Article No. 4

Jammer Girls and the World Wide Web:
Making an About-Face

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Keywords

Girls, Internet, World Wide Web, Identity, Sex Roles, Feminism, Third Wave

Abstract

Adolescent girls must make a decision, the results of which affect the quality of their lives early, often, and sometimes through adulthood. Being a "good girl" or a "bad girl," according to social constructions of femininity, is a key component in identity formation. I argue that this is a false dichotomy imposed upon adolescent girls as a means of creating conformity to a set of ideas and behaviors by using morality (or lack thereof) as a social barometer. Advances in girls' access to sports, media literacy education, access to the Internet, and participation by many in third wave feminism has made the emergence of a third girl identity possible. I call her "Jammer Girl ." In this article, I describe the underpinnings of the imposition of the identity dichotomy, explore the nature of female adolescence as it relates to identity formation, and explore the impact of peer pressure on self-esteem. Finally, the Web resource About-Face.org is described as an Internet catalyst for Jammer Girl activism.

A girl has two choices in life according to advertising critic Jean Kilbourne (1999): (1) to be a good girl who conforms to sex role expectations and strives to achieve an unrealistic body ideal, or (2) to be a bad girl who rebels against the culture and society with violence, aggression, and indiscriminate sex. But are there really only two choices? What about the girl who rejects the tenets of thinness, fashion, and passivity? What about the girl who is tired of the barrage of commercial messages and the hard sell, and who wants to challenge beauty ideology with positive actions and representations of healthy femaleness? This article is about the false dichotomy of good girl versus bad girl in American society, how the divide between the two can be filled by a third girl identity--Jammer Girl--and strategies that facilitate the process of becoming a healthy, activist girl by way of the Internet. This analysis accepts Kearney's (1998, p. 289) challenge that studies of girl culture need to go beyond "consumerist practices of female adolescents" to reflect not only advances in studies of girl culture but also the improving status of women in society.

In this article, I have four goals. First, I would like to briefly explore the roots of the good girl versus bad girl dichotomy in adolescent development. Second, I will describe the harmful effects this division has on the psyches of adolescent girls. Next, I will explore the emergence of Jammer Girl, who represents an identity based not on physical appearance and passivity, but on health and activism. And finally, I examine About-Face.org (A-F.org), a World Wide Web site resource for girls and women that provides examples of and skills needed to evaluate and respond to harmful images of girls and women in advertising (particularly in fashion advertising) that help sustain the good girl/bad girl dichotomy. Importantly, A-F.org offers a solution to many of the frustrations facing girls by demonstrating ways to interrupt the flow of images--the "media circus"-- by culture jamming.1 While A-F.org is only one among several proactive girl sites, it is unique in its use of a media literacy framework within which ads are evaluated and posted. In

the sections that follow, I briefly describe the challenges of adolescent girlhood, the relationship of commercial media to that experience, and the role of the Internet in facilitating a safe and private space in which girls are invited to create content, advocate for change, and explore questions about their minds, bodies, and roles in society.

Adolescence and the Cultivation of the Ideal Girl

A time of awkwardness and opportunity, adolescence is a critical moment in identity formation for both boys and girls (Erikson, 1950). It is a time of "searching and introspection in which the individual is constantly faced with the perplexing question 'Who am I?'" (Avery, 1979, p. 53). For girls, adolescence is a particularly tender time. Although both boys and girls experience puberty (the biological process/sex distinctions) and adolescence (emotional process/gender formation), girls are faced with a unique set of challenges (Gilligan, 1982). For girls, physical development, for example, often triggers unrealistic expectations and low self-esteem (Offer, Schonert-Reichl, & Boxer, 1996). Widening hips, developing breasts, and emerging curves are inconsistent with media-generated and sustained images of ideal female beauty.

Research that investigates girls' developmental issues has focused primarily on four areas, briefly discussed below: (1) Body image, (2) Self-esteem, (3) Sexuality, and (4) Peers.

