

Goals and Dreams of Adolescent Women Carrie Hankerson

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gather information regarding the way that young women set goals for themselves, and how they plan on achieving these goals. I wanted to obtain a better understanding of what shapes young women's goals (i.e. family, location, and friends) and how these variables contribute to the ability that they have to set goals for themselves and follow through on accomplishing them. After conducting seven interviews it became clear that the variable of family has the largest influence on an adolescent girls ability to set goals for herself and this variable can be a very negative impact in a child's life.

Settling/Community

Cows, Colleges and Contentment

In order to understand the different experiences that are discussed in this study it is necessary to explain the setting and the context in which each of these young women was interviewed. The experience of each young woman is drastically affected by her community, living conditions, and family situation.

Northfield is a small town that is permeated by the atmosphere of two colleges, St. Olaf College and Carleton College. It is located south of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. It takes approximately 45-60 minutes to reach the Twin Cities from Northfield. Northfield is home to 17,147 residents, many of whom attend these two colleges. 15,873 of the people are white, while 154 are Black or African American, 405 are Asian, and 982 are Hispanic. Along with these demographics, I found that 85% of the high school graduates in Northfield attend some sort of post-secondary schooling. 469 women live in Northfield as single parents (United States Census 2000). The colleges continue to be a very large source of employment for residents in Northfield and both colleges have become central to the community, in fact St. Olaf is the largest employer in Northfield.

John W. North founded Northfield in 1855. A prominent story and historical event of this city centers on Jesse James. In 1876, the James-Younger Gang attempted to rob the First National Bank, in hopes that the bank held the Ames family fortune. As the violence of the raid spilled over into the street, the lives of two members of the James-Younger gang were lost. The remaining portion of the gang followed what is now called the Outlaw Trail. The James brothers escaped and rode to safety in South Dakota, while the Younger brothers were captured during a shoot-out near Madelia, Minnesota. The Defeat of Jesse James is celebrated each year with a magnificent festival the weekend after Labor Day.

Along with this exciting history, Northfield is also the home to many quaint coffee shops, like Blue Monday, and also many bars and restaurants, The Cow and the Tavern being two of the most prominent ones. McDonald's is also a hot spot for young workers along with two other small food complexes, Subway and Hogan Brothers, which are located in the heart of downtown Northfield.

Northfield holds within it many housing developments and small neighborhoods. Along with these neighborhoods, two trailer parks exist and some small apartment/low income housing complexes. One of the housing developments is called Viking Terrace and this is where a few of the girls I interviewed live. Viking Terrace Mobile Home Park is located right behind Dairy Queen on the main drag and is home to many Northfield residents, along with a high population of Hispanic residents.

Jefferson Square is the complex where the majority of the girls I interviewed live and is located near Northfield High School and behind McDonalds. It is a quaint place, often termed "smurf village" because of the blue color scheme of all of the small apartments. Single parents and/or low-income families inhabit many of them. An average apartment has three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen and living room area. The apartments are small, but house a few people very easily.

When examining these two specific housing communities more closely, one can easily tell that there are many cultural barriers and problems in this small town, problems that are hard to be seen by the naked eye, but are more evident on closer inspection. According to the Community Study Circles on Immigration and Diversity Issues done in Northfield racial discrimination is the biggest issue that many immigrants discussed. This racism is something that shows up in schools, businesses and daily interactions. The Northfield League of Women Voters has been taking steps to help get rid of the racism problem through many community unity efforts, which hopefully be making headway (McWilliams 2000).

Northfield is also home to many schools, and the majority of the girls interviewed attend Northfield High School, while the rest attend Northfield Middle School. There are also four elementary schools and an Alternative Learning Center. The following excerpt is a description of the Northfield community:

Although Northfield no longer boasts the large dairy industry it once did, the farms that nestle around the city are still dotted with grazing cattle. Situated just forty-five minutes south of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Northfield blends the charm and tranquility of its rural heritage with the sophistication of a cosmopolitan perspective. Rolling farmland skirts the grounds of a corporation which produces advanced technological equipment. A Victorian popcorn

wagon stands beside a contemporary fountain. The newest fashions are sold in a downtown restored to recall the nineteenth century. This is Northfield... a unique blend of the historic, the progressive and the creative (Northfield Chamber of Commerce 2003).

