

**Window Panes & Mirror Frames:**  
Social Constructions of American Girlhood  
in Children's Pages and Periodicals (1865-1952)

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I dedicate this dissertation in memory of my grandparents, great-grandparents and aunt.

## **Abstract**

### **Window Panes & Mirror Frames: Social Constructions of American Girlhood in Children's Pages and Periodicals (1865-1952)**

Representations of girlhood have been socially constructed via media content and popular culture. This can be done by providing a society with a certain way of talking about girls, creating, in essence, a discourse. Content from 177 articles in children's periodicals and 757 articles in children's sections and girls' pages from 1865 through 1952 were examined to discern what girls were reading about:

- a) Who or what girls could be (roles), and
- b) How girls could be (traits, learned or inculcated).

The purpose was to get a better understanding of what the girls' choices were (range of roles and traits seen in texts) and what messages girls were most exposed to (frequency of constructions and messages in texts).

At least 21 roles and more than five dozen traits were identified—dominant, enduring and/or consistent—across the 87-year period. The Socializer role became more mentioned while the Nurturer roles became less mentioned, and the Keeper-of-the-Hearth roles remained strong. A proper-sphere discourse dominated throughout the 87 years.

## Table of Contents

Chapter One <b>Introduction: Girls, Gender and Meaning in Media</b>	1-31
Chapter Two <b>Historical Sketches: Concepts of Childhood, Womanhood and Girlhood</b>	32-55
Chapter Three <b>Window Panes and Mirror Frames: Content and Textual Analyses of Girls' Pages and Children's Periodicals</b>	56-95
Chapter Four <b>Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1865 – 1894</b>	96-116
Chapter Five <b>Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1895 – 1923</b>	117-145
Chapter Six <b>Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1924 – 1952</b>	146-172
Chapter Seven <b>Becoming a Woman: Looking out of the Window (Roles)</b>	173-186
Chapter Eight <b>Being a Girl: Looking into the Mirror (Traits)</b>	187-201
Chapter Nine <b>Looking Through the Glass: Discourses of Girlhood</b>	202-218
Chapter Ten <b>Conclusion: Girls Seeing Themselves</b>	219-227
Bibliography	228-244
Appendix	245-253
Charts	
Discovered Roles and Discovered Traits	245
List of Roles: Total Mentions	246
List of Roles: Trends Across Eras	247
List of Traits: Total Mentions	248-249
List of Traits: Trends Across Eras	250-251
Children's Periodical and Girls'/Children's Pages Totals	252-253

## Chapter One

### Girls, Gender and Meaning in Media

Today more and more mass media and popular culture are being produced for and about girls than at earlier points in American history. Girls are not only the source of news and entertainment media content, they are also seen as the market for these cultural texts. As a result many parents, educators and scholars are increasingly concerned about the images, models and representations children are exposed to. In fact, anxieties about media effects on children recur in debates about education and the general future of society (Buckingham 3). Marjorie Allen, in her 1999 book about the female role models that children's books provide, asked: "How will 21st-century society define roles of male and female, how can parents prepare their daughters and sons?" (Allen 6)

Gender is often the focus of these concerns. Academic psychologist Cordelia Fine emphasizes that "the information we provide to children, through our social structure and media, about what gender means—what goes with being male or female—still follows fairly old-fashioned guidelines" (Fine 213). We see traditional feminine ideals of the Victorian era in publications today, such as the *Disney Princess* magazine for 2- to 4-year-old girls. These ideals emphasize a woman's place is the home and stress the importance of motherhood and domesticity in female lives. Fine describes the "pink princess phenomenon" the magazine presents as offering lessons about "how to be pretty, caring and catch a husband" (Fine 220). Even in an 1897 issue of *Woman's Journal* one of the girls

written about in a magazine said: "I will be a princess and you must give me a castle to live in. Nothing else in the world will content me" (*Woman's Journal*, April 3, 1897). Is this girl-as-a-market phenomenon new—is this the first generation to inspire such media texts? Have these traits—pretty, caring, alluring—been a constant presence in media for children and girls? Or have they risen and fallen throughout American history? Have shifts of girlhood's meaning and how to define girls occurred in previous eras? This dissertation relates to these questions while exploring what American media and popular culture conveyed as female roles and traits in earlier eras, especially for girl readers and users of the mass culture products of their times. Specifically, the purpose here is to get a sense of the range of representations girls read about in previous eras of American history.

In this dissertation, the terms "girls" and "girlhood" include girls from the age they start to read on their own (around age seven) to the age when girls start to move away from home (around age seventeen). The setting or context of the girl is the determining factor, not age. Also, in this dissertation, the term "girlhood" encompasses childhood, tween and adolescence. The interest here is in what girls read because "the act of reading is one of the modes by which we acquire our social—indeed gendered—orientations to our identification with the world," according to Holly Virginia Blackford (Blackford 4). Research therefore focused on media content used by girls in order to explore conceptions of girls and girlhood in American history from 1865 to 1952. This dissertation's analysis of mass media content focused on texts, specifically periodicals that were produced to be read by children. A goal was to identify discourses of girlhood in American mass communication texts that targeted girls as a primary audience. What role models appeared in these texts? What traits were

girls encouraged to cultivate? It is assumed that content aimed at girls played a significant role in girls' conceptions of who they were and who they wanted to become.

This relationship of girls and media rarely received critical attention before the 1970s. Since then scholars have noted increasingly that, as advertisers, authors and other text producers select certain elements for emphasis while excluding others, they take part in what Myra Gutin describes as the "institutional mechanisms which process facts and events and personalities through the filter of highly continuous assumptions" (Gutin 2). A thesis in this dissertation is that the "highly continuous" assumptions about girlhood conveyed via cultural texts, including media, work to set unquestioned societal expectations for the age group and gender—expectations for girls that have been narrow and that become entrenched through generations that follow. Even though opportunities for girls continue to expand, as Sharon Lamb and Lyn Mikel Brown state: "Old messages about being soft, sweet and lovely in pink have all but taken over the consumer girl world" (Lamb and Brown 4). Where did these "old messages" start? What is the trajectory over time?

Discourses across texts and across periods of time in a given society are generally consistent, in part because societal norms, such as gender roles, are embedded in and persist through culture and media. Kathryn Weibel's statement that "popular culture portrays American women as housewifely, passive, wholesome and pretty" (Weibel i) provokes questions about whether stock portrayals of girls have existed over time. Popular culture in this dissertation refers to the ideas and perspectives communicated in mainstream American culture about girlhood, such as child-rearing approaches or production of toys for children, during the time period examined. Media treatment and popular culture representations of and for girls likely reflect the common sense view of girls' (and women's) roles at given

times in society at large. Very importantly, although this dissertation focuses on girls, common sense views pertain to roles of both male and female genders.

Virtually no one questions whether people of any age take meaning from media. For example, often the media are pointed to as a cause of social unrest, breakdown of the family, and moral decline (Buckingham 3). Media's potential influence on the construction of gender roles leads to issues that are part of these larger concerns. Many concerns today are based on anxiety about media content as threats to children's stability in American culture, according to Mary Hilton (Hilton 1). Popular culture and mass media are routinely discussed as anti-educational and enemies of literacy (Buckingham 3) because educators know today's children take meaning from these sources. Young people get narratives from "a vast and lucrative culture industry for children: imaginations captured by warrior figures, Barbie dolls and the latest Disney film" (Hilton 2).

An overwhelming amount of cultural products—videos, toys, comics, ads, computer games and magazines—are aimed at child consumers. But, despite concerns noted above, scholars often overlook the lasting impact of early cultural experiences and children's popular culture, according to Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 1). Research has shown that many American children are not happy with themselves, and this may be linked to what they see in media. "Only 29 percent of high school girls and 46 percent of high school boys are happy with themselves," according to Allen (Allen 6). The comparatively larger number of unhappy girls vs. boys demonstrates that gender differences must be considered when studying children and media. For example, to what extent are gender differences social constructions? And what gender constructions recur in media?



The search for pervasive discourses in children's sections and girls' pages (in general interest magazines) and children's periodicals stemmed from belief that media content contributes to how a girl forms her identity by shaping ideas about what it means to be a girl. Perhaps, most importantly, those discourses indicate whether girls were presented with a range of roles and traits, or narrower choices. The findings here reveal assumptions about girlhood that were unquestioned in earlier eras; thus findings may be instructive regarding assumptions about girlhood today. Since such assumptions can set expectations for girls' behavior, it is important to study meanings of girlhood available in the periodicals that girls read. The research for this dissertation included a look at the history of children's periodicals from a mass communication perspective. Children's early exposure to media, especially exposure of girls to media, with a focus on meaning-making, are topics that have been relatively overlooked in past scholarship. To identify meanings girls may have taken from media—especially constructions of girlhood they read about – selected periodicals, girls' pages and books from an 87-year period (1865-1952) were studied.

Children today are persistently exposed to gender constructions in media because they grow up in a media-saturated environment. But where did children learn about gender roles when there were no broadcast media, no Internet, and especially no widespread media targeting girls (Blackford 12)? Were children always born into a world in which gender is continually emphasized through conventions of dress, appearance, color, segregation, and especially symbols and language (Fine 227)?

Children's literature is usually the first medium that children engage with of their own volition. Hence, one must assume children gather meaning from such media for their

own lives. Children's literature in this dissertation refers to mostly fiction, sometimes non-fiction texts, written for children. While children's books are not a focus here, the research did examine literature published in children's periodicals, which were very common earlier in America. Gender constructions in children's literature and periodicals today are just as controlled by societal common sense as they are in music videos and other media. In other words, child readers use a genre of media that is controlled by layers of adults and adult institutions, including writers, publishers, marketers, critics, bookstores, libraries, educators, parents, producers and marketers of commercial products and multimedia adaptations. Children's literature and periodicals are unique cultural texts because, as Beverly Lyon Clark asks, "Where else would one find a body of literature in which virtually none of those who write it, nor those who edit or publish or market it, and very few of those who buy it, belong to its ostensible audience?" (Clark 14) Those sources bear encoded meanings, and studying them and children's reading habits can provide insight about ways meaning is reproduced (Blackford 2) by child readers as they take meaning from them.

Much research about children, such as work in psychology and sociology, neglects the issue of meaning and instead focuses on the effects of reading and observing media. Such approaches tend to see children as passive recipients of external social forces rather than as active participants in constructing their own social lives and identities (Buckingham 7). An approach that focuses on meaning, such as Brownyn Davies' study of children's reading of fairy tales, pays attention to language and the shaping effect of discourse as individuals construct who they are (cited in Blackford 3). Other cultural texts and influences that play a part in that process must also be taken into account.

Some powerful influences, of course, are the people in children's lives; for example, Blackford says girls today indicate that they turn to mothers and friends, in addition to self-help books, as resources that "tell you what your life can be" (Blackford 12). Blackford quotes Michael Smith and Jeffrey Wilhelm's work that states "girls read more fiction than boys" and that books "also represent a crucial and problematic site of socialization" (Blackford 4); and Inness asserts that girls' reading, which is important to understanding how girls are socialized, provides insight into how popular reading reinforces cultural ideology (Inness 1).

"Literature makes people see and experience worlds they would not normally see, experience and think about in their daily lives," Blackford says (Blackford 1). She quotes Carol Christ as saying, "We identify with Jo in *Little Women* and imagine the possibilities of our own lives differently" (Blackford xi). In Georges Poulet's article, "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority" in Jane Tompkins' book on reader response theories, he discusses this seeing and experiencing, asserting the book, as an object, disappears – it is no longer a material reality: It "becomes a series of words, of images of ideas which in their turn begin to exist" within the reader (Tompkins 42), and it "gives itself a meaning" within the reader as well (Tompkins 47). According to Poulet, "you are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer an outside or inside" (Tompkins 42).

Scholars agree that fiction enlarges one's experience by inviting one to contemplate fictional characters (Blackford xi), but girls and boys experience fiction differently. Girls look to characters when reading, and boys look to action, according to Blackford (Blackford 12). Therefore, Blackford says, it is understandable that many see fiction as powerful, especially in girls' lives (Blackford xi), because fiction usually emphasizes

character development. One could likely say the same thing about non-fiction as well. Helen Keller's autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, first appeared in installments in *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1902. The non-fiction book tells Keller's story of her childhood in Alabama, her education with her teacher Anne Sullivan and her schooling. The text offers an inspiring story of a courageous individual who overcame tremendous challenges and likely influences young readers perhaps more than do most fictional texts.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, assumptions about public (male) and private (female) social spheres determined content and readership according to gender. Boys were encouraged to read to reinforce ideologies of masculinity while girls were to read to reaffirm the value and necessity of feminine ideals. Literature could teach lessons of specific relevance to girls and young women—often demonstrating desirable traits of womanhood (Foster and Simons 24). The text surrounding the heroines in stories revealed "appropriateness" of feminine behavior, and values that were defined by the prevailing (often masculine) hegemony (Foster and Simons 3). Thus, such stories can be seen as sites for negotiating female identity (Blackford 4).

The first girls' literature—at least literature which recognized girls as a market—was likely published in the 1860s and can be seen as an intensified version of children's literature in that it strongly sentimentalized childhood and revealed children's reluctance to enter adulthood. An example is the series of L.M. Montgomery novels—the first of which was published in 1908—that idealized girlhood. According to Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, girl readers were entranced by heroines (Foster and Simons 7), and the characters in the books they read did not look forward to growing up. Foster and Simons note that

little girls, before they reach puberty, can be courageous, competent, nurturing, compassionate and introspective; but they can also be irreverent. They are at an age when they are not yet constrained by gender role expectations. Clinical psychologist Mary Pipher notes that "almost all heroines of girls' literature come from this age group—Anne of Green Gables, Heidi, Pippi Longstocking, Caddie Woodlawn" (Allen 5).

It is of particular significance that a child's first exposure to media texts is through children's literature because that first exposure potentially shapes her further media use – how the child will read and use other texts. For example, a text read at age 8 will affect how a child then reads a text at age 10 and how she obtains meaning from a film or television show she watches at age 12. Children's literature and periodicals, which is the first mass media specifically marketed to children, can influence and shape both the content and appeal of other media and popular culture texts. One text that was highly available and accessible to girls was the periodical. Many leading children's periodicals were usually by-products of, or started out as, children's pages in adult publications. The youth-oriented magazines generally presented the same social values seen in magazines for adults (Stoneley 40).

Analyzing children's sections and girls' pages and children's periodicals revealed common features and repetitive themes in representations of childhood. Because widespread ideas about children, especially child rearing, directly affect children's experiences (James 73), the concept of childhood is important in this dissertation about girl readers and will be addressed at length in Chapter Two. Even across different genres of writing, each of which may reflect a particular discourse, significant areas of overlap appear in talk about children, according to James (James 75). Together these discourses can be

taken to constitute a dominant ideology of childhood. That is, according to James, the discourses form a "particular and persuasive representation of children which both stands in for and helps perpetuate a particular conception of 'the child' " (James 75).

Children's literature has only recently received historians' attention (Allen 5), and we have learned that, in the early 1800s, there was much less distinction in media produced for adult vs. younger readers. Early 19th-century tales for children had an authoritative voice and moralistic tone, but a relationship between narration and message was less clear as the century progressed (Foster and Simons 10). There was also less distinction in what was produced for boy vs. girl readers.

Today, however, Americans are accustomed to explicit categorization of texts according to gender. In fact, Victorian literature and culture scholar James Kincaid suggests that "ungendered seeing is not quite comprehensible in our culture;" and it is "extremely difficult for us to imagine ways in which a century or so ago gender was of little importance in the usual sort of thinking on children" (Steedman 7). Gender, in fact, is an explicit category in today's media market, especially regarding marketing to youth. For example, mass media producers of the late 1990s rediscovered the "girl market" and started targeting girls through magazines and television shows, and through products, such as cosmetics, according to Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Odom Pecora (Mazzarella and Pecora 7). Many have called this targeting of girls as a market detrimental. In *Reviving Ophelia* (1994), Mary Pipher says American society has perpetuated a "girl poisoning culture," and she contends that girls today are "coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media saturated

culture;" and "they face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior high means using chemicals and being sexual" (Mazzarella and Pecora 2).

During the 1990s, narratives in scholarship, feminist literature and even self-help books appeared in overwhelming numbers about girls "at risk," and these implicated popular culture as the source of girls' problems. These problems include poor body image, lack of self-esteem, and eating disorders, such as anorexia and bulimia. According to Janice Radway, "public discourse was dominated by worried stories about how girls lose sense of self as the culture transforms them into female teens whose only project is their own body" (quoted in Green, Strange and Brock 184). In *The Body Project* (1997), Joan Brumberg wrote: "At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the female body poses an enormous problem for American girls. It does so because of the culture in which we live" (Brumberg xvii). She argues that, although girls in the 1990s were no longer literally restrained, as may have been the case in Victorian times, they were "figuratively restrained by social and cultural norms dictating an excessive emphasis on the body" (Brumberg xvii).

The Victorian ideals which were established in Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) prepared daughters for their place in society—the private sphere, the home—as mothers and wives. They were also being prepared for what was to come when they reached adolescence. Puberty was the time when their girlhood came to a close and womanhood characteristics of femininity, modesty, delicateness, fragility and dependency were expected. The onset of these characteristics coincided with the start of menstruation, according to Gorham. (Bell 249). According to historian Susan Groag Bell, "the feminine ideal triumphed in the experience of the majority of women who grew up all through the Victorian period, and it is still with us today" (Bell 250). While appearance isn't explicitly

mentioned in the British Victorian origins, in the 1970s a *Saturday Evening Post* writer commented on what America's Victorian women were subjected to from 1837 through the early 1900s in the name of beauty: corsets and more. "The mechanical aids to wholesome beauty included nose pinchers, shoulder braces, iron weights (to give the shoulders a 'graceful droop'), and other heroic inventions" (Aaron 39). The article said beauty experts also emphasized the importance of cosmetic and medicinal products in attaining beauty in the Victorian era.

What was the state of girlhood during the time between the Victorian age and development of the current constraints? Brumberg indicates that girls have started linking identity to physical appearance earlier and earlier with each generation (Brumberg xvii). This suggests that today's issues of identity and body image have earlier origins. If so, these origins may be visible in media messages in history. Are concerns today about girls "in crisis" comparable to concerns of parents, educators and clergy in earlier eras? Popular culture and mass media messages about girls and aimed at girls help to answer this question.

Of course, no one today can know the specific meanings girls took from the texts they read in earlier eras (or any era). However, studying the historical context in which reading girls lived gives a sense of the range of meanings that were available to girls. Mass communication scholars F. Gerald Kline and Peter Clark said that the "most fruitful way toward an understanding of the importance of mass communication to young people is to look at how communication fits into a context of social relationships, perceptions and expectations" (Kline and Clark 11). Language is vital to understanding the ways of knowing



of earlier time periods, and language in media texts makes such knowledge accessible in some degree to scholars (Jones 142).

## **Theoretical Framework**

Theories from several sources, including cultural studies, feminist scholarship, and poststructuralism, influenced research and writing of this dissertation. Taken together, popular culture and media messages about girlhood indicate a certain way of talking about girls—a discourse of girlhood. Discourses are a part of a process whereby people make meaning (Gamson and Modigliani 2). To illustrate, one often sees a paradox in media content about girls: A girl shown at home sewing is praised while the same girl working as a seamstress outside the home is criticized. Each view signifies a discourse of girlhood—girl as homemaker and girl as paid laborer—and each expresses a gender norm.

Representations of girls in media tend to fit societal expectations and assumptions about gender roles; they tend to reflect constructions in society at large; and they influence how the public talks about girlhood. In this way, the media and popular culture participate in creating a cultural meaning of what a girl is, in other words – social constructions of girlhood.

The theory of the social construction of reality underlies much work of cultural studies scholars. Cultural studies, as communications scholar James Carey describes it, "has modest objectives: it does not seek to explain human behavior, but to understand." Others have stressed that it does not seek causes and effects but rather seeks to interpret significance (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 418). Cultural studies scholars of communication, then, view human behavior, or more accurately, human action, as a text.

Media users gather meanings from texts as they decipher symbols (speech, writing, gesture, etc.). In essence, media users "interpret the interpretations" (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 421) encoded by those who produce the text. Hence, construction of reality occurs as text producers encode meanings into texts and as users decode texts, taking their own meanings from them.

People can create multiple realities through the use of different symbols and different symbolic forms, such as art, science, religion. Regardless the form, the meaning-making task is the same; in the words of James Curran, the task is "to seize upon the interpretations ... and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us" (Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 424). As indicated earlier, for this dissertation it is assumed that consistent symbols of girlhood lead the public—especially girls—to certain interpretations and meanings of who girls are, or at least who girls should be.

Gunther Kress says that studying language provides a powerful way of examining structures of meaning because (quoted in Van Dijk 30) social reality is constantly mediated by and through a culture's language and message system. Or, put another way, culture, as defined by communication scholar George Gerbner, is "a system of messages that regulates social relationships" (quoted in Van Dijk, *Discourse*, 14). Gerbner adds that communications in a culture "not only inform, but form common images; they not only entertain but create publics; they not only reflect but shape attitudes, tastes, preferences." In other words, communication provides boundaries and patterns within which the processes of social interpretation and interaction go on (as quoted in Van Dijk 14). To study communication is to examine the social process wherein significant symbolic forms are "related, apprehended and used, " according to Carey (Carey 30). In the case of examining

girlhood, this means studying what is read and used by real girls as well as studying the historical context in which the content is produced and used.

This perspective follows the ritual view of communication, articulated by Carey, who said communication concerns the maintenance of society over time, for it is "not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs" that is significant to cultural maintenance (Carey 18). To illustrate, Carey describes reading a newspaper as "a situation ... in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed" and the reading shared by many – helps maintain that view (Carey 20). To further elaborate, in the words of Raymond Williams, "in any society, in any particular period, there is a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective." These are organized and lived and thus "constitute a sense of reality for most people in the society" (Williams 38). This view follows Williams' explanation of hegemony, a concept some seem to equate with ideology. But hegemony goes beyond ideology in that it is not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs; it is the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values (Williams, *Marxism*, 109). It is not the level of "manipulation or indoctrination" that is of concern in the concept of hegemony; it is the "whole body of practices and expectations, over the whole of living: our senses and assignments of energy, our shaping perceptions of ourselves and our world" (Williams, *Marxism*, 110). This "lived system of meanings and values" as they are experienced as practices, appear as reciprocally confirming and thus constitute a sense of reality for most people in the society (Williams, *Marxism*, 110). This illustrates the notion of hegemony as deeply saturating the consciousness of society as it "corresponds to reality of social experience" (Williams 38). In other words, using girlhood

as an example, it is not that anyone intentionally creates a definition of girlhood; rather, most institutions interpret girlhood in a similar way, thus creating a sense of "naturalness" of the dominant meaning – making it seem common sense.

"Ideological representations are generally implicit rather than explicit in texts, embedded in ways of using language which are naturalized and commonsensical," according to Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 44). But this does not mean that the meanings are uncontested. In fact, a concept in the theory of hegemony is that dominant ideologies constantly face resistance. As expressed in the work of Italian linguist and one-time Communist Party leader Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is a theory of power and domination that emphasizes power through the struggle to achieve consent rather than to coerce consent (Fairclough 67). Journalism scholar David Domke defines hegemony as "a system of dominance which is attained not through obliteration of the opposition, but thorough negotiations with opposing groups and classes" (Domke 279).

This conceptualization of hegemony is especially well-illustrated in the case of media messages and texts. As Stuart Hall states in "Decoding and Encoding on Television Programs," "Open texts are capable of being read in different ways by different people" (quoted in Fiske 98). The reading of text and language is therefore a process of negotiation; that is, the dominant ideology in the text is fully communicated only when there is a direct correlation between a reader's social situation and the structure of the message. A conflict of interest must be reconciled when a reader's life experiences are at odds with the dominant ideology or hegemonic message in the text. From this point of conflict and struggle, Hall developed a theory of "preferred readings." Outlining three broad reading strategies that result from different social positions of people in relation to the dominant ideology, he

called the first strategy the dominant (preferred) reading. This preferred reading is most likely when a reader is situated in a societal position allowing her to agree with and accept the dominant ideological stance contained in the text. For example, a girl who reads a novel about farm life that features women doing household tasks and men doing field tasks accepts the ideas that girls learn to cook and sew and boys learn farm tasks. The girl reader may see this separation of roles as the "reality" of most girls' (and boys') lives.

The second strategy, the negotiated reading, occurs when a person who, while generally in agreement with the dominant ideology, needs to relate the text to his or her own social position. When personal experiences conflict with the dominant ideology, readers will "negotiate" the text toward their own interests because they seek to match their experiences and beliefs with that of the dominant ideology (Fiske 101). In this case, a girl reader may "read" that her and her brother's daily tasks are not separated as completely as what she read about in the novel because she helps her brother with farm chores. Still, because most of her time is spent on domestic tasks, she perceives these as a priority for girls. On the other hand, an oppositional reading, the third strategy, occurs when the reader's social situation is in direct opposition to the dominant ideology. The reader disputes the text, in effect attempting to deconstruct the dominant ideology and construct a meaning very different than intended. For example, a girl who is an only child may spend every day helping her father and mother in both field and domestic farm work. Her reading of the novel may be that it portrays a fantasy – not a reality – virtually opposite the preferred reading. A researcher cannot know each reader's meaning, but one can know what the reader's choices were (range of roles and traits seen in texts) and what messages she was most exposed to (frequency of constructions and messages in texts).

The part of the theory of hegemony emphasizing a struggle for consent of subordinate groups underlies the negotiational and oppositional readings, which demonstrate the meaning-making process as results of a more "complex interlocking of political, social and cultural forces" (Williams, *Marxism*, 108), than is experienced with those ideological forces in a preferred reading, according to Williams. Fiske argues that the media "hail" people so they know when they are being spoken to. Ideas and concepts become dominant, and their dominance is continually reinforced because most people find them familiar and relatable to the accepted values of the day. The significance of what is being said is established by the means of coding, referred to earlier (Hall 124). Many codes, such as certain mechanisms of organization (including certain narrative structures), are so pervasive that they appear natural. By presenting symbols familiar to their readers, publishers and media producers create a "preferred reading" of a text (Jensen and Jankowski 190).

The key to the power of both ideology and hegemony is that people are not aware of their potential impact. This is partially due to the fact that ideology, which determines people's world view and defines what aspects of society they perceive as natural, is, according to theorist Louis Althusser, as quoted by John Fiske, "constantly reproduced and reconstituted in practice in the way people think, act and understand themselves and their relationship to society" (Fiske 97). This process can be especially powerful when the people affected are children. Gendered patterns of our lives can be so familiar that we no longer notice them, as this anecdote reported by legal scholar Deborah Rhode makes plain: "one mother who insisted on supplying her daughter with tools rather than dolls finally gave up when she discovered the child undressing a hammer and singing it to sleep. 'It must be

hormonal," ' was the mother's explanation. At least until someone asked who had been putting her daughter to bed" (Rhode 19).

When the majority of a culture or entire social structure subscribes to the same meanings, ideological beliefs achieve dominance, or hegemony. That said, it is rarely, if ever, the result of a conscious intent of individual members of a culture. A girl learns about who she can be from seeing girls and women represented in stories. Assumptions underlying much British cultural studies work are that meanings and the making of meanings are, in the words of cultural studies scholar Fiske, "indivisibly linked to the social structure and can only be explained in terms of that structure and its history." Thus, according to Fiske, the social structure itself is ultimately held in place by the meanings produced in culture (Fiske 96).

Writing about discourse, Kress said that "social institutions produce specific ways or modes of talking about certain areas of social life," and these "ways or modes of talking" are discourses; or, as stated by Goldhagen, people's "social reality is taken from the stream of unending conversations which constitute it" (Goldhagen 33). Variations in culture certainly influence a society's conversations. According to Carey, communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed (Carey 23); and Fairclough says the version of reality produced through the media depends on "the social positions and interests and objectives of those that produce them" (Fairclough 103), as well as the meanings that text users—in this case girls—make from them. In this dissertation, broadly addressing connections between society and media in a cultural context, hegemony means, in the words of Pamela J. Shoemaker, the "means by which a ruling order maintains dominance" (Shoemaker 194)—in this case, dominance of gender

norms. Certainly, hegemony works through media, but it also works through many other societal phenomena.

Business enterprises, media institutions, book and magazine publishers and authors support and reinforce societal norms and beliefs, which may also be hegemony, and thus they work to maintain the status quo (Belkaoui and Belkaoui 169). For example, similarities were found in views of gender roles as expressed in *Caddie Woodlawn*, a 1935 children's book, and those found in *Ladies' Home Journal* advertisements of the same era.

Assumptions about gender include differences in functions and physical structures (strength and weakness) of men and women, women's dependence on men, a circumscribed "proper sphere" (with emphasis on family) and generality of women's characteristics. Comparing the book *Caddie Woodlawn* to the selected popular culture content (*Ladies' Home Journal* advertisements) revealed consistency in how girlhood was defined. Images of "girlhood" in each text emphasized family-oriented daughters. Yet, they also indicated marginal acceptability of what may be called semi-independent young women (Edenborg 19).

The media role in hegemonic beliefs during specific historical periods is important here because media help to maintain or modify a society's hegemony as related to other societal institutions. A hegemonic belief, as described by public opinion scholar Tom Burns, "represents a social order held in equilibrium by a consensus which is both moral and intellectual and is diffused throughout the whole of the population and norms in [people's] daily lives" (as quoted in Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 62). And Domke says that "media presentation of dominant ideologies as common sense is critical in the concept of hegemony" (Domke 229). Hegemonic beliefs play a role in language used in media content since the ideas communicated can usually be linked to those of a society's dominant social



class. Language reflecting practices and ideas of the dominant social class maintains an ideological environment, a phenomenon described by Fairclough: The "ideological work of media language includes particular ways of representing the world, particular constructions of social identities and particular constructions of social relations" (Fairclough 12).

All of these elements contribute to constructing social reality. This construction, Fiske asserts, "delimits the area of the struggle for that meaning [of reality] by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated" (Fiske 103). Because interest here focuses on how girls are talked about in media and in popular culture content about girls, some further discussion of discourse is needed. Discussion of discourse analysis as a method appears in Chapter Nine, so the emphasis here is on discourse theory.

As noted earlier, representations of girlhood in media content and popular culture form a certain way of talking about girls—that is, a discourse of girlhood. The media and popular culture are powerful shapers of the cultural meaning of "girlhood." This meaning is thus socially constructed, as indicated earlier. Gamson says that discourse helps individuals make sense of issues by allowing them to "bring their own life histories, social interactions, and psychological predispositions to the construction of meaning" (Gamson 2). These histories, interactions and predispositions are influenced by many institutions, including media. For example, according to Carolyn Dyer, numerous accomplished women profiled in newspapers and magazines cite the Nancy Drew series as "central experiences in their childhood, leading them to understand that their horizons are unlimited," and they say the series "introduced them to the joys of a lifetime of reading" (Dyer 91). This illustrates the way discourses are part of the process by which individuals construct meaning (Gamson 2)—part of girls' constructing of selves, in this case. Discourses, which, as noted above, are

socially produced ways of talking about a topic, are shaped by the dominant ideologies and hegemony in a society and vice versa.

In discourse theory, text is a "site" in which different and even contradictory ideological ways of talking about subjects are articulated, but, the text, while having a coherent expressive unity, is a "mosaic" of references to other texts (Van Dijk 38). A creator of texts seeks simply to communicate, but her message contains embedded discourses and is therefore more than a simple transmission of information. If girls are consistently portrayed in one way in media and popular culture, conceptions of girlhood and certain discourses of girlhood, which reflect that portrayal as defining girls, become embedded in culture. Existing discourses structure a sense of reality and can therefore impart to a reader/viewer a notion of her own identity (Van Dijk 58).

This research borrows ideas of Michel Foucault, who said that "all utterances or texts which have meaning and which have some effects in the real world count as discourse" (as quoted in Mills 6). Mills added that a discourse "groups texts which have similar force or effect" (Mills 11) and limits the types of readings possible for, and accessible to, the reader. A discourse's influence is affected by what Weedon calls "discursive regularity"—meaning recurrence across a variety of sites and positions (Weedon 211). For example, Mills, again citing Foucault, writes that disparate texts with very few common features can still be part of the same discourse (Mills 74). This signifies that the knowledge produced within a particular historical period has certain homogeneity (Mills 75). Weedon says Foucault stresses historical specificity, meaning one must consider the emergence of particular discourses in the context of particular historical conditions under which different texts have appeared (Weedon 212).

Like ideology and hegemony, according to Mills, "discourses are not fixed but are a site of constant contestation of meaning" (Mills 16); the conflict is the essence of discourse structure (Mills 14). Mills says that discourse is something that one does rather than something to which one is subjected (Mills 88). The meanings are consistently produced by the majority of a society's institutions, and thus it is hard to locate the ideological struggles that are taking place. Some scholars refer to media messages as "structured in dominance"—meaning the range of interpretations that can be made are restricted by codes used and understood by the dominant class (Becker 1). In other words, while all individuals do not agree on a particular view of the world, all of the sanctioned utterances and texts are produced within similar discursive constraints (Mills 75).

But discourse is not forced, nor deliberate. For example, authors and publishers of children's literature and children's periodicals likely do not intend to present girls as inferior or weak. But, because the book industry's seemingly benign message is viewed in concert with messages from courts, schools, and other institutions, published texts reinforce ideologies.

Every discourse is ordered both externally and internally, according to British scholar David Spurr. A discourse is marked off against the kind of language it excludes while within its own limits is established a system of classification, arrangement and distribution (Spurr 62). In concert with this view, Hall describes communication as a "complex structure of dominance." Communication relies on discursive forms that affect its circulation and distribution. To be effective, in other words, discourse must also be translatable into social practices. The translation involves what Hall calls encoding and decoding of messages referred to above.

While the production of children's books and periodicals, popular culture texts and other media varies, the process in each case requires some form of selection, association, or omission of information. Hall explains that information must provide a familiar story to become discourse. In other words, discourse provides readers with accessible, understandable messages. Intelligible discourse is not possible without the use of codes, "which have social meanings, practices and usages, power and interest 'written into' them" (Hall 131). Certain codes are so prevalent that their ideological effect conceals the process of coding (Hall 132) and leads to the creation of "maps of meaning" and "maps of social reality" (Hall 134). For example, for girls there are codes of beauty. The naturalness of a discourse is the result of what has been excluded, according to Mills. (Mills 12) Thus, a girl's social reality regarding beauty is shaped by how it is designated as a priority for her gender. Yet, the exclusion of such a designation in favor of other qualities, such as intelligence or confidence, contributes to the discourse as well. The institutions involved in creating the discourse wield a certain power that may be best illustrated in Spurr's writing about colonial discourse: "For the colonizers as for the writer, it becomes a question of establishing authority through the demarcation of identity and difference" (Spurr 6). The way beauty is talked about creates a sense of difference between genders (dividing boys and girls) and within the gender (among girls) and ultimately contributes to how a girl forms her identity.

One goal for this dissertation was to identify prevalent representations in media content and popular culture of girls. It was assumed that media content, in concert with widespread philosophical and moral ideals, plays a significant part in shaping public perceptions and opinion. "These underlying ideals and values come from religious groups,

from the law, from educational institutions, from political movements and parties ..."

(Bocock 12), according to Robert Bocock. In Fiske's words, because "publications (tend to) reflect meanings that are circulating in the culture" (Fiske 111), the media often support particular ideological beliefs. Feminist discourse theorist and sociologist Dorothy Smith, as cited by sociologist Gaye Tuchman, emphasizes that ideology can impede knowledge by "closing off the possibilities of an analytic examination of social life" (Tuchman 179). As a result, what ought to be explained – such as what it means to be a girl – is treated as assumed or taken for granted, and embedded in discourse as such.

This brings up another relevant theory: Feminist theory is important here because of what girls may infer from media as their societal roles. According to Sara Mills, femininity is a social construct, which portrays women as passive recipients (Mills 87). This ideology could be seen as being reproduced via certain basic societal conventions that have become "natural" within a particular cultural tradition (Williams, *Marxism*, 174). Important variations occur, of course, in the range of available gender constructions in different historical periods. But, of particular relevance here, feminist research on the relationship among gender, culture, and textual production says that masculine and patriarchal forms of understanding are emphasized through mass media and that messages have a masculine "bias," which has been reinforced over time—in part because it has become "natural" and therefore unconscious (Jensen and Jankowski 30).