Do I look fat?

Body image, mediated by weight, is only one among many concerns of female adolescence. How this intimate aspect of femininity translates into feelings of self worth is one of the most important concerns of girls (Cusimano & Thompson, 1997; Kilbourne, 1999; McCabe, 2001). Given that women are judged not by what they do, but by how they look, the sense of urgency in meeting social expectations of ideal female beauty can be intense (Wolf, 1991). While boys are conscious of their bodies, girls are most worried about appearance, in particular how their weight affects popularity and relationships (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2003). The mass media play an important role in cultivating and maintaining the flawless skin/body/hair/personality image, yet only one percent of girls are naturally "flawless" (Lee, 2003). More specifically, American adolescent girls are often dissatisfied with their behinds, thighs, hips, and waists, all of which they wish were smaller, and with their breasts, which they want to be larger. Eating disorders are one among many possible results of diminished self-esteem, negative body image, and depression (Field, et al., 1999; Harrison, 2000; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Hofschire & Greenberg, 2002; Levine, Smolak, & Hayden, 1994).

Am I worthy?

For many girls, "identity is largely shaped through images of themselves seen in movies, television, magazines, and music" (Sutton, 1999, p. 164). At a time characterized by intense self-consciousness and self-scrutiny, advertising that targets adolescent girls usually spotlights solutions to personal conflicts and challenges that are solvable by the purchase of the right clothes, cosmetics, hair ornaments, and other beauty products.

Psychologically, long-term exposure to stereotypical role portrayals of women in the media may encourage girls to internalize the associated values and ideals of ideal female beauty (Jennings-Walstedt, Geis & Brown, 1980; Tan, 1977). However, while physical appearance is a key component of self-esteem for girls, other factors contribute to a healthy (or un-healthy) self-image. For example, feelings of competence are tied to how much or how little parents and teachers support girls and respect their opinions (Caron, 2000). In addition, outcomes related to shaky self-image include dropping out of school and, among girls, the additional stresses of dating violence, sexual assault, and pregnancy. While worrisome for both girls and boys, the rate of depression and suicide is higher among teen girls (Marcotte, et al., 2002).

Does he want me?

Adolescence is also a time when girls begin to see themselves as sexual beings. Information from parents, teachers, counselors and the media play important roles in how a girl perceives herself and her relationships with others. Stereotypical sexualized portrayals in the media reinforce ideas of ideal female beauty, and equate this beauty with an ideal sexuality (typically heterosexual), and support a willingness to "give up" the self in the process. Techniques of presentation show female models appearing "both passive, yet actively sexual," as desirable objects of the subjective male gaze (Shields, 2002, p. 45). They are articulated in ways that make them appear natural, normal, and hence, unremarkable by using particular codes of sexuality in advertising and attaching them to products designed to maintain desirability (Hall, 1980). Attracting boys is an essential motivator for maintaining a particular physical appearance, and perceived success or failure directly affects self-confidence, measured by responses from peers.

What will other people think?
Peers are a major source of validation and socialization for adolescent girls. Peer opinions are more important, at this time, than are those of their parents (Coleman, 1961; Lashbrook, 2000). In fact, "tweens" (adolescents 7-14 years) are "more susceptible to the opinions of friends than to traditional media messages" (Lueker-Harrington, 2001, p. 13A). The collective consciousness of peer codes is often the determinant of self-esteem as "adolescents look to each other, rather than to the adult community for their social rewards" (Coleman, 1961, p. 138). However, these peer relationships become so paramount to girls that they hide or silence parts of themselves to avoid conflict and maintain relationships. This silencing seems to go hand in hand with declining self-esteem, another worrisome characteristic of the developmental process in contemporary female adolescence (Brumberg, 2000, ¶3).