I included this description of Northfield because it contrasts greatly with the information many of the girls shared with me in terms of their economic status and the opportunities available to them. Although Northfield may seem quaint and strongly centered around community from the outside, once on the inside it is easier to detect the negative aspects of this community such as racism and poverty. Through examining the location and demographics of this town, it will be easier to understand the environment in which these girls inhabit. One's environment is a very strong factor in influencing a person's experience, especially that of an adolescent.

The Problem

All children think about what they want to do with their lives at some point in their childhood. Most of these dreams embody being a fire fighter, doctor, police officer, nurse, and perhaps even an actor. Most of these goals seem like dim dreams to many less privileged kids and by the time they reach the teenage years many of their dreams have dissipated. They either cease to dream and set goals or continue to cling to childhood hopes. For many who are privileged those childhood dreams can come true, but for many adolescents who grow up without encouragement to set their hopes high end up settling for less than the best for them.

The media does an excellent job of portraying low-income/high school dropouts as McDonalds workers and janitors, leaving many adolescents in a position to believe that there isn't anything more for them. However the movie "Good Will Hunting" portrays an "average" guy who works as a janitor but is in reality a genius. The movie depicts the incredible dreams he is able to live out because of his natural talent and hard work. This can be an inspiration for many who are never motivated to work hard or even believe in their natural gifts and talents. The question that we have to ask ourselves is, what factors actually do influence an adolescent's ability to set goals?

This research set out to study that very question. As I progressed in my interviews I found themes centering on parental influences, peer influences, and issues centering on how each child was socialized. All of these factors stem out of the fact that the people I interviewed were young girls, and the very fact that they are female automatically influences their responses and the process of socialization that they went through. Mary Pipher sets out to describe this very phenomenon through a framework that explains that culture is responsible for splitting adolescent girls into true and false selves. Because of the culture and

social processes that young women go through they are forced to take up false selves in order to make up for their true self, and what it lacks, as society dictates (Pipher 1994: 37). I set out to study why many of the young women I had encountered in Northfield, who come from low-income areas, had such low aspirations, and had in fact, taken up false selves. The following factors embody the research that was performed and the framework surrounding it.

The first factor to look at is that of gender. Because this project is focused on young women it is necessary to understand the importance of gender in social interactions. Let us first examine what a young woman finds herself living for. The main thing that motivates young girls is being good and pleasing others so that she can earn love and approval (Mickelson 2001). This desire filtrates into all other behavioral motivations that young women adhere to. Because of this performance drive to do well and be good, it has been found that although females have higher aspirations than males, they are also more dramatically impacted by parental economic resources than males (Dennehy 1992). Therefore, if parents have fewer resources young women are more likely to allow that fact to become a direct reflection of the ability that they possess to achieve their goals. Along the same lines, females are also more likely to respond negatively to stressful situations. Once a young woman has something stressful happen to her, the parents automatically exert more control over her and this only makes the situation worse. From this point forward, the girl attributes negative or positive academics to her own fault. Because of the stress that parents add by the pressure they put on their daughter, or the intense monitoring of her behavior, her future is impacted negatively because she becomes so discouraged and places blame on herself (Mickelson 2001).

Gender also affects the possibilities that a young person has access too. The Pollyanna hypothesis is a theory that states that a young girl who graduates from high school is most likely to be optimistic about her future. Although she may be completely aware of the struggles that her mother's generation faced she sees society as changed and believes that she has many opportunities that will not be affected by her gender, as it was in her parents' generation. This hypothesis states that young women today believe that they have "come a long way" and that any barriers to their careers have fallen away (Mickelson 2001). This hypothesis is important for this research as I examine what each girl's optimism is about her future and find that this theory may not be true in all cases.

Parental influences can greatly affect a young woman's ability to set and implement goals for herself. A father's attitude about his economic resources and/or a loss of income greatly affects the daughter. This relates to the large role that the father has in the sex role socialization process that a daughter goes through. This is important because it pin points the large effect that a father has

on his daughter, something that I anticipated would play a large role in the findings of this research. Mickelson found that a young woman wants to perform well and “be good” because of the pressure placed on her by the males in her life and the part this plays in the socialization process (Mickelson 2001). The primary drive to perform well can be dramatically influenced by the male parent.

Although parents are huge influences on an adolescent as they go through the socialization process, it is also true that neighborhood influences can be an even greater influence, positively or negatively. A study was completed in 1994 where 800 adolescents completed interviews. It is clear from this study that when discussing career aspirations, neighborhood influences had a greater impact than of family or peer influences. This refutes some of the previous studies and puts a greater emphasis on the influence of the social neighborhood around youth (Hadly-Ives 2001). By social neighborhood I am referring to the actual place where the child lives and the surroundings that make up that place. For example, for the women who live in Jefferson Square their 'neighborhood' is Jefferson Square and then the social network of friends that evolves from living there.

