and I’d always go with him and we’d catch bugs and frogs and stuff. I just liked playing outside and playing sports.
(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

For other girls, enjoying playtime outdoors was associated with the ‘tomboy’ label,

I know I’m going to have fun. We’re always doing something, we never watch TV. We’re always outside. We love swimming, but in wintertime we go outside and we make like fifty forts in one day.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys like to go outside and have fun. We would play tag. We were always outside, we would play basketball because we had a basketball net, and we used to play hockey on the street. We just ran around. Biking, we were big into biking. We used to dress up as Batman and run around the house. Or we’d just swim in the pool the entire day or be running around at the cottage.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory of childhood, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

**Social behaviours.** The Social Behaviours theme included two subthemes: interpersonal style and social preferences.

*Interpersonal style.* Many of the girls discussed how ‘tomboys’ do not conform to normalized gender stereotypes about how girls should behave. Some girls discussed this as a rebellion from gender norms suggesting a freedom that comes with releasing oneself from socially dictated appropriate girl behaviour.
Tomboys kind of act like boys do – mouthy and stuff. Like not really mouthy but sometimes.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girls also described ‘tomboys’ as independent,

Tomboys don’t really care what people say, so they do what they want.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Furthermore, girls described ‘tomboys’ interpersonal style as being “tough”,

Tomboys do the sport stuff, like the rough stuff. Like soccer, soccer’s rough and usually so is basketball.

(Tiger, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

With a tomboy, it’s like ‘watch out’. Tomboys are really tough and it’s like, ‘you’re gone if you come near me’.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Social preferences. This group of girls described ‘tomboys’ as more likely to be friends with boys than with girls only.
Boys and tomboys are friends. They play together and they are almost like ‘besty’ best friends.

(Hillary, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys are the ones hanging out with the guys more.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

**The ‘girly girl’ label.** The ‘girly girl’ label, as a shared cultural construct, also included three similar themes. Aspects of Appearance were described in terms of the stereotypes of ‘girly girls’ regarding clothing, hair, and makeup. Activities and Interests in the stereotypes of a ‘girly girl’ included three subthemes of not playing sports, appearance-related activities, and sedentary activities. Social Behaviours similarly included two subthemes related to the stereotype of a ‘girly girl’s interpersonal style and social preferences.

**Aspects of appearance.** When describing the appearance of ‘girly girls’, these girls’ stereotypes spoke about three subthemes: clothing, hair, and make-up. It was evident this group of girls felt that those identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label spend a significant amount of time on their appearance. An emphasis was placed on how ‘girly girls’ attempt to appear ‘perfect’.

**Clothing.** In terms of clothing, the girls described ‘girly girls’ as wearing tight, restrictive and more revealing clothing. They were often described as wearing skirts or dresses and as liking the color pink for their clothes.

Girly girls wear like bell bottoms and then like a really kind of like a tight top like this. Girly girls dress in a skirt all the time.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting 2nd interview)
Girls are supposed to be girly and wear skirts. Girls wear tight clothes. Like a short skirt and a short top with a flower on it. And high heel shoes and the color pink.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls like dresses and high-heel shoes. They like pink.

(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls wear dresses and short skirts and frills.

(Tiger, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Olivia described a stereotype of ‘girly girls’ wearing accessories,

Girly girls usually wear all kinds of jewellery and necklaces.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Hair. The second subtheme regarding a ‘girly girl’s appearance was descriptions regarding hair. Some girls described ‘girly girls’ as enjoying the process of styling and changing their hair.

Girly girls really like doing their hair.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
Girly girls have their hair like up in a bun, their hair down, in hair bands, or pink barrettes.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting 2nd interview)

Girly girls usually wear their hair curly and pretty.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A girly girl has her hair up all the time.

(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Erica emphasized the stereotype that ‘girly girls’ seek perfection in their hairstyle,

Girly girls try and get their hair perfect and stuff like that.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Make-up. A third subtheme in the dimension of ‘Aspects of Appearance’ for the ‘girly girl’ label was a preoccupation with wearing make-up. Their narratives described ‘girly girls’ as needing to alter their natural appearance with makeup.

Girly girls really like putting make-up on.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A girly girl is wearing makeup every day.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
The definition of a girly girl is just being perfect. This one girl carries lip gloss, like fifteen things of lip gloss – in her pencil case, in her pockets, she keeps one in her shoe in her locker, and she has lipstick on all the time.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

**Activities and interests.** In describing what it is that ‘girly girls’ like to do, the activities listed were divided amongst three subthemes: not playing sports, spending time on activities to do with changing one’s appearance, and sedentary activities.

*No sports.* Some participants responded to inquiries about the stereotypical activities of a ‘girly girl’ by stating that they do not like to play sports.

A girly girl is just not sporty. They’re the highest class of the girls, they just don’t do anything. They’re just like the ‘starers’. That’s what me and my friend made up. Because they just watch people do their sports and they just stand there and stare.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A girly girl doesn’t like to play sports.

(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

*Appearance-related activities.* It was a common thread in the girls’ narratives that a stereotype associated with the ‘girly girl’ label was a focus on appearance-related activities.
A girly girl is kinda like Alicia Silverstone in the movie ‘Clueless’, she just likes to do all girl stuff. Like putting on make-up and going sun-tanning.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

Girls are supposed to like doing girly stuff – like trying to have nice hair and have a nice body and stuff like that. She should have blue eye shadow and mascara and a necklace. She has to spend a lot of time on her hair and make-up and stuff. Girly girls spend a lot of time in the bathroom doing their hair and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1<sup>st</sup> interview)

A girly girl would be like someone who goes “oh no, my nail just broke, I better go fix it”. Or she would be like, “umm, I’m not sure, should I wear this skirt or that skirt?” or she goes, “Is my hair perfect?”.

(Madison, age 10, Grade 4, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

Madison also highlighted shopping as another appearance-focused activity of ‘girly girls’,

Girly girls like shopping. I have a step-sister who’s a girly girl and she has an “I love shopping” keychain.

(Madison, age 10, Grade 4, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview)

*Sedentary activities*. Interestingly, the most commonly cited ‘activity’ for ‘girly girls’ found in these girls’ narratives was an understanding that what ‘girly girls’ do most involves
sitting-related activities. There seemed to be a widespread understanding that ‘girly girls’ spend much of their time ‘talking’.

Girly girls, they usually just talk.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

A girly girl might just want to sit around and just talk and do like that kind of stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Other girls described ‘girly girls’ as sitting around or walking,

Girly girls are not really into playing games. They just like maybe walk around, they’ll sit with their legs crossed.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A girly girl just likes to sit around.

(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Some girls described ‘girly girls’ as liking to sit and play with dolls,

Q: If a girly girl’s body could talk, what do you think it would say? A: I can’t play that, I’d break a nail. A girly girl walks like this and says, “Hi, do you want to play Barbie”. That’s what a girly girl does.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting 2nd interview)
My cousin tries to get me to play dolls, but I’m not that kind of girl. That’s girly. Girly girls like to play with dolls and play house.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

We’d always play with dolls. I was very girly. I was always prissy.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 8, recalling memory of age 6, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

This one friend, she was a bit more girly girl, so you know once in awhile, I’d probably play Barbies with her or whatever, or we’d watch movies.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, recalling memory of childhood, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls just liked playing with dolls and things like that. They wouldn’t like to get dirty or do anything that’s going to ruin their dress.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory from age 6, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Social behaviours. The girls’ narratives on the stereotypes related to the theme of Social Behaviours of ‘girly girls’ is divided into two subthemes: interpersonal style and social preferences.

Interpersonal style. The interpersonal style that was stereotypically associated with the ‘girly girl’ label was hyper-feminine with descriptions matching the most stereotyped
characterizations of girls. These girls described ‘girly girls’ as behaving in a way that is reminiscent to the ‘good girl’ stereotypes of ‘being nice’ or ‘being perfect’,

They think they’re better than everybody else and stuff like that. Girly girls try and be like perfect and they’ll try and be like, ‘I didn’t do anything wrong’ and stuff like that.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls are goody-two-shoes. Like around adults, they’re like suck-ups and stuff.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting 2nd interview)

Other girls felt that ‘girly girls’ behave like the ‘mean girl’ stereotypes of being ‘snobby’ and as gossiping about other girls.

Girly girls are like snobs. She may think that she has everything in the world.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls like to talk. They talk behind people’s backs. Girly girls say tomboys are dorks, they’re terrible, they’re yuck to be friends with.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Some girls described ‘girly girls’ as overly emotional or hysterical in their behaviours,

Tomboys don’t really care what people say, so they do what they want.
A girly girl would care. They have a lot more feelings. If someone calls a girly girl a name, they go off in a corner and cry. They’re more snotty, more perfect. They whine. They’re wannabe people.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls are like, ‘Oh, I broke a nail’.

(Tiger, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

At age 11, Erica refers to ‘girly girls’ as ‘ditsy’ in the way they behave and interact,

Girly girls are all, I don’t know, they act differently. They’re more, ah, ditsy. They get called ditsy a lot.

(Erica, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Social preferences. The subtheme of social preferences of a ‘girly girl’ as described by this group of girls included how ‘girly girls’ are perceived to relate to other girls and how they are perceived to relate to boys. Some girls felt that ‘girly girls’ struggle to fit in with other girls,

Q: How are girly girls treated by other people. A: Not very good. Because they’re not like other people. Like, they get teased a lot, they’re just so girly girlish.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys hate girly girls. They find them so annoying with their little purses, carrying it around everywhere with their lip balm and stuff.
The girls’ narratives describing how ‘girly girls’ interact with boys included descriptions of boys being attracted to ‘girly girls’,

Boys think that girly girls are special. Because they’re prettier than other people, but that’s not really true.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Boys think girly girls are pretty and they like them.

(Megan, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

As well as narratives suggesting a preference to maintain a separation between boys and ‘girly girls’,

Girly girls are just like, “let’s not hang out with the boys”.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Boys don’t really like girly girls. You know, they’re just too perfect and they’re all snobby and stuff like that. They try to ignore them.

(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Adolescence
As in childhood, the labels were described by these girls in a manner that provided three main themes: Aspects of Appearance, Activities and Interests, and Social Behaviours. The definitions these girls provided both for the ‘tomboy’ and the ‘girly girl’ labels were similar for girls of different ethnicities, geographic locations, and socioeconomic status. There were interesting changes in the girls’ definitions as they moved further into adolescence and neared adult years. These differences and changes will be identified throughout each theme.

**The ‘tomboy’ label.** The ‘tomboy’ label in adolescence included similar three main themes, but the subthemes found within each theme included some slight differences from childhood. For the theme of Aspects of Appearance, there were once again two main subthemes of clothing and hair. Under the theme of Activities and Interests, in adolescence, this stereotype held just one subtheme of playing sports. In Social Behaviours, ‘tomboys’ were again described for their interpersonal style and social preferences.

**Aspects of appearance.** Within this theme of the ‘tomboy’ stereotype in adolescence, there were two subthemes that emerged: clothing and hair.

**Clothing.** The girls described ‘tomboys’ as wearing baggy and loose clothing. Some girls described it as comfortable clothing,

Q: Do girls wear baggy clothes?  
A: Only if you’re a tomboy. If you’re a tomboy like you kind of like, you have pants like a guy but have a cute top on.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Tomboys are girls who like to wear comfortable clothing.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys wear something not tight fitting, but baggy and comfortable.
I know of some girls that are like more tomboy than other girls are but that’s usually because they are athletic and they like to dress more like in track suits and stuff like that.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The girls often referred to a ‘tomboy’s clothing as ‘boys’ clothing or as ‘dressing like a boy’,

Tomboys’ kind of dress like guys. They wear baggy pants, they wear like jerseys and that. Because that’s what most of the guys wear, jerseys and like really baggy shirts and stuff.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys just pretty much like to be a guy. The clothes that you would wear are kind of different. Like pretty much baggy stuff. Like not what you would see someone who is really feminine wearing, like tomboys wouldn’t wear dresses and stuff like that.

(Sarah, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A tomboy is a girl that is more boyish. A lot of girls these days, their fashion is like tighter clothes or stuff like that. Maybe the tomboy would wear like guys’ shorts or something.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Ashley and Kelly described ‘tomboys’ clothing as unfeminine or as masculine in appearance,
We don’t have like any stereotypical tomboys in our school. Like there are girls who like to wear more masculine things. It was just like, ‘oh why is she always wearing baggy pants and like hoodies and that type of clothing?’ . Maybe they’re just afraid to change, you know? But it was like whatever. It’s like, oh well, if that’s what she likes to wear, that’s cool, but this is what I want to wear. She dresses like a guy and whatever. And it’s kind of like no one really pays attention to it. It’s just like that’s her own thing, she’s like that and let her do her thing. She wants to dress like a guy, let her dress as a guy. We should just look our best as girls.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

There are girls that are really putting themselves out there as not being feminine. Like they wear the big skull t-shirts and it probably could just be their personality but when you look at them, you think ‘tomboy’. Where you think ‘guy’, but they are a girl.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Hair. The girls spoke about tomboys’ hair as another distinguishing marker, primarily referring to a tomboy’s carefree attitude towards hair.

With tomboys, it’s like whatever, ‘I’ll let it do what it wants to. If it was supposed to be curly, I’ll let it be curly’, and stuff like that.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Tomboys just like put their hair in a ponytail. They don’t care what it looks like, they just put it up or something like that. They don’t care about like what they wear or what they look like.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

**Activities and interests.** Girls in adolescence, as in childhood, held a similar stereotype that ‘tomboys’ enjoy playing sports, being active and competitive.

Tomboys play sports and stuff like that.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Tomboys are very competitive. They’re into sports, but like the more contact ones like rugby. They like to beat on the other girls.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Tomboys like to watch football and are into the videogame thing. They’re more into like the guy kind of sports, you know the sports that usually guys do.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Most of tomboys are really athletic.

(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)

Tomboys are playing more contact sports with the boys and things like that.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)
**Social behaviours.** The girls recognized ‘tomboys’ as girls who break norms of femininity by being aggressive and competitive and described their interpersonal style as ‘acting like a boy’. A ‘tomboy’ s social preference in adolescence was limited to spending time with friends who are boys.

**Interpersonal style.** These girls described a ‘tomboy’ s interpersonal style as girls who behave like boys.

A tomboy just kind of more like relates to guys and is someone who relates to other people more like a guy does.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Well, tomboy is more like a guy.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

A tomboy is like a girl who acts like a guy. Most of them are really athletic. But some girls are athletic but they aren’t tomboys. A tomboy more acts like a guy. Like with girls who are just athletic, they don’t act like a guy.

(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Some girls felt that ‘tomboys’ behaved like boys through their manner of speech, stereotyping the use of slang or swear words as ‘boy behaviour’. 
Tomboys do boy things and they kind of act like a guy. Like they use slang words like the guys.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

They talk rude like guys. I personally don’t think girls should swear a lot. I don’t think guys should swear either, like as much as they do. But I think it sounds more lewd coming from a girl. I don’t know why. I think it seems more rude when girls do it.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3\textsuperscript{rd} interview)

\textit{Social preferences.} These girls’ narratives indicated that they viewed ‘tomboys’ as primarily choosing to spend time and make friends with boys,

Tomboys are friends with guys longer because you’re not getting into fights and stuff, you’re always playing sports with them or joking with them or talking.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Tomboys like hanging out with the guys.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)

This one girl at our school, she hangs out with the guys all the time. She’s like one of the guys.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 8, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)
Q: How do tomboys get along with other girls? A: Sometimes not good, but sometimes good. They just don’t get along because they don’t have like things in common as much. They get along good with boys because they have similar interests – like sports.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys hang around with boys more. They act more like boys, they like to go outside and have fun.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The ‘girly girl’ label. The ‘girly girl’ label, as a shared cultural construct in adolescence, covered aspects of identity delineated across the three main themes: Aspects of Appearance included subthemes related to clothing, hair, and makeup; Activities and Interests included subthemes suggesting ‘girly girls’ do not play sports, spend time on appearance-related activities, enjoy shopping and sedentary activities; and Social Behaviours were explored through the subthemes of interpersonal style and social preferences.

Aspects of appearance. The girls’ narratives from adolescence mirrored the pre-puberty girls’ stereotypical descriptions of ‘girly girls’ with subthemes related to clothing, hair, and makeup. Their descriptions of girls’ clothing as tight, revealing and restrictive and the time and energy they emphasized that ‘girly girls’ spend on hair and makeup illustrates a very appearance-focused stereotype associated with the ‘girly girl’ label. The consistency of these stereotypes demonstrates how pervasively girls understand what is expected of them from a wider socio-cultural definition in terms of how they should display their bodies.

Clothing. These girls’ narratives often referenced ‘skirts’, other revealing clothing, and the color pink when referring to a ‘girly girl’s clothing,
If you’re a girly girl, it’s usually skirts, jeans and low-cut tops.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Girly girls are like girls who dress more like girls. Like skirts and tank tops and that.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Most of the girls in my class are girly girls because they dress really girly. Really girly is like wearing skirts and stuff.

(Chelsea, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls would be in skirts, little skirts and their pink shirts.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girl things are like girly colors like pink and stuff. Like dresses and skirts more than pants.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

The girls’ narratives referenced the clothing of ‘girly girls’ as being tight, as evidenced here with Brady and Lauren’s descriptions,

Girly girls walk around in tight skirts and stuff and like tight jeans and tight shirts and stuff.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
Girly girls at my age, they wear the tighter clothing. Girly girls are usually the girls that dress a little bit like they’re trying to be more mature, but they might look pretty stupid trying to be mature.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

In later interviews, Lauren and Brady continue to hold this stereotype of the ‘girly girl’ label,

They wear clothing that’s more teeny-tiny and itty-bitty. Girly girls wear tighter clothing, like skirts usually.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly clothes are like the tight jeans and like cute little girly shirts.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Jenna shared her impression of ‘girly girl’ clothing as more formal, when she said,

Girly girls dress like fancy all the time and stuff.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Roxas and Kelly focus on the overall fashion emphasis of the ‘girly girl’ stereotype in their descriptions of a ‘girly girl’s appearance,
I call them fashion freakazoids. Because they’re all about fashion and it’s like, ‘oh I’m going to buy this because it has someone’s name on it and it’s more expensive just because of that’. I laugh at that.

(Roxas, age 15, Grade 10, Caribbean-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

You have your girly girls where they’re so much into fashion. They have like perfect hair. They wear perfect makeup and everything, not too thick, not too much or anything, but perfect. They have beautiful fashion sense.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Hair. Another important aspect to the appearance of a ‘girly girl’ related to these girls’ narratives suggesting ‘girly girls’ work to attain a perfected ideal image through their hair.

Like, I’m a girly girl and it’s just like, ‘Is my hair going curly? Oh my god, my hair is curly! Oh my god, let’s go to the bathroom quickly!’

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Girly girls usually do their hair, like they have long straight hair; they all do their hair like that.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls like curl their hair and make sure their hair looks perfect and stuff like that and like to leave it down and just always have to have something done with it.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
With girly girls, their hair always has to look good. It’s like, ‘oh I have to do my hair all pretty’.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

In two interviews, Lauren accentuates that ‘girly girls’ will give preference to their attempts at a perfect image over participating in physical activity,

Girly girls are like, ‘Eww, I’m going to get sweaty and we’re outside with the boys, I don’t want to play, my hair might get messed up’. They are very much about appearances.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

I didn’t have the pretty image or whatever. I liked to run around so I’d get sweaty or gross and play in the mud. I didn’t care. But girly girls don’t do that. They always look perfect.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

**Makeup.** A final aspect to the ‘girly girl’ image as described by these adolescent girls included references to makeup when discussing the stereotypes of a ‘girly girl’,

With girly girls, it’s like, ‘I need tons of make-up to cover myself’. And if they get a zit, it’s like, ‘Oh no! My life is ruined!’.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
They put on make-up. Girly girls care more about how they look and stuff.
(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls put on loads of makeup. Generally, they wear a lot of makeup. They’re very, very girly. Girly to the extreme. Girly girl – you say it twice because you put it to the extreme.
(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

**Activities and interests.** The girls narratives in adolescence about a ‘girly girl’s activities and interests demonstrated an understanding that ‘girly girls’ do not play sports, that they do spend time on appearance-related activities, that they enjoy shopping as well as sedentary activities focused on relational interactions.

*No sports.* The adolescent girls’ narratives included comments that a stereotype of ‘girly girls’ is that they do not engage in sports,

Girly girls don’t play much sports and all that stuff. They like chick flics and stuff like that. Adults might like pressure girls as teenagers to not play very many sports so that she’s more girly.
(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls are like not so sporty, not very sporty but into fashion. A lot of my friends aren’t athletic. Like my close, close friends don’t play any sports.
(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
I have friends that are total girly girls. They don’t play any sports.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls are not so athletic. At my school, the girls that are considered ‘girly girls’, they don’t really participate in gym. They’re not very active and stuff like that. Girly girls don’t usually play sports.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Sports is mostly like a guys’ thing and like more of the girly girls stay out.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Appearance-related activities. When describing what activities ‘girly girls’ enjoy, these girls’ narratives largely related to appearance-focused activities. They often referred to grooming one’s body or altering one’s body as an activity of a ‘girly girl’.

This one girl, she is like, “Aww, I have a broken nail, Oh my God! I have to make an appointment”.

(Kyra, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls always try to be perfect and everything, with their makeup and their hair and their clothes. They probably spend like an hour or so to look like that.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
Girly girls, they stay at home and take hours to get ready and put on make-up and think only about what they’re wearing or what their favourite celebrity is doing.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I do have friends who are very fashion-conscious and spend hours on their hair and are all about tanning and planning prom. So they would be a girly girl, which comes up a fair bit. You just look at her and you see the Barbie Doll and it’s just the ‘girly girl’ stereotype like with the hair, the nails, the tan, the makeup, the clothes, the body, like everything.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Shopping. The narratives also included several references to ‘girly girls’ going shopping as a main activity and interest. The stereotype of ‘girly girls’ includes the socializing into shopping as a shared feminine activity. The idea of shopping as an activity illustrates the pervasive understanding by girls of how focused they should be on worrying about their appearance. It also underscores the relevance of one’s socioeconomic status in being able to maintain the ideals of the ‘girly girl’ label.

My best friend, she’s super girly – she likes pink, she likes shopping, and she likes wearing shorter clothes. I think it’s like being the super girly girl – who likes shopping every weekend. They like pink and they like going shopping. I really, really like shopping, I really like buying clothes and trying things on. I love shopping.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Girly girls go shopping and hang around with friends.
(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

My older sister, she’s more girly and she likes fashion and clothes and likes to go shopping and I didn’t like that or anything. She was more into the designs and like she would tell me about this stuff and I would have no idea what she was talking about.
(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls are into fashion. They’re into going shopping and stuff. They like shopping and movies.
(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls shop. They like name brands. Like I wear American Eagle and I love it because it’s nice, something name brand like American Eagle.
(Sarah, age 15, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Sedentary activities. A final activity describing what ‘girly girls’ do, included narratives about girls engaging in very sedentary forms of activity. This included engaging with different forms of media,

Girly girls like to talk on MSN and be on the computer.
(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls watch TV and look at magazines and talk about stuff.
This also included references to how ‘girly girls’ enjoy the relational activity of ‘talking’,

Girly girls like to sit around and chat, talk on the phone.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

If you’re really girly, you pretty much just sit around and talk. We mostly just talk about guys.

(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

**Social behaviours.** The girls’ narratives in adolescence on the stereotypes related to the theme of Social Behaviours of ‘girly girls’ were divided into the subthemes of interpersonal style and social preferences.

*Interpersonal style.* The interpersonal style description of the ‘girly girl’ stereotype included references to an exaggerated expression of hyper-femininity describing ‘girly girls’ as often “shrieking”, “giggling”, and “squealing”.

Girly girls, they’re mostly popular. My friend and I were sitting in the hall watching them, and they were all like screeching, like “Oh my God! Oh my God!” and they were all like wearing bright, bright pink.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls, sometimes they squeal and it’s kinda irritating.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
Girly girls are always like shrieking and hitting the boys and being like, ‘oh stop it!’.
(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls, I find that they like to hang around the guys a lot and they’re very loud at times. They can be very loud with giggling and screaming or something like that.
(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

A demeaning stereotype that emerged in the narratives of the adolescent girls relating to interpersonal style included descriptions of ‘girly girls’ as acting “dumb” or “slow”,

A girly girl is a really dumb girl. Really dumb and like all about looks and like stupid. She wouldn’t have a clue about what’s going on. Like this one girl, she is the dumbest person in the world, like she talks like this and she goes with her hands like this. I just want to punch her, I’m like, ‘you are so dumb!’. Like, I think she is putting on an act. Otherwise, if she really is that dumb, then I will cry for her.
(Kyra, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Is that a label that appeals a lot – the girly girl label? A: Yeah, and usually they’re called ‘valley girls’. My friends call me a ‘valley girl’ sometimes, but I’m not always. Sometimes I make stupid comments that I thought sounded smart, but then it sounds so stupid. And also, I don’t always understand, I’m very slow sometimes. (laughs). It’s like you’re smart in school, but sometimes you’re just really slow in a street kind of way.
(Brittney, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
Social preferences. Many girls discussed the increased importance of the boy-girl relationship in adolescence in terms of heterosexual dating. The girls discussed how the ‘girly girl’ label is the presentation most preferred by heterosexual boys. Their narratives suggested that this influences girls’ social behaviours.

The girly girls when they’re talking to guys, they will be like kinda flirting and stuff.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The girls changed toward the girly, I guess. Like they start liking boys. Boys would rather girls be like that. They want to like brag to their friends that they have like a hot girlfriend or whatever.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Boys usually see girly girls as the girl that they’d like rather than the girl that they’d pal around with. As you get older, boys are kind of like, ‘okay this girl is starting to look appealing because you know she cares about what she looks like’ or whatever so then they start to treat them differently than the girls that they’re more friends with. Boys are usually the big thing, because they’d rather have you looking pretty, and well, that’s why I think there are more girly girls than tomboys. Boys always liked this one girl, she a girly girl, the perfect image, the guys want her.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Summary of Shared Cultural Stereotypes in Childhood and Adolescence
For the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’, the stereotypical descriptions in these girls’ narratives were delineated across three main themes in both childhood and adolescence: Aspects of Appearance, Activities and Interests, and Social Behaviours. For Aspects of Appearance of a ‘tomboy’, the girls’ descriptions in childhood and adolescence included references to clothing that is baggy, loose, and boy-like. The girls’ narratives identified ‘tomboys’ as having a carefree attitude about their hair, often preferring wearing their hair naturally and not managing or disciplining their hair. In adolescence, the girls’ narratives included reference to a ‘tomboy’s clothing as comfortable. There was also more discussion in adolescence identifying ‘tomboys’ as masculine or unfeminine in their appearance. For stereotypes of a ‘girly girl’’s Aspects of Appearance, these girls described clothing that is tight, restrictive, and ultra-feminine in both childhood and adolescence. There was more focus on clothing as being revealing in adolescence, as well as an emphasis on clothes as fashionable. Both age groups emphasized a ‘girly girl’s preoccupation with perfecting their hair by styling, changing and worrying about their hair. Both age groups also identified a stereotype of a ‘girly girl’ as a girl who alters their natural appearance by wearing makeup.

The theme of Activities and Interests for ‘tomboys’ included three subthemes in the childhood narratives demonstrating the stereotypes that ‘tomboys’ enjoy playing sports, being physically active, and being outdoors. In their narratives from adolescence, this stereotype had been reduced to a focus only on stereotyping ‘tomboys’ as playing sports. These girls’ narratives in childhood demonstrated that the stereotype of ‘girly girls’ in relation to Activities and Interests was that they do not participate in sports, they enjoy appearance-related activities, and seem to be mostly sedentary through activities like sitting, talking, and playing with dolls. Similarly in adolescence, these girls emphasized that the stereotype of a ‘girly girl’ is that she does not play sports and that she focuses on her appearance as a form of activity. In addition in
adolescence, there was the stereotype that ‘girly girls’ enjoy shopping. The sedentary activities identified in adolescence were focused on engaging with different forms of media and being relational through ‘sitting and talking’.

The final theme in the shared cultural stereotypes of a ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ included Social Behaviours, which was described in two subthemes: interpersonal style and social preferences. For the stereotype of the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood their interpersonal style was described as rebellious, independent, and tough; while in adolescence their narratives primarily focused on how ‘tomboys’ behave like boys. The interpersonal style of a ‘girly girl’ from the childhood narratives included the stereotypes compared to that of a ‘good girl’ and of a ‘mean girl’, as well as being overly emotional. In adolescence the narratives about a ‘girly girl’’s interpersonal style described an exaggerated or hyper-femininity. The second subtheme of social preferences demonstrated that girls in both the childhood narratives and the adolescent narratives felt ‘tomboys’ were likely to have friendships with boys, while they perceived ‘girly girls’ to hold social currency with popularity and to attain boys’ romantic attentions in heterosexual relationships.
Summary Chart of ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels in Childhood and Adolescence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOMBOY – CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>TOMBOY – ADOLESCENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspects of Appearance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aspects of Appearance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clothing (baggy, loose, boys’ clothing)</td>
<td>• Clothing (baggy, comfortable, like a boy, unfeminine, masculine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hair (carefree)</td>
<td>• Hair (carefree, natural, don’t care)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities and Interests</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities and Interests</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sports (passion, love of sport)</td>
<td>• Sports (competitive, play guy sports, athletic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Being Physically Active (enjoy being physical and active in their bodies)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Being Outdoors (explore nature, play games and sports outside)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social Behaviour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Social Behaviour</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal Style (rebel from gender norms of being nice, are seen as independent, tough)</td>
<td>• Interpersonal Style (behave and act like boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Preferences (more likely to be friends with boys)</td>
<td>• Social Preferences (friends with boys, hang out with boys)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIRLY GIRL – CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>GIRLY GIRL – ADOLESCENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspects of Appearance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aspects of Appearance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clothing (tight, restrictive, skirts or dresses, color pink)</td>
<td>• Clothing (tight, restrictive, revealing, fashionable, color pink)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hair (style hair, change hair, want perfect hair)</td>
<td>• Hair (preoccupied with doing hair, changing hair, avoiding hair getting messy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Makeup (preoccupation with makeup, alter natural appearance)</td>
<td>• Makeup (preoccupation with makeup, wear lots of makeup, care about appearance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities and Interests</strong></td>
<td><strong>Activities and Interests</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No Sports (watch sports from sidelines, don’t like sports)</td>
<td>• No Sports (not sporty, doesn’t participate in gym class, stays out of sports)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Appearance-Related Activities (putting on makeup, doing hair)</td>
<td>• Appearance-Related Activities (altering, changing, fixing the body, wants perfection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sedentary Activities (sitting and talking, playing with dolls)</td>
<td>• Shopping (loves going shopping, spending time in malls, focus on fashion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Behaviour</td>
<td>• Sedentary Activities (engages with media forms, likes talking with friends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpersonal Style (hyper-feminine, good girl, being nice, being perfect, mean girl, overly emotional, ditsy)</td>
<td>• Interpersonal Style (hyper-femininity, overly emotional, shrieking, giggling, dumb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social Preferences (teased for being too girlish, don’t get along with tomboys, liked by boys)</td>
<td>• Social Preferences (focus on heterosexual relationships)</td>
</tr>
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CHAPTER FOUR

Social Outcomes: Privileges and Consequences of the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels

Beyond looking at the stereotypes of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels, the second dimension examines the social outcomes of each label by exploring the privileges and then the consequences held by each side of this dichotomy. The girls’ narratives are delineated based on grade level, with girls in grade six or below categorized as ‘Childhood’ and girls in grade seven or above categorized as ‘Adolescence’. The privileges and consequences identified in these girls’ narratives illustrate the dynamics of power held by each side of this dichotomy. Through examining privileges and consequences, a better understanding emerged in girls’ lived experiences of these two labels.

Childhood

In childhood, the Privileges are first explored for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label and then the ‘girly girl’ label. Following is an examination of the Consequences for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label and then the ‘girly girl’ label.

Privileges associated with each label. Each side of this ‘tomboy’/ ‘girly girl’ dichotomy held certain privileges. According to these girls’ narratives, privileges associated with being a ‘tomboy’ included a strong connection to self, a comfort in one’s body, and the freedom to be passionately involved in physical activity and sport. Their narratives pertaining to a ‘girly girl’ suggest privileges associated with popularity and gaining male romantic attentions.

Privileges of being a ‘tomboy’. Throughout the girls’ narratives, it was clear that girls recognized many freedoms that come with embodying the tomboy identity. Three themes emerged related to Privileges of Being a Tomboy: a strong connection to self, comfortable in one’s body, and a physical freedom to be passionate about activity and sport.
**Strong connection to self.** The girls discussed an authenticity amongst tomboys that demonstrated a connection to self that was not compromised by external demands or pressures. These girls recognized a strong connection to self apparent in those who identify with the ‘tomboy’ label. There was a frequent narrative naming congruence and authenticity in how ‘tomboys’ present themselves and in the way they live their lives. The girls frequently alluded to or named tomboys as being ‘normal’, suggesting that at this pre-puberty stage, it is more desirable to be seen as distancing oneself from traditional expressions of femininity.

Tomboys feel normal. They don’t feel like they’re better than anybody and stuff like that. They just act normal. They don’t try and be someone that they’re not.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Tomboys just act like normal people. Tomboys just act like, they just stay themselves.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Like I didn’t care what I looked like or anything. Tomboys it’s just like ‘whatever’. They just kind of will be doing their own thing.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

**Comfortable in one’s body.** Many of the girls described ‘tomboys’ as having a carefree attitude about their appearance that allowed for greater comfort in their bodies.

The girls often repeated the same phrase, that ‘tomboys’ “don’t care” or “don’t think” about their bodies, suggesting they experience freedom from the pressures to meet an ideal.
Q: How do tomboys feel about their bodies? A: They basically do whatever they want with it. They don’t feel bad. Like I don’t care about the way my body looks. I don’t really care about clothes, as long as it doesn’t look weird.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: How does a tomboy feel about her body? A: Probably nothing, because tomboys don’t really think about their bodies.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys don’t really care about their appearance.

(Madison, age 10, Grade 4, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys are just like, they don’t really care about what they’re looking like or whatever. I think they’re really comfortable with themselves. Like I never really thought about how my body looked. It didn’t matter what I was wearing or what I looked like, I would just do whatever. Tomboys don’t care about how they dress.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

The girls’ consistently discussed how the identity of ‘tomboy’ allowed a freedom to dress comfortably and without restriction.
Tomboys wear no skirts or no dresses or anything. They hate skirts and dresses, cause it like dresses them up. They don’t have their hair in clips or anything. And they don’t wear any heels.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys don’t wear as much short things like skirts or dresses.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys probably feel comfortable because they like the clothes they’re wearing and because they play sports, they probably feel good. They like baggier pants and baggier shirts and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Several girls also expressed that identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label relieved certain pressures related to having a girl’s body, such as trying to attain a body shape or weight ideal.

Tomboys don’t try and be skinny, they don’t try and wear skirts and stuff like that. They don’t feel bad.

(Erica, age 9, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

I never really thought about how my body looked. I didn’t care, I was like, fat or skinny, there’s like no shape, you know. I never thought about my body.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
Physical freedom to be passionate about activity and sport. A third privilege associated with identifying as a ‘tomboy’ was the freedom to physically engage one’s body in sport and to feel passionate about physical activity and sports.

Q: If a tomboy’s body could talk, what do you think it would say?  A:  Go me! I’m the best! Let’s go me! Like, you’re playing soccer, like tomboy girls like to play soccer all the time. A tomboy says, ‘I’m gonna win everything’, they don’t care what anyone says, they just want to be the best tomboy they can. As a tomboy, I think of the activity I’m doing. It’s so fun. I like the way my body moves as a tomboy, like I like having long legs so I can run fast with them.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Tomboys feel good because they like being active and stuff.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

I’m more tomboyish now, because I like sports more now.  Q:  If your body could talk when you’re more like a tomboy, what would it say?  A:  Go for it!! It’s just more fun!

(Hilary, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

It was great! I would always be out in the fields having fun! We’d play soccer and baseball and football and all that kind of stuff.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
I didn’t care what I looked like, I was just like, “let’s play tag”, it was always tag! I loved sports, playing baseball, fun things like that. We would play basketball and like hockey on the street, too. We ran around and we were big into biking.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory of childhood, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

**Privileges of being a ‘girly girl’**. There were two subthemes related to Privileges of Being a Girly Girl in the pre-puberty stage: male romantic attention and greater social currency.

*Male romantic attention.* The main privilege evident in these girls’ narratives was their perception that boys seem more likely to be attracted to or interested romantically in a girl who identifies with the ‘girly girl’ label.

Boys think that girly girls are special. Because they’re prettier than other people, but that’s not really true.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Boys like the girly girls because girly girls wear skirts and they especially like it better if it is all windy and their skirt flies up!

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Boys are more likely to have crushes on girly girls, I think. Because they wear like short shirts and stuff, and like they don’t play as much sports, I guess.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
Boys think girly girls are pretty and they like them.

(Megan, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Popular is girly and you wear all the right clothes, have boyfriends you know, all that jazz.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

*Social currency.* Amongst some girls there was an understanding that ‘girly girls’ hold social currency in their peer group and were described as ‘popular’ girls.

Girly girls think that they’re pretty special. She probably feels that she’s better than everyone else.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls, they usually like, they get in like this big group and then start talking about other people and stuff like that. Sometimes, a girly girl comes and says, ‘you’re disgusting’ and stuff like that and they’ll just walk away.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Most girly girls are really snobby. Like they’re not nice to people and they think they’re so popular and pretty and perfect.

(Megan, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
Popular girls and girly girls are the same.

(Megan, age 11, Grade 5, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

**Consequences associated with each label.** There were also consequences identified in these girls’ narratives for both sides of this dichotomy. Consequences associated with being a ‘tomboy’ were in relation to how ‘tomboys’ are seen as borrowing from boys because of their participation in sport and their choice of clothing as well as the consequence of being socially ostracized. The consequences highlighted for the ‘girly girl’ label were related to feeling objectified in their bodies and to feeling insecure about maintaining peer acceptance.

**Consequences of being a ‘tomboy’.** The girls’ narratives demonstrated consequences and disadvantages attached to the ‘tomboy’ label. In particular, three subthemes emerged related to consequences of being a ‘tomboy’. The first theme was that ‘tomboys’ were defined as borrowing from boys’ territory in terms of sports and physical activity. The second theme related to seeing ‘tomboys’ as borrowing boys’ clothing. The third theme highlights how these girls perceive ‘tomboys’ as socially ostracized.

*Playing boys’ sports.* Despite strong involvement by many of these participants in competitive sport, they named many team sports as belonging to boys. Thus, they seemed to have internalized the gender power dynamics involved in sports and athletics that keeps girls from feeling that these activities are a rightful and natural aspect of girls’ lives.

It’s like you’re a girl but you kind of like guy stuff. You’d play in the mud or do something like football. When you’re a tomboy, you can play basketball, hockey, and soccer.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
A tomboy does more sports, some girls don’t do sports...they don’t do anything.
(Roxy, age 9, Grade 3, Romanian-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys usually want to do sports and all that more than anything else. Just like boy things.
(Erica, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

A tomboy is really boyish, you always do sports, whatever team you try out for, you’re the first one to be picked, you’re an athletic rep, and everything you do is sports.
(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

While the ‘tomboy’ label seems to permit freedom for girls to play sports, this participation is not seen as rightful girl territory. Girls continued to name sports as belonging to boys, so that even if they passionately enjoyed and participated in these sports, they spoke as though this was borrowed territory.

Wearing boy clothes. All girls interviewed described tomboys as girls who wear boy clothes. When asked to further describe what qualifies as ‘boy clothes’, the girls overwhelmingly defined boys’ clothing with words like, “baggy”, “comfortable”, and “loose”.

A tomboy wears clothes like the ideal guy would. She wears baggy clothes and stuff like that.
(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
A tomboy kind of dresses like a boy.
(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

A girl who acts like a boy and wears boy clothes and caps and all that. Q: What are boy clothes? A: Loose pants, and really long shirts.
(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)

Tomboys never wear really frilly pink tops. They wear baggy pants, any shirt, just not the frilly pink tops. They wear a lot of baggy clothes, like basketball shorts. As long as they look like more of a boy than a girl, cause they don’t want to be all girly girl and stuff.
(Olivia, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)

A tomboy is a girl but dressed kind of like a boy.
(Tiger, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)

Two participants, who self-identified as tomboys, especially in their younger years, discussed why they sought out wearing boys’ clothing.

I just wore like a shirt, like a boy’s shirt or whatever and just like a pair of pants or whatever. I didn’t really care what I wore. I wore more sporty clothes. I wouldn’t be into the tight jeans or anything. As long as it wasn’t a dress, as long as it wasn’t girly.
(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)
You don’t feel constricted like you do with tighter clothing. It’s kind of sometimes awkward to move and especially since I was so active and always running and stuff. When flared pants started coming out, that’s when I started shopping in the boys’ section, I bought boys’ pants cause they were straighter. Also that’s when shorts started getting really short, so I’d feel weird when I sat down because I don’t like my butt sticking out of the side, so I started wearing boys shorts. I don’t know, I just love boys’ clothing a lot.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory of age 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Socially ostracized. A final consequence to identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood highlights how girls can be ostracized or made to feel abnormal for identifying as a ‘tomboy’. Madison discusses the possibility of ‘tomboys’ being ostracized,

People say my friend is a tomboy. They call her a man and stuff when she comes around because she dresses in guy clothes. People call her a man, but you know she’s not a man. And they have weird songs about her, like they make up songs about her, like about her having a dick and stuff. She once ran to the washroom and started crying. I told her, ‘don’t listen to them, they’re just boys’.

(Madison, age 12, Métis, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Lauren discusses a memory of being left out by a group of girls,
In grade six, there were a bunch of girls that were kind of more girly and I was kind of…I was always playing tag and stuff and then in grade six we started playing hockey a lot. These girls didn’t like doing that, so they had this little club, and I didn’t know what they did, but it was girly stuff. So I was just like, ‘Can I be in your club?’ and they were like, ‘No’. So I was excluded from that and that kind of was like, ‘Ouch’. But I didn’t care too much. I just went off and played with the boys and I was fine.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, recalling Grade 6, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

The participant, Melissa, who shared her reasons for preferring baggy clothing, also shared about how her choice in dress was tolerated by her parents except for one day a year when she was pressured to dress more ‘girly’.

My parents pretty much let me do whatever. Except when it was picture day, then my mom would dress me up. I would like cry and fight with her. It was kind of like she was trying to change me into someone else. ‘Cause she wouldn’t let me be what I was like all the time. And now when you look back at the picture from picture day, it looks like I was like that but I really wasn’t. Now when I look back at the pictures, it’s like, ‘ugh’.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

At a later interview, Melissa reflected back to her childhood and recalled feeling pressure to change her ‘tomboy’ identity to be more girly,
Q: Do you feel pressure from the labels? A: I guess I just ignore them… I guess I used to sort of feel pressured by them, like I’d always want to be outside, catching bugs, you know? And then my mom would be like, ‘no, wear this dress’, or ‘go play with this little girl’. And I’d be like, ‘no! I want to play with Nicholas!’

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Consequences of being a ‘girly girl’. While there were privileges noted for those identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label, there were also consequences to this identity. Two main subthemes emerged in Consequences of Being a Girly Girl: ways that ‘girly girls’ become objects rather than agents in their bodies, and a tenuous sense of peer acceptance.

Objects instead of agents. One consequence that emerged from these girls’ narratives for the ‘girly girl’ label was the way in which the characteristics and demands of this identity make girls objects rather than agents in their bodies. It appeared in the narratives that girls identifying as a ‘girly girl’ learn to put their body on display for others making it challenging to live in a connected, embodied way. The girls spoke of restrictive clothing that limits movement, and clothing that is meant for pleasing the ‘other’ rather than for functionality of the body.

My mom dressed me till grade one and she made me wear dresses and I hated it. You’re playing tag and running up the stairs of the jungle gym and it was a pain because you’re wearing a dress and it’s difficult to run in and I used to fight with my mom every morning.
Sometimes I wear shirts that go past here and go down to here on me. I don’t care how I look. My dad does, he says, ‘Why did you dress like a slob today?’. But it’s comfy. It’s better than staying in tight clothes.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

When you have to be perfect, you can’t run or anything. You have to walk; you have to wear high heels.

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The girls referred to clothing that restricted their freedom of movement and described the ‘girly girl’ label as analogous to being a doll, or having felt “like a doll”, a striking image exemplifying the feeling of having your body on display.

I was always prissy. I would always run around playing with dresses and jewellery. I liked wearing dresses, I just liked how they looked and everything. I thought I looked cutesy. I think all the dolls that were coming out always wore dresses.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, recalling memory of age 6, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

When I was little, my mom practically picked out all my clothes, but I liked pink, and I liked pretty, frilly, girly things. I don’t know why. Maybe subconsciously, I was like,
oh, pink is for girls. I remember liking it a lot. My mom mostly dressed me in things like that. Like a little doll.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, recalling memory of age 5, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

The girls’ narratives often connected pressures around body ideals to the ‘girly girl’ label,

Girly girls are mostly skinny.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Girly girls…they want to be really skinny.

(Jackie, age 11, Grade 5, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Insecurity. These girls have recognized the struggle that exists for ‘girly girls’ who do everything asked of them to fit the ‘ideal image’ and yet because perfection is unattainable, they are left feeling inadequate and ‘not good enough’. The girls repeatedly described ‘girly girls’ as worrying about what others perceive of them.

I think girly girls probably won’t talk about it in front of people, but they probably care a lot about their bodies because girly girls like worry about how they look.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting 1st interview)

Girly girls worry, they worry like if they’ve got a zit on their face.

(Tiger, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
The girly girl, she coordinates her braces with her clothes, she always wears high heel shoes, and she always asks everybody ‘do I look okay?’

(Jackie, age 12, Grade 6, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Adolescence

First explored in the adolescent narratives are the Privileges associated with being a ‘tomboy’ and then the Privileges associated with being a ‘girly girl’. Secondly, the Consequences of being a ‘tomboy’ are explored followed by the Consequences associated with being a ‘girly girl’.

Privileges associated with each label. The Privileges associated with each label are delineated first with an examination for the ‘tomboy’ label followed by the ‘girly girl’ label. The Privileges associated with the ‘tomboy’ label included similar subthemes as in childhood: a strong connection to self and comfortable in one’s body. The Privileges associated with the ‘girly girl’ label in adolescence included the similar subtheme from childhood of having social currency and also included a new subtheme demonstrating the privilege of being the norm for adolescent girls.

Privileges of being a ‘tomboy’. While there were two similar subthemes carried over from childhood to adolescence of a strong connection to self and comfort in one’s body, there were significantly less narratives illustrating these subthemes suggesting a weaker position of privilege for the ‘tomboy’ identity in adolescence.

Strong connection to self. A couple of girls discussed ‘tomboys’ as being connected and comfortable with themselves suggesting a strong sense of self.
I’m more comfortable with girls who are like tomboys or butch or whatever you want to call them, cause they are more comfortable to be themselves I would think.
(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: How do you think tomboys feel about themselves? A: I think they feel good.
Because they’re like being themselves, they would rather be themselves than be like other people. So they feel better about themselves.
(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Comfortable in one’s body. These girls repeatedly referred to ‘tomboys’ as comfortable in their appearance, and as not having appearance-related concerns. Some girls described it as “not worrying” about looks,

Tomboys don’t really worry about what they look like.
(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: How do tomboys feel about themselves? A: I think they can be self-conscious at times, too, but not as much. I think that they are just more loose and comfortable and not really caring if they get a zit.
(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

They aren’t so clothes-oriented or thinking of their appearance. Tomboys don’t care what they look like so sometimes, they might look like a kid, ‘cause you know they don’t care what they look like. But still, you’re not trying to be something that you’re not.
Other girls felt that ‘tomboys’ don’t have body-related concerns,

One of my friends she got really worried about her weight. But my friends who are tomboys, they just don’t really care how they look.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Tomboys don’t care about how they’re dressed.

(Q: How do you think tomboys feel about their bodies? A: I don’t think they care.

(Katasha, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Privileges of being a ‘girly girl’. There were two main subthemes for Privileges of Being a ‘Girly Girl’ in adolescence. The first subtheme refers to how ‘girly girls’ are viewed as the norm for how girls identify in adolescence. The second subtheme, carries over from childhood, and illustrates greater social currency for girls who identify as a ‘girly girl’.

Being the norm. This subtheme arose from the many narratives suggesting that the majority of girls will identify as a ‘girly girl’ during their adolescence. There was power in numbers illustrated from their narratives. Fitting in and being part of the norm was a safe space for these adolescent girls. Many girls used the phrase that all girls “are the same” in adolescence, stating that all girls “look like girls”, implying the ‘girly girl’ appearance.
Q: In grade seven, are people still using those labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’? A: No. That stopped at the end of grade six. Now it’s just ‘girl’ or ‘boy’…like it’s just girls, people look at girls the same now. Now that we’re in high school, it’s like they all look the same.

(Erica, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: Now that you’re in grade nine, do people still use the terms ‘tomboy’ or ‘girly girl’? A: No, they’re all basically the same. There aren’t really groups like that.

(Katasha, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Last time we talked, you talked about the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’, do those labels still get used now? A: Not really no. I guess they’re all kind of the same, just with different attitudes and personalities.

(Jenna, age 15, Grade 10, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Do you guys use the terms ‘tomboy’ or ‘girly girl’ now? A: Um, not really anymore. I mean there are girls who are more into sports and stuff, but not really. Now that we’re in high school, everyone’s like, all girls are girls.

(Jessica, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: What happens to the terms ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’? A: They stopped in like grade 8. I don’t know, everyone’s just kind of the same. It doesn’t really matter; it’s just all the same kind. It’s just kind of a happy medium. Girls start going out with boys more and stuff.
There were also statements made demonstrating a ‘girly girl’ privilege whereby girls identifying as ‘girly girls’ were seen as “normal” and as following the appropriate gender norms for girls.

Q: Where would a ‘normal girl’ fall? A: A little more girly. Almost every girl in my classroom is a girly girl.

(Question and answer from Chelsea, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: So if they were referred to as tomboys, what was everybody else referred to as? A: Just normal people.

(Question and answer from Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Q: Why do you think your mom wanted you to be more ‘girly’? A: That was what was expected and accepted, you know? Like, ‘you’re a girl, this is what you do’. You’re taught from such a young age. Like, ‘you’re a girl, go play with the Barbies’. You know? They set that up, like from when you’re like one year old, it’s all set up. Girls have just been programmed to do that.

(Question and answer from Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

I think at this point like all girls are pretty much like girly girls. I don’t see a lot of tomboys, I can’t even off the top of my head think of a girl that dresses like a guy that much in my grade, like I can’t think of one.

(Question and answer from Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
It’s different for boys, because like guys look so much better in baggy clothes, like that’s how they’re supposed to dress whereas girls should be dressing more like feminine. It should be wearing tight pants and like cute little shirts and that and guys are supposed to wear the baggy pants and the baggy sweatshirts and the long t-shirts and the hats and all that. I don’t think it’s right for girls to be dressing like guys. I don’t know, because there’s like hardly any really now there’s like maybe one or two tomboys that you’ll actually see. The rest have changed to girly girls now.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

I think now ‘girly girl’ is more of something that’s more recognized, like, um, because as you get older, I think everyone kind of….like I don’t know anyone that really doesn’t care about their appearance. Like butch girls and tomboys, I don’t see very much. More you see the type of girls that is very, like, you just look at her and you see the Barbie Doll. And that is a lot more common. Its way more common to see a girl that’s completely done up than someone that doesn’t care at all.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

*Social currency.* The girls’ narratives were consistent in stating that in adolescence, ‘girly girls’ are more likely to be popular and enjoy greater social access to ‘fitting in’ to the larger peer group.

Girly girls stay girly as they grow because they’ve always wanted to fit in and they always keep trying. There are more girly girls, so more and more people want to fit in
all the time so they just keep changing like them. On shows, like the more popular people are more girly – like Jessica Simpson and Britney Spears.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Do popular girls tend to be tomboys or girly girls? A: Girly girls.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Is it easier for a tomboy or a girly girl to go through puberty? A: Girly girl, because it’s more socially acceptable. I think just because it’s more socially acceptable to be a girly girl kind of thing, like how your body is and stuff like that. It’s just more fitting with what you are wearing and it’s just easier I think.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Girls recognized that identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label privileges girls to greater social currency by colluding with social norms regarding how girls should be,

I think in younger ages, like kindergarten or something, I think it doesn’t really matter, nobody’s really judging you. But as you get older, I think it’ll probably be easier being a girly girl because they’re more in the in-crowd.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

For awhile it was like, there was the outside people and then the girly girl people.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
In the media, people are telling you how to look, how to be, and it’s to be a girly girl, definitely.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

You have your girly girls where they’re so much into fashion. They have like perfect hair. They wear perfect makeup and everything, not too thick, not too much or anything, but perfect. They have beautiful fashion sense. But then they go and play soccer and everything like that and hockey. They’re very much into the fashions and stuff like that but they love to play sports. Like girls now who are very girly, like love to do their hair and always boy talk and stuff like that and have total fashion sense and everything, perfect fashion sense. But then they love hockey and they love soccer. A lot of them I played soccer with when we were younger.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

**Consequences associated with each label.** The Consequences associated with each label are delineated first with an examination for the ‘tomboy’ label followed by the ‘girly girl’ label. The Consequences associated with the ‘tomboy’ label included one similar subtheme from childhood – being socially ostracized for being a ‘tomboy’. The Consequences associated with being a ‘tomboy’ in adolescence also included a number of new subthemes: felt pressure to discard their ‘tomboy’ identity and become more ‘girly’, the emergence of harsher labels associated with sexuality, and the fading of the ‘tomboy’ identity and masquerading of the ‘girly girl’ identity. The Consequences associated with the ‘girly girl’ label in adolescence included the similar subthemes from childhood of a ‘girly girl’ being an object of their bodies rather than an agent in their bodies and the subtheme of insecurity in their sense of self. The Consequences associated with the ‘girly girl’ label also included new subthemes in adolescence: the
emergence of harsher labels associated with sexuality, a blurred line between the ‘girly girl’ label and the ‘slut’ label, fear of the ‘slut’ label, a hyper vigilance in dressing the body, and policing of girls’ bodies.

Consequences of being a ‘tomboy’. There were four main subthemes identified in the Consequences of Being a ‘Tomboy’. First explored is the subtheme of being socially ostracized when identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label. Next is an examination of the emergence of new and harsher labels associated with sexuality. Thirdly, the subtheme of how ‘tomboys’ are pressured to be ‘girly’ is explored. Finally, the subtheme of how ‘tomboys’ begin to fade and masquerade as ‘girly girls’ in adolescence will be explored.

Socially ostracized. By adolescence, the ‘tomboy’ identity was no longer an acceptable form of presentation for girls. This is evident in the way the girls discussed ‘tomboys’ as “different” and as a phase that girls should grow out of,

Some girls are still girls…but they’re just different. Q: What would be an example? A: Tomboys.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: What would it be like for a girl to stay a tomboy? A: Well, I think they would be like, not weird, but kind of strange. Just the fact that she never grew out of it.

( Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: Is it easier for a tomboy or a girly girl to go through puberty? A: I actually think it would be very hard for tomboys. Q: What was it like for you as a tomboy? A: It was…it’s one of those things where you want to be recognized as a girl, but you don’t;
because it’s scary…it’s so scary. I don’t know, like I guess maybe the attention used to scare me or something, and now attention doesn’t really bother me. But yeah, I don’t know, like it just seems like that would be really hard to go through to me, I don’t know. There is definitely a period of transition; I don’t know exactly what happened.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

This was also evident by the way ‘tomboys’ interests were seen as abnormal and pushed outside the boundaries of ‘normal girlhood’,

Q: What happened to the girls that were tomboys when you were in grade 7 or younger?
A: They’re still like the same person, but just like different. I don’t know. Like it’s like they still do sports but it’s like outside the schools.

(Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Sports is mostly like a guy’s thing. Like more of the girly girls stay out. And like you have to kind of cross the line, like with sports, like the active girls do. But I want to, I just love the game. I love the competitiveness and I just love the feel of sports.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Sports is a guys’ thing to do, I guess. Like that, and like the outdoors. Like the whole label thing again, you know? Like, this is a guy thing. Like fishing, boating, and biking, and all that sort of stuff. And then girls are in the house. Like that’s the roles of like girl/boy roles. It’s just all the labels I guess.

(Melissa, age 17, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)
We’re supposed to follow the norm and like if we do something that the other gender does, like yeah, that’s questioned, like who we are. Like playing sports. When I was in elementary school, I was like the only girl who played hockey. I don’t know, I thought I was cool, getting out there and playing hockey. But it’s a guys’ sport, the guys played it first, guys made it. There’s more men who play hockey. But then it’s like, I feel special if I’m a girl playing hockey, I’m not just doing what everyone else is doing.

(Shannon, age 18, 1st year university, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

This social banishment of ‘tomboys’ included a more explicit form of ostracizing through teasing and harassment arising from rules of femininity that discipline girls on the social order of how girls should appear and behave.

Q: How do people treat tomboys? A: Well, fine, but some not. They’ll say, ‘you look more like a boy than a girl’. They probably feel horrible.

(Roxy, age 13, Grade 8, Romanian-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

This one girl at our school, I’ve never seen her really hang out with the girls or anything. I think tomboys, since they’re not girly, get teased a lot more by the girls – because they’re different. As you get older, I think it will be easier being a girly girl because they’re more in the ‘in crowd’. Not like the tomboys, when they’re with the guys and everything, all the girls are judging them ‘cause they’re different. Like on some TV shows, it’s usually the tomboy’s being picked on and then they end up getting in a lot of trouble.
Most of the tomboys seem like losers. When you get older, people make fun of you because of it. They say, like ‘oh yeah, you’re a man’ and stuff like that. But when you’re younger people don’t care what you wear or how you dress and like what you look like and stuff. They care more about your personality and stuff. But now people make fun of you for trying to be yourself and stuff.

It’s more that they’re manly, like, we don’t really use the term ‘tomboy’, it would be more like, ‘oh wow, she’s a beast’.

If you’re a tomboy, then people will be like, ‘Oh my God, that’s a man, that’s a guy’. And like I don’t think a girl would really want to be called a guy. I’d really be hurt if I was called a guy. At my school, we have a couple of girls who look like guys. Like my neighbour goes to my school and she dresses…like if she didn’t have long hair, she would definitely look like a guy, but she’s a girl. And so like I heard people talking and saying, like, ‘oh she’s a guy’ and girls were arguing over if it was a guy or a girl.

There is this one girl who I noticed dresses like a boy, she kind of has long hair still, but dresses like a boy. She even kind of looks like a boy. I feel kind of bad for her actually,
because you know, people aren’t nice to her. She’s very tomboyish in that way. I mean, she must get labelled.

(Hazel, age 16, Grade 11, Métis, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Like I still wear, like if I have soccer tryouts in the morning and then I have gym that day and baseball after school, I will wear track pants all day long. So my guy friends, like just last week this happened, they were like, ‘hey Lauren, you’re really frumpy today’. And I was like, ‘frumpy?’, like what’s that? But they were joking around.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Emergence of harsher labels associated with sexuality. Once these girls moved out of childhood and into adolescence, a new set of rules was introduced regarding the socially constructed scripts of girlhood. These rules pertained to sexuality and how girls should present themselves. A form of disciplining around sexuality and gender included harsh labels addressing girls who stepped out of bounds. Girls who did not fit the desired mould of femininity were no longer referred to as ‘tomboys’ but were often called “butch”. This term held a more derogatory implication in how a girl has crossed the lines of femininity. This was used to refer to girls who were judged to take up too much space with their physical bodies, a characteristic seen as not acceptable or desirable in girls.

Q: So describe a masculine girl for me. What are their characteristics? A: I don’t know, just someone who is kinda like a butch or something. Like just someone who doesn’t care about like what they wear, like what they look like or like play sports and
stuff like that. Just kind of like more like relates to other guys, who relates to other
people more like a guy does.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

I really don’t know many girls at all who are like butches. But it’s kinda weird because
like I don’t know, I just don’t really classify people, cause like I don’t know where I
would fall into because like I don’t play with guys, but then again, I’m not like, I don’t
think I’m normal. I don’t know what normal is actually. In a sense, like normal is like
kind of a default category.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

People will be like, ‘don’t go work out, you’re going to get butch’. Q: So what is that
label? A: It’s a manly girl. Which means, I guess, oh big muscles and being big.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3\textsuperscript{rd} interview)

Q: So you said people don’t really use the term ‘tomboy’, but they might say someone is
athletic? A: Yeah, athletic or butch. Butch is more kinda used to describe bigger, like
more of like athletic, like really I guess girls that don't even take care about their
appearance. And it’s not about weight, but about build. Because generally I find athletic
girls are usually like that big anyway, because you do work out. Like there are some that
are bigger or whatever, but mostly it has to do, I guess with girls that have like big
shoulders. Like bigger shoulders that do kind of you know they resemble a man or
whatever. So they’re like, ‘hey that girl’s butch’. Just that she’s kinda like maybe
masculine or just really doesn’t care.
Along with the ‘butch’ label, girls who did not follow the rules of femininity were also attacked from a homophobic lens by being labelled as “lesbian” or “dyke”.

Like my dad was talking to my old assistant coach on my hockey team and he just like joked around like, like stuff like, ‘oh yeah, there is my daughter, she is probably a lesbian’. Like he will say stuff like that, cause I guess that’s what he thinks, I don’t know. He is just trying to impress people, so it doesn’t really bother me.

(Sarah, age 15, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

If you’re a butch, people think you’re more, like, lesbian-ish, sort of, or ‘dyke’.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: So in terms of labels given to just girls, what do you hear? A: Lesbians, sometimes they call them dykes. I was like, ‘aw, that’s not nice, dikes are something you use for like a dam’. Q: So what gives them that label? A: Well, usually they actually are. But it is the way they dress. Like some girls are a little more butch than others.

(Hazel, age 17, Grade 12, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: How are tomboys treated? A: Well, like there are these three girls who were always best friends, like they grew up together. And then one started playing hockey and she got really close with one of the best players on the team. And so her two old friends started rumours that they are lesbians together.
(Kyra, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

There are a lot of girls that don’t wear makeup or that would wear makeup every other day or something, nobody cares. If they were to wear boy clothes, nobody ever says anything. But if they wouldn’t shave their legs and then wear shorts, people would be like, ‘ew, that’s gross’. For the most part, they won’t be made fun of to their face, but people might say something like, ‘she’s such a lesbian’. Something like that.

(Kelly, age 18, Grade 12, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: Has anyone ever made assumptions about you or judged you or stereotyped you because you are a girl who plays hockey? A: Yeah, this year at work, he said something like that I’m gay because of it. He told his girlfriend at the time and she told me.

(Shannon, age 18, 1st year university, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Pressure to be ‘girly’. The disciplining of girls with rules of femininity included a strong pressure on girls who had not yet colluded, such as ‘tomboys’. They were pressured, coerced, and encouraged to leave their ‘tomboy’ identity behind. This occurred by pressuring girls to change their clothing to a tighter style.

Clothes now are older-looking and tighter. I started caring more about what other people thought of me and what I was wearing. I didn’t want to be made fun of and stuff. People get teased for baggy clothes.

(Chrissy, age 13, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)
Tomboys change. They don’t want to dress like in guy clothes anymore and stuff like that. They just want to fit in. They don’t want to be left out; they don’t want to be different anymore. They want to fit in more and more.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

They try to get other girls to help them and go shopping with them and they pick out more girly clothes…I would definitely give them like more girly clothes. Like take them shopping and like buy them the tight jeans and like cute little girly shirts and definitely get some makeup for them. And do the hair, always. I don’t think it’s right for girls to be dressing like guys. I don’t know, because there’s like hardly any really now there’s like maybe one or two tomboys that you’ll actually see. The rest have changed to girly girls now.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

I remember the shift between like wearing a one-piece bathing suit and going to a two-piece…my friend just turned to me and was like, ‘are you kidding me? You still wear a one-piece?’ And I was like, ‘I don’t know, it’s easier to move in, like you’ll lose your bathing suit when you’re running around’. And she’s like, ‘no, come on’ and then she made me wear one and then it just started, I don’t know, that’s just how I made that switch that way. That was probably grade nine.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

I’d probably call myself a tomboy before. But like I’d say to girls now, like still keep your fashion sense. Like you can wear what you want. But I wouldn’t say go wear
guys’ clothes. Like you still want to be comfortable, but I would say don’t go get guys clothes because then you’re just being one of the guys.

(Shannon, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

These rules of femininity were also pressured by encouraging ‘tomboys’ to start wearing makeup.

Q: Did any of the girls who were more girly ever say to you, ‘come on, try this on’? A: Oh yeah. Sleepovers and birthday parties were like that. It was always like, they’d be like, try and put makeup on me or something, and I’d be like, ‘you’re crazy’, but I’d sometimes I’d go along and be like, ‘ah no one’s going to see me’, and then it would be like ‘oh try on this skirt’, and I’d be like, ‘hey!’, but I’d do it just to make them laugh. They felt it was really funny because they all knew me and they were like, ‘oh Lauren is wearing makeup, wow’. I just laughed because I knew it was true, like I just never had. I just felt that it was funny that they had so much amusement in trying to put that stuff on me, so I just let them.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

I started wearing makeup in grade eight and I just wear eyeliner. I remember it was at the end of grade eight, when you’re graduating and it’s a big thing and for the ceremony, my mom said, ‘okay I’m going to put makeup on you’, and I remember saying, ‘oh, they’re coming at me with the mascara’, and I couldn’t hold my eyes open, it was terrible. It took them over an hour to get the stuff on me because I kept blinking and backing away. And then, I don’t know, I just started putting eyeliner on myself after
that. Every day I wear eyeliner, and well, I wear foundation sometimes, but like mascara only if it’s like a big occasion.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, recalling grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Another way that rules of femininity were expressed is found in Melissa’s narrative of being pressured to grow out her hair to be more ‘girly’.

I used to have really short hair, and then I grew out my hair. It used to be more boyish, like I didn’t have to brush it or anything. My grandma wanted me to. She’d say, ‘you should grow out your hair, you’re such a pretty little girl’. At first, I said, ‘no Grandma, I don’t want to’. And then after, I was like, ‘fine, I’ll give it a try’ and then she got all excited. I’ve kept it about shoulder length. People didn’t treat me differently, I just felt like I fit in more. I guess because I looked more like them.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

The girls’ narratives also demonstrated the felt pressure to be ‘girly’ in order to receive romantic male attention. This was seen in girls at early adolescence,

Q: Why do you think there’s pressure on girls to be more girlish outside of sports? A: Well, kind of because it’s like you start liking guys and stuff like you want to like impress them.

(Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)
Q: Is there pressure to be more girly at your age? A: Well, it’s kinda like…hard.

Cause like if you’re not unlike the guy, like if he doesn’t look at you, then they’ll say, ‘Oh my god, he didn’t look at me, what am I doing wrong?’ So like they’ll go and change, then the guy would look at them once they’ve changed into something else, like a low-cut top.

(Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: When did you shift from not caring to caring about appearance? A: Probably in grade six. I got more interested in boys, I guess. And I cared about what they thought of me, what other girls thought of me. I don’t know, that’s how I was supposed to be, I guess. That’s what I thought I was supposed to be like. Q: How did you learn that? A: By the way the other girls acted and my older sister. Like they all had a boyfriend and then me and my two friends who didn’t care about our looks, we didn’t have a boyfriend, so…I started wearing jeans and stuff, started changing my clothes. Instead of huge shirts that went down to my knees, I wore like smaller ones that were more fitted. I used to have really short hair and I grew out my hair.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

If there was a tomboy and she was around a guy she really likes, maybe she’d act more girly. Maybe she’d dress more like a girly girl a bit.

(Katasha, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: Do you think being a tomboy changes over time? A: Yes. When you’re older like, you care more about guys; I think that changes it because like you want to get married,
you want to have a husband. Like you can still be a tomboy, but it’s just, it’s not the same, I don’t know.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: What’s it like for tomboys? A: Ahh, like a big, big change because I mean you got to think of things from different perspectives instead of being best friends with the guy, you’re going out with the guy, you know? Definitely weird. Like I was like a tomboy, then I started dressing a bit more like a girl. Then once I moved here, I mean all these guys started rushing me and I’m like, ‘oh dang’, like I think it was totally weird.

(Sarah, age 15, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

The concern about presenting a ‘girly’ image for male approval and attention continued to affect girls into their later adolescent years,

Q: What happens to tomboys when they become a lot older? A: Usually they become a little bit less of a tomboy because then things change. They start to like boys and stuff and then they may try a little bit to be girly girls even if they may not be comfortable doing that. When you’re a tomboy and you grow up, the media and boys and stuff, are telling you to be girly girls, so then you’ve got to kind of flip… At the end of grade six, I guess that was a major growing up phase cause I was going to the junior high, and it was like, okay boys are starting to come in a bit more, and I was like, ‘hmm, boys are kind of pretty’. So then in grade seven, I was really like, okay, I started brushing my hair. That was when we started liking boys and stuff. It’s the whole boy thing, like if you’re playing with the boys is different. Athletic girls, they sweat, they do stuff like that
where they’re not…they might not look all beautiful and stuff. They’re not standing pretty and perfect on the sidewalk. So people think of you differently.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: So what’s bad about staying ‘one of the guys’? A: Ah, because like then they might not see you in the same way. Like they might think of you just as a friend. Like you might want to be just friends with guys, but I don’t know. Like if you want to hang out with a guy and just hang out with guys, that’s fine, but like if you liked one of those guys but then they just saw you as one of the guys, like they might not think of you like you think of them.

(Shannon, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Finally, the insidiousness of this pressure to become ‘girly’ can be seen in the girls’ narratives in how they normalize this change and how they have internalized the scripts of femininity.

Q: What happens to tomboys when they grow up? A: They might like have the same personality but depending on the kind of job they have, they might dress more professionally. Like to make a better impression and stuff because they know, ‘okay, I have to wear a skirt because I need to look professional’. They may hate it, but like they still have to do that because they know that’s something they have to do. They’ll probably still play sports and hang out with the guys, but they’ll still like have to wear skirts.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Girly girls are more like adults and when I think of a girly girl, they’re more grown up than like a tomboy is. Because girly girls have more in common with the adults than like the tomboys do. They care about how they look and stuff and that’s just like adults. Tomboys are just running around and you don’t really see adults doing that.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Do you think there’s pressure on girls to be ‘girly’? A: Yeah, probably. Well, I think it’s just like a natural change that occurs. And so, I think people get tired of trying to fight with it and they just like embrace it. Maybe people try to stay young, people try not to change and changes can be scary! But it’s not even really being a ‘girly girl’, but just wearing nicer clothes in general.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

I actually think that tomboys are actually scared to show what they actually look like. Because they always wear such baggy clothes and everything, so it’s kind of like they’re scared to show off what they look like underneath all that. Like their figure and everything. I don’t know, but they’re kind of weird.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Fading of ‘tomboys’ and masquerading as ‘girly girls’. A result of these consequences, and therefore a consequence in and of itself, in adolescence the ‘tomboy’ label begins to fade and girls who previously identified this way begin to masquerade their outside appearance as ‘girly girls’ and the ‘tomboy’ identity is no longer represented. This is demonstrated in the girls’ narratives about no longer using the ‘tomboy’ label,
Q: Do you guys still use the labels, ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’? A: No! They kind of got old, that’s more of an elementary school thing.

(Jackie, age 15, Grade 10, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Is there anyone that gets called a ‘tomboy’ at school? A: I don’t think so. I don’t think I’ve known anyone that’s been called a tomboy since elementary school. Because when we were little, a lot of us wore dresses and bright colors and then if you didn’t, for some reason, you were called a tomboy. Then they began to dress differently.

(Brittney, age 16, Grade 10, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Do people get called ‘tomboys’ and ‘girly girls’? A: Um, I don’t find that as much. I think it’s more classified as ‘you’re athletic’. I guess that’s taken over the tomboy type label.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Do the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ still get used at your age now? A: Not really. No. They’re pretty much done. I don’t really know what tomboy means anymore. I don’t know. I never hear the terms anymore or anyone refer to them.

(Kelly, age 18, Grade 12, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

The girls’ narratives demonstrate a fading process of identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label,
Q: Do you know tomboys now? A: No. Q: What happened to all the tomboys? A: They all got a life, and they all figured that…well, my friend, like once she got mistaken for a guy. So she didn’t like that. So they just realized it wasn’t really a cool kind of look anymore with the style. That was dying out and then new styles came in.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

It’s just kind of a happy medium. Like a lot of girls still play sports and stuff but then they don’t dress like a boy or anything.

(Jenna, age 16, Grade 11, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

This fading process involves masquerading oneself as a ‘girly girl’,

Q: At your age, are there still girls who are tomboys? A: Kind of, but not really. They start to fade into like the girly girl stuff and that. They start dressing more like girls and not like, wearing baggy pants and big baggy shirts.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: I think sometimes tomboys grow out of those things. Like, I think if I was still a tomboy now, like I would be wearing different clothes, definitely. Like one of my close friends, she used to be a tomboy with me and she changed, too. Just a girly girl now.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: So what happened to the girls that used to be tomboys? A: Um, most of them have now become more girly girl.
Q: Are there more tomboys than girly girls or more girly girls than tomboys at your age? A: More girly girls. I notice, for example, like my twin sister and my cousin, they actually wished they were boys when we were in grade three. Like they hated being girls. They hated everything. Like they wanted to wear boy clothes and they wore their hair up all the time and stuff like that. But now they’re girlier than ever! I went through my tomboy phase, but now I love fashion and I love shoes, I absolutely love shoes!

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

**Consequences of being a ‘girly girl’.** There were seven main subthemes identified in the girls’ narratives regarding the consequences of identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label in adolescence. The first two subthemes were also found in childhood: being an object of the body instead of an agent in the body and a feeling of insecurity in one’s sense of self. New subthemes emerged in adolescence regarding the ‘girly girl’ label. As with the ‘tomboy’ label, there was an emergence from the ‘girly girl’ label of harsher labels associated with sexuality, such as ‘slut’ and ‘whore’. Another subtheme was the blurred understanding of what distinguishes the ‘girly girl’ label from the ‘slut’ label. The next subtheme demonstrated that with this emergence there was a fear of being labelled as a ‘slut’ or one of its variants. This resulted in a sixth subtheme of a hyper vigilance in dressing one’s body so as to not be labelled unfavourably. A final subtheme arising in adolescence was the policing of girls’ bodies that occurred as a consequence of girls having to live between these labels.
Objects instead of agents. The girls referred to pressure to fit an ideal image and discussed how ‘girly’ girls’ are often disconnected from their bodies. Girls discussed pressures to be thin or pressures felt around having a certain body shape.

Television has all these new shows coming out where all the girls are all looking beautiful and skinny and like the girls watch this and start thinking, ‘oh these girls are popular, I should be like them, everyone likes these girls’.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I think girly girls feel more pressure because you know their friends are all girly girls and they all talk about appearance, like things like bra sizes and that.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Usually the girls that are like an anorexic are the girly girls.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

They discussed ‘girly girls’ dressing to please others rather than dressing for their own sense of comfort.

Girly girls wear the shorts that go up to there, the short shorts – I can’t wear those at all. Not fun! They are so tight. You can’t even like walk in them. I don’t like them at all.

(Roxy, age 12, Grade 7, Romanian-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)
A girly girl feels kinda good, kinda bad about herself. Because like she’s being like other people and stuff, but then also trying to be herself. Like, you have to walk around in tight skirts and stuff and like tight jeans and tight shirts and stuff like that and then you have to buy pants that are like that to be more like a girly girl because if you buy baggy pants then you….like people would like call you a tomboy and stuff. I wish that I could like dress as I want to dress and still try and be like the other kids and fit in.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls at my age, they wear the tighter clothing, they put on loads of makeup, they’re out to impress boys, and they don’t – well, they’re not very active and stuff like that. Girly girls don’t usually play sports.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Feeling insecure. The girls recognized that this tenuous sense of security in meeting social ideals takes a toll on ‘girly girls’ sense of self.

I find girly girls are kind of like not comfortable to be like who I think they would really be on the inside. Like they might be girly girl all the way through, but I don’t know if it would be possible to be that way.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls feel insecure because they want to fit in all the time. They change their hair color and start wearing makeup and stuff.

(Jenna, age 13, Grade 9, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
Q: How do you feel about your body when you’re dressed more girly? A: I feel good about myself, and bad. ‘Cause like, then, like I feel like, I’m trying to be like other people more than when I’m just like in sweatpants and sweatshirt, then I feel more myself.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

I think girly girls really care about what others think of them. I think some really care about the opinions of others and not really in their own opinions, so they have to meet other people’s standards, not their own. They’re just trying to fit in more.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 9, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

I think girly girls are more insecure. I don’t know it’s just because of what they care about and that sort of thing. Like it’s about their body. That’s what they care about.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Girly girls are more self-conscious and stuff like that. They care more about things that some other people don’t care about.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Emergence of harsher labels associated with sexuality. At adolescence, the girls’ narratives about the label ‘girly girl’ included a disturbing emergence of harsher labels. As girls emerged from puberty and further pressure was placed on girls to become ‘girly’ and to dispose of ‘tomboy’ attributes, the dilemmas girls faced in learning to embody their developing selves
only intensified. The girls described a blurring between the ‘girly girl’ label and labels such as ‘slut’ or ‘whore’. These girls described finding it difficult to define the lines between the desirable label ‘girly girl’ and the undesirable label of ‘slut’. In adolescence, the girls described dealing with the threat of the ‘slut’ label or one of its many variants. Their narratives in adolescence included words such as ‘slut’, ‘whore’, ‘ho’, and ‘skank’.

Q: What about labels that are put on girls, what are girls called more often now that you’re older? A: Like my friends say I get called slut and whore so many times, and lately I take it as a compliment. Like it’s in cat fights and stuff. So, like, someone will say, ‘oh you’re such a slut’.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: So what would be kind of labels that come up for girls your age? A: I don’t know, practically just sluts and whores and that. Q: So what makes someone fall into those categories? A: Dressing really sluttyish. Like they go and grind with guys in the hallway and do things like that. The guys don’t like it, because they’re like, too whorish for them.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: What are some labels that are used to describe girls at your school? A: Like, there are the skank girls. I don’t know…it’s pretty bad.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)
Q: What are the labels that are used against girls right now at your age? A: Normally when I hear the label slut used, it’s just as a joke between friends.

(Roxas, age 16, Grade 11, Caribbean-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Girls get called like ‘slut’ or ‘skank’ or ‘ho’ or ‘whore’. It’s just terms that people use towards girls, it’s just thrown around.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: The label, ‘whore’, is that used a lot? A: Actually, yes. I know a lot of people…I try not to use it but it slips out a lot actually. It’s a terrible term and I shouldn’t use it but it comes out. Like even just with friends, with each other, we’ll be like, ‘oh you’re such a whore haha’. Half the time they don’t literally mean these things, that’s just how they talk to each other.

(Hazel, age 17, Grade 12, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

*Blurred line between the ‘girly girl’ and ‘slut’ labels.* Girls often spoke of the pressure to wear tight and revealing clothing in order to be seen as attractive and fitting the norm. As seen in their definitions, tight and revealing clothing has been a part of the girls’ narratives for the ‘girly girl’ label from childhood through to adolescence. At adolescence, an interesting blurring occurs between the ‘girly girl’ label and the ‘slut’ label when it comes to clothing. This same definition of “tight and revealing clothing” was then often used to explain what a girl might do that gets them labelled as a ‘slut’. The rules about this form of clothing, a clear understanding of when it was acceptable and when it was not, seemed confusing and difficult for the girls to articulate.
Q: And so are they considered girly girls or is that different than whores? A: It’s a lot different grouping. Q: So what would be the difference between somebody who might be called a girly girl and somebody who might be called a whore? A: I don’t know. (Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Some girls spoke about wearing clothing that is considered too revealing as a reason for being labelled a ‘slut’ or a ‘whore’,

Like you could just be labelled a slut from what you wear. Like short skirts, low cut tops. (Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: What gets a girl that label, slut? A: It’s more about some sort of wardrobe. Like it could be wearing like really miniskirts, like tops that go up like this. (Hilary, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: You referred to girls’ clothes as ‘slutty clothes’, tell me about that. A: I don’t know, like they want guys to see what’s under it and everything. Like girls go to school wearing shirts that have holes in them, like they’re made with holes. And then boys like the strapless shirts and the shirts that have like thin straps that show your bra straps and everything. (Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)
Q: What’s it like having to wear a uniform to school? A: Even in uniforms, you still get called a whore. You wear your skirt like one inch too high and then someone says, ‘well, she’s a whore, you know what she wants’.

(Kyra, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Like I’ve heard people just be like, ‘oh slut’, for like the way you dress or act. Like more revealing clothes I guess.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: What does that label, ‘slut’, mean? A: Isn’t that like someone who like dresses like really um, revealing to the fact that it’s not really attractive.

(Roxas, age 16, Grade 11, Caribbean-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: So does your style tend to be kind of baggier clothes or fitted clothes? A: More fitted, I would say, but I don’t like the slutty look, which sounds bad, but I don’t like the like mini, mini tube tops and stuff, but I like to look good, so I like the things that are nice and kind of classy and just you know. Q: So how would you contrast classy versus slutty? A: Well, slutty kind of seems like you’re, you are revealing way too much skin and you are like…I mean I do wear tank tops and stuff like that, too, I’m not saying that I always cover up, but there are some things that are provocative and stuff, and I think I can be attractive without that. And I don’t think that anyone else looks particularly attractive like that, as it seems kind of like you are not being yourself.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)
Q: And so how do you know how to be revealing but not too revealing? A: Hmm, when you’re showing way too much of skin. It’s more in the chest area and your stomach. Like if your shirt is way too high up on your stomach, then that’s really revealing. And like your shirt like showing way too much of your boobs and everything.

Q: And is that risking when you’re not considered a girly girl anymore and considered something else? A: Um…they’d call you like a whore or a slut. Kind of like a hooker and all that stuff. It kind of gets nasty after that.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

They dress more provocative if they’re a slut. They would be much more comfortable naked! Like they’d wear something short and kind of like show skin type of thing.

(Sarah, age 18, post-high school, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Girls also spoke about wearing clothing that is too tight as another reason for being labelled a ‘slut’ or ‘whore’.

Q: Would you say that clothes now are tight or just normal, like comfortable? A: Most of them are tight but they’re in a comfortable way. Q: What happens if a girl’s clothes are too tight? A: Well, she looks like she can’t breathe. Sometimes behind their back, it’s like ‘oh wow, look at what she’s wearing’, stuff like that. Sometimes they call them bad names. Like the ‘w’ word. (whispers) W-H-O-R-E.

(Erica, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)
There are some people who are labelled as like sluts or whatever. I think there is so much pressure put on like wearing really tight clothes and all that, but to me, isn’t that a slut? Like I wouldn’t call anyone a slut, but I don’t understand kind of what is and kind of what isn’t.

(Bronwen, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Q: So tell me about that label, ‘slut’. A: Well, people always call people slut even though it’s like, I don’t know, everyone just calls people that, and I don’t know. It doesn’t mean anything anymore, I don’t think. I think everyone’s been called a slut. Q: What’s a situation where you’ve been called a slut? A: I don’t know. Just if I wore a tighter shirt or stuff like that. Or a low cut shirt.

(Brittney, age 16, Grade 10, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Some girls identified clothing that is both “tight” and “revealing” as factors in being labelled a ‘slut’.

Q: What happens that a girl gets called a slut? A: If they dress really um, like that. Like really, really low cut shirts and really tight and very short shorts or skirts.

(Megan, age 13, Grade 7, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: So what would be different then between the whores you referred to and a girly girl? A: Like tight jeans but not so low cut in the hip and that. And like tight t-shirts but like not revealing so much skin.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Q: How would a girl get the label ‘skank’? A: By getting around, you know, putting herself out there. Not just with guys, but with clothes, too. Like very tight, revealing clothes.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: So it sounds like there’s a point where you dress in tighter clothing, more revealing clothing, more girly clothing…what happens where all of a sudden it becomes slutty clothing? How do you know where the line is? A: Yeah, I don’t know. I guess like a combination of all that, like too revealing, too tight. I really don’t know.

(Jenna, age 15, Grade 10, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

A lot of the girls dress in tighter clothes. But its more tighter, but not revealing. Q: What happens if your clothes are revealing? A: A lot of people just judge on it, they just judge you. They’re just like, ‘why is she wearing that, it’s not attractive’. They’ll call you a slut. Q: When did the word ‘slut’ start being used? A: Probably in grade 7. I don’t remember who, but people just started calling other people sluts cause everyone started dressing more…well, in grade 6 it wasn’t like tight clothes, it was just colourful clothes. But then after that everyone started becoming or dressing more in tight and revealing clothes and stuff like that.

(Brittney, age 16, Grade 10, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

There was also a fine line where girls were negatively labelled for being judged as too ‘girly’ or as doing ‘girly’ things with too much emphasis,
Q: What does skanky mean? A: They wear a lot of makeup and like their attitude is kinda like really, like dumb, like do dumb things. Like kinda does bad things and like wears really bad clothes and just acts really dumb around guys.

(Olivia, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Depending on where you are on that whole scale again, with the girls that are extremely girly girl, like the girls in my school that I would call kind of skanky, those girls don’t do well in school, they have too much focus on their looks, what they think is cool, trying to get boys, that kind of stuff. Girly girls dress very provocative. They wear like the low pants and belly tops and stuff like that and the makeup and stuff like that.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Other girls spoke about the location as being a determinant for the kind of clothing seen as appropriate or acceptable.

There’s always clothes I wish I could wear but my parents won’t let me. Like, all my other friends, they have different clothing than I do. Like lower cut tops and like really short skirts. Like, I don’t normally wish I’d wear those, but to like a party, it’s fun to dress like that. Q: How come it’s more fun at parties to wear shorter skirts? A: I don’t know! It’s just cause you can’t like, well, like, everyone’s dressed slutty to a party, so like, you can’t be judged for what you wear to parties. But like at school though, like if you’re wearing slutty clothes to school like you’d wear to a party, you’d be judged for that. Q: What would people say? A: Um, like, ‘Oh my god. That’s so like wrong for
her to wear that to school. That’s gross’. But when you’re at parties, they’re like, ‘oh you look so cute’. Because it doesn’t matter, cause you’re at a party and you’re here to have fun.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Are there words that you hear people using against girls? A: I guess like slut or whore or whatever. Stuff like that. Like for wearing tighter clothes or shorter clothes or whatever. Usually I guess more at parties. I don’t know, I guess if you’re like that, they just assume that you’re like a whore or whatever. Q: So what changed that that label started being used? A: I don’t know, it was like in grade 9 or 10. Like clothing changed, like tighter and shorter stuff and whatever.

(Jenna, age 15, Grade 10, French-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Is your style still the same? A: Um, probably, it depends. Like, lots of the people I like are going to my church, so you have to, like you obviously can’t put on something slutty and then be like, ‘hey!’ cause it wouldn’t be appropriate. People would be like, ‘what are you thinking?’. So that’s not the approach I would use. It would be put together but like confident as well in what I was wearing.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

_Fearing the ‘slut’ label._ The girls’ narratives indicated that the use of the ‘slut’ label was intended to cause harm. The negative consequences and damaging insinuations intended with these labels are clear to the girls. The girls discussed a negative connotation of the label and their fears of being labelled a ‘slut’ because of the harsh consequences that accompanied this
label. Some girls referred to being teased or socially ostracized through use of the ‘slut’ label or one of its variants.

Q: So what happens that somebody would get called that name, ‘whore’? A: Usually if there’s a big group of friends or something and she walks by, then one person will say something, it will be like staring at her and then they will tell the whole school.

(Erica, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: How does that make you feel about being a girl, like with being labelled a slut? A: Like my friend, all she has is low cut tops. And like guy teachers are like, uncomfortable around her and stuff. And the boys called her a slut. Like girls get called sluts and whores in the front of our school. They’re just like, ‘get away from me, you whore’

(Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: Have your friendships changed since you started high school? A: I just made new friends. All my other friends, I left. They all went a different way than I did. Like they went to go hang out with the whores and that. Like they wear short skirts and tank tops that like practically show their tits and everything. I didn’t want to look like that because people make fun of them, they hate them because of it. And I didn’t want to be hated.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
It’s probably easier for a girl to get called it than a guy. Cause guys, I don’t know, guys don’t really dress differently if they want to be noticed by girls, they dress the same as they always would. Girls are the ones that are dressing to try and do that and they are the ones that it’s just easier to get labelled. It becomes so everyone notices and then like that’s when rumours get started and stuff like that.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Like it doesn’t bother me. Like girls will just be talking. Like they’ll pretend, well, they know you can hear, but they’re pretending like they want you to think they don’t know you can hear, so it’s like they’re talking about you. They’d just be like, ‘Oh my god! Look at what she’s wearing! She’s such a slut’. But I don’t care when I hear people talk like that cause I don’t know, they just, I don’t know, they just call everyone sluts. When I first would hear it, it’s like, ‘oh why would they say that?’, but then after awhile, it’s like, ‘meh, I don’t really care’.

(Brittney, age 16, Grade 10, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

A lot of girls are really judgmental. Like they call each other, pardon my language, but for fun they’ll call each other whore or something like that. It’s like, what’s the point of that. Say, ‘hey hon’ or something like that. That’s what I say to my friends. I don’t call them whores or anything like that. I hear girls talking bad about the girls a lot. And once in awhile, you hear the guys, ‘oh she’s such a whore’ or something like that, like to the kind of girl that wears nothing to school.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)
Some girls referred to fear that being labelled as a ‘slut’ would imply more negative connotations about their character, in particular in relation to choices about being sexually active. The girls themselves held strong stereotypes of what the ‘slut’ label implied of a girl’s character.

Q: So we’ve talked about labels that get put on girls, like tomboy and girly girl, are there other labels you’ve experienced that girls have to deal with? A: Well, there’s always the fear of being called a slut or something like that. So that’s another spectrum of it as well. But it’s a totally different label. I think it depends on the context you’re using it in. Like some people just joke around and they’re like, ‘oh that shirt’s really low cut’, or whatever. But some people are actually like, well, she’s actually what the word means, you know. So it depends on what context you were using it in.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Q: So what is the stereotype of the label slut? A: She’d probably just be like a nasty person, like being mean to people and also the way she dressed would probably be, um, just showing a lot off, and not really like, well, caring about the way she looked, but not really caring about what others thought of her.

(Jessica, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

I think it’s become a vague term, like for example if I say like ‘slutty clothing’ it doesn’t mean that if I dress that way I’m an actual slut, just like the connotations of it. So I think the words have evolved to something different. Like it might not actually have to do with the physical act of it, it’s just like the connotation or the perception or how people
perceive it. Q: So what does ‘slutty clothing’ mean? A: Well, just things that are really revealing or things that would attract more attention than other clothing would.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

If you dress like with the completely tight clothes, low cut, showing all your skin, you are definitely going to get called something. Even if you haven’t done anything. Like there are girls where, even I’m guilty of it, you judge them based on what they’re wearing. You start to make assumptions and other people do, too.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Extreme consequences were identified by some girls illustrating how toxic and damaging the use of the ‘slut’ label is for adolescent girls.

Q: Have you ever experienced people calling you that because of the way you dress? A: No. I don’t think I want to! Cause once you have a rumour, it’s hard to get rid of that rumour. People tend to move schools and everything because of it and I don’t want to move schools cause I want to graduate with all the girls. It gets really bad, the rumours start because of the way they dress or for the way they act and that. People think that if you are so revealing, then you do things with people like sexually and everything. Like really you don’t do that, but they don’t know that.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

School is not safe. You cannot walk down the hall and not be called a slut, like four times. Even though they are like ten times sluttier than I am, but I don’t care. Q: How
does that make you feel in your body?  A:  I want to punch them in the face.  I have so much anger.  My mom thinks I am going into a depression.  I just want to get through it.  Like, I used to care about school so much, like I used to care about my marks and tests and stuff and I just don’t care this year.  I just don’t care.

(Kyra, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Hyper vigilance in dressing the body.  With this new consequence of being labelled a ‘slut’ for dressing one’s body outside of the narrow definitions for the ideal look of ‘girly’, the girls’ narratives demonstrated a hyper vigilant monitoring of the clothes they wear so as to avoid being labelled unfavourably.  Girls expressed feeling pressure to learn to dress in tight and revealing clothing to be seen as attractive and appropriately ‘girly’, but must be careful not to be too revealing or be in too tight of clothing as this is deemed worthy of the ‘slut’ label.

Q:  What do you think, if a girl was called a slut or a whore or a skank, what do you think her body would say?  A:  Probably just like, ‘I told you not to wear that’.

(Erica, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q:  So we’ve heard that label a lot, what does ‘slutty’ mean for you at this age?  A:  Skimpy clothes.  Like tops that go up to here, and short, short, short shorts, or miniskirts.  But I feel good about myself, because I don’t get down to that level.  Q:  So what earns you that label?  A:  They don’t dress appropriately.

(Katasha, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)
Q: Does being worried about being called a skank affect how people dress? A: Yeah, definitely I am. Even when I go to school and like I might be really uncomfortable wearing certain clothes cause you might like get called a certain name that you’re not.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

I’m not afraid to wear an outfit that would accentuate my body but I’m not going to show up to school in like, booty shorts and a bra. Because it’s not appropriate and it’s not for everyone to see. Q: So does the label affect how you live in your body? Like the way you dress? A: Well, I guess the style I like, I mean I don’t really like those kinds of things. Like if I did like them, I might wear them. Like I do wear sometimes low cut shirts but like I wouldn’t wear it with like a mini skirt. Like I wouldn’t go like full out like dressed to suit that word. But it’s not so much that I’m afraid what I’ll get called but I just don’t feel comfortable showing that much anyways.

(Jessica, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: So what gets someone called a slut for wearing a shirt like that and someone else not? A: I am pretty sure that I have never been categorized as a slut because people are teasing me like, ‘oh you’re so square’. But like for me, it’s like there’s only a certain amount of skin that you can show – I mean if you are wearing a t-shirt that goes down low then you wear like long pants or bigger sleeves or even a skirt that’s decent length. But it’s a sort of thing like if you wear a shorter skirt, then you wear a long sleeve shirt.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)
Q: How do girls react to these labels, like slut? A: I think it’s mostly just moderating your own behaviour so that you don’t get labelled in that way. I think once you’ve already been branded then I think maybe you try to fight against it a little bit more, but I think if it hasn’t touched you personally, then it’s just something that’s kinda out there, you just don’t want to be associated with it and you don’t want to go there.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

The girls also discussed the challenges in staying in line with the desirable ‘girly girl’ appearance, preferred by boys, but not going too far as to be labelled a ‘slut’. Girls who are seen as stepping out of line of these blurred distinctions are vilified and demonized.

Q: What labels would you say are used to describe girls at your age? A: Some girls are just very revealing and stuff. Like slut or something like that. Like just being around guys and dressing very slutty. Like very low cut shirts and it’s like they’d be wearing a thong or something and it sticks out and very tight clothes. They want guys to notice them.

(Megan, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: What do you think of those kinds of clothes that you called ‘slutty clothes’? A: I think they’re cool but they show too much, like it looks more like you want guys to see you and what’s under. So it’s kinda dirty and that. Some girls don’t want guys to look at them when they walk by and stuff like that. So they don’t dress like that so that they don’t have guys looking at them like that. Most of the guys go for the girls that dress slutty and like that.
And if you flirt with guys, you’re considered a slut. But I don’t think it means anything anymore.

(Brittney, age 16, Grade 10, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: Is it considered good to be dressed slutty or skanky? A: I don’t know, but the boys are more judging the way the girls dress like they’ll be like, ‘oh you’re dressed like a slut because you’re showing off your stomach’, but like all the girls do it so I guess we’re all sluts cause we all dress that way. Like most of the guys like the way the girls dress just because you can see their figure and the way their body looks and everything because now, when guys look at girls, they really don’t look into their personality. It’s more about what they look like. Like a couple of guys I dated they pretty much went out with me because of my butt and because of the way I look.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: What about for boys – if the guys are dressed in a certain way, do people assume that he sleeps around a lot? A: No, you can’t really tell with them. Like usually when they are sleeping around with girls and all that, they’ll come to school and tell everyone and then the girl gets labelled and the guy is supposedly the man. So, really it’s more the girl’s fault and then the girl regrets it and everything and then it becomes a big mess.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)
Q: What do you think society says girls should look like? A: A whore. Like with low-cut jeans as really popular and like the whole Britney-style thing, like thong showing and stuff like that.

(Hazel, age 17, Grade 12, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Q: How does the label ‘whore’ or ‘slut’ impact girls’ decisions about the clothes they wear? A: I think it impacts it a lot actually. Like have you ever watched ‘Degrassi the Next Generation’? It’s like my favourite show ever. It’s so good. This one character, Manny, she wanted to be known for her sexuality, like she didn’t want to have sex per se, but she wanted to be perceived as sexy. So she started wearing clothes that were... that showed a lot of skin and stuff. And then what happened, she had to have an abortion because she had sex with Spinner and they were gonna have a baby but she decided to get an abortion. So just things like that. It does affect how women are going to dress, because it’s like ‘I won’t get attention if I don’t dress as provocatively as I could’. Flash a little cleavage and there we go.

(Hazel, age 17, Grade 12, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

_Policing girls’ bodies._ Girls quickly learn to avoid the ‘slut’ label and its’ variants and to monitor and police with vigilance one another ensuring that all other girls remain within the appropriate boundaries.

We don’t use the term ‘slut’, we use the term ‘whore’. Like girls that like try to switch groups a lot but to do it, they try to move up and they try to wear what the other girls are wearing but they totally miss it and they start like revealing themselves and girls that
wear their shirts to here, and these tiny little miniskirts and it’s just like ‘what are you doing? You don’t look good like that’.

(Jackie, age 15, Grade 10, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: I remember last time, you talked about how it’s good to be a girly girl, but that you don’t want to dress too revealing, because then you’ll be called slutty. Is that still something you have to wrestle with? A: Um, not really. Because like all the girls dress the same so we all wear the same kind of clothes so if one girl is called a slut because she wears that then all the girls must be called that. Like if you go shopping at Garage, they all have the same shirts and they’re all just in different colors so when you go to school, all the girls have the same shirts, they’re just different colors So, really, if one wears a skanky shirt, then we’re all skanky girls. There’s no way we can’t be the same by the way we dress.

(Brady, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Q: Has anyone ever said something about your clothing? A: Um, not really. Like kind of, but like…well, maybe not using the word, but maybe like implying the same thing. So say if I’m with my friends and we’re trying on some shirts and this one went really low, they’d be like, ‘ohh, I don’t know about that one’ kinda thing. So it wouldn’t be like calling you a slut per se, but it would just be like, ‘yah you look too attractive in that shirt’ or something like that.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Q: Have you ever been called a slut? A: Um, well, this one time was pretty funny. My hair was coming out the side and my friend was like, ‘Hazel, you harlet!’, and I was like, ‘Ugh, I’m such a hussy, my hair is showing’. I don’t know, I never really thought of that, like maybe because we were using more archaic terms for ‘whore’, like ‘hussy’ or ‘harlet’ or something. To us it was a joke, but I guess at the same time that’s like calling someone a ‘whore’, so that’s no good.

(Hazel, age 17, Grade 12, Metis, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Some girls experienced harsh policing of their bodies from parents,

For me, slut is the one term that stands out. Like definitely what you wear…like people who like you can see more of them than you can’t, I find it’s a bit disturbing. Like showing your boobs, but I mean, in that way I can’t make judgments because I do wear shirts that you know my mom is always like, ‘your boobies are showing’.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Like my mom says it. Like if I am wearing something that doesn’t cover enough skin she’d be like, ‘you look like a slut’. Like at the same time she means it but she doesn’t mean it hurtfully.

(Sarah, age 18, post-high school, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Girls were also exposed to systemic policing of their bodies through rules about clothing girls are allowed to wear and under what circumstances.
You might like the clothes in general, but...like tank tops and stuff. I have some, but I can’t wear them to school because the uniform code will not let you wear short shorts, anything short and like short sleeves too.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Q: How does that word make you feel about your body? A: Well, I kinda went on a journey with this one. Before, it was just like, it wasn’t that big of a deal to me. Like I didn’t understand why it was such a big deal, because I thought if guys are getting attracted to you by the clothes that you’re wearing, it shouldn’t be your problem because you’re just dressing the way you want to dress and it shouldn’t have to affect you about stuff like that. And then the leaders of our church were becoming more concerned and then this whole thing where it was just like, okay even if you like...even if you don’t feel like you what you’re wearing is inappropriate it may be inappropriate for other people, so you have to be considerate of other people when you’re dressing. So it’s not really about you, it’s kind of the images you’re putting on for other people, you have to be considerate about that. It should be a practice you’re continuously using all the time. But especially when you’re at church because it’s disrespectful and it’s not helping out the guys in that respect.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

It got to a point of almost being on force, too. Like they brought like sweaters to church, so that if they thought you were dressed inappropriately, you’d have to wear a sweater over top. That never happened, but it was just like the fear aspect of it. Q: Did it affect how you felt getting dressed for church? A: Definitely! I’d be like, oh well, this might
be a little low, and it was a bit stressful cause you had to like layer things, like layers and layers and it got really stressful. At the time, there was a lot of tension around that for awhile and it got really annoying. Now, it’s not as much of an issue, but it’s more like noticeable. Like now, people will be like, ‘wow what were you thinking, we’re at church’ kinda thing, whereas before we wouldn’t even think twice about what people were wearing. Yeah, like we monitor each other but I think it’s mostly monitoring ourselves, so like I know when I’m going to church I really have to think over what I’m wearing.

(Ashley, age 16, Grade 11, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Summary of Social Outcomes: Privileges and Consequences Associated With the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels in Childhood and Adolescence

In order to understand how girls make decisions and choices about how to live within these labels, it is important to examine the power and privileges associated with each side of this dichotomy as well as the consequences that arise when living in either label. In this section, privileges and consequences were examined for both the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels in both childhood and adolescence. Privileges associated with the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood and adolescence related to how this identification allows girls to feel connected to their self desires and needs. These girls’ narratives in both childhood and adolescence also recognized a privilege in how ‘tomboys’ experience freedom from appearance-related pressures and feel comfortable in their bodies. A subtheme that arose in their narratives during childhood only was that these girls recognized a ‘tomboy’s privilege in their freedom to passionately engage in sports. This was no longer evident in their narratives at adolescence. While girls may still be
participating in sports, it is no longer discussed in terms of a passion of those identifying as a ‘tomboy’.

In terms of ‘girly girls’, their narratives in childhood expressed that ‘girly girls’ over ‘tomboys’ benefit from romantic male attention. For both the childhood and adolescent narratives, there was the privilege identified that ‘girly girls’ enjoy greater social currency related to popularity in their peer groups than do ‘tomboys’. A privilege identified in the adolescent narratives suggested that the ‘girly girl’ label fits the norm for what most girls identify as by their adolescent years therefore those girls benefit by being a part of and fitting in with a larger, mainstream group.

The consequences for the ‘tomboy’ label highlighted by these girls in childhood expressed how ‘tomboys’ are seen as taking from boys’ territory with both their participation in sport and in their choice of comfortable, baggy clothing. ‘Tomboys’ were seen as borrowing from boys showing it is difficult for these girls to feel that they can rightfully embody comfortable clothing and engagement in sport. A subtheme that was shared in both childhood and adolescence was the consequence for ‘tomboys’ of being socially ostracized. The ‘tomboy’ label was widely seen as an abnormal position for girls. ‘Tomboys’ were described as being different and abnormal, and they were left out of social groups. In adolescence, teasing and harassment became a common experience for those identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label. There emerged the consequence of harsher labels that were extended beyond gender norms and entered into the territory about acceptable norms of sexuality. Girls who had been called ‘tomboys’ now also risked being called a ‘butch’, a ‘lesbian’, or a ‘dyke’, for having transgressed the boundaries of dominant ideals of femininity. Into adolescence, ‘tomboys’ were pressured to become ‘girly’ and collude with social norms of acceptable girl identification. They were pressured to start wearing tighter clothes and makeup and to take on an overall more
‘girly’ appearance. A final consequence identified resulted in response to these above mentioned consequences. Identification with the ‘tomboy’ label began to fade. Girls’ response to the isolation, teasing, harassment, pressure to be girly, and the barrage of new labels meant to demean and degrade girls resulted in a masquerade of their ‘tomboy’ selves and ultimate collusion with the ‘girly girl’ appearance.

The consequences highlighted by this group of girls illustrate the complexities of identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label. While this label seems to be what is idealized and normalized for girls, once girls embody this identity they meet further obstacles. The girls’ narratives suggested that ‘girly girls’ in both childhood and adolescence are left feeling like objects rather than agents in their bodies. Their bodies are continuously put on display for others. Reaching a social ideal does not provide girls with security; rather the acceptance is tenuous and leaves girls feeling anxious with the impermanence of popularity. They recognize that ‘girly girls’ never feel entirely comfortable or secure in their positioning, as the grounds for attaining acceptance are constantly shifting. Their narratives demonstrate an understanding that even once one embodies the demands and pressures of how girls ‘should’ look or behave this is a tenuous position of acceptance. In adolescence, those identifying as a ‘girly girl’ also face the emergence of harsh labels associated with sexuality. Once girls come to recognize and embody the social construction of femininity, they are barraged with labels like ‘slut’ and ‘whore’. The difficulty came with the blurred lines between the ‘girly girl’ label and the ‘slut’ label. Their narratives indicated an understanding of these labels as derogatory and something to try and avoid. Girls learn to become hyper-vigilant in how they dress and begin policing themselves and one another in terms of how they are embodying femininity. These results suggest a dismaying consequence of being a girl. There is no safe place for girls to live as girls. They are pressured to give up the comfort, confidence, and connection available in the ‘tomboy’ identity.
in order to fit in with their peers as a ‘girly girl’. This identification is then wrought with further consequences making it difficult for girls to find comfort and security in their sense of themselves.
Summary Chart of Consequences and Privileges of Identifying with the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels in Childhood and Adolescence

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<th>TOMBOY – CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>TOMBOY – ADOLESCENCE</th>
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<td>Privileges:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• Comfortable in One’s Body</td>
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<td>• Freedom to be Passionate about Sports and Physical Activity</td>
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<td>Consequences:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Playing “Boy Sports”</td>
<td>• Socially Ostracized</td>
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<td>• Wearing “Boy Clothes”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Socially Ostracized</td>
<td>• Emergence of Harsher Labels Associated with Sexuality (Butch, Dyke, Lesbian)</td>
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<td>• Fading of Tomboy Identity, Masquerading as a Girly Girl</td>
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<tr>
<th>GIRLY GIRL – CHILDHOOD</th>
<th>GIRLY GIRL – ADOLESCENCE</th>
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<td>Privileges:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Male Romantic Attention</td>
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<td>• Social Currency</td>
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<td>Consequences:</td>
<td>Consequences:</td>
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<td>• Objects Instead of Agents</td>
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<td>• Feeling Insecure</td>
<td>• Feeling Insecure</td>
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<td>• Emergence of Harsher Labels Associated with Sexuality (Slut, Whore, Ho, Skank)</td>
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CHAPTER FIVE

Negotiating Self Experiences and Identities in Relation to the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels

Girls form a relationship to the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. These labels are prevalent in their social environment and came up spontaneously in all interviews. In describing their self experiences, girls invariably examined themselves in relation to these dichotomous labels. These girls live with these labels all the time and must spend energy every day managing their location within this dichotomy, which dictates options for dress, activity and friends. As they spoke experientially about this dichotomy, the girls described different ways of negotiating it. As is evident in their narratives, the girls rarely stayed fixed on their position in this dichotomy, but rather demonstrated that there is a continuous and constant state of decision making that takes up girls’ time and energy. In negotiating this dichotomous labelling, these girls demonstrated unique and creative solutions with how to handle the pressures of living within these labels.

Childhood

In the childhood narratives, three prominent themes emerged: Identifying with One Side, where some girls chose to identify strongly with one side of the dichotomy at different periods of their childhood; Moving Between the Labels, where girls sought to find space in both labels, moving back and forth between the labels; and Finding a Center Location, where some girls simultaneously embodied aspects of both labels.

Identifying with one side. The girls’ narratives shared stories of different times in their young lives when they had identified with one side of this dichotomy over the other. There were two subthemes in this dimension: choosing to be a ‘tomboy’ or choosing to be a ‘girly girl’.
Choosing to be a ‘tomboy’. There were a number of girls who spoke of current identification with the ‘tomboy’ label at the time of their interview. For some girls, this choice was made because of their enjoyment in sports and physical activity,

Q: So you said you think of yourself as a tomboy, how does that make you feel about yourself? A: Um, I feel really kind of like sporty. And like these are tomboy pants, like there’s rips in them, and then you wear like a top like this, like a soccer top or something. Q: What do you like most about yourself as a tomboy? A: The way I play. Q: Do you think you’re going to stay a tomboy? A: Maybe, because I love soccer.  
(Alice, age 10, Grade 6, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

I’m not really in between, I’m tomboyish, because I like sports more now.  
(Hilary, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 3\textsuperscript{rd} interview)

For other girls, choosing to be a ‘tomboy’ allowed them to feel they had more options in friendships and activities,

I’m just more as a tomboy now. In my class, all the girls are tomboys. Because tomboys are the ones hanging out with the guys more. Tomboys just don’t like doing as much girl stuff, like they like girl stuff, but just not as much. I’ve just been more into the tomboy side.  
(Erica, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)
Q: So you said that tomboys are here and girly girls over here, you said you’re a tomboy? A: Yeah. Q: How do you feel about that? A: I feel happy. Because if you’re a tomboy, you can do whatever you want, you can do boy things or girl things.
(Madison, age 10, Grade 4, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Megan described enjoying being a ‘tomboy’ in a way that suggested being comfortable in her body,

Q: What’s it like to be a tomboy? A: Fun! Like you just wear jeans and hardly do anything with your hair really.
(Megan, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Four adolescent girls recalled identifying as a ‘tomboy’ as children,

My brother used to call me a tomboy when I was a little bit younger, because I’d always be playing street hockey with him and his friends and then other girls wouldn’t. And partly because all my cousins on one side are guys and we spend so much time with them, so we all play sports together.
(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, recalling memory of age 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Like, when I was younger, I was like a tomboy, I guess you’d say. I really liked baseball caps and short hair and like a guy’s shirt. And then like shorts, whereas the girls would be in skirts, little skirts and their pink shirts and their long ponytails or whatever. I
didn’t want to wear dresses, I’d just wear big shirts. I didn’t care what I looked like, I just wanted to do stuff. My best friend was a boy and we’d catch bugs and frogs and stuff. I just liked playing outside and playing sports and stuff. I hung out with mostly guys.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, recalling childhood, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

I was a tomgirl or a tomboy, whatever they call it. I liked the boy stuff. I liked playing Digimon. I didn’t like skirts. As long as it wasn’t a skirt, I’d wear it.

(Roxas, age 15, Grade 10, recalling childhood, Caribbean-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Q: What kind of words did you have for girls?  A: Maybe in Grade 3, we would say tomboy or normal girl.  Q: What was the difference between tomboy and normal girl?  A: Tomboy is like me. It’s the clothes and the attitude of actually being athletic.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, recalling childhood, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

There was a difference found in the girls’ narratives between girls who had the freedom to choose their identity and girls who identified with the ‘tomboy’ label because they did not have another choice. In the narrative of Madison she spoke of being a ‘tomboy’ and the clothes she wore as a younger child. Her experiences demonstrate the ways that attaining ‘ideal girlhood’ requires a certain socio-economic level. For Madison, because of the limited clothing available from second-hand clothing stores, identifying as a ‘tomboy’ was her only option.
I wore like long sleeved shirts most of the time and long, baggy pants. I wore like big skateboarder pants. We only went to these special places with clothes, like a Goodwill, we started going there more and they only have like skateboarder pants and long-sleeved shirts so that’s how I grew up with long-sleeved shirts and baggy pants. But tomboys don’t really care about their appearance. It doesn’t matter what you wear, it only matters who you are.

(Madison, age 10, Grade 4, Aboriginal, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Choosing to be a ‘girly girl’. In the childhood narratives, there were no girls who identified choosing to strictly be a ‘girly girl’ at their present age. The following narratives were from the adolescent narratives of two girls who recalled identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label as children.

I was very girly. My sister and cousin would be playing with motorcycles and I’d be whining that I wanted to play with the dolls. I wore lots of dresses, lots and lots of frilly shirts and dresses and overalls. I’d always have my hair in pigtails. I was always prissy. I would always run around playing with dresses and jewellery.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 8, recalling memory of age 6, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

In kindergarten, I liked pink, and I liked pretty, frilly, girly things. I don’t know why, maybe it goes back to the things put up on the media, subconsciously, I was like, ‘oh pink is for girls’. I remember liking it a lot.
Moving between labels. A creative way of negotiating these labels was to continuously move back and forth between each label, taking turns embodying dimensions of either label. There were two subthemes within this theme: maximizing opportunities and making room for comfort.

Maximizing opportunities. Some girls spoke of moving between the two labels as a way of resisting the restrictions to their activity options or friendship possibilities when just identifying with one label. The girls found freedom by not allowing themselves to be limited by one label. Moving between the labels gave these girls more options.

While in her first interview Erica identified herself as a ‘tomboy’, by the second interview later that year, she had moved to identifying as someone who moves between the labels,

Q: So you said that you consider yourself to be in between (the two labels)?
A: Yup, but slanting more to tomboy.
Q: Can you explain what it’s like for you to be where you are?
A: It’s really fun because I have friends that are boys and I have friends that are girls, which makes me have more friends. And then I can do more things and stuff like that. I feel happy that I have lots of friends and I don’t think that being friends with boys is bad and stuff like that.

(Erica, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)
Alice also changed her identification with the labels between interviews. Here, in the first interview, she describes moving between the labels, but by the second interview she was identifying most as a ‘tomboy’.

Some girls dress to impress the boys, well, sometimes I dress like that. Like wear tomboy stuff and wear sporty outfits. Because the boys really like sports and girls who like sports. I’m kind of more like a tomboy. But like when I’m playing with my friends, like makeup and make-believe games, I change to a girly girl.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 5, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Other girls’ spoke of the benefits they enjoy in being able to move between the labels and not feel restricted to one identification. These girls described finding freedom to enjoy and participate in activities and friendships from both sides of this dichotomy.

I don’t think I’m a tomboy, but I don’t think I’m a girly girl. It depends on what you like and what your interests are and stuff. I’m kind of in-between. I like sports and I like to go shopping.

(Emma, age 10, Grade 5, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

When I’m playing sports, I’m kind of like, I’m not fully a tomboy but I like to play sports, like I like that kind of stuff, and I like going shopping and stuff. So I think like it kind of depends what I’m doing that day or whatever. You can do more stuff in the middle. Like you’re not just doing sports all the time, maybe you get tired of them and you could go shopping or whatever. I feel good because I can, like I like doing sports
and having fun and I also like going shopping and sometimes not really wearing makeup, but sometimes we just do it for fun or whatever.

(Emma, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I’m kind of in-between because I like to play sports and I like to play with boys because there are two best friends I have at school who are boys.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

When I was at school I was always like reading the new magazines or like listening to the newest music. But then when I was with my friends at home we’d be talking about how cool airplanes were, or like playing games, or like doing tricks on our bikes and stuff. I had way more fun doing that than I ever did doing the girly girl stuff.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, recalling memory from childhood, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

*Making room for comfort.* Many girls discussed finding refuge in the ‘tomboy’ label as they could wear more comfortable clothing when they move from the ‘girly girl’ side to the ‘tomboy’ side. These girls described choosing to be ‘in between’ as a way of holding on to some freedom in their choice of dress.

I’m a Tommy Girl at school. Like on Fridays since we don’t have gym, I sometimes will wear skirts. But I don’t like to chance it and wear a skirt. So then I wear my jeans or my track pants.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 4, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
I’m in between. I like wearing boys’ clothing. I like being in between cause you can have more fun.

(Roxy, age 9, Grade 4, Romanian-Canadian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Q: How do your clothes show that you’re in between? A: I like my clothes. They’re comfortable I guess. I don’t like wearing short shirts and tight pants. I just like wearing jeans, like flared jeans, and like not too tight of a shirt but fitted ones or whatever.

(Emma, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Finding a center location. Girls demonstrated ways to creatively resist this dichotomy by forcing a middle ground. Most of the girls try to find a way to hold a center position between these two labels. This way, girls do not close the door to either side of the dichotomy and are more likely to find temporary positions that feel safe in the moment. These girls symbolized, through their bodies, neutrality with both compliance and resistance to the pressures to conform to label stereotypes. The majority of the girls who discussed finding a center location spoke of doing so in a way that suggested self-protection. By staying neutral these girls can enjoy privileges associated with both labels and minimize the consequences from each label as much as possible.

Q: Do you think it’s better to be one or the other? A: In between. So you don’t have to take sides. I’m like a girly girl and a tomboy. It’s like you’re a girl but you kind of like guy stuff. Like you wear dressy jeans or a shirt and you’d play in mud or something like football. Like sometimes I’ll wear my skirts and dresses, like I’m also a Tommie Girl.
Like I’m a girly girl and a tomboy mixed together. I’m odd. It’s a good thing and crazy, and I’m weird.

(Hilary, age 9, Grade 3, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

I’m probably in the middle. Between the soccer player and the cheerleader and the tomboy.

(Alice, age 10, Grade 5, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Q: Is it better to be one or the other? A: In between, because you can do what you want and not be made fun of because people will get used to you doing that. Like I have a ponytail, but I don’t like dolls or Barbies. I have a pink shirt, it’s the only pink shirt I have, but sometimes I wear it.

(Katasha, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Most girls I know are in-between, too. Like they don’t like, they’re not like a girly girl but they’re not a tomboy. So we all get along good.

(Emma, age 11, Grade 6, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I’m not a tomboy, that’s someone like a girl who is very strong and wears clothes like the ideal guy would and plays lots of sports. I’m in between. Q: What’s the definition of being in the middle? A: Um, the middle is like, well, you’re not into sports, but you’re not into makeup, like you’re just like normal. You’re not into fashion, you just wear whatever you want, you don’t really care. I’m like closer to tomboy, like I wear lipstick but not all the time. So I’m like in the middle of ‘tomboy’ and ‘the middle’.

Adolescence

In adolescence, the negotiation of the girls’ self identities primarily illustrated processes of change and movement towards the dominance of the ‘girly girl’ identification. The narratives are divided into five main themes illustrating their changing negotiations. The first three themes are similar to childhood, with the themes of Identifying with One Side, Moving Between Labels and Finding a Center Location. The fourth and fifth themes illustrate the changing nature of girls’ identification with these labels and the effects of the consequences and privileges associated with each one: Fading the ‘Tomboy’ Identity and Becoming More of a ‘Girly Girl’.

**Identifying with one side.** While these subthemes are similar to childhood, that of identifying with one side of this dichotomy or the other, the presence of these subthemes in the adolescent narratives is much less frequent. This suggests that adolescence is a time where girls are constantly renegotiating their identities within these dichotomous labels.

**Choosing to be a ‘tomboy’.** There were only three girls who, in early adolescence, referred to themselves as ‘tomboys’. Interestingly, these girls also appear in other dimensions of negotiation, illustrating that a fixed identification is rare in adolescence.

I’m probably a tomboy. Because I do more sports, some girls don’t do sports, they don’t do nothing.

(Roxy, age 13, Grade 8, Romanian-Canadian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

A tomboy is more me actually. Like short shorts instead of wearing skirts, and sports shorts instead of like short shorts. The clothes and the attitude of actually being athletic.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
I’m probably more of a tomboy because I’m more active and stuff and I mean I do care what I look like but not to the extent where I would, I don’t know, I do care about it but not that much right, it’s not that big of a deal to me.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

**Choosing to be a ‘girly girl’.** While throughout their interviews many adolescent girls spoke about the strong presence of ‘girly girls’ in their peer group, when it came to discussing their own identification within this dichotomy, there were few girls who described themselves as strictly fitting the ‘girly girl’ label.

Q: Where do you fit these days? A: Girly girl. Q: Were you always? A: No, I wasn’t always. I had a girly girl phase in nursery, grade 1, and then I was a tomboy, and now I’m a girly girl. Now I’m more obsessing about my hair and makeup. Like, I’m a girly girl and I’m athletic, too. Like when you play sports, you get more competitive, but when you’re not, you’re just like, ‘Oh my God! Like totally!’ and stuff like that. Most girls will be like, ‘Oh my God, your shoes don’t match’.

(Alice, age 12, Grade 7, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 3\textsuperscript{rd} interview)

I’m a girly girl. I don’t like dress like a guy. I’m just more girlier. Like, I wear tight shirts and tight pants.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1\textsuperscript{st} interview)
Q: Where do you consider yourself now? A: I consider myself more a girly girl. Q: And if you had a line and the girly girl was at one end and the tomboy on the other end, are you in the middle, are you leaning more towards girly girl, or are you all the way at girly girl? A: I’m leaning kind of towards girly girl, because like I’m into hockey and soccer and stuff like that, and like those are kind of boy sports and that, and like because it’s mostly guys who play hockey and soccer and that. Like, I have friends that are total girly girls. They don’t play any sports. At school, I’m less of a girly girl because I play sports like hockey and stuff and I don’t know, I just play kind of boy sports.

(Brady, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Moving between labels. Many girls reported that they preferred negotiating an identity that allowed them to move back and forth between the two labels. There were plenty of narratives illustrating that girls attempted to allow themselves the freedom to move between the two labels based on their needs and priorities of the moment. At times girls described moving back and forth between the labels depending on their style of dress. Girls often mentioned a desire to be comfortable, a need met through the ‘tomboy’ identity, but felt it necessary to counteract that with the demands that girls wear tight and revealing clothing, the stereotype of the ‘girly girl’ identity.

I like both. Like I like to wear skirts, but I’m not always comfortable in them. It depends like what the day is, like whatever I feel comfortable in that day. Like, um, maybe like I’m more comfortable not wearing skirts and all that, like dresses, like I don’t like them at all. I’d rather wear pants, shorts, like even short shorts, I’m fine with. Just no open bottom.
(Hilary, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Right now, I’d probably be in the middle. Because now, I’ll sometimes wear tomboy clothes and sometimes I wear girly girl clothes. It depends on what kind of mood I’m in. I like it, because whatever I feel like, I can do. I can just do whatever I want.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

I wear skirts to school now and that kind of thing. I mean you always care what you look like but sometimes…like there are some days now when I care more than I know that I did in like grade ten. But there are some days when I care nothing at all. Sometimes you just get so sick of it though. A dress-up day would be like, I don’t know, like nothing’s going on, your day is not exciting. I guess maybe your day lacks excitement, so you’d be like, ‘ah, well, I’ll look good’. And then days when you have like 6 million places you have to be like you’re just like, okay, not going to care. You just want to be comfortable and get through it. So you have no time to think about what you’re wearing or what you look like.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Girls referred to the need to change their clothing, and move between the labels, because of their enjoyment for sports. Playing sports and being athletic required one style of clothing, while fitting in with their peer group and feeling attractive required another set of clothing.

Q: Are you still always a tomboy? A: No, it changes. Like when you go to a dance or a show, you get dressed up. But when you’re playing sports, its tomboy.
Because I’m wearing tighter clothing…once I’m going to play football then I have like shorts and a t-shirt in my backpack, and I usually have sports after school and stuff so I can always change.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

When I go to like sports, I’ll be wearing sweats, hair in a pony. And then like if I’m going to a party or something at night, then I’ll like curl my hair, or put lots of makeup on, and like wear tight fitting clothes.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

Many girls also moved back and forth between the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ identities based on the activities they were participating in and the external appearance that was stereotyped to match that activity.

Q: Are girls more girly or tomboy now? A: Girly. Well, it’s like they’re girly like outside, but when they get to gym class, it’s like guys, we all become like jocks.

(Alice, age 13, Grade 8, Aboriginal, middle SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Now I hang out more with girls I guess and my best friends are girls now. And I like shopping now; I’m more into clothes and stuff. But I still hang out with – like I like hanging out with boys more because girls they get mad at you for stupid reasons, you know. They can get jealous and stuff sort of. I’ve always hung out with boys and I
always like playing with them and stuff, but then when I do that it seems like the girls get mad sometimes. So then, I would try and stay away from the boys more and hang out more with the girls but they were boring and I wasn’t having as much fun. The girls just talk about other girls behind their back and stuff like that and I just wasn’t interested. I didn’t want to do that.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

I am in between, because like I’ll wear both. And like I play sports, but I’ll also wear girl clothes. Like I’ll talk to the girly girls, but I’ll also like hang out with the guys. It depends who I’m with. When I’m going to ringette or playing sports or with my girlfriends who play sports with me, I’m more tomboyish. Or when I’m with my old guy friends and we always like to be outside and doing stuff, then I’ll be more tomboyish. But when I’m at school with my new friends or with girly girls, then I’ll be more girly. But I like being tomboy more.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I’m more tomboy when I’m playing hockey. Like I don’t want to be like, ‘oh I’m going to break a nail if they take a slap shot’, or like, ‘oh I have to dress up and be all pretty before the game’ cause I’m just going to get sweaty. But like I’m more girly girl when I’m going out with my friends and when you see more people like dressed up.

(Shannon, age 18, 1st year university, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Finding a center location. The girls’ narratives also demonstrated that for some girls, they preferred negotiating an identity that allowed them to position themselves in between the
two labels. This was described by the girls in a way that illustrated embodying both labels at once.

I am kind of like one of the ‘in-between’, because I wear guy shorts and girly clothing. Like the most popular is the golf shirts, they’re really cool, and then there are the blouses. Like the golf shirts are kind of the guy thing and I wear them both. But I don’t really find the blouses that comfy. I always get my brother’s shorts and then I just wear like a normal top like a tank top or something. Like baggy clothes for shorts and stuff, and then tank tops.

(Olivia, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

The girls have all shifted right to the middle. I think a lot of girls are tomboy like in the way they dress because it’s not all like skirts and high shoes and stuff, it’s usually like jeans and sweats and stuff like that, and then the girly girl part usually is like their hair and like makeup and stuff like that. Like I’d say I’m right in the middle. Because like my hair, I’m so obsessive about it. It has to be perfect. But then when I have sports, I pin it up and then wear a headband.

(Erica, age 12, Grade 7, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 4th interview)

Like in-between, like you have the sporty moments and then I guess have like the pretty moments. Like you can wear shorts and a t-shirt. Or maybe even in between like a tank top and shorts. And sneakers.

(Tiger, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)
Like I wear baggy shorts still, but then I’ll wear a baggy shirt and like tie it up, so I’m sort of like half and half.

(Hilary, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Girly girl and tomboy, it’s like the extremes of a girl and then kind of average in the middle, maybe I’m more here – in the middle between tomboy and average…because I wear my brother’s shorts and I’m more athletic and stuff, but then I do wear eyeliner and I sometimes do act kind of girly.

(Lauren, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

I like being in-between because you have a sense of both and of different things. I mean if you want to wear a baggy shirt, yeah, wear a baggy shirt with tight pants. Like you are getting a sense of both things. You don’t really care what you wear, but you do at the same time. It’s really weird.

(Sarah, age 15, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

Their narratives also described a negotiated identity that involved finding a center location in their sense of themselves between these two labels. Their narratives suggest a refusal to adopt entirely the elements of either label, but a preference to choose aspects of each label that fit for them.

Q: Does being a tomboy or a girly girl change over time? A: It’s changed for me, because I was like tomboy, girly girl, tomboy, girly girl, but I found I’m always much
more happy being the tomboy, or actually not really just being a tomboy, just being in the middle, like being both.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

Q: So you said you used to identify with the tomboy label, but now you are kind of in-between these two? A: Yeah, in-between. Cause like then you’re not a totally out there weird person.

(Kyra, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

It’s kinda weird, because like there are the really girly girls and everything, who like wear the miniskirts and all that, and like then there are like the butches, and then there is like the normal girl or something, I don’t know. But I mean, I don’t really feel that I fit into any of those, because like I don’t know, I’m probably not a butch, but I’m not a normal…well, I’m kind of in between, like just myself. Cause I’m just comfortable, cause I don’t even like bother qualifying myself as something or the other thing.

(Bronwen, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2\textsuperscript{nd} interview)

The clothes I wear are girly, but not really girly. They’re comfortable clothes and they’re for girls. But some of the things I do…like lots of girls like to play sports, and I like to play sports, but a lot of girls I see are not really into sports and they’d rather just watch. A lot of girls are wearing makeup, lots of makeup, and are always having their nails done. Like, I like that, but I don’t want to paint my nails, but it would be nice to have nice nails like a French manicure or something. I’d probably be in the middle.
Like I’m not really girly, but I’m somewhat girly. And I’m not really boyish, but I can be.

(Kelly, age 14, Grade 8, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

At a younger age, I was dressed up as a doll like all the time, so I’d have definitely been one of those girly girls in pink frilly dresses. But as I started getting older, I just found other clothes were more comfortable. So I started becoming more like in the middle group, just exactly in the middle. Like some days, I’d love wearing dresses and other days, well, I want to wear jeans today. That was okay. I wouldn’t be stuck in a category.

(Ashley, age 15, Grade 10, African-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 1st interview)

Q: What do you consider yourself now? A: Well, I’m not a girly girl, but I’m not a tomboy. So I’m a girl. I’m a girl, I like shoes, I love shopping. I don’t really care about my hair besides that I want it long but if I’m having a bad hair day I’ll pull it up or I just normally put it half up or something. But I do care about the way I look for myself. I don’t care what other people think. I have my fashion and style, and I don’t care if other people like it, I love my fashion.

(Kelly, age 17, Grade 11, Portuguese-Canadian, low SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

**Fading the ‘tomboy’ identity.** A new dimension present in the adolescent narratives about negotiated identities was the manner in which many girls began fading their ‘tomboy’ identity. Some girls’ narratives demonstrated that they began to fade their ‘tomboy’ identity as
they began spending more time with other girls and less time in friendships with boys in adolescence.

I started hanging out with the girls more and like when I was younger, I was like a tomboy. But then, I wanted to become more of a girl, I guess. I don’t know. Like, when I’d go into sports and stuff, it would be all girls now. I got into ringette, and that was an all girls sport, so I hung out with the girls more. Our baseball team started becoming all girls, and I guess I just started having more in common with the girls. And then I didn’t like bugs as much anymore and stuff like that. I started getting really scared of spiders. Like I used to go frog catching, but then we kind of stopped, we got sick of that, you can only frog catch so much. I met more girls that had the same interests as me.

(Melissa, age 14, Grade 8, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 1st interview)

Q: The last time we talked, you really identified as a tomboy, has that changed or stayed the same? A: Um, well, I’m more of a girl now. Like I like shopping, but I still have the same feeling about sports, I guess. Like all my friends are pretty much girls now and I don’t really hang out with that many guys or anything. Like I don’t feel all, like, weird. Because like you know, when you’re a tomboy, you’re kind, um, it’s hard…like um, you just don’t feel normal sometimes. Because you’re acting like a boy, but you’re a girl. I think the change just kind of came with ageing, like I just started liking shopping and stuff, like I never really liked it before.

(Olivia, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)
Other girls’ narratives demonstrated this fading of their ‘tomboy’ identity due to a desire to feel accepted and ‘normal’, a privilege in adolescence that was no longer a part of the ‘tomboy’ label.

I changed, because I think my friends changed. My one friend moved away, and I fit in with her and so I didn’t need to change. But my other friends wore skirts. I still feel comfortable and confident, like sort of I have actually gotten more because I’m not as different because you are different and you don’t really want to be necessarily, it’s not feeling as good. I’m finding who I want to be. Instead of you know…what I was. I don’t necessarily need to be one way all the time. I feel more accepted among more different kinds of people. Like I’m accepted around my friends that play sports and my friends that don’t.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

You’re obviously comfortable in the ways that you are a tomboy, so you don’t really want to be a girly girl but because you have the influences and pressures and stuff like that then you’re going to have to make the flip a little bit. You don’t really want to, but you’re probably going to do it anyways. Still you’re going to be uncomfortable doing it because it’s not what you want. The media and then mainly because of boys and telling you that you should be a girly girl, so you kind of want to be accepted and stuff and you want to be normal, so you do. You want to be normal, and then to feel normal….turn out normal I mean. Huh, it’s not a good term, it’s not that you’re not normal, but just acceptable as that is defined by everyone else. So it’s just to get accepted by everyone and what everyone is trying to be like.
Other girls discussed a distance and a disconnection from their former identification to the ‘tomboy’ label.

I don’t even think about it anymore. I was more a tomboy, which is weird because now I’m not. I kind of feel sad, because it kind of seems like a grade seven thing to think about, it’s like, ‘ok guys you can get over it’. It’s one of those little, like you know how people sort themselves out at that age. Yeah, it’s like one of those things where I just want to take care of the little kids in grade seven and eight. Like that’s what they have to do to be socially accepted, like to classify people.

(Bronwen, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4rd interview)

Like I guess you could still call me a ‘tomboy’. Like I play a lot of sports and I don’t like dress up to go to school every day. I’m a bum sometimes, like I will just wear sweats. It’s too much work. But I don’t know, I don’t think I’m really a tomboy now. But I guess, what is a tomboy, right? No one’s really called me a tomboy for a very long time.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

**Becoming more of a ‘girly girl’**. A final theme to negotiating identities within this dichotomy coincided with the fading of the ‘tomboy’ label and that was the process of girls becoming more ‘girly’ in their identification. This process of identifying with more ‘girly girl’ attributes was strongly present in the girls’ narratives at adolescence. Changing one’s identity
along these dichotomous labels appeared to be embodied through stereotypical appearance elements of the label. One way that girls began to adopt more ‘girly girl’ traits was by starting to wear makeup.

Q: When did you start wearing makeup? A: Ah, grade eight. My aunt does makeup, like Mary Kay. And like when I first started wearing makeup, I got this one color, it was like a split color and there was blue and pink and then it kind of had a silvery color you could put on your eyebrow and then a pink. I just wear pink but then that looked, you know, kind of girly, and now I have more brown that I think are nicer looking.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)

I’m pretty close to tomboy, but then again, I do have a little bit of girly girl because I do wear makeup and I do care what I look like, but I mean most people do, like most people care but just I don’t care as much as certain people who are ‘oh I got to look good’ or something like that.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: What about makeup? A: I kind of wanted to do those things. Like it’s fun to just play around with stuff. I remember one summer with friends at the cottage, we watched the movie, ‘Coyote Ugly’ and then we decided we’re going to put on a show. So we like dressed up in like all this makeup and they did my hair, and we sang and danced for our parents. That was the first time I ever wore makeup, I think. And then after that I was kind of like, well, I started wearing it, and it started like, slowly, you know I’d just wear mascara, or like you’d get like a zit and then I’d like want to cover it up.
(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

I went through a phase with makeup, where I used to actually wear eyeliner every day. That was grade ten, and like if I didn’t wear it one day, you’d look like you were, I don’t know, sick or something. You’d look more pale and you’d be like, ‘whoa, this is bad’. So you’d wear it just because you couldn’t go without it, because you thought you looked so funny without it or whatever. I guess it started out as a more casual thing, like if you’re going out or something to some event. And then it just became like, ‘hey this looks good. I’m going to wear it to school’. And then it was doing it again and it would be like that for awhile. But then if I had no time to do it, then I looked in the mirror, and thought ‘Oh God, I look sick’. I remember thinking I looked really pale without it.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Another method of becoming ‘girly’ in one’s appearance was found in their narratives about changes to their hair.

Now, I’m like, ‘Oh my God! Is my hair okay?’, like 24 hours a day, or stupid things like that.

(Olivia, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

I guess it was more like my body started to change, too. I felt more different from them I guess. Like, before, I was like one of the guys, and then I started going through all the changes, you know. And I was like, ‘Oh my gosh. Like I’m different, I’m really different’. So that changed it for me. Then I like started growing my hair out and then I
don’t know. Cause like my body was, like, ‘yeah, you’re a girl’, you know, ‘you’re
different’. But it wasn’t that big of a deal.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

I have a hair straightener now which I would never have thought, if you’d asked me that
in grade seven, I would’ve been like, ‘yeah right, my hair will always be in a ponytail’.
I’ve gone through that whole, you know, actually tried to care about my hair for once.
Sometimes I straighten my hair for like a week. And then you’re just like, ‘man, am I
ever tired of this!’

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)

Girls spoke of starting to wear ‘girly’ clothing by dressing in pink clothes, tighter or more
revealing clothing,

I wear a little more pink now. Yeah, I don’t mind pink, I just don’t like wearing it a
whole bunch.

(Katasha, age 14, Grade 9, Caucasian, low SES, rural setting, 4th interview)

Like I wear tight clothing now but at one point I did wear baggy clothing. I mean from
the tomboys, I leaned a bit more to the girly girl side. I wear tight pants now and tighter
jeans, I sometimes wear tighter shirts. At first I was definitely self conscious, not a high
confidence level, no. I never had a high confidence level with going out and wearing
tight clothes at all. I was always kind of like my pants are pulled up when I sit down and
all that kind of stuff. Just make sure everything is pulled down and stuff. I still never
wear like cut up belly tops but I wear tighter clothes. I kind of gradually went into it, like it wasn’t like a sudden thing, it was like a thing that kind of happened, like I’d wear a tight shirt and my like baggy shorts and it just kind of, I don’t know, it happened gradually and at a level where no one really said anything to me about it.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Many girls made a change in their clothing based on explicit pressure from others to wear clothing deemed as more feminine or more ‘girly’.

Q: Do girly girls or tomboys change over time? A: They can change. Cause I was an extreme tomboy, like you couldn’t get me near anything pink, and then I was gradually like, well, they’d be like, ‘come on, try it on, just try it on’. And then I was like, ‘hey, it looks kind of nice’.

(Jessica, age 13, Grade 8, Caucasian, low SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

My friends sort of pressured me into wearing a skirt one time. And I had never worn one, so now I’m okay with wearing that at school. It felt like I was not really wearing anything! And then one of my friends teased me by flicking it. I was just freaking out. But then I got more confidence. They said it looked pretty. Like I think I have become more girly. I’m more comfortable with my body so I wear fitted clothing, and I wore a skirt, and I’m fine with that now.

(Shannon, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, rural setting, 2nd interview)
Some girls spoke of recognizing, in adolescence, the ways that they did not fit the norm within their peer group. They expressed wanting to change to a more ‘girly’ identity as a way to fit in with other girls.

I didn’t change too much. I just started wearing tighter clothes and accepted it and that’s what I’ve been like ever since. I never did anything to impress boys, like I won’t toss my hair or anything like that. Like you just start noticing, like why are other girls like that and like how can I be more like them. But then you don’t want to, but then you have to a little bit. So I started wearing tighter clothes and started wearing makeup, but I never really…I don’t know, I didn’t do it and hate it. I did it and I was kind of like, ‘oh it’s not so bad’.

(Lauren, age 15, Grade 10, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 2nd interview)

Q: When did you start wearing tighter clothes? A: Um, probably in grade seven or eight. Like…I guess everyone in my class started doing it. And then I wanted to, too. I guess it just like made you feel older, and you always wanted to be older.

(Melissa, age 16, Grade 11, Caucasian, upper-middle SES, rural setting, 3rd interview)

I went through a baggy phase when you’re little I guess everything’s baggy. Like you’re wearing your brother’s hand-me-downs, like that’s the way it is. And then you kind of get pushed into everything is really tight. And I was not a fan of that. Like I’m a fan of sweatshirts and things that are loose and comfortable and that I can move in. But I do wear tighter clothes; I guess I’m a little more comfortable with that now.

(Lauren, age 17, Grade 12, Caucasian, middle SES, urban setting, 3rd interview)
Summary of Negotiating Self Experiences and Identities in Relation to the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels in Childhood and Adolescence

It was clear across the interviews in both childhood and adolescence that the girls found some freedom in being able to move between and around these two labels. While there were differences in where along the continuum each girl felt comfortable most of the time, and while this positioning was rarely fixed across time, the girls’ descriptions indicated a desire to express themselves as girls in their own way, free from the constraints of having to fit the expectations and rigidity of dichotomous labels. In both childhood and adolescence, there were three main themes to this section of Negotiating Self Experiences: Identifying with One Side, Moving between Labels, and Finding a Center Location. For Identifying with One Side, the girls’ narratives indicated that some girls, at times, felt most comfortable identifying strongly with one label. There were girls who were either currently identifying or recalled having identified most as a ‘tomboy’ and other girls as a ‘girly girl’. From childhood to adolescence, there were considerably less girls identifying with one side of the dichotomy only. The dimension, Moving between Labels, illustrated how girls often attempted to move back and forth between the labels. This allowed the girls to maximize their opportunities for friendships and activities. This also allowed girls to make room for comfort within their clothing choices. Many girls recognized that strict ‘girly’ clothing was often restrictive or uncomfortable, while strict ‘tomboy’ clothing meant they might be seen as dressing ‘like a boy’. These girls used a creative solution of moving back and forth in wearing clothing from both labels to combat these problems. The third theme, Finding a Center Location, explored how girls negotiated their self identities in relation to these labels by finding a center location within this dichotomy. Girls seemed able to maintain this fluidity and flexibility between the labels of ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ by
establishing a neutral position between the two, refusing to identify with one label over the other.

In adolescence, there were two new themes present in their narratives about Negotiating Self Identities. As girls negotiated their sense of self within this dichotomy, the girls who had incorporated the ‘tomboy’ identity into their negotiated self began a process of a Fading of the ‘Tomboy’ Identity and girls were Becoming More Girly in adolescence. Girls discussed spending more time with female friends and less time with male friends, compartmentalizing their ‘tomboy’ self to the sports environment only, and discussed the process of beginning to wear makeup, worrying about their hair and appearance, and starting to wear tighter and more revealing clothing. This section illustrated how intricate and consistent are the negotiation processes of living between these dichotomous labels. Girls must constantly evaluate their surroundings, present activities, and peers around them, then decide where to negotiate within these labels and embody themselves accordingly to best maximize privileges and minimize consequences of each label.
CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to examine girls’ lived experiences with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ from childhood through to adolescence. The investigation focused on interviews conducted with twenty-seven girls at up to four interview times over a five year period. The investigation examined narratives of their experiences with these socially constructed labels. Through life history interviews, memories about their experiences with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ were elicited from childhood through to their present age at the time of the interview. Analyses of participants’ experiences uncovered three core dimensions: Cultural stereotypes of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels; social outcomes of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels; and negotiating self experiences and identities in relation to the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels.

The girls’ narratives across each of these three dimensions were delineated into two age categories based on grade level – childhood (up to grade six) and adolescence (grades seven and up). This allowed the data to be compared and contrasted between childhood and adolescence to examine for shifts and changes across each of the core dimensions. Results of the cultural stereotypes of the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels illustrated stereotypes based on aspects of appearance, activities and interests, and the social behaviour of each the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels for both childhood and adolescence. Results from their narratives related to social outcomes provided a series of privileges and consequences identified for each label in childhood and then in adolescence. The final dimension of negotiated identities illustrated the complexities of girls’ real lived experiences within these labels across time. For both childhood and adolescence, their narratives indicated that girls’ positions were rarely fixed, but rather moved between choosing to identify with only one label, moving between the labels, and
finding a center location within the labels. In adolescence, there were two additional categories illustrating the intensifying pressures for girls to fade their ‘tomboy’ identity and become more ‘girly’ in their identity.

In brief, the present study expands the existing psychological research on the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ by demonstrating the complex gender socialization factors affecting girls’ experiences with these labels as they move from childhood into adolescence. The present study expands an understanding of the importance of broadening the exploration into girls’ body related experiences. The girls’ experiences with these labels and in turn their own identification with these labels were informed by cultural stereotypes of each label in terms of appearance, activities and interests and interpersonal possibilities, as well as by the privileges and consequences the girls perceived for identification with each label. No published accounts within the research literature examined prospectively through a qualitative inquiry girls’ own lived experiences with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ from childhood through adolescence. The current findings are therefore discussed in light of previous research findings on the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. Discrepancies and parallels between the present findings and past research results are addressed and the strengths and weaknesses of the current research are discussed.

**Cultural Stereotypes: The ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly Girl’ Labels**

In childhood and adolescence, the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels were explored along three main dimensions: Aspects of Appearance, Activities and Interests, and Social Behaviours.

**Aspects of appearance.** For the ‘tomboy’ label, the Aspects of Appearance theme for both childhood and adolescence included stereotypes about clothing and hair. Narratives consistently included descriptions of baggy or loose clothing and the girls often compared a ‘tomboy’s clothing to that of boys’ clothing. These findings are consistent with results from
Morgan’s (1998) study which included descriptions from adult participants stating ‘tomboys’ wear ‘boy clothes’, as well as findings from Cockerill and Hardy (1987) where adolescent girls described unfeminine girls as scruffy and wearing pants most of the time. A study with girls in childhood found that wearing masculine clothing marked someone as a ‘tomboy’ and that there was an emphasis on what ‘tomboys’ did not like to wear, such as statements describing ‘tomboys as not liking to wear skirts or the color pink (Paechter & Clark, 2007; Paechter, 2010). In the present study, narratives about a ‘tomboy’s hair referred to girls who do not worry about their hair, do not manage or discipline their hair to change its natural appearance, and tend to wear their hair as they feel to be comfortable. This was consistent with Paechter and Clark (2007) and Paechter (2010) where it was found that “messy hair” (p. 350) was associated with the ‘tomboy’ identity.

For the ‘girly girl’ label, the Aspects of Appearance theme included stereotypes about clothing, hair, and makeup in both childhood and adolescence. Beginning in childhood, it was understood by these girls that the clothing of a ‘girly girl’ referred to clothing that is tight (e.g. “tight jeans”, “tight tops”), revealing (e.g. “short skirts”), and restrictive (e.g. “high heel shoes”, “tight jeans”, “short skirts”). Clothes were also described as pink in color and ‘girly girls’ were described as wearing skirts and dresses. The girls also made references to accessories, like jewellery when speaking of the stereotype of a ‘girly girl’. These same stereotypes continued throughout the narratives of the adolescent girls, with even more emphasis placed on ‘girly girls’ wearing tight and revealing clothing. Hair was discussed by these girls, beginning in childhood, as an important element of a ‘girly girl’s appearance. These girls understood a ‘girly girl’ as someone who spends a lot of time on disciplining, styling, and manipulating their hair to reach an ideal look. In adolescence, there was an added emphasis on the anxiety felt by ‘girly girls’ to maintain a perfected hairstyle. A final dimension to the Aspects of Appearance theme
for the ‘girly girl’ label included narratives about makeup. From childhood through adolescence, the girls described ‘girly girls’ as motivated to change their natural appearance with makeup in order to achieve an idealized and perfected image. These results are similar to Cockburn and Clark (2002) in which adolescent girls described the pressures to conform to emphasized femininity as meaning to be pretty, fashionable and to pay attention to one’s appearance. Connell (1987) described ‘emphasized femininity’ as referring to the form of femininity based on women’s compliance with subordination to men, and is the most culturally valued form of femininity. Cockerill and Hardy’s (1987) results indicated that adolescent girls described a feminine girl to be someone who is concerned with their appearance, is slim, and wears jewellery and makeup. The present study similarly found that the girls discussed a ‘girly girl’s body shape as “skinny”’. Reay’s (2001) classroom study with children found that ‘the girlies’ were found to be feminine in the most emphasized way. Allan (2009) also demonstrated findings that ‘girly girl’ was stereotyped by children as wearing pink and being “well made up” (p. 6). Paechter (2010) described results from children suggesting ‘girly girls’ appearance involves dyeing one’s hair and wearing make-up.

**Activities and interests.** In childhood the girls’ narratives included stereotypes suggesting ‘tomboys’ are passionate about playing sports, enjoy being physically active and love being outdoors. In adolescence the stereotypes about what ‘tomboys’ like to do included references exclusively to playing sports. Reay’s (2001) elementary classroom study and Paechter and Clark’s (2007) study found that ‘tomboys’ were described as having similar interests to boys. Paechter (2010) highlighted that ‘tomboys’ were described to be physically adventurous and to enjoy being active in nature. Morgan’s (1998) study with adult participants also found stereotypes about ‘tomboys’ interests included references to sports, playing outdoors, and being active in their bodies through rough and tumble play. Results from that study also
included stereotypes that ‘tomboys’ like to play with ‘boy toys’, described as trucks, action figures, bikes, and skateboards (Morgan, 1998). Jones (1999) discussed how girls who are interested in outdoor childhood activities are often labelled ‘tomboys’. Van Volkom (2003) found that participation in stereotypically defined masculine activities (e.g. basketball, baseball, soccer, and wrestling) and neutral activities (e.g. running, swimming, and tennis) in childhood was related to ‘tomboyism’. Van Volkom (2003) indicated that the general activity level of the child is more important in determining ‘tomboy’ behaviour than the specific activities that are divided along gender lines. Carr (1998) interviewed adult women who self-identified as ‘tomboys’ through a life history study and found similar results that ‘tomboys’ were described as preferring stereotypically masculine activities over feminine ones. Another study asking adolescent girls to describe an unfeminine girl found responses indicating stereotypes of a girl who is sporty, enjoys being outdoors and does not mind getting messy (Cockerill & Hardy, 1987). Paechter and Clark’s (2007) study demonstrated findings suggesting that enthusiasm, determination and commitment were important to the relationship between ‘tomboyism’ and sports. The present study illustrated the stereotypes of what activities a ‘tomboy’ likes to engage in becomes much more narrow and exclusive by adolescence, with sports consistently named as the only activity and interest of a ‘tomboy’.

For Activities and Interests of the ‘girly girl’ label, in both childhood and adolescence, the girls stereotyped ‘girly girls’ as having no interest in sports, as focused on appearance-related activities (e.g. putting on makeup, doing their hair), and as engaging in primarily sedentary activities (in childhood, this included sitting and talking and playing with dolls; while in adolescence, this referred to engaging with different forms of media, and talking with friends). In adolescence, there was an added stereotyped activity of shopping associated with the ‘girly girl’ label. Paechter (2010) found that girls in older childhood expressed interest in
the ‘girly girl’ identity as it allowed them access to appearance-related activities they associated with being a woman, such as dying one’s hair, wearing high heels, and wearing makeup. Cockerill and Hardy’s (1987) study asked adolescent girls about the interests of a feminine girl and their responses indicated that a feminine girl is thought to dislike getting messy, to have little interest in sport, to prefer being indoors, and was described as inactive and unenergetic. Other studies have also found that women spend extensive time and energy thinking and worrying about ideals of femininity (Krane, et al., 2004; Rubin et al., 2004). Butler (1993) discussed how the engagement of these disciplinary practices is the ‘performativity’ of femininity and emphasized how the body is the site where these practices are most often produced. The results indicating that ‘girly girls’ are seen as disinterested in sports and as not participating in sports presents a dilemma for girls who may enjoy sports but also feel the pressure to fit the norms of idealized femininity. Coakley and White (1992) found that adolescent girls perceived their participation in sports to be incompatible with becoming a woman and were likely to describe sports as having a low priority in their lives. Cockburn and Clark (2002) also found that adolescent girls recognized that to be socially acceptable as an appropriate teenage girl, they must not take part in sport, particularly ‘boys’ sports, nor exert themselves physically in any other way. Hills (2006) likewise found that adolescent girls described sports as incompatible with what it means to become a woman and enact appropriate female behaviours. Paechter (2010) discussed how as their participants approached adolescence and began to identify more with the ‘girly girl’ identity, there was a tendency to withdraw from active play and spend more time talking in friendship groups.

**Social behaviours.** In childhood, the girls’ narratives about ‘tomboys’ suggested they think of ‘tomboys’ as behaving ‘like boys’, and used descriptors such as being rude, independent, and tough. By adolescence, their stereotypes included reference to ‘tomboys’ as
aggressive, competitive, and as ‘acting like boys’. Consistently from childhood through to adolescence, the girls’ described ‘tomboys’ as choosing to spend time with male friends over female friends. Similarly, Reay (2001) found that ‘tomboys’ were seen to act and behave like boys and to hang out with boys over girls. Morgan (1998) also found results of adults’ stereotypes of ‘tomboys’ to include a preference for spending time with mostly male friends and role-playing as boys in their behaviour. Paechter and Clark (2007) found in their qualitative study with children that ‘tomboys’ were seen to enjoy play fighting and fighting-related sports, and that they were described as likely to stand up for themselves physically or willing to fight back. Their results also found that ‘tomboys’ were seen as more likely to misbehave and get into trouble. Paechter and Clark (2007) found that the children described ‘tomboys’ as having “masculine speech style and language” (p.351), stating that the children referred to ‘tomboys’ as using “slang language like the boys use” (p.351) and they expressed that ‘tomboys’ will defend themselves with verbal aggression. Similar to this study, their results also indicated that tomboys were frequently described as wanting to hang out with boys (Paechter & Clark, 2007). Paechter (2010) highlighted how ‘tomboys’ were described, in attitude, dress and demeanour, to be “more like a boy” (p. 228). Tomboys were also described as likely to get in trouble at school and to be aggressive (Paechter, 2010), not a characteristic described in the present study.

The girls’ narratives about the Social Behaviours of ‘girly girls’ illustrated stereotypes in childhood about an interpersonal style of girls who are hyper-feminine, nice, perfect, overly emotional, and ditzy. Their stereotypes included narratives about the ‘good girl’ as well as about the ‘mean girl’ associated with the ‘girly girl’ label. Allan (2009) also found descriptions of ‘girly girls’ included stereotypes of being nice and compliant. Paechter (2010) found stereotypes for ‘girly girls’ of ‘being nice’ and as more emotional during the younger years of their participants, but that as girls moved toward the end of childhood, the stereotype for ‘girly
“girly girl” behaviour moved toward ‘flirty’ and was much more heterosexualized. The social preferences of a ‘girly girl’ included stereotypes about not getting along with ‘tomboys’, as being liked by boys in a romantic sense, and as being teased by others for being too girly.

In adolescence, the interpersonal style of a ‘girly girl’ was described again as hyper-feminine and overly emotional. There were also descriptions of ‘girly girls’ “shrieking”, “giggling”, and as being “dumb”. Kelly, Pomerantz, and Currie (2005) described results of ‘girly girl’ descriptions included behaviour like flirting with boys, spending too much time and money on appearance-related activities, and being concerned about what others thought of them. Brown (1998) discussed how girls will criticize other girls for taking on traditionally feminine roles, as seen in this study where girls criticized ‘girly girls’ as hyper-feminine, overly emotional, and ditzy. Brown (1998) emphasized how this kind of stereotyping of girls does not interrupt the classification of girls, but rather perpetuates it.

The social preferences of ‘girly girls’ were emphasized as being focused on heterosexual relationships. In a working class community, research demonstrated that girls believed that attracting boys requires an exaggerated expression of femininity and attachment to men was seen as an important concept of being a woman (Williams, 2002).

The present study was unique in its use of a prospective design that allowed for the analysis of how girls’ stereotypes of the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ change over time. This allowed for an understanding of how these stereotypes are understood in childhood and then in adolescence. The present study therefore adds to and builds upon the previous literature.

Social Outcomes: Privileges and Consequences of the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly girl’ Labels

The girls’ narratives from childhood through to adolescence were examined to explore the Social Outcomes of Privileges and Consequences, experienced by these girls in relation to the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. As Foucault (1979) emphasized, it is important to examine
not just where power lies, but how it operates and the consequences of those operations. Valocchi (2005) warned that categories must not be taken as givens because then we are not able to fully consider the ways that categories construct inequality. Malson (1998) highlighted how discourses construct particular truths, realities, and subjectivities, which therefore reproduce particular power relations. This is relevant to the analysis of privileges and consequences for each label in the ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’ dichotomy, as this discourse of femininity informs girls about power, how to obtain power, the limitations of their power, and the damages or consequences that accompany different kinds of power. The Privileges and the Consequences for each label were explored first in childhood and then in adolescence.

‘Tomboy’. In examining the ‘tomboy’ label, privileges and consequences were found in childhood and adolescence for those identifying with this label.

**Privileges in childhood.** The Privileges for those identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood were illustrated in three themes. The first theme demonstrated that those identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood experienced a strong connection to self. It was understood and experienced by these girls that those who identified as a ‘tomboy’ demonstrated an authentic connection to their self desires and interests that were not compromised by external demands and pressures. The girls referred to ‘tomboys’ as “acting normal” or as “feeling normal”, suggesting that girls believe ‘tomboys’ to be living congruently and authentically. Morgan (1998) found other positive qualities associated with the ‘tomboy’ label, such as assertiveness and self-reliance. Van Volkom (2009) found that participants who had identified as ‘tomboys’ as children had higher self-esteem in adulthood.

The second theme illustrated that these girls felt that ‘tomboys’ feel comfortable in their bodies. The girls’ narratives consistently emphasized their impression that ‘tomboys’ “don’t care” about their bodies, suggesting freedom from worrying about the pressures to meet an ideal
image. The girls also stressed how ‘tomboys’ wear comfortable clothing that allows them to be active and engaged with their bodies. Their narratives included discussions of how ‘tomboys’ are not preoccupied with attaining an ideal weight or body shape. The girls’ reflected on these freedoms found in the ‘tomboy’ identity with longing and understanding for the embodied freedom and comfort that comes with this label. This finding that girls associate the ‘tomboy’ label with a freedom to feel connected to and comfortable in one’s body was unique in the literature.

The third theme in the Privileges of identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood was girls’ understanding that ‘tomboys’ are free to be physical in their bodies through activity and sport. The girls spoke from a place of passion when they talked about how much ‘tomboys’ love sports and physical activity. It was clear from the girls’ narratives that this is an enormous privilege to the ‘tomboy’ identity. It provides girls an identity that opens up the world of sports and physical engagement in a way that otherwise feels unattainable. Morgan (1998) also found there was more choice in activities available to girls identifying as ‘tomboys’. Defining oneself as an athlete has been found to be related to tomboyism (Csizma, Wittig & Schurr, 1988; Van Volkom, 2009). Giuliano, Popp, and Knight, (2000) reported that girls who reported having played with ‘masculine toys and games’ during childhood, who played with predominantly male friends or mixed-gender groups during childhood, and who considered themselves to be ‘tomboys’ as children were more likely to become varsity athletes in college and university.

A privilege noted in other studies, but was not as clear in this study, was the idea that being a ‘tomboy’ increases a girl’s likeability and popularity amongst her peers (Reay, 2001; Hemmer & Kleiber, 1981). In the present study, girls who identified as ‘tomboys’ discussed finding like-minded friends through girls’ sports teams, but there was not sufficient support suggesting that overall being a ‘tomboy’ increased their likeness amongst all peers.
Privileges in adolescence. By adolescence, there were significantly fewer narratives discussing privileges for ‘tomboys’. There were two privileges that carried over from childhood and continued to be discussed by some of the girls into adolescence. The first was the theme suggesting ‘tomboys’ hold a strong connection to self and the second theme relayed that ‘tomboys’ are comfortable in their appearance and do not have appearance-related worries or concerns. This is consistent with Van Volkom’s (2009) findings suggesting girls who identified as ‘tomboys’ developed strong self-esteem. The results from the present study also demonstrated girls described ‘tomboys’ as being free from weight or body shape related concerns. These narratives were from girls who were in their early teens. By late adolescence, there were no longer narratives discussing privileges for those identifying as ‘tomboys’. This study uniquely delineates the changing privileges associated with the ‘tomboy’ label from childhood through adolescence.

Consequences in childhood. There were also Consequences that came with identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label. In childhood, while girls felt more freedom to be involved in sports and to be physically active as ‘tomboys’, there was also a clear message that in doing so, girls were crossing into ‘boy territory’. Despite an overwhelming participation by girls in team sports, the girls still expressed an understanding of many and most sports to be considered “boys’ sports”. Their involvement in these sports suggested improvement in girls’ participation in sport, but the strongly held internalized message that sports is a male domain illustrates how strongly the patriarchal gender order is still at play. Previous research has also found that sports is overwhelmingly seen as a male domain and is predominantly associated with masculinity (Adams et al., 2005; Burn et al., 1996; Cahn, 1994; Carr, 1998; Choi, 2000; Cockburn & Clark, 2002; Morgan, 1998; Paechter & Clark, 2007; Paechter, 2010; Safir et al., 2003; Van Volkom, 2003; Williams, 2002). While girls have shown they can play sports, it is still seen, depicted,
held, attributed and owned as rightfully boys’ territory. Adams et al. (2005) discussed this discourse following their research with adolescent girls in sport and stated,

The cultural meaning of the female body and how it is regulated and controlled takes on a particular meaning when discussing women’s participation in sports because athletic endeavours require women to engage their bodies in practices that are typically associated with masculinity...sports play a powerful role in the reproduction of patriarchal gender regimes (p. 19).

Girls must identify as ‘tomboys’, as ‘quasi-boys’ to be allowed to and feel they have a right to step into the territory of sports owned by their male peers. Cahn (1994) discussed how the arena of sports is maintained as a patriarchal space through the attack on female athletes’ bodies as gender deviant.

Previous research has attempted over and over again to define a ‘tomboy’ and understand this socially defined deviant girl identity (Van Volkom, 2003; Burn et al., 1996; Safir et al., 2003). Van Volkom (2003) suggested that just being active, regardless of a girl’s expression of femininity or masculinity, is a sufficient to earn her the label ‘tomboy’. What is clear from this feminist post-structural analysis is that in order for girls to engage their bodies physically, to participate in organized play, to enjoy the fun, competition, and joy of sport, the current social order requires them to take on the ‘tomboy’ identity. Previous researchers, such as Van Volkom (2003) attempted to clarify what we should define as a ‘tomboy’ and suggested a widening of the definition of ‘tomboy’. This suggests it is necessary to identify and target as many girls as possible who are deviant and stepping outside of the bounds of ‘normal’ girl behaviour. A critical perspective, on the other hand, suggests that the activity levels of girls and the high participation of girls in sport, demonstrates the need to re-examine and question the need for the ‘tomboy’ label. Studies have continuously demonstrated that the majority of adult
women recall being ‘tomboys’ (Bem, 1996; Burn et al., 1996; Carr, 1998; Gottschalk, 2003; Morgan, 1998; Plumb & Cowan, 1984; Phillips & Over, 1995; Van Volkom, 2003; Van Volkom, 2009), that girls enjoy and participate in sports and physical activity, and yet this discourse remains firmly entrenched suggesting a need for a label that distinguishes girls apart. This illustrates the power of patriarchy in limiting girls’ freedom to experience their bodies as powerful agents of functionality. This feminist analysis suggests that it would be more appropriate and more representative of the reality of girls’ lives to recognize and validate that girls and boys alike enjoy participating in sports and physical activities. Girls should be able to play sports as girls – powerful, strong, competitive, able, and connected girls – without having to become ‘quasi-boys’ to do so.

A second Consequence to being a ‘tomboy’ in childhood was that in choosing to wear comfortable clothing, girls who identified as ‘tomboys’ were once again seen as borrowing from boys’ territory. These girls repeatedly named ‘tomboys’ as choosing to wear “boys’ clothes” in their preference for baggy, loose, and comfortable clothing. Paechter (2010) also found children described girls who wear baggy clothing as ‘tomboys’ and were seen to be wearing ‘boy clothes’. When girls choose to dress their bodies comfortably, from a place of agency and ownership in their bodies, rather than dressing to please others, they are seen as deviant and abnormal girls. This so clearly takes girls away from being connected to their bodies. Becoming a ‘tomboy’ to play sports and wear comfortable clothes should not demonstrate girls as deviant, but rather we should see it as demonstrating girls as resilient and resourceful. Rather, what needs to be problematized is the current social construction of femininity and its limited understanding of what is acceptable girl behaviour and girl embodiment.
A third consequence to the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood, uncovered in this analysis, is that identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label can ostracize girls because it is seen as deviant or abnormal girl behaviour. Brown (2003) discussed the downfall of ‘tomboys’ when she stated, “While she can attempt to gender pass – copying boys’ behaviour and endorsing boys’ interests and values and judgments about girls – of course a girl can never really be a boy. Signs of her assertiveness, individuality, and competitiveness will be read differently and responded to differently – she’s too bossy, rude or mean (p. 31).” Valocchi (2005) stated, “categories exert power over individuals, especially for those who do not fit neatly within their normative alignments” (p. 752). Girls shared stories of being labelled and teased for acting like a boy, of being left out of or rejected by their female peers, and of feeling that their families showed points of intolerance for their deviant girl appearance or behaviour. Kenway et al., (1994) discussed the ‘normal girl’ discourse in her research. Highlighted in their results is how girls who follow rules of traditional femininity are seen positively and their culture is made central, while girls who do not fall under this definition of ‘normal’ are seen as deviant or at risk (Kenway et al., 1994). Lobel et al., (1997) found ‘tomboyism’ to be linked to low popularity; while other studies found being a ‘tomboy’ increased girls’ likeness and popularity amongst her peers (Reay, 2001; Hemmer & Kleiber, 1981). What the research seems to show is that in the younger years of childhood, being a ‘tomboy’ is tolerated and accepted by peers, but that as girls approach puberty, this acceptance is less likely and ostracizing and teasing begins.

**Consequences in adolescence.** In adolescence, the Consequences for the ‘tomboy’ label included one shared consequence from childhood and three new consequences found in adolescence. The first theme, as also found in childhood, but certainly more intensified in adolescence, was that of being socially ostracized for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label. In
adolescence, girls identifying as ‘tomboys’ were no longer tolerated or accepted as ‘normal’ girls. There were narratives describing ‘tomboys’ in adolescence as “different”, “weird”, “strange”, and there was the judgment that girls should “grow out of it” in reference to the ‘tomboy’ identity. It was also clear from the girls’ narratives that the interests of a ‘tomboy’, such as sports and being outdoors, was seen as an abnormal interest for girls and was pushed outside the normal territory of girlhood. In adolescence, the girls spoke of explicit teasing and harassment against girls who embody the ‘tomboy’ label. The intensity and severity of teasing was most prominent in the girls’ narratives at later adolescence, with terms like “frumpy”, “loser”, “manly”, and “beast” used in their narratives, suggesting more severe consequences the longer girls hold onto a ‘tomboy’ identity through adolescence. Similarly, Ross, Ali and Toner (2003) included discussion of a girl who received negative peer responses because of identifying as a ‘tomboy’. Adams et al. (2005) also found that girls who play competitive ‘male’ sports were ostracized.

The second theme in Consequences for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in adolescence was the emergence of harsher labels associated with sexuality. As has been found in other research studies (Carr, 1998; Paechter, 2010), the ‘tomboy’ label at adolescence is no longer an acceptable embodiment for girls. As this research has demonstrated girls are teased and harassed for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in adolescence and are pressured to take on more ‘girly’ traits. This was further compounded by the emergence of harsher labels. Not only are girls in adolescence being policed around their gender identity, but their sexual identity as well. It was found that girls in adolescence began discussing labels that target discourses surrounding both gender and sexuality. The girls spoke of harsh homophobic and transphobic labels used against girls who stepped outside of these boundaries. Girls who were not towing the line of appropriate femininity were no longer referred to only as ‘tomboys’ but more often as
“butch”. This term steps up the derogatory implications of just how severely a girl has crossed the boundaries of appropriate femininity. This term was most often used to describe girls who were judged to take up too much physical space with their bodies and to have too much strength in their bodies, characteristics seen as unfeminine. Paechter (2010) also found girls feared ‘looking like a butch’ and discussed the negative stereotypes of girls who developed too much muscle. Heteronormative pressures experienced by these girls included hearing homophobic labels such as “dyke” or using the term “lesbian” to insult and demean girls who were not adhering to socially defined rules of femininity. Paechter (2010) found that some girls felt that being ‘tomboys’ in adolescence risked being labelled ‘butch’ or ‘lesbian’. Lamb and Brown (2006) heard girls in their studies use ‘lesbo’ as an insult for girls who were not staying in line with heteronormative femininity. In a study with female adolescent athletes, Adams et al. (2005) found that female athletes continued to be pressured to demonstrate that they are feminine and heterosexual. Goldberg and Chandler (1991) highlighted that there continues to be a predominant societal view that femininity and athleticism are incompatible.

The third theme in Consequences for being a ‘tomboy’ in adolescence was the intense pressure to become ‘girly’. Girls experienced and participated in the disciplining of all girls to become ‘girly’ in adolescence. There was strong pressure on girls who were still identifying with aspects of the ‘tomboy’ label to become more girly. The girls described this pressure as involving a focus on their clothing choices. Girls who still identified with ‘tomboy’ characteristics in their appearance described pressure from friends, family and peers to start dressing in tighter clothing. Girls, who were already identifying more with the ‘girly girl’ label, described pressuring friends and peers to make changes to their clothing style. This was also experienced through pressure to wear make-up and to wear their hair in more ‘girly’ styles, such as growing it long and managing their hair. Similarly, Allan (2009) found that girls at the cusp
of adolescence felt that being a ‘girly girl’ was expected of them by their peers. These results echoed a study with adult women who had identified as ‘tomboys’ as children who recalled that parents, peers, and teachers tolerated their ‘tomboyish’ ways in early childhood, but that there was an increasing pressure to conform to stereotypical femininity as they grew up. They reported pressure in early adolescence to start dressing, sitting and acting more feminine and to cease playing with boys and start playing with girls (Carr, 1998). Many of the girls in the present study discussed feeling the pressure to be ‘girly’ in adolescence in order to win the romantic attentions of their male peers. Girls described wrestling with the changing nature of their relationships with male peers, moving away from platonic friendships and towards heterosexual relationships. Many of the girls throughout adolescence described their impression that the only way they will receive romantic male attention is through the objectification of their body as ‘girly girls’. This was similarly found in Williams’ (2002) study where results indicated that girls believed that they must embody exaggerated expressions of femininity in order to attract boys. The girls’ narratives demonstrated an internalization process throughout adolescence about what it means to be a girl and to become a woman. The girls descriptions suggested an understanding that being ‘girly’ is necessary for being seen as “professional”, as being an “adult”, and that many have normalized this as a “natural change” for girls.

The fourth consequence of identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label in adolescence resulted in many girls fading their ‘tomboy’ identity and masquerading as ‘girly girls’. As a result of consequences such as teasing, harassment, exclusion, a desire to fit in with one’s peers and to please family, friends and boys; girls who had identified with the ‘tomboy’ label and enjoyed the privileges associated with the ‘tomboy’ label began to masquerade their outside appearance as ‘girly girls’ and the ‘tomboy’ label faded and was eventually no longer represented amongst this group of girls. Girls in later adolescence expressed no longer even using the label ‘tomboy’.
Moving away from the ‘tomboy’ identity, most especially in terms of appearance, is normalized by these girls right from early adolescence. The girls referenced this process using terms such as “fading”, “grow out of”, “change”, “become”, and “phase”, when discussing ‘tomboys’ becoming ‘girly girls’. Carr (1998) also found that women recalled eventually conforming to the pressures to become more feminine in their teenage years and described actively engaging in more feminine behaviours such as adopting a feminine appearance through clothes, makeup and posture; discontinuing athletic or other active pursuits, participating in girls’ peer groups, and flirting, dating, and having sex with boys. This abandonment of ‘tomboy’ characteristics in adolescence has been consistently found in several other studies as well (Morgan, 1998; Gilligan & Brown, 1992; Burn et al., 1996, Cockburn & Clark, 2002).

‘Girly girl’. In examining the ‘girly girl’ label, privileges and consequences were found in childhood and adolescence for those identifying with this label.

*Privileges in childhood.* Beginning in childhood, there were two main privileges identified by the girls’ narratives for identification with this label. The first privilege involved girls’ perceptions that boys were more likely to be attracted to or interested in girls who identify with the ‘girly girl’ label. The girls used words like, “special”, “prettier”, “boys have crushes on them” to illustrate their ideas that this was a privilege ‘girly girls’ enjoy over ‘tomboys’. Williams (2002) also found that girls believed boys were more attracted to girls who expressed an exaggerated femininity. Paechter (2010) found that girls at the end of childhood began to find power and pleasure in a sexualized ‘girly-girlness’.

The second privilege of being a ‘girly girl’ in childhood was the understanding consistent across the narratives that ‘girly girls’ hold social currency, or popularity, amongst their peer group. Allan (2009) also found that being a ‘girly girl’ was held as the ideal by the
girls they interviewed. They described the girls who most identified as ‘girly girls’ as the most popular group of girls in the class.

**Privileges in adolescence.** In adolescence, there were also two themes that arose as privileges for identifying with the ‘girly girl’ label. Similarly to childhood, the girls’ narratives indicated that ‘girly girls’ enjoy greater social currency amongst their peers. ‘Girly girls’ were consistently described as “popular”, as “fitting in”, as “socially acceptable”, and “the in-crowd”. The girls recognized that through collusion with social pressures of femininity, girls can gain greater access to popularity and fitting in with their peers. A second theme of privileges for ‘girly girls’ in adolescence was that ‘girly girls’ were seen as what is normal and acceptable for girls. The more girls that collude with this label, the more the ‘girly girl’ identity is seen as the norm for an adolescent girl identity. The girls narratives during adolescence discussed girls as “all being the same” in their ‘girly girl’ identity. Some girls seemed to rebuke the need for labels at this age implying that all girls are the same and therefore labels are not needed or used anymore. Therefore, girls who colluded with this label enjoyed the praise and acceptance awarded through being a part of what is defined as the norm for girls.

**Consequences in childhood.** In terms of Consequences for the ‘girly girl’ label, in childhood there were two main themes identified as consequences. Emerging from the girls’ narratives about ‘girly girls’ was the understanding that a ‘girly girl’s body is on display. It was clear from the girls’ narratives that in taking on the ‘girly girl’ identity, girls became objects of their bodies rather than agents in their bodies. As seen in the descriptions of stereotypes for a girly girl’s appearance, ‘girly girls’ learn to think of their body from the perspective of an external gaze. The girls discussed the restrictive clothing worn by ‘girly girls’ and discussed the limiting nature of these clothes in terms of movement and comfort for the wearer and the pleasing nature of these clothes for those looking at and desiring a girl’s body. The girls used
words like “tight”, “perfect”, “difficult”, “revealing”, “cute”, “pretty”, and “frilly” to describe the ‘girly girl’s clothing. Girls emphasized the limited movement possible in these clothes. They compared this look to that of a doll, exemplifying succinctly the ‘girly girl’s body as on display. The girls discussed a ‘girly girl’s body as “skinny”, also emphasizing the importance on ‘girly girls’ to fit the ideal body shape for girls and women. Bartky (1988) highlighted how the female body is produced as a spectacle through the disciplinary regime of femininity. Yancey Martin (2003) also discussed research demonstrating how expressions of femininity involve disciplinary practices on girls’ and women’s bodies.

A second consequence to the ‘girly girl’ label in childhood was identified by many of the girls as feelings of insecurity. The girls discussed ‘girly girls’ anxiety to fit an ideal image, their feelings of being inadequate, and of not measuring up to the ideals. The girls used phrases like “care a lot about their bodies”, “worry about how they look”, “always asks everybody, ‘do I look okay?’”, demonstrating the anxious efforts to try and look perfect and pleasing, and yet the tenuousness of attaining any level of security or comfort. Kelly et al., (2005) also found that girls described ‘girly girls’ as disconnected from their sense of self. Susinos, Calvo, and Rojas, (2009) reported that young women who were concerned with achieving ideal femininity were most actively concerned about their physical image. They recognized this as a consequence to girls and women in stating,

As long as this concern for aesthetics has a character that is dependent on male approval, it places women in a subordinate role, which has a clear political meaning insofar as it is one more tool of control and unequal power (p. 106).

**Consequences in adolescence.** In adolescence, there were seven themes identified as consequences for those embodying the ‘girly girl’ label. There were the same consequences carried over from childhood – being an object of the body instead of an agent in the body and
feelings of insecurity in one’s sense of self. Under the theme of being objects instead of agents in their bodies, ‘girly girls’ are described as struggling to fit an ideal image and are therefore seen as quite disconnected from their bodies. The girls described pressures on ‘girly girls’ to become and maintain thin body shapes and to dress their bodies to be pleasing to others rather than for personal comfort. In a study with adolescent girls in a high school setting, Kenway et al., (1994) expressed concerns about the ways that girls are taught to focus on their appearance. Discussing a home economics course taught in the high school, Kenway et al., (1994) found that girls, but not boys, were implicitly taught to be concerned about managing and constructing the way other people view their bodies and the way they look. In the second theme carrying over from childhood, the girls in adolescence also recognized how the tenuous position of popularity takes a toll on a ‘girly girl’s sense of self. Rice (1988) highlighted this consequence in stating, “pressures to conform to society’s standards of beauty and femininity cause us to become profoundly insecure about our bodies” (p.1). The girls’ narratives demonstrated an understanding that ‘girly girls’ live with insecurity and incongruence between their inner selves and in how they present themselves on the outside. Brown (2003) captured this insecurity when she stated, “By trying to be a girl boys desire, she can never really be or know herself” (p. 31).

Emerging in adolescence, were five more themes of Consequences for those identifying with the label ‘girly girl’. As found with the ‘tomboy’ label, in adolescence, new and harsher labels emerged that were clearly linked with aspects of the ‘girly girl’ label. The labels that emerged for girls who took the ‘girly girl’ label too far or expressed its qualities with too much emphasis were the many variants of the ‘slut’ label. Lamb and Brown (2006) found that as girls entered adolescence, they began to use language such as the ‘slut’, ‘skank’, and ‘whore’ labels in their dialogue. Another theme emerging from this discourse was the blurred line between the ‘girly girl’ label and the ‘slut’ label. Suddenly girls who were wrestling with the pressures to
become more ‘girly’ had to balance this with the pressures around being careful not to be “too girly”. Dressing in ‘tight’ and ‘revealing’ clothing was no longer just a marker of being ‘girly’ but also bordered on being labelled ‘slut’. An understanding of how to stay in safe ‘girly’ territory and avoid the dangerous ‘slut’ territory was difficult for the girls to identify and articulate. There was a clear anxiety present in the girls’ narratives as they discussed the ways they try to understand this differentiation. Girls, who had left behind the platonic friendships with boys and focused instead on fostering heterosexual relationships, risked being labelled as a ‘whore’ should they be seen as crossing the line of acceptable flirting. Repeated in their narratives was the understanding that being “too girly” at all – such as wearing too much makeup, clothing that is too tight, being too flirtatious, focusing too much on one’s appearance, revealing too much bare skin – risked one being labelled as a ‘slut’. The emphasis on and frequent use of the word “too” highlights the limitations placed on girls and the strict rules inherent in being a girl and living in a girl’s body. The power of this language shows how this discourse works to keep girls in line, to socialize them to understand their place as subordinate, and to maintain the status quo.

Another theme in this section underscored the girls’ obvious fear of being labelled a ‘slut’ or one of its variants. The girls understood this label as one used with intent to harm. The negative consequences and damaging insinuations intended with these labels were clear to the girls. The girls described awareness of how the ‘slut’ labels are used for teasing and harassment as well as for socially ostracizing girls. Other researchers have similarly found the ‘slut’ label being used in adolescence as a form of social control over girls (Brown 2003; Lamb & Brown, 2006; Tanenbaum, 2000; Tolman, 2002). As Brown (2003) found in her research,
Being labelled a slut by other girls or by boys doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with sex or sexual behaviour, but is a way for girls to seek revenge or to control another girl who is too different or too popular or threatening in some way (p. 116).

Tanenbaum (2000) also found that the ‘slut’ label is used broadly to ostracize girls,

Slut-bashing is one issue that affects every single female who grows up in this country because any preteen or teenage girl can become a target...The ‘slut’ label doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with sex. Very often the label is a stand-in for something else: the extent to which a girl fails to conform to the idea of ‘normal’ appearance and behaviour (p. xv).

The girls themselves perpetuated the stereotypes of this label through their own crucifixion of what girls’ do that could earn them this label. While many girls recognized the unfairness in the way the ‘slut’ label is used simply to bully or ostracize a girl; they also had their own line in the sand for where the label can be used and where it is deserved. This came up throughout narratives of girls deemed as ‘bad’ girls and most clearly arose in the girls’ discussions of sexual activity. There seemed to be a clear understanding that when it came to being sexually active, a girl is definitely at risk of being called a ‘slut’. Tolman (2002) found similarly that girls judge other girls “who have sexual experiences under the ‘wrong’ circumstances” (p. 61). Any suggestion, such as a girl’s clothing choices or her behaviour and attitude around boys, risks the assumption that she is sexually active, and therefore puts her at risk of being labelled a ‘slut’.

While the girls spoke of the flippancy with which girls will throw these ‘slut’ labels around in their dialogue with one another, whether in jest or in conflict, there was also a clear and telling thread throughout their narratives – that they each avoided and feared this label being turned on them. Tanenbaum (2000) highlighted this succinctly in stating, ‘Because ‘good’ girls can
become ‘bad’ girls in an instant, slut-bashing controls all girls” (p. 87). Brown (2003) discussed this fear,

Girls know they are one mistake away from being labelled slut themselves and they know a culturally sanctioned double standard increases the risk...Girls are, indeed, ‘held’ differently – their sexuality is contained more and their desire is nearly unspeakable (p. 117).

Tanenbaum (2000) found girls’ experiences demonstrated that once a girl is labelled ‘slut’, it becomes very difficult for girls to counter this attack. Extreme consequences were identified in the present study for how toxic and damaging this label is for those who are the victims of this verbal lashing. This included such extremes as depression, violence, dropping out of or changing schools. This is similar to work by Larkin (1994) who documented the pervasiveness and consequences of sexual harassment against teenage girls. Tanenbaum (2000) commented on the consequences of the ‘slut’ label from her research in stating,

Being known as the school ‘slut’ is a terrifying experience. In school, where social hierarchy counts for everything; the school ‘slut’ is a pariah, a butt of jokes, a loser. Girls and boys both gang up on her. She endures cruel and sneering comments – ‘slut’ is often interchangeable with ‘whore’ and ‘bitch’ – as she goes down the hallway. She is publicly humiliated...her body is considered public property: She is fair game for physical harassment. (p. xvi).

In reaction to the themes of consequences already listed, another consequence that emerged in the girls’ narratives was a hyper vigilance enacted by the girls in dressing their bodies. The girls expressed a hyper vigilant monitoring of choosing clothing that keeps them in line as a ‘girly girl’ but is not bumping up against the borders of the ‘slut’ label. Malson (1998) described the “normalizing gaze” (p. 173) as responsible for the self-imposed disciplinary
practices where girls are engaging in self-surveillance, measurement and comparison with the notion of idealized femininity. Girls take on responsibility for keeping themselves in line and place a lot of pressure on their clothing choices being appropriate. Some girls expressed anxiety and worry in making the right clothing choices due to the fine line distinguishing them as acceptable ‘girly girls’ versus unacceptable ‘sluts’. Tanenbaum (2000) found that girls can be called a ‘slut’ simply because of the way she looks, emphasizing that a girl’s clothing or makeup could make her seem like a ‘slut’. Other girls expressed a sanctimonious awareness over other girls of how to stay in line with appropriate dress and appropriate choice in how to reveal one’s body in a pleasing, rather than ‘slutty’ way. There was a most certain vilification of girls who had not yet figured out how to avoid the ‘slut’ label and who risked this labelling with their clothing choices.

A final theme in Consequences identified for the label ‘girly girl’ in adolescence was the way in which the girls’ narratives described a process of policing girls’ bodies. With the rules multiplying as to what is appropriate for a girl’s body, there emerged a policing and monitoring of girls’ bodies to ensure that girls remain within the boundaries. Girls engaged in this monitoring not only of their own bodies, but of each other’s. Girls ensured that there is a likeness amongst girls and their appearance, which serves to protect themselves individually from being targeted for teasing and bullying. When one girl steps out of line this puts all girls at risk and so the girls held a fierce grip on their understanding of how girls should dress their bodies. Tanenbaum (2000) discussed this disruption in girls’ solidarity in stating,

Women and girls lash out at other women and girls when they recognize that no matter how hard they work, and no matter what sacrifices they make, they will always have more to prove than men and boys do (p. 201).
Parents were also named as inevitable monitors of their daughters’ bodies, likely coming from a place of wanting to protect their girls from being ostracized or seen as deviant, but ultimately this works to collude with the social order in controlling and restricting the way girls live in their own bodies. Brown (2003) emphasized, following her research studies with adolescent girls, that these pressures on girls to follow rules of femininity encouraged girls to police one another, to exclude and reject girls who do not meet the norm. The present research validates what Kenway et al. (1994) emphasized when stating that girls learn about discourses of femininity and what is acceptable and what is not and that girls,

- Come to define various normal, natural and preferable ways of being male and female,
- which construct identities in gendered ways and in multiple shifting, yet patterned, relationships of dominance and subordination (Kenway et al., 1994, p. 198).

Sawicki (1991) emphasized that disciplinary practices create desire and attach individuals to specific identities and establish norms against which women’s behaviours and bodies are judged and against which they police themselves and one another.

The present study was the first to examine prospectively girls’ own narratives of positive and negative experiences with the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. A delineation of the range of privileges and consequences experienced within this dichotomy is important to understanding girls’ experiences and evolving identities at each age and to documenting where the shifts are from childhood through adolescence. Results demonstrated that ultimately, no matter where girls’ situate themselves within this dichotomy, there is no safe space for girls to occupy. This study uniquely demonstrates how such dichotomous demands on girls’ identities sets up disconnection in girls’ relationships to themselves, their bodies, and to one another.

**Negotiating Self Experiences and Identities in Relation to the ‘Tomboy’ and ‘Girly girl’ Labels**
An important analysis that emerged from this research was an understanding of how girls themselves described living within the discourse of this dichotomy from childhood through adolescence. The first chapter of these results examined girls’ understandings of the stereotypes of these labels. The second chapter examined the privileges and consequences identified by these girls to understand how power is situated within this dichotomy. The final chapter highlighted how girls then described their own experiences with these labels, considering these stereotypes, privileges and consequences, and how they have negotiated their own sense of identity within the labels of ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’. As Weedon (1987) articulated, meaning is given to experiences according to the discourses one is surrounded by and through this, their way of thinking and understanding their sense of themselves – their subjectivity – is constituted. This chapter highlighted the process Smith (1988) discussed in stating that women will “use, play with, break with, and oppose” (p. 53) rules of femininity to negotiate their own identity within this discourse. Kenway et al., (1994) emphasized that individuals will respond to the discourses surrounding them depending on the way their individual and group histories come together and will consciously or unconsciously choose to take up or reject the current position offered. Girls in the present investigation expressed a narrative demonstrating that this discourse of femininity is all-present and all-encompassing. They must think about and spend time negotiating these labels throughout various facets of their life – such as their clothing choices, activity choices and their various relationships. Their narratives indicated that these girls rarely stayed fixed on one position in this dichotomy, but rather that most girls worked to negotiate a way to force the dichotomy into more of a continuum where they could position themselves with more flexibility than a strict dichotomy allows. While this provided them with unique ways to negotiate the social pressures with their desires for comfort, it again highlighted the all-encompassing nature of this discourse in girls’ lives. While the girls demonstrated ways
to find some flexibility or negotiations within this dichotomy, they could not entirely escape this discourse of femininity and the rules entrenched in what it means to be a girl.

**Childhood.** In childhood, there were three prominent dimensions identified in how the girls negotiated their self experiences and identity within this discourse. The first dimension illustrated how the girls’ narratives demonstrated times in their lives when they have identified strictly with just one side of the dichotomy. There were several girls who spoke of identification with the ‘tomboy’ label at the time of the interview. For some, this allowed more freedom to express their passion for and participation in sports and physical activity, while others focused on enjoying more options for activities and friendships afforded with the ‘tomboy’ identification. Paechter (2010) found that ‘tomboy’ identities in childhood were often constructed through a rejection of femininity, as also found by Reay (2001). Paechter (2010) stated,

> Boys, for example, do not feel the need to reiterate that they hate pink, make-up, or frilly clothes: they assume that everyone knows. For some tomboy girls, on the other hand, such rejections are a central aspect of claiming this identity (p. 228).

Several girls identified that the ‘tomboy’ label provided them with a sense of being comfortable in their bodies. There was certainly a theme of freedom in the body – both in terms of comfort, as well as being physical and active – that accompanied girls’ descriptions of choosing to identify with the ‘tomboy’ label. One narrative clearly demonstrated the intersection of the discourses of class and femininity. Madison described being a ‘tomboy’ as a younger child because ‘tomboy’ clothes (i.e. baggy clothing) were the kind of clothes available from the Goodwill store where her mother could afford to shop. Madison’s own freedom of choice in her negotiation of how she identified within this dichotomy of the ‘tomboy’/ ‘girly girl’ labels was restricted by her family’s socioeconomic status and the availability of resources
Madison was able to use the ‘tomboy’ identity, rather than her social class limitations, to explain her baggy clothing. Whether identifying as a ‘tomboy’ would have been her choice at that time in her life regardless is unclear, but rather what is important to take note of is the ways that intersections of different discourses limit and change girls’ options and possibilities for their own negotiated identities.

Interestingly, within the childhood narratives, there were no girls identifying strictly as a ‘girly girl’ at the time of the interview. There were just two narratives from adolescent girls who recalled identifying as ‘girly girls’ in their childhood. Considering the consequences identified for the ‘girly girl’ label in childhood and the lack of pressure in childhood to be strictly ‘girly’, it is not surprising that the girls preferred keeping access open to the privileges available in the ‘tomboy’ label in childhood. This is similar to research from Paechter (2010) who found that the 9-10 year old girls they studied did not identify as ‘girly girls’, but rather described this as ‘babyish’.

Throughout the childhood narratives, the girls described a process of moving between the two labels and enjoying access to the privileges of each label. This dimension was discussed along two themes of maximizing opportunities and making room for comfort. The girls enjoyed some freedom of moving between the labels to avoid restrictions on their activity options and friendship possibilities. For some girls, they became ‘tomboys’ to enjoy sports and physical activity and then moved back towards ‘girly girl’ to maximize friendships with other girls. Other girls spoke of moving between the two labels depending on what activity they wanted to participate in. Within the theme of making room for comfort, many girls found refuge in the ‘tomboy’ label as it afforded them more comfortable and less restrictive clothing options than the ‘girly girl’ label. Paechter (2010) described some girls nearing the end of childhood who began to experiment with enjoying the dual benefits of being both ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly-girl’.
The third dimension of how girls creatively negotiated their identities within this dichotomy was to force a middle ground and find a center location from which they could occupy aspects of each label at the same time. This is consistent with Leahy (1994) who noted that subjectivities are not necessarily unified, but rather often involve contradictory positions depending on the situation and the environment. Foucault (1979) named this phenomena of both colluding and resisting dominant discourses in emphasizing that discourses do not only produce docile bodies, but rather individuals will also demonstrate resistance and the body will sustain a multiplicity of meanings. The girls’ narratives indicated how they embodied neutrality with both compliance and resistance to living within these labels. Through staying neutral and central, the girls described enjoying privileges associated with both labels while minimizing the consequences from either label. This dimension was qualitatively different from the dimension describing girls moving between the labels, as moving between labels demonstrated the girls’ preference to occupy one label at a time, while finding a center location demonstrated girls’ preference to embody aspects of both labels at the same time. Paechter (2010) described a similar finding in her research whereby girls described themselves as “a bit tomboy” (p. 228). These were described as girls who were able to retain certain aspects of femininity while also taking on aspects of masculinity.

Adolescence. In adolescence, there was a significant shift in the girls’ negotiations of identifying with these labels as social pressures to be ‘girly’ intensified. However, in early adolescence there were still processes of identifying with one side of this dichotomy over the other. The presence of this dimension in the narratives was markedly reduced from what it was in childhood, indicating that this was a less likely identification for the girls in adolescence, suggesting a continuous renegotiation of one’s identity between these labels. This is apparent in the fact that the three girls whose narratives demonstrated identification with the ‘tomboy’ label,
also appeared in other dimensions of negotiation at other points in their interviews, illustrating that a fixed identity within this dichotomy is rare in early adolescence. There were also few girls who spoke of identifying strictly with the ‘girly girl’ label. Interestingly, the girls narratives illustrated that they stereotyped many of their female peers to be complete ‘girly girls’, but they were more complex in their own identification within this dichotomy.

As in childhood, in adolescence there was a dimension of negotiating identities that illustrated the moving between labels phenomenon. The girls’ narratives demonstrated a strong preference for negotiating an identity that allowed them to move back and forth between the two labels based on the needs and priorities of the moment. One aspect to this negotiation revolved around girls’ choices in clothing. The girls clearly enjoyed the privilege of wearing comfortable clothing, a need met through the ‘tomboy’ identity. The girls also expressed feeling the pressure to meet the social demands of wearing the tight and revealing clothing of the ‘girly girl’ label, which they understood as the preferred look for adolescent girls. At times, girls moved between the labels several times in one day. For girls who stayed connected to sports, being athletic required the style of a ‘tomboy’, while fitting in with their peer group and meeting the norms of heterosexual dating required the style of a ‘girly girl’. Many girls discussed wearing their ‘girly girl’ identity to school, while carrying their ‘tomboy’ identity in their backpack for their after-school activities – demonstrating once again how all-encompassing this negotiation process is.

Another dimension carried over from their childhood negotiations, was the dimension of finding a center location. Many of the girls’ narratives indicated a preference for allowing themselves to embody both labels at once. This was described through clothing choices, where girls would wear one piece of clothing from the ‘tomboy’ identity and other pieces of clothing from the ‘girly girl’ identity. This was also described as wearing more ‘tomboyish’ clothing, but choosing to wear make-up as well. Many of the girls described feeling more comfortable
and connected to themselves when they were able to negotiate a centered location between the two labels, so as not to be stereotyped as only one side of this dichotomy or the other. Brown (2003) also found that adolescent girls seek to negotiate a location that allows them to best fit in, stating, “What becomes ‘normal’ for adolescent girls is negotiating the ‘in between’, finding that place of least discomfort, fitting in, feeling safe” (p. 118).

As discussed in the consequences and privileges chapter, a process that emerged in the girls’ negotiation of self experiences and identities in adolescence was the fading of the ‘tomboy’ identity. This was described in terms of friendships, with girls in adolescence expressing a move from enjoying friendships with boys to mostly spending time with other girls. Other girls discussed fading their ‘tomboy’ identity in order to fit in, to feel ‘normal’ and accepted by your peers. The consequence identified in adolescence of being teased and ostracized for identifying with the ‘tomboy’ label took its toll on these girls and they responded with greater collusion to the social pressures to be ‘girly’. Some girls discussed feeling disconnected from their former ‘tomboy’ identity, and instead normalized the fading process and eventual collusion with the ‘girly girl’ label. Many of the girls discussed maintaining an athletic identity, but clarified that they were ‘girly’ outside of sports. Choi (2000) discussed this dilemma for female athletes in stating, “If a girl or woman wants to play the masculine game of sport, she must do so in conformity with the patriarchal rules that ensure she is first and foremost recognized as a heterosexual feminine being” (p. 8). The girls in this study echoed this in their descriptions of struggling with their desire to be physically active versus their need to meet social demands and expectations on femininity. Girls learned to negotiate this dilemma by compartmentalizing their athletic, or ‘tomboy’ side, to the field only. Hills (2006) noted that many girls at adolescence felt compelled to hide their sporting interests and behaviours. Paechter (2010) found that girls on the cusp of adolescence began to move from predominantly
identifying as ‘tomboys’ to predominantly identifying as ‘girly girls’. It was found that girls feared the homophobic harassment that they viewed would accompany an ongoing ‘tomboy’ identity through the ‘butch’ or ‘lesbian’ labelling and therefore began to reconstruct themselves as ‘girly girls’ (Paechter, 2010).

In response to the fading of ‘tomboys’, girls negotiated their identities and self experiences by becoming more ‘girly’. This process of identifying with more ‘girly girl’ attributes held a strong presence in the adolescent girls’ narratives. The strongest element of the girls’ changing identities was in their embodiment of the stereotypical appearance traits of the ‘girly girl’ label. Girls changed their bodies to change their self identity. The girls’ narratives illustrated processes of starting to wear make-up, of beginning to manage and discipline their hair, and of changing their clothing choices to tighter, more revealing clothing. Girls, who had previously rebuked all things ‘girly’, were now embracing the color pink, donning skirts and dresses and displaying their bodies in more objectified ways. Girls discussed explicit pressuring from friends and family to become more feminine and ‘girly’ in their appearance. While many identified that changing in this manner helped them to fit in more with their peers, the girls normalized this process as part of maturation and as being more like a grown woman, as opposed to fully recognizing the socialization process shaping their negotiated identities.

Becoming ‘girly’ was a phenomenon that occurred at an earlier age in previous research where it was found that as the girls turned 11 years old more girls were self-describing as ‘girly girls’ (Paechter, 2010; Paechter & Clark, 2007). Paechter (2010) discussed how for these girls, becoming ‘girly girls’ seemed like a novel position for them and something they associated with growing older and an inevitable part of puberty.

This process of the girls’ fading their ‘tomboy’ identities and becoming more ‘girly’ due to the increasing pressures regarding rules of femininity and their own attempts to access social
currency, highlights the work of Foucault (1979) who argued that discourses discipline the body. He emphasized that the body is the location where power relations manifest themselves. Bordo (1993) contributed further to post structural theories in her discussions of how patriarchal systems will use women’s bodies in the struggle over power to maintain gender inequality. As girls wrestle with understanding how to appropriately be a girl within a culture determined to maintain patriarchal status, their bodies do indeed become the “site of political struggle” (Bordo, 1993, p. 16). Following her research with adolescent girls and their sense of self, Brown (1998) suggested that there is a dominant cultural context invested in reinforcing an image of conventional femininity that silences girls’ voices and expressions of thoughts and feelings. The present study found similar results with girls’ bodies. That same dominant cultural context is not only silencing girls’ voices, but it is constricting the way girls’ live in their bodies to fit conventional femininity and maintain women’s subordinate position to men. As girls moved through adolescence, they conformed and colluded with the social pressures to be ‘girly’, an identity wrought with restrictions and limitations on their physical and mental freedom.

The present study was unique in identifying the ongoing process of negotiating one’s identity and self experiences in relation to this dichotomy through the use of the prospective methodological design. By interviewing the same girls at different ages over a five year period, an intricate and detailed analysis was available for understanding the forced process of living within this dichotomy. The analysis of these girls’ experiences over time allowed for an in-depth examination of the ongoing active negotiation process that girls must manoeuvre. This study emphasizes the problematic nature of patriarchal discourses in girls’ lived experiences of their bodies. This ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’ dichotomy limits girls’ freedom to choose how they want to express themselves as girls and how they want to live in a girl’s body. It contains and
suffocates their agency and power as girls, and it divides girls against one another, restricting possibility for the pleasure and power found in solidarity and sisterhood.

**Strengths and Limitations of the Current Investigation**

The aim of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of girls with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ through the process of change from childhood to womanhood. From a feminist post-structural analysis, these girls’ experiences were analyzed to uncover what it is like for girls to be constrained by this gender discourse of social constructs of femininity. The findings of the current study are grounded in methodological strengths, but are also limited by other methodological constraints.

**Strengths.** Inquiring into girls’ experiences of this ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’ dichotomy with a qualitative methodology allowed an understanding of girls’ own lived experiences of how they have come to understand this discourse and have negotiated their own identity within this discourse. The use of a qualitative methodology was a main strength of this study in that it allowed for a delineation of the multilayered social processes affecting girls’ experiences of these labels and their own embodiment within this discourse.

This study used a life history approach (Cole & Knowles, 2001). This approach fostered an understanding of each girl’s narrative within the context of their own developmental histories. This approach allowed the researcher to highlight points of transition throughout the participant’s life, while also integrating the social context into their life story. For example, girls’ lived experiences with the labels ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ was examined across their life span, providing a rich understanding of how these girls negotiated their own identities within this dichotomy. Furthermore, how the social context, such as social class, family make-up, opportunity, and school environment, affected these girls’ experiences was available through the use of the life history approach.
This study also used a prospective methodology by following the girls for five years and interviewing the girls up to four times during this time period. During such a transitional and developmental period of young girls’ lives, a prospective design allowed for a more in-depth understanding of what was happening for the girls as they moved from childhood, through puberty, into and through adolescence. A further strength to this prospective design was that the same interviewer completed each interview with the same girls. This allowed for rapport and trust to be established between the researcher and participant, which therefore fostered and enriched the interview process. Throughout the research project, there was an ongoing analysis of the data occurring following each interview stage. This allowed the researchers to stay close to and be informed by the data, therefore the next interview was always shaped and enhanced by the previous interviews and data analysis process.

This study included data for girls from the ages of nine years old through to eighteen years old. The range of ages covered in this study provided a unique look at what was happening for girls during an important developmental stage in their lives. A further strength of this study was the diversity of the group of girls interviewed. The girls embodied diversity in terms of ethno-cultural group membership, social class, rural versus urban location, and family make-up. This diversity was important for understanding further about how the social context of girls’ lives shapes their developing sense of self within discourses of femininity.

This study included 87 interviews with 27 participants. For a qualitative study, this was a strength of the study to have this number of participants. This allowed for the study to easily reach the criterion of saturation (Seidman, 1991).

A contribution of this study was through its theoretical approach of feminist post structuralism. In using a feminist post-structural analysis, the girls’ experiences of the ‘tomboy’/ ‘girly girl’ dichotomy was analysed by problematizing a patriarchal discourse that
situates girls as subordinate to boys. Through this lens, the analysis could examine how this discourse forced the girls to live within restraining dichotomies, such as ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’, limiting their sense of freedom in their bodies and their sense of self. While much of the previous research into these labels has problematized girls who deviate from socially constructed gender norms, and therefore earned a label like ‘tomboy’, this study aimed to problematize the social construction of gender and its use of labels which constrained the possibility for the girls to live full, embodied lives connected to their own desires and interests.

**Limitations.** One of the limitations to this study was that while it included a diverse group of participants from various ethno cultural heritages, there was an absence of participants from Asian or South Asian descent. Similarly, this study did not include girls with physical disabilities or girls who are new immigrants to Canada. Enhancing the diversity of the group participants allows for a greater likelihood that a broader group of individuals will find the results of the study reflective of their own experiences. While this study included a diverse sample of participants from various ethno cultural backgrounds, the number of girls from each ethno cultural background was not sufficient to allow for an analysis comparing the girls from each background. The scope of this study was limited to understanding the overall broad experiences of a diverse group of girls.

A further limitation was the limited availability of several girls during specific points of the study. Consequently, there was not a complete interview set of four interviews for each participant; the average number of interviews was three per participant. While participant withdrawal is an expectation for any research project, it does place limitations on the outcomes of the data analysis in that some girls were not followed prospectively as long as other girls.

A limitation of qualitative research is the subjectivity of the researcher. In order to stay aware of this subjectivity, the data was reviewed with the participants following the first
interview phase. A chronological summary of the girls’ life history interview was given to the girls at the second and third interviews and participants were asked to correct or clarify aspects of the story to ensure that an accurate representation was captured of their own embodiment experiences. The final analysis of their interviews was informed by the researcher’s interests and interpretations guided by a feminist post-structural theoretical framework. The dimensions and themes derived in this study were discussed and supported by the author’s academic supervisor as well as by a team of fellow student researchers.

**Areas for Future Research**

The analysis of the present study discovered a number of new phenomena about the ‘tomboy’/ ‘girly girl’ dichotomy. Future research could highlight aspects of these results and explore further and more intricately how this shapes girls’ development of their sense of self and their embodiment. In particular, it would be interesting for future research to explore further the connection between discourses of gender identity, sexual orientation, and sexuality and how this intersects with the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels. It would be beneficial to understand in greater detail the connection between labels like ‘butch’ and ‘slut’ with the ‘tomboy’/ ‘girly girl’ dichotomy.

Future research should continue to explore how dichotomies developed within restraining gender discourses affect girls’ experiences in their bodies. Too often research explores girls’ experiences as individual pathologies, without questioning or examining the social context surrounding girls. Therefore, future research on labels used to define girls should incorporate a feminist post-structural analysis to continue to strengthen feminist research and its contribution to a greater understanding of how girls are affected by the patriarchal social structures surrounding them.
It would also be useful for future research on this dichotomy to increase the diversity of the sample of participants. As mentioned in the limitations of the present study, an examination of girls who are new immigrants to Canada would be interesting, as would an exploration into physically disabled girls’ lived experiences with these labels. An overall wider range of cultural heritages and religious affiliations would also allow for a broader group of girls to find the research results reflective of their experiences.

The prospective design of this study was found to be such an important strength to the analysis. Therefore, future research could embark on a more extensive prospective methodology, beginning with girls in young childhood and following them through to their adult years.

The present study used the one-on-one interview format. While this revealed interesting and detailed understandings of girls’ experiences with this dichotomy, it would be most worthwhile for future research to explore how girls discuss their experiences while in a group interview format. This may allow for further intricate layers to unfold through group validation of girls’ individual experiences. It would also certainly be worthwhile for future analyses to examine several case studies of certain girls, creating a contextualization of the experiences within this discourse of girls from specific social locations.

**Clinical Implications**

The findings of this study have important clinical implications for improving the lived experiences of girls and women through the development of healthy self-esteem and positive embodiment. This study has further emphasized puberty as a critical age for a girl’s development of a healthy sense of self. Research has demonstrated how one’s body experience centrally relates to mental health in the long term (e.g. Piran, 2002). This study illustrated how damaging it can be for girls when they do not feel they are accepted by their peer group or
fitting societal definitions of how they should be. Despite finding comfort and confidence in their sense of self and in their embodiment as girls through the ‘tomboy’ label, and despite quite damaging consequences identified for the ‘girly girl’ label, the privilege of being part of the norm and having social currency led most girls to choose the embodied identity of ‘girly girls’ by adolescence. Through socio-cultural constructions of girls in either/or dichotomies, such as ‘tomboy’/‘girly girl’, girls must learn to disconnect from certain aspects of their desires and interests in order to fit the socio-cultural construction of appropriate girlhood. The necessity and desire of being connected relationally is a tool used by patriarchal discourses to threaten girls to abide by rules of femininity that ultimately work to keep them limited in their power and agency. Interestingly, while the girls received messages that the ‘girly girl’ identity buys social currency and more interpersonal success, it also comes with the consequence of division between girls through hyper vigilant and anxious monitoring of themselves and one another in order to maintain the tenuous position of social acceptance. The policing of girls’ bodies interrupted possibility for solidarity and sisterhood amongst girls and introduced relationships rife with comparisons, division, and fear. In order to fit in to the larger group, girls were willing to give up a sense of security, to lose aspects of themselves, and to disconnect from their passion for and ability to be physically connected to and active in their own bodies.

Forcing girls into this dichotomy required the girls to choose between feeling in connection with others at the expense of being in connection with themselves. Through the use of this dichotomy, girls learned to identify these positive traits of passion for sport and activity, confidence and agency in their bodies, comfort and freedom in how they live in their bodies, with the ‘tomboy’ label. Once it was clear that the ‘tomboy’ label ostracized them from their peers, girls were willing to give up all that they associated with that label. Despite all the consequences found in girls’ narratives for being a ‘girly girl’ in adolescence, the privilege of
fitting in and finding some social currency outweighed the consequences of girls becoming disconnected from themselves and their own body. There is a clear clinical implication apparent in this dilemma. Girls are unable to have both the relational connections and to stay positively connected to their own bodies. The paradox in this trade off is that if one is never really in connection with themselves, they cannot truly be in connection with others. The ‘girly girl’ identity offered girls a false sense of security and a false sense of connection.

The clinical implications in this research surround the importance of incorporating life history explorations into the therapeutic process. This research suggests that connecting girls and women with their own journey through their points of transition and change as well as the various social contexts that affected their own connection to their self and body would prove healing in the process of reconnection. The disappearance of girls’ voice and passion is normalized. It is imperative that as researchers and clinicians we increase our empathy in seeing the complexities of girls’ journeys through the problematic environments they grow up in. Rather than pathologizing individuals, we must look with our clients at their social environments and process what has shaped their own body journey. This study highlighted the complexity of girls’ struggles. It is necessary that we listen to how harsh it is for girls to feel disconnected relationally. We must empathize and recognize the severe consequences they are willing to endure in order to feel some semblance of interpersonal connection. We must offer girls safe spaces to discuss their own personal struggles while teaching them to have critical perspective on the limiting social discourses involved. We must raise women’s consciousness to how current social discourses about women’s bodies interrupt their possibility for genuine and authentic connection to themselves and others. Prevention work needs to focus on listening to girls, pre-adolescents, and adolescents, and on hearing their struggle. Girls need to be reminded of their voice and they need help and support to stay connected to it.
Parents, educators and clinicians must work together to change the current gender discourse that interrupts girls’ freedom to stay connected to their passion, interest and desire to be physically engaged in their bodies. We must question efforts that silence girls’ power and agency. We must demand that limiting and patriarchal labels, such as the ‘tomboy’ and ‘girly girl’ labels, be abolished. We must stop using labels that only serve to limit and restrict girls’ and women’s possibilities for engaging in a wide range of embodied identities. We must encourage girls to embrace all the possibilities available to them for staying active, curious, and engaged in their bodies and support them in resisting social pressures that silence girls’ agency through objectifying their bodies. Empowering girls to stay connected to their own desires, passions, comforts and interests will foster a healthy sense of self and a healthy relationship with their bodies through their lives from girls to women. Through raising girls who are connected to themselves, we can strengthen possibilities for solidarity and sisterhood between girls and women. Therefore fostering and building greater possibilities and availabilities of safe spaces for future girls to learn to be healthy, strong, connected, and powerful agents in their bodies.
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Appendix A

Poster Advertisement

*Understanding Girls’ Self and Body Image*

Would your daughter like to participate in a research study examining how girls’ understand their self and body image? We are looking for **girls** aged 9-10 and 13-14 who attend a private or public school setting to participate in our research study.

**Who are we?**
This study is conducted through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). The principal investigator is Dr. Niva Piran. One of Dr. Piran’s graduate students, Robyn Legge, will be assisting in conducting the interviews.

**What will participants do?**
In *confidential* interviews, girls will spend about 1-1½ hours in 2 or 3 interviews. The interviewers will ask girls about their self and body image in different social situations, and how these experiences changed over time.

**What will participants get?**
Participants will have an opportunity to discuss their experiences of self and body image, and the interviews aim to emphasize participants’ strengths. Girls will also receive their choice of a movie pass or a gift certificate (e.g., HMV music store) with a value of $10.00.

**Benefits of the study:**
We hope that a greater understanding of the social experiences that affect girls’ self and body image may help parents, teachers and other professionals in providing better conditions for girls to grow into strong women with positive self and body image.

**For further information please contact:**

**Dr. Niva Piran**  
Ph.D., Principal Investigator  
(416) 9236641 Ext. 2339  
npiran@oise.utoronto.ca

**Robyn Legge**  
Graduate Student (OISE/UT)  
rllege@oise.utoronto.ca

Slips will say: *Girls’ self and body image*    Dr. Niva Piran  (416) 923-6641 Ext. 2339
Appendix B

Telephone Information

Understanding Girls’ Self and Body Concepts

My name is Dr. Niva Piran. I am a professor in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I understand you wish to hear more details about the study entitled “Understanding Girls’ Self and Body Concepts”.

The goal of the study is to find out more than we currently know about the ways in which girls’ self and body image change over time, and what kind of social experiences change the way girls feel about themselves and their bodies. In order to understand more, we need to hear from girls themselves how they describe their experiences and what they think about how their different experiences affect their self and body image. A better understanding of girls’ experiences can help adults, like parents, teachers, health, and mental health professionals provide girls with better social experiences.

If you agree to allow your daughter to participate, my research assistant or I will interview your daughter 2-3 times for about 1-1½ hours, depending on how much time your daughter has, or how long she is interested in being involved in the interviews. In the first (and, if needed and agreed upon, the second) interview, we will interview your daughter about herself and body image, how she describes herself in different social situations, such as with friends, at school, and at home. We will also ask her how herself and body image changed over time. We will invite her to write down her experiences of herself and her body image and to draw herself, if she wanted to. About 4-6 months after the initial interview(s), we will contact you and your daughter to see whether we can schedule a follow up interview with your daughter. In this interview, we will ask your daughter about any further thoughts on these topics, make sure we understood her experience well by reading the summary of the interview(s) with her, and ask her views about the findings of the study. This will be our opportunity to again let your daughter know how much we value her opinions and contribution to the study. We will use an audio cassette tape recorder to record all interviews. We will conduct the interviews at a private room at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, at your home, or another place of your choosing.

When we finished interviewing all girls who are participating in the research, we will be glad to share with you the results of the research and, in particular, results that are useful for parents to know from the study. We would ask you for the way you prefer to receive this information, by mail, email, or by phone. If you have further questions about the results of the study, you are welcome to contact us.

Confidentiality will be respected and no information that discloses the identity of your daughter will be published without consent unless required by law. The tapes will be kept in locked files for 1 year and then destroyed. The tape will be identified by a research code name only. The
tapes will be transcribed and all identifying names and information will be taken out of the transcripts. The transcribed interviews, identified by a research code only, and with all identifying information erased, will be kept in locked files until five years following the completion of the study, and then will be shredded. In any publication related to this research, we will ensure that all identifying information will be omitted so that your child could not be identified. The one exception to this is the very unlikely event that your child indicates that she might do serious harm to herself or others, or that she is being harmed. If that were to happen, we would inform you and appropriate mental health professionals.

In terms of direct benefit, girls often express an interest in having the opportunity to talk about their experiences of themselves and their bodies, and in this interview, myself or my research assistant aim to emphasize how much we value each girl’s views and opinions and the special strengths she has in dealing with day to day situations. In terms of indirect benefit, we believe that the study may benefit girls. A greater understanding of the social experiences that affect girls’ self and body image may help parents and professionals in providing better conditions for girls to grow into strong women with positive self and body image.

There are no known harms associated with participation in this study. The only potential risk we have identified is that your child may feel some discomfort when talking about her experiences. We will clearly inform your child that she may decline to participate and that if she decides to participate she may skip any question, request a break, or withdraw from the study at any time. We aim to emphasize in the interview your daughter’s strengths. Throughout the interview, and especially before the end of the interview, we will check the way your daughter feels about the interview. Following the session, if you find the discomfort to be more than minor, please contact us so that we can discuss how to provide further support. Should you decide to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, please let me (Dr. Piran) know about your decision by telephoning me at the number below.

In order for your daughter to participate in the study, you will need to agree to her participation and to sign a consent form for your daughter participation. After you sign a consent form, we will describe the study to your daughter, and if she wants to participate in the study, we will read an assent form to her, and she will then state her decision. She is free to make her own choice.

Do you have other questions?
Appendix C

ASSENT LETTER

Understanding Girls’ Self and Body Concepts

We have learned that some girls feel better about themselves and their bodies than some other girls. Sometimes, girls feel good about themselves and their bodies in some places, for example, when playing with their best friend, but not in other places, for example in school. Sometimes girls change the way they feel about themselves and their bodies when they get older. I am working with Professor Niva Piran, who works at the University of Toronto, and we want to continue our research on how girls feel about themselves and their body and what makes them feel the way they do. I am interested in what girls say about themselves and their bodies. We also want to know what makes them feel good or not so good about themselves and their bodies and how this changes over time. You may have questions about the research which I will try and answer now.

Why are we doing this research? The thoughts you and the other girls who participated in the study shared with us during the first two interviews were so helpful. Your thoughts helped us understand how girls’ feelings changed about themselves and their bodies over time. I would like to continue to understand and explore these changes with you. I think that if teachers, parents, doctors and other professionals know how girls feel about themselves and their bodies, these adults will be able to be more helpful to girls. I believe that your opinions, thoughts, and feelings are very important.

What will happen during the study? This study has two parts. In the first part, I will interview you once for about 1 – 1 ½ hours (or twice if we find we need more time and you agree to meet again). During these times, I will ask you different questions. Some of the questions will be about how you feel about yourself and your body in different places, such as school, with friends, or at home with your family. I will also ask you how your feelings about yourself and your body have changed from the last time we met. I will suggest to you to draw yourself like you did before. In the second part of the study, after I finish all of the interviews, I will contact you to see if you agree to meet one more time. During this time, I will see if you wanted to add anything and I will read to you a summary of what you said in the first interview to make sure I understood you well. I will ask you whether there were changes from the first interview in how you feel about yourself and your body. I will also let you know what the results of the study are and ask your opinion about these results. I will always tape the interviews, in order to type out your answers, think about them, and relate your experiences to that of the other girls interviewed.

Who will know about what I did in the study? The professor I am working with and I will put the results together, talk about it at conferences, and publish it so that parents, teachers, doctors, and other professionals and researchers learn what we have found. The tapes and your drawing or writing will not have your name on them. Research assistants will sometimes help in putting together the results, but they will not know your name. When I write or present about this research, people hearing our presentations or reading what I write will not know who
participated in the study. I do not tell names of who participated in the study or give any information that can help people know who you are.

*Are there any reasons why you might tell my parents what I said even though you promised to keep it secret?* I will not tell your parents about what you talked about unless you tell me that you will seriously hurt yourself or someone else, or someone else is seriously hurting you. In this situation, I will have to tell your parents and make sure you get help. Otherwise, everything you tell me is secret.

*Are there good things and bad things about the study?* I will ask you different questions about your feelings and thoughts about yourself and your body. It is possible that you will find the questions interesting and that, together, we can think about your special knowledge and other qualities that give you strength in your day to day life.

There are no bad things about the study. The only thing that might happen is that you may feel a little uncomfortable talking about yourself and how you feel about some things. If you feel that you don’t want to answer some of the questions, you can tell me, and we will talk about it. You may also tell me that you want to stop, that you want to skip the question or that you need a break and want to continue some other time. Nothing bad will happen to you if you do that. You are free to participate in a way that makes you comfortable.

*Can I decide if I want to be in the study?* Yes. Your mother/father signed a letter saying that they agree for you to be in the study, but you don’t have to agree to participate if you don’t want to. Nothing bad will happen to you. You are free to decide what you want to do.

Do you have any other questions? Do you agree to participate in this research?

“I was present when ________________________________ read this form and gave her verbal assent.”

______________________________
Name of person who obtained assent

______________________________

Signature

______________________________
Date
Dear Parent:

My name is Robyn Legge. I am a doctoral student, working with Dr. Niva Piran, in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). I am asking your permission for your daughter to continue her participation in the research project I am doing about girls’ self and body concepts: the way they describe their feelings and thoughts about their image of themselves and their bodies when they are in different social situations (for example, with friends, parents, and at school) or when they think about ideal images of girls and boys, and the way these feelings and thoughts have changed over time.

Purpose of the Research

Why am I doing this research? Most of the research to date suggests that, in order to support girls in becoming strong women, we need to find out more about the ways in which girls’ self and body image changes over time, and what kinds of social experiences change the way girls feel about themselves and their bodies. In order to understand more, we need to hear from girls themselves how they describe their experiences and what they think about how their different experiences affect their self and body image. After analysis of the first two interviews, I have realized even more strongly how much is changing for this age group of girls. Through an ongoing follow-up with your daughter, we would have the opportunity of gaining a better understanding of these changes and what it means for girls. A better understanding of girls’ experiences can help adults, like parents, teachers, health, and mental health professionals provide girls with better social experiences.

Description of the Research

If you agree to allow you daughter to participate, I will interview your daughter 2-3 more times for about 1 - 1 ½ hours, depending on how much time your daughter has, or how long she is interested in being involved in the interviews. In the first (and, if needed and agreed upon, the second) interview, I will interview your daughter about herself and body image, how she describes herself in different social situations, such as with friends, at school, and at home. I will also ask her how herself and body image changed over time. I will invite her to draw her experiences of herself and her body image if she wanted to. About 10 months after this interview(s), I will contact you and your daughter to see whether I can schedule a follow up interview with your daughter. In this interview, I will ask your daughter about any further thoughts on these topics, make sure I understood her experience well, and ask her views about the findings of the study. This will be my opportunity to again let your daughter know how much I value her opinions and contribution to the study. I will use an audio cassette tape recorder to record all interviews. I will conduct the interviews at a private room at the Ontario...
Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, at your home, or another place of your choosing.

When I have finished interviewing all girls who are participating in the research, I will be glad to share with you the results of the research and, in particular, results that are useful for parents to know from the study. I would ask you for the way you prefer to receive this information, by mail, email, or by phone. If you have further questions about the results of the study, you are welcome to contact me.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be respected and the identity of your daughter will be protected unless required by law. The tapes will be kept in locked files for 1 year and then destroyed. The tape will be identified by a research code name only. The tapes will be transcribed and all identifying names and information will be taken out of the transcripts. The transcribed interviews, and any additional material provided by your daughter during the interviews (such as drawings), identified by a research code only, and with all identifying information erased, will be kept in locked files until five years following the completion of the study, and then will be shredded. In any publication related to this research, we will ensure that all identifying information will be omitted so that your child could not be identified. The one exception to this is the very unlikely event that your child indicates that she might do serious harm to herself or others, or that she is being harmed. If that were to happen, I would inform you and appropriate mental health professionals.

Potential Benefits

In terms of direct benefit, girls often express an interest in having the opportunity to talk about their experiences of themselves and their bodies, and in this interview, I aim to emphasize how much I value each girl’s views and opinions and the special strengths she has in dealing with day to day situations.

In terms of indirect benefit, I believe that the study may benefit girls. A greater understanding of the social experiences that affect girls’ self and body image may help parents and professionals in providing better conditions for girls to grow into strong women with positive self and body image.

Potential Harms, Discomforts or Inconveniences

There are no known harms associated with participation in this study. The only potential risk I have identified is that your child may feel some discomfort when talking about her experiences. I will clearly inform your child that she may decline to participate and that if she decides to participate she may skip any question, request a break, or withdraw from the study at any time. I will aim to emphasize in the interview your daughter’s strengths. Throughout the interview, and especially before the end of the interview, I will check the way your daughter feels about the interview. Following the session, if you find the discomfort to be more than minor, please contact me so that we can discuss how to provide further support. Should you decide to withdraw your permission for your child to participate in the study, please let me know about your decision by telephoning me at the number below.
Participation

Participation in research is voluntary. Your daughter may withdraw at any time without consequence and she may skip any questions she is uncomfortable with.

Sponsorship

This dissertation project is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada Graduate Scholarship.

Should you wish further information about the study, or have any questions please telephone me. My number is listed below.

Sincerely,

Robyn Legge, M.A.
rllege@oise.utoronto.ca
(416) 465-3547

Niva Piran, Ph.D.
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto
(416) 923-6641 Ext, 2339

“I acknowledge that the research procedures described above have been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed of the alternatives to participation in this study, including the right not to participate and the right of my child to withdraw at any time. As well, the potential harms and discomforts have been explained to me and I also understand the benefits (if any) of participating in the research study. I know that I may ask now, or in the future, any questions I have about the study or the research procedures. I have been assured that research records relating to my child’s participation in the research will be kept confidential and that no information will be released or printed that would disclose personal identity without my permission unless required by law.”

“I hereby consent for my child to participate.”

______________________________  The person who may be contacted
Name of Parent

about the research is:

Robyn Legge

who may be contacted at:

(416) 465-3547

______________________________
Signature

______________________________
Date

______________________________
Name of person who obtained consent

______________________________
Signature
Appendix E

Interview Guiding Questions

**INTERVIEW – FIRST STAGE (Collected in 1 OR 2 interviews)**

(Questions in Italics are geared for the 13-14 year olds; All probes that relate to changes over time, will specifically ask about changes during puberty, for 13-14 year olds)

**Introduction, rapport building, and background information**

My name is Robyn Legge and I am a student in the university and I am working on this research about how girls feel about themselves and their bodies.

Can you tell me about yourself?
First, what is your date of birth?
Where were you born?
Do you know where your parents were born?
How many brothers and sisters do you have?
What does your mother do?
What does your father do?
What are the things you like to do?
What school you go to, what grade, etc?
Who are you living with (family members, ages and number of siblings)?

**Introducing the central question and examining girl’s own interest in the research.**

(Introducing the central question and examining girl’s own interest in the research. Are there particular things that make her interested in the research? What are they?)

In this research we want to understand how girls feel about themselves and their bodies when they are with friends, at school, at home and in other places where they like to spend time, and what makes them feel this way.
What do you think about these questions?
Do you have a question in your own mind about how girls feel about themselves and their bodies?

**Repetition of freedom not to answer questions and the freedom to stop the interview at any point.**

I want to make sure that you know that you do not have to answer any question that you do not want to, and that you can also stop the interview whenever you want. Before you leave, I will want to check how you have felt about the interview.

**Self concept descriptions and related probes**

Here is a chart that invites you to write about the way you feel about yourself when you are with different people. You can write it yourself, or you can let me know and I will write it.
Mother
Father
Sisters
Brothers
Best friend (girl or boys)
Friends (girls)
Friends (boys)
Teachers (coaches)
Others (who?)

Probes for each facet:

What makes you feel this way?
Has it changed over time? *(Interviewer: For 13-14 years old, examine specifically about changes following the onset of puberty)*

**Body concept descriptions and related probes (parallel to self concept questions)**

Here is a similar chart that invites you to write about the way you feel about your body when you are with different people. You can write it yourself, or you can let me know and I will write it.

Mother
Father
Sisters
Brothers
Best friend (girl or boys)
Friends (girls)
Friends (boys)
Teachers (coaches)
Others (who?)

Probes for each facet:

What makes you feel this way?
Has it changed over time? *(Interviewer: For 13-14 years old, examine specifically about changes following the onset of puberty)*

Regarding circles of friends:
Have your friends changed over time? *(Explore further if friendships networks include only males or females or have changed regarding gender compositions)*

**Activities**

Do you have chores you are responsible for?
What are they?
How do you feel when you do these chores?
What kinds of activities do you do at recess?
After school?
How do you feel when you do these different activities, when you play different games?

**Eating**
How do they feel about eating, favourite foods, least favourite foods...

**Experience in Relation to Widely Disseminated Cultural Images**

**Ideal Images of girls and boys**

Can you draw yourself? (optional)

Do you have an idea in your mind about who is the ‘ideal’ girl?
What is she like as a person and what does she look like?

Can you draw the ideal girl? (optional)

Possible probes:

If these concepts come up, clarify these concepts: ‘a girly girl’, a ‘tomboy’.
What are your reactions to the image of the ‘ideal’ girl?
(interviewer: support the validity of counter reactions, unreality of images portrayed by media, etc.)

What is the ‘ideal boy’ like?

Can you draw the ‘ideal boy’?

What are your reactions to the image of the ‘ideal’ boy?
(Interviewer: support the validity of counter reactions, unreality of images portrayed by media, etc.)

**Cultural Idols:**

Do you have an ‘idol’, a singer or another famous person that you admire?
Who is that person?
What makes you admire that person?

**Clothing** (if did not come up earlier in the interview)

What kind of clothes do you like to wear? (at school, home, at play, when you ‘dress up’) Why?
How do they make you feel?
Has that changed over time?

**Body Care**
When you need to talk to an adult about questions you have about your body, especially about having a girl’s body, do you have someone who you can talk to?

*Interviewer: for 13-14 year olds:*

*When you need to talk to an adult about questions you have about your body, especially about the way your body has been changing during puberty, do you have who to talk to? What does it feel like?*

**Thinking about puberty:**

What do girls think about puberty?  
What does it mean to go through puberty? (What did the older girls know about bodily changes before they hit puberty?)  
What do the girls imagine boys think of girls going through puberty.  
What do they think of boys going through puberty?  
What do they imagine girls think of other girls going through puberty?

**Health**

How often do they get sick? With what?

**Thoughts about the Future**

Do you think sometimes about the kind of person you’d like to be when you become an adult?  
How do you see yourself in the future?  
Do you sometimes think about your body changing over time to become a body of a young woman?  
What do you feel about that?  
What are your thoughts about that?  
*(Interviewer: for 13-14 year olds)*

*When you are thinking about your body changing from that of a girl to that of a young woman, what are your feelings about that? Your hopes, concerns? What would you like to see happen?*

Is there somebody in your life that you’d like to see yourself become like when you are an adult?  
Who would that be?  
What is it that makes you want to be like that person?

**Ending the Interview**

This is our time to stop the interview. I learned a lot from you. What you talked about today will help us understand more about how girls feel about themselves. Thank you for your valuable help.

How are you feeling about the interview?

I am so impressed by your __________ (Interviewer: highlight the different strengths of perception, thinking, confidence, knowledge etc.).
Do you have questions you want me to answer?

(Interviewer: if all questions were asked),

Now, I, together with the research team, am going to spend time thinking about your important information and the information of other girls that we interviewed. Will it be OK if I, or somebody else from the research team will contact you in about 4-6 months to see if you agree to meet one more time so we can see if you want to add or change anything. At that time, we can read with you a summary of what you talked about in the beginning of the study and you can tell us if there is anything you want to change. We also want to let you know what the findings of the study are and see if they make sense to you. This is up to you and you can decide to meet or not to meet, or you can think about it, and tell your decision over the phone.

(Interviewer: if there was not enough time to cover all relevant topics),

I wanted to know whether it is OK with you that we meet another time soon, within the next month, and continue with the interview, because there were a few more questions I wanted to ask you. It is up to you and you can decide to meet or not to meet. Would you like to make a decision now, or would you like to think about it and tell your decision over the phone?

INTERVIEW – SECOND PHASE

Introduction

We found the information you talked about in the first interview(s) very helpful and important in helping to understand girls’ self and body image, how being with others affect self and body image and the way self and body image change over time.

Reflections about the first interview(s)

First we wanted to know what were your reactions to the first interview(s) and if you had any more thoughts about what you talked about.

Reading a summary of the first interview(s)

We wanted to read to you (or you may want to read it by yourself) a summary of what we understood you said in the first interview(s) and we wanted to check that we understood you correctly.

What will you change?

Revise?

Reading a general summary of the results adapted to benefit of this particular participants and highlighting this participant’s contribution to the report

We wanted to share with you the main findings of the study, results to which you contributed. We want to see if you agree with these results, if they make sense to you, if you will change
Questions to consider for second, third and fourth interviews RE: LABELS ‘TOMBOY’/ ‘GIRLY’

Clarify again the terms “tomboy” and “girly” or “girly-girl”.
What do these terms mean now?
Have those definitions changed over time for them?
Was it different to be a tomboy as a kid than it is to be a tomboy now?
Was it different to be a girly-girl as a kid than it is now?
Is there any other stereotypes girls face?
Do you feel pressure to fit a certain label?
What is different between a tomboy and a girly girl?
Where do you fall in terms of these labels?
Are you always a tomboy? Girlygirl? When are you more so? Less so?

Do some people act as a tomboy in one situation and then switch to being girly in another situation? Tell me about this.
For a girl who is only one or the other – tell me what you think her life might look like - let’s start with tomboy – what kinds of friends does she have? What does she do with her friends? What does she do for fun? How does she do in school? What does she do for fun? How does she do in school? What does she spend time doing? How does she feel about her body? How does she dress? How does she wear her hair? How do other people treat her?
What do other people say about her? Repeat questions with girly-girl.

When you are in a situation where you may be more like a tomboy – how do you feel about yourself? About your body? What are you doing? Thinking? Feeling? Who are you with? Where are you? What do you look like? Are there certain things you like more about yourself in this role? Are there things you don’t like about yourself in this role? What do you like/not like about your body in this role? How do other people treat you? How do other people treat your body? ** Ask these questions again but with the situation of being in the role of ‘girly-girl’.
What does it mean to be in the middle of being a tomboy and being a girly-girl? If this is how she describes herself – explore this more fully.
Do you feel pressure to stick to one role rather than being in the middle?
Are you comfortable sometimes being a tomboy and sometimes being girly?

When you were younger did you fit one of these roles more than the other? Did you feel free to change the role depending on the situation? Were you comfortable between roles or more comfortable as one or the other?

What do you think happens when a girl who identifies as a tomboy goes through puberty? Is it harder to be a tomboy after puberty? Tell me about this. Do other people expect girls to become more girly after puberty?

If she describes needing to change herself to fit in – ask: how did it feel to need to change yourself in order to fit in with other girls?

INTERVIEW – THIRD AND FOURTH PHASE

Possible questions to probe:
What kinds of comments does dad (mom) ever make about mom’s body?
What have you heard dad (mom) say about mom’s body?
How do you think it makes your mom feel when he/she says these things?
How does it make you feel (about your own body)?

What kinds of things has your mom told you about her feelings towards her own body?
How does that make you feel about your own body?

Does your mom ever say/do anything that makes you think she feels negatively about her body?
What kinds of things does she say/do?
How does that make you feel (about your own body)?
What goes through your mind when you hear mom talk critically about her body or appearance?
OR Does mom ever say anything about her body that surprises you or makes you feel uncomfortable?
How does this affect the feelings you have towards your own body? OR: If you could tell mom how it makes you feel when you hear her say these things, what would you say to her?

What does “taking care” or “caring for” your body mean to you?
How does mom/dad care for their bodies?
How does the way mom care/doesn’t care for her body affect the way you care/don’t care for your body?

How do mom/dad’s comments to you about your body make you feel?
Might use the “if your body could talk” line: e.g., If your body could talk what would it say in response to these comments?

What kinds of things do mom/dad say about the bodies or appearances of other women (e.g., family, friends, celebrities)?
Why do you think mom/dad make these comments?
How do you think it makes her/him feel about her/his own body?
How does it make you feel about your own body when you hear these comments?

When you have family meals does anyone ever talk about food and weight at the table?
What kinds of things are said?
How do these comments make you feel about what you’re eating and your body?

**Body experience and dating/sex**

Do you feel like your attitude towards your body changed since you started dating?
Does your view of how attractive you are change when you are with your boyfriend versus when you are with your girlfriends? OR when you are around guys versus when you are around girls? Do you feel more or less attractive?
When you are being sexual with your boyfriend, what would your body say if it could speak?
When do you feel most attractive?

**Sexual desire questions**

Do girls have sexual desire? Sexual feelings? Is that OK? Are they allowed to?
Do boys have sexual desire, sexual feelings? Is that ok...
What happens to girls if they don't feel desire? [Wondering about: do they let others lead when it comes to intimacy? Do they know what they want, what feels good, when they want to stop?]

What feelings in your body are OK? What aren't?

You've told us that you learn about puberty and some things about sex in your health class, we're wondering what have you been told/taught about sexual feelings?

Is it different for boys and girls to have sexual feelings?

What does it mean for girls to have sexual feelings?

Is this different from girls wanting to have sex?

What do you think of girls having sex? Of boys having sex?

What do you think of girls having sexual feelings? Of boys having sexual feelings?

Do you think boys and girls get different messages about sex?

What do boys think of girls wanting/having sex?

When you are with your boyfriend, do you base your decisions about how far you are ready to go based on what you think others would say?

Do you think that girls and boys have equal desire for sex?

Do you think that guys are more horny than girls?

Generally speaking do you think that girls are in touch with their sexual desires when they are being sexual?

What kind of thought do you think go through a girl's head when she is being sexual?

**Family dynamics and attractiveness**

Does your mom or (step)dad comment on how you look? Like, if you wear a skirt, do you get more compliments from your mom/dad? What kinds of things does she/he say?...etc'

How does it make you feel about your body?

Do you feel more or less attractive when your mom/dad comments on how you look?

Does your (step)dad comment on how your mom looks like?

What kinds of things does he say to her?

Does your mom say anything about it?

Does it make you feel differently about your body when you hear comments like that?

Why/How?

*Ask about brothers' and sisters' and mom's comment about appearance as well...

Does your mom/dad/etc comment on what you eat?

If applicable, ask about boyfriend’s comments about body:

Does your boyfriend comment on how you look?

What kinds of things does he say?

Does he tell you not to wear certain things?

Does your boyfriend comment on what you should eat?

**Ideal Girl**

What do you think are the messages that girls are receiving from parents/friends/TV about what the girls should be like?

Do you agree with that?

Do you think your friends agree with that?

What does a girl need to do in order to be considered pretty?

How much time do you think it takes her?

What do you think she could have been doing with that time instead?
When you see a girl who looks ideal (like a girl from a magazine/like a model), what do you feel? What do you think?
If your body could speak at that moment, what would it say?

**Body Weight**
Did your mom ever talk about her own weight/your weight when you were growing up?
When was it?
What did she say?
What do you think about it?
Why do you think some girls want to be very thin?
What do you think helps some girls to not want to be very thin? (What helps you?)

**Dieting**
Do you have friends/know girls who talk about wanting to be thin/thinner?
What do they say?
Why do you think they say that?
Who do you think would like them more if they were thinner?
Who would like them less?
What does it say to you?
What do you think helped you to not become this way?
If you had a friend who wanted to become a little thinner, what would you say to her? What would you say to a friend who wanted to lose a lot of weight?
Is it different when a girl wants to lose a little bit of weight or a lot of weight?
Do you think a girl who wants to lose a little bit of weight and a girl who wants to lose a lot of weight have the same reasons?
What are their reasons?

**Ending the Interview**

This is our time to stop the interview. I learned a lot from you. What you talked about today will help us understand more about how girls feel about themselves. Thank you for your valuable help.

How are you feeling about the interview and participating in this project over the last several years?

I am so impressed by your __________ (Interviewer: highlight the different strengths of perception, thinking, confidence, knowledge etc.).

Do you have questions you want me to answer?