McRobbie (2000) identifies how "commercial representations of young women which now dominate visual culture bring together the signatures of 'slim blondeness' and also perpetuate routinely a series of violent exclusions, of the non-white, non-heterosexual, non able-bodied" (p. 198). Clearly, body image, self-esteem and sexuality are disproportionately affected by peer pressure as well. The "relentless body-image mood swing not only wreaks havoc on [our] self-esteem, it also turns [girls] against each other" (Lee, 2003, p. 133).

When she was good, she was very, very good
In the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, the good girl next door isn't free; she's enmeshed in male conventions of perfection and the obligation to fulfill them. The bad girl isn't free either; she's labeled, used, and trashed. (That's me! 2004). Being defined as "good" or as "bad" serves a useful organizational function in society. Adolescent girls often find themselves subjected to moral judgments based on a set of socially defined characteristics. If a girl is considered "good," she has the blessings of the culture by meeting the criteria of acceptability and preferences for what is "feminine." She learns to "bury her sexual self" and gives in to what Gilligan calls "the tyranny of nice and kind" (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 149). If she is identified as "bad" she is often shunned for lacking the will or the desire to conform and will "flaunt her sexuality, seduce inappropriate partners, smoke, drink flamboyantly, use other drugs" (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 149). While a discussion of the physical requirements needed to fulfill this role are beyond the scope of this chapter, the behavioral elements play a central role in understanding identity development.

Maintenance of good girl status often pits girls against each other. Essentially, a good girl likes to shop (particularly for brands), spend time and money on advertised products, and is "normatively feminine" (straight, white, and middle class). In preparation for womanhood, she has been trained, by her mother, magazines, and manners to be a good (i.e., compliant, orderly, quiet), and willing participant in the ideology of preferred femininity. As a culturally sanctioned identity, being a good girl is also not "a natural attribute, but one constructed through the interplay of language and social expectations" (Bucholtz, 1999, p. 9). Meeting this nebulous

goal requires intense self-scrutiny and self-consciousness as well as surveillance of other girls to maintain a position of power.

Conversely, the stereotypical bad girl, who is less often studied and typically pathologized, wears too much or the wrong kind of makeup, too little or the wrong kind of clothing, rejects authority, is angry, aggressive, and uses bad language. The image is of "nasty, backbiting, manipulative" adolescent girls who "deride and undermine each other mercilessly" (Boyle, 2004, ¶1). The self-consciousness inherent in female adolescence is fertile ground for planting the seeds of shame associated with bad girl femininity. These girls "are ashamed for being too sexual, too loud, too boisterous, too big (in any sense of the word)" (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 133).

If not in life at least in the media, the division between "good" and "bad" is increasingly blurred, and few healthy alternatives offered. While many girls strive for the former and experiment with the latter, the boundaries are less clear. Whereas "girls-in-real-life" (g-IRL) face conflict over the false dichotomy of good or bad, celebrities such as Britney Spears confuse things even more. According to Lowe (2003, p. 125) girls desperately want to believe Spears' good-girl image and projected naivete but, because of the clashing photographic images, contradictory messages in her music, and inconsistencies in the course of her career, the girls don't know which is the real Spears--the pure and wholesome Britney they meet in *Teen People* or the Lolita they discover in *Rolling Stone*, the chaste Britney of "Sometimes" or the lusty Britney of "…Baby One More Time."

The contradictions, the "unaffordable but palpable world of yearning" presented in the media, and the simultaneous fear of becoming a bad girl "set girls up for disappointment, self-doubt, ridicule and solidifies feelings of economic and taste inadequacy" (Quart, 2003, p. 5). Unrealistic desires often cultivate unhealthy competition between girls seeking not only to achieve impossible standards of beauty, but also the attention of boys. Brown (2003) explores factors that turn adolescent girls against each other. In interviews with hundreds of girls, Brown (2003) found a common theme:

> It's a story about containment and dismissal that gets acted out by girls on each other because this is the safest and easiest outlet for girls' outrage and frustration. Simply put, girls' treatment of other girls is too often a reflection of and a reaction to the way society sees and treats them. (p.2)

Go G-IRL
While most girls are initiated early into the culture of sexuality, physical appearance, and consumerism, some girls choose, in healthy ways, to reject the confines of good versus bad girl femininity. They speak out and want to be taken seriously. They are "the passel of teens who resist brand culture" (Quart, 2003, p. 189) and are often ostracized as "weird" or "unusual," or ignored because they often voice opinions. "In a world where simply *being* can count as bad, identities are often constructed in opposition to dominant cultural ideologies" (Bucholtz, 1999, p.10). Jammer Girls are teen girls who are not affected by advertising messages which promote the notion that self-worth, value, popularity, and agency come from conforming by buying the right products. Instead, they "see the cultural contradictions clearly" (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 149). Jammer Girls seek choice, change, place, and media that celebrate the individual, physical, *and* intellectual qualities of girl-ness, and encourage speaking out about the damage done to girls by the steady stream of commercial messages. Moreover, Jammer Girls know that good girl/bad girl dichotomy is false because "the world doesn't work that way; people are never so simple" (Brown, 2003, p. 2). Girls can be each other's best friends who watch (as well as stab) each other's backs. The goal is nurturing the first reality while working to neutralize the second.

Over the past decade, the rise of Jammer Girl has been facilitated by two changes, one sociological and one technological. First, a Jammer Girl identity is consistent with the rise of

third wave feminism, a response by many young women not only to the perennial, patriarchal restrictions of 20th century definitions of femininity, but also to narrow exemplification of who/what makes a feminist. In Driscoll (2002), Rebecca Walker, daughter of Alice Walker, describes a "rigidly ideological second wave feminism" that doesn't fit anymore:

> Constantly measuring up to some cohesive fully down-for-the-feminist-cause identity without contradictions and messiness and lusts for power and luxury items is not a fun or easy task…For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories. (p. 136)

Second, the ascension of Jammer Girl coincides with girls' access to the Internet. Unlike teen girl magazines that continue to emphasize beauty, consumerism, and passive interaction with the medium, the Internet allows girls to interact, interpret, and negotiate their world. For example, whereas magazines such as *Seventeen* emphasize music, "girls are provided with no information about how to set up a band, nor are they encouraged to learn to play an instrument" (Kearney, 1998, p. 291). They are hailed as consumers of music, not as makers of music. The World Wide Web provides an avenue for girls to speak out about their refusal to accept "the established story of a woman's life" (Brown, 1991, p.72).

Web sites have a narrower focus compared with the broader view of other media. The Internet facilitates an intimate, transactional, informational relationship for young women, particularly in their search for knowledge about personal topics (Robbins, 2000). Girls' use of the Internet affords ways of negotiating social relationships and supported engagement in "personalized, self-directed and self-initiated learning" (Robbins, 2000, p. i). The accessibility and privacy of Web-based information offers girls personal and private space in which to explore questions about their bodies and their minds. Stern's (2000, p. 6) study of teen girl created Web sites as public/private places reveals girls use them for "self-disclosure, especially self-clarification and self-expression." Dede (1996) explores girls' social life in the virtual world and describes how the Internet facilitates a social life of shared common joys as well as trials and tribulations. She noted the Internet provides a mechanism to maintain friendships while avoiding face-to-face contact. The Net is also a place where girls can enjoy a sense of freedom and a sense of control. Gruber (2003, p. 160) points out "Cyberspace is a place that allows for the 'complex and shifting play of body, self, and community.'"

Riot Grrls, paper zines, and bands such as Bikini Kill and Bratmobile preceded the Internet, but the compulsion to create them was, and remains, the same. Just as Riot Grrls did not "shy away from difficult issues and often addressed painful topics such as a rape and abuse," (Rosenberg & Garofalo, 1998, p. 810) Jammer Girls answer a similar call to action. Riot and other girl/gurl/grrrls are examples of "the independent, assertive, and empowering attitude of many young women who are not only entering previously male-dominated fields…but are completely convinced they have every right to do so" (Denfeld, 1995, p. 135). Collectively, these pre-Web activities resulted in an "accumulation of practices" (Hawisher & Sullivan, 2003, p. 220) as second wave feminists forged the way for other active feminist groups to extend their reach and claim virtual space. Just as girl zines were "often created to either resist or oppose representations of gender, sexuality, class, race, and age found in mainstream culture," today, several Internet sites "openly ridicule the dominant ideologies of female adolescence reproduced in mainstream girl magazines" (Kearney, 1998, p. 300, and, most particularly, the advertising.

While most Web sites provide net savvy teens a heavy dose of popular culture (fan sites, fashion, and advice), others provide more pro-social content. The Web makes the space for activism, "for forging new social arrangements by creating a visual discourse that startles and

disturbs" (Hawisher & Sullivan, 2003, p. 220), and it is a place for women and girls to "act potently" (Haraway, 1991, p. 181).

Simultaneously, there has been "an escalation in the promotion of 'culture jamming' as a viable form of populist, anti-commercial critique" (Soar, 2002, p. 572). This activist strategy draws upon the ideas and ideals of The Situationists, a group who "first applied" the "spirit of anarchy to modern media culture" (Lasn, 1999, p. 100). *Adbusters,* the magazine and the Web site, is best known for spoof ads that aim "to subvert corporate brainwashing through satire and 'social marketing campaigns' such as 'Buy Nothing Day' and 'TV Turnoff Week'" (Sullum, 2000, ¶3).

Lampooning, critiquing, and parodying mainstream media representations are forms of culture jamming. Subvertising focuses on commercial messages and "uses the power of brand recognition and brand hegemony either against itself or to promote an unrelated value or idea" (Cortese, 1999, pp. 49-50). The intent is to turn the way we look at media "on its head" (Cortese 1999, p. 50) by actively appropriating "the ad's images…in critique and subversion" (Kearney, 1998, p. 300). The creation of culture jamming-focused Web sites, increased numbers of users, and gender-based user equity have combined to extend the hands-on aspects of girl culture activism. The sister concepts of subvertising and culture jamming are strategies embraced by Jammer Girl activism and illustrated by the Web site About-Face.org.

Making an About-Face
The Web site About-Face.org (A-F.org) launched in 1997, encourages girls to voice their opinions and use the site as a "launching pad" for their own rebellion and to do so "with guts and humor" (Brunkala, 1998, ¶2). In 1997 and 1998, the site received an average of 3,580 page views per day, but by 2002, the hits were up to more than 11,000 (A-F.org). A-F.org uses a feminist pedagogical approach to guide young women through the process of "making an about-face, a 'reversal of standpoint,' when they look at advertising and media messages." The goal, according to its founders, is to get girls "to stop, turn around, and think about what they are seeing. Conversely, we agitate for an about-face in the way advertisers portray women" (A-F.org). The founding and ongoing charge of A-F.org is to address the dozens of glossy advertisements contained in dozens of glossy magazines, ads that emphasize what women look like instead of what they think.

In the summer of 1995, Kathy Bruin saw, on the side of a bus, a Calvin Klein Obsession fragrance ad featuring a naked, reclining Kate Moss. Bruin and a friend found a print version of the advertisement, scanned it, subvertised (manipulated it) and, with help from friends and family, plastered posters onto temporary structures around San Francisco. In true Culture Jammer fashion, Bruin played on Moss' already thin body by exaggerating her skeletal features through enhancing shading and elongating the image to emphasize the model's already apparent vulnerability. She states that Kate Moss:

> looked so young and gaunt, so frightened and vulnerable. This ad was the last straw for me. I wanted to make a statement that would be louder than just writing Calvin Klein a letter. I envisioned myself scrambling up scaffolding to deface billboards, or waiting at bus stops to attach an ad on the side of a bus! (A-F.org)

Bruin did not deface the ad; rather she satirized it by changing the text to "Emaciation Stinks!" and "Stop Starvation Imagery!" This led to the creation of the culture-jamming organization About-Face. In 1996, in honor of National Eating Disorders Week, Bruin and company created another poster "Bodies are not Fashion Accessories: Question the motives of the Diet Industry," and, again displayed it around San Francisco, catching the attention of critics and comrades. A critique of the messages of fashion magazines' seasonal dictates of what is *in* and what is *out*, the poster satirized the objectification of women's bodies and presented the parts as baubles

and beads. Bruin describes what motivated her to become an activist and why sexist advertising images are harmful to the psyches of both girls and boys:

> It does all of us a disservice to put such importance on the way women look rather than who we are. Encouraging women — and then expecting us — to spend a lot of time and money on beauty/fashion/diets guarantees that we may never measure up. Images of women in popular culture, led by the entertainment and "beauty" industries, affect women's perception of themselves and contribute to unhealthy relationships with food. This campaign encourages people to voice their own disenchantment and to make changes in their own lives….If nothing else, we as individuals have the power to make an important impression in a young woman's life or to give a great big company a piece of our minds. (A-F.org)

A favorite trope that fits A-F.org well is the concept of *détournement*, defined as "an image, message or artifact lifted out of its context to create a new meaning" (Klein, 1999, p. 282), and drawing upon Debord (1983), is "a way for people to take back the spectacle that had kidnapped their lives" (Lasn, 1999, p. 103). This type of rebellion is a way of combining teenage traits of angst and anxiety with the urge to rebel that touches a deep-seated adolescent trait usually associated with boys. Media literacy is "the ability to critically consume and create media" (New Mexico Media Literacy Project, 2004). The goal is to teach individuals how to decipher deeper meanings from the media they consume. A-F.org demonstrates media literacy by applying the concepts to advertising as well as instructing girls how to use and transform ideas into their own words. It also serves as an exchange, a place to document action, post alternative responses, and create community.

Based within the rubric of media literacy at the grass-roots and on-line levels, About-Face.org believes "when girls and women understand what media messages are saying and the impact of such messages, they will act to change them" (A-F.org). In 1996, the A-F staff began a media literacy program by giving speeches, talks, and workshops at colleges, high schools, and to women's organizations. A-F.org applies the same principles of awareness and critique to online examples, thereby reaching a wider geographical audience. The strategies and tactics give girls and women the tools needed to think critically about advertising, providing an outlet for them to become active, educated, and visible consumers. Girls are encouraged to "use this Web site as a launching pad for [their] own rebellion" (A-F.org). The goal is to "disarm irresponsible advertisers" by subverting the messages that undermine girls' and women's strengths (A-F.org).

The media literacy principle of "informed inquiry" (Center for Media Literacy, 2004) involves a four-step inquiry process of awareness, reflection, analysis, and action with which young people acquire the skills to navigate the sea of media messages in order to:

·   Access information from a variety of sources.

·   Analyze and explore how messages are "constructed," whether print, verbal, visual or multi-media.

·   Evaluate media's explicit and implicit messages against one's own ethical, moral and/or democratic principles.

·   Express or create their own messages using a variety of media tools (Center for Media Literacy, 2004).

When interrogating A-F.org, I question whether the cite fosters activism in Jammer Girls. In most cases, it is difficult to determine whether or not a particular "jam" was ultimately effective in changing corporate behavior or how girls were moved to do something because of visiting the

Web site. However, A-F.org provides the place and the space for Jammer Girls and school groups to post their information, art, and essays. To examine responses to the site, I discuss examples that demonstrate online Jammer Girl activism under the three links "Your Letters," "Visitor Feedback," and "Your Forum" ("Visitor Picks," a fourth link, was not operational, but is a site for submission of images).

Your letters

Twenty-four letters, and in some cases company responses to them, are posted on the "Your Letters to Companies" page. Examples include an exchange between individuals and PETA about their sexist portrayals of women as a way of creating awareness for the plight of animals and Skyy Vodka's sexist representations of women. An example of letter writing to a company, the company's response, and change catalyzed by this activist effort was written to Dana Perfume objecting to their "Fetish" perfume ads that target girls. The letter, signed by a group of concerned individuals, includes a high school girl, an undergraduate psychology student, a psychology professor, a nurse, a business professor and "father of two daughters," and the associate director of a teen theater project. The objectionable advertisement, printed as an insert in the Portland *Oregonian,* shows a young woman wearing an orange bikini top, heavy pink eye makeup above and below her lashes, and a vial of Fetish perfume hanging between her breasts. The copy across her chest reads: "Fetish #16: Apply generously to your neck so he can smell the scent as you shake your head 'no.'" The group's objection was perpetuation of "the dangerous myth that girls and women mean 'yes' when they say 'no,'" and that this translates to the suggestion that is it acceptable to ignore a girl's voice. Further, it reinforces the stereotype that, by wearing certain kinds of clothing or makeup, a girl gives permission to be sexually violated. The text of the letter also mentions the rail-like thinness of the girl, how the red-rimmed eyes speak to the "heroin chic" look, and that she looks battered. The group asks the company to discontinue running the ad, but until that time states they would boycott Fetish products.

The response, written by the general manager of Dana Perfumes, refers to a telephone conversation between the general manager and the professor. The company stands behind the ads and does not believe them to be in bad taste or harmful to girls. What they do say, however, is that the group's letter demonstrates how the ads "do not live up to the standards that we attempt to maintain." Consequently, the ad campaign was discontinued.

Visitor feedback

Short quotes from visitors to the site are presented on this page. Examples of their comments show their interest in and response to the site's content. The first quote demonstrates familiarity with the Internet and what is (or is not) available there while the second demonstrates the importance of peer pressure to a girl's self-image. The third example showcases the importance of validation to self-esteem, and the fourth is evidence of true Jammer Girl response to the information at A-F.org:

·   *A.H., Female, Age 18:* i loved it, it has to be the best thing i've found on the net in years!

·   *J, Female, Age 18* -I absolutely love it. Never in my life have I felt as though someone really understood what I was going through as a size 12 in a high school world of size 3s. As soon as I entered your site I felt immense relief... like I didn't have to do it alone anymore... like there was a whole world full of people out there who understood me. I can't find the words to express the immense gratitude I feel towards you. You have made me feel like I have worth even though I am 20 pounds over my "acceptable" weight based on height. I will be a full supporter of you forever, you've given me my life back, it's the least I can do in return.

·   *V., Female, Age 14:* I found your site very informative, and it was very nice to know that I am not the only one to think that some of the pictures in magazines are ridiculous, and out of control.

·   *A., Female, Age 14:* I loved this web site so much that I started writing letters and getting on the phone with companies. I even started my own webpage.

Your Forum

"Your Forum" is the place at A-F.org to post original essays, art projects, student projects, reviews, and columns. Among the 17 essays posted, thirteen deal with eating disorders and body image. Sixteen-year-old Katie Rainbow, for example, is a high school student from Philadelphia. She says, "I enjoy writing, reading anything I can get my hands on, and upsetting the natural order of the universe as often as possible." Katie uses chocolate as metaphor in her brief essay in which she explores peer and parental pressure to be thin and popular, her disgust at having her cake and throwing it up too, increased awareness of what a life of denial means, and, ultimately, her rebellion against a thin-obsessed culture. Similar to the poetry on girl-authored home pages, by using third person, essay format, Katie is able to "address serious and intimate matters " yet remain one step removed from confessional writing (Stern, 2002):

> She sees all the chocolate cake she wouldn't eat, and all the chocolate cake she threw up. And later, the chocolate cake she couldn't taste anymore. And the chocolate cake she couldn't swallow. And the chocolate cake she couldn't keep down. And now it's the chocolate cake that has been replaced with an IV tube in a horrible hospital where nurses yell at her when she doesn't eat her pudding. And they force that pound it took her so much work to lose back under her skin.(p. 277)

An example of an art project is sixteen-year old Erin's post of a collage of magazine images of unrealistically thin women in advertisements, fashion spreads, and art. The words "Shed the weight of the world" are placed on both sides, drawing the viewer's eyes back and forth across the piece. Sarah submitted an image of a blond woman in a neon pink string bikini with her wrists wrapped in rope, dangling like a puppet from a stick. Between the figure's arms are the words "The diet industry takes in over $40 billion each year and is still growing." To the right, she has typed, "Don't participate in your exploitation."

Five student projects are linked to the "Forum" page including "Beauty is in the eye of the media," "Fashion: The cycle of shame," and the essay "Girl Power or Girl Downer?" written by Cate, 15 years old, Santa Clarita, California, for her American Literature class. In this piece, Cate discusses Barbie, the Spice Girls, and cartoons as not only perpetuating the thin-is-in stereotype but also appropriating the concept of Girl Power by mainstream culture: "Having women in high positions. What a lie the media is feeding us? Can you say Girl Power?"

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the underpinnings of the false dichotomy of good girls and bad girls in American society and to posit the need for and appearance of a third teen girl identity. I argue that, because of the development of Internet sites such as A-F.org, Jammer Girls have visibly emerged from the cloudy cultural waters of female adolescence. These sites have facilitated the concurrent "coming out" of nonconformist girls whose blossoming rose from soil made fertile by sister movements such as third wave feminism. Other Web sites, such as AdiosBarbie.com and Loveyourbody.org, also strive to empower girls with information to work toward changing the flow of media images in order to help them love the bodies they are in and to value and voice their ideas. What A-F.org offers that is different from the others is a research-grounded media literacy framework within which images are analyzed, discussed, and culture jammed.

A shortcoming of this chapter and other feminist analyses of girl culture is that they primarily addresses the experiences of white, heterosexual, middle-class girls. There are vast and important opportunities within this research area to explore, for example, identity issues within other groups in American society, particularly among African American girls and Latinas. Social class issues also limit this kind of analysis. Not all girls have access to computers and not all girls receive education in how to use them.

Based on the anecdotal comments posted by girls visiting the site, the content of their essays, and the messages of their "jams," I believe A-F.org has made a difference in girls' lives. As girls navigate a world littered with complexities of celebrity culture, consumerism, and media ad-monish-ments about makeup, clothing, and related accoutrements of female beauty, Internet sites such as About-Face.org, media literacy education in schools and on the Internet, girls participation in sports, and the burgeoning critical mass of girls who are, to quote the film _Network_, "mad as hell and not taking it anymore," all offer hope that girls of the future will be more in a position to choose their identities. In conclusion, A-F founder Kathy Bruin offers this positive message:

> We must all choose between battles: One battle is against the cultural ideal, and the other is against ourselves. Must we always define ourselves by what popular culture dictates? Develop your own style. Have fun-- Wear lipstick. Or don't. You're the boss of you. By speaking out and accepting yourself (dimples and all), you help break the barriers. (A-F.org)

Notes
The expression "culture jamming" was first used by the jammer band Negativland (http://www.negativland.com/) and popularized by Dery (1993) who defines it as "media hacking, information warfare, terror-art, and guerrilla semiotics all in one" (http://www.levity.com/markdery/culturjam.html). The expression has since become associated with Kalle Lasn and Canadian activist group Adbusters.

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