After performing this initial research I was ready to delve into the world of an adolescent girl and discover for myself what affects her aspirations and hopes for the future.

Methodology

In this particular study I set out to look at a particular group of adolescents in Northfield who fit the criteria that I was studying those criteria were that of females who live in low-income housing, such as the trailer parks and assorted apartments located in Northfield. I used a number of connections that I have to the female adolescents of Northfield and explained to ten of them what my study was about and asked them if they would willingly consent to participation. Seven girls ended up participating in the study. Because this study was focused on such a specific population, the information gathered was from many young girls with whom I previously had some sort of relationship/acquaintance.

I chose to do my research through the process of interviews. The seven girls consented to participate in this study each went through a forty-five minute interview. I went to each girl's house to pick her up and talk with her parents, sharing with them what the study was about. Each parent signed a form that in turn allowed me to interview his or her daughter (Appendix A). Each young woman also signed a consent form (Appendix B). The ages of participants in the study ranged from thirteen to sixteen. Six of the participants are Caucasian, while one is Hispanic. The majority of my interviews were done in the town of Northfield at either a small ice cream shop or sandwich shop.

Therefore, all of my data was gathered through interviews. There are a few weaknesses of the methodology used. First, I didn't receive a large enough sample, or broad enough sample to make all the findings capable of generalizability. Because I thought it was important to have previous relationships with many of the young women it was more difficult to receive a large sample that could apply to the feelings of adolescent women in general. However, because all the young women interviewed came from the same background, it gives adequate grounds to generalize about these specific areas in Northfield and the way that their socialization in this areas has affected their goals and dreams.

FINDINGS

Setting the Stage

Before we begin to unravel the mysteries of female adolescence, I will describe each young woman that was interviewed in as much detail as possible without breaking confidentiality so as to better understand the context of these interviews.

Lets begin with Anna: Anna is a sophomore in high school who attends Northfield High School and lives with her parents, who aren't married, and her four siblings, two sisters and two brothers. Her father is very overbearing and can be scary at times and her mother is passive and works a lot. Both her parents drive her to church when she needs to get there and provide for her basic needs. Anna is not close with her family, but coexists with them nicely in her own room. Rachel is a close friend of Anna's who lives a few apartments away with her two parents and her brother who just returned from rehab. Her father is also very domineering and her mother is a passive but very sweet woman. Rachel, who attends Northfield Middle School and is in eighth grade, also attends church with Anna.

Becca also lives in the same apartment complex with her two sisters, one of whom was born just a few months ago. Becca, who is a high school freshman, lives with her sisters and their mom, who has had periodic live-in boyfriends over the past few years. Becca has spent her summers and most of her childhood in another state where her grandmother and father live and continues to spend her summers there. She takes care of her sisters and acts as caregiver when her mother is working. Tonya also lives in this same apartment complex with her three younger siblings, two girls and one boy. They live with their father since their parents got divorced when Tonya was in middle school. They have undergone much economic turmoil, and her father has had to find a new job since the divorce. Both Tonya and her sister are very aware of the struggles her father endures to make money for their family. She also attends Northfield High School and is a sophomore. She is very outgoing and caring of everyone who is around her. She takes care of her siblings and cleans just as a mom

would do. It is easy to tell that Tonya has a lot of responsibility for being only sixteen and she accepts this well.

Jan lives in the trailer park with her mother, father and her one brother. She used to live with another family and then the number in the trailer was ten rather than four! Her mom and dad both work and she works as well at a shop downtown. Jan is very independent, and always has a guy on her arm, and if one isn't there, then one is most definitely in sight! She is a sophomore in High School and attends the Northfield High School with many of the others girls who participated in this study.

Lindsey lives near these girls with her three siblings and father and is quite oblivious to the world around her. She gets teased a lot at school and continues to reap the consequences of that negative attention. She is only in sixth grade and is just coming into her own person. Finally, Kara who is in eighth grade at Northfield Middle School and lives with her two parents who have never been married. Her older sister moved out a few years ago and she longs to be able to do the same someday. She is a very well mannered and quiet girl, always willing to help and excited to share about her life and ask questions.

When I was little.....

One of the first things I asked each girl to share with me was her own definition of the word "goals" and "dreams." Rachel responded by saying that a goal is "something that can be reached" while a dream is something that you have wanted to do for a long time, but at times can seem unattainable. Anna answered similarly, responding that a goal is something you "set your mind to do" while dreams very rarely come true. Most of the girls responded with answers similar to these. For example, Becca stated that dreams are things that you can attain but it's hard to get them, and Tonya shared that dreams are things that, in order to attain them you have to "never ever give up." Kara responded by sharing that goals are "standards that you set for yourself and try to achieve."

After these responses I proceeded to try to understand what some of their childhood dreams had been that they had given up on. Many of their dreams seem unrealistic now and have vanished as a mere mist of their past. Rachel said that she used to want to be a doctor when she was little, but now, that seems to be impossible because of all the education she would need. Tonya has also had a small dream crushed, but her dream was a bit different from the rest. When she was little she always dreamed of being able to fly, just like Peter Pan. One day, she actually tried to and ended up running into the wall! Tonya also dreamed when she was little that she could have the perfect family, one that doesn't yell, but communicates and has dinner together...a dream that has yet to come true in her life. Kara also wanted to follow in the footsteps of a

hero, but her hero was her aunt, who is a cop. She used to dream of being just like her, but as the years have passed her desire to do this has faded. Jan has always wanted to be a hairstylist and hopes to go to Tech school and get her degree there. She would love to have her own hair salon and she knows that if she keeps her grades up then the Tech school will pay for the tuition! This is a dream that Jan has had since she was little and continues to have now! Lindsey has always wanted to be a dancer, but now she finds herself without any dreams at all. The last girl to be discussed in Anna. Anna dreamed of being a writer when she was younger and still clings to this hope. Her mom is always encouraging and pressuring her into doing bigger things, like being a brain surgeon, which is a hope that stems out of her moms' desire to be supported by her children someday, a dream that perhaps Anna will have to fulfill.

All of these girls had dreams when they were little, and for some reason, most have changed and downgraded to something more “realistic.” Why is this? What causes dreams and goals to change so quickly as one moves from childhood to adolescence? Could it be because these young women are forced to enter adulthood at such a young age?

Now that I’m all grown up....

I set out to figure out how these girls' dreams had changed from when they were little to this point in their life. First understanding what specific goals changed in these girls lives will make it easier to understand why they changed. The following explains what their goals and dreams are now, and how those have changed from the innocence of childhood dreams.

Rachel hopes to go to college, hopefully St. Olaf, and keep her grades up and “make something of my life.” Her goals have become a little more immediate as she has gotten older. When asked about what she would like to do as the years go on, she had many ideas. She said she wants to help others become more like Christ, and maybe be able to become an interpreter for deaf people. She also wants to have a family and get herself out of Minnesota. Her dreams of being a doctor are long gone and have been taken over by more immediate needs. Anna said her main goal is to graduate from high school and hopefully obtain enough scholarships to go to college when she does graduate. She has a very good sense of money and how unrealistic it may be for her to want to go to college. She hopes to stay in Minnesota so she can have her parents to fall back on if she doesn’t make it through college. One of her continuing dreams is to be able to write a children’s book, but that seems to be more of a dream for her than a goal that she has set her mind on. Becca hopes to do well in school, pass her classes and hopefully get into college so she can study criminal justice. When confiding with me what her biggest goal was she whispered, “I hope to never be like my parents.”

Tonya had no problem sharing goals with me and would have talked for hours

if we had had the time. She hopes to get her poems published someday and hopefully be able to get a job and a car. She wants to get into college and leave Northfield to be a forensic scientist. At some point, she wants to get the proper schooling she needs and be able to be self-sufficient and get her own apartment so that she can decorate it. When sharing about how she wanted to do something with her life she stated “I don’t want to end up like some crackhead on the street!” Tonya shared about all the kids she has known who have ended up like that, and as if she still considers this a possibility for her life, prays and hopes against that. She also doesn’t think she ever wants to have kids, but, she thinks that it might happen anyway. For some reason she is stuck in a place where she believes that becoming a drug user, or getting pregnant may be her only options. It seems to be quite a contradiction that she wants to go to college and become a forensic scientist, but at the same time, fears becoming pregnant or addicted to drugs. Perhaps it is because as much as she dreams to get out of her life patterns, she fears that she will not be able to.

Kara hopes to be a hairstylist after she graduates from high school. She feels like going to college will cost her too much money and there are easier ways to get jobs. She doesn’t know if she is smart enough to get a scholarship and because of this her dream of being a dolphin trainer may never be fulfilled. Her parents and family members are always bringing her back to reality and telling her to make sure to think logically. Sometimes this can be a positive thing, but for Kara it forces her to set her goals lower and aim in a direction she may not want to take. Jan hopes to graduate from high school and have a family. Having a family was one thing I noticed that not many of the girls desired, but Jan was adamant about having kids and marrying! Lindsey, the youngest of all the girls, is just hoping to get her grades up and perhaps go to college someday, but dreams and goals aren’t things that cross her mind very often.

With all of these young women, most of their dreams have changed radically and become more practical with the end of childhood, which is something that happens with all of us. However, many of them have realized they may not have much potential and couldn’t possibly achieve what they desire, especially with parents who don’t support them. Parental influences are the next aspect we will look at.

Saving Ophelia

Ophelia is a character in Hamlet and she endured life in a male dominated society where all she tried to do was please the men around her and fulfill their expectations of her. Through her pursuit of goodness and righteousness she ends up losing the love of others, especially her father, and drowns by the weight of her clothing. Many of these young girls are caught in this same syndrome and find themselves weighed down by the weight of societal

expectations and their pursuit of love from their father and/or mother (Shandler 1997: 7). This “Ophelia syndrome” takes root in the family, and in the case of this study, each young woman responded and commented on the fact that family is the most important thing in her life. Through this discussion on family it also became evident that many of these girls were forced to enter adulthood far too early. This sense of responsibility affects their view of reality and their role as a daughter and friend.

Rachel said family is important because “they are family.” Becca said that family will always be there, and while you can make new friends “you can’t make new families.” Tonya describes family as always being there since the day you were brought into the world, and a unit of people that love each other. Kara describes her family as her number one priority and people that will always be there, even if they aren’t close.

Each girl brought up her father when discussing her family, and most of them discussed their fathers with an emotion of distance or disdain. It was easy to tell that their relationships with their fathers were not very loving, and had given each girl a bitter edge on the world. This could be for a variety of reasons. First, a father’s role in a young woman’s early life is very important, because she is looking for love and acceptance from him, and if it isn’t given during the socialization process, she will begin to look for it from other men. The distance that is created between a girl and her father can cause her to question herself and what she has done wrong (Pipher 1994). These are all concepts that came up when talking with each young woman. All of the girls shared with me how their parents encourage or don’t encourage them and what their relationships with their family are like. Most of them have passive mothers, and aggressive fathers.

Rachel stated that her parents don’t help her as much anymore, partly because she lives a very different life from them as the only one in the family who goes to church. Whenever she makes mistakes her parents call her a hypocrite and a “bad Christian.” Her dad constantly compares her to her brother and makes her feel bad about herself, which leads to a distant relationship with her dad and a closer one with her mom. Of the two parents her dad is definitely the dominant one, a theme running through all of the interviews. Her father will attempt to make her work harder in school through his negative remarks about how stupid she is and through his constant comparisons of her behavior to her brothers, making her feel like she never measures up in anything that she tries to do. When conversing with her over email she said, “I know that the pain won’t just go away and that it takes time for the pain to go away, but it’s so hard to keep my strong faith because my family doesn’t help me out and my dad is always yelling at me for no reason and I feel so hurt from what he says that I just want to sit in a corner and never move. I really sometimes want to give up...He

makes me feel like I am not worth anything.”

Anna says that her parents have actually made her more abusive with other people because she is picked on so much at home and has to fend for herself. Anna is one of the young women who has been forced into adulthood far too early. Instead of being shown a positive way to solve a problem she instead solves it in an angry, violent manner. Anna’s parents do not encourage her to work hard in school, but nag occasionally, and generally don’t care about how she does. She tries to keep away from her father especially because “you do one thing wrong and he comes after you.” Both of these girls have fathers who control them through threats and comparisons to the other children in the family. This constant negative attention can cause them to focus their goals lower so as to not fail and disappoint their fathers.

Becca, on the other hand, lives only with her mom. She said that her mom hasn’t really been around so she has lived with her grandmother for a good part of her life. Becca never saw her parents when she was younger, and she said she “had a really crappy childhood.” Becca continued at this point in the interview to let some tears of sadness roll off of her cheeks as she shared with me the time when her father left her. She recalls seeing her dad leave her and her sister when she was little to go after his new wife (who had left him), and she didn’t see him for three years after that point. After this incident during her childhood, she began seeking love from her mother, but it finally came to a point where she realized she would never receive her mother’s love, and her father “hasn’t really been there.” So she began searching for love in other ways, through her close friendships and her grandmother who loved her a lot, and she also sought love through many relationships with guys. As Becca has gotten older her mom has become more and more encouraging of her dreams telling her that she is smarter than she is and can go farther in life. The memory of her father still burns Becca’s heart and she carries much bitterness about this, a bitterness that then affects all her male relationships, and enhances her tough exterior. She dreams big dreams, but inside has little hope of ever achieving them. It seems as if they are there to give her hope that she will one day get out of her situation, but in reality, she doesn’t see potential achievement of them.

Tonya, much like Becca, doesn’t have a relationship with her father even though she lives with him. Every time she tries to talk with him he ends up getting mad at her, so instead she relies on her friends for support. He doesn’t encourage her in her schoolwork or goals at all. However, Tonya respects her mom now that she has gotten her life back together but admits that she doesn’t want to be like her mom when she grows up. However, Tonya has found herself in a fairly large mother role at home. She is the mom of the family and cares for her siblings because her father works so much. “I’m like their protector,” says Tonya nonchalantly as she recounts to me her daily duties

around the house. Her family isn't a source of encouragement; they are instead a source of responsibility in her life.

Kara shared with me the importance of her family and had a very positive view of them. Her parents are still living together, although they aren't married, and always try to help her do her best. She said that they have allowed her to realize what is attainable and helped her come out of her "fairyland" to realize realistic dreams for herself. Her dream of being a dolphin trainer isn't realistic to her family because she wouldn't really ever be able to accomplish that. Finally, Lindsey, like most of these girls, longs to make her father happy, and mentioned him as the most inspirational person in her life because whenever she is responsible he tells her that he is proud of her. This socialization process of "good behavior = positive rewards" instills responsibility in Lindsey and shows her how to fend for herself in a world that seems to eat her up.

Peer Influences—neighborhood dynamics

I expected many of the girls to share pressures that they felt from their peers in their ability to set goals for themselves, but instead I found the opposite. Most of the young women expressed positive relationships with friends that helped balance their familial relationships and encourage them to do what they wanted to do. Most of the girls hardly had answers for questions regarding peer pressure and shared that most of the time their close friends are very encouraging. Becca said that her very best friend always encourages her and tells her that she can do it. Tonya, who has a very gifted spirit of love and encouragement shared that when she was younger she used to want to follow people but now she is learning how to be a leader and doesn't want to let negative friend influences get in the way of what she wants to do with her life.

However, despite the fact that negative peer influences weren't of utmost importance, neighborhood influences and more importantly a class specific living environment has greatly changed the way each young woman responds to the world. I hung out a few times at Jefferson Square, the small apartment complex where many of the girls live, and was able to observe and participate in some of their conversations. Most of the time the conversations centered on boys, their job at McDonalds or their desire to get a job at McDonalds! The majority of the apartments that I went into would have some kids in them circling the television and trying to waste away a few more hours of the afternoon. Pots and pans and dishes were everywhere, not to mention old food and garbage. Who would have thought, that in our very own town of Northfield, people lived in such hopelessness? It wasn't the mere appearance of the apartments that gave me this clue, it was the attitude of the parents and their lack of socialization skills in dealing with me as a college student. Many of them wouldn't look me in the eye, but would see me at first, hide behind the

door until I knocked, and then speak about three words too me before I left with their daughter in tow. For many of these young women, it is a wonder that they are able to communicate and interact with others in the way that they do! I was most surprised by the trailer park. I entered the home and dog poop was on the floor, which was a precursor to the fleet of seven dogs I would soon meet that lived in the trailer. The house was very small and musty, and it was clear that cleaning wasn't a necessity for this family. Although it definitely had everything we would call "necessities" it provided a very dirty living environment.

These descriptions above describe that of the lower class. Even something as superficial as a living environment can affect the way that a young person responds to the world around them. All of the girls interviewed live in situations where cleanliness, hospitality and kindness are all virtues that are unimportant. This very fact enhances their lower class socialization and reflects in the ways that they relate with people outside of their own neighborhood environment.

The Effects

We have already seen evidence that in some ways these girls feel discouraged by their parents. Also, the situation that they have to live in affects what they feel they are capable of doing and even what society deems them capable of. But what are their actual feelings about their own capabilities as young adults?

The question asked is number thirteen on the questionnaire (Appendix C): How do you feel about your ability to accomplish your dreams and goals for the future? Do you believe that you can? Rachel responded by saying "I can do anything I put my mind too." Anna responded in much the same way but she was a little bit less optimistic about her abilities to accomplish her goals. Becca said she could probably accomplish most of it, but because she gets so discouraged about school she is a little bit more wary. These girls had such a hard time talking about their abilities because it seemed as though they figured they would end up failing and changing their goals anyway. Tonya said "sometimes things get in the way" that can inhibit accomplishing goals, but most of all, she just "wants to be me" in everything that she does. She did say that she will accomplish the big things, but she isn't as sure about the smaller goals.

Lindsey was probably the most discouraged about her ability to accomplish her goals. At first she said she would probably be able to, but then wasn't so sure after thinking about it. Because she isn't popular at school she cries a lot and feels bad that she is one of the only people who doesn't have a boyfriend and is afraid she will never get one. She doesn't have enough faith in herself to believe that people could actually like her because she is made fun of so much.

A boy with whom she plays soccer always says to her “you suck, you can’t do it!” Because of comments like this she is less likely to believe in her abilities and skills and more than that, she has a hard time recognizing any types of gifts that she has, which is evident in her lack of goals at all. Because she is a middle child she is neglected more and not encouraged in areas in which she is skilled.

I found that although these girls have many goals for the future, when it comes to whether think they can accomplish them they are too wary to answer an affirming and resounding “YES!”

Summary and Conclusions

I believe that this study is important for society as a whole for it describes one of the players in the dramaturgical play of life. Every player is important and by understanding one, we can gain a better understanding of our own lives and the other characters and people with whom are interacting with. Goffman would argue that we all put on faces for the public to see and then take them off in our private “backstage” world. Some of the most prevalent and interesting sociological work is done for it reveals to us implicit motivations of particular players and explains behavioral patterns that are seen in the public, or the “onstage” sphere (Ritzer 2000: 71-72). This research does just that: it studies adolescents in their own private worlds, in order to try to unpack why they behave the way they do and make the decisions that they make within a public context.

Many themes appeared throughout the course of this study. First, all of the girls had similar explanations of what goals were and most saw dreams as attainable but very difficult to achieve. All of the girls also agreed that family and friends are two of the most important things in this life, and the main importance of family stems from the fact that they will always be there for you, despite a lack of intimacy.

One of the most enlightening themes that was evident in all of the interviews centers on the socialization within the family. Because of a young woman’s relationship with her father her entire view of her future can change and shift downward if that relationship is negative. With all of the young women interviewed their fathers played crucial roles in their self-perceptions and their perceived ability to accomplish their goals. As Sara Shandler says in *Ophelia Speaks*: “Girls need their dads (1999: 78).” This simple phrase epitomizes the core of research done on young girls and the negative effect family can have. All of these adolescent women discussed painful relationships with their fathers and notions that they were stupid or unworthy of love because of that father-daughter relationship. Some expressed desires to be respected by their fathers, while some expressed disdain, but all of them have been drastically affected by the lack of paternal love in their life, which has led them to believe

that they aren't smart enough, or good enough, to succeed in their dreams. Instead, the girls believe they will have to settle for lesser goals and continue to stay in the same position and mindset of their parents. The paternal relationship that many of the fathers have with their daughters can be explained by understanding their class situation. All of the girls' parents come from lower class backgrounds and it is apparent that the lower class oppression inflicted on their parents, in particular, the father, has infiltrated into the way that each father treats his daughter. Perhaps class oppression translates into the oppression of females within the family, and becomes a coping mechanism for fathers to deal with their lower class situation. Because of this, their daughters are oppressed within the home and can never escape this oppressive mindset. Oppression and domination is something that is cultivated in one's environment, and in this case, the environment of the lower class. A young girl who lives with wealthy parents is more likely to believe that she could be a doctor, while many of the young women I interviewed would settle for trying to graduate from high school. However, let us remember that this, in itself, is an accomplishment and should not be looked down upon. The main point is that these girls have not been given the mere opportunity to dream dreams for their lives, because class limits opportunities and through this, they have been socially and economically limited because of their circumstances.

This research is important for a variety of reasons. First, I believe that it is important, if not necessary for schools to be doing this kind of research because school is one of the most prominent places where young people are socialized. Perhaps they could be socialized at school in such a way that they were supported and given the means to do what they desire to do. This research is also important to mentorship programs and churches and will help them to become aware of the necessity to challenge young people and encourage them to be all that they can be. Further research should be done and should include a longitudinal study of females so as to see what happens to their goals and lives when they reach their twenties or thirties. Research concerning socio/economic background and the effects this has on a person's ability to even think outside of that specific realm would also be helpful to this research project. Finally, research specifically targeted at the father-daughter relationship and the way that this dramatically affects a daughter's ability and desire to set goals would expound greatly on this project and add to this field of knowledge in a wonderful way.

Mary Pipher said it best in her book *Reviving Ophelia* when she said:

Let's work toward a culture in which there is a place for every human gift, in which children are safe and protected, women are respected and men and women can love each other as whole human beings. Let's work for a culture in

which the incisive intellect, the willing hands, and the happy heart are beloved. Then our daughters will have a place where all their talents will be appreciated and they can flourish like green trees under the sun and the stars (1994: 293). This, in essence, is the ultimate goal of this type of research and my hope is that we will begin to understand the importance of encouraging each other, and allow each human heart to shine, from the very core of who we are.

Appendix A Participant Information and Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a study that I am doing through St. Olaf College. This study will examine the dreams and goals that young women have and what shapes and changes these life long goals. I am a student undertaking this research under the supervision of Professor Carolyn Anderson in the Department of Sociology/Anthropology. Approximately 10 young women will be participating in this study.

If you decide to participate you will be asked 14 questions and it will take about an hour. The study has small risks, if any. First, there is always the risk of getting “too personal” and the risk of feeling discouraged about life plans. However, you can choose not to answer any question for any reason, and you can ask to end the interview at any time. Anything you say during the interview will be confidential. Nobody will be identified in the final research paper by name and your responses will not be used if it they can easily distinguish who you are. The only people who will read my final research paper are my professor and members of the Sociology/Anthropology department. Please know that your participation in this study is voluntary and you can end your participation at any time with no penalty!

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me, Carrie Hankerson at 507-646-2739. If you have any other questions that I cannot answer you may also contact my instructor, Professor Carolyn Anderson, at 507-646-3133.

Please sign below if you agree to participate in this study. By signing this you are telling me that you have read the information above and that your questions have been answered. You can have a copy of this form to keep. Please know that you can still withdraw from the study at any time even after you have signed the form.

Date / / Signature of participant_____

Date / / Signature of researcher_____

Appendix B

Parental Consent Form

My name is Carrie Hankerson and I am doing a research study for my Sociology class at St. Olaf College under the supervision of Professor Carolyn Anderson. Approximately 10 young women will be participating in this study. I would like to interview your daughter in order to obtain a better understanding of what shapes young women's goals (i.e. family, location, and friends) and how these variables contribute to the ability that they have to set goals for themselves. The interview will take about an hour. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. All of the responses that your daughter gives will be kept confidential in the final project that I write up, meaning no names will be used and nothing that can easily distinguish each girl will be used either. The only people who will read my research paper are my professor and members of the Sociology/Anthropology department. I do not anticipate any negative effects of participation in this study. Your daughter can choose not to answer any question for any reason and she can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me, Carrie Hankerson at 507-646-2739. If you have any other questions that I cannot answer you may also contact my instructor, Professor Carolyn Anderson, at 507-646-3133.

I have read the description of the study and I agree that my daughter may be invited to participate in this study, and I understand that if she chooses to participate, all information she provides will be kept confidential, that she may refuse to answer any interview question, and may withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that neither my daughter nor I will be penalized for not participating or for declining to answer any question.

By signing below I am giving my permission to allow her to participate in this study and understand that she is allowed to withdraw at any time.

Date / / Signature

Appendix C

Goals of Adolescent Women

- 1.) What is one thing that really makes you excited? Why?
- 2.) Define, in your own words:
 - goals
 - dreams
- 3.) What is one thing you want to do when you get older and how to you want to accomplish that?
- 4.) What are some of the most important things to you? (example, family, friends)Why?
- 5.) What was one dream you had when you were little? What is one dream that you have now?
- 6.) How has your peer group influenced your dreams? (have you ever changed your goals because of what they said, how so?)
- 7.) Is there one person in your life who really inspires you? If so, how does he/she inspire you?
- 8.) What are some of your goals for the next few years, before, or after High School?
- 9.) Do you live in Northfield? Where? For how long?
- 10.) Who do you live with?
- 11.) How has your family shaped who you are?
- 12.) Do your parents encourage you to work hard? If so, how?
- 13.) How do you feel about your ability to accomplish your dreams and goals for the future? Do you believe that you can?
- 13.) Have you ever failed at something you were trying to accomplish? If so, how did you recover?
- 14.) Disclaimer: this is a fun question! If you could do one thing to change the world, what would it be?!

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