The concept of naturalization of a social reality is especially useful in the analysis of male dominance and female subordination, Susan Bordo says, since so much of this ideology is "reproduced voluntarily through our self-normalization of everyday habits of masculinity and femininity" (Bordo 278). These habits are part of the cultural system of

messages that cultivates images to fit the established structure of social relations (Tuchman, Daniels and Benet 47). The assumed differences between genders are not explained by historical circumstances, but are instead based on supposed "natural differences" that are invariable by definition. The status of inferiority therefore is inextricably bound to the status of difference (Marks and de Courtivron 219). A group in power propagates the reigning ideology and imposes categories: The group in power, which always needs to justify its domination, condemns those that it oppresses to being different (Marks and de Courtivron 218).

Gender differentiation, in feminist theory, uses "real" differences between the sexes—either biological or "natural"—upon which society has created, according to Catharine A. MacKinnon, some "distorted, inaccurate and irrational and arbitrary distortions of sex stereotypes and sex roles" (MacKinnon 117). The assumption that masculinity is the norm means that norm directly determined what are norms of femininity. This means, in turn, that femininity must be "elaborated, signified and explained," to use the words of Helen Damon-Moore, in relation to the masculine norm to be of any significance (Damon-Moore 8). In many ways, this opposition to maleness is the basis of the definition of womanhood (Ardener xvii)—and girlhood. Were male-associated roles and traits ever-present in girls that girl readers have read about throughout American history?

This gender structure has developed out of dominant constructs shaped by Western philosophical tradition, a tradition that set up binary oppositions: male-female, mind-body, nature-culture, reason-emotion, public-private, and labor-love. Genders are often placed in a polarity of opposites based on sexual analogy, a polarity due to women always being defined in relation to men (Marks and de Courtivron 4). Members of a given society derive

meaning from the contrasts and apply them to the genders—and hence, the meaning becomes common sense. Femininity, usually considered to embody the second half of the pairs, has been treated as meaning a tendency to be weaker, more emotional and more irrational than men, and lacking basic control over one's own life (Glenn, Chang and Forcey xvii). Masculine orientation is to be expected in a society that is traditionally and culturally male-dominated, or what is called patriarchal, rather than matriarchal (Potter 118). For example, man is seen as supremely rational and intelligent whereas woman is viewed as, in the words of Ashley Montagu, a "creature of her emotions" (Montagu 85). The major problem with assuming such differences between the genders is that "people are not highly gendered beings every moment of their lives," according to Damon-Moore (Damon-Moore 8). This is particularly true of girls' lives.

Marks cites Simone de Beauvoir to stress that the issue is not who devised this social system but rather that gender bias has been perpetuated (Marks and de Courtivron 8). Women, she says, have always been placed in the "mysterious threatened reality" known as femininity (Marks and de Courtivron 4). Women have occupied these sharply circumscribed spheres—"the home, the church, the philanthropic society or sewing circle"—regardless the differences among individuals in talents and tastes, according to Aileen S. Kraditor (Kraditor 7). Feminism exists because women have been oppressed in a wide range of social discourses (Marks and de Courtivron 4). The origins of the oppression are many—biological, economic, political, linguistic, psychological—or a combination. Even though woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man and he with reference to her, she is always the "other" (Marks and de Courtivron 44). The differentiation places women where they cannot win, according to Claudine Herrmann: "What she gains in the social

arena she will lose on a personal level" (as quoted in Marks and de Courtivron 89). "It means nothing if women are allowed to participate if it means that they have to give up everything that makes them different." For example, if a girl changes the way she communicates and dresses so that she can participate in boys' activities, she may potentially be denying those qualities that make her unique.

Alongside other social institutions, family, school, church and other media, magazines contribute to the wider social process and hegemony that defines the position of females in a society at given points in time (Heinemann 1). As Levander states, childhood is "a site of rich cultural inculcation" (Levander 3) and Steedman notes that adults' beliefs are often expressed in the figure of a child (Steedman 5). These beliefs can then come to "represent and often codify the prevailing ideologies of a given culture or historical period" (Levander 3). Many prevailing ideologies are related to gender. Examining the historical backgrounds tells more than just what happened. It can show "how the subjectivities and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed" (Johnson 6).

As stressed earlier, many mass media sources are involved in parts of identity construction, but the involvement is not conscious or planned. What Tim Morris writes about the film industry also applies to other media: "I don't think disparate writers and directors of films have a concerted message or studio heads are imposing ideology on the public. I conceive of Hollywood, not as some sort of Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus, but as an uncomtemplative mechanism for reflecting cultural common places not usually available to analysis." He goes on to say that producers of mass media content take certain things for granted because most Americans also take such things for granted,



including "ideas about the family, the status of children, and the nature of power" (Morris 43). What have been taken-for-granted beliefs—especially those that pertain to girlhood in American history?

The media investigated here—girl's pages, children's sections and children's periodicals—are assumed to convey values and instruction to readers via content they present. For example, in a children's periodical, selection of article topics and stories are telling. Decisions are often influenced by the need to keep a publication successful (Johnson 4), and as Johnson states, popular media "must speak to readers who choose to consume it." Readers, especially younger ones, select texts (or have texts selected for them) that meet particular needs or provide some sort of satisfaction (Johnson 5). This is especially true for publications directed toward girls. Magazines certainly were part of the mass media that led to the creation of a girl culture. While it is impossible to know what girls' lives were like at the points in history explored here, in Johnson's words, "culture supplies images, narratives, situations and cues" that give girls ways to name what is going on in their lives (Johnson 139).

American girls' culture has played and continues to play a vital role in shaping girls into women (Inness 2). Much of the analysis for this dissertation took womanhood concepts into consideration when discerning girlhood constructions. For example, due to the strength of the cultural stereotypes about women, girls tend to be granted less social status than men and boys (Inness 2). Thus, young females in society—with little social power, no vote, and virtually complete dependence on parents (Inness 3)—are relegated to an inferior place in American society and grow up to be women who find themselves with similar status. Girls' culture creates certain rules about what is acceptable behavior, which can have a lasting

influence from age 7 to 17, and sometimes beyond (Inness 3). This is why girls' culture needs to be explored to understand how gender works in American society (Inness 2).

Girl culture became (and continues to be) increasingly mass marketed through commodities (like books and magazines) that are manufactured by adults and sold to audience of girl consumers. In other words, as Inness explains, adults are profiting while indoctrinating girls into the behavior that society expects (Inness 3). An ideal of girlhood did not likely exist in the lives of many, if any, girls at any point in American history. Yet for the nation's girl readers, the consistent representations presented in periodicals and magazines transformed a constructed ideal into a powerful cultural reality (Johnson 3).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this dissertation recognizes that girls might resist cultural messages, or might observe the culture and not take on roles and traits presented to them. We see resistance today with girls creating their own media (podcasts, blogs, print publications, music, etc.) Girl culture is often based on an assumption of conformity, and because products demonstrate that today, it's easy to track that romantic notion of girlhood. Some cultural products that demonstrate non-conformity are often instructive to girls as well. An article about Maxine Wallace, a farm girl commenting on her life, includes authentic discussion of girl struggles: "Town girls don't speak to us farm kids unless we speak to them first," and "Popular? No I'm not. Popular girls have boys around all the time" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, Profile of Youth: Maxine Wallace — "When a girl has never been away...", January 1950). The text, from a 1950 girls' page in *Ladies' Home Journal*, illustrates that girls in earlier eras likely lived non-conforming lives, but their stories, roles, traits weren't prevalent in print. For this reason the range of talk—not just the dominant talk—was important. Would Maxine see herself in the periodicals of her time?

Chapter Two provides background regarding the concepts of childhood and womanhood in America. Chapter Three explains the research design and methods used to study girlhood across the 87-year span. Chapters Four through Six present findings from the sources alongside a historical sketch of the three eras from which primary sources were drawn.

Chapters Seven and Eight present findings about the constructions of girlhood identified in the periodical content over time. The ranges and frequency of girlhood roles are presented in Chapter Seven, and the girlhood traits are presented in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Nine presents findings about the discourses of girlhood identified in the periodical content across the 87-year time period. Chapter Ten offers conclusions and makes connections between the findings about girlhood roles and the girlhood traits identified in the constructions of girlhood.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Historical Sketches: Concepts of Childhood, Womanhood and Girlhood**

Since girls are children on the path toward becoming women, it is important to discuss the concepts of childhood and womanhood as they relate to girlhood. How have childhood and womanhood influenced the constructions of girlhood? Each of these three concepts—childhood, womanhood, girlhood—is introduced here as a basis for further discussion relating them to findings in Chapters Four through Nine.

#### **Concept of Childhood**

Child-specific institutions and laws in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Western world set the child apart as a special kind of being. But the concept of childhood has not always been as it is today. French historian Philippe Aries' claim in 1962 in *Centuries of Childhood* that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist" seemed radical to many at the time. Since then, scholars from a range of disciplines have become more alert to research about childhood. Of particular interest is how (and if) the concept came to represent (and often codify) prevailing ideologies of a given culture or historical period (Levander 3)—for example, how characters in children's literature and children's periodicals may or may not reflect the psychological and development theories of an era.

In the 1600s, the ideal child was an industrious child (Woloch 104 and Avery 16).

Parents sought uprightness for their children so they could become adults as quickly as possible (Calvert 7), perhaps because the 17<sup>th</sup>-century household was based on production (Woloch 9) and all family members assisted. It was during this era, according to Beckett, that the concept of child started to appear as distinguished from adults. This distinction was revealed gradually in material items (like clothing) and norms of acceptable behavior (Beckett 35). Before this era, as Neil Postman states, there was no need for the idea of childhood because everyone—young and old—"shared the same information environment and therefore lived in the same social and intellectual world" (Postman 36).

In the medieval world, childhood was invisible and children were seen merely as miniature adults (James 71). That started to change in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, when the use of the printing press created what Postman calls a "new symbolic world" (Postman 18). Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the concept of childhood emerged in European societies. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it was assumed that children were born evil (Heininger, et al 60) and thus parents (and society) needed to impose specific patterns of behavior on them. Still, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, one out of three children died during their first year of life and only 50 percent reached their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (Collins 11); so children were not a prominent part of the population.

Through the 18<sup>th</sup> century there was a shift away from beliefs in predestination, and adults' attitudes toward children started changing. Behavior was no longer seen as a manifestation of something; rather, it was seen as something that was changeable (Heininger, et al 3). In fact, this led to the publication of a large number of parenting manuals after 1820 (Heininger, et al 4).

When it came to material goods, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, very few products were created for children's use. Those available were used to help hasten development, like walking stools, to quickly move children into adult society. Again, the idea that children were born bad and had to be taught to be good influenced how people viewed children's behaviors. For example, crawling was seen as a bad habit and thus products were developed to urge the child to walk.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the world slowly transformed from a "remote insular and traditional colonial world" to a "mercantile propertied elite" (Woloch 34). The massive economic growth from 1800 to 1860 transformed the United States into a nation that relied on industrialization instead of agricultural and home production. Charitable organizations and reform were also popular in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and many of those had religious goals and sought moral reform by first changing thought, and then behaviors. During this era educators and moralists took children's minds seriously (Avery 18). According to Postman, children start out as "a category of people who must be taught to read" (Postman 43). What children were reading became of increasing concern in the last two decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially the "corrupting power of the novel over females" (Avery 33). As the 19<sup>th</sup> century began, books were among the consumer goods—in addition to clothes, furniture, and magazines—that were being marketed to the new middle class (Woloch 67).

In the Victorian era, there were many assumptions about the purity of childhood. Children were seen as vulnerable, yet naturally good, so childrearing efforts focused on the suppression of certain patterns of behavior. During this era it was assumed that children were born good and had to be taught in order to remain good. This assumption of innocence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fostered an idealized and sentimentalized attitude toward childhood

(Heininger, et al 33). Also, this era was one of self-restraint and control, and children's products, such as high chairs with restraining bars, reflected that (Heininger, et al 41).

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American childhood has tended to be regarded as preparation for adult life (Buckingham 7). Feminist and post-structuralist scholarship attempts to reveal the use of "the child" in society—from representations in literature to the development of laws—because of its tendency to legitimize adults. For example, literary scholar Jacqueline Rose identifies potential motives for the "making" of childhood, saying, "if we have constructed childhood as 'part of a strict developmental sequence at the end of which stands the coherent and rational consciousness of the adult mind' then children are no threat to our identity because they are, so to speak, on their way. Their difference stands purely as the sign of just how far we have progressed" (quoted in Clark 12). In fact, the modern uses of childhood in American society are closely identified with adult selfhood (Steedman x), according to Steedman, who says the term childhood came to be commonly used "to express the depths of historicity within individuals" (Steedman 12). For example, adults use the child as a way to configure or represent their pasts.

Still, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the transition from childhood to adulthood occurred relatively quickly. Children worked on farms and in shops and were expected to contribute to their family's wellbeing (Heininger, et. al 1). Schooling was sporadic and books were rare, thus family was the primary influence in children's lives (Heininger, et al 1). The attitude toward children shifted between 1820 and 1920 to the concept of child that emphasized an individual capable of being molded and improved by adults. The notion of children's natural innocence became stronger in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century when children were assumed to be so pure that their presence could "teach" adults how to

be better beings (Foster and Simons 7). During this era, there was an explosion of information about physiological and cognitive development in human beings (Steedman 5). Thinking in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century fixed childhood as a category of experience conceptualized as a time span of one's life. In effect, this signified a type of social marginalization arising from new child-rearing practices and institutions, development of mass schooling, and the grouping of children by cohort (Steedman 7). Many of these practices were based on ideas being generated at the time in child psychology and child development disciplines (James 72). According to sociologist Barrie Thorne, "conceptualizing children in terms of development and socialization imposes an adult-centered notion of structured becoming upon children's experiences" (quoted in Clark 11). Childhood was a stage on the way to adulthood and not a place to remain or be content. The discipline of child psychology indicated what children should look like at certain ages (Steedman 7).

Each new philosophical construction of childhood accompanied changes in society and everyday dealings with children, in the home, in the classroom and on the street. New social and educational reforms were introduced to "curb, control and order the activities of children," according to Allison James (James 72). The age-based social practices and stages of growth were seen as universal; yet cultures had begun, in the words of Beverly Lyon Clark, to simply "project onto infants and young children a natural opposite of the qualities prized in adults" (Clark 11). In fact, according to Holly Virginia Blackford, the study of childhood can reveal these intersections between child and adult cultures (Blackford 3). However, childhood, because it signifies a space well before maturity, creates an imagined opposite—child vs. adult—and this results in a dichotomous structure, like innocence vs. experience (Levander 5).



Much recent scholarship departs from Aries' idea that a "child is not only born, but made" (quoted in Levander 3). Sociologists and historians have shown childhood is not merely a biological phenomenon or a particular stage on the way to physical maturation; it has been constructed in very different ways in different cultures and different historical periods (Buckingham 15). According to James, "childhood cannot be regarded simply and unproblematically as the universal biological construction of immaturity which all children pass through." She adds: "It must be more critically depicted as embracing particular cultural perceptions—it is these which shape the life experiences of the members of the social category—because it is providing a culturally specific rendering of the early years of life" (James 74).

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the culture of consumption emerged to ultimately become central to Americans' lives (Fox ix). The middle class was no longer the producer of goods and was instead the consumer of goods (Woloch 169). In this new society, children faced barriers to the adult world, such as child labor laws that started to redefine roles. According to Zelizer, by 1899, 28 states had some legal protection of child workers (Zelizer 64). Overall, children were more constrained and isolated in their own world than had been true in previous eras (Woloch 8), and a great shift occurred in the economic and sentimental value of children (Zelizer 1). In early eras, children were seen as future laborers or objects of utility, but the sentimentalization of childhood that started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Zelizer 9) treated children as "economically worthless, but emotionally priceless" (Zelizer 1), according to Zelizer.

*Childhood and American Culture*

The development of childhood as a concept was intertwined with many institutions and historical factors. A pointed interest in children and childhood didn't appear until after 1865, and today's view of childhood became pervasive around this time as well. After 1865 child labor laws were introduced, the public school movement began, pediatrics became an official specialty in medical schools, and social and governmental agencies concerned with child welfare were created (Beckett 36).

The terms "childhood" and "child" are not clearly defined. Childhood was first seen as a biological category, not a product of culture (Postman 67). But thanks to a climate of enlightenment, childhood was a social principle and social fact by 1850 everywhere in the Western world (Postman 51). Generally, ideology is revealed in language use, which for purposes of this dissertation is shown in the elasticity of these terms. "Childhood" is not controlled by age limits; in fact, according to Steedman, "anyone between the age of one day and 25 years or even beyond in different contexts" may be experiencing childhood (Steedman 8). James states that the "age at which childhood ends and adolescence begins ... is both fluid and context specific" (quoted in Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 6). Contextual influence becomes particularly clear in cultures where children's social status and roles radically differ from those in the West in general. The Western ideal of schooling and education may run counter to norms in other nations because of family labor needs. For example, the survival of a family in some nations may require that every family member work, including the children, as was true in early America. The prioritization of education does not make sense in the context of their lives. In addition, American and Western childhood today tends to be portrayed as a time of security, when one is surrounded by

parental love, and often comes hand-in-hand with commodities, such as toys, phones or televisions. Such phenomena are irrelevant to many cultures (James 73).

Yet, the historicity beyond the individual needs to be explored. Caroline Levander asks: "What do ideas about children—as represented in the narratives, rituals, and legislation or common practices society develops around the child—tell us about the culture?" (Levander 3) Within the Western tradition, childhood is treated as a time in life associated with ideals of happiness and sexual innocence. According to Allison James, it is also a period of lack of responsibility when rights are to be protected and children trained—but it is not a time of rights to autonomy (James 75). The concept of childhood remains ambiguous and malleable.

Childhood is not simply a "universal biological condition of immaturity which all children pass through," says James; childhood is a concept that embodies particular cultural perceptions and statements about that biological condition. Such perceptions "shape the life experiences of members of the social category 'children' through providing a cultural specific rendering of the early years of life" (James 74). Many of today's renderings of notions of childhood come from the mass media. Some studies, such as David Buckingham's work on television and the policing of masculinity as well as Gemma Moss' histories of girls reading teen romances, indicate that media play a significant role in young people's relationships with their families and peers; and media also play a significant role in the formation of identities (Buckingham 5).

Thus, age is a social category, not a biological one (Buckingham 15). "Increasing globalization of western childhood occurs through the continuing failure to acknowledge the socially constructed nature of childhood," according to James (James 73). Judging

children and childhood by some universal standard for children can have devastating effects—not only for children in other nations, but also those living with Western ideals (James 73). Having such a standard means that those who are not of a particular class, race, intellect, aptitude, or are different in any way, may feel that they do not fit in, or are not "normal." It is important to identify ideas that shape the contextual practices and perceptions of childhood (James 74).

Scholarship today tends to explore relevant contexts. Age studies, which contest the fixed category of "child," are relatively new in studies of childhood. Some scholars, such as Lisa Bird, who studied children's after-school activities, question basic assumptions about children, such as that they are innocent and unknowing (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 7). Other common, more comprehensive approaches, such as work by Carolyn Steedman and Michael Warner, treat childhood as representative of thinking in new ways about the adult self and about social, civic and erotic elements of society. Another prevalent perspective concerns the impact of ideological work about "the child" on real children. This approach, by Gillian Avery and Karin Kumet, among others, assesses material cultures of children of diverse classes, races and ethnicities to learn how differing childhoods affect the ways children experience their lives (as cited in Levander 3). Such an approach often involves examining popular culture and mass media. According to Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, who published a text on researching children's popular culture, there is a "dearth of publicly accessible and well documented collections of children's popular culture." This makes it difficult to obtain specific, precise data and information—such as the date a book or toy originated—for research (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 10).

The study of popular culture and mass media can provide insight about childhood

and the relationship of adults to childhood (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2), because popular culture is an entry point for studying childhood as an area that is "informed by age, status, and insider knowledge of children themselves" (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2). Users of popular culture, including children, construct their own meaning from the sources. That is, children are not passive recipients of popular culture messages—especially those in mass media—as treatment of popular culture as a monolithic power, particularly regarding children, might suggest (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 1). This view reflects the idea that children are "other people" who are too immature to resist negative media influences. But the view also reflects a broad ideological construction of childhood that rests on an assumption of innocence and vulnerability and signifies adult power and control (Buckingham 4).

The ways children have traditionally been represented in media can shape particular experiences of children and re-representations of childhood (James 74). The child figure in literary representations, for example, has a long history, which popular culture and mass media expand on, portraying the established figures in new ways. For example, the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* progressed from a 16<sup>th</sup>-century folktale, to the Brothers Grimm version and beyond. Modern uses of *Little Red Riding Hood* include a Stephen Sondheim musical, Bugs Bunny cartoons, a present-day feature film adaptations, and a 2006 computer-animated children's movie. Each version manipulates, builds on and re-invents the basic "don't talk to strangers" theme.

Of course, popular culture, including mass media, are among many influences on, and resources for, children. Children are not born with resources intact and are at least partly defined through regulation by adults—parents, teachers and representations of the

state (Buckingham 15). Parents have a strong influence on their children, especially in early years of development, but by the time children start to interact with other children (around age 2), they move toward independence and individuality begins, according to Marjorie Allen (Allen 3). Gradually, even before school age, the child looks outside the family for role models, and the influence of peers and mass media increases (Allen 3). Sociological studies indicate peers and mass media have had a larger role in children's social identity in the last few decades (Allen 3). Popular literature and periodicals offer many narratives to children that influence the way they see the world and one another (Allen 3). Janice Radway says that "children gradually develop resources by taking up particular languages, objects, gestures and habits, those that are presented to them as they emerge always within and through culture. Basically, children make and remake themselves with materials ready-to-hand" (as quoted in Green, Strange and Brock 190).

At some points in history, real people served as the sole role models, and were the primary influences in children's lives. Often, those were public figures who exhibited virtues that parents hoped their child would emulate—strength, fairness, bravery, confidence, compassion, respect and honesty. Although those types of role models may no longer predominate, the virtues still are represented in popular culture and mass media, especially in books and periodicals (Allen 3). In addition, because we "currently live (and write history) at the end of a process that has both sexualized children and very determinably assigned them a sex," according to Steedman (Steedman 7), these virtues often are distinctly gendered.

## **Concept of Womanhood**

Clearly, women have played different roles throughout history, including fulfilling tasks as homemakers, workers and citizens. Their social, marital, economic and legal-political status has changed over time, however. Most significant here is the force exerted by groups of people sharing similar concerns and needs. Looking at how American women lived at earlier points in history helps us understand present-day society better. For example, as Lerner points out, women of the past faced essentially the same problems facing modern women. "The way they solved these problems, the various institutions they built, and the ideas they developed around the world and their place in it are part of the background of our own time" (Lerner 5). What women did and attitudes toward women were powerful shapers of girls' roles, traits and goals.

In the colonial era, a shortage of women enhanced women's status and position, ultimately allowing them much personal freedom. Men and women worked together, even when the law and traditions directed otherwise, because frontier conditions demanded such cooperation. But cooperation did not mean equality of status. The colonial model of womanhood was based on the concept of "Adam's rib" in that women had a central economic and social function but were constantly subordinated to men (Ryan 12). According to Woloch, in 17<sup>th</sup>-century frontier society, the British class structure did not transfer well, but the ideology of female subordination was "transported intact and easily replanted in colonial soil" (Woloch 2). This ideology meant women were ideally meek and obedient, served their husbands, cared for their children and worked in the home (Woloch 2). Household labor took most of their lives because of the need to produce food and clothing for the family (Woloch 9).

During the American Revolution era, women shared in some of the benefits of increasing wealth, urbanization and industrialization (Lerner 29). They gained more access to education and started to experience more leisure time. Nevertheless, while the nation shifted toward a subsistence economy, 18<sup>th</sup>-century women were still relatively isolated from the changing environment because most were not involved in institutions beyond family or church (Woloch 34). According to Woloch, women were mostly marginalized in public life and subordinated in private life. For most of the century, femininity was "defined by and associated with a core of inherent defects" (Woloch 41), which meant women's roles needed to be dependent and circumscribed (Woloch 42). This pattern ultimately reinforced traditional roles (Woloch 35) and, at this point in American history, the role of women started to lag significantly behind societal changes. Popular culture and mass media reflected this trend.

As women's cultural needs changed, women were sometimes addressed by popular magazines. According to Lerner, " 'woman's place is in the home' started to become a widely accepted concept" (Lerner 80). The idea of the woman's sphere, which was heavily promoted from 1800 through 1860, indicated that a woman should be confined to "a narrow social habitat without productive economic activity," Ryan wrote (Ryan 144). That said, women were responsible for guarding the national soul and strengthening the national moral fiber (Ryan 145).

Gender concerns grew throughout the 19th century. For example, in 1830 womanhood was a distinct topic of popular discourse for the first time in American cultural history. According to Ryan, a few decades later, directives of femininity were developed in novels (Ryan 142). The main standard of femininity became the nurturance of family and



society, and the main concept of femininity—central to the idea of public and private spheres—was everywhere in popular culture (Ryan 13). Along with that came the "cult of true womanhood" ideals that promoted notions of women as passive, delicate and intellectually ignorant along with notions that women were to be modest, pious and chaste. These are all characteristics outlined in Barbara Welter's 1976 text, "Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century."

Some say the nation's cultural industry started between 1830 and 1860 mostly due to the changes occurring across the country. By mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, one-fifth of Americans lived in towns and cities, and populations were spreading westward (Woloch 67). Transportation improved, urban population tripled, and, perhaps most important, markets and incomes grew (Woloch 67). This meant individuals and families were making fewer things and purchasing more (Strasser 15). By 1880, most people used factory-made products instead of homemade products. This, in turn, created markets for advertising, national brands and new goods (Strasser 6).

Included in the new goods were books and magazines for women that presented clear ideas of a woman's role in society. The new forms of transportation spread these publications to the west—publications based mostly on experiences of Eastern women. Thus, there was a widespread conformity to a single model of behavior since the transmitting of ideas was under direction of a few powerful publishers in the east (Ryan 142).

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women became conscious of gender in a way not evident in previous eras (Woloch 70). Men took jobs outside the home, thus the home and domestic space was shared less and became women's distinctive domain. While women had more

responsibility and were "given social significance and recognition," Woloch says, they did not have the power they appeared to have. Women were in a dependent role since the work they did was unpaid labor (Woloch 68). Activities expected of American women were two-fold: being proper ladies and moral guides. Some were activities of an upper class European lady. For example, during the first half of the 1800s, it was clear to girls and women that their proper sphere was at home where they, as Lerner says, were "trained to be an ornament of the home" by making social calls, creating decorations and singing or performing musical compositions (Lerner 437). Activities of women were also guided by spiritual and religious principles (Lerner 437). Both approaches meant that home was a "bastion of female values of piety, morality, affection and self-sacrifice" (Woloch 70).

The domestic values and proper sphere concepts prevailed due to "how domestic ideology found its meaning and social function," Woloch says (Woloch 146). The hope was that a good home would counter the chaos in society, and women were the keepers of that domain. Woloch indicates that this view of womanhood extended to forming the limitations women experienced: "Truncated personality proscribed for women was an antidote to a world gone mad with change, acquisitiveness and individualism" (Woloch 146).

By 1860, woman's role as guardian of the home had been solidified, but other factors intervened—some were drastic and some were subtle. The main shift was spurred by the Civil War. Women were drawn into all aspects of economic life during the war years. Women took jobs in mills in order to feed and clothe their families, similar to what they had done in the 1840s. A few women even worked at offices in the federal government, according to Lerner (Lerner 101). Some worked as nurses; some were soldiers (in disguise); others worked as spies; and many more kept farms and plantations going

while men were away in the war. Still, women's labor was only used in times of severe shortage and was not valued as equal to that of men. After the war some women entered new fields of work—in offices, government service, and retail trade. Opportunities expanded as women moved into higher education at women's colleges and teacher training institutions (Lerner 93).

By the 1860s, education was acceptable for women but paid employment was not; that changed, however, with the demands of the war because women worked in the public sphere to aid the war effort. Technological change and smaller families led to new life patterns and expectations for women—the home was no longer necessarily the center of women's lives (Lerner 94). Smaller family sizes contributed to this de-emphasis on home-centered lives for women.

### **Concept of Girlhood**

Scholarly analysis of girlhood and girl culture has long been neglected while research focused on boys. Communication scholar Angela McRobbie says that most of the "history of child and adolescent development research and theory in the United States was also a history of the development of boys." Even studies in psychology and education tended to ignore female children (Mazzarella and Pecora 1). But research about girl culture increased dramatically in recent decades. History of schooling of young women has received more attention probably than other areas of girlhood. Some examples are Lucy Bland's work on the ideology of femininity in education, Anne Marie Wolpe's examination of education policy, and Deborah Thom's investigation of the inculcation of domesticity (as referenced in Johnson 7). In 1982, Carol Gilligan's book *In A Different Voice* considered the

distinct development of adolescent girls. Still, the conditions and experiences of girls remain largely undocumented (Tinker 1). "What's written and said about American popular culture in both mass media and academic works focuses on passions of boys and men—girls are ignored," Carolyn Dyer states (Dyer 5).

Some research has focused on the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy in cultural products for girls. *Constructing Girlhood*, by Penny Tinkler, for example, explores this intersection in the production of popular literature for girls and in constructions of adolescent girls and girlhood (Tinkler 4). Tinkler argues that the changing form and content of girls' magazines are largely determined by articulation of interests of capitalism and patriarchy and how these conflicting interests are managed, negotiated and, on occasion, harmonized within the sphere of cultural production (Tinkler 5).

Other scholars who have addressed similar concerns regarding girls and consumerism are also notable. Mary Napoli, in work about the recent popularity of products marketed by 1990s child stars Mary-Kate and Ashley Olson, asks what kind of ideological work these products—which range from cosmetics and clothing, to books and videos – perform and how the cultural texts construct girlhood (Napoli 2). This follows the 1999 work of Mary Rogers, whose book *Barbie Culture*, discusses the Barbie Doll as a corporate icon for girls, and work by Carolina Acosta-Alzurus' about the recent American Girl book and doll collection and its impact on girls' consumerism (Napoli 7).

Many recent books about the mass media and girls focus on the formation of identity, and these sources consider girls as being "at-risk" in today's society. Pipher's book *Reviving Ophelia* (1994) discusses differences in how girls come of age now vs. in the past (as referenced in Green, Strange and Brock 185). Joan Brumberg's book *The Body Project*

(1997) focuses on exploring the historical origins and meaning of girls' body-image concerns. These texts assume that adult intervention is needed to protect girls from certain cultural elements (Green, Strange and Brock 184). Scholars who challenge this view include Tinkler, who points out that girls in the 1920s and through 1950—the time period addressed in her research—probably recognized preferred readings due to the similar and repetitious narrative techniques that were reinforced by other cultural forms (Tinkler 7).

The girl reader constructed as "at-risk" is a "passive, defenseless recipient to all-powerful cultural messages," according to Janice Radway (as cited in Green, Strange and Brock 185). Scholarship about mass media or popular culture influences tend to ignore that girls do not see these texts in isolation; girls also interact with family and friends and in school settings, among a variety of other relationships (as quoted in Green, Strange and Brock 185). Radway says research is needed about what people do with stories encountered in the context of a socially complex daily life.

Although girl readers may not be passive, one should not assume girls' readings are solely based on conscious decisions. As Stuart Hall posits, "while any one cultural text can offer a multiplicity of meanings to its readers, ultimately not just any meaning can or will be drawn from it" (as quoted by Tinkler 7). Most cultural messages—whether provided by popular culture or family—will likely be similar in meaning, according to Hall. Most meanings are "structured in dominance," offering a pattern of preferred options in line with the "preferred institutional, political and ideological order" (as quoted by Tinkler 7). This suggests that exploring the complex relationships of girls with products of popular culture allows one to study alternative experiences and modes of growing up (Johnson vi).

Childhood, as discussed earlier, is defined as a process of growing up, as a transition

stage of life. Transition tends to be a theme in what girlhood is all about; many girls feel in limbo. They encounter messages from school, parents, magazines and other cultural products that supposedly show them "the way" to maturity, but many girls seem never to feel they are on "that" path and thus fear that they will never reach "the" destination. Of scholars who have referred to their own such girlhood struggles, Radway said: "Like hundreds of thousands of others, I was a girl in the 1950s, a teenager in the 1960s and a young adult in the 1970s. Throughout I was desperately trying to figure out what I might make of myself with the materials I had been given during the years of my coming of age" (cited in Green, Strange and Brock 183). And feminist scholar Germaine Greer, at age 50, wrote: "All my life I've been trying to turn from being a girl into being a woman" (as quoted in Johnson vi).

Parents, teachers, friends and a variety of cultural texts influence the growing-up process, yet, the general consensus among scholars seems to be that "growing up" is simply a stage in a person's life. Regardless the label – child, girl, tween, youth, adolescent, teenager, teenage girl, schoolgirl—a girl is told she is going through a particular stage in her life (Johnson 153). According to Lesley Johnson, reflecting from the stance of adulthood, the "meaning and significance [for her as a girl] lay in eventually achieving a stable and responsible adult identity." Thus, the meaning of girlhood lies in its ending (Johnson 149). More specifically, according to Johnson, the definitions of growing up, or of girlhood—even if contradictory – all tend to share the assumption that girls will confront the desire for the freedom of girlhood and the contradictory desire to give up that freedom to attain maturity (Johnson 153). These messages say a girl is someone who has distinctive needs and interests that make her a member of a specific group (Johnson 153).

Many of these messages can be found in the texts girls read, from magazines to books. Children's literature history is intertwined with women's history in that it was one of few approved early outlets for women's published writing. Thus, according to Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, children's literature has often "functioned as a perfect vehicle for the alienated woman to work through her own dilemmas and preoccupations via imaginative constructs within a conventional format" (Foster and Simons 27).

Clearly, popular culture and mass media have roles in the making of feminine subjectivity—or awareness of what it means to be female—in this case the subjectivity of girls. Today, many say that girls, in the words of Radway, are "bombarded by redundant messages of titillating teen TV shows, by sexually explicit lyrics of pop music, by print and video images of anorexic models, and endless quizzes about heterosexual mating and dating in teen magazines" (as quoted in Green, Strange and Brock 184). Today, girls often name actresses, athletes and singers as their role models, and, according to Holly Virginia Blackford, many say television and magazines are sources of information for solving problems in their lives.

But the concern with girls goes beyond message consumption; representation is central. Not only are girls consumers of popular culture; they are subjects of popular culture (Walkerdine 3). For example, in the 1930s the working-class girl was commonly featured. The cartoon character Annie and child actress Shirley Temple are other examples (Walkerdine 4). These representations often emphasized being "free from adult interaction, along with ensuring liberal democracy," according to Valerie Walkerdine (Walkerdine 4).

Of particular interest here is what media and other cultural texts may "say" to girls. Literature scholar Mary Hilton emphasizes that "popular culture can take a place alongside

more crafted literature as a vital resource of learning" (Hilton x), and she notes that many texts for children today are "designed by the toy and media industry and delivered by television, computer games, comics and pulp fiction" (Hilton x). Also of interest here, of course, is what the media and cultural texts may "say" to society (including the general public, parents, educators, etc.) about what is expected of girls.

To reiterate, a concern here is the influence of media and popular culture on the creation of cultural identities, especially the shaping of girls' identities and their future societal roles. Representations of girlhood have been socially constructed via media content and popular culture across America's history, and scholarship has recently increasingly focused attention on these. In the book *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (1998), Valerie Walkerdine, who says that pre-teen girls have traditionally been overlooked in cultural studies, explores how society sees young girls, how girls see themselves and how popular culture and mass media mediate those views.

Since much of the research in this area focuses on girls and present-day popular culture or exclusively addresses British or Australian girl culture, including literature and periodicals, there is a need for more study of American girlhood in history. The issue of what shaped girlhood in earlier historical periods has not received much attention. While the text forms are not the same in all eras, the impact may have been similar. Were girls in earlier eras inundated with popular cultural texts as are girls today? If not, what were perceived dominant influences shaping their growing-up process?

### *American Girlhood*



Early in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century girls were not always socialized to femininity, yet most were trained to cook and do needlework (Ryan 52). Still, this upbringing was not as rigid as one might expect. For example, in 1750 Benjamin Franklin wrote to his mother about his daughter:

Sally grew into a fine girl and is extremely industrious with her needle and delights in her book. She is a most affectionate temper and perfectly dutiful and obliging to her parents and to all. Perhaps I flatter myself too much but I have hopes that she will prove an ingenious, sensible, notable and worthy woman like her Aunt Jenny (Coleman 14).

By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century attention to the upbringing of children (Woloch 56) increased. Once children were recognized as individuals with distinctive characteristics and capacity for reason, concern increased about the values and experiences they were exposed to (Lerner 56). Schooling was not a priority for girls. Lerner wrote, "female education was preparatory to altruism rather than personal achievement" (Lerner 150). Girls were basically put in training for the private service of others.

This lack of focus on girls' education was reflected in how little was being written for girls to read. In the mid-1800s, children's series books were published, but none specifically for girls (Inness, Nancy Drew 3). By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, boys' adventure series and dime novels were popular—but these were not for girl readers, either (Inness, Nancy Drew 4 and Foster and Simons 8). Texts deemed appropriate for girls were religious, evangelical and didactic. Anxiety about damaging effects of novels on female readers was even stronger regarding young female readers (Foster and Simons 1). Still, many sentimental, domestic novels targeted girls. This suggests girls' literature had a precarious status between nursery/school room tales and adult fiction.

Domestic realism was the model for most popular literature in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Texts focused on family and neighborhood and had geographically specific settings (Foster and Simons 4). One example is Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, which was published in 1868. A contemporary review of the book published in *Harper's* called it "a rather mature book for the little women, but a capital one for their elders" (Foster and Simons 9). Edward J. Salmon's perspective on girls' reading was similar in 1886: "Girls' lit performs one very useful function. It enables girls to read something above mere baby tales, and yet keeps them from the influence of novels of a sort which should be read only by persons capable of forming a discreet judgment" (as quoted in Foster and Simons 1).

From 1830 to 1860, women played a large role in a civilizing mission and so efforts were made to reconstruct the female personality, a process which began with the early socialization of girls. Author Lydia Maria Child started a socialization project in 1830 (Lerner 147). In fact, antebellum American mothers were informed by domestic experts to instruct their "daughters to be 'useful' within the context of the family" (Formanek-Brunell 8). This was seen as natural training that they would need in the future as wives and mothers of citizens (Formanek-Brunell 10).

As noted earlier, in the 1800s childhood was not as defined as today and did not last as long; much of girls' "training" lessons likely came early in their lives. As Woloch writes, "Daughterhood was primarily a long apprenticeship in housewifery" (Woloch 8). Lerner explains, "girls played with dolls to give them a 'playful apprenticeship' in the adult female role" (Lerner 148). The games girls played were usually differentiated carefully from those played by boys (Lerner 149). Yet, the onset of puberty generally guided when play and games were to change or end. For example, in the 1820s girls often played along side

brothers until judged "too old" for sports and games. One girl of the era, Una Hunt, referring to girls engaging in boys' activities, recalled her mother's advice after she fell out of a tree: "Una, you must learn to climb better" (Tarbox 37). The American woman in early 19<sup>th</sup> century is most often thought of as a selfless provider and domestic expert, but, while most girls who hadn't reached puberty were not yet taking on the duties of womanhood, they were to prepare for them (Tarbox 37).

### **Chapter Three**

## **Window Panes and Mirror Frames: Content and Textual Analyses of Girls' Pages and Children's Periodicals**

In early adolescence girls start to censor their own thoughts and feelings based on what parents, teachers and other sources say, according to mass communication scholars Lisa Duke and Peggy Kreshel. As girls in the past internalized cultural prescriptions for acceptable feminine behavior (Duke and Kreshel 46), what models of behavior were they likely to see that they could emulate? Because interest was in what they might see through reading, research identified what was being presented to American girls in selected periodicals (described later in this chapter) from 1865 to 1952. What direction were girls being given or shown directly or indirectly through characterizations (of fictional and non-fictional) girls, through outright instructions and discourse, about:

- a) Who or what could girls be (roles), and
- b) How could girls be (traits, learned or inculcated)?

These two research questions are detailed along with others, later in the chapter. At this point, some notes about assumptions underlying procedures are needed.

First, the word "could" is used intentionally instead of "should" in the above questions, because no judgment is made here about the roles and traits. The word "could" implies options in the prescriptive messages presented in reading material available to girls.

Second, because it was assumed that variations in roles and traits seen in the reading material implies choices for what girls could do and be, research also sought whether a range of roles and traits appeared in what girls could have read. For example, Nancy Rost Goulden and Susan Stanfield say that the weeping Elsie Dinsmore character in 1867 literature could have a negative influence on girls (Goulden and Stanfield 185). These scholars were commenting in a 2003 publication on something that was not of their era, however, and neglected to note that books featuring brave, active, strong non-conformist heroines could negatively influence girl readers, as well. The positive or negative nature of the girls in reading material is beyond the scope of this dissertation, however. What matters here are the range and types of roles and traits that the girl readers had the opportunity to observe. Put another way, what choices of meanings were available to girls through what they could have read?

A third assumption here, because girls are children, is that content in children's periodicals and pages in general-interest magazines indicate the way girls are being perceived and the way gender is constructed. Very importantly, as indicated earlier, it is assumed that girls learn from such constructions what they aspire to be and become.

These assumptions shaped the research purpose to discover what kinds of constructions (indicated by roles and traits presented) and discourses of girlhood were likely to be seen by girls who were reading periodicals and children's pages from 1865 through 1952. A secondary objective was to determine whether/how these constructions and discourses changed over time because this information can be instructive about conditions that may prompt changes in gender norms. It may also be helpful for discerning when changes are likely to occur, whether norms rise and fall, remain stable, or revert to

previous stages over time – and what cultural strains seem associated in these circumstances. The 87-year period was divided into three eras of roughly equal lengths, and girls' reading material was selected from each for study, as detailed later in this chapter.

The importance of other influences on girls, including family, church, friends and school are recognized here, as did Louise Rosenblatt. But it is assumed that, of all elements entering into a girl's educational process—except, of course, the actual personal relationships and activities that make up her family and community life—literature (and, by extension, other media) have the greatest potential influence through girls' assimilation of ideas and attitudes (Rosenblatt 173). Examination began with 1860s periodicals because the cultural definition of girlhood was becoming strong by then. This is illustrated by the fact that constructions of girlhood appeared strikingly similar in British and American media, despite very different approaches to child rearing and family life, according to Nelson and Vallone (Nelson and Vallone 4).

The 87-year time period from 1865 through 1952 was selected to allow for identifying constructions and discourses of girlhood from the time children began to be a market for mass media products until the freeze on television station licensing was lifted and Ultra-high Frequency (UHF) channels were unveiled (Driscoll 59). In other words, the era of television is excluded because it began to drastically change the media market. The time span allowed the chance to look for differences in representations of girlhood in different eras, when different dominant cultural trends likely affected girls and women. Methods of analysis included simple forms of content analysis and textual analysis followed by discourse analysis. Before explication of the selected reading material, research

questions and methods, the following discussion of girls' and children's socialization through reading provides necessary foundation at this point.

### *Socialization through Reading*

Socialization into femininity begins early: girls' consciousness of gender might be influenced by interaction with media early in life. When girls read texts, they recognize themselves as belonging (or not belonging) to the group being written about, according to Dawn Currie (Currie 117). The influence of the cultural environment can be envisioned as setting the broad limits within which the individual can develop and within which lies whatever freedom of choice she has (Rosenblatt 149). The boundaries and range are of interest here, because those indicate how much choice girls could perceive for themselves in media. Did they see themselves or a model of someone they could aspire to become?

According to Angela Hubler's study, girls use three reading techniques—liberatory reading, critical reading and identification – and these show girls are not passive recipients of either "positive" or negative" images of women in literature. Rather, the reading strategies mean girls are actively engaged with what they read; they "participate with the author in the construction of text at the same time that the text constructs them as readers," says Hubler (as cited in Inness 271); the same is true for periodicals (as cited in Inness 273). Sometimes girls identify directly with what they read, such as a girl reader whose letter was printed in a 1928 issue of *Country Gentleman*: "Jo March has been my good chum since I was ten years old, at which time I first became acquainted with her. Now I am seventeen and we are still wonderful pals. I know why I like Jo the best! It is because we are so very much alike in our tempers, tongues, literary and dramatic inclinations, awkward appearance

and cooking ability. ... the memory of her never fails to make me want to sit down on that worn sofa and talk, talk, talk with her for three, no, six whole hours. — Verna Bricker" (*Country Gentleman*, March 1928).

Other girls were perhaps seeking a different experience than their own. A 1932 article in *Country Gentleman* explores this. "Books, like daydreams often carry one far, far away into new roles! There are some girls who perhaps would delight in the idea of stepping into the costume of a gypsy ..." (*Country Gentleman*, November 1932).

Children go through a process of imaginative trial and error, trying out different modes of behavior and working out their probable effects. Literature permits something resembling ideal experimentation because it offers such a wide range of vicarious experiences (Rosenblatt 190). That said, Rosenblatt has said that, given the "interplay of forces acting on the individual, the literary work, unaided, will probably have little weight if its emphasis is opposed to images that many of the agencies in the society around [the child] are reiterating." If the literary work does not reflect or accommodate dominant conceptions, the reader may reject what it offers readers (Rosenblatt 187). Is rejection prevalent in children? Or less prevalent than in mature readers?

A researcher cannot know the meaning each reader takes from a text—but can learn something about what the choices were (range) and what messages were most available (frequency) at a given time in the past. The range of choices is important because researchers, although unable to know how girls read texts, can get a sense of the range girls were presented by reading the texts and by exploring how readers remember their heroines in children's literature. Many female readers experience gaps in how they remember texts of



favorite childhood literature (Inness 270). Girls will focus on aspects of a text – for example, on behavior they found desirable—while ignoring aspects that undermined desirable behaviors. Texts often constructed the "perfect girl," which said to reading girls that they were to avoid damaging influences that increase around the time of a girl's early teens (Inness 266). Was that perfect-girl message reaching readers? It is possible that girls resisted the ideological effect of the stories they read (Inness 266).

Today a girl might look at the child-cartoon character Dora the Explorer, a young wildlife preservationist who has been described as one of the best role models in today's girls' early worlds. When creators of Dora developed a tween version of her character, they struggled to define her: Can she still be a wildlife preservationist? Or does she now like to shop? Is she a world-class runner or a fashion icon? Once a girl, in literature or in animation, grows up, the producers of the girl seem to struggle with how she should be as a grown-up. This leads one to believe that many creators of girlhood characters, past and present, likely struggle with the need to narrowly define girlhood.

### *Childhood, Girls' Reading and Women's Periodicals*

To study girls' socialization through their reading material requires discussion of children's reading (noted earlier), as well as discussion of women's periodicals because girls are children on the way to becoming women. Girls learn from many sources, including reading, how to become and be women—a process that begins at birth because they are born into a world where culture, hegemony and discourse about girlhood and womanhood exist in structures to which they conform. "At the time of birth, culture takes over, announcing sex with colors and labels," Ryan has written (Ryan 3). This culture is not

internalized until around age five or six, when a child starts to recognize these material- and language-based signs, at which point they may start to model their behavior after adults.

Other scholars similarly emphasize the shaping structures into which children are born. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains, "We become individual under the guidance of cultural patterns, historically created systems of meanings in terms of which we give form, order and point to direction in our lives" (as quoted in James 74). And Greene has written that "people's experience of being in the world is profoundly influenced by the culture and historical period they find themselves in" (Greene 36). What are the origins of these patterns and systems? More important, what are the ideological aspects of childhood? Childhood reading is likely important in answering both questions.

Interestingly, childhood as a concept came to be during an era when information exclusively controlled by adults was made available in stages to children in what were judged to be appropriate ways. Clearly, the form of childhood in any culture or historical period is shaped then by, in James' words, the "articulations of the systems of meaning through the lives of its individual child members and their adult caretakers" (James 74).

For most of the history of childhood, the primary focus has been on child development, mostly concerning the delineation of normal development (Greene 20). Defining "normal" is a subjective task, but those in the field of developmental psychology failed to recognize it as such. Greene explains that "value-laden assumptions have shaped [the field's] selection of behavior worthy of its attention and colored its definition of what is normal behavior." Behavior that is defined as normal or appropriate development usually corresponds to the current norms and models of a particular society (Greene 21).

In the Western tradition, the norms of childhood highlight the ideals of happiness and innocence, as noted earlier; childhood is described as "a period of lack of responsibility with rights to protection and training, but not autonomy" (James 75). This view of childhood allows adults to attribute an overarching categorical identity to individual children. This identity "specifies and justifies children's marginal position within Western societies" and denies their personhood (James 75). The "discourses concerning personhood, self, the significant achievements and goals expected of a person of their sex, age and social location" define what a child is (Greene 36). One source of these discourses is children's literature (a form that at least in part exemplifies control since it is not being created by those who consume it). Hence, girls begin to understand something about who/how they should be very early in their lives.

Girls' reading of books is a foundation for literature unlike girls' reading of teenage periodicals. Combining the scholarship on children's literature with that on women's periodicals is more appropriate here than looking at studies of girls' periodicals. Most young women's periodicals are aimed at girls in their teens. Reading these teenage magazines provides a different experience than do children's periodicals and girls' pages in general-interest publications. The latter two were more likely to be approved reading—and perhaps even encouraged—by parents and other adults than some of the more teen-oriented publications.

Textual and thematic analyses of children's literature, according to literature scholar Linda Christian-Smith, confirms that "much of children's literature presents a view of the world that routinizes gender: women in the kitchen; men outside; women sharing, caring or

nurturing; men leading directing and doing" (Christian-Smith 23). This type of societal discourse helps teach desirable and undesirable behavior for girls and also sets parameters of girls' behavior (Inness 6). "Popular images not only provide inducements to behave within socially acceptable limits, but also expose in the process the social and political functions of gender differentiation" (Ryan 17). Popular children's literature has offered popular characters, and, according to Vallone, "beloved girl characters create girl culture and help define it" (Vallone 5). Mostly, literature like that read for this dissertation indicated virtues girls should strive for and vices they should avoid (Avery 9).

After the 1830s a young girl's acculturation, featured in books and magazines, not only dictated marriage and motherhood; it also inculcated the specific virtues that these roles entailed (Lerner 148). Gwen Tarbox traced the shifts in girl characters. In the early 19th century, themes of gentleness and simplicity were common traits for girl characters. Later, more emphasis was placed on piousness and cheerfulness, based in evangelical notions, especially those of self-sacrifice (Tarbox 34). Story settings were often in the home or with family. Also from the late 19th century into the early 20th century, girls were pushing the limits of the proper sphere. Still, the ideal girl was modest and submissive. For example, according to American studies scholar R. Gordon Kelly, a good girl was slow in school, yet she conscientiously applied herself (Kelly 79).

The characteristics of girls emphasized in literature depended on the assumed age of the reader. As girls grew into their late teens, preparation for adult roles became more pressing in texts, and inculcation of feminine personality traits were stepped up (Lerner 149). It is important to note that, while the intended reader may have been a teenager, younger girls also read these books.

Girls' fiction did not exist as a comprehensive body of literature until the late 19th century (Cadogan 9), when publishers recognized the nature and interests of young girls. Books quickly became a medium for reinforcement of social prohibitions and expectations of girls (Cadogan 9). Most early girls' literature did not have strong female protagonists, and stories were likely to be about relationships, focused on friendships or family (Odean 5). Girl's stories were typically intensely domestic and interior (Foster and Simons 23). Where boys' novels tended to revolve on a young man's encounter with the outside world, girl's novels focused on character and relationships (Heininger et al 106).

As the 20th century began, the number of women authors of children's books increased. It turns out that many American girls who read these books in the 19th century accepted the view of life presented to them, including women's proper role. Not only did many accept it; "they absorbed and internalized it and eventually passed it on to a new generation," according to Heininger et. al. These girl readers became women writers, and the books they wrote for children often suggest how the "processes of adaptation and accommodation actually worked," the authors say (Heininger et. al 117). This may help explain the cultural lag between events in 20th-century society and what appeared in books and other publications, like magazines, in the early 1920s. According to Lerner, magazines were especially "playing catch up in content in the early 20th century" (Lerner 439).

So what was that content like? A study of four popular women's magazines, *Ladies Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Delineator* and *Good Housekeeping*, showed that 85 percent of fiction in them during the first 20 years of the 20th century "provided escape or reinforcement of social and moral values (or both)," according to Ellen Hoekstra

(as quoted in Nye 45) through six basic plots. The most prominent plot was boy-meets girl and often ended with marriage. Then there was the plot where a woman learned a lesson through suffering or punishment for her wrongdoing, which often consisted of being foolish, irresponsible or "bad" in some way. Another plot was the uniting of child and parent after separation or adoption; this is related to the plot of mother-centered stories. These plot lines both idealized children and glorified the maternal role. A common theme in problem-solving stories was a wise older woman giving advice. Finally, one plot was of the working girl who achieves fulfillment through employment (Nye 45). A common thread through all of these, according to the study, was that women or girls placed in a traditionally feminine role almost always live happily (Nye 45).

Girls' fiction of the early 20th century reveals some similar plots. For example, during the era of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Anne of Green Gables*, a number of texts focused on the age span from 11 to 17, showing the "passage from childhood to adulthood" (Heininger et. al 113). These texts were primarily character studies in the sentimental romantic tradition, yet they were fairly realistic. The characters Anne and Rebecca embody the idea of childhood that celebrated the child as child. The stories show them transforming lives of others and especially bringing happiness to adults. Interestingly, as Heininger et. al describes, the two girl characters are never really wrong or bad; they merely make childish mistakes (Heininger et. al 113). This is a shift from earlier narratives because the girls' child-like behavior and attitudes do not block the path toward traditionally womanly responsibilities. Heininger et. al write, "neither ambition nor achievement had destroyed the selfless sense of duty" (Heininger et. al 114). That selflessness at the core of

the 19th-century, true-womanhood model continued into the 20th century. Yet, what was acceptable in children was not tolerable in young women (Heininger et. al 111).

A plot around transition from girl to adult was particularly popular in the early 20th century. In fact, it was so strong that, according to Stoneley, the "girl at an awkward age" came to dominate the American imagination from the 19th century into the 20th (Stoneley 1). A girl could hardly miss the message that puberty would be the beginning of her placement into the "woman's sphere." Adolescence, as defined by a girls' culture, was the time when her mind and character would be molded to fit the "model society had prepared for her" (Heininger et. al 118).

Adolescence was not only a transition, but also a life-changing shift some did not welcome. According to Heininger et. al, even books intended "to perpetuate the conventional ideals revealed mourning and sometimes outrage just under the surface" about growing into womanhood; and, at the very least, there was a sense of loss and nostalgia for childhood (Heininger et. al 11). American girls often enjoyed a season of freedom before they "became women," a time a girl could choose to either rebel against or accede to the demands of her culture. Either way, the girl could not ignore that a certain destiny was laid out for her, one that was much different from that of her male counterparts (Heininger et. al 118). This differentiation between the genders was articulated especially well in 1777 by Hannah More when commenting on the upbringing of girls:

That bold, enterprising spirit, which is so much admired in boys, should not, when it happens to discover itself in the other sex, be encouraged, but suppressed. Girls should be taught to give up their opinions betimes. ... It is of the greatest importance to their future happiness that they should acquire a submissive temper, and a forbearing spirit; for it is a lesson the world will not fail to make them frequently practice, when

they come abroad into it, and they will not practice it the worse for having learnt it the sooner (Heininger et. al 118).

Comparing this statement to a text produced more than a century later, *Rebecca Of Sunnybrook Farm*, Heininger et. al said that More's prescription was not out of date (Heininger et al 118).

### *Reading and Meaning*

The previous chapter and the three that follow give an idea of the social setting of people and resources that were available to make meaning-making possible in the years examined for this research. The discussion here concerns the cultural process and practice which engage people in meaning making. This is important as a foundation for explication of methods later in this chapter.

If we assume that periodicals simultaneously replicate and question prevailing social and gender role models and follow the same behavior patterns already set, we can see how examining magazines can reveal what girls were expected to do and not to do: "The assumption is that one could track a gradual shift in attitudes toward female roles that would occur from mid-[19th] century onward," by examining these publications, according to Foster and Simons (Foster and Simons 108).

The perceived power of reading is important. Girls' fiction is said to invite "a close and sustained identification between a reader and character" (Stoneley 10), and the genre encourages girls to identify with heroines in particular (Foster and Simons 24). Because reading is a means for constructing and negotiating identity (Christian-Smith viii), the effect of reading can be very significant. In fact, Brownstein writes that "girls have learned



from novels about the most important things in their lives" (Brownstein xviii), perhaps because reading is both a social practice and private experience. The social element can be demonstrated in the fact that two very different women with different backgrounds can share reading experiences (Foster and Simons ix). The private experience seems clear in a statement by Amelia Earhart after her trip across the Atlantic in the 1930s:

... of course girls have been reading so-called 'boys' books ever since there were such. But consider what it means to do so. Instead of closing the covers with shinning eyes and the happy thought, "That might happen to me someday!" the girl turning the final page can only sigh regretfully, "Oh dear, that can never happen to me because I am not a boy (Odean 1).

This woman of great accomplishment still recollected the limiting messages books provided her as a young girl. Her statement illustrates how a girl, in Vallone's words, "internalizes the implicit and explicit ideological messages communicated by her reading" (Vallone 5). These messages join with those from her family, community and social class, among other sources. Sometimes all the messages will concur; other times they will not. As noted earlier, readers accept some aspects of traditional femininity but may also resist them. For example, one woman's recollection of her girlhood reading reveals her negotiation of the book's conclusion: how the outcome of the text did not affect her individual reading of the book:

When I went back to books I loved as a girl, those that I remembered as encouraging my own desires to rebel against a repressive version of femininity I was shocked. My fond memories of Carol Ryrie Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn*, dominated by the exploits of the protagonist, did not include the conclusion to the novel in which her father folds her back into the cult of domesticity (Inness 267).

She was not the only one affected in this way. A 1993 study of young girls showed two out of three girls ignored or blocked out Caddie's transformation (as quoted in Inness 269). These girls interpreted the text in their own way that resisted the message's ideological effect. Certainly, there are more than a few ways to "read" a book or magazine. Examples are the three reading techniques Huber explained, as mentioned earlier: libratory reading, critical reading and identification.

Even though girls can determine a different meaning from a book than was intended, an individual reading can be shifted by other factors. O'Keefe explains, "If hundreds of stories told girls that aggression must be denied or endured or placated, never challenged, if countless heroines were praised for subjugating their own needs in order to serve others, it is hard to believe that these messages had no effect" (O'Keefe 21). Girls' fiction likely "contributed to a pattern of dependency and subservience," but again, books were not alone in inculcating such behavior (O'Keefe 20). Regardless of "whether children's books merely represented feminine values and stereotypes or whether they also successfully inculcated them – books were an enormous presence in the lives of girls in the pre-television era" (O'Keefe 23).

### *Media, Socialization and Gender*

There is much interest in how media affect a child's socialization process. Media likely have played a role in creating the myths and ideals about females across time because, according to cultural historian Warren I. Susman, the monopoly on the interpretation of society's myths resides in a special class that includes media. Change

occurs very slowly in part because few question the nature of the social order (Susman 9). Among scholars who have written about the socialization impact of media, Neil Postman points to exploration of how the printing press created childhood and how electronic media are erasing childhood (Postman xii).

While media are a part of the environment a child grows up in, they are not the only, nor the main, influence. Parents are usually the most constant influence on a child. As Calvert states, "parents don't merely raise their children—they define them." Parents accept certain definitions of childhood, often those which are the most current in their culture, when considering the nature and needs of their children. Calvert explains that most often parents "try their best to bring their youngsters into the accepted patterns" (Calvert 149).

These accepted patterns are most obvious when it comes to gender. In societies where the gender order is patriarchal, it is characterized by a particular version of femininity and masculinity. According to Christian-Smith, femininity is defined as the complement of masculinity that emphasizes traits of compliance and subordination that accommodate desires of men. Other traits include "sociability, passivity and acceptance of domesticity and motherhood" (Christian-Smith 129).

All such cultural patterns shaped girls' ideas of what they wanted to be and what they wanted to do during the eras considered here. As Calvert describes, this may be why parents tell themselves and each other that "any baby girl is dainty, pretty and a little coquette and that any baby boy is strong and brave and quite the little man" (Calvert 3). It is a gender discourse. Then material goods are used to modify children's appearance or behavior to meet social and cultural expectations. The world children live in reveals a great deal about their accepted place in the larger world (Calvert 5).

The themes and messages presented in children's magazines reveal some details about these worlds. These forms of media indicate what was considered appropriate for children to be exposed to in given eras. They also provided cultural definitions of "what is, what is good, true, beautiful and what things go together" (Inge 150). For example, best sellers may be useful for tracing changes in dominant beliefs and behavior patterns as they take place across the decades. The same can be said for magazines. According to Searles, magazines helped women understand what was expected at home and in the community, as well as what was expected behavior in each role. For example, in the early 1900s, *Ladies' Home Journal* articles indicated that women who neglected their natural duties and resisted their "innate feminine nature" would "suffer and eventually repent," Searles says, and the content often stressed the importance of a woman submerging her identity to assist others (Searles 264). Since the American female from young girlhood is encouraged to buy periodicals, it is likely that girls were also encouraged to "believe in certain circumstances as normal and to be taken for granted" (Wolseley 109). Popular reading can reinforce dominant cultural ideologies (Inness Nancy Drew, 1997). This is why girls' reading is seen as such an important building block to understanding how girls are socialized in culture.

Historian Joan Scott asserts that four interrelated elements constitute gender as a material and discursive practice. One, culturally available symbols evoke multiple and (often contradictory) representation (and myths.) The interesting part is which representations are invoked, how and in what contexts (Scott 1067). The second element is "normative concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities." In other words, these are typically in the form of binary opposites representing masculinity and femininity. The

concepts are expressed in religious, educational, scientific and legal and political doctrines. For example, a 1908 Supreme Court decision limited the number of hours women could work based on women's assumed physical weakness. The moments the concepts are contested are of interest; Scott writes, "The point of new historical investigation is to disrupt the notion of fixity, to discover the nature of the debate or repression that leads to the appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation" (Scott 1068). Third, kinship systems and social institutions help construct gender, such as schools and friendships. Fourth are subjective identities as they are constructed at the level of individual biography and collective social functions. This is where a girl's own life experiences and interactions with peers build her view of gender.

Clearly, countless factors contribute to the construction of female identities, yet periodicals are key sources of early socialization of girls. Magazines tend to present a clear and coherent message about what it means to be a young girl in America. Often that message focuses on "strategies for fitting in and improving attractiveness" (as quoted in Duke, and Kreshel 47). Magazines can be seen, as McRobbie says, as "a mechanism by which girls' leisure time was controlled and exploited" (as quoted in Duke, and Kreshel 47). Was this always the case?

## **Methods**

Girls' behavior is often an index of cultural continuity and cultural crisis, according to Catherine Driscoll, who notes a series of public redefinitions of Victorian girlhood to illustrate (Driscoll 15). In fact, Western public discourse about girls emerged in the Victorian Era. Research for this dissertation focused on eras after the girlhood discourse

emerged and rested on an assumption—based on reading of secondary and primary sources—that traditional 19th-century gender roles and traits would appear in girls' texts across the 87-year period considered here. It was assumed that constructions and discourses in media reflect main trends, and thus, shifts in trends will accompany or follow shifts in constructions and discourses of girlhood.

### *Research Questions*

As a reminder to readers, two research questions asked what reading material presented to girls about 1) who or what girls could be (roles) and 2) how girls could be (traits, learned or inculcated). This study of media texts (primary sources as used here) focused on roles and traits of girls to ascertain what seemed to be expected of girls. Of particular interest was how desirable traits and roles were presented (characterized) in each of three eras (explained below) and whether they changed over time. These questions are restated first below, followed by remaining research questions:

#### I. Constructions of Girls and Girlhood: Roles and Traits

##### A. For each of three eras —

1. What did reading material for and about girls present about their activities and roles? That is, what was presented about who and what girls could be?
2. What did reading material for and about girls present about girls' traits—to learn or inculcate? That is, what was presented about how girls could be?
3. What was the dominant construction of a girl's role and trait?

B. Across three eras, based on frequency of mentions in periodicals, did roles and traits change over time?

1. What were trends in girls' roles and traits seen in the periodicals over time?
2. What were dominant constructions of roles and traits over time?
3. What roles and traits endured over time? Did some roles and traits rise and fade across the 87 years? What roles and traits remained stable over time?
4. What was the range of constructions available across the 87 years?

II. Discourses of Girlhood, 1865 through 1952

1. What discourses of girlhood are identifiable in each era?
2. What identifiable discourses included the most enduring constructions of girls' roles and traits?

Of course, many roles and traits of girlhood were expected in mass media and popular culture content. But it was expected that constructions, overall, would reflect discourses of girlhood—ways of "talking about" girls and girlhood in accordance with prevailing gender norms and concepts of childhood and womanhood.

### **Three Eras in the Time Span Covered**

Study across the 87 years was divided into three eras: 1865 through 1894; 1895 through 1923, and 1924 through 1952. Constructions and discourses of girlhood were studied first in media selected from 1865 through 1894. Family and religion were probably more influential in the late 19th century in determining norms across American culture than any era since.

In the years from 1895 through 1923, the second era of the 87-year period, women increasingly gained access to education, the public labor force and professions. Women fought for and gained suffrage. Women writers increased significantly in this era also, and what women wrote for and about girls is of special interest because those women writers would have had more reason than their predecessors to emphasize images reflecting hopes and dreams for girls-growing-into-womanhood.

Constructions and discourses of girlhood were studied in sources from 1923 through 1953, the third era, when unprecedented trends in media meant more opportunities for content about and for girls. From the 1920s through 1952, a vast development of mass media, including great expansion in advertising, rise of movies, radio and what would come to be called the culture industries, altered American culture in unprecedented ways.

From 1865 through 1894, traditional traits and behaviors were expected to dominate. For example, according to Searles, "Traditional, self-sacrificing characters are idealized in the fiction and are presented as truly feminine and admired as the epitome of womanly virtue. These characters most likely served as role models, as ideals to which the more traditional female readers, the present and future wives and mothers in the audience might aspire" (Searles 276). Content that contradicted traditional feminine traits and roles was also expected. Searles writes that those who "renounce their self-sacrificing feminine nature and pursue personal recognition and achievement in the more traditionally masculine fashion are presented as doomed—doomed to be unsuccessful and or unloved" (Searles 277).

While some emphasis on traditional female traits and roles was expected across the years considered here, less explicit emphasis was expected over time. This change in



emphasis might indicate turning points or new perspectives of girlhood. For example, according to Searles, representations of more independent girls "provide guidelines for integrating aspects of modern attitudes and lifestyles with traditional feminine virtues" (Searles 276).

It was expected that, in each era after 1895, the traditional traits and behaviors would not be constant. For example, from 1895 to 1923 other factors, such as popularity, were expected to supersede the pure 19th-century traits, roles and concepts. Then from 1924 through 1952, an even greater shift away from traditional constructions was expected.

Given the cultural changes—such as shift in family focus, school settings, forms of media exposure—in the years considered here, did content about and for girls change? As indicated above, roles and traits in printed content for girls were expected to reflect prevailing roles and traits as cultural values, attitudes, mores and customs changed.

### **Content Analysis**

After study of the selected eras for insight about historical contents in which reading material was produced and used across the 87 year period, research began with the first two questions and the sub-questions about how prevalent roles and traits change over time. For content analysis of reading material in selected girls' pages and periodicals, lists of expected roles and traits (explained later) were developed and used as categories for classifying role and traits identified in selected reading material from across the 87-year period. Here is the full list of Expected Roles and Traits:

## Expected Roles

### *Womanhood*

**Keeper of the Hearth** (relates to domestic skills)

**Looking Good** (relates to fashion, appearance and beauty)

**Nurturer** (relates to responding to needs of others, especially children)

**Femme Fatale** (relates to romance and dating)

**Moral Authority** (relates to characteristics of piety and purity)

### *Childhood*

**Tomboy** (relates to being a girl who enjoys things that people think are more suited to boys)

**Child** (relates to doing things that a young person between infancy and young adulthood does, such as playing with toys)

**Challenger** (relates to not hesitating to confront—or to being bold—in actions)

**Self/Introspective Girl** (relates to understanding one's own individuality and identity)

**Learner** (relates to being a person who is trying to gain knowledge or skill by studying, practicing, or being taught)

## Expected Traits

### *Womanhood*

**Weak** (relates to having little power or influence)

**Passive** (relates to being acted upon by others and being receptive to outside influences)

**\*\*Dependent** (relates to needing someone or something else for support and help)

**Emotional** (relates to being dominated by or prone to emotion)

**Ornamental** (relates to being used for decoration; concerns appearance)

### *Childhood*

**Innocent** (relates to free from guilt or sin especially through lack of knowledge)

**\*\*Dependent** (relates to needing someone or something else for support and help)

**Unprepared** (relates to not ready to deal with something)

**Loyal** (relates to showing complete, constant support for someone or something)

**Curious** (relates to having a desire to learn or know more about something or someone)

**\*\* Note:** Dependent is an Expected Womanhood Trait and Expected Childhood Trait.

Two kinds of published content were selected through a systematic process for study: Children's periodicals and children's sections/girls' pages in general-interest magazines were selected from four months of each year from 1865 through 1952. The months were rotated and alternated to avoid holidays or seasons that could distort results. The selection method produced 111 editions of children's periodicals and 839 children's

sections/girls' pages. A total of 177 individual articles in the periodical editions and a total of 757 individual articles in the children's/girl's pages were read and recorded for this dissertation. Thus, 934 articles were carefully read and recorded.

All stories, articles and columns that featured a girl or were directed to a girl reader were read in their entirety for information delineating girlhood and childhood. Excluded were poetry, song lyrics, captions for photographs and illustrations. For each article read, the author's name was recorded along with whether the article was fiction or non-fiction. All references to a girl or girls were pinpointed in texts studied and recoded as "mentions." A mention of a girl included any of the following: girl, girls, niece, girl's first name, daughter, child, sister, lassie, maiden, etc. The mentions of girls tracked in this way in reading material likely includes ranges of ages from the very young to those who are pulling away from parents and families and discovering their own identities. Excluded were mentions of girls who are living on their own, making their own money, engaged or married. Advice columns were both for and about girls. If investigation showed the girl being written about/to in such a column was permanently no longer living in a parental/familial home—for example, if advice was to a married girl or working girl living on her own—the content was excluded. To be included, content had to be about or for a girl living in her familial home or (if at boarding school), at least not yet living fully on her own and making all of her own decisions. Age was not a determining factor for a number of reasons: It was often hard to discern the age of a character or reader (in direct address) with certainty. Even if age was clear, there are many ambiguities about maturity —physically, chronologically and culturally. Also, it seemed likely that the age of who was considered a girl would shift between 1865 and 1952. Evidence of those shifts was identified when

found. The method produced 2883 mentions. After textual analysis clarified their contextual meanings, these were placed in categories, as listed on p. 79 and explained, beginning on page 82.

### *Textual Analysis*

After mentions of girls were identified in all selected periodicals and children's sections/girls' pages, meanings of terms mentioned were ascertained through a simple form of textual analysis. Recording of mentions removed them from surrounding content and form—whether narrative, advice column, or other genre of writing—and detached them from content that supplied their meanings. To keep track of those meanings, the relevant content around each mention of girls (and terms standing for girls given above—phrases, sentences, paragraphs or words [adjectives, adverbs, etc.] that showed how the term was meant—was collected. Related information and themes of each item (story, article, column) in which mentions were found were also recorded.

The selected periodicals featured content for girls that clearly could be defined as literature. It was recorded whether a text was fiction or non-fiction, but all content was evaluated in the same way, whether it was a short story about a girl's party or an article about planning a party. The same message communicated in two different formats/presentations demonstrated even more strongly how prevalent or enduring the roles and traits were.

What was published about what girls do and how girls are indicates how girls were talked about and how they were portrayed—a discourse of girlhood. Relevant constructions and discourses and consistencies or inconsistencies communicate a message about girlhood

to a girl reader. Some materials girls read, especially periodicals that did not show girls themselves, still showed girls what they could be (what girls were doing — roles) in the future and how they could be (how girls were doing — traits) in the present.

### *Developing Categories for Roles and Traits*

The analysis began with assumptions about 19th-century womanhood and childhood, based on much reading. In the early eras (1865 through 1894 and 1895 through 1923), strong beliefs about the roles and traits of females and children were clear—centered on traditional 19th-century notions of womanhood and childhood. According to Marion de Ras and Mieke Lunenberg, 19th-century ideology of womanhood—that girls had to become "obedient devoted wives, caring mothers and efficient housekeepers"—deeply affected ideas of girlhood (Ras and Lunenberg 58). This ideology was likely to be very prevalent in 19th-century periodicals for girls, and its inherent constructs for womanhood and childhood might be carried into future generations.

The starting point for the categorization of the womanhood traits was Barbara Welter's article about the proper sphere and the 19th-century women's sphere—that is, all women were viewed as Weak, Passive, Dependent, Emotional and Ornamental. These were the Expected Womanhood Traits used in this dissertation. See the list on page 79. (The traits of domesticity, piety and purity were not used to categorize traits, for reasons described shortly.)

Categorization of the womanhood activities/roles drew on dimensions of the traditional female role, articulated by psychology scholar Martin Fiebert. He described traditional female roles as "providing a framework within which to examine the adherence

to cultural conditionings and expectations" (Fiebert 1). Drawing on Fiebert's work, the Expected Womanhood Roles were named: Keeper of the Hearth (relates to domestic skills), Looking Good (relates to fashion, appearance and beauty); Nurturer (relates to responding to needs of others, especially children) and Femme Fatale (relates to romance and dating). Characteristics of piety and purity were combined into Moral Authority for a fifth Expected Womanhood Role.

Regarding childhood, categorization of traits and roles began with characters in the following children's books published from 1866 through 1894: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), *Elsie Dinsmore* (1867), *Lorna Doone* (1869), *What Katy Did* (1872) and *Heidi* (1885). These texts provided insights into the variety of childhoods that girls would likely read about, and roles and traits of/for girls were gleaned from them. The categorization also took into account prevalent notions of childhood in the 19th century, and used roles and traits from those. Each text is briefly summarized below, followed by the list of traits and roles gleaned from them.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a classic, fantasy-based story about a girl named Alice who makes her way through Wonderland after falling down a rabbit hole. According to children's book writer and researcher Marjorie Allen, Alice confronts and deals directly with all obstacles she comes across, usually relying on the straightforward logic of childhood (Allen, Decade, 13). First published in England in 1865, the book was imported to America in the late 1800s (Allen, Decade, 3). According to Mott, the book was successful in America from the start (Mott 99), a best seller of its time which sold at least 300,000 in its era (Mott 308).

Some credit the book with leading children's literature away from sermonizing and toward more enjoyable stories. Unlike many American and English stories for children at that time, Allen says, the book allowed a reader to "plunge into a rabbit hole with Alice" without any guidance from an adult (Allen, *Decade*, 4). Carroll's work did not "preach," as most Victorian literature did (Allen, *Decade*, 5). Carroll wrote stories with multiple meanings, which led some people to question what type of texts should be designated as children's literature (Allen, *Decade*, 4).

O'Keefe describes Alice as a "mixture of propriety and strength" (O'Keefe 136). For example, even though she was "cool and bold in adventures, she was obsessed with politeness and tact and rules" (O'Keefe 136). She was "candid, extroverted, adventurous and motivated by curiosity" (Cadogan 44). Most 19<sup>th</sup>-century parents did not encourage these qualities in their children, yet Alice was one of most popular personalities in fiction (Cadogan 44).

The first book said to recognize girls as a market was Martha Finley's *Elsie Dinsmore*, published in 1867, as the first in a 28-volume series about the domestic life of Elsie as a girl, woman and wife. According to Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, the book's protagonist, Elsie Dinsmore, is one of the first and longest-surviving fictional American heroines. A very popular text about the life of a young girl, *Elsie Dinsmore* has Elsie in a schoolroom at eight years old. Even at this age, her character is described as "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (Cadogan and Craig 32). She was a moralistic little girl who embodied conservative values (Cadogan and Craig 32). White indicates that Elsie had a "very clear and correct view on almost every subject connected with her duty to God and her neighbor" (White 25). She adds that Elsie was "gentle, sweet-tempered, patient yet not

yet perfect" (White 25). Known for being heavily didactic and sentimental, this book is rooted in the didactic tales of early Victorian writing, and, according to Cadogan and Craig, there is a "sermon on almost every page" (Cadogan and Craig 32). That was likely what made it one of the top sellers of its time (Mott 321).

R.D. Blackmore's 1869 *Lorna Doone*, a historical, sentimental romance novel set in late 17<sup>th</sup>-century Exmoor in England, revolves on a family of outlaws, the Doones. The story is told by a male, but centers on a girl whom he met at as a boy. John Ridd is only twelve when the book opens, and the book recounts his growing up with the threat of the Doone family. At fourteen, he meets a little girl, Lorna Doone, who is cruelly treated by her family, and he falls in love with her. The text is described by O'Keefe as offering an "array of female stereotypes. The mother character was fluttery, one sister was sharp-tongued and physically deformed, and the other sister was sweet and prone to fainting" (O'Keefe 46). The title character Lorna "swooned a lot" and is further described as a "lovable maiden who is physically weak and mentally vacant" (O'Keefe 47). The near-tragic romance became a best-selling book for children (Kujoth 23), and, according to Mott, sold at least 375,000 copies in its era (Mott 309).

*What Katy Did* is a classic that Allen calls one of the standards of the era for American girls' books (Allen, Decade, 110); published in 1872, it led to two more books to continue Katy's story. Susan Coolidge created a 12-year-old heroine with vitality – Katy Carr. Katy was a "tall, rangy, self-willed tomboy," who lived with her siblings and widowed father. According to Coolidge, "her hair was forever in a snarl and her gowns were always catching on her nails ..." (Tarbox 38). Early in the book, Katy wants to be a crusader or artist at a time when only nursing and teaching were acceptable for young



women. Her independent nature did not go unpunished. After a disobedient act, she had a swinging accident that paralyzed her for several years (Allen, Decade, 38). The experience transformed her – through self-reflection, she is socialized into a narrowly determined female role (Vallone 132).

Foster and Simons consider *What Katy Did* to be a landmark book that contributed to domestic narratives of the time (Foster and Simons 107). It is the story of a vigorous tomboyish girl who learns her womanly role when she is invalided—her lively personality pressed into standard mold (Heininger et. al 112).

*Heidi*, a best-selling book of realistic fiction, was first published in German in 1884 by Janna Spyri. This story of a Swiss girl and companions on mountainsides sold at least 500,000 in its era (Mott 310). According to Hunt, the book about a free-spirited girl in the Alps who wins over her dour grandfather was a landmark book (Hunt 178). Heidi is described by Allen as a character "who meets life head on with curiosity and courage" (Allen, Decade, 16). The book offered realism at a time when folk and fairy tales dominated children's literature (Allen, Decade, 16).

Nineteenth-century children's books were incorporated in this dissertation in this way, because, as stated earlier they are often the first media that children engage with; usually, parents begin reading to children from infancy, and children ultimately "graduate" to reading for themselves at an early age. The individual books provide examples of what girls could be reading—outside of periodicals. The selected books spanned the 1865-through-1893 time period as much as possible. In general, each book selected from each period was either a best-seller, a classic, an award winner and a text for readers ages eight to twelve. Animal stories and nursery rhymes were excluded because it was assumed that

young readers would identify only with human characters and "real" people—albeit these at times included fairy-tale beings that seemed to have human attributes—as potential models.

A mix of genres of children's literature was included so that the genre would not overly influence how girlhood was portrayed. Thus, the sources for each time period include at least one realistic fiction and at least one fantasy-based story. The latter is a narrative that involves a human character in make-believe situations or a human-like character in realistic situations. The genders of the books' main characters were also considered, and, in general, girls are main characters in four of the five books. It is assumed that books about girls are more likely to be read by girls. To try to avoid missing less obvious girlhood representations, at least one selected text in each time period has a boy as the main focus or a boy and a girl with equal importance to the story.

Five categories for roles and five for traits were developed. The selected children's books guided the selection of Expected Childhood Roles taken for the dissertation. These included Tomboy, Child, Challenger, Self, Learner. The five Expected Childhood Traits taken from these books included Innocent, Dependent, Unprepared, Loyal and Curious. These roles and traits were either strongly demonstrated in at least one of the five books, such as Self in *Heidi*; or the role or trait appeared in a number of books, such as Dependent in *What Katy Did* and *Lorna Doone*. The lists of Expected Roles and Expected Traits for womanhood and childhood, when found in the selected primary sources, provided insight into which notions might have been most influential in constructing girlhood, childhood or womanhood in different eras.

Additional categories were created when mentions fit no existing category. These categories, called Discovered Roles and Discovered Traits, were added to the list as traits

and roles were discovered. (The list of Discovered Roles and Discovered Traits is on page 249.) This addition supports James' claim that: "Historians themselves are the products of cultures in which complex and largely unarticulated views about children exist" (James 71). That certainly extends to views on gender. An adult, female researcher might be unable to be fully objective because, as Carolyn Steedman describes, "adults' capacity to sentimentalize, project themselves onto, and reify children is almost infinite" (Steedman 6). And again, that might even be more true when it comes to a woman's research on female children. In addition, the writer of the text, "whether historian, social scientist, or novelist, is inevitably enmeshed in ideology," sociologist Allison James wrote (James 74). Therefore, the relationship between the texts produced about children and the socio-historical context of their production is especially complex. Chapters Four through Eight present findings about girls' roles and traits seen in the selected reading material.

### *Discourse Analysis*

One research question concerns what discourses of girlhood appear in the reading material, so discourse analysis was used to discern the ways that girls were talked about in the selected sources from the 87-year period considered here. Discussion of discourse analysis as a method appears in Chapter Nine, which presents findings about discourses in the selected reading material.

### *Primary Sources*

Finally, explanation about the sources studied for discourses and constructions of girlhood, including roles and traits, conclude this chapter. The two children's periodicals and six magazines from which girls' pages/children's pages were selected for study are

*Youth's Companion* and *St. Nicholas*; *The Delineator*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Women's Journal*, *Country Gentleman* and *The Christian Recorder*. These are discussed in turn here, beginning with children's periodicals.

### **Children's Periodicals**

While books were the inspiration for this research, magazines reached larger audiences because they were more affordable for families to purchase than were books. Also, magazines were easier to share. Children's magazines were selected for study because most magazines, especially early ones, usually must appeal to a general audience to survive and thus are likely to reproduce only the "most widely acceptable, bland and generally known terms" of a discourse (McRobbie and Nava 51). According to Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava, magazines also keep in circulation the "established stereotypical and controversial notions of what it is to be female" (McRobbie and Nava 51). Girls' magazines (including girls' pages and children's periodicals) in particular are among the few forms of popular culture for girls that has remained important across history (Driscoll 74). These publications provide a place for recorded girls' experiences and they reflect and help shape many changing interests and expectations of girls (Driscoll 74).

The specific periodicals from each time period were selected with particular interest in the audience, of course, because the focus here is on media aimed at girls. But it is important to stress that the majority of magazines, especially in earlier eras, were produced for both boys and girls. Thus, a number of periodicals read by girls had a general audience and those periodicals with mixed readership were especially revealing of whether boys and girls were (or were not) addressed differently as audiences. Two children's periodicals had

long lives, having been published much of the 87-year time period covered in this dissertation: *Youth's Companion* (1827-1929) existed 102 years and *St. Nicholas* (1872-1940) existed 68 years. Both were intended for both boys and girls. According to R. Gordon Kelly, *Youth's Companion* (1827-1929) remains one of the best-known periodicals for young people published in America (Kelly 507). It grew out of religious newspaper origins, was financially successful and achieved great popularity.

According to Heininger et. al, minister Nathaniel Willis led *Youth's Companion* to its status as one of the most influential children's periodicals of the 19th century. The publication was established because Willis saw an increasing need for "select and appropriate reading" for young people. In the inaugural issue in April 1827, he set the tone for a new generation of children's authors:

Finally, this is a day of peculiar care for youth. Christians feel that their children must be trained up for Christ. Patriots and philanthropists are making rapid improvements in every branch of education. Literature, science, liberty, and religion are extending on the earth. The human mind is becoming emancipated from the bondage of ignorance and superstition. Our children are born to higher destinies than their fathers; they will be actors in a far advanced period of the church and the world. Let their minds be formed, their hearts prepared, and their charters molded for the scenes and duties of a brighter day (Heininger et. al 2).

According to Kelly, *Youth's Companion* reflected the dominant trends about the sort of literature children were expected to read (Kelly 508). In 1857 the magazine was sold to John W. Olmstead and Daniel Sharp Ford and their version offered more fiction while still maintaining a focus on morality. The circulation grew from 4,800 to 50,000 in 10 years (Tebbel 104). After the Civil War, it became one of most popular magazines in America. The basic formula was a mix of serial stories, with short stories on science, anecdotes and

puzzles. The magazine also offered outdoor adventure and historical tales that seemed to appeal to a wide age-range. In the late 1860s *Youth's Companion* was one of the first magazines to effectively use premiums to get subscriptions (Tebbel 105) and this may have helped it reach a top circulation of a half million (Damon-Moore 32). In 1929, *Youth's Companion* merged with *American Boy*.

In 1873, *St. Nicholas* absorbed *Our Young Folks*, a periodical that started four months after the Civil War ended in 1865 and was the first significant children's periodical before 1867 (Kelly 330). With fiction, poetry, puzzles, plays and many other features, *St. Nicholas* (1872-1940) was intended for the upper-middle class, and, according to Kelly, it touched several generations of readers (Kelly 377). It also influenced the form of many juvenile periodicals that followed (Kelly 386). Editor Mary Mapes Dodge—author of the childhood classic *Hans Brinker and Silver Skates*—wrote in 1873 that the 90-page magazine was intended to be "natural" and entertaining as well as "unabashedly didactic" (Kelly 379). Dodge, who edited it until her death in 1905, utilized a distinguished list of contributors, including Louisa May Alcott. According to Lundin, many saw the publication as a great stimulus for growth of American children's literature (Lundin 40).

Dodge wanted the magazine to belong to those who read it: "A child's magazine is its playground," she wrote (Tebbel 148). The magazine catered to a wide range of ages, but likely appealed most to older children and more to boys than girls because of its regular "Wild West" and "Red Indian" features. *St. Nicholas* contained the moralistic tone of earlier periodicals but featured a design that was said to have captured readers in a new way. The publication's peak circulation was around 70,000 (Tebbel 149).

### Children's Sections/Girls' Pages

Girls' pages and children's sections in mainstream women's periodicals were selected for study because these demonstrate media recognition of girls (and children) as not only a readership, but as consumers as well. A page or small section written for girls or children among content for women or a general readership indicates an effort to reach that specific audience. Girls' sections of women's magazines were especially popular in the 1920s and reflected the format and structure of the texts that came before—fiction as guidance manual—and influenced the structure for the girls' magazines that followed (Driscoll 74).

During study of children's and girls' pages in each of the selected women's magazines, it was important to identify when this specialized content appeared and was most prevalent. Four women's magazines were examined from each time period, three of which were published across the entire 87-year time period (1865 through 1952): *The Delineator* (1873-1937), *Good Housekeeping* (1885-present), and *Ladies' Home Journal* (1883-present). According to Lyn Stiefel Hill, by the early 1900s most of these magazines—especially *The Delineator*—published two or three children's features per issue, including content offering "little magazines," "cut-outs" and contests (Hill 169). Also, in the late 1930s the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping* started monthly columns ("SubDeb" and "Teens of our Times," respectively) about, and often for, girls.

*The Delineator: A Journal of Fashion, Culture, and Fine Arts* (1873-1937), was a middlebrow fashion magazine that, according to Mary Ellen Zuckerman's index of women's magazines, published a feature for children called the "Jenny Wren Club" in the early 1900s (Zuckerman 48). In 1918 its editors began publishing the toy theatre series "*The Delineator*

Children's Theater." The section provided instructions for constructing a theater from a box, using the cut-outs provided on the magazine's pages. According to Hill, while these sections were not aimed at either sex, "girls would be more likely to turn to the pages in their mothers' magazines" (Hill 171). Content in this magazine started by Ebenezer Butterick as an offshoot of dress pattern printing and expanded over time to include household issues, fiction and mostly light reading (Tebbel 146). *The Delineator's* circulation reached a million in 1920 (Nye 44).

*Good Housekeeping* (1885-present) another women's magazine, started out as a mail-order journal (Damon-Moore 24). According to Zuckerman's index, in 1905 and 1906 the publication targeted readers with such content as recipes and a serial about a young girl's adventures in homemaking (Zuckerman 216). A young people's column ran in *Good Housekeeping* in the 1920s and 1930s. Also, according to Hill, the most popular series of film cut-outs, similar to those found in *The Delineator*, was in *Good Housekeeping* from 1921 through 1923 (Hill 181). In 1924 the magazine's circulation reached a million (Nye 44).

The *Ladies' Home Journal* (1883-present), another popular women's magazine, was in 1903 the first magazine in the world to surpass a million in paid circulation (Damon-Moore 1). According to Damon-Moore, it served as a prototype of the female targeted mass-circulation magazines of today (Damon-Moore 1). The magazine published girls' issues in the first decade of the 20th century and then ran a girls' page called "Sub-Deb" in the 1930s and 1940s.

Cyrus H. Curtis and his wife Louisa Knapp were the founders of the publication, but Edward W. Bok's name is likely the one most associated it. According to Davenport and



Derieux, Bok, the magazine's editor from 1890 to 1919, made *Ladies' Home Journal* an institution. Bok's approach was to "dish out homogenized advice and opinion," and he even wrote "Side Talks with Girls" under the name "Ruth Ashmore," a column that was later turned over to a woman (Davenport and Derieux 177). Bok tried to balance two goals: a) shielding America's young women from evil and b) holding their attention (Davenport and Derieux 190). By 1912 the magazine reached 2 million circulation (Tebbel 186).

According to Nye, there is a presumption that magazines, such as *The Delineator*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*, published content reflecting attitudes their readers would likely accept without questioning (Nye 43). The popularity of these magazines partially rested on reinforcing what readers already believed (Nye 44). Often this meant casting women in roles that were inherently feminine and reinforced taboos regarding gender behavior. This approach kept women on a pedestal of sorts (Nye 44). Did the content place girls on a pedestal as well?

To try to avoid missing less obvious girlhood representations, one additional periodical with a more specialized audience (race, gender, class/region) was selected from each time period. For the 1865-through-1894 period, the *Christian Recorder* (1861-1902) was selected; for the 1895-through-1923 period, the *Women's Journal*, and for 1924 through 1952, the *Country Gentleman* (1865-1982) was selected.

The *Christian Recorder* (1851-1902), examined from the 1865-through-1894 period, began publishing content for children in 1854, according to Chanta M. Haywood (Haywood 1). The Philadelphia-based periodical was the result of efforts by Richard Allen and other African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church founders to provide a forum for African-American leadership and to encourage education. Deemed the "official organ" of

the AME Church, it was known for confronting and engaging with political issues. It had a fairly stable and sizable circulation, according to Gilbert Williams (Williams 15). The publication strived to unite African-American families (Williams 103), and perhaps one of the ways that this was done was through its content for children in the families. According to Haywood, editors of the *Recorder* were not only proponents of "good" literature for children, but they also assured that such literature reflected adult African-Americans negotiations with their conditions. Thus, the editors created an entire section of the paper that dealt strictly with children's issues. As the paper developed, the titles of the children's sections changed from "Our Children" to "The Child's Cabinet" to the "Child's Portion," but material in that segment of the newspaper consistently ranged from reports on children's activities to didactic and entertaining poems and stories, illustrations, letters, and articles and brief items about children. According to Haywood, this material addressed themes as diverse as "expected gender department, correct child behavior, proper parental training, moral and spiritual awareness, family and community values, and social and political responsibilities" (Haywood 3).

The *Woman's Journal* (1870-1917), selected from the 1895-through-1923 period, was founded in 1870 by the American Woman Suffrage Association. Edited by Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore and Julia Ward Howe, the weekly publication featured articles by members of suffrage organizations and included cartoons. The *Woman's Journal* was dedicated to women's issues and by 1875 drew subscribers from all states and 39 countries (Harris 99). The *Woman's Journal* was published for 47 years before being replaced by the *Woman Citizen* in 1917.

The *Country Gentleman* (1865-1982), selected from the 1924-through-1952 period, provided articles for farm families – not just for men, despite what the title may suggest. The magazine was the most popular farm journal in America for nearly a century, according to Alan and Barbara Nourie (Nourie and Nourie 82). In 1925 the editors started a section called "Girl's Life." Luther Tucker created and guided the magazine's vision of rural improvement (Nourie and Nourie 83). First and foremost for farmers, the *Country Gentleman* expanded to provide information for farmers' wives on farm-related issues, such as canning, gardening and labor-saving devices (Nourie and Nourie 83). For nearly 60 years the format and content remained relatively unchanged. Then in 1911 Curtis purchased the *Country Gentleman* and made it a more general interest, mass-market magazine by adding elements of entertainment and culture. In 1925, the weekly became a monthly. Then in 1955, the *Country Gentleman* was sold to its chief competitor, the *Farm Journal*.

During this research, no work was located that has examined girls' pages or children's sections for constructions of girlhood. And, although much attention in recent years has focused on the potential impact of media on children and on girls especially, no work in the field of mass communication has been located that considers the role and impact of media in girls' lives historically. This dissertation begins to fill these two significant gaps in knowledge about girlhood and media while also adding to knowledge about being a girl during nearly a century of American history.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1865-1894**

The nation from 1865 through 1894 was in a new social and economic environment with increased mechanization, industrialization, and urbanization. It was an era of migration and invention, along with adaptation.

Cities were growing. The number of American towns and cities with populations of 8000 or more doubled between 1880 and 1900 (Emery, Emery and Roberts 155). The people of the nation were moving from the East coast and increasingly settling further west and south. Many moved for better farming opportunities or to ranch. Between 1870 and 1900, more acres were settled and put under cultivation in the United States than in the previous 250 years (Norton et. al 451).

The Industrial Revolution, beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and continuing through the 19<sup>th</sup>, brought major changes in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transportation, and technology and had enormous impact on the nation's socioeconomic and cultural conditions. During this age of invention, the steam engine and sewing machine were adapted to the needs of industry and agriculture. And even though the nation's population was spreading out—many going into remote areas, even—two developments in the early 1900s that made reaching dispersed settlers easier were extension of postal service and the expanding mail-order businesses, such as that of Sears and Roebuck, that made industrial

products available to all. In addition, by 1890, railroads connected the nation, facilitating shipping and enabling the spread and growth of manufacturing.

By the late 1890s, however, the nation faced economic depression as manufacturers' profits dwindled and left them unable to pay debts. Still, among the most positive developments of the era, education became ever more commonplace across the last quarter of the century. The percentage of children attending public schools in the United States rose from 57 percent to 72 percent between 1870 and 1900 (Emery, Emery and Roberts 157).

The period from 1865 through 1894 encompasses almost half of the Victorian era (1837-1901), during which traditional gender norms became entrenched. The idea that women belonged within the private sphere, the home, was solidified. As the nation moved away from the Victorian Era, and as those traditional gender notions became distant in time, did women's private sphere remain intact, or was it replaced?

Girls during the years from 1865 through 1894 were most likely to be dutiful daughters of the household, fully within the private sphere. In this early era, family was the strongest influence in a girl's life. So, in a sense, her main way of *being* was being a daughter. These girls were likely still similar to their mothers, yet the definition of true womanhood was expanding to include fitness, health, higher education. And not only marriage but paid employment was in their futures. These girls were dependent on family and believed to be good because of family influence. Although education and good health practices were encouraged, reading was still limited. During this era girls were seen as individuals, as indicated by girls being addressed by name in stories and articles. Advice

columns and articles that replied to submitted questions as if everyone had the same concerns and issues had long existed but seemed not to be popular in this era. One could say, in a nutshell, that girlhood roles of the era were to: Take care of the home, take care of others, take it easy. The traits of the time were to: Be good, dress properly, help others.

During this era, what roles and traits would a girl reader be likely to read about the most? What was the dominant construction of a girl's role and trait? What roles and traits were dominant and recurred across the era? This chapter presents what was found to answer these questions for the years from 1865 through 1894.

### **Dominant Construction: Emotional Keeper of the Hearth**

The dominant construction of the girlhood role and trait in the selected periodicals from 1865 to 1894 was an emotional girl preparing to be a keeper of the hearth. Note that the dominant trait Emotional as well as the dominant role Keeper of the Hearth make up the dominant construction. This connects with a common theme in cultural texts of the time—that girlhood is a journey to wifehood, or as Vallone called it, a path from "from marriageable to married" (Vallone 2). The theme appears in various places, ranging from manuals on conduct to novels to religious tracts and legal practices (Vallone 3), and it was very evident in the periodicals studied for this dissertation.

Girls often had to complete household duties before they could embrace activities associated with childhood. For example, in 1886, a *St. Nicholas* article told about girls who were hoping to go sledding: "[I]t happened one Saturday afternoon when there was very fine coasting on Redtop Hill that Kitty and all her friends could go. Martha Stebbin's little brothers and sisters were so considerate as to go to sleep without being rocked and Rosy

and Roxy, who had to help in the Saturday baking by peeling apples and seeing raisins and chopping meat, had finished their work ..." (*St. Nicholas*, February 1886).

By the 1860s, writers started to write more fiction aimed at girl readers and, by 1890, more magazines were more directed at girls (Lerner 320). The themes often revolved on religion, beauty, appearance and manners. By 1890, mandatory schooling, and thus increased literacy, of children spurred publishers' interest in reading habits of young girls (Tarbox 43). This trend was complemented by the fact that department stores and retailers started to focus on girls' purchasing needs during this era as well (Formanek-Brunell 16). Children, in general, were becoming a targeted market for products like toys, paper dolls, puzzles and promotional give-aways (Strasser 166).

Girlhood began to be seen as separate from adulthood in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when society's structure relied greatly on gendered lines, according to Inness (Inness 4). During this time, girls started moving from the private sphere of home to the public sphere of polite society (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 9). The boundaries of girlhood were similar to those of womanhood, in fact. The female sphere, in the general consensus, was "moral rather than intellectual, domestic rather than worldly" (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 9).

Yet 19<sup>th</sup>-century American girls tended to be allowed a certain amount of freedom before they moved on to adult lives (Heininger, et. al 99). Novels and journals provide accounts of American girls climbing trees, falling into rain barrels and fishing in horse troughs—activities generally associated with boys (Heininger, et. al 100). That said, girls were very aware that childhood independence would come to an end (Heininger, et. al 98).

Awareness of the dichotomy of public vs. private lives, or 19<sup>th</sup>-century domestic ideology, was a basis for construction of 19<sup>th</sup>-century girlhood (Nelson and Vallone 5). Girls were to devote themselves to health, education, and household management, as well as piety, charity, and proper dress and manners (Vallone 114).

### **Recurring Roles, 1865 - 1894**

Keeper of the Hearth was the most prevalent girlhood role in the selected periodicals from 1865 to 1894. This ranked first of 495 mentions, followed by Weaker Sex, Nurturer, Socializer and Learner, in that order. Two of these roles are very much about family and home and are tied to the Victorian roles for women. Beginnings of Socializer and Learner roles in sources studied are signs of things to come in subsequent eras. Each role is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Keeper of the Hearth (81 mentions):** Katie worked zealously beside her mother ... (*Christian Recorder*, May 26, 1886).

The Keeper of the Hearth role emphasized that girls were encouraged to act out scenes of maturity, to take on domestic duties and develop self-monitoring skills (Levander 66). These guidelines of girlhood were the same as for "true womanhood," which Barbara Welter explicated in a 1966 article of the same name. Girls were merely women in waiting. The descriptions of their actions often mirrored those of their mothers. An 1874 item shows a girl acting like her mother, for example: "The girl stooped and opened the stove door furtively wiping her eyes with her apron" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).



From the mid-1800s to early 1900s, girls' relationships to the world were established through family (Nelson and Vallone 20). According to Collins, late 19th-century parents raised "sturdy, confident daughters, who had a sense of self importance and confidence," which made the girls feel essential to the family (Collins xiii). Girls' journals and memoirs show canning of foods, gardening, and washing clothes as crucial stages in the growing-up process (Collins 6). Collins said that many families treated girlhood as a training ground for life as a housewife (Collins 2). In 19th-century American homes, girls were to care for siblings, cook, sew and clean; and pride in their contributions was stressed in selected periodicals. An example is a young girl in a *Christian Recorder* article: "So all the morning Katie worked zealously beside her mother, with flushed cheeks and eager eyes and a very happy heart. She felt repaid when she arranged the results of her work temptingly on a large plate, and left them all ready in the cool pantry-a little cranberry pie, a miniature loaf of cake, a dozen of the 'most cutest jumbles,' said Katie and some tiny tarts" (*Christian Recorder*, May 26, 1886).

Girls knew very well when they had fallen down on their duties. An 1866 item about a young girl who apologized to her mother after not helping with tasks illustrates: "I understand, mamma, you mean I must be my own fairy in order to get along in the world, and I promise you I will hereafter try to do my duty" (*Christian Recorder*, January 6, 1866).

**Weaker Sex (66 mentions):** ... a little body not quite eight, who is only a girl, anyway, never went to school in her life, and can't go out when it rains because she is delicate (*St. Nicholas*, September 1882).

The construction of Weaker Sex refers to a girl's inability to do things on her own. Because a girl is both a child and female, this might be one of the least surprising findings.

According to Steedman, "Childhood was a category of dependence, a term that defined certain relationships of powerlessness, submission, and bodily inferiority or weakness, before it became a descriptive of chronological age" (Steedman 7). She notes that knowledge about development in human beings did not gain ground until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Steedman 5).

Some recognition of what females were capable of outside the home emerged toward the end of the era. According to Lerner, "ideals of early 19<sup>th</sup>-century were no longer relevant to women in the age of industrialization and mass education" (Lerner 117). As education became increasingly important, college graduates were more prevalent. Female teachers had been accepted from the time of the Civil War. In 1860, about 25 percent of teachers were women; by 1880, 60 percent were women; and, by 1910, 80 percent were women. Such trends brought pressure on institutions of higher education to admit women. Between 1865 and 1890, several women's colleges were founded, including Vassar, Barnard and Radcliffe (Lerner 110). Women intellectuals emerged in various fields. Yet, although colleges admitted women from the 1860s, ambivalence remained toward the idea of women in public education institutions (Woloch 177). This ambivalence of offering and recognizing the benefits of opportunities while devaluing the outcome also applied to girls.

Even though their choices and options broadened, many girls were not exposed to the full range of educational opportunities. Girls who considered themselves well-read did not know about all texts: "'Foreign books!' exclaimed Jenny. 'Pray what were they?' And they listened for something new, for they had never heard of foreign books before" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874).

Also, while higher education was more available to them, girls still read about other girls who were not going to school. Some girls were still needed at home to work on family farms; others needed to be sheltered. An example is a girl in an 1882 *St. Nicholas* article, "... a little body not quite eight, who is only a girl, anyway, never went to school in her life, and can't go out when it rains because she is delicate" (*St. Nicholas*, September 1882).

**Nurturer (57 mentions):** I must be going home now, for the children have been sick... (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874).

The Nurturer role was especially clear in the new attitudes about doll play and girlhood in post-bellum America (Formanek-Brunell 363). Children's magazines, books, poems, songs, and stereographs revealed that girls were encouraged by adults to develop strong emotional bonds with their numerous dolls. One young girl in an 1874 story told her playmate: "I must be going home now, for the children have been sick, you know, and will get cross if we stay any longer" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874). The "children" she mentions were her dolls.

Nevertheless, it was clear that girls often struggled to determine the meaning of dolls in their lives (Formanek-Brunell 364). Many girls in rural areas preferred to spend time outdoors (Formanek Burnell 366), which may explain why this role was not seen more often in sources from this era; it did not fit the reality of rural girls. Still, after 1865, dolls sold well and widely, and, by 1875, dolls were being sold in Macy's department store (Formanek-Burnell 367). The conception of 19<sup>th</sup>-century girlhood—that girls were active, intelligent playful and loving tomboys (Vallone 119)—was also popular, but these traits were expected to disappear when a girl moved into adolescence.

**Socializer (50 mentions):** Young ladies, there is a wide domain of influence to which I call your attention ... the power peculiar to the graces and attractions of youth ... use it for good (*Christian Recorder*, March 19, 1885).

One begins to see girls in more social environments toward the end of this era. For example, an 1894 article describes an event that featured girls as part of the entertainment: "Babette was one of the throng of little girls, dressed in white, who at the Arch of Triumph showered the coronation coach with flowers, and sang a welcome to the new Empress" (*St. Nicholas*, December 1894). One reason girls were allowed in public settings more often is that adults were realizing the potential power of girls: "Young ladies, there is a wide domain of influence to which I call your attention, because it is yours and yours only – it is yours now, and only for a limited portion of time. I refer to the power peculiar to the graces and attractions of youth, for if you have a sweet face or a winning smile, it is God's gift and he means that you shall use it for good" (*Christian Recorder*, March 19, 1885).

In the 1870s, most girls were taught at home and parents supervised their work and play (Cadogan 46). However, by 1890, circumstances of girls and young women changed dramatically as legislation made school mandatory and limited the hours children under 16 years of age could work (Tarbox 42). This meant girls who had spent childhoods in isolation were brought together in schools. It is likely that some girls adjusted well to new social situations. For example, an 1894 item said that "Dolly found plenty of entertainment in looking about and chatting with her companion" (*Youth's Companion*, April 1894). But other articles show that friendship and companionship were not givens for all girls, as the following 1866 item illustrates: "When they knelt to pray, they thanked God for their kind parents, and asked Him to bless all the poor little girls who had no kind friends to love them" (*Christian Recorder*, January 27, 1866).

In this era, the Socializer role overlaps a bit with the Learner role. School provided girls a peer group away from household chores, and, because girls were out of the house for school, walking became an acceptable exercise that girls did with friends. Education also led to after-school socialization as students engaged in group activities.

As girls' education changed and its focus started to shift away from the home (Johnson 24), girls became more visible in society. Even the word "girl" became dramatically visible around 1880, and hundreds of books featured the word "girl" in the title (Johnson 6) during the last quarter of the century.

**Learner (45 mentions):** [T]hey were bending over their geographies, rocking back and forth and moving their lips, apparently studying with all their might ... (*St. Nicholas*, July 1874).

Learning for girls was often tied to piety in this early era. Girls were shown struggling with how to do what was right for their gender and what was right in their hearts, as an 1867 item indicates: "[S]he was sure her Mother would not let her go alone, in the dirty dismal streets, where the poor people live; and she recollected reading the story of a little girl, who went without her parents knowing it and what trouble she met" (*Christian Recorder*, December 28, 1867). The readings girls were allowed taught them how to be good children.

A widespread effort to raise virtuous Christian children accompanied the increasing importance of education and nurturing (Heininger, et. al 3). The growing commitment to public education, in fact, strengthened emphasis on nurturing and education of girls in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some reading and learning were depicted as very useful for some girl characters in the selected periodicals: "But Polly was a faithful reader of the newspapers,

and she remembered the expedients which had been found of service in the great fires. She remembered too that it was only the people who kept cool and quiet whose lives were saved" (*Youth's Companion*, December 1878).

By late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was common for girls to attend secondary school, and girls' participation in education eventually began to undermine Victorian social mores. This concerned some adults, especially mothers, as an 1891 article indicates: "Worthy mothers long to bring up their daughters to produce 'the perfect woman, nobly planned'; the more cultivated the mind and heart, the more complete the influence, whatever the position she occupies" (*Good Housekeeping*, March 1891). Adults still had control over what the girls learned and read.

The years 1865 through 1894 fall within the Victorian Era, so it is not surprising that many roles seen in the primary sources fit the true-womanhood ideal. During this era, girls were tied to home and likely were perceived as being in household roles. The next section explores the recurring traits located in the selected periodicals.

### **Recurring Traits, 1865-1894**

The most prevalent girlhood trait in the selected periodicals from 1865 to 1894 was Emotional. This was overwhelmingly the most frequent trait in 234 mentions of traits tabulated. A similar and somewhat complementary trait, Weak, was the second most frequent. As discussed later, the two traits next in order of frequency were somewhat contradictory—Ornamental and Strong. Caring rounded out the top five traits most often seen. The Strong and Caring traits relate closely to the Nurturer role highlighted earlier.

Each trait is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Emotional (46 mentions):** But Lizzie could not take it; she could only cover her face and cry ... (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).

The trait of Emotional can range from sensitivity to expressive outbursts, or both. For example, an 1874 article in *Youth's Companion* described a girl struggling to control her emotions: "Jenny was annoyed to be interrupted in the middle of her book, and it required all Mary's warning glances to keep her from saying something harsh to the old lady" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874). The emotionalism was not always about something negative, either, as an 1874 item illustrates: "But Lizzie could not take it; she could only cover her face and cry ... 'I can't bear it when you are so good to me,' sobbed Lizzie, quite overcome" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).

It remains part of conventional wisdom that some persons require sheltering from certain types of information. This is well illustrated by what girls were allowed to read in this early period. According to a writer for *Good Housekeeping*, "Just as a girl can be taught to avoid vulgar words, to refrain from coarse and rough actions and to have nothing to do with rude and frivolous associates, so she can be taught to avoid what is gross, coarse and unprofitable in books" (*Good Housekeeping*, March 1891).

Nineteenth-century girlhood has been represented in literature as a dangerous time for females and those who care for them, according to Vallone (Vallone 2), primarily due to the assumed sensitive and emotional female nature. Because, Johnson writes, girls longed to read, it was widely believed that they needed to be disciplined in their reading selection (Johnson 118). It seemed to people at the time that girls clearly recognized and idealized

versions of themselves in books (Johnson 160). Parents controlled reading matter for children, especially for girls (O'Keefe 3). Perhaps because much was didactic fiction that set a path to adult society, the potential influence of reading, especially of reading fiction, was a concern.

According to Vallone, "it is in girlhood that the moral values instilled in childhood are tested" (Vallone 2). So, even though fiction for children became less obviously didactic by mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, those who wrote for young people continued to convey values and instruction via choice of character structure and plot (Johnson 4).

**Weak (29 mentions):** From weeping afresh at this thought, and feeling utterly lonely and wretched, she began to wonder how it would feel to be Delia (*St. Nicholas*, September 1882).

Being weak and being emotional might not seem like two different traits, because some consider being emotional as a weakness. Physical weakness is also part of this trait, but that did not appear often in the sources studied from this era. Instead, content focused on mental, emotional and sometimes intellectual weaknesses. This weakness on occasion was due to an accident. An 1890 item illustrates: "She had grown up intelligent beyond her companions. At that time she had a fall from a cherry tree. The doctors talked of 'arrested development' but it seemed to be more than that. ... She continued a child in mind" (*Youth's Companion*, November 1890). Sometimes the weakness was due to upbringing, or lack of it, such as a girl described in an 1874 article: "[T]he most forlorn creature out that day was a small errand girl, with a bonnet-box on each arm, and both hands struggling to hold a big, broken umbrella. A pair of worn-out boots let in the wet upon her tired feet; a thin cotton dress and an old shawl poorly protected her from the storm; and a faded hood covered her head" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).



Children were assumed to start their lives weak and become stronger as they grew older. By 1860, a child was seen as a whole person with her own wants and needs-- yet still innocent and needing protection. By the final third of the century, there was a growing popular acceptance of childhood innocence (Heininger, et. al 15). Heininger, et. al states, "Simplicity and innocence were assumed to be child's natural state" (Heininger, et. al 16). Karin Calvert says one cultural shift in understanding of American childhood from 1830 to 1900 was marked by adults taking pleasure in childhood and seeking "to prolong and shelter it as a special period of innocence from the adult world" (as quoted in Jenkins 17). Innocence implies naïveté, and that requires protection. Child-rearing became of increasing concern during this era as a means to address the weakness of children, especially girls. In fact, some articles in the selected publications implied weakness was simply due to a child's gender. In one story, a girl trying to alert a boy found she could not: "Kate tried to call for help, but she had no voice. What could she do?" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).

According to James, by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the changing attitudinal tides about childhood had culminated in both conceptual and literal marginalization of children from adult social spaces (James 72). This meant heightened concern about child-rearing practices. During closing decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rapid industrializing led to formation of a children's culture, which became ever more visible through the next century.

**Ornamental (21 mentions):**

She was a beautiful child, with ripples of golden hair tossing down in rings on her head like a nimbus, and she had a floating, noiseless way of walking that was very spirit-like (*Youth's Companion*, June 1886).

Since many girls had little opportunity to socialize outside their homes and household responsibilities, the scarcity of the ornamental trait in sources read is not surprising. Some resistance to focus on appearance over other traits is demonstrated in an 1870 article in which a mother says: "White frocks are well enough, I suppose, when they are wanted; but they are soon soiled, worn out, and laid aside, and are only cambric or muslin at best; while a good little girl is something that I can love as long as she lives" (*Christian Recorder*, December 3, 1870). That said, girls were increasingly seen as objects – ornaments – during this era, even while engaged in household duties. An 1875 article called "What a clean apron did" says: "Tidy neatness in girls is an attraction quite equal to a pretty face: and it is a better recommendation, because it is a safe evidence of good qualities of character" (*Christian Recorder*, October 21, 1875). Sangster highlighted girls' "sweetness and radiance" (Sangster 5) as important traits; and these indicate the ornamental trait. The angelic look was seen in descriptions of girls: "She was a beautiful child, with ripples of golden hair tossing down in rings on her head like a nimbus, and she had a floating, noiseless way of walking that was very spirit-like" (*Youth's Companion*, June 1886). These traits have nothing to do with who a girl is but everything to do with how she appears in social settings. As familial obligations during industrialization lessened, it seemed possible that this trait (girls as ornaments) would grow in future eras.

**Strong (20 mentions):** When Elsie's vivid account of the rescue had been given, the boys stared at Puss with a new interest, as though she had undergone some transformation in their brief absence (*St. Nicholas*, August 1878).

The fact that girls' traits as ornamental and strong appear equally often in the selected periodicals is interesting because they seem to contradict each other. But the

shifting views in the later part of the era seem to explain. In the mid-1870s, the concept of girlhood expanded a bit with wider acceptance of self-reliance as a girl trait. At this point, emphasis on strength, resourcefulness and character did not mean that traits of domesticity were suppressed. Nevertheless, the gradually shifting views and attitudes toward women from the 1870s onward, including development of girls' education and the origins of the expanding role of the "new woman," were reflected in the types of texts available to girls. Women's lives at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were changing dramatically, principally because a growing secondary school system meant more girls had the chance to graduate high school and go on to college. That opened possibilities for not pursuing only domestic occupations when leaving family and home.

Moral emphasis in texts weakened as the century progressed (Foster and Simons 8), perhaps because the heavy doctrinal religious nature was disappearing by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Foster and Simons 6). Females were supposed to be strong in morality, in particular. Strength in girls, as it appeared in literature, was typically set in the home and "exemplified charity, kindness, patience and self discipline, virtues which most girls had ample opportunity to practice" (Foster and Simons 2). Strength was most often connected to heroic actions taken in connection to family members. In one example, a daughter takes care of her family's farm and her siblings during a storm: "It was a dreadful storm ... she must have milk for the baby—that was the paramount idea right now. ... She was not conscious that she, a girl of thirteen, had accomplished a feat that night which many strong, brave men had lost their lives in attempting, the feat of going a dozen yards in that storm" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874). Another example shows a girl being more heroic as she remained strong for her parents: "During the war, while yet a child, Miss Reed went alone

and unprotected into the Confederate lines in search of her father, who was missing, and found his remains where he had been killed by the bush-whackers two days before. With the help of a colored man, she brought the body within the union lines, and thence to the bereaved family" (*Christian Recorder*, June 23, 1887). The girl then supported her invalid mother and blind sister. After her mother died, she provided training and education for her sister. Strength was demonstrated, and often expected, when it came to family matters.

**Caring (17 mentions):** She had taken all the care of the baby, and was, as her father called her, a 'little mother' (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).

Girls were assumed to be Caring. Many examples in the selected periodicals were simple, such as this from 1874: "Mary, more true to her kindly nature, begged her to come in and sit down" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874). Because caring was assumed to be in the nature of a child, a woman and, thus, a girl, perhaps it did not require much mention in periodicals. This relates to the shifting focus of childhood from what children could *become* to what children *were*, a notion rooted in the assumption of human kind's innate virtue (Heininger, et. al 10).

Sometimes caring was shown as a leadership trait, as depicted in an account of a young girl trying to care for her friend: " 'Girls,' said Diantha, desperately, 'we must make her walk about. Don't let her drop down that way. Stop that crying and help her keep moving' " (*Youth's Companion*, December 1878). This could be connected to the concepts of emerging Progressivism, a reform movement that became defined by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recognizing the plight of the poor, this young girl wanted to help: "Well this wise little lady thought of a great many plans—one was to ask her Mother to let her fill a basket with food and clothes, and go around and distribute them among the poor people"

(*Christian Recorder*, December 28, 1867). Caring also strongly connects to the role most often shown in the periodical content for girls in the era: Nurturer. An example from 1874 says that, "Since their mother's death Beckie had tried to supply her place to the other children. She had taken all the care of the baby, and was, as her father called her, a 'little mother' " (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874 ).

The search for roles and traits attributed to, or expected of, girls in the years from 1865 through 1894 revealed the dominant construction of girlhood was an Emotional Girl Preparing to be Keeper of the Hearth. Four other roles in addition to Keeper of the Hearth (with 81 mentions) were Weaker Sex, Nurturer, Socializer and Learner, in order of frequency of mentions ranging from 66 to 45. Appearance of Socializer and Learner, particularly late in the period, seemed related to a shift in focus away from the home and toward education. These roles may also be related to the rise of Progressivism, a reform movement in which women increasingly participated as it spread from the late-1890s into the next century. Four other traits in addition to Emotional (with 46 mentions) were Weak, Ornamental, Strong and Caring, in order of frequency of mentions ranging from 29 to 17. Contradictions in traits – such as Weak and Strong – would be seen even more often in the following eras.

**Proper Sphere—Perfect Circle?** Why no grandma, I can't, because I'm a little girl  
(*Christian Recorder*, May 1866).

The construction of girlhood in the selected periodicals from 1865 to 1894 tended to circumscribe what a girl could be in ways that aligned with ideals associated with a proper,

private sphere of women. The exceptions, such as the role of Socializer, signify the potential expansion of constructions that girls might read about.

The concepts of boundaries and protection established how strong the sphere remained. Protection had to do with what external forces did about girlhood, whereas boundaries were about what girls themselves did with girlhood. When both concepts were in agreement, the forces in each direction were relatively equal.

During the years from 1865 through 1894, girls were highly protected. One example from 1881 may serve to illustrate: "The girl, on the contrary, is so hedged in with protection, that she has no power of her own, and she cannot learn the lessons of life, for the book is kept too close to her" (*Christian Recorder*, April 21, 1881). Even from this early era, adults were trying to protect girls from consumer culture while girls wanted the products and messages being directed to them. Even dolls were not trusted by adults, as the following 1874 excerpt clearly shows:

Two country girls want *St. Nicholas* to offer dolls for premiums—elegant dolls with full outfits, beautiful dresses, furs, bonnets, parasols, fans, locketts, bridal costumes and everything perfect. 'Thousands of little girls would try for it,' they add. That might be. But we should be very sorry to see the publishers of *St. Nicholas* doing such a shocking -- we were going to say wicked—thing as to send out to our little girls any of these horrid puppets in full dress, that are now a days sold in the fashionable shops as dolls. Dolls they may be, but not doll-babies; not something to love and fondle and take care of in true mother style or even to punish and subdue as naughty little Mary Anns or willful Sabina Janes, when occasion demands. No real, motherly doll loving little girls ... wish to have for their doll-baby a stiff little figure of a fully dressed fashionable lady, flounced and curled with

perfume on her little real lace pocket  
handkerchief and a miniature eye-glass  
dangling from her absurd little belt. Now, do  
they? We have seen such dollies borne stark  
and stiff in the arms of misguided little girls,  
but we think it always a pitiful sight (*St.  
Nicholas*, July 1874).

One can sense in this excerpt a hesitation in further emphasizing the Looking Good role and the Ornamental trait.

Girls did begin to test the boundaries of girlhood in this era but usually only in thoughts, not actions, as shown in an 1878 item: "... Bab observed in the young ladyish tone she was apt to use when she composed her active little mind and body to the feminine task of needlework" (*St. Nicholas*, August 1878). Even when a girl's actions did push past the boundaries, her response to the occurrence put her clearly within the proper sphere. For example, a young girl in one story pretended to miss the archery target so a boy could win: " 'I don't mind not getting it; I did better than all the rest, and I guess I shouldn't like to beat you,' answered Bab, unconsciously putting into childish words the sweet generosity which makes so many sisters glad to see their brothers carry off the prizes of life, while they are content to know that they have earned them and can do without the praise" (*St. Nicholas*, August 1878).

Only the Socializer role prevented the dominant, prevalent roles and traits from being enclosed rather completely in the proper sphere. The term proper sphere, although used to mean a realm of particular activity, evokes the notion of a circle. If we visualize the proper sphere as a literal circle, we may say it was at the time a perfect circle in that the sphere encompassed traditional womanhood norms. Girls remained overwhelmingly within the proper sphere's boundaries. Despite the direction created by the Socializer role—to

continue the metaphor of a literal circle—girls were not making significant movement toward the circle's edges. The proper sphere remained fully intact; or, put another way, the core of the circle remained strong and helped the circle keep its shape.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1895-1923**

The Progressive Era (c. 1895 - c. 1914), characterized by reform efforts in virtually all areas of American society, dominated the early years of the period from 1895 through 1923. Often seen as a response to vast changes brought by industrialization, reform efforts that coalesced into the movement called Progressivism began after exposés in magazines revealed excesses in businesses and city administrations. Reform ultimately encompassed a series of movements aimed at providing social justice for everyone (Hofstadter, 5; 174-186). Women were very involved in reform efforts. In the process, women, including those who rejuvenated the Women's Suffrage Movement and gained the vote in 1920, challenged entrenched attitudes about women's role in society.

Expansion of industrial and financial organizations with accompanying consolidations and corporations produced big business trends that, despite Progressives' efforts to temper, were widely believed to strengthen the nation (Hofstadter, 215-256). Communications developments, including rapid growth of advertising, spread mass culture throughout the country (Susman xx-xx; Marchand, xxi-xxii; 2). Mass production and marketing techniques—such as direct sales in retail—increasingly marked the American economy, facilitating sales of automobiles and time-saving household appliances while department stores served a culture transformed from a 19<sup>th</sup>-century producer society to a 20<sup>th</sup>-century consumer society. New appliances for the home, advances in food

preservation, and increased reliance on store-bought instead of home-sewn clothing meant household tasks became less laborious. This trend allowed families, especially women and girls, more time for amusements, such as sporting events or other leisure-time activities. In short, a woman's workload changed significantly.

More families lived in neighborhoods, instead of being somewhat isolated on acres of farm land, and many families had two incomes as some women worked in textile mills and others worked in new white-collar jobs, such as salesclerk positions. By 1900, four times as many women worked in industry as in 1870, perhaps attributable—at least in part—to the significant decrease in number of children per household between 1880 and 1910. When the two wars in this era—Spanish American War and World War I—reduced the numbers of men in the labor force, women worked in factories and other professions.

Family was still important during this era, but its emphasis was shifting. While parenting remained important, more dimensions of education became a school's responsibility. Education, seen to be about experience instead of rote memorization, was revered as a way to achieve a better society.

The years from 1895 through 1923 encompassed the end of the Victorian Era (1837-1901), and women increasingly challenged the proper sphere ideology. In fact, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, declared domesticity and female innocence obsolete (Gilman 6). Women's public service was especially notable during this era. For example, in 1904 the Women's National Child Labor committee battled on educational, legal and legislative fronts to end exploitation of children. The committee set minimum standards of health and safety for employed youths, created the school lunch program, addressed ways to reduce infant mortality, and established aid for handicapped children (Lerner 129). Women were

also involved in unions, in addition to suffrage efforts. Still, the notion of women as passive remained, perhaps due to cultural lag. Or, given women's activism of the time, perhaps those creating content for publications simply struggled with portraying traditional vs. emerging traits in this era—which could also be due to cultural lag.

Regardless what kept alive the cultural perception of women as passive, that view was seriously challenged. After women gained the right to vote in 1920, the perfect, private sphere would need to stretch a bit to contain the new ways women—and girls—lived their lives.

Girls in the years from 1895 through 1923 would most likely be faithful friends, because they spent more time outside of the home than did girls before 1895. They attended school and engaged in other social activities, such as camping groups and magazine clubs. A reader of content for girls in this period can see that, as women's clubs spread, so did clubs for girls. But, unlike the girlhoods of their mothers, these girls were expected to do less homework, and they had more leisure time. They had looser ties to their families and thus experienced less parental control than did their predecessors. Girls were seen as individuals—but as individuals within a group.

During this era, the roles that a girl reader likely read most about gave her these messages: Beautify yourself, socialize, and make meals. The traits she would be most likely to see in her readings told her to be friendly, dress properly, and spend time with others. What, then, was the dominant construction of a girl's role and trait? What dominant roles and traits recurred across the era? This chapter presents what was found to answer questions about roles and traits for the years from 1895 through 1923.

## **Dominant Construction: Weak Socializer**

The dominant construction of a girlhood role and trait from 1895 to 1932 was a Weak girl striving to be a Socializer. Although the role of socializer and trait of weakness seem contradictory, a girl was urged to become more public while still being perceived as needing protection. This tension of girls being urged to do something only within certain boundaries was apparent in published content across the era.

As the era began, one main directive, as offered by Marianne Farningham in 1869, was that "Girls need to understand the best and happiest place for them ... is at home" (Farningham 131). But that message became less clear as time passed. Even Farningham recognized the shifts and the leeway in what was acceptable for girls to do. In the 1869 edition of *Girlhood*, she wrote that girls must acquire "womanliness" and said that "the hoydenism, the frolic and the exuberant mirth will now become unseemly." But by the 1895 edition of *Girlhood*, this message was softened: "There are very few girls indeed who are kept back by the fear of being called 'tomboys.' ... They can become strong and vigorous and yet retain that essential womanliness" (Farningham 222).

The dominant themes in content girls could read in the years from 1895 through 1923 were tension in what girls should do and ambiguity about girlhood. Part of the ambiguity about girlhood may have to do with the view of girlhood as a transition period. Again, Farningham's words from 1895 are instructive: "It is in part the desire to go forward which gives thoughtful girls the sweet womanliness which we all admire and which teaches them so early the grace and tenderness of girlhood" (Farningham 205). Still, girlhood remained to many a time when girls should be preparing for higher duties. A girl in a 1923 *Youth's Companion* article certainly was doing more than playing, but one may ask whether

she was perceived as preparing to become an adult wage-earner: "Martha had earned a quarter of a dollar all by herself. On afternoon she received ten cents for taking care of little Dorothy Williams while her mother went to the dentist's. Another afternoon she received ten cents because she stayed in from play to wait on her mother who had a bad headache. Then the lady who lived next door gave her five cents for running to the post office with two important letters" (*Youth's Companion*, December 1923).

A girls' culture developed around the "new girls"—independent, youthful and humorous—of this era and suggested a new way of being, including new modes of behavior and new attitudes that were not yet acceptable for adult women (Johnson 3). This new culture was evident in some clothing, styles, clubs, sports, and especially magazines and books. For example, dolls became more about social status than mothering skills (Formank-Brunell 376) as indicated in this excerpt from an 1895 article: " 'Let us go to my playroom and see the dolls,' said Geraldine. 'I have twelve, and you would never guess their names.' 'I am afraid I should not remember so many,' Lucy said timidly" (*Woman's Journal*, June 22 1895).

Farningham indicated that, while girls' circumstances and surroundings had changed immensely by 1895, girls' nature had not. In 1895 Farningham wrote, "A girl's heart and a girl's life, a girl's dreams and hopes are pretty much the same all the world over" (Farningham 2). The basic descriptors of girls as "generally gay and jubilant" (Farningham 7) clashed with what others saw in the new girl of this era.

Perhaps uncertainty about when a girl became a woman aided acceptance of the new girl. Farningham acknowledged the ambiguity of the concept of girlhood when she wrote in 1895 that "girlhood is a very elastic name and embraces a good many years. Indeed the

age at which a girl ceases to be a girl and becomes a woman is not and cannot be at all clearly defined" (Farningham 203).

Girls at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century experienced very different lives than their mothers experienced as girls. Pages and magazines for girls played an increasingly larger role in creating a community of interest among geographically scattered readers (Johnson 177). From 1880, girls increasingly occupied a culture separate from home, especially due to schooling (Johnson 2). By the 1920s, fashion was increasingly discussed in girls' reading material (Schrum 3). Johnson explains that girls were no longer limited to just the ideas and models available in their own families or neighborhoods (Johnson 4).

### **Recurring Roles, 1895 - 1923**

The most prevalent constructions of girlhood roles seen in the selected periodicals from 1895 to 1923 were led by *Socializer*, which ranked overwhelmingly first of 1498 mentions. This is perhaps due to the lifestyle change for many girls as they spent time in school. That role was followed by *Looking Good* and *Keeper of the Hearth*. *Looking Good* relates to the social role and how girls connected with others as they moved more into the public sphere. The role as *Keeper of the Hearth*, seen next in frequency, adhered to 19th-century notions of domesticity. The role of *Learner* ranks high in frequency of mentions, indicating continuing and consistent importance of education. The new role seen among those most mentioned was *Child*, recognition that girls are not just little women; they are children as well. Each role is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Socializer (456 mentions):** Polly Ann was a born story-teller there was no doubt about that. ... in the first place she could always get an audience (*St. Nicholas*, May 1911).

Girl as Socializer, increasingly visible in sources from this era, had to do directly with a lifestyle change, but was indirectly due to publishers' detection of this change. Girls were becoming a part of a community outside of home and school through organizations like Girl Scouts, which was started by Juliette Gordon Love in 1912. Schools offered more extracurricular activities for girls, too, and these organizations often had nurturing foci, as an 1899 item illustrates: "I belong to a club at school, and everybody in the club must try to help some poor sick animal and make it better, or else feed hungry ones and do all they can to make animals happier" (*Woman's Journal*, October 21, 1899). Magazine groups were also popular. A writer for the *Delineator* boasted in 1907 about that magazine's influence on girls: "Delineator little girls all over the country are forming Jenny Wren clubs like ours" (*Delineator*, February 1907).

Girls were being brought together in social groups in unprecedented ways. Sometimes this created new social situations in which girls evaluated each other, as an 1895 item illustrates: "The 'old girls' eyed the new girls, and decided, according to their different standards, that Nathalie was 'the gem of the collection,' or that Ruth was lovely, 'a real Boston girl—just the type one likes to have pointed out as a student,' but Frances, or Fran, as she was known from that first night—was the favorite" (*St. Nicholas*, January 1895). Recognition of girls as a potentially organized group was apparent when in 1913 a California department store invited 5,000 girls to attend a doll tea party on the store rooftop (Formanek-Brunell 161).

Popularity became something girls started to strive for in the early 1900s, as illustrated in the following excerpt from an advice column: "So many of you write to ask if I think it is important that a girl should be popular. A cheap popularity is certainly not worth anybody's while, but I do think that all of us, as girls, may wish to be popular in the best sense, and not feel any prick of vain conscience about it either. For my part I think it is a wholesome and girlish ambition" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1906). The article offers a mixed message to girls who don't know what a "cheap" popularity might be.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, home was still important, but personal achievements outside the home mattered, too (Collins 14). At some point in the 19<sup>th</sup> century some girls stopped doing housework, and middle class values gradually shifted from housework to self improvement as girls' primary duty. Daily life was less physically demanding due to the developments of packaged food and mass-produced clothing. Girls' labor as part of the family economy was less needed since families increasingly bought rather than made what they needed (Collins 3). Thus, parents needed to figure out what to do with their idle daughters (Collins 61).

By the 1920s, friendships were seen as very valuable in maintaining some of the key roles of females, as highlighted in an 1895 article: "For all three girls had the young woman's instinct for home-making; and their friendship grew into a very close bond, which held through many differences of temperament and training, and taught them the most vital truths of human society" (*St. Nicholas*, January 1895). Yet, there was also concern about having just one very good friend, as was addressed in an 1896 advice column: "I agree with you that it is pleasant to have a familiar friend—one who is near to the heart and always close at hand. And yet, I think there is danger in the close companion. Undoubtedly there is



great comfort in telling to another woman all the worries of your life, but if you happen to be a sensitive woman and exaggerate worries and your story, when told to a close friend, it makes you a martyr" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1896).

**Looking Good (208 mentions):** Harriet was vain and she yearned to be able to buy a pretty dress now and then with her own money (*Youth's Companion*, May 1895).

The role of girls as Looking Good is closely related to the role of girls as sociable but was perhaps not as accepted or as practical. A girl could make friends without spending money on clothes and cosmetics. A girl in a 1904 *Delineator* article explains: "So time passed, and I found the beauty and dainty airs and graces of my little friend quite equaled by her kindness and gentleness" (*Delineator*, November 1904). While some girls in this era had their own money to spend, the amount probably was not enough to motivate massive purchases of new fashions or cosmetics. That is not to say that girl's didn't want new clothes, as illustrated in an 1895 item: "Harriet was vain and she yearned to be able to buy a pretty dress now and then with her own money" (*Youth's Companion*, May 1895).

The articles in the selected periodicals did not focus as much on selling products as selling the idea that appearance was important. A good example comes from 1907: "An ingenious New York girl is cultivating the use of her left hand as a measure of economy. She says, according to the newspaper which reports the important news, that in summer she wears out a pair of silk gloves every two weeks because the thumb and fingers of the right glove give way in that time through their constant use. If she can make the thumb and fingers of her left hand do the work, a pair of gloves will wear twice as long" (*Youth's Companion*, August 1907).

Advice columns were effective in promoting attention, indirectly, to appearance and health and beauty products. Excerpts from a 1906 column is revealing: "A dry shampoo ... in the case of any skin eruptions ... stubby fingers of the nail biter ... if tiny veins of your nose are permanently enlarged electrolysis will be beneficial ... proper mastication is one of the great aids to good digestion ... the blackhead formula you request is as follows .. the appearance of the neck and chest may be greatly improved by breathing exercises ... tonic for the hair ... tooth powder ... toilet lotion for the face" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1906).

This was an era of transition for the appearance role, so the message that appearance was important was only beginning to be communicated. Girls made efforts to look good, but those efforts could only go so far, given their funds and family limitations. That said, the reality changed in the ensuing era.

**Keeper of the Hearth (206 mentions):** [K]eeping the fire burning in a camp or in a home is a feminine activity (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1912).

The role of girls as Keeper of the Hearth, while still a priority, was waning a bit. When the role was mentioned, the domesticity was usually tied to something more active—like a game—than housework, or at least it was made to appear that way. "There are all kinds of things to be rehearsed in play," a writer in 1912 explained, "cooking and sewing, weaving and dying, washing and ironing; and all that is done in the home can be learned in play before the task of a real home is undertaken" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1912).

The years from 1860 to 1920 brought the rise of the new woman, which meant women's culture took on a public shape. Women were "integrating Victorian virtues with an activist social role," Woloch wrote (Woloch 168). The ideals of real womanhood were a product of industrialization, and they differed from the ideals of true womanhood described

by Welter. Real womanhood ideals expanded on the acceptable characteristics of womanhood—and thus girlhood—to include physical fitness and health, higher education, preparing for marriage and employment, which was mostly domestic, philanthropic or salaried (Cogan 9). A 1912 article, titled "What the Campfire Girls Stand for," addressed the housekeeping (female) part of camping: "Scouting is a masculine activity; keeping the fire burning in a camp or in a home is a feminine activity" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1912).

Girls had new goals to strive for in the role of Keeping of the Hearth. In the early 1900s, the homemaker was elevated to professional status through publications and domestic science courses (Woloch 192). A 1915 article called, "Why a Girl Studies Household Science," explains the importance of this new preparation for adulthood:

... she has much to gain from the study of home economics. There are many important things the average father and the average mother cannot teach their sons and daughters. ... Most mothers can instruct their daughters in cooking, but not all can tell them how to plan a balanced meal, or explain the physiological needs of the body or show them how to furnish a room tastefully. ... When a girl goes to an organized institution to study the science of home making, she learns to respect its importance ... Girls thus trained are more efficient and cheery, and change the atmosphere of the home in regard to the housework. They do not detest dish-washing, cooking or cleaning because they know the interesting reasons for the many ways of performing those duties (*Youth's Companion*, February 1915).

Even those women who worked at home faced changes because production had been taken out of the home. The leisure time that allowed for new opportunities was very much due to the technological developments that freed women from some home tasks:

commercially produced food and clothing; the development of washing and sewing machines; mechanization of home heating and lighting. Still girls read about girls taking on many of the typical housekeeping tasks. A 1900 article says that "The breakfast dishes were nicely washed and put away, she had dusted the house, fed the chickens, changed the draughts in the big coal stove, eaten her small lunch, hemmed two dish towels and now there was nothing more to do until father and mother returned" (*Woman's Journal*, March 10, 1900).

As women turned to public service (Woloch 169), some followed new pursuits, such as improving conditions of communities. Some women became involved in reform movements, such as temperance and the abolition of child labor. While these activities were outside the home, they remained tied to women's domestic role. Reacting to girlhood of the late 1800s, Sangster wrote in 1906, "Our daughters are the most precious of our treasures, the dearest possessions of our homes and the objects of our most watchful love. Beyond this they are to the family and the race as cornerstones on which depend the integrity and beauty of the social edifice" (Sangster 5).

In publications from this era, one can sense a looming shift in the Keeper of the Hearth role. There was an increasing realization that women were needed in industry and thus many were expected to work outside the home to help the nation prosper. Yet, according to Searles, this trend created tension and confusion because the "natural role" of wife and mother was undermined by demands of a new economy (Searles 263). This would affect the roles for girls seen in media.

**Learner (139 mentions):** She and Edith Mortimer, her chief girl friend, would spend hours and hours reading together (*St. Nicholas*, May 1911).

Learning requires access to and reading of texts, and, the 20<sup>th</sup>-century book publishers increasingly recognized the interests of young readers. Many authors of articles in children's periodicals were book authors, including Louisa May Alcott. According to Marjorie Allen, the Macmillan publishing house developed its first children's book department in 1919 with Louise Seaman as its head. Research suggests that the 1920s was a "golden" period of children's books in America. According to Allen, it was a time of experimentation in education when children were in the public eye (Allen 7). Interest in children's literature was apparent in the types of publications and writing available. The *Horn Book Magazine*, which discussed the types of available children's books, debuted in 1924, edited by Bertha Mahony (Allen 7). And girls were reading, as demonstrated by this letter from Margaret Rhodes:

I'd like to be Lorna, because she was so sweet and gentle. I love Robin Hood, because he was so jolly and lived such a happy life ... Angelica is stupid. Giglio is nice but he is funny. ... I love Queen Esther in the Bible; she was so brave .... Hiawatha I like very much; he could run so wild in the woods. I'd like to talk to the bees and the birds and have the little rabbits come to me and not be afraid. .... I am seven years old... I'd like to be the Lady from Philadelphia, she's so wise. I forgot Alice, I'd love to be Alice, she has so many adventures ... (*St. Nicholas*, June 1889).

While parents might have been loosening control on what their children read or had access to, restrictions remained. But reading was becoming a key part of being educated and a part of social life. "The reading of newspapers and magazines of the day and talking about them will tend to make you versatile in conversation," an 1896 article told girl readers (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1896). And girls wanted to learn a wide variety of things;

for example, a young girl's letter to *St. Nicholas* asked, "Will you please tell me where frogs go in winter? — Barbara Wellington" (*St. Nicholas*, April 1907). By 1913, it was no longer enough for a girl to just be "docile, obedient, self sacrificing and kind"; fitness and education were important, too (Johnson 172). These latter two activities were regulated and usually under adult control (Johnson 173). In reaction to girlhood of the late 1800s, child psychologist G. Stanley Hall wrote an article titled "What Children Do Read and What They Ought to Read," in which he told parents to prohibit their daughters from reading series fiction: "The danger is very great the modern school girl will early in life make excessive demands on [her culture] which will cloud her life with discontent in the future" (quoted by Tarbox 46).

Learning was increasingly important, but only if girls were learning the "right" things at the right time. Sometimes learning was combined with other tasks, as the following excerpt from 1907 illustrates: "At last Miss Oakly said: 'Girls you may put down your pencils. ... Elsie, give out the sewing bags. May, give a piece of this dressmaker's canvas to each girl. Now girls, come to my desk in turn and choose a piece of material from each of the two piles that you will find there. Be sure to select two colors that go well together' " (*Delineator*, October 1907). The following excerpt from 1895 might help explain why the role of girl as Learner was less prevalent than some other roles: "Ruth's blue eyes, under a bewitching floss of baby curls looked at her mother with calm decision, 'I want to read Dickens... ' Her mother replied: 'What are daughters for if not to read Dickens with their mothers? But not quite yet, sweetheart. Wait until you are—say fourteen' " (*Youth's Companion*, October 1895).

By the end of the 19th century, there was a divide between what adults endorsed for reading and what girls wanted to read. Books were increasingly available and that was a concern. An item warned in 1903: "Books are cheap, plenty and accessible everywhere. But precisely as books increase in number and become familiar, it is harder to be a good reader ... be sure that an author is worthy of your reading before you give your time and thought to him; for, as good reading is beneficial, poor or ill-chosen reading is harmful" (*St. Nicholas*, November 1903). This concern was also clear in a 1902 response to a letter from a girl who fell asleep while reading: "Well, for a few weeks I advise you to dispense with reading of a kind that taxes you mentally. ... You need sleep more than literature at present" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1902).

Girls' texts often provided a pattern of girlhood and gave American girls a way to envision themselves (Inness 34), a fact perhaps at the root of adult concerns over the content girls were reading. The books entered their real lives: "Paige had decided immediately that it looked like the house in *Little Women*. The shades were all up now, and she could see quite plainly into a cheerful living room, the opposite walls of which were covered with rows and rows of books" (*St. Nicholas*, August 1923). In fact, in 1895 Farningham demonstrated skepticism about girls' "inordinate love of books," when she wrote: "Often a needle would be better in their hands than a novel" (Farningham 132). Her comment about domesticity trumping reading exemplifies the place of the Keeper of the Hearth above that of Socializer and Learner.

**Child (86 mentions):** [S]ecret of perfect health for girls lies in the habit of intermittent work and play, not at one special time only, but at short intervals (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1904).

Childhood was the least mentioned role in the years from 1895 through 1923, yet its presence is significant because it did not rank at the top of the lists or roles seen in any other era. Many of the articles in the selected periodicals avoided illustrating children being children. An article from 1902 does show a girl being a child: "The snow was falling and Janie grew tired of playing with her doll and tea set. It was too cold to put on her bonnet and cozy jacket and boots and go out and build a snowman so she begged her Mamma to come and play with her" (*Good Housekeeping*, January 1902). Usually, the mentions of child touched on bigger issues than childhood matters, as implied in an excerpt from 1896: "The prevailing idea of the time is to make everything as pleasant as possible for children. And the principle seems almost unquestionable. It would seem little short of barbarous to do otherwise. But some good things are spoiled by overdoing, and it may be that we are overdoing the attempt to make everything easy and agreeable for the rising generation. ... But when the household pet passes into the business world, the way is not made easy" (*Good Housekeeping*, June 1896).

During this time, girls as plucky, spirited or tomboyish became clearer and hence implied other options for who a girl could be. This was due in part to the new camping clubs phenomenon. One illustration of this new concept of girlhood was girl scouting, which offered a "blend of outdoor activity, self-improvement and homemaking pursuits" (Inness 20). In 1895 Farningham saw scouting "as adults' late recognition of (and attempt to tame) girls' yearning to be boys and incorporate freedom and exercise into their lives" (quoted by Johnson 119). In fact, a girl's boyishness became somewhat acceptable in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the term "tomboy" became a positive descriptor (Johnson 105). This seemed likely due to the nation's obsession with health and physical



skill during the era. A number of articles from the selected periodicals emphasized benefits of outdoor activity, as illustrated by the following excerpt from an 1899 article: "[B]uffeting the breezes gives her grace and strength and she gains from the health laden atmosphere a well poised and comely form" (*Ladies Home Journal*, June 1899). Playing of games and sports, anything to be done outdoors, was encouraged. "Walk two or three miles a day regularly and if you have the opportunity play tennis or golf ... work in the garden," a 1900 article told readers (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1900). A 1904 article commented on the superiority of active children in England, who knew that the "[S]ecret of perfect health for girls lies in the habit of intermittent work and play, not at one special time only, but at short intervals" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1904).

Sometimes girls thought they needed to act younger to appease adults, and the tension between child and woman became apparent. An 1895 article noted, "It was the way of the child when she was excited. Not for the world would she have the three dear old aunts know the longing in her heart—the longing to grow up like other girls. Her intense loyalty to them forbade the slightest open rebellion" (*Youth's Companion*, October 1895).

The following construction of girls as tomboys is the only one located in this study that defines girls as children instead of little women: "If the fault is not remedied early, especially in the case of a girl who is not inclined to be a romp and a 'tomboy' (and we may wish for their own physical good that all growing girls were tomboys) the deformed positions become permanent" (*Youth's Companion*, October 1895). This statement underscores recognition that girls were still children and not yet adults. Perhaps the tomboy construction was accepted only because it was seen as merely a stage and not a constant state of being. Again, although girls had some freedom to resist girlhood boundaries, they

still needed to conform to gender expectations once they became women (Inness 35). Basically, girlhood was, Inness wrote, often an "abrupt transition from a tree-climbing, unsupervised childhood to a restricted, appearance-conscious womanhood" (Inness 35).

Childhood, or childish behavior, was brought up as something to avoid, such as indicated in an 1896 article: "It is in very bad taste to wear a table napkin in bib fashion. When a young girl finds it necessary to do this she should return to the nursery" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1896). "Child" references often came up at a moment when a girl was disappointed in herself, as this statement from 1919 shows: "... As she sat by the window in her room, however, she said to herself that she had been silly and childish in stealing off in order to avoid saying good-bye" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1919). However, a writer for a periodical in 1903 commented that children of earlier eras had an "imaginative nature ... unlike many of our matter-of-fact boys and girls of today" (*St. Nicholas*, November 1903).

From 1895 through 1923, girls were moving incrementally closer to living more public lives, so it is not entirely surprising that the public role of Socializer was among the most mentioned roles in the selected periodicals in this era. That it was the most mentioned role was unanticipated. The traditional womanhood roles had been expected to be at the top of the list until at least the mid-1920s. The next section explores the recurring traits that were located.

## **Recurring Traits**

The most prevalent girlhood trait in the selected periodicals from 1895 to 1923 was Weakness, closely followed in rank order by Emotional and Ornamental. Traits totaled 312

mentions and all seemed to fall within the proper sphere, including the most mentioned traits: Passive and Proper. All five seemed to circumscribe the traditional notions of womanhood more than was seen in content from other eras. Girls were moving out of the home and into schools and some even into paid employment; still, Passive and Proper traits applied there just as they had applied in the home. Each trait is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Weak (40 mentions):** 'She must go to the country and fatten with the little calves and lambs,' the doctor said, nodding his head decisively. ... and [he] looked at Tilly's poor little cheeks (*Woman's Journal*, September, 1898).

Weakness had a great deal to do with the concept of childhood as it applied to girls. Children needed to be protected from sickness and commercialism. In the early 1900s, G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist who specialized in childhood development, celebrated childhood freedom yet advocated increased adult intervention in children's play (Jenkins 19). Cultural materials were scrutinized as potentially damaging to children's mental health. Media reform campaigns, which started in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, included criticism of all commercial culture that targeted young children (Jenkins 20) and likely commercial culture that included young children as well. Stories like this one in a 1907 *Youth's Companion* provided a warning: "Martha was a farmer's daughter in the middle West, a daring self willed girl, always full of dreams and ambitions. She said, 'I am going to be a singer...'" Newspapers reported the suicide of the young girl in New York" (*Youth's Companion*, August 1907).

Among notable major changes after 1895, education reformers transformed schools from "centers of moral and civic nurturing to labs of science and replicas of society"

(Heininger, et. al 87). Another notable shift occurred in the definition of childhood itself. According to Heininger, et. al, "A happy childhood free from responsibility, sickness and economic worry was essential to proper development" (Heininger, et. al 13). One activity that likely went against his guidelines was wearing of corsets, especially at a young age when girls' bodies were still developing. An article warned in 1900: "[Y]ou must not wear tight corsets. ... I once knew a rosy plump splendidly healthy girl who ... squeezed herself into an hour glass ... for three entire years. At the end of which period she died of what used to be called galloping consumption" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1900).

Some girls were supposedly born physically weak and needed to take vacations to get stronger, or at least to gain weight. " 'She must go to the country and fatten with the little calves and lambs,' the doctor said, nodding his head decisively. ... [he] looked at Tilly's poor little cheeks" (*Women's Journal*, September 17, 1898). Other girls became weak after an event made them so, as implied in this excerpt from 1911: "The white, delicate pale tint had left Dorothy's face, and in its place was a glow of happiness such as had not been seen there since the dreadful accident" (*St. Nicholas*, May 1911).

Even encouragements to engage in healthful activities often came with disclaimers for girls. An excerpt from 1897 illustrates: "A celebrated physician says that he considers walking the very best exercise that can be taken, tennis he believes is too violent, cycling renders women awkward in their walk, cricket is also an uneven exercise and with golfing the strokes are not conducive to the cultivation of physical beauty since to drive a ball a long way the club must be raised above the striker's head and brought down to the ball with a sideways motion twisting the body from the waist, riding is one sided and croquet is not exercise at all" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1897).

Girls were also cautioned about other appearance-based activities. For example, an advice columnist responded to a girl who asked about using a curling iron: "Do not use a hot curling iron. A hot iron will injure anything that has life" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1901).

Interestingly enough, this was also the era when women's suffrage gained ground in the 1890s. From 1865 to 1869 women's suffrage had been tied to abolition, and battles within the women's rights movement slowed its progress for years. By 1890, the movement had expanded and gained legitimacy. The tide of opinion turned in favor of suffrage by 1910 (Woloch 228). Before gaining the vote ten years later, women had been on a pedestal—yet without real power (Hoekstra 43). This situation was likely tied to assumptions about women's weakness and inability to participate in even a minor way in politics.

**Emotional (37 mentions):** The idea of a quarrel with him seemed unbearable. ... Her love of him rose up passionately ... (*Youth's Companion*, September 1911).

**Ornamental (33 mentions):** The girl was like an old-time portrait of a Virginian beauty of the fair type (*St. Nicholas*, January 1895).

The traits of Emotional and Ornamental are closely related and are discussed together here. They were mentioned about equally often in the selected texts and nearly as often as the dominant trait—Weakness. Emotionalism was often connected to relationships, especially those with the opposite sex. An excerpt from 1911 exemplifies: "The idea of a quarrel with him seemed unbearable. ... Her love of him rose up passionately at his quick tenderness after his roughness, and her habit of loyalty to him and trust in him made her instantly ready again to distrust herself" (*Youth's Companion*, September 1911).

Ornamentalism could be about anything appearance-based, including decorating a room, as a 1904 excerpt shows: "Almost any girl if she thinks about it, knows when colors are crude or inharmonious, when things are vulgar or ornate; but few girls think of these things or realize the artistic value of simplicity" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1904). But girls were warned that decorating one's own face could backfire, as a writer bluntly put it in 1905: "Many a girl's complexion is ruined beyond repair by the use of injurious cosmetics" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1905).

These traits, Emotional and Ornamental, likely imply inferiority to present-day readers. But that likely wasn't the case in the eras studied. Weakness and Emotionalism were assumed traits of the female gender, and girls likely strived for the Ornamental trait--now referred to as objectification of women. An example from 1895 seems to show as much: "Nathalie gave a helpless little sigh, and sank into the sofa-pillows which lay heaped on the floor. She did not know whether to laugh or cry. ... The girl was like an old-time portrait of a Virginian beauty of the fair type. The red-gold of the hair, and the exquisitely cut profile with the nose just a bit tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower" (*St. Nicholas*, January 1895).

**Passive (18 mentions):** She became 'once more a shy, modest retiring little girl' (*St. Nicholas*, June 1899).

Even though passivity was one of the most mentioned traits, women and girls were being encouraged to be more active, within boundaries. This often meant that a girl would be active but then submit or become passive after the fact. For example, a young girl saved a crowd of people from being trampled by horses and was described afterward as what today would be called "an emotional wreck": "[P]oor, overwrought Little Rhody ...

collapsed into a trembling little red, white and blue heap on the footboard, buried her face in the cushions of the high driver's seat, sobbing hysterically." She became "once more a shy, modest retiring little girl" (*St. Nicholas*, June 1899). The same also occurred in less heroic situations, like climbing a tree, as a 1915 excerpt shows: "When we came to the tree up which I had clambered I hesitated, for going down seemed a much more perilous undertaking, but the boy, quick to note my timidity, gave me an encouraging smile and pointed out an easier manner to descend, leading the way like a squirrel" (*St. Nicholas*, October 1915). Even when given a compliment, a girl would often negate it if it was potentially outside of acceptable traits. A passage from 1895 illustrates: "'Polly,' said Tony, looking solemnly at her, 'I think you're the smartest girl in the world. Don't you?' And she replied, 'Why, no,' said Polly. 'You're the only person who ever thought so, and perhaps you don't know much about smartness'" (*Woman's Journal*, October 5, 1895).

**Proper (17 mentions):** She felt like quite a lady going shopping ... (*Woman's Journal*, April 20, 1910).

Girls were to be Proper, but this is the least mentioned trait and perhaps the most complex and revealing one. Some of being proper was based simply on social graces and guidelines, such as "The girl of seventeen wears her dresses the length that any lady does, while a girl of fifteen wears her dresses well below the ankles" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1895); and "A girl of sixteen is supposed to be going to school and she should not be allowed to pay formal calls or receive visits" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1897).

The notion of being a proper girl is rooted in much earlier eras. This trait as fitting with traditional girlhood was perhaps best exemplified in Farningham's book *Girlhood*. She stressed home as the key to a strong girlhood, when she wrote in 1869: "Whoever wishes to

know the true character of a girl, whether she is tender and true or frivolous and superficial, let him not inquire amongst her acquaintances, but let him see her in her ordinary home life" (Farningham 34). The book is very clear on what was essential for an appropriate girlhood, and girl readers could not miss that they were to be "faithful and true female friends" (Farningham 34). "Happy" girls would be "generous, kind, good-natured, interesting, honorable, self-denying and devoted" and not "self-absorbed, bad tempered, selfish and conceited" (Farningham 101). A girl should also be resolute (possess "quiet strength and firmness of purpose") (Farningham 123), brave ("exhibit moral courage, with strength of mind to face popular custom when custom is wrong") (Farningham 136), and domesticated.

That the trait of Proper remained strong into the years between 1895 and 1923 is shown in Farningham's 1895 edition of the book *Girlhood*, where she wrote: "No girl who values the estimation of her friends would say boastingly that she never made a pudding in her life and had not the remotest idea how to cut a bodice" (Farningham 129). Being proper—and some other traits-- required moderation; vanity, which Farningham considered a sin of girlhood, especially must be controlled. In fact, one story in the *Woman's Journal* starts off with a seemingly vain girl: "Niminy Priminy Anne came down the wide stone walk fresh from her bath and fresh in a new pink gown with ruffles edged with lace and a beautiful pink silk sash tied at the back. She was very fine indeed, quite as fine as the big doll in Duff and Dore's great store. ... she was so afraid of a stain or wrinkle in her clothes that she spent half her time looking for them..." (*Woman's Journal*, November 12 1904). The story's message seems to be that the girl, due to her fastidiousness, was left behind by others who were playing. The opposite of vanity was also unacceptable (Farningham 188),



however, as an excerpt from 1896 implies: "It is very bad taste even for a frolic for a young girl to assume boys' clothes or get herself up in any way that will tend to make her look masculine" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1896).

Physical fitness, urged for young women, was also to be pursued only in moderation. For example, outdoor exercise was acceptable but limited to swimming, tennis, golf and cricket in summers—and skating in winters (Farningham 173). "The girls confined their swimming to early mornings and evenings and remained indoors during the greater part of the day" (*Youth's Companion*, December 1923).

Propriety was often shaped by upbringing and parental guidance. An advice columnist addressed girls in 1902: "Your mother is right. A girl of sixteen is too young for society. Her pleasures should be simple and herself in the background. Early to bed is a good rule for you, my dear" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1902).

The fact that advice columnists appeared in the periodicals during this and the following era indicates a perceived need for someone, in addition to parents and schools, to explain what girls should and should not do. Girlhood was more complex than it had been for girls of earlier eras. A columnist told girl readers in 1912: "I shall be glad to help any girl who may be puzzled about any perplexing little problem in deportment, either personal or as applied to any occasion if she will write me" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1912).

The search for roles and traits attributed to, or expected of, girls in the years from 1895 through 1923, revealed the dominant construction of girlhood was Weak Socializer. Four other roles, in addition to Socializer with 456 mentions, were Looking Good, Keeper of the Hearth, Learner and Child, in order of frequency of mentions ranging from 208 to 86.

Four other traits, in addition to Weakness with 40 mentions, were Emotional, Ornamental, Passive and Proper, in order of frequency of mentions ranging from 37 to 17.

### **Stretching the Proper Sphere Boundaries**

As expected, the construction of girlhood roles and traits in the selected periodicals from 1895 to 1923 tended to circumscribe what a girl could be and how a girl could be in this era. That said, the proper, private sphere as seen in previous eras was not so clear in girls' reading material; instead, again considering the sphere as a literal circle, a new shape was evident. Girls were still shown boundaries, but those boundaries differed slightly from those in previous eras. To continue visualizing the proper sphere as a literal circle, one can say that it was no longer a perfect circle.

Again, boundaries and protection for girls determined the strength of the proper sphere. Now, however, the needed protection and the boundaries established were not in complete agreement. The perceived need for protection was manifest in concern that girls were doing "too much," regardless what "too much" might be. In 1904, a writer explained, "Overexertion mentally as well as physically does much injury to the young, growing girl" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1904). On the other hand, a writer in 1919 implies that girls may need less protection than previously: "Sixty years ago little girls were expected to be very quiet and demure, and generally they were," but, "For some unexplained reason, fainting is not so common as it used to be in the early Victorian and mid-Victorian eras" (*Youth's Companion*, July 1919).

During the years from 1895 through 1923, girls were protected, but the reins controlling them had loosened. The girlhood boundaries continued to be tested—through actions that often raised eyebrows, symbolically speaking. Even so, the questionable actions more often than not could be associated with traditional gender norms. Still, the range of what was acceptable expanded, as girls continued to push the boundaries, stretching the "sphere" until, metaphorically, one could no longer visualize it as a perfect circle, albeit it resembled a circle. The following list shows some girls' actions that pushed boundaries of traditional gender norms—while also remaining associated with those norms:

- Earning money associated with nurturing and homemaking: "An excellent way for a young girl to earn pin money is to offer herself as an entertainer at children's parties, planning and managing the children's games and assisting in the preparation and serving of the menus" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1897).
- Manifesting strength in protecting family: "... her pluck and patience were equal to the ordeal ... For weeks the brave girl would say each morning, when the surgeon came to dress her wound, 'Has Mother gone?' ... the daily hour when the dressing was changed was one of such agony that nobody but the doctors and nurse could endure to witness it" (*St. Nicholas*, May 1911).
- Pursuing career goals connected with household duties: "Not very long ago a bright girl applied to a friend, telling her that she needed to earn some money and announcing that while she could paint a little, sing a little, play a little and speak two or three languages tolerably well, she could do nothing thoroughly. ... discovered that her one accomplishment was in the direction of figures and that she was a good bookkeeper. So it was suggested she start a class in arithmetic and the friend offered

to get nine women who with herself would constitute it. The worker taught them how to keep their bank books in order; the simplest manner of managing their accounts, the filing of bills, the caring for receipts—in short she taught women who had plenty of money how to look after it in a business way ..." (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1898).

Content in selected periodicals from 1895 through 1923 acknowledged struggles girls faced, such as feeling alone or awkward. Published letters showed girls they were not alone, that others were feeling the same way. One columnist explained in 1906: "One of the things about which you girls write me oftenest is loneliness, here is part of a typical letter ... 'I am so lonely. Nobody understands me. When I go among people I cannot get near to them. ... I feel as though there is no place for me. I can't feel that I am needed, and I do get so lonely. I am perfectly ashamed to write you this way. Probably you will think it very strange and very unreserved of me ...' " (*Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1906).

During this era, the selected periodicals more often addressed girls as a group, rather than as individuals. Sometimes this was done subtly. An example is the 1899 explanation that a girl in another country—living a very different life—did the same girlhood tasks, such as sewing and cooking, as American girls: "The little girl learns to sew with a needle made from a bone of a bird's wing, to care for the lamp, to dress the skins, to cook meat, and to cure the fish which are put by for winter use" (*Woman's Journal*, February 18, 1899).

The following list illustrates that descriptions were often more direct in pointing out the same nature of girls across the country and around the world:

- "Chatter, chatter, chatter; giggle, giggle, giggle—but finally came the healthy happy sleep of normal girlhood" (*St. Nicholas*, August 1923).
- "What Happened at Camp? Why everything. Every single thing a real live American girl would want to happen!" (*St. Nicholas*, August 1923).
- "Any work undertaken by a girl should be the best of its kind... I cannot too strongly say that half-done things, things left scrambling and at loose ends are disgraceful to girlhood" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1901).
- "To Every Little Girl: GH thinks these are the nicest paper dolls it has ever seen and hopes you will like them too" (*Good Housekeeping*, October 1923).

Constructions of girlhood in the years from 1895 through 1923 give today's reader a sense that future texts might revert to some traditional 19th-century notions of girlhood. But a reader expects that some new notions—contradicting traditional traits—might be even stronger. Girl readers in future eras might be exposed to a complex picture of who they should be: Be good, but not too good.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Through the Looking Glass of Girlhood: 1924-1952**

From 1924 through 1952, many habits and values of Americans changed. In the 1920s new attitudes were established about work and family responsibilities, as well as guidelines for proper behavior at home and in society.

Much of the change in habits and values was connected to the fact that lives were increasingly divided into work and leisure. More ready-to-wear clothes, packaged foods and mass-produced household items were available for purchase; labor-saving household devices, such as toasters and vacuum cleaners, were increasingly used by the general American population. Half of the American population lived in cities or towns of 25,000 or more by the 1920s, and, according to Woloch, new technologies, such as phones, radios, movies and large circulation magazines, connected people across the country (Woloch 241). As families moved to suburbs, they realized the need to connect with others on cultural topics, such as fads and sports like boxing, as well as the latest news about movie stars—such as Rudolph Valentino—public heroes—including Charles A. Lindbergh—and sports heroes like Babe Ruth.

The nation was caught between two value systems—hard work and restraint vs. liberating leisure time and growing mass entertainment. The era, which began calmly enough, encompassed life-changing events, such as the Great Depression that began with the stock market crash in 1929, World War II (1941-1945), racial tensions and related

protests that evolved into the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. More forms of media became prevalent and accessible from at least the 1930s, with film and radio joined in the 1940s by limited television. Dancing grew in popularity, as well (Schrum 15). The growing culture of consumerism in the 20th century reshaped child-rearing practices (Jenkins 20), and the symbolic role of youth started to be seen as essential to businesses (Jenkins 105).

While women were still entering the workforce, especially during the war years, managing the household began to be considered as a profession in its own right. A wife, to whom belonged the entire job of household management and child rearing, was sometimes referred to as the chief consumer in American society. Some people began to point to the great contradiction in the expectation that women who worked outside the home still must fulfill all household duties. Women who did not have families—such as the independent-minded and some who were called "flappers"—were interesting to others but not taken seriously. Nevertheless, the flapper image remains well known—because it ultimately became a symbol of liberated aspirations and exemplified (Woloch 242) the dichotomy between "the new morality" of a new age and Victorian values of a century earlier (Woloch 254).

The years from 1924 through 1952 were far removed from the Victorian Era (1837-1901), but threads of traditional notions about the proper sphere remained across these years. Although women had been challenging traditional gender norms for decades, gender roles and traits had not shifted as much as one might expect. In 1938, women's integral role in the reform activity that responded to rapid industrialization included passage of the Fair

and Labor Standards Act outlawing child labor, long advocated by the women's National Child Labor Committee. But, although women made progress in many areas, their status wavered (Lundin and Wiegand 147).

Girls in the years from 1924 through 1952 would most likely be dutiful daughters—as gender norms reverted to an earlier concept of girlhood. A girl would be a daughter not of the household alone, now, however; she would be also a daughter of society to which she contributed with her style and purchases. In other words, a daughter during this era was a consumer and was grouped with all other girls as a market.

By 1924, traditional roles of Looking Good and being Ornamental had evolved to require shopping, cosmetics and fashion, while the Femme Fatale role involved boy-chasing and romance. Traditional roles and traits were again prominent in this era, but they looked different than in previous eras. Girls were being encouraged to be fun-loving, imaginative and even powerful. But divergence of expectations and realities left girls without a clear path toward what they could be and do. A shift in girls' activities took place in the 1930s when girls were briefly encouraged to be "physically active guardians of health as mothers and custodians of beauty" (Cadogan 161), a trend inspired by the Girl Scout organization and a series of "campfire books."

Girlhood roles during this era were identified as to: Make an appearance, make many friends, and make meals. The traits of the time were to: Be pretty, dress well, talk to others. That is, girls would be likely to read most about these, based on the selected periodicals and pages. What was the dominant construction of a girl's role and trait? What roles and traits recurred across the era? This chapter presents what was found to answer questions about girlhood roles and traits for the years from 1924 through 1952.



## **Dominant Construction: Ornamental Socializer**

The dominant construction of girlhood roles and traits in the selected periodicals from 1923 to 1952 was girl as Ornamental Socializer. This is perhaps a by-product or outgrowth of the great shifts in the culture, which included expanded public education, changed nature of work, and increasingly urban life. Schooling directly affected girls. Between 1910 and 1930, enrollment in secondary schools increased almost 400 percent (Schrum 12). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students had filled schools, and this meant that girls were subjected to influence that girls did not experience in earlier eras (Heininger, et. al 70). Dating became acceptable in the 1930s (displacing courtship of earlier decades), and the fashion industry targeted girls as more of them bought clothes. Girls were shopping instead of wearing home-sewn dresses (Schrum 24). An increasing awareness of the domain of children's goods was demonstrated in the new and often elaborate department stores that began developing children's sections (Jenkins 103).

In the 1920s and 1930s a range of new social positions for girls emerged, including negative "positions" like delinquent girls and "flappers," whom some viewed pejoratively (Driscoll 62). The flapper form of dress symbolized a hedonistic and privatized femininity as women took control over their sexual lives (Ryan 256). According to progressive scholar Randolph Bourne, the "rowdy" or "bawdy" woman was emancipated and zestful with a combination of innocence and self-reliance and wisdom and youthfulness. Charlotte Perkins Gilman described this woman thus: "Here she comes, running out of prison and off the pedestal; chains off, crown off, halo off, just a live woman" (Gilman 6). Concern grew about youthful rebellion, deviance and delinquency.

Toward the end of this era, the culture and conception of the teenage girl developed more clearly. According to Collins, "zip and independence" characterized many middle-class girls growing up between the turn of the 20th century and World War II, but that independence fizzled by the 1950s (Collins 86). So, even though "public ideology about a girl's place, role and occupation had shifted "in a single generation" (Johnson 24), these years encompassed particularly contested, conflicting and confusing messages. An example is a 1927 article that says girls should play baseball and are good at it, but only a certain type of girl should play, and she might need to ask for help: "Many girls are adept at baseball and not infrequently have organized teams which have aroused wide interest. For several reasons the most popular form of the game among girls is indoor baseball. This demands neither the strength nor the skill of the more familiar national game ... if there is in America any girl who doesn't know those rules she need only ask her brother" (*Country Gentleman*, February 1927).

According to Nash, from the 1930s until the early 1960s, dominant portrayals of girls in popular narratives centered on how well a girl adhered to patriarchal-approved models of youthful femininity. The concern was how a girl's actions and being would affect her domestic and institutional "fathers" (Nash 215).

### **Recurring Roles, 1924 - 1952**

The most prevalent girlhood role in the selected periodicals from 1924 to 1952 was Socializer, which ranked overwhelmingly first of 984 mentions of roles. This role was followed in order of prevalence by Looking Good, as in the previous era but was now more visible. This is not surprising since girls were increasingly marketed to, and many marketed

products focused on appearance and fashion. The role of girl as Keeper of the Hearth remained constant and seemed to revert to what was seen in the first era (1865-1894). The Femme Fatale role ranked next—not surprising, given the emphasis on dating. The Learner role also remained among the most mentioned roles. Each role is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Socializer (246 mentions):** Every girl wants friends. ...Show your friendliness as natural toward boys and toward girls ... (*Country Gentleman*, July 1928).

Socializer was the most mentioned role. In a culture where children and girls did not have to work inside or outside of the home, girls increasingly had time to socialize. During this period, child labor was regulated or prohibited and, by the 1930s, most children were no longer in the labor market (Zelizer 97). School attendance was compulsory, but, otherwise, children had little to do. According to Jenkins, permissiveness emerged in the post-World War II era along with suburban affluence. The decrease of references to parents or family in the selected periodicals was particularly telling. Friends and peers were the focus. This excerpt from a 1928 article explains: "Every girl wants friends. You can have them if you cultivate the friendship of folks. Go out of your way to cheer up someone who is blue or lonesome or discouraged. Show your friendliness as natural toward boys and toward girls ..." (*Country Gentleman*, July 1928).

Popularity and parties were common themes in the selected periodicals, and they connect closely to friendship and socialization. The following excerpts illustrate:

- "Every normal girl wants to be charming and popular—which after all, are pretty nearly synonymous terms. And every normal girl can be both, if—it isn't such a big 'if' either—vital details of a well-groomed appearance—becoming

- clothes, a real consideration for the preferences and tastes of your friends, and a willingness to cooperate in their good times, which is merely another description of good sportsmanship—you will find these ingredients are the unfailing recipe for just the kind of girl you want to be" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1929).
- "Now we all have parties, we'll have picnics, we'll have festivals, we'll go places and see things, we'll look our prettiest, wear our frilliest frock ..." (*Country Gentleman*, June 1931).
  - "Popularity—it's wonderful! But while you're riding so high, wide and pretty, remember that popularity has its own responsibilities. People will be more critical of you than others, quicker to pounce on rudeness, quicker to resent a snub, quicker to spot vanity or hypocrisy—but at the same time quicker to appreciate friendliness and genuine warmth. You're the one who can determine whether your success is based on a fad or on affection" (*Good Housekeeping*, November 1952).
  - "Dot is one of the most popular girls in town. She loves clothes and looking nice and parties and books and being with people and going places. And she has plenty of chances. Dot has an all around personality ... grab your mixing bowl. Let's whisk together a personality" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1934).

Dating was also part of socializing. A 1938 article says, in part: "[D]ates were the A-1 interest with most of the other 12 and 13 year old girls in my class" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1938).

Younger girls might be limited in the activities they could partake in, but their lives were filled with toys, books, clothing and items that were mass-produced just for them

(Heininger, et. al 11). By 1924, childhood lasted longer than was possible in early American history because reduced need for children's help in the home and abolition of child labor meant children had more time to be children.

**Looking Good (197 mentions):** We all can't be perfect, but it doesn't hurt to try. Let us begin by scrutinizing ourselves and find out what we have, or have not, been doing to improve in appearance (*Country Gentleman*, September 1938).

The number of mentions of the role of girl as Looking Good could be tied to increased consumer products targeting girls. Manufacturers started making products specifically for teen girls that were mostly beauty- and health-related. The tween market (older than a child but younger than a teenager) emerged as a children's clothing industry in the 1940s (Roman and Linda K. Christian Smith 1). As a variety of media became more accessible, including movies, from the 1920s to the 1940s, girls were exposed to new role models who influenced attitudes about many things, including fashion and beauty. In 1934, editors of one of the selected periodicals had a young American girl fashion designer make a special design for readers every month (*Country Gentleman*, December 1933).

In the 1940s, companies specialized in ads for teenagers that reached more than just their intended age group. Advice columns in the 1940s reveal that girls wanted to look older. It had been suggested for at least 30 years or so that girls wanted to be, look and act older than they were; but they were not sure about letting go of their childhood. An excerpt from a 1915 article illustrates this mood: "Mildred thought herself quite beyond dolls, but she stopped short before the wonderful creatures that stood in the center show cases as they entered the great toy store ... finally refusing to look at anything more" (*St. Nicholas*, October 1915).

The magazines began to create content and advertising aimed at girls, and the advice column became an increasingly popular way to connect with girl readers (Driscoll 75).

From the 1920s through the 1940s, teenage girls' magazines, such as *Seventeen* and *Young Miss*, became a distinct genre. General interest magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* abandoned children's sections in favor of girls' pages, like SubDeb, to speak directly to girls (Schrum 15). An item from 1927 shows such direct address: "Last month I promised to tell you about the girls of France—what they wear and how they wear it. Almost every girl in Deauville must own one of the cunning little sleeveless jackets of flannel..." (*Country Gentleman*, October 1927).

Many articles addressed ways to enhance appearance via fashion choices or cosmetics. The following few excerpts show how these were often connected with the Socializer role:

- "[O]ur fashions may intrigue each girl, for clothes do make the young minds whirl, and dresses shown on the Sunshine page are sure indeed to become the rage" (*Delineator*, October 1927).
- "When I saw one of the lively little fabric dogs that are so popular just now tugging away so realistically and the end of his leash on the hem of a white satin blouse in a shop on the Avenue, I said here is something that every one of my girls will want to hear about" (*Country Gentleman*, July 1928).
- "A new set of accessories gives a complete about-face to a frock. You'll feel very wealthy with so many different costumes. But the secret is one frock and various sets of accessories to wear with it" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1932).

- "Say hello with your eyes -- it's a pretty how do you do! Eye talking! ... Brush the hairs of the brows straight up and then down ... eyes must be treated kindly if they are to do their duty well and attractively" (*Country Gentleman*, January 1934).

Some mentions linked athleticism and fitness to appearance, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

- "As an enjoyable exercise for girls, swimming can't be beat. Robust health, a symmetrical development of smooth flowing muscles and grace are its rewards" (*Country Gentleman*, June 1931).
- "Archery ... fast becoming a favorite sport of the American girl ... develops not only health and grace, but also the perfect coordination between mind and muscles which is the object of all exercise" (*Country Gentleman*, January 1934).

Associating fashion and sports was another theme of articles. Perhaps the writers and publishers sought to subtly camouflage their motives in promoting fashion and cosmetics by connecting the use of products with activities that had achieved relatively recent public acceptance. The following excerpts illustrate:

- "The girl who is fond of swimming will be interested in the gay triangular bandannas the New York shops are showing to be worn over plain rubber bathing caps in place of the old clumsy square" (*Ladies Home Journal*, July 1928).
- "Athletic girls, girls who skate, coast and play hockey in winter and swim, ride, handle sailboats and play golf and tennis in the summer, use their hands hard, just as a boy does. Yet they don't want them to look as a boy's hands look, nor do they want

- to give up any of their healthy outdoor activities" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1929).
- "When sports occupy too much of your time and most of your thoughts, you are sure to be quite thrilled to hear about the latest arrival in the shop windows ... What next? Now they are recommending trousers for boating" (*Country Gentleman*, August 1929).

Likely due to hesitancy at the start of the era to emphasize appearance so openly, some writers connected Looking Good to a very established role like Keeper of the Hearth. This was done via associating another role like Athlete with Looking Good. The following excerpt from 1929 illustrates: "There is the dusting or reaching exercise as I call it, which offers a splendid opportunity to keep the muscles limber. When dusting a picture or hanging curtains use all the muscles" (*Country Gentleman*, August 1929).

**Keeper of the Hearth (151 mentions):** [I]t can be such fun to hop right in and do our best to help do the dishes with as little fuss and as much dispatch as possible (*St. Nicholas*, December 1936).

The role of Keeper of the Hearth was mentioned less often than in previous eras, perhaps because the influences of being social and exposed to many forms of media were overtaking the family focus. While family remained a strong influence on girls, attitudes of parents and their children were increasingly shaped by educators, doctors, media and advertisers (Heininger, et. al 1).

Some girls' social groups and school experiences emphasized domestic skills and helped maintain their visibility in the periodicals. In the 1920s, girls joined Girl Scout troops and took home economics classes (Lundin and Wiegand 139). Both groups



emphasized that women were responsible for health and well being of family, as well as the health and well being of the nation – which was named as a civic duty of Girl Scouts (Lundin and Wiegand 140). At the start of the era, a woman was to maintain a good home through the Keeper of the Hearth role; later, making ties to others in the community—including doing this from home—became more important to keeping a good home. A 1924 excerpt exemplifies this notion: "The Dairyman's seventeen-year-old daughter Lisbeth, anxious to show us some hospitality, supplied a pot of good coffee and an abundance of milk and cream, these beverages together with fried potatoes or an occasional soup" (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924). Sometimes younger girls practiced their hostess skills, as implied in an excerpt from 1925: "For a little girl going on nine or ten, nothing could be more delightful than to be a guest at a paper-doll luncheon. ... Making the doll dresses would keep the girls interested all afternoon, but diversion can be offered with games" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1925).

The interwar image of woman as having the power and a calling to reshape and reform American society originated in what women accomplished in the home with domestic skills. The same skills a woman used to manage a home and family could improve collective health and happiness of the nation (Lundin and Wiegand 143), it was assumed. Much of this view of womanhood was based on the resourcefulness with which one contributed to the family or community. Sometimes this meant a girl made her own toys and gifts, as the following excerpts from 1925 suggest: "On rainy days I light my candles and make sealing-wax baskets ... Then I make rags with fringes. I cut furniture out of the cardboard...it makes a very cute doll house" (*Delineator*, April 1925); "[N]ext

month a girl will tell how to make your last year's felt hat brand new" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1925).

The Keeper of the Hearth role combined duty and self-sacrifice with domesticity, but the other side of this role is consumerism, which had followed the producer ethic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hard work, sacrifice and saving were rooted in this ethic, which was still visible in girls' reading material. It meant, for a young girl, that she had pride in household chores, as explained in this excerpt from 1936: "When you've been called upon to dry the dishes, do you groan inwardly and put it off twice as much time as it would take to do the job... it can be such fun to hop right in and do our best to help do the dishes with as little fuss and as much dispatch as possible" (*St. Nicholas*, December 1936).

Despite a consumer ethic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fox x), one might say that 19<sup>th</sup>-century expectations still had a hold on females. Girls grew up knowing what was expected of them but also were not innately able to fulfill the expectations. For example, by 1944, child-rearing was no longer seen as arising from a woman's natural instinct; rather, child-rearing was a skill that could be learned (Jenkins 122).

**Femme Fatale (88 mentions):** In every high school crowd there are some fortunate gals who seem to know how to attract boys by saying just the right thing at the right time or by saying nothing at all at just the right time ... (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1945).

The role of girl as Femme Fatale indicates a bit of independence in that it implies girls had some freedom—but only when it came to attracting men. The power was in the girl's hands in many cases, as implied in an excerpt from 1943: "Being a girl gives you certain Rights and Privileges. I mean as far as men are concerned. Businesslike as you are

at a school and First Aid, you have a beautiful right to be fatally feminine when you're out on the town. You have to set the Standard of Behavior for dates and you might just as well have everything your way" (*Good Housekeeping*, February 1943).

The overall message offered in the selected periodicals about attracting boys is that a girl must have standards and guidelines because boys do. *Ladies' Home Journal* invited boys to contribute their comments to a 1933 magazine article titled "Any Girl Can Neck But A Smart Girl Doesn't Have To." The article content, however, does not really address that; instead, it indicates what boys said they were looking for when it came to girls. The boys' message is complex, with specific guidelines, limits and boundaries: "We don't want to be best beaus. And get all tangled up and tied down to one girl. We want lots of girls. ... The girl that we go for in a great big way is full of pep, good humored, a good dancer, a good sport, good looking and she has a 'line.' We like pep. Lots of it. But we don't want to get worn out. We want a girl with lots of pep and some control. A good natured, adaptable, ready-for-anything kind of girl is the girl we like. A girl who can laugh and sparkle and who can keep us amused" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1933).

The Femme Fatale role illustrates contradictions during the years from 1924 through 1952. Despite the popularity of the flapper image as the era began, mixed messages and contradictory demands for women marked the era. Messages of domesticity and passivity were still prevalent, despite the growing number of women with careers (Woloch 314). According to Lerner, by the 1930s, the idea of the "ideal woman" had been liberated from many 19<sup>th</sup>-century proscriptions but was still a product of American patriarchal background (Lerner 357).

Much instruction in girls' reading material was intended to educate girls in the ways of getting a boyfriend and keeping him. An excerpt from 1944 illustrates: "You clutch at this moment when a new guy comes into your life. You want to annex him...If you're friendly, at ease, gay and pretty to look at, his eyes will follow you around" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1944). Still, one needed to be careful to not be a fake, as a writer warned in a 1945 article: "There is a difference between putting on an act (perking up automatically, smiling coyly and winking those baby-blues) for fellows and just being natural—so roll your eyes, giggle and look pretty if you feel like it" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1945).

Girls needed to consider how selective and picky they should be about the boys they dated. "What is your date data?" a writer asked in 1947. "Do you have some standards, or do you go out with any old guy just to be out? It isn't good to do too much of the latter – it's better to stay home with a magazine. But it isn't good, either, to stay home too much" (*Good Housekeeping*, June 1947). This mixed message must have confused girl readers.

One message that was quite clear told girls to set dating guidelines once they had a guy. "Don't rush," was the message in a 1951 *Good Housekeeping* article: "You can date him as much as you like whether or not you're formally going steady – and it's better to be 'single' and sure than 'steady' and sorry" (*Good Housekeeping*, October 1951).

**Learner (68 mentions):** Jolly Jo March was here, of course with her three sisters. And so were red-headed Anne of Green Gables, Linda Strong wearing her common sense shoes, funny little Alice, ... (*Country Gentleman*, March 1928).

Reading, a large component of learning, was an increasingly important facet of 20<sup>th</sup>-century girls' lives, and this was demonstrated in the relatively high number of mentions of

the Learner role. Of course, mandatory schooling was also a factor, and a 1932 writer encouraged girls to keep learning outside of school: "[T]ime to start a George Washington scrap book ... don't forget that this is the time of year to bring in a few little branches from the pussywillow and apple trees ... If you start all these things between school and home chores and perhaps music lessons, you'll be busy" (*Country Gentleman*, March 1932). Still reading was mentioned most often.

In the 1930s, the producers of books and magazines capitalized on the fact that reading was the most popular pastime for girls (Currie 40). By 1930, librarian Ann Carroll Moore wrote "Three Owls," a children's book review column in the *New York Tribune*, and Anne Eaton started a review column in the *New York Times* (Allen 7). Children's literature and texts were becoming an important part of the publishing business. By 1941, Ursula Nordstrom increased Harper Brothers' staff from 3 to 25, and, due to publishing children's books, the company profits increased from \$200,000 to \$10 million in 25 years. By the 1950s, the children's book industry was well established (Allen 7).

A number of the selected periodicals recommended books or referred to characters in literature, seeming to assume their girl readers would be familiar with the titles and names. *Country Gentleman* even had a book-friend contest in which girls wrote to the magazine describing their favorite characters (friends) in books they read. An article in 1928 summarized the results this way: "Jolly Jo March was here, of course, with her three sisters. And so were red-headed Anne of Green Gables, Linda Strong wearing her common sense shoes, funny little Alice, her eyes round with wonder at her extraordinary experiences, Judy Abbott and her orphans all dressed alike in straight gingham pinafores, Rebecca with her pink parasol that was so dear to her, brave Betty Zane, the ladylike Little

Colonel, her cousin Betty Lewis and her chum Mary, patient Elsie Dinsmore, the sweet child Heidi, Pollyanna, the girl of the Limberlost and hundreds of others ..." (*Country Gentleman*, March 1928).

In the years 1924 through 1952, two quite public roles—Socializer and Looking Good in the context of consumerism) were the most prevalent, and the public nature of both fit the way American marketers increasingly sought to connect with girls. The next section explores the recurring traits located in the selected periodicals.

## **Recurring Traits, 1923-1952**

The most prevalent girlhood trait in the selected periodicals from 1923 to 1952 was Ornamental, which ranked overwhelmingly first of 208 mentions. The trait Weak ranked a distant second, and Intelligent was third. Traits of Passive, Emotional and Reliable tied among the six most mentioned. Intelligence and Reliability were notable outliers, being least mentioned. It should be noted that girls were described as Emotional, Weak and Ornamental in all eras. Each trait is discussed below, with number of mentions observed and accompanying examples from primary sources.

**Ornamental (41 mentions):** Nan Bowers waiting for her cousin beside the tennis net made a striking picture. She was a tall, handsome girl, brightly blond ... (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924).

**Weak (15 mentions):** How old should a girl be to ... wear make up (13/14) ... Pick out own clothes (13) ... go with boys in crowds (13/14) ... (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1952).

**Emotional (11 mentions):** Virginia pressed her hand to her lips to quell an hysterical impulse ... (*Youth's Companion*, August 1928).

The Ornamental, Weak, and Emotional were traditional traits. Their prevalence in girls' reading material was interesting because media were becoming more influential in the years from 1924 through 1952. The prevalence of these traits suggests that other social influences, like family and school, may not have affected traits seen in content for girls. Still, many mentions included limits and boundaries given to girls in order to protect them from perceived negative cultural influences. At the same time, expanded education may explain why Intelligence as a trait was mentioned more than in previous eras.

The Ornamental trait most often appeared as a way to compare girls. In a 1928 *Youth's Companion* article, the girls' looks were critiqued so clothing selections could be offered: "Judy is small and a blonde. ... Genevieve is tall and dark and very fond of bright colors ... Sally is medium—medium brown hair, medium height and she doesn't mind" (*Youth's Companion*, August 1928).

In other cases, articles offered very detailed descriptions of girls for no apparent reason. An example from 1924 illustrates: "Nan Bowers waiting for her cousin beside the tennis net made a striking picture. She was a tall, handsome girl, brightly blond, already showing the pale tan of her forthcoming very summer bronze. Though too muscular for grace, she gave a splendid impression of robust youth as she tied a ribbon band to hold back her glimmering bobbed hair ..." (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924).

Girls were advised to plan their appearance in advance or make it part of their daily way of being. A 1934 *Ladies Home Journal* article, titled "Being Merely Decorative," told girls: "Days ahead of time, experiment with your hair ... get the how of it down pat" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1934). A 1939 article told girls to "[T]ake poise and grace

into the common tasks of dishwashing and dusting—wearing crowns, they call it, and it gives them a beautiful posture" (*Country Gentleman*, June 1939).

Perceptions of girls as weak often were revealed in information that indicated the ages at which girls could do certain things. It was assumed that someone needed to decide this for girls, as the following 1952 excerpt illustrates: "How old should a girl be to ... wear make up (13/14) ... wear high heels (16) .. Pick out own clothes (13) ... have own door key ... go with boys in crowds (13/14) ... go on dates (15/16)" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1952). The same advice applied to reading books. An article in a 1932 issue of *Good Housekeeping* indicated that 4- or 5-year-olds could read illustrated adventures and picture books; 6-, 7- or 8-year-olds could read the "dreamy books, as well as fact books, animal stories and story books; 9 and 10 year olds could read stories about shipwrecks, detectives, history and old legends; those 12 and older could read romantic novels and books about legendary figures." The author added, "I did not forget that, being a girl, [a girl] would want her share of stories written for and about girls" (*Good Housekeeping*, November 1932).

Being emotional was presented as a negative trait, especially if it affected a girl's looks and ability to socialize. "Being blue isn't fashionable—and never has been," a writer explained in 1948. "The main features of the blue look are dragging shoes, sagging shoulders, and a nobody-cares-about poor-little-me expression. (And you may be pretty sure that as long as you wear it, nobody will care!) ... So we'd like to suggest a different look. It isn't new, but it never goes out of style; and the best thing about it is that it suits everybody. You don't have to go to New York or Paris to get the design. It's easy: just a hop skip and a smile" (*Good Housekeeping*, July 1948).



**Intelligent (13 mentions):** You try to do your best in your school works and if your best happens to be a little better than the rest—that's that (*Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1936).

Intelligence was encouraged in girls as long as it was used in acceptable ways. An excerpt from 1928 implies it was considered good if a girl demonstrated the ability and interest in reading non-fiction, practical and useful books: "She had no interest in sentimental romance or in adventure—the first was uninteresting and the second was improbable" (*Youth's Companion*, August 1928). An article in one periodical in 1926 encouraged a young girl to start a business: "Grace Thomas not only copied those bead bugs and beasts but made up new ones—kittens, French dolls, saucy puppies, and started a little bead novelty business of her own. ... Grace is fourteen and bugler for her Girl Scout troop" (*Delineator*, May 1926).

Despite all such encouragement, a girl could be too smart when it came to social situations. A writer warned in 1936: "Avoid knowing the answers to everything. Establish a reputation for knowing absolutely nothing about playing a saxophone, or broad jumping ... Don't be the big help every time ... Leave your schoolwork behind you ... Make yourself the best all-round sport you can" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1936).

Despite women's apparent progress by the early 1930s, home economics texts and Girl Scout manuals were narrowing the definition of womanhood (again) to homemaking and motherhood (Lundin and Wiegand 147). And, although education and employment were much more open to women by 1936 than in previous eras, women did not have full equality with men in these areas. Women's wages remained lower than men's as women worked in new industries during World War I; more than a decade later, the 1930s Great Depression eliminated any economic progress women had made. Women entered the

workplace again during World War II, but most returned to domesticity after the war ended, and many of those who remained in the workplace were confined largely to "women's professions" (Woloch 248), such as teaching and nursing. In the 1950s, the role of housewife became (perhaps once again) the ideal (Woloch 320) role for women.

**Passive (11 mentions):** And what an amiable 'good little girl' she had become as she grew older (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924).

Passivity as a girl's trait was still evident in the selected reading material but was harder to detect than previously. Passive girls were often the good girls in articles and stories in earlier eras, but the notion of what a girl was, was changing. A 1924 statement shows some ambivalence on the subject: "And what an amiable 'good little girl' she had become as she grew older. .. If only Esther were a little more—boyish!" (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924).

Meredith Rogers Cherland wrote that texts had to make "passivity more palatable and less demeaning" (Cherland 151) to keep girl readers. Although passivity seemed to be disappearing, it showed up in subtle ways, associated with athletics and sports at times. Yet, the message to girls was that the goal in sports was never about winning; submitting was alright. A 1928 article quotes tennis champion Helen Willis as explaining: "If a girl enjoys playing and is doing her best in the game, why worry over championships? If she has it in her to become a champion, she will. The important thing is to enjoy playing—and to play your best" (*Youth's Companion*, August 1928).

That the passive trait remained prevalent is interesting because women were more active – in many ways – in this era. By the mid-1920s, women's careerism was celebrated.

And, according to Ryan, the ideal of women's purity outlived its usefulness in an age of commercialism (Ryan 260).

**Reliable (11 mentions):** Cynthia's courage invariably rose when the family atmosphere became bluest, and with this attempt at light-heartedness she ran into the house and began to bustle about making preparations for supper (St. Nicholas, September 1924).

Girls' trait of Reliability was strong enough in this era to call attention to shifts in what women did outside the home. The genre of advice books and conduct manuals that had earlier assumed girls would stay home focused in the 20<sup>th</sup> century on girls attending college and going to work outside the home. In the 1940s girls began to go outside home to baby sit. By the 1950s, the business and profession of domesticity became the trend (Lundin and Wiegand 149). According to Johnson, the traditional themes of women's service and self-sacrifice were reconstituted to encompass women's paid employment (Johnson 24). After 1920, girl culture was less promising as far as offering new opportunities than the new culture that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to Johnson (Johnson 188). Attitudes toward women in paid work and public life switched back and forth during this era as the 1930s Depression forced women back into useful public roles, such as factory and textile workers. But, after World War II (Collins 4), women were not welcomed in the labor force.

Collins says women who lived through the Great Depression had "dutiful daughter" experiences similar to those in the era right after the Civil War (Collins 63). In fact, girls were often seen to be useful by other family members, and aunts and uncles borrowed their nieces at times. An excerpt from 1924 illustrates: "I'd like to take one of the girls back with me – at my expense, of course ... I need a girl who's a good sport, used to roughing more or

less, who is able to put up with the crude life in the woods, who'll be at home in my mountain shack—a ready, outdoor companion" (*St. Nicholas*, September 1924). The reliability extended even further, as a 1925 excerpt implies: "[T]he *Country Gentleman* proves that America believes that girls contribute much to the building up of a better community" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1925).

The search for roles and traits attributed to, or expected of, girls in the years from 1924 through 1952 revealed the dominant construction of girlhood was an Ornamental Socializer. Four roles, in addition to Socializer with 246 mentions, were Looking Good, Keeper of the Hearth, Femme Fatale and Learner, in order of frequency of mentions, ranging from 197 to 68. The role of Child was replaced on the list by Femme Fatale—what seems an extreme opposite trait—perhaps suggesting a bigger shift in preferred roles.

Four traits, in addition to Ornamental with 41 mentions, were Weak, Intelligent, Passive, Emotional and Reliable, in order of frequency of mentions ranging from 15 to 11. The traits of Intelligent and Reliable did not receive the most mentions in the era, but they may have appeared enough to expand how traditional gender norms were perceived.

### **Adding Depth Reshapes the Proper Sphere**

... my mother had bought some wonderful material and a ballerina pattern for a dress for me .. I told her I was going to ride the bike while I waited for the bus. She didn't approve of it but I did. I felt like a real dancing girl. ... went flying into the pond—Kathryn Margeson 12  
(*Country Gentleman*, September 1949).

The construction of girlhood in the selected periodicals from 1924 to 1952 again showed a limited view of what a girl could be and how a girl could be. The difference in this era was that the limitations had more depth than in previous eras. In other words, girls

were depicted with dimensions—lonely, insecure, awkward, weary of "old rules" that guided their mothers, frustrated about being treated differently than boys and perhaps exasperated with trials of adolescence. The reading material for girls in a number of the selected periodicals from this era acknowledged girlhood struggles much more openly than seen in previous eras. The following excerpts provide some examples:

- Discrepancy in gender expectations: "It seems to us that not very much is expected of boys. Girls are supposed to grow up first, dust off their childhood, get better grades in school, show some signs of manners and of respect for the adults who come their way" (*Good Housekeeping*, September 1946).
- Hormones stirring up emotions: "During the teen age years when most emotions are topsy-turvy anyway, it's especially hard to be good natured, friendly and keep your sense of humor all the time. But try hard" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, March 1948).
- Insecurity: "It's an ailment commonly called 'inferiority complex' and few girls get through high school without it" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1948).

Perhaps girls' struggles in the late 1920s and 1930s prompted reflections on past girlhoods. Someone in 1936 pointed to the Victorian era, implying it could still teach girls: "Do you jot down on a list headed 'Books I Must Read?' ... If so, add the book, *Florence Nightingale* .. In the early Victorian days it was considered unwomanly for a girl to want a career, yet out of this smothering atmosphere Florence Nightingale forced her way" (*Country Gentleman*, June 1931).

But many girls critiqued girlhoods of yore—girlhoods of their own mothers. "None of the old models will help us moderns," asserted a writer in a 1926 article. "What our mothers

did is out of date. The books they read fail to illumine our lives. The precepts that guided them are not for us to follow. We have a new psychology, a new philosophy. Everything is new. We need a brighter light" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1926). One wonders if such a judgment of these early girlhoods was based on what girls read about them, for it is likely that their mothers were more like them than they might have realized. For example, a 1925 *Delineator* article quotes a mother: " 'She's a tomboy,' explained her mother—rather proudly—and I guessed to myself: 'Aha, You used to be one yourself!' " (*Delineator*, December 1925). According to Johnson, a girl near mid-20<sup>th</sup> century did not take advice from her mother. Girls found other sources—advice manuals, books, periodicals—more useful. These new sources purveyed girlhood values, attitudes and encoded messages (Johnson, 10). Did their mothers and grandmothers rely on such sources as heavily as did girls of the 1920s through the early 1950s?

A writer of a *Country Gentleman* advice column in 1926 chided girls who made these assumptions about their mothers' girlhoods, calling them "weighted down, apparently by a sense of the importance of doing things differently." The writer continued, "The standards of the past had to do with integrity and honor and industry and intelligence. ... A lamp without such lights as these will fail to illumine any life whether of yesterday or of today. A lamp with them still make bright the way, however shadowed by anxious questionings ... If you will believe this, you can trim your new lamp light-heartedly, burnish it and hold it high as your mother held hers, and all the girls before her. Old lamps or new, their fire will shine down the ages for the other who come after you" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1926).

During the years from 1924 through 1952, the concepts of boundaries and protection fit the proper sphere, and the protection and boundaries seemed closer in agreement than earlier. But a closer look shows that girls pushed against the boundaries in a different way that stretched their possibilities in new directions. The proper sphere no longer looked so proper—or private. Again, visualizing the proper sphere in terms of a literal circle, one can say the circle was no longer flat—it had angles, perhaps. Still, the illusion of a wider range of acceptable traits and roles for girls obscured that many of them – under the surface – remained strongly tied to traditional gender norms.

During the years 1924 through 1952, opportunities for girls and women increased, the boundaries between life stages became more defined, and adults had more control of cultural institutions (Johnson 188). By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the boundaries of private and public spheres of womanhood (and girlhood) were modified, mostly due to the rise of consumer culture and marketing aimed at girls and young women (Formanek-Brunell 185). It's not by accident that the selected periodicals from this era more frequently addressed girls as a group, instead of as individuals. The traditional notions of gender were useful to those who were selling products—or periodicals—and so, too, was targeting consumers as homogenous groups. The new traits and roles of girls in this era often somehow connected to, or were associated with, traditional roles and traits. This provided depth of girlhood dimensions but, perhaps more important, it likely helped legitimize the new traits and roles.

Publishers recognized girls of the era constituted a different audience, and, they "catered"—in a way not seen before—to what might interest girls versus what society said was good for them. For example, in the late 1920s and early 1940s, *Country Gentleman* and *Ladies' Home Journal* made serious attempts to gain young girl readers. *Country*

*Gentleman* tried a variety of section/column concepts—Girls' Life, Modern Juniors, Girls Today, Hodgepodge Page, Teen Times—during these decades. *Ladies' Home Journal's* Sub Deb page reached out to girls with an introductory invitation in 1928: "This is a page for girls ... girls who like jolly new parties, outdoor things, sports, interesting books, the latest pretty, frivolous accessories of Paris fashions and real life stories of what other girls and women have done or are doing, that is exciting and unusual. Soon there will be each month some charming novelty sent us straight from our Paris office just for this particular page; and there will be suggestions for games, picnic recipes table decorations, bridge prizes—in fact any and everything we think girls will be interested in" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1928). A girl could like any and everything, the publishers seemed to be saying. But could she?



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Becoming a Woman: Looking Out of the Window (Roles)**

The destinies of American daughters were spelled out in the early 19th century—they were "future wives and mothers of the republic" (Tarbox 36). According to Catherine Driscoll, girlhood was "consistently articulated in relation to a future role—who or what the girl will be or do as a woman" (Driscoll 108). Ultimately, the roles presented to girls in publications helped provide guidance about becoming a woman. By the late 19th century, this included looking outside who they were and figuratively looking out of the window of their homes—away from their families. An example is this mention in a 1900 *Woman's Journal*: "Maisie Gilbert sat soberly on the window seat, looking out into the bare garden" (*Woman's Journal*, March 1900).

#### **Girls Looking Out of the Window**

The theme of girls and windows appeared early on as mentions of roles and traits were being recorded. In fact, 23 mentions of them were recorded, 5 from 1865-1894; 12 from 1895-1923 and 6 from 1924-1952. These mentions connected girls' roles and illuminated some themes of girlhood—such as loneliness and awkwardness—that were not otherwise addressed in the materials read in search of roles and traits.

Three prominent window-themes related to roles were recorded:

- Window as a place at home where one could sit and think or read or be alone by oneself. (Thinker or Learner)
- Window as a place outside of the home through which to view appearance-based products, as in window shopping. (Looking Good or Femme Fatale)
- Window as a place through which to connect with, learn about or observe, others. (Socializer)

The shift in the window theme across the 87-year period from an observation post to a place used while shopping is intriguing. From 1865 through 1894, the most common use of a window mentioned in materials read was for observation (being watched or watching others). An example from 1874 is about a girl who is "eager to hide her misfortunes from a pretty young girl who stood at a window laughing at her" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874).

Windows also were mentioned as providing escapism. An example from 1887 illustrates: "Instead of keeping house, she confesses that she keeps staring out of the house" (*Good Housekeeping*, February 1887). The window was also a place to ease frustrations and a place to be by one's self or to think or read.

From 1895 through 1923, the window was most mentioned as a place for a girl to be by herself and as a place to think, some of which appeared in the first era. This statement from 1897 illustrates: "... she sat down by the window to think how very satisfactory it all was, and how she had at last reached her proper station in life" (*Women's Journal*, April 1897). The window also came to be a symbol for a place where girls could connect with other girls. A passage from a 1905 *Ladies' Home Journal* is especially telling:

We girls have wanted a cozy place all our own in *The Journal*, a comfortable sort of window seat where we would not be disturbed,

but could just tuck our feet up snugly and forget for awhile all about the children and the older people and clothes and cooking and all that and just have a good talk with some other girl who would understand. That is what I have wanted and so many of your letters tell me that is what you want. Well we are to have our cozy window seat in which to talk things over to our heart's content. I want this to be the coziest most comforting kind of a place. Your letters help me to love and understand your girlhood and my own and in return I want to be of use to you when I can. Here in this department we shall be girls together. Here you may come and be welcome, and here in our comfortable window seat you will find a girl with her feet tucked up cozily, and ready to talk things over—a girl who understands or one at least who is always ready to try to (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1905).

From 1924 through 1952, most mentions of windows related to shopping and looking good, understandable because of the growth in media and consumerism. The following from a 1937 issue of *Country Gentleman* exemplifies: "If you have been looking into shop windows—and what girl has not?—you have been intrigued by the gay spring frock ornaments with lovely appliqués..." (*Country Gentleman*, April 1937).

A 1947 *Good Housekeeping* statement shows comparison and connection with boys: "And yet boys get bicycles first, more freedom, more dates, more time for games. They get a longer prank without a spank period. While girls are helping with the housework, boys are still out breaking windows. Wonder why they're not asked to behave, instead of indulged with 'Boys will be boys'? And is it fair? Maybe it is" (*Good Housekeeping*, September 1946). Girls look out the windows that enclose them in domesticity while boys break windows willfully.

Looking out of a window is a seemingly innocuous activity. But Bronwyn Davies compares it to a discourse, in that the looker is not aware of the window unless something happens to obscure the view: "Generally discourses and their attendant storylines are taken

up as one's own in a way that is not visible, since discourse is understood as the transparent medium through which we see real worlds. Just as we disattend the pane of glass in order to look at the view out the window, so we generally disattend discourse. It is not until the glass fractures or breaks, for example, that we focus differently" (Davies 154).

## **Roles Across Time**

The roles that girls were most likely and least likely to read about give a sense of available roles and their boundaries. During the 87-year period considered here, a girl could read most about girls in roles that did not test boundaries—that, figuratively speaking, did not break the window pane. That is, the roles continued to fulfill domestic requirements. The Keeper of the Hearth role endured. However, girls could increasingly read about girls who went outside that role a bit—girls who "cracked the pane" (to use the window metaphor) through their connections and activities outside the home in a Socializer role. Over time, girl readers could see increasing choices for themselves because the broadening range of roles gave them an idea about their choices as to who they could become.

Because the range of roles gave girls ideas of whom they could be, the recurring roles identified were examined for trends over time. Did the most prevalent roles rise and fall? Did they endure, or remain stable, throughout the 87 years? Did the same role dominate in all eras? Did some roles fade out of existence? What was the range of roles seen in the selected periodicals? This chapter addresses these questions.

## **Recurring Roles**

A search for consistency and dominance of roles in the selected periodicals across time and for prevalence within the three eras revealed the most recurring roles during the 87-year period. The discussion below begins with dominant and consistent roles across the three eras, followed by prevailing, waning and enduring roles.

### *Dominant Roles*

The three dominant roles out of 36 identified across the 87 years, measured by numbers of mentions in periodicals read, were:

- Socializer = 762 mentions (out of 2977 total mentions of roles)
- Keeper of the Hearth = 438 mentions (out of 2977)
- Looking Good = 426 mentions (out of 2977)

Two were traditional womanhood roles and likely models that girl readers sought to emulate. The most mentioned role from 1865-1952 was Socializer, accounting for 26 percent of total mentions of all roles across the 87 years. Mentions of this role exceeded by 11 percent the Keeper of the Hearth role, which accounted for 15 percent of total mentions of roles, making it second most-mentioned across all three eras. Looking Good ranked third in number of mentions, accounting for 14 percent of all mentions of roles across the three eras. Learner and Nurturer ranked fourth and fifth, with 8 percent and 6 percent, respectively. The Independent Woman and Weaker Sex role ranked sixth, being tied at 5 percent of total mentions of roles; Child and Femme Fatale roles tied with 4 percent of total mentions, ranking seventh. The final roles among the ten most mentioned were Scout (2

percent of total mentions) and Creative Artist (1 percent of total mentions). The tied pairs of roles suggest tension and contradictions among roles across time.

All five expected roles listed in Chapter Three were among the ten most mentioned, but two fell near the bottom of that list. The Moral Authority and Femme Fatale roles were less visible in the periodicals—perhaps because they seem to lie at opposite ends of the roles spectrum and extremes of any phenomenon appear less frequently as a rule.

Six unexpected roles, discovered during research, received more mentions than Moral Authority and Femme Fatale roles: Socializer, Learner, Independent Woman, Weaker Sex, Child and Athlete. Of these six, four non-traditional 19th century roles – and thus not linked to the home, or proper sphere, are: Socializer, Learner, Independent Woman and Athlete. The other two (Weaker Sex and Child) were more dependent than those four non-traditional roles.

### *Consistent Roles*

A role was considered consistent if it was one of the most mentioned in every era. Three roles seen consistently throughout the entire 87-year period were:

Socializer

Keeper of the Hearth

Learner

The Learner role replaced the Looking Good role when roles were examined for consistency. This may mean that Looking Good sometimes ranked among most-mentioned roles but was not stable or enduring. In other words, the role fluctuated across the years and was not highly visible in all eras.

*Prevailing Roles (Individual Eras)*

The most-mentioned roles in each era, discussed in previous chapters, are listed here for comparison.

Era One (1865-1894) = Keeper of the Hearth (81 of 495 mentions)

Era Two (1895-1923) = Socializer (456 of 1498 mentions)

Era Three (1924-1952) = Socializer (246 of 984 mentions) *~tied*

Looking Good (197 of 984 mentions)

Looking for dominance, consistency and prevalence reveals the four recurring roles seen across the 87 years:

- Socializer = 762 out of 2977 mentions; 26 percent of all mentions; most mentioned role from 1895-1952; one of the most mentioned roles from 1865-1952
- Keeper of the Hearth = 438 out of 2977 mentions; 15 percent of all mentions; most mentioned role from 1865-1894; one of the most mentioned roles from 1865-1952
- Looking Good = 426 out of 2977 mentions; 14 percent of all mentions; most mentioned role from 1924-1952
- Learner = 252 out of 2977 mentions; 8 percent of all mentions; one of the most mentioned roles from 1865-1952

Based on number of mentions seen in the periodicals, Socializer seems the most dominant role, overall, followed by Keeper of the Hearth, across the 87 years. This is interesting since Keeper of the Hearth is mainly an in-home, family role, and Socializer is a

more public role. The number of mentions about roles fluctuated a great deal across the time period. From 1865 through 1893, 495 mentions were located; from 1894 through 1923, the numbers more than doubled to 1498 mentions. The number of mentions then dropped from 1924 through 1952 to 984 mentions. The trends in how much girls' roles were being talked about might reveal that people working for media were more comfortable writing about girls from 1894 through 1923. This could be due to the fact that roles were more clearly defined and thus easier to communicate. The increase over the number of pre-1894 mentions might suggest hesitancy in the first era to place girls in the public eye. After 1894, any such hesitancy was overcome, perhaps to re-emerge after 1924.

### **Range of Roles**

From 1865 through 1952, girls who were reading the variety of publications selected for this study would be exposed to a range of roles. A girl reader would be most likely to see the following roles in the texts (listed in order of most mentioned to least mentioned):

- Socializer
- Keeper of the Hearth
- Looking Good
- Learner
- Nurturer
- Independent Woman
- Weaker Sex
- Child



- Femme Fatale
- Athlete
- Moral Authority
- Scout
- Creative Artist

Many of these can be associated with 19th-century traditional womanhood norms, but many seem connected to growing societal influences – school, friends, media – in some way. The roles range from passive to active and from dependent to independent. Although the roles seem specific, well defined and fixed, they were actually flexible and particularly malleable across the 87 years. For example, an independent woman in the 1880s might be earning her own money, but in 1944, an independent woman likely dressed as she pleased, came and went as she pleased, and expressed her own thoughts freely to her family and friends. In 1897, an article in *Ladies' Home Journal* described a girl on her way to being independent, explaining that: "An excellent way for a young girl to earn pin money is to offer herself as an entertainer at children's parties, planning and managing the children's games and assisting in the preparation and serving of the menus" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1897). The following excerpt appeared in the same publication in 1931: "[O]thers of you are thinking about positions in the business world ... take a look at our new booklet 'How to Apply for a Job' ... Some of you will marry soon after you leave school" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1931). Both articles refer to ways to earn money, but the 1897 reference to being an Independent Woman is less formal (earning money is not called a job); and the 1931 reference, while recognizing and addressing the fact that many girls would seek jobs, acknowledged that many would simply get married. The ambivalence

of Independent Woman-ness remains across the years. Thus, the role endures across the years, but its endurance may mean it shifts with cultural changes.

The roles that girls would rarely read about across the 87 years include:

- Leisure Girl
- Tomboy
- Entertainer
- Thinker
- Challenger
- Hero
- Self/Introspective Girl
- Patriot

A number of these roles are similar in that they are clear and stable over time. For example, the perception and acceptability of tomboys has changed across time, but the definition of tomboy in 1880 is quite similar to that in 1944. An 1895 *Youth's Companion* article encourages tomboyishness: "[W]e may wish for their own physical good that all growing girls were tomboys" (*Youth's Companion*, October 1895). Forty years later, a *Ladies' Home Journal* article said the following in the girls' page: "It's not tomboyish to know what makes your car go" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1935). While encouraging girls to learn about cars, the text simultaneously discourages girls from being a tomboy. See chart on page 246 the full lists and total mentions of each role.

## **Trends in Roles**

It seems reasonable that certain roles would become less relevant with increasing distance in time from 19th-century womanhood norms and notions about childhood. If this is true, the trends in visibility of roles in the periodicals give a reader a sense of how stable the roles were throughout the 87-year time period. Trends in the ten most recurring roles are discussed below, beginning with the roles that diminished across time.

### *Waning Roles*

The roles seen less and less across the three eras include Nurturer, Weaker Sex and Child. A decline in mentions of Nurturer, one role connected to 19th-century womanhood norms, is not surprising. It was assumed that mentions of the expected role, Weaker Sex, would decline over time because it was tied to 19th-century notions of gender.

The decline in mentions of Child as a role was unexpected but might be due to publishers' realization that references to girls as childish or as children would not appeal to their primary audience of girls. A girl's role as a Child was more often seen in the first era (1865-1894) than in the second and third eras. Perhaps girls were seen as less child-like over time.

Mentions of Moral Authority as a role decreased across the years but at a slower rate than mentions of Nurturer, Weaker Sex and Child. This slower decline is surprising because the treatment of women as stewards of morals goes to the root of 19th-century notions about womanhood.

### *Increasingly Mentioned Roles*

It was expected that roles discovered during research would become more visible over time because they were not tied to 19th-century notions. Those were likely connected to societal/cultural changes during the eras examined.

Mentions of Looking Good and Femme Fatale increased through all three eras, but mentions of the latter increased more in the last era. Both are traditional 19th-century roles that became more visible over the time span. Perhaps the roles were associated with factors that became increasingly influential in girls' lives, such as school/friends and media. For example, looking good could have been a more important part of girls' lives as they spent more time outside the home (at school and with friends). It could have been part of what they saw and read about as they were exposed to more and more messages and media, including advertising for products promising to help a girl look good.

### *Enduring Roles*

Some roles seem to have been unaffected by the passage of time (moving further away from 19th-century notions), or by the shifts in cultural influences from family, school/friends and media. This seems true for the following roles: Independent Woman, Learner and Keeper of the Hearth, all of which were stable in number of mentions throughout the eras for which content was examined; the Keeper of the Hearth role, however, was tied to expected 19th-century roles. Mentions of the roles of Scout, Creative Artist and Athlete were constant as well. Some of these roles never were among the ten most mentioned but were enduring—seemingly unaffected by cultural changes. Keeper of the Hearth was the only 19th-century role on the initial list of expected roles that endured.

Mentions of those expected roles were closely examined because the trends in mentions could indicate how enduring the 19<sup>th</sup>-century-based roles might be beyond the 1865-1952 time period:

- Keeper of Hearth = Enduring role; mentions remained stable over time
- Looking Good and Femme Fatale = Increasingly mentioned roles
- Nurturer and Moral Authority = Waning roles; decrease in mentions over time

The only one of these expected roles that endured was Keeper of Hearth. Looking Good and Femme Fatale were increasingly visible, but, if they were susceptible to cultural influences, they might not endure through changes after 1952. See page 247 for list of roles and trends in mentions.

### **Summary: The Trends in Roles**

These findings about visibility of roles over time suggest that 19th-century notions about womanhood discussed in Chapter Three were much stronger than were notions about childhood in shaping the roles girls read about in the selected periodicals. That said, the role of Learner was among the ten most mentioned and Child was close to the top among those most mentioned. The enduring roles include not only a key traditional womanhood role (Keeper of the Hearth); they also included a key childhood role (Learner). The range of roles presented in the content – from Socializer to Self/Introspective Girl and from Keeper of the Hearth to Hero – indicates that girls might have a chance to see choices available instead of seeing only rules to follow when considering their futures.

The enduring roles—those that were seemingly unaffected by cultural influences — Independent Woman, Learner, Keeper of the Hearth, Scout, Creative Artist and Athlete — showed girls a range of roles they could become as women. The enduring quality of the roles is significant because, although some were never dominant in the periodicals, they might fit girls' realities. For example, a girl might connect with the Scout role even if she only read about it once or twice in a publication, compared to reading about a Socializer dozens of times. Yet, because she was a frequent camper—and because girl readers do not passively accept the roles presented to them—she might have connected with the (enduring) Scout role.

What girls read gave them a window on womanhood, but the view was often limited to domestic roles (such as Keeper of the Hearth). However, their reading material also offered them glimpses of options beyond this home-based role, such as connecting with peers (Socializer) and becoming educated (Learner).

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Being a Girl: Looking into the Mirror (Traits)**

Girls of the early 19th century were expected to be hard-working, supportive and virtuous (Tarbox 36). As was true of roles, the traits seen in publications for girls provided guidance about being a girl. Looking at themselves in a mirror to see who they were ultimately symbolized girls' search within themselves for how/who they could be. Looking at oneself was not just about evaluating one's physical appearance; it was also about what appearance implied about status, character, and temperament, according to Susan Sweeney (Sweeney 140).

The "gaze" and the act of looking is often related to the concepts of identity, power and cultural constructions of gender (Sweeney 141). Foucault explained that observing and being observed signify power and powerlessness in Western culture (as quoted in Sweeney 141). So what does this mean for a girl looking at herself in a mirror? According to Laura Mulvey, a girl's identity is determined by her "to-be-looked-at-ness." Looking in a mirror can be a metaphor for the lack of identity of the person doing the looking (cited in Sweeney 142). For a girl who is on the cusp of defining an identity, this could hinder how well she understands herself. According to feminist theorists—Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray—seeing oneself in a mirror tends to perpetuate the difference between the image of self and the actual self. Or the girl might see things about herself she has not seen before.

Looking into a mirror can be connected to a much-quoted 1972 passage by John Berger, a British art critic, novelist, painter and author: "A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself." Berger continued, "...from earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life" (Berger 46).

During the time period under study, a girl could read about girls who displayed traits focused on appearance (Ornamental). Perhaps that focus on looking at oneself increasingly evolved into an overt anxious (Emotional) nature.

### **Girls Looking In the Mirror**

As with the theme of window, noted in Chapter Seven, a theme of girls and mirrors emerged during the research about traits. Whereas 23 mentions of windows were found in relation to roles (see Chapter Seven), only eight mentions of mirror in connection with traits were found in the selected periodicals drawn from the 87-year period. One mention of a mirror was recorded in each of the first two eras (from 1865 through 1894 and 1895 through 1923) and six mentions were found in periodicals selected from 1924 through 1952. These mentions of girls' traits illuminated some themes of girlhood—that were not otherwise addressed in material read while searching for roles and traits. Overall, the mirror-theme as it related to traits was of a mirror as a place to evaluate or enhance



appearance. This, of course, supported the Ornamental trait (and Looking Good role discussed in Chapter Seven).

Subtleties in the shifting use of the mirror in texts across the 87-years seem revealing. From 1865 through 1894 and 1895 through 1923, girls' looks were the focus of attention, although it was about admiring beauty—not "fixing" one's appearance—in these early eras. For example, an 1897 statement in *St. Nicholas* said: "With her heart in a flutter and pinker roses in her cheeks than the one in her pocket, Lizzie followed to a handsome room where a pretty girl stood before a long mirror with the hat in her hand" (*St. Nicholas*, March 1874). In the second era the focus was on evaluating flaws. For example a statement in a 1906 *Ladies' Home Journal* said that "Gums were not made for exhibition, and the girl who smiles so carelessly that she raises her upper lip nearly to its attachment needs to study before the mirror until she can smile without making her friends think of a savage" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1906). From 1924 through 1952, the mirror theme and Ornamental trait were set outdoors, capturing the scouting interests of the era. For example, a statement in a 1931 *Ladies' Home Journal* said, "Things to make camp comfortable at the Girl Scout Shop ... Unbreakable metal mirror ... Flash light ... first aid kit ..." (*Ladies' Home Journal*, June 1931). One mention in a 1932 issue of *Country Gentleman* suggested utilizing "nature's mirror" when possible: "It's fun to practice outdoors bedside a brook, where your movements are reflected in the water" (*Country Gentleman*, July 1932).

Still the early era's theme of admiring beauty endured, as suggested by this statement in a 1934 *Ladies' Home Journal*: "You steal a glance into the mirror to see if you're really as devastating as you thought" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1934). A 1940 statement in the same periodical implied importance of "fixing" one's appearance as it

directed girls to "Look hard in your mirror" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1940). That same year, a writer for the *Country Gentleman* gave a similar directive: "Stand before a mirror, a full length one if possible" (*Country Gentleman*, March 1940).

The mirror theme provides a perspective from which to understand the distinction between traits and roles. The traits described below might have shown the readers of the selected periodicals how girls could be.

### **Traits Across Time**

The traits that girls were most likely and least likely to read about give a sense of available traits and their boundaries. During the 87-year period considered here, a girl could read most about girls with traits that did not seem to test boundaries. Girls' reflections mirrored those of their mothers – traits based around domesticity. The traits of Passivity and Dependence endured. Not only that; they endured with the support of the prevalent traits of Weak, Emotional and Ornamental. By the last era considered here, the traits seen in periodicals set boundaries in a manner similar to those of previous generations, but the boundaries were wider, more inclusive. The girls didn't actually have more choices, but they had more freedom within the choices of traits. This gave girls an idea about how they could be.

Recurring traits were examined for trends. Did the most prevalent traits rise or fall or endure and remain stable across the 87 years? Did the same trait dominate in all eras? What range of traits appeared in the selected periodicals? Whereas the range of roles in the selected periodicals (discussed in Chapter Seven) gave girls ideas of whom they could be, the range of traits that girls were most likely (and least likely) to read about gave them a

sense of their behavioral boundaries and an idea about choices they might have about how they could (and should) be.

### **Recurring Traits**

As with roles discussed in Chapter Seven, recurring traits were identified by looking for consistency and dominance across all three eras and for prevailing traits within each era. The discussion below begins with dominant traits and consistent traits across the three eras, followed by prevailing, waning and enduring traits.

#### *Dominant Traits*

The three dominant traits across the 87 years, out of 96 possible traits, measured by numbers of mentions in periodicals read, were:

- Emotional = 94 mentions (out of 754)
- Ornamental = 95 mentions (out of 754)
- Weak = 84 mentions (out of 754)

Again, the three most-mentioned traits were traditional womanhood traits – as true of roles (discussed in Chapter Seven). The ten most-mentioned traits in the selected periodicals from the 87-year period were Emotional and Ornamental, tied at 13 percent each of total traits mentioned. The trait Weak followed with 11 percent; Strong with 6 percent of total mentions, ranked third. The remaining traits in rank order by percent of total mentions were: Passive, Caring, Intelligent—all tied at 5 percent each—Proper (4 percent). Dependent (3 percent), Confident, Fun, Reliable, Selfish, Spiritual (tied at 2

percent). Finally, Entertaining, Embarrassed, Vain, Motherly, Self-Sacrificing and Competitive tied at 1 percent each of total mentions of traits.

The five traits that initially were expected to appear in the periodicals ranked in the ten most-mentioned, but Dependent was near the bottom of the list. This may mean that Dependence was not affected by cultural influences over time. Traits discovered during the research that were mentioned more often than Dependence were Strong, Caring, Proper and Intelligent. Two of these—Strong and Intelligent—surpassed Dependence and might suggest a shift toward Independence or Self-Sufficiency.

### *Consistent Traits*

A trait was considered consistent if it was one of the most mentioned in every era. Studying the five most mentioned traits in each era shows certain traits were among those mentioned through the entire period of the study. The most consistent and most dominant traits were the same. These appear below:

- Emotional
- Ornamental
- Weak

The fact that these three traits ranked so high from 1865 to 1952 suggests how strong they were.

### *Prevailing Traits (Individual Eras)*

The most-mentioned traits in each era, discussed in previous chapters, are listed here for comparison.

Era One (1865-1894) = Emotional (46 of 234 mentions of traits)  
 Era Two (1895-1923) = Emotional and Weak (41 and 40 of 312 mentions)  
 Era Three (1924-1952) = Ornamental (41 of 208 mentions)

Examining findings by looking for dominance, consistency and prevalence revealed the four recurring traits seen across the 87 years:

- Emotional = 94 out of 754 mentions; 13 percent of all mentions; most mentioned trait from 1865- 1923; one of the most mentioned traits from 1865-1952
- Ornamental = 95 out of 754 mentions; 13 percent; most mentioned trait from 1923-1952; one of the most mentioned traits from 1865-1952
- Weak = 84 out of 754 mentions; 11 percent; most mentioned trait from 1895-1923; one of the most mentioned traits from 1865-1952

Ornamental and Emotional seem to be the most mentioned traits, overall. These two traits are complex – one seems to be a choice that a girl makes (Ornamental) while the other can be beyond a girl's control (Emotional). Yet, both traits can be used strategically by girls. Unlike what was found in roles (see Chapter Seven), the number of mentions about traits remained relatively stable across the time period. From 1865 through 1893, 234 mentions were located, then from 1894 through 1923, the number increased to 312. From 1924 through 1952 the number dropped a bit to 208 mentions. Substantially fewer mentions of traits (754 mentions), compared to mentions of roles (1479 mentions), were located. Perhaps only half as many traits were discovered due to the format of periodicals. In a book, a writer can provide many descriptors and adjectives (which indicate traits), but a writer has limited space in a periodical. That limitation might have meant that more words

were used to describe what someone was doing (which indicate roles) than to describe how something was being done. That said, the increase and decrease in trait mentions followed the same pattern as was found for roles. But the shifts were much smaller.

### **Range of Traits**

From 1865 through 1952, girls who were reading the variety of publications selected for this dissertation were exposed to a range of traits. A girl reader would be most likely to see the following 20 traits in those publications (listed in order of most mentioned to least mentioned):

Emotional

Ornamental

Weak

Strong

Passive

Caring

Proper

Intelligent

Dependent

Confident

Fun

Reliable

Selfish

Spiritual

Entertaining

Embarrassed

Vain

Motherly

Self-Sacrificing

Competitive

Most of these traits can be associated with 19th-century traditional womanhood, but many exemplify what females should do or are expected to do rather than what they should not do. The traits do not seem connected to changing societal influences—school, friends, media—as much as the roles seen. Further, the traits seem more concretely defined and likely to mean the same in 1880 as in 1944. Perhaps this indicates rigidity in society regarding these traits.

What traits would girls have read about rarely in the texts? The following 45 traits include some that were seen--but rarely.

- Distracted/Bored
- Awkward/Odd
- Reserved/Careful
- Content
- Innocent/Pure/Naïve
- Loyal
- Lovelorn
- Pleasant
- Ignorant/Unintelligent
- Affectionate
- Apologetic/Regretful
- Disappointed/Frustrated
- Independent
- Honest/Fair/Sincere
- Excited
- Whimsical
- Thoughtful/Attentive
- Improper/Dangerous/Impulsive

- Athletic/Healthy/Active
- Precocious
- Burdened
- Eager/Earnest
- Talented/Creative
- Catty/Bossy
- Thankful
- Dedicated
- Indifferent
- Talky
- Addicted
- Young
- Spontaneous
- Interesting/Well Rounded
- Depressed
- Anxious/Worried/nervous
- Plucky/Spirited/Tomboy/Curious
- Lonely
- Careless
- Happy/Cheerful/Joyful
- Rude/Cross/Inconsiderate
- Modest
- Challenging
- Helpful/Useful/Efficient
- Simple
- Contrary
- Unprepared/Unreliable
- Hesitant/Unsure



Many of these traits connect to notions about childhood, suggesting that girls were not likely to see girls' childish natures in the periodicals. Because some of these did appear, the contrary, impulsive or challenging girl might see traits she could relate to, albeit that was not likely. Perhaps these traits were not there for proscriptive reasons, meaning that if girls did not see negative traits, they would not learn them. See chart on pages 248 to 249 for a full list and total mentions of each trait.

### **Trends of Traits**

The expected traits seemed likely to decline through the eras as distance in time from the 19th-century notions of traditional womanhood increased. The trends in traits over time give a sense of how stable they were across the 87 years. The trends in the ten most mentioned traits are discussed below.

#### *Waning Traits*

Many of the traits faded across the eras, among them are Emotional, Weak, Caring, Self- Sacrificing and Spiritual. Strong weakened a bit, as well. Emotional and Weak were linked to 19th-century traditional womanhood norms and likely seemed less relevant as time passed. Some traits were also tied to family (a girl needed to be strong to help with a farm and home); but as girls' culture developed more around friends and social settings, these traits were perhaps less relevant.

#### *Increasingly Mentioned Traits*

It was expected that the traits discovered during research would become more visible over time because they might not be tied to 19th-century notions. They were expected to reflect societal/cultural changes during the eras examined. Ornamental became more visible across the three eras, as did Intelligent—seemingly contradictory traits—but perhaps these were parallel goals for girls to pursue. The strength of media influence might explain the increased mention of Ornamental, similar to the increase in the Looking Good role. Perhaps the increasing mentions of the Intelligence trait could be connected to the increasing emphasis on education.

Mentions of a number of traits rose slightly across all eras, including Proper, Motherly, Reliable, Entertaining and Vain. Family and home were likely linked most to the traits of Motherly and Proper – and perhaps Reliable. These traits were not expected to remain very visible, especially in later eras. The traits of Entertaining and Vain may have some connection to social/cultural influences, including media.

Celebrity and appearance became increasingly significant in the culture over the 87-year period, according to historians. Mass media expanded beyond print in the early 1900s to include radio and, perhaps more significantly, film. Movie stars became celebrities—and people that girls might use as models. By the 1930s, celebrity mentions appeared in *Country Gentleman*, as shown in the following 1934 excerpt: "Here's a new fad: ... [E]xhibit the picture of your favorite radio or movie picture star or a hero or heroine of the sports world or any other inspiring present day character in a book cover" (*Country Gentleman*, March 1934).

### *Enduring Traits*

Some traits were not expected to be affected by the passage of time, that is distance in time from 19th-century notions of traditional womanhood, nor by the shifts in cultural influences of friends, school and media. Passive, Dependent, Embarrassed and Competitive traits remained constant in mentions throughout all eras; and Confident, Fun and Selfish were relatively constant over time. In the selected publications, these were the enduring traits that did not seem to shift with changing cultural trends. Two of these were 19th-century based traditional traits of womanhood: Passive and Dependent. The others reflected the complex array of traits girls read about across the eras: Girls could be competitive yet selfish, fun yet embarrassed.

The expected traits were closely examined because trends in mentions may indicate how durable these 19<sup>th</sup>-century-based traits could be beyond the 1865 through 1952 time period. The examination produced the following results:

- Passive and Dependent = Enduring traits
- Emotional and Weak = Waning traits
- Ornamental = Growing trait, increasingly visible

The enduring traits Passive and Dependent would seem the least likely to wane or disappear and most likely to remain visible beyond the period under study. Mentions of the traits Emotional and Weak started to decrease slightly during the early 1900s, perhaps due to the changes in girls' lifestyles – more education and more social opportunities, especially through social groups like those that involved scouting. Mentions of Ornamental were increasing, but that may have been influenced by consumerist-culture trends, and the trait might not endure after 1952. See pages 250 to 251 for list of traits and trends in mentions.

### Summary: Traits Over Time

Studying traits by looking for dominance and consistence across the years and for prevailing traits within the three eras showed, overall, that 19th-century notions about womanhood were much stronger than notions about childhood. In other words, what girls could read about in selected periodicals was dominated by how they were to be as adults—and not by the prevailing concepts about childhood—such as those defined in this dissertation in the selection of Expected Childhood Traits and Roles. (See page 78 in Chapter Three for the list.) That said, the notions about childhood were stronger in the traits than in the roles identified (discussed in Chapter Seven). Dependence was the only trait expected in both women and children. The enduring traits of Passivity and Dependency were a mix of notions about childhood and about womanhood. Both of these traits related to submissiveness, a quality that suggests the need for protection. Yet, the range of traits located in the periodicals also suggests that girls might have an opportunity to see parts of themselves—that is, how they could be in certain behaviors. Girls in the early 1950s were living very different lives from their grandmothers, and even quite different from the lives of their mothers, yet the girlhood mirrored in the readings still resembled what these relatives saw as girls—not themselves. A 1951 article in *Good Housekeeping* called "Through the Looking Glass" recognized the disconnect:

[W]hirling from school to dates, new ideas, and new people. It's part of being young and wanting to find out all about everything. But it's just as important to you, the you inside, that there be times in your life for a rendezvous that's strictly private. You need these moments to try to find out what the things you're doing mean to you, and why you're doing them, whether they are right for you and where you want to go from there....it

hasn't just slipped by in a directionless blur.  
 Remember the line (old but always good)  
 that goes 'And lets talk about you'? Try it on  
 yourself one day when you're alone and get  
 to know a fascinating stranger (*Good  
 Housekeeping*, October, 1951).

The enduring traits—those seemingly unaffected by cultural influences—Passive, Dependent, Embarrassed, Competitive, Confident, Fun and Selfish—showed girls a range of options in how they could be. The enduring quality of the traits is significant because, although some of these traits never were dominantly mentioned, they might fit girls' real experiences in their daily lives. For example, a girl might connect with the Competitive trait even if she only read about it a few times in a periodical, compared to the many, many mentions about Passive or Dependent girls. But, because she played on an indoor baseball team—and, again, because girl readers do not passively accept the traits presented to them—she connected with the enduring trait.

What girls read served as a kind of mirror of girlhood, where the view was often limited to 19th-century traits (such as Emotional, Ornamental and Weak). But reading offered a peek at options beyond the "true womanhood"-based view, highlighting new ways girls could think about seeing themselves, such as Competitive, Fun, and Confident or even Embarrassed and Selfish.

## Chapter Nine

### Looking Through the Glass: Discourses of Girlhood

The circumstances of a well-known literary character, Jane Eyre, illustrate something about the social construction of gender presented in girls' periodicals and pages throughout the years from 1865 through 1952. The novel opens with ten-year-old Jane retreating into a room and taking a picture book from the book case: "I mounted into the window-seat: gathering up my feet, I sat cross-legged ... folds of scarlet drapery shutting my view to the right hand; to the left hand were the clear panes of glass, protecting, but not separating me from the dreary November day" (as quoted in Bellis 640). The drapery offers the chance for her to adjust it and to decide for herself how much, and how, to adjust it. At the same time, the window pane indicates just how much she can see outside the room or how much she can connect with through a "veil" protecting her. The scene, read as a metaphor, represents the sphere that held women while implying that restraints keeping them in the proper sphere could potentially be loosened (or removed) to some degree so they could connect with the public. And yet, the girl in the Jane Eyre segment was still within the sphere—looking outside it and not being outside it—and she was presented with the illusion of choice.

These balances are still present today, especially with girls' involvement in social media, according to Shayla Thiel Stern. "The discourses around girls being involved in

today's social networks are comparable to discourses about girls in the early 1900s in that society tried to protect the young women" (Thiel Stern 3). Much of society's effort to guide girls is based on assumptions about gender difference. Cordelia Fine explains the need to look more closely at what are considered to be differences. "What is being chalked up as hardwiring on closer inspections starts to look more like the sensitive tuning of the self to the expectations lurking in the social context" (Fine 13). In other words, girls' attune themselves to the social construction of girls' realities.

According to Catherine Driscoll, "girlhood is made up and girls are brought into existence in statements and knowledge about girls, and some of the most widely shared or commonsensical knowledge about girls and feminine adolescence provides some of the clearest examples of how girls are constructed by changing ways of speaking about girls" (Driscoll 5). But are these ways changing as much as we think?

The fact that girls are also children heightens the complexity. "Childhood—a temporary state—becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow -- between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future" (Jenkins 5). One might be able to make the case that this is even more true with regard to female children.

"When we want to prove that something is basic and natural (the differences in genders, for example) we look at the presence in our children," according to Jenkins. (Jenkins 15). Browyn Davies' explains that children are not being pressed into masculinity and femininity as sex role socialization theory suggests. Instead, they become members of their social worlds by actively taking up their assigned gender in their own

ways. These ways might not be necessarily compatible with what their teachers and parents tell them about how gender should be expressed, but they would likely be compatible with the discourses of maleness and femaleness in daily life (Davies xix). It is not individuals alone who have impact; it is the whole cultural system.

## **Girlhood Discourses**

Many roles and traits of girlhood were expected to be reflected in the selected periodicals and in discourses of girlhood—ways of "talking about" girlhood—which reflect gender norms and cultural influences.

As a reminder to readers, the questions guiding the dissertation research include two about girlhood discourses -- that is, culturally embedded ways of "talking about" girls. Discourse theory is outlined in Chapter One and discourse analysis as a method is discussed below. The two research questions about discourse are repeated here.

- 1) What discourses about girls/girlhood are identifiable in the selected periodicals?
- 2) Of the identified discourses, which were dominant and consistent across the 87-year period?

### *Discourse Analysis*

Discourse analysis has been developed in recent decades as a research method because, in contrast to goals sought in formal linguistics, scholars wanted to examine culturally embedded ways subjects are talked about in a given culture (Mills 135).

Discourse analysis is concerned with language in "real" use—an analysis that equates



language with communicative function (Mills 138). According to Norman Fairclough, analysis of language in media texts helps answer questions about media content in relation to representations, identities and social relations. The analysis of language in representations reveals something about how language works ideologically via media (Fairclough 5).

Discourse analysis requires transcending the level of the sentence to focus on a larger cultural "conversation" (Mills 132). It rests on the premise that texts do not have meanings in and of themselves but are assigned meanings by users (Jensen and Jankowski 117). That is, people gradually construct meaning from text and store it in memory, and from that understanding of text, the language user builds mental models—of, for example, a reported phenomenon. These models, however, contain other information about phenomena that is not explicitly expressed in the text because it is assumed to be known by readers and thus unnecessary in the report. Such presupposed information is part of cultural "scripts," or collective knowledge about well-known and familiar aspects of the given culture. Hence, discourse analysis requires attention to intertextuality (discussed further below), which encompasses cognizance that text producers' beliefs belong to general social structures, such as attitudes and values, shared with audiences.

The purpose for this dissertation was not to uncover the truth or origin of statements but to identify discourses—in this case, how girls and girlhood were "talked about" in selected media and popular culture content across a portion of American history. There was no intent in this research to draw a causal relationship between discourse in popular culture and mass media content and readers; rather, the aim was to

explore discourses and constructions in popular culture and media content as potentially reflecting, shaping and/or reinforcing perceptions of girls and of girlhood.

Discursive and institutional limitations become habitual within cultures at certain periods and even across time. For example, girls were discouraged from being physically and publicly active in the Victorian Era and many constraints, such as "taboo" subjects, continue during a new historical period (Mills 65). For example, the norm of not encouraging girls to participate in athletics or sports continued well beyond the Victorian Era.

The research reported here is thus broadly concerned with discourse about girlhood from the late 19th century to mid-20th century that may have reflected and shaped views about girls and girlhood—and hence today's definition of girlhood. It was expected that, while one might find images unique to each girl represented in popular culture content, the content overall would portray girls, and define a girl's role, in accordance with gender norms prevalent in each era. For example, representations of girls in the 19th century were expected to reflect 19th-century ideals of "true womanhood," and content was expected to "tell" a girl, among other attributes, to provide support for the males in her life. A consistent message in the representation of girls across even uncertain, unstable times was assumed to reflect an entrenched social norm.

Discourse analysis of texts was expected to, in Gunther Kress' words, "reveal how the text tended to define, describe, delimit and circumscribe what is possible and impossible to say" (Kress 27) with respect to girlhood. This type of analysis is concerned with practices, both discursive and socio-cultural, as well as content of texts. Practices include the way texts are produced by media workers, (potentially) received by audiences

and distributed in society (Fairclough 16). In addition, identifying themes and patterns in language is a key element because discourse, according to David Domke, "indicates parameters in which an issue is discussed, reinforced, understood, created and perpetuated" (Domke 34).

Therefore, in discourse analysis, one looks for recurring themes or patterns – or what some call discursive structures—which, according to Mills, "can be detected because of the systemacy of the ideas, opinions, concepts, ways of thinking and behaving which are formed within a particular context" (Mills 17). Still, very important to discourse analysis is contextualization—that is, probing the context in which the discourse was produced. For example, Domke argues that, to understand general discourses prevalent in culture of a given time, one must study important social, political, economic and legal developments in the relevant time period (Domke 31). An underlying interest here is the possible roles of popular culture and the media, in concert with other social institutions, in helping maintain, challenge or modify hegemonic beliefs about gender—hence, affecting girls. For example, some knowledge of the female gender's social and legal status in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was essential to this research because women's status formed a crucial component of the context of girlhood.

Another element of discourse analysis is attention to what is absent (Fairclough 106). Fairclough breaks discourse into presence, absence and presupposed ("present" in text as part of implicit meaning). Present items are either explicit—in the background or foreground—in text while "absence" means omitted information (Fairclough 106). The category of presupposed means discourse "anchors the new in the old, the unknown in the

known," the unfamiliar in the familiar "scripts" of culture. This refers to intertextuality – an essential component of discourse.

The need for attention to intertextuality in discourse analysis cannot be overstated because texts (discourses) are understood due to constant incorporation of references to what is familiar in the culture—that is, knowledge of prior texts. Kress says individuals do not create discourse; rather, they become parties to reproducing discourses (Kress 31). Discourses may originate from seemingly diverse societal institutions; but discourses are very similar ways of talking about a given topic in a given society because of hegemony and intertextuality.

Although, according to Van Dijk, "possibilities for creative configuration of genres and discourses seem unlimited," media tend to produce and reproduce the same discursive themes because those make up cultural knowledge. Recurring themes, phrases and patterns help media users understand the text, and this is one way the media aid in the construction of social realities for the public (Van Dijk, *Discourse*, 46). While it is assumed here that popular culture and mass media producers are not aware of the ideologies affecting selection, association and omission of content, it is assumed that discourses influence how girlhood has been understood, reinforced and perpetuated in American society. Did discourses in the media and popular culture challenge hegemony regarding girlhood (gender norms) during the historical periods considered? If so, what were those discourses? And did they ultimately prevail? Or were they subordinated and "silenced?" If the latter, what was that process?

For this dissertation, the roles and traits were first discerned; any evidence of consistent and contradictory themes and patterns of discourse was noted. Those that

revealed the way girls were "talked about" at the level of culture—the larger conversation—were identified as discourses.

Discourses were identified through studying constructions of roles and traits that girls could have read about between 1865 and 1952. That is, content surrounding mentions of roles and traits, plus the mentions themselves, indicate how girls' lives were being constructed -- who girls could be and how they could be. This content revealed how girls were being "talked about" -- signaling discourses of girlhood. Repeated recurrence of the same "talk" led to identifying/labeling a discourse. Discursive regularity across the selected periodicals (texts) across the 87-year period was read as confirming the identified discourses (likely embedded in culture).

A proper-sphere discourse dominated in material read across the 87 years. Five supporting discourses, or discursive formations, were identified in the selected periodicals from the three eras: Girls are In-Training-To-Be Women; Girls are Compliant Homemakers; Girls are Daughters Who Play with Dolls; Girls are Friends with Crushes; Girls are Smart Shoppers. Each discourse is presented below.

### **Girls are In-Training-To-Be Women**

A girl needed to shed certain characteristics in order to become a woman, Myra and David Sadker, wrote. For example, girls were convinced that it was their role to teach "girl traits," such as gentleness, courtesy, love and kindness, to men and boys. A 1907 article shows this in describing how girls were providing guidance to others in their community: "Three other girls living in a town where the boys were notoriously bad and troublesome, started a boys' library" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, October 1907). The texts

that girls could have read in each of the three eras considered here highlighted that a girl would soon have to give up childhood activities. Many literary characters, including Anne of Green Gables, Laura Ingalls Wilder and Caddie Woodlawn, were depicted as "spontaneous, spunky, mischievous, and courageous," as children (Sadker and Sadker 239), but a reader saw all of them face the realization that they must grow up. The hesitancy and tension about growing up appears in this excerpt from a 1949 article:

"[M]y mother had bought some wonderful material and a ballerina pattern for a dress for me ... I told her I was going to ride the bike while I waited for the bus. She didn't approve of it but I did. I felt like a real dancing girl. ... I went flying into the pond... -- Kathryn Margeson, 12" (*Country Gentleman*, September 1949). The transitional nature of

girlhood was also articulated much earlier, as seen in this excerpt from an 1867 article:

"Now, Miss Emily was quite a little woman, and she liked to sit in the parlor and listen to the conversation of older people, though she did not understand half she heard, better than to play with Jennie and the dolls" (*Christian Recorder*, December 28, 1867).

Gender is embedded in the way girls were talked about in a way that is not true for childhood, in general. Typically, 19th-century girls' stories were seldom about very young children; instead, the narratives centered on heroines who were approximately 12 to 16 years of age, when girls were "at the end of childhood and on the verge of young womanhood," Heininger et al say (Heininger et al 106).

Authors of many girls' books focused on a decisive moment in a girl's life when she realized she must leave childhood behind and take on required demeanor and activities of a woman. Periodicals do not have space for long narratives, so articles focused on what happened right before or right after that moment of leaving childhood—

usually the after-moment. This allowed for connecting a girl's story to other activities, such as shopping and scouting—activities taking girls closer to the stage of adult woman (with scouting preparing girls for service to others).

### **Girls are Compliant Homemakers**

As was expected, 19th-century traditional traits and roles of both women and girls had a consistent presence in the girls' texts examined. Two traits that endured across the 87 years were Passive and Dependent. The role of Keeper of the Hearth also endured but shifted somewhat in what constituted it across the 87 years, while mentions of Passivity and Dependency remained relatively similar from 1865 through 1952. Thus, girls were being constructed throughout the 87-year period as Keepers of the Hearth who were (inherently) Passive and Dependent.

Sometimes girls mentioned in the selected periodicals had a sense of what they should be doing and could not be doing. For example, when asked to do something, a girl featured in one item replied, " 'Why no grandma, I can't, because I'm a little girl' " (*Christian Recorder*, May 26, 1866). Here gender and youth were reasons for not being able to do what was apparently expected of the girl.

Through the 87-year-time period, the Keeper of the Hearth role evolved a bit but had the same focus throughout: Housekeeping is important and integral to girlhood. The following excerpts selected from articles at different points during the 87 years illustrate:

- "The girls who don't sweep in the corners or dust under things ... are the girls who are very likely to make failures in life because the habit of inaccuracy has become a part of their characters" (*Youth's Companion*, November 1890).

- "Molly had her playhouse on one side of the wall, and Beth had hers on the other side. Molly's house was full of pretty pink dishes, and Beth had a little stove, with kettles and sauce pans. 'I'll be Bridget and cook,' said Beth, 'and you be Mrs. Spreadeagle and give a party' (*Woman's Journal*, January 29, 1898).
- An excerpt from an article titled "4-h Girls Put Charm to Work," asserted that "Taking poise and grace into the common tasks of dishwashing and dusting -- wearing crowns, they call it ... gives them a beautiful posture" (*Country Gentleman*, June 1939)

### **Girls are Daughters Who Play with Dolls**

Playing with dolls gave girls opportunities to model what was likely seen as adult women's most important function; playing with dolls led girls to model (mimic) their mothers and other adult women who cared for children. It also gave them settings for learning to be nurturing and to practice acts of mothering. "[G]irls were to assume lives in the private realm as pious and pure wives and mothers who were nurturing, gentle, self-sacrificing, emotional, physically weak and moral strong," Formanek-Brunell wrote.(Formanek-Brunell 39). Girls were depicted as playing with dolls, especially in the first era, 1865 through 1894. An excerpt from 1874 illustrates: "So Phebe placed the dolls all in a row, Dinah with the rest, and passed them bits of cake and bread ..." (*Youth's Companion*, July 1874).

The family-oriented roles and traits remained strong during those years, while girls were presented in the texts as needing protection, especially given their assumed emotional natures. Sometimes they even needed to be protected from dolls. Because



dolls were so popular, concerns were often expressed about the type of dolls girls were playing with, as illustrated by another excerpt from 1874. "[We would not] send out to our little girls any of these horrid puppets in full dress, that are now a days sold in the fashionable shops as dolls. Dolls they may be, but not doll-babies; not something to love and fondle and take care of in true mother style ..." (*St. Nicholas*, July 1874).

Dolls introduced girls to many aspects of girlhood, as the following series of excerpts shows.

- Social status: " 'Let us go to my playroom and see the dolls,' said Geraldine. ' I have twelve, and you would never guess their names.' ' I am afraid I should not remember so many,' Lucy said timidly" (*Woman's Journal*, June 22, 1895).
- Friendship: "Her great treasures were her old rag doll and the pretty plant her Sunday school teacher had given her" (*Woman's Journal*, May 31 1902).
- Fashion: "She was very fine indeed, quite as fine as the big doll in Duff and Dore's great store" (*Woman's Journal*, November 12, 1904).
- Homemaking: "I can imagine how fast your needles are flying just now as you get your dolls ready for Spring" (*Delineator*, April 1909); and "The time spent on making dolls' clothes is not time lost for you are really learning to make your own clothes in miniature" (*Delineator*, June 1910).
- Socializing: "May hoped 'twould stay in fashion for a while. ... My dolly was invited to a party just today. This dress you know will be her party one" (*Delineator*, October 1911).
- Charitableness: Dorothy wrote me that once Santa Claus brought her ten dolls and she kept only one, a weak little baby doll that she could snuggle in her arms

and help to grow up. All the other nine dolls went to little girls who had none" (*Delineator*, January 1914).

### **Girls are Friends with Crushes**

From 1895-1923, girls were depicted as friends with crushes. Girls were in school and otherwise spending more time outside the home in social environments where they connected with other girls and boys on a regular basis. Group friendships and dating activities developed during this era. Generally, socialization among peers in public increased throughout the 87-year-time period, and by the early 1950s girls were "whirling from school to dates, new ideas, and new people" (*Good Housekeeping*, October 1951). Many of the social interactions involved school, scouting and club activities, as the following excerpts indicate:

- "... I belong to a club at school, and everybody in the club must try to help some poor sick animal and make it better, or else feed hungry ones and do all they can to make animals happier" (*Woman's Journal*, October 21, 1899).
- "[T]he Jenny Wren Club is of use to you in ever so many ways. From being merely a sewing society three years ago, it has grown into an organization that helps girls with almost every problem that comes to them" (*Delineator*, April 1909).
- "What the Campfire Girls Stand for...the word camp symbolizes the outdoor spirit of the organization" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1912).

- "Delineator Sunshine club: Our fashions may intrigue each girl, for clothes do make the young minds whirl, and dresses shown on the Sunshine page are sure indeed to become the rage" (*Delineator*, October 1927).
- "... Marie A. Ingram, of Durant, Oklahoma, who joined the poultry club in 1922 with twelve hens and a cockerel, was a member of the team winning the champion junior judgeship" (*Country Gentleman*, December 1925).
- "[F]orm a jolly little decorating club, and work on one another's rooms in turn" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1929).

Parties (or gatherings) and dating were also among ways girls interacted with their peers and the opposite sex. These gatherings began as ways to further connect in the home but evolved into public activities. The following excerpts from years at intervals from 1895 through 1946 illustrate the phenomenon of crushes, their settings and pursuit:

- "Party calls are usually made within two weeks after the affair. In paying these calls, your friend should be with you" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, February 1895).
- "The route to... follow will have been carefully worked out beforehand by the girl who gives the breakfast party" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1929).
- "If you like the boy put up a fight for him. ... Get your family to give the boy a chance" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, May 1938).
- "But there's a technique to going with several boys. Avoid going with two boys who are best friends" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, September 1938).
- "Being a girl gives you certain Rights and Privileges. ... You have to set the Standard of Behavior for dates and you might just as well have everything your way" (*Good Housekeeping*, February 1943).

- "You may have 'liked' boys ever since you were an off-sized character back in the pigtails and pinafore department and the little chaps from round the neighborhood made good company for playing hide and seek and Red, Red Rover. But as you hit the upper age brackets, anywhere from a freshman to a senior in high school your attitude changes" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1946).
- "Or would you and your crowd like to spend your spare evenings sewing doll clothes, making scrapbooks or repainting toys for your local orphanage or children's hospital? ... And how about a big old time boy-girl barn dance with cornstalks in the corners, apple cider and doughnuts ...?" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, January 1946).

### **Girls are Smart Shoppers**

From 1924 through 1952 girls were seen as shoppers, even though many, if not most, did not have jobs. Still, they were subtly being targeted by advertisers as if they did. Some merchandisers had appealed to girls in earlier eras, as this excerpt from 1915 shows: "Mildred thought herself quite beyond dolls, but she stopped short before the wonderful creatures that stood in the center show cases as they entered the great toy store" (*St. Nicholas*, October 1915). By 1951, some publications used advice columns to answer girls' questions about spending, as this excerpt shows: "Next month our teenagers will share their money problems with you" (*Country Gentleman*, October 1951).

Shopping was seen as part of a step toward growing up, as illustrated by the description in 1910 of "Margery's" reaction to going to a store: "She felt like quite a lady going shopping ..." (*Woman's Journal*, April 20, 1910). While most suggested purchases

were for fashion or cosmetics, the task of shopping was described almost as a talent or skill that could even be used for good. An article in 1901 put shopping in the same category as helping those who were bereaved: "[S]he may develop a certain line of her own in marketing, or in shopping or in writing the family letters or reading to a friend who is blind or receiving the confidences of the sorrowing" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1901).

Girls often saw or heard about items in shops or store windows—many potential new purchases were pointed out to them—as shown in the following excerpts from the last era considered here:

- "When sports occupy much of your time and most of your thoughts, you are sure to be quite thrilled to hear about the latest arrival in the Avenue shop windows ..." (*Country Gentleman*, August 1929).
- "The girl who is fond of swimming will be interested in the gay triangular bandannas the New York shops are showing to be worn over plain rubber bathing caps in place of the old clumsy square" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, July 1928).
- "When I saw one of the lively little fabric dogs that are so popular just now tugging away so realistically at the end of his leash on the hem of a white satin blouse in a shop on the Avenue, I said here is something that every one of my girls will want to hear about" (*Country Gentleman*, July 1928).

The ornamental/appearance traits and roles created "ready-made" shoppers, and they were tied to increasingly social lives. An increasing amount and variety of media targeted girls as shoppers, particularly in the last era considered here.

The dominant discourse of proper-sphere was clear in the selected periodicals across all 87 years; it was perhaps most exemplified by the discursive formation of *Girls are In-Training-To-Be Women*, which was pervasive. Dominant themes in supporting discourses—homemaking, dependence, family, nurturing, friendship, courtship and appearance—kept traditional womanhood norms squarely in the view of reading girls from 1865 through 1952.

## Chapter Ten

### Conclusion: Girls Seeing Themselves

Periodicals about and for girls are a site for studying attitudes toward girlhood, for they reveal prevailing uncertainties regarding gender, Shirley Foster and Judy Simons explain (Foster and Simons 1). The contents "sculpt girls' actions and activities by showing what's typical and what's acceptable for them to do" (Lamb and Mikel Brown 198).

Content in the selected periodicals from 1865 to 1952 studied for this dissertation provide insight through expressing who girls could be (roles) and how girls could be (traits). The research focused on the descriptors of girls to discern what might be prescriptive—what girls were "told" about who and how to be. The reading material for girls was examined for the direction girls were being given or shown directly or indirectly, through characterizations (of fictional and non-fictional) girls, through outright instructions, and through discourse.

The research found at least 21 roles and more than five dozen traits—some of which were dominant, enduring and consistent across the 87-year period considered here. The Socializer role became more mentioned over time while the Nurturer role became less mentioned. Mentions of the Ornamental trait also increased over time, while mentions of the Emotional trait decreased. The endurance of the Keeper-of-the-Hearth role and Dependent trait, