C H A P T E R   1

Introduction

Well! What are you? said the Pigeon. I can see you're trying to invent something!

I—I'm a little girl, said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through, that day.

A likely story indeed! said the Pigeon.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

To open this discussion on inventions of girls and girlhood, I invite you to the Blue Room. For in many ways, both my own entry into thinking about the discursive and social practises of femininity and the origins of the *About Us, By Us* video project that will orient our explorations of these practices can be traced to the Blue Room, otherwise known as the school staff room, and a meeting that took place there. The meeting in the Blue Room was convened to discuss a program funding proposal and the problem that precipitated its submission to the Toronto Board of Education's Youth Alienation Program. Joining us in the Blue Room are about fifteen other people: the school principal and vice-principle, two or three teachers, a parent who was also involved in the community group W.A.V.E. (Working Against Violence Everywhere), a few other W.A.V.E. members, two school board staff, and a staff member from the community recreation center. My presence at the meeting is due to the securing of only partial project funding from the board, which did not cover the request for hiring a program facilitator. Thus, in exchange for the opportunity to do some research, I volunteered.

The school is located in Toronto's west end and its population reflects the area's largely immigrant, refugee, and working-class residents. There are approximately five hundred students in grades Junior-Kindergarten through eight, with two hundred in grades five to eight. The ethnic makeup of the community is in constant flux but, at the time the program proposal was written, 40 percent of students had Portuguese backgrounds, 30 percent were Asian and Southeast Asian, 15 percent

were Anglo-Saxon, and the reminder were from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe.

The proposal we are discussing had been written in April 1991 by the school's former vice-principal who had, by the time of the meeting, moved on to another school. The teachers present at the meeting had, however, also been involved in the proposal's development. While it does not lay out a specific plan for a video project, (I would initiate that some time later) the document does identify a number of areas of general concern, clustering around the themes of physical and psychological safety and participation in the school and larger community. The proposal anticipates that a project designed to address these areas of concern will benefit the entire school population, however; girls in grades five through eight are singled out as being in particular need of such a program. As one of the teachers involved explained, the project emerged out of a "concern expressed by teachers originally, who were concerned about the young women in this school population. . . . [W]hen they reached a certain age, they seemed to be silenced by the school environment. Because of the ethnicity of certain kids in the school, there was a parental thing which silenced them as young women as well" (teacher interview, July 1995).

For these teachers and the former vice-principal, who were "tremendously committed to the whole area of antiracist work and equity" (teacher interview, June 1995), the proposed programme was seen as a means to build on other school initiatives these individuals had organized under the exigence of the school board. For example, the school's grade seven and eight students had been among the participants of the board's citywide antiracist camp and there had also been one or two gender workshops within the school for some of its students. There was also an active student group facilitated by a teacher called M.C.Stars (Multicultural Students Against Racism and Sexism), which planned events for the annual March 21 International Anti-Racism Day, as well as events for holidays such as Chinese New Year.

WHAT IS THE "PROBLEM" WITH THESE GIRLS?
SCHOOL DISCOURSES OF TEENAGE FEMININITY

The proposal is impressive in its stated goals and procedures for achieving them. It addresses empowerment, building a strong and safe school community, and a collaborative process that would see the involvement of teachers, parents, community workers, and students. The proposal notes that although known to be a vulnerable age, girls aged ten through thirteen have few services and school resources devoted to them. Thus, this group of students would be the focus of the

program. However, the program would not only be directed at them; it would also be largely defined by them.

While the themes of safety, community, and participation were rearticulated at the program committee meeting as the primary impetus for organizing an initiative, the discussion at this meeting also seemed to produce something of a shift in understanding about the identification and locus of the "problem."

"They're not joiners," the principal said by way of opening the discussion. "The only school program the girls are enthusiastic about participating in is cheerleading." "It's a senior school phenomenon," added the gym teacher. "The senior school starts off keen when it comes to teams but they have no long term commitment. The baseball team started out with thirty players and ended with six." "They're apathetic," rejoined the principal. "When some of them came to ask me if they could have a dance and I said no, there was no protest. They don't take control of a situation." "They're directed by their families. Some are tightly structured and others are hardly supervised. . . ." "They're not attached to community or anything. . . ." "They have a victim mentality, with girls at the very bottom. . . ."

It seems that for many of the participants in this discussion, rather than a perception of a problem in the relationships between the school, its teachers, its programs, the community it is offering, and the girls as students, the girls themselves are seen to somehow embody the problem. "The problem" was clearly seen to reside exclusively within the girls' purview, with some suggestion of their families as the source. Their attitude, their behavior, their outlook, their interests, and their demeanor somehow did not quite measure up, was not at all what was desired.

Overlapping, contradictory, and competing discourses also circulated around the room in accounting for "the problem" and how it should be addressed. "They have no voice." "They lack a feeling of control over their environment." "Their parents feel powerless." "They don't want to fail, so they opt out." "Their form of protest is to drop out." "It's second individuation process." "It's hormones." "It's a clash between the homeland culture and the downtown scene." Cutting across these explanations based in sociological, psychological, biological and feminist discourses—disciplines which have contributed to the constitution of girls as subjects, albeit with contested meanings (Hoogland 1993; Walkerdine 1990, 1993)—are discourses of gender, age, race, sexuality, class, culture, and nationality. While the girls embody the problem, it is the constellation of social positions that they occupy as adolescent, immigrant, working-class, and (some) nonwhite girls that seems to underline some of the concern.

It is possible to trace a long history linking participation in school-organized leisure activities to the kind of anxiety articulated by the committee about the production of proper subjects and citizens. For example, the early twentieth century saw increased school enrollment by working-class youth, whose future occupational

identities schools were responsible for shaping, but what was also provided was the opening for schools to participate in the transmission of middle-class values through its organization of extracurricular activities of school clubs, school dances, student government, and recreational sports (Best 2000; Graebner 1990; Messner 1992). As Amy Best points out, the effects of the organization of these activities produced more than the stated intentions of extending democracy to the economically disadvantaged. It also created opportunities for the regulation and surveillance of working-class youth beyond the work settings they inhabited less and less, moving into their social spaces and leisure activities (2000, 6).

Middle-class youth have also not been immune from being the focus of adult anxiety. For example, following World War II, the emergence of a teen leisure market generated concerns about youth sexuality, delinquency, and complacency. A wealth of organized activity including high school proms, teen canteens, and sock hops sprang up to guard against these dangers, becoming the mainstay of middle-class cultural life and solidifying class and race divisions (Graebner 1990; Johnson 1993; Palladino 1996). The question we might pose therefore is, What kinds of new feminine subjects are being shaped in the current historical period through programs like the one the committee gathered to discuss? And secondly, what is being guarded against?[1]

In explaining the problem, the staff and administrators of this particular school are not inventing it. Rather, they are making use of discourses about girls and girlhood which are both very much rooted in a specific place and historical moment and currently in wide circulation. When the tensions of race, class, and gender rise dramatically, as they have in recent times, social anxieties converge and tend to be projected onto the bodies of adolescent women (Fine 1991; Griffin 1993).[2] However, such anxiety does not necessarily get conferred equally or in the same way on all girls. According to Kenway and Blackmore (1995, 16), implicit in much Australian school education and gender reform programs within schools is the notion of normal girls, who are usually seen to be Anglo, middle-class, and, I would add, white. Girls who are not positioned as normal are implicitly positioned as other than and as less than normal girls. They are seen as different from what is normal and preferable, as special or at risk. Their apparent lack is not seen to have anything to do with how they have been positioned by schools, but is rather attributed to some sort of dysfunction in their backgrounds. Kenway and Blackmore argue that this sleight of hand allows two things to happen. First, it allows schools to shift responsibility for any problems such girls may have at school to their home or "culture." And second, such girls are positioned by education structures and practices in such a way as to marginalize and dispossess them (Kenway and Blackmore 1995, 16).

Perhaps a few other things also happen within this dynamic. These discourses, I think, do more than just delineate the differences between girls. They

also work to create girls. As Alison Jones has pointed out, girls become girls by participating within the available sets of social meanings and practices—the discourses which define them as girls (1993, 159). Here, this definition seems to emerge from within a medley of interlinked narratives of normal and its antithesis. Additionally, if making sense of oneself occurs through the construction of the other (Morrison 1992; Said 1993), then it is possible that in delineating the not-normal, the normal is able to know or recognize itself. I am suggesting that these narratives, on one level, make knowing what a "girl" is possible at all, and on a second level, make the normal girl imaginable, through the presence of the not-"normal" girl. Furthermore, in attributing this sense of lack to the (Asian, Portuguese, Afro-Caribbean, immigrant, refugee, and working-class) girls in the school, the largely white, middle-class Canadian committee (one of the teachers was a black male) may also reconfirm their sense of their own beliefs, values, ideals, and aspirations as the norm. In doing so the hegemony of this set of understandings is reinscribed and those who are seen as other are further marginalized.[3] The difference that couples the figures of the normal and problem girl, which are then projected onto real girls, seems to also serve as a site of contrastive identification for the members of the committee which works to affirm their own sense of themselves as adult and in control of their own identities, unlike the girls. The sense is that the committee views their role and by extension that of the school and the program we are planning as providing the conditions for the production of normal girls who will eventually become proper adults in control of their identities.

However, it is also possible that there was not as much homogeneity of opinion amongst committee members as I have presented thus far. Traces of what seemed to be a feminist, antiracist sentiment and the force behind the origins of the project remained. Among the quick scribblings of names, affiliations, and points of discussion that are my notes of the meeting, is a question: "Do the girls think there's a problem?" and a comment: "This project may even change the way the school treats its youth." The question was asked by a board staff member and the comment was made by a teacher (who had a hand in the writing of the original proposal); both suggest that there may have been committee members with divergent—maybe even dissenting—versions of the issues under debate.

What is important in our reading of the various versions is not whose truths are more correct or accurate. Nor is it to discover explanations and causes for how and why girls fall victim to overwhelming social problems, as has recently become the popular framework for engaging questions of girlhood. This book is not a developmental account of adolescent girls which forecasts the outcome of current socialization practices or psychologies. Rather, the interest here is in the interacting forces between discourses of femininity that make it (im)possible to

know oneself and be known by others as a girl, and as a particular kind of girl. Girlhood, far from signifying a universal, biological grounded condition of female experience, emerges instead within particular sociohistorical, material, and discursive contexts (Inness 1998; Johnson 1993; Jones 1993; Lesko 1996; McRobbie and Nava 1984; Wald 1998; Walkerdine 1990). It is shaped and reshaped in complex ways through ongoing fantasized acts of relationality—with others, with idealized images, and with both conceptual categories and practices (Pitt 1996). Thus, the questions I want to ask in relation to "the problem" are: What is involved in making and claiming positions within femininity? What are the relationships between some of the very specific, material, discursive, and phantasmic practices which produce girls as beings with specificity? What are the contradictory and ambivalent (dis)identifications that both interpellate and repel those who might live this category?

Asking this set of questions, rather than those focussed on development or socialization, orients us away from essentialist notions of gendered identity and the humanist ideal of accomplishing an identity in control of itself and a self which is noncontradictory. Instead, it centers on an analysis of gender practices as potential "sites of critical agency," to use Judith Butler's term (1993), and towards using the fluidity and unpredictability of identity and difference as a resource for revealing, interrupting, and reconstructing meanings and power relations, thus casting the question of identity into the political arena.

I was standing in a crowded hallway talking to a girl I call Chantrea when a comment she made piqued my curiosity, provoking me to listen more carefully to the ways in which girls speak themselves through the conflicts, contradictions, and ambivalences of femininity. It is March 1, 1995, three months before the end of the school year which would also mark the end of two and half years I have spent in the school. The hall is full of boisterous students, just released from their desks by the ringing of the bell signalling the lunch break. The bench I am leaning against is my waiting place. Here, the girls that I have been working with on a video project assemble to ascend the two flights of stairs together, to our meeting room.

The school foyer is brightly painted in noninstitutional purples and blues and decorated with student artwork: paintings with seasonal themes, the award-winning posters in the schoolwide competition in celebration of Anti-Racism Day, and the elaborate cloth mural panels from some long ago project, hanging permanently from the ceiling.

Chantrea leans up against the bench beside me. She never seems to have a lunch of her own, but will often share in what the other girls in the group have brought from home or bought from the canteen. Today, as people pass by, she conducts a running commentary, punctuated with the nervous laugh that ends most of her sentences. "Mai," she remarks, as she spots her friend walking past us

towards the school office. "She's becoming such a girl." No longer leaning, I give her my full attention. I scrutinize Mai for what could have elicited the comment. Hands in her front pockets giving her shoulders a slight hunched up look, long straight black hair worn loose down her back as usual, her jeans, large plaid shirt, and black boots don't look dissimilar from Chantrea's own. But then I see it. "You mean the lipstick?" I ask tentatively, as it is so faint as to almost not be there at all. "Well, duh!" Chantrea scoffs. "What is a girl?" I ask, laughing. "That's a girl," she replies emphatically. I turn in the direction she has indicated with a fast nod of her head. It's her classmate Julia, with long blond hair pulled up into a high pony tail that swings as she walks. Her bangs are twisted into curls that she repeatedly brushes away from her eyes. Though the weather is mild, she still wears her winter parka with its pink and pale blue patterned flowers. The fur on the edge of the hood was white when it was new. "So, how do you become a girl?" I ask. Chantrea groans. "Don't start with that, Marnina!" But then, tossing her hair over her shoulder before darting off to join her crowd that is noisily assembling a few feet away, she adds, "All I know is, I'm going to have a lot of trouble." She giggles and is gone. (FN 03/01/1995)

I recall this conversation in the hallway, setting it alongside the meeting in the Blue Room for what they suggest together about just how contradictory and complex the terms are through which girls can (or cannot) become knowable, recognizable, identifiable, and acknowledged as subjects within discourses of femininity. They both highlight, in compelling ways, the central themes of this book: the complications and ambivalence involved in creating and staking positions within femininity. Yet, situated where they are as the entry into this study, they may also be read as a series of ethnographic arrival scenes. Perhaps most expected they perform the task of introducing you, the reader, to the school, the girls, and myself and tell a fairly conventional story of gaining entrance to the research site. But the entry I am referring to here is not simply into the school per se, but an entry into a realm far more elusive: the imaginary terrain of the girls. As I will discuss in more detail in the chapters that follow, the space of the *About Us, By Us* video with its five fictional characters[4] and narrative storylines is a fantasy space creating points of contact with the imaginary object of femininity.

Using a realist narrative structure to tell the stories of the characters, the girls worked to develop a series of events that would convey the dilemmas faced by each character in a manner that they as writers considered plausible. However, as a negotiated process, not only did the girls not always agree on how this would be signified, but they also had contradictory ideas about the relationship between the fit of character and dilemma. Debating the issue from different angles and perspectives, the girls worked to make sense of the discursive conditions of social recognition that structure the formation of gendered subjects. Juggling their

knowledge of both hegemonic discourses of femininity and other, sometimes conflicting, discourses of femininity, the girls, in creating each of their characters, shaped a series of experiences of gendered subjectivity that engaged with the social, economic, material, and cultural practices that produce girls. The positions and relations created within the video's narratives both related to the girls' own social struggles and provided fantasy spaces that a particular girl writing the story or enacting it may identify with and thus want to inhabit, as well as ones she may disidentify with and would probably not want to inhabit. Drawing on their own experiences in their discussions of how to represent the characters and their dilemmas, the girls' conversations often slipped into the personal; the exercise of inventing characters was simultaneously one of inventing selves.

Moving in and out of the material and phantasmic worlds, the imaginative work of the video presages possibilities of becoming other to ourselves and of the social that we inhabit. Thus, naming the imaginary terrain of the girls as an ethnographic site offers a very different sense of what ethnographic entry is. As a stage for the construction of ever changing subjects, scents of wishes, and wild desire, the imaginary does not offer the ethnographer clear passage to securable selves and social worlds. The terrain is marked instead by contingency, uncertainty, permeable boundaries between admitted and expressed knowledge and perceived and expressed identities. Entering into such a site is to invite participation in events that offer hints more often than firm resolutions. In creating the conditions for a record for thinking that is, of course, never fully known or representable, such an ethnographic site reorders thought on the relation of writing to knowledge, of writing experience to self and others, and of question to solution. Simply put, it disorders them, drawing them together and then apart, creating unexpected and sometimes troubling moments of contact and separation.

Thus, even as I mark these scenes as arrivals, I forewarn a synchronous backward movement (Was it Chantrea's scoffing, "Well duh!"?), a certain uncertainty impeding a straightforward laying out of the spatial and temporal points on an investigatory map of this project. Contrary to the ethnographic arrival scenes that Pratt (1986, 32) likens to those of travel writing, playing, she says, on the intensity and sensuousness of personal experience to anchor authority in the text that ensues, there is something else stirring here. A stirring which, in recollecting the stuff of ethnographic arrival scenes as déjà-vu, while also juxtaposing the real and the imaginary, the familiar and the strange, threatens the authority of that experience. It is both exposed to an already-been-there-seen-that familiarity and vulnerable to its own failure to assert itself as originary, uninherited and in mastery of itself. Moving backward and forward, arriving and returning, it is the dual mobilization of the dynamics of social recognition in the negotiation of both collective and individual identities that is the subject of this book. On one level, I am interested in

the girls' articulation of the positions that define the discourse structures that make girls viable as a social category. On another level, I am interested in analyzing the relationships of identification or disidentification that specific girls in the group might express in relation to particular discursive positions. I ask: Through what regulatory norms is gendered experience materialized in the video's narratives so that a character becomes intelligible as a position that makes sense within available discourses of femininity? Once materialized, how does a given gender formation regulate identificatory practices such that certain fantasy positions are deemed desirable and others are disavowed? Within the matrix of gender relations, how do both desired and disavowed positions work together to produce and define the self? And within the array of identificatory sites that femininity might offer, what are the possibilities for disrupting normative femininity?

Thus, my purpose in insisting on a scene of arrival that reveals, interrupts, and reconstructs meanings and power relations is to link two intersecting themes: the fluidity, incoherence, and unpredictability of identities and an epistemological series of questions about writing that wonders how these identities might be represented in ethnographic texts. I elaborate below.

THE ITINERARY OF AN IDEA

What notion of girlhood can accommodate both the certainty that enables Chantrea to be able to respond to my question, "What is a girl?" as well as the ambivalence of her own becoming? For if this story of girlhood is, as I have already claimed, not a tale of a progressive perfecting of femininity nor one of a latent naturalness waiting to be uncovered, then the question of how one becomes a girl must be given considerably more attention than its apparent transparency would seem to require.

The itinerary I am proposing draws on theorizations from poststructural, psychoanalytic, and queer perspectives on and questions about subjectivity. In centralizing processes of identification as constitutive of the human subject, it is an itinerary replete with complicated detours through questions and problems of recognition and misrecognition. It is, in other words, a rerouting of an interest in asking "how one acts if one is this or that identity, to one that is about inquiring into how one becomes (and comes to be known as) this or that identity" (Sumera and Davis 1999, 195).

To begin the mapping of this framework and series of questions let us consider Stuart Hall's conceptualization of the term identity. He says "identity" is used to refer to "a meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate,' speak to us or hail us

into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'" (1996, 5). Thus, this dynamic involves a double movement between a subject speaking/writing her way into existence by using the stories or discourses that are available and in the moment of doing so, also subjecting herself to the constitutive force and regulative norms of those discourses.

However, as Chantrea' s sense of the likelihood of her own failure to correctly position herself within discourses of femininity suggests, people do not automatically internalize or live the discursive interpellation. Some enter into a process of struggle, resistance and negotiation. Others simply never do. Therefore, another mechanism is required for understanding the (in)effective suturing of the subject to a subject-position, the notion of an affective investment or a process of identification (Butler 1993; Davies 1993; Grossberg 1993; Hall 1996; Hollway 1984; Walkerdine 1990). Drawn from both the discursive and the psychoanalytic repertoire, the usefulness of the concept identification stems from the possibilities it opens up for theorizing the diverse, conflicting and disorderly ways in which individuals as subjects identify and/or do not identify with the "positions" to which they are summoned (Hall 1996, 14). With the possibility of multiple and contradictory identifications co-existing in the subject at the same time, "subjectivity" can be understood as precisely this struggle to negotiate a constantly changing field of ambivalent identifications (Fuss 1995, 34). More specifically, the concept is useful because while it offers a way to think about the relationship between how things are conceptually ordered and the deep investments invoked by such orderings, it also acknowledges that people may live rather untidily, outside neat social categories. In organizing a means of taking into account not only the ideas an individual might have about what it means to be recognized by others and recognize oneself as a person or a girl, the concept of identification also makes allowances for the variations within those categories and how people might invest in competing discourses simultaneously (Hollway 1984, 121). Finally, in arranging strategies for the realization of these multiple identities, while also confounding the possibility of ever doing so once and for all, it forces us to consider the likelihood that, as Britzman puts it, there is "always more to the story" (1998, 321).

We might say then that an "always more to the story" story of girlhood is a tale about the problematised making of the feminine body. A story about the repetitious making and remaking of bodies through and in relation to the prohibitions and imperatives of the impossibility of ever fully and finally inhabiting the feminine position (Pitt 1996, 38). It is a story, therefore, that acknowledges the play of specific modalities of power as productive of various subject positions, identificatory possibilities, and ideals of the normal body. For within every historical period and specific social and political contexts, differentially valued subject positions emerge

along various axes of power. As Lawrence Grossberg states, "[A]lthough everyone exists within what we might call the 'strata' of subjectivity, they are also located at particular positions within the strata, each of which enables and constrains the possibilities of experience, but even more of representing and legitimating these representations" (1993, 99). Grossberg's assertion provokes and partially addresses Judith Butler' s question, "[W]hich bodies come to matter—and why?" (1993, xii). An answer to this question, as we will discuss in more depth momentarily, is also succinctly explicated by Renée Himmel, fictional heroine of Rebecca Goldstein's 1983 novel, *The Mind-Body Problem*: "[W]ho matters is a function of what matters," she bluntly states (22). Aiding her in the process of meaning making is an imaginary "mattering map," with separate regions onto which what matters is projected, producing a range of shadings whose intensity depends on how many and various are the perceptions they contain. Noting that one and the same person can appear differently when viewed from different positions on the map, Renée wryly notes that "some of us do an awful lot of moving around from region to region" (22), returning us to the issue of the dynamic process of discursive interpellation of subjects to particular subject positions.

Far from random, access to subject positions is governed by both a proper "citation" of regulating norms (Butler 1993) and by a perception of sharing some "obviousnesses" with others belonging to the category, as that is understood within a particular time and place (Davies 1993). Linking the question of intelligibility to that of identification, the process of subjectification may be seen, therefore, to occur within a matrix of reflexive relations synchronized by discourse to produce and constrain identificatory possibilities, as well as the conditions by which one might recognize a self and have that self recognized by others.

The complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that sets the process of (dis)identification into motion is critical to how a sense of identity is brought into being.[5] Using a psychoanalytic theory of intersubjectivity that develops Hegel's notion of domination and differentiation,[6] Jessica Benjamin (1988, 1995) argues that recognition is so central to human existence that its presence or absence is critical to consolidating or disrupting a sense of self. A similar argument is also made by Charles Taylor (1991, 1994), though he contextualizes the emergence of this relationship between identity and recognition within the development of Western liberal society and its particular ideology of individualism. Arguing that an understanding of an individual identity ("one that is particular to me, and that I discover in myself"), arises along with an "ideal of authenticity" ("there is a certain way of being human that is *my* way"), Taylor suggests that the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity greatly increases the importance of recognition, as identity comes to crucially depend on dialogical relations with others (1994, 34).

For Benjamin, recognition is "that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way" (1988, 12). Recognition is understood as including not only the other' s confirming response, but also how the self finds itself in that response: "We recognize ourselves in the other" (1988, 21). As Taylor points out, however, the importance of this response extends beyond that which is accorded by one individual to another. It also includes broader collectivities. He argues that a confining, demeaning, or contemptible image mirrored by one group of people to another can be a form of oppression resulting in a reduced mode of being (1994, 25).

The interface between recognition and identity has also been a rich site of inquiry in the work of Judith Butler. However, for her recognition is not conferred on a subject, as both Benjamin and Taylor partially suggest. Rather, recognition forms the subject. This critical difference in Butler' s formulation allows her to claim that the discursive condition of social recognition precedes and conditions the formation of the subject (1993, 226). Thus, in referring to the specific process of gendering she argues that it is the social and cultural category of gender, with its normative conditions and symbolic legitimacy, that articulates the intelligibility of the subject: "[S]ubjected to gender, but subjectivated by gender, the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (1993, 7).[7]

Figuring identity, like Butler suggests, as performances of relationality to both conceptual categories and practices invites certain forms of and particular sites for investigation. We might, for example, ask what the implications of this conceptualization might mean for theorizing the relationships between femininity, processes of identification, and ethical forms of relations between subjects. We might also wonder about the specificities of identity, the ways they come together, and the conditions of their emergence and circulation. And, once we have paused to consider those specificities, we might wonder further, as Alice Pitt does, how the stories we tell ourselves and others work to enhance our image of our identities as cohesive and coherent and the role that fantasy plays in this process (Pitt 1996).

Binding these queries together is an invitation to open up what seems natural about femininity and gendered identity to a consideration of other possibilities. Foucault formulates the task as follows: "We have to dig deeply to show how things have been historically contingent, for such and such reason intelligible but not necessary. We must make the intelligible appear against a background of emptiness and deny its necessity. We must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces. To make a truly unavoidable challenge of the question: What can be played?" (1981, 139–140).

Posing the question of "what can be played?" alongside that of "what bodies come to matter and why?" (Butler 1993) situates us at a central intersection of our "always more to the story" story of girlhood. They are suggestive not only of a complicated relationship between gender identity and normative femininity. They also implicate the dynamic process of discursive interpellation of subjects to particular subject positions in a process that is tied to the conditions for social recognition, the quest for visibility, the sense of being acknowledged, the profound desire for association, and the endeavor of endowing oneself with significance (West 1995, 20–21). In suggesting that gendered identity always preforms more than it intends, this already busy intersection is rendered a little bit busier by inviting a further question, as yet unasked, but central to the concerns of this book. That is, what is it to consider femininity as a question of identification?

As an oscillating movement between simultaneous and incompatible placements and consolidations, between subject positions and object positions, "me" and "not-me," identification is a process that renders subject formation as unstable and always incomplete. Thus, configuring femininity as a question of identification demands thinking of it not as a solitary quality or inherent characteristic of particular sexed bodies, but rather as an expression of certain kinds of relationality. Formed and reformed through ongoing remembered and fantasized acts, these expressions of relationality necessitate a consideration of how unclaimed or mistaken identities are just as critical to the conjugation of a feminine self as are perhaps more readily claimed and recognizable identities. As Alice Pitt (1996) puts it, if identity is secured, however provisionally, by the processes of assuming a sexed position, in doing so it bears as well an identificatory relation to its abject other. Linking the production of normative femininity to the constitution of "bodies that matter," we might say that both are secured through the mutually dependent production of a domain of the normative and a domain of abjection (Butler 1993; Fuss 1995; Hall 1996; Oliver 1993). Butler suggests, "[T]he zone of un-inhabitability constitutes the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life" (1993, 3).

At the same time, it is the existence of both domains that also offers the possibility for expanding the horizon of these investments to embrace new forms of gendered subjectivity. Butler (1993) argues for example, that it is the ever present threat of the outside to expose the founding presuppositions of the inside that renders it a critical resource that can be used to rewrite the order of "insideness" and "outsideness," to rearticulate the very meanings, legitimacies, and uses of "insideness" and "outsideness," and to expand the meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body.

I will show that it is precisely because identification is purchased via this set of constitutive and formative exclusions that subjectivity' s boundaries and in particular gendered subjectivity are constantly open to renegotiation. The play of difference and similitude in the formation of a subject means that recognition is from the beginning always a question of relation—of self to other, subject to object (Fuss 1995, 2). Conceived in terms of a slippery "elsewhereness" (Davies 1994, 36), the work of identification renders identity problematic at the same time as it is productive of it simply because such exclusions have consequences that cannot be fully controlled. The meaning or effect of a particular (dis)identification, as Fuss argues, "critically exceeds the limits of its social, historical and political determinations" (1995, 8). The impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one' s social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject formation (Butler 1993, 226).

The classifying acts of inclusion and exclusion producing the conditions for social recognition also engender what is for Bauman a product of the labor of all classification projects: ambivalence (1991, 3). Bauman links the naming and classifying compulsion, and thus ambivalence, to the enterprise of modernity, an interesting coupling, in view of the pivotal way in which ambivalence figures in psychoanalysis, a science born of the modern age. Using a Freudian perspective, Jane Flax defines ambivalence thus: "Ambivalence refers to affective states in which intrinsically contradictory or mutually exclusive desires or ideas are each invested with intense emotional energy. Although one cannot have both simultaneously, one cannot abandon either of them" (1990, 50). She goes on to note that such ambivalence is not necessarily a symptom of weakness or confusion but, on the contrary, "a strength to resist collapsing complex and contradictory material into an orderly whole" (1990, 50). In this sense, "ambivalence is an appropriate response to an inherently conflictual situation" (Flax 1990, 11).Grounded in fantasy, projection and idealization, identification in enacting such a conflictual situation is, as Freud writes, "ambivalent from the very start" (Freud, 1921/1991, 134).

My interest in the operation of ambivalence is twofold: at the structural level, in so far as it references the internal contradictions within discourses of femininity with their conflicting expectations and pressures, and at the subjective level, in the sense that there will be certain consequences for girls' struggle(s) for recognition in having to position themselves within discourses that have these structural characteristics.[8]

Analyzing femininity and its identificatory capacities through the lens of ambivalence resists collapsing complex and contradictory material into an orderly whole. For as Dorothy Smith argues, "[T]he notion of femininity does not define a determinate and unitary phenomenon" (1988, 37). And if its incoherence has led

some feminists to insist on the impossibility of any singular understanding of gendered experience, then its indeterminacy is complicated even further by considering the ways in which discourses of femininity intersect with other dimensions of social difference, such as class, race, and sexuality (Bannerji 1991; Hill-Collins 1990; hooks 1981; Pratt 1984; Riley 1988; Spelman 1988). Focusing on the ambivalent structure of femininity and its consequences for girls' identificatory practices allows us, therefore, to locate the concept on and between its boundaries, to defy the distinction between fantasy and reality, and to map the inside and outside borders underlying its thresholds of meaning and nonsense, mattering and abjected bodies. Its very ineffectivity is perhaps also what presents the opportunity for the proliferation of identificatory possibilities and the expansion of stories for girls to turn life into.

Due to the fact that the concept of femininity is itself implicated in the social construction of the phenomena it appears to describe, Smith suggests that inquiry should begin with the ordinary and unanalyzed ways in which we know what we are talking about when we use the concept and can demonstrate that competence in how we can recover or cite particular instances (1988, 38). As will become clearer in the chapters that follow, my own investigation of femininity attempts such a recovery by assembling and organizing a series of "scenes of recognition" produced through the planning, development and filming of the *About Us, By Us* video with is fictional girl characters. Through the stories, the scenes of recognition delineate some of the discursive and social practices defining female sexuality, embodiment, relationship to self and others, material culture, use of social space, cultural-political agency, and power. I analyze the ways in which the scenes are at once the medium through which different racialized and classed femininities are rendered intelligible to self and others and the identificatory sites which reproduce the concept's negative capability.[9] Together, the multiple positions of femininity created in the video stories chart a discourse map of femininity which I will attempt to analyze in terms of the identificatory relations and investments mobilized in the negotiation of girls' gendered subjectivity. However, as chapter 2 will outline in full detail, the drawing of this map is accomplished as a result of a process that is neither neat nor linear. Rather, the transcripts through which this map is pieced together are a veritable cartographic nightmare. Fantasy mingles with reality, while fragments of rational thought, emotion, and lived bodily experience merge and separate. Threads of discussion spin in multiple directions: personal stories, commentary on group members, talk of different cultural texts. More often than not, numerous conversations occur simultaneously and rarely is one person able to finish a sentence before someone else begins.

The result is a map of bits and pieces, of paths begun and than abandoned, of enticing trails that lead nowhere and of completely contradictory

coordinates. Rather than fighting to clean these up, to somehow weave them into a coherent story that may be read unobstructively, I include the interruptions, the inconsistencies, and the dead ends. What I am presenting is a map that reveals more than mere traces of its own construction and thus reveals more than what is usually considered polite in social scientific research. This is a textual strategy that is reflective of the ongoing and nonstatic nature of the conversation that structures practices of identification and as such it emphasizes that the stories of identification and this ethnographic telling of those stories are unfinished, multiple, and conflicting ones. And, as I will discuss presently, it is also a strategy that mirrors the messy methodology used and the context in which the girls' meaning making occurs.

While I am attempting an analysis that acknowledges the interlinking relations between gender, race, class, sexuality, and ethnicity in the production of identities, such an aspiration is not easy to accomplish textually. Among the challenges I encounter is how to theorize the sites and relations of difference mobilized by various girls without doing so by making them representative of their different racialized and ethnic categories. Thus, in this regard, as in others, the text is rife with gaps where some relations of difference may, at times, be foregrounded and at different moments, others.

The nature of the questions I am asking—questions about the social, psychic, and physical embeddedness of individuals and collectivities in the discursively constituted categories to which they are subjected—has forced something of a trespassing of disciplinary boundaries. Drawing on the analytical tools of discourse analysis developed by Foucault and widely used by a range of feminist critics and sociolinguists, while borrowing key concepts from psychoanalysis and philosophy, the questions about gendered subjectivity that I am asking arise in discussions most current within cultural and feminist studies informed by poststructural theory. This kind of cross-fertilization has proven productive for many interested in critically analyzing the discursive structures and signifying relations of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and the distinct cultural and social formations that result.[10]

Of course, because of its situatedness within the academy, a social institution that is an active participant in structuring ways of thinking, the act of writing is also highly implicated in the production and circulation of these very discourses and significations. As such, it participates in creating the social and cultural identities it purports to merely describe or analyze. I raise this issue now in anticipation of a more in-depth discussion in the chapter that follows, but also to signal the doubleness of my own project. For, since I am interested in analyzing identity as an effect of discursive practices, this book is part of the story it is trying to tell. In worrying the discursive practices of ethnographic writing, my goal is to attempt to

make the links between the processes of theorizing and analyzing identity and difference, the political and ethical dilemmas of representing the lives of others, and the processes of "reconfiguring what will count as the world" (Butler 1993, 19).

ITINERANT WRITINGS/READINGS/PEDAGOGIES

Since subject position is everything in my analysis of gendered subjectivity, you should know that as author of this text, I have multiple and contradictory functions, and this will very likely also have implications for you, the reader.

My various tasks of mapping discourses of femininity and analyzing the identificatory practices they facilitate, while at the same time attempting to destabilize ethnographic epistemologies and identificatory strategies have, like the structure of the discourses of femininity I want to analyse, precipitated something of a state of ambivalence. For, rather than synthesizing apparently contradictory elements and claiming them as parts of some coherent whole, I work to maintain them as sites of displacement, of inconsistency and complexity within my ethnographic text, mining them for what they might offer in the way of new ground, across which systems of structural order and symbolic pattern might move, bend, and dissolve, opening up space for difference, struggle, confusion, and emergence.

I acknowledge that certain challenges may be posed to the reader of such a text: chapters that go on for too long, pieced together from bits of transcripts whose fragments never add up to more than a partiality, and are made up of stories that, like Renée Himmel's, belong to mere fictional characters. But perhaps what may prove most unsettling is the absence of what is usually commonplace within social scientific texts: the provision of a classificatory introduction of the girls whose writings, fantasies, and talking make up the practices I analyze. Whose story then, am I asking you to consider?

Warning against the dangers of a defense against the anxiety induced by the lack of coherence and irresolvable conflict, Flax advises that it is often better in such a situation to analyze the sources of the ambivalence and one's inability to tolerate it (Flax 1990, 11). Perhaps, as Crapanzano suggests, the uneasiness induced by maintaining contradictory stances within an academic text stems from what it announces about the inconstancy of the self and the instability of vantage point. One purpose of our rhetoric is, he writes, "to mark us as constant throughout our writing, to fix our perspective. We are taught to read accordingly—to perpetuate an author's illusion of singularity, coherence and constancy, and in our engagement with him our own illusions of singularity, coherence and constancy" (1992, 9).

Rather than judging the absence of a single controlling voice in this text, therefore, as a problem of ethnographic lack, a failure in the contest of mastery over the unruliness that is the nature of data, I would suggest a shift in attention to text-reader relations and to ethnographic reading practices. By purposefully leaving a gap where one might expect to find an answer to the question, Who are the girls? I am attempting to enact a certain kind of pedagogy. It is a pedagogy that, as Patricia Williams says of her own writing, "forces the reader both to participate in the construction of meaning and to be conscious of that process"(1991, 7–8). Leaving gaps to be filled by readers, she states, compels them to participate self-consciously with her in historicized and contextualized meaning invention.[11]

In refusing you a passive reception of information already defined elsewhere, who the girls are, is precisely what I am rendering problematic in this text. For though it is a question I return to repeatedly in my analysis of the data transcripts, I am also suggesting that any version of the answer to the question also depends on who wants to know, the context in which the question is being asked, and for what purposes. The anxious writing/reading position that is created by ethnography as radical pedagogy is at least partially due to the dynamics of engagement created in a text which, in reminding us of the limits of our understanding, also demands that you read with an awareness of your own multiple and shifting positions, identificatory practices, and reading strategies.

My attempt to write in a way that encourages a certain consciousness of your responses to the workings of meanings of identity and difference in my text marks reading and writing as complex and closely entwined social transactions. As Bauman notes, every reader is a writer: the reader is a writer while s/he reads (1991, 192). "Reading like a writer," Morrison explains, carries certain demands. It means "being mindful of the places where imagination sabotages itself, locks its own gates, pollutes its vision. Writing and reading mean being aware of the . . . serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability" (1992, xi).

Traces of my own sweaty fights for meaning (and far fewer serene achievements of it), are accessible to you through the stories and transcripts that are not only included in the text but are also where my analysis is grounded. That is, rather than making knowledge claims from empirical evidence that you have no way of substantiating or contesting, my analysis emerges from these combined bits of story, always inviting further writing and rewriting. As Anna Tsing reminds us, "[E]thnographic insight emerges from stories told by one situated commentator to another" (1993, 225). Chantrea and the other girls' critical commentary makes mine possible and so in turn, does mine make yours.

Towards facilitating this engaged and mindful reading, this book is organized as follows. Chapter 2 is an in-depth introduction to the video project with

an interwoven discussion of methodologies, the play of feminist desire in the goals of critical research agendas, and the ethical and political issues surrounding questions of representation and self-other relations inherent to an ethnographic inquiry. Situating my own study within some of the recent attempts to reconceptualize ethnographic practice, I review the critiques that have been made about traditional social scientific writing and outline my own strategies for producing an analysis of nonunitary gendered subjectivity and for writing in ways that attempt not to refix and resolidify difference and identity.

Chapters 3 and 4 are structured around three fictional characters whose stories serve as heuristic devices for mapping discourses of femininity and investigating femininity as an intersubjective negotiation. Using two of the genres most commonly associated with the stories of women's lives—romance and transformation—the narratives explore the intersections of femininity, race, class, nationality, and sexuality with those of recognition, agency, and subjectivity. While each of the stories is built around different specific thematics, the two chapters are woven together by the motif of inside and outside, insiders and outsiders. Its various repetitions and reconfigurations signify forms of imaginary coherence in the ambivalent project of identity formation.

In chapter 5, I give further consideration to the question of ambivalence and the provocative possibilities it might offer for creating and supporting the conditions for feminist social change. I do so by returning to the characters' stories to draw out some of the merging and separate moments where the negotiation of femininity proves inherently conflictual. By looking closely at where different ambivalent responses are elicited, I hope to understand more about the discursive and social practices which legitimate and contest what it means to become a girl (and an academic) at the beginning of a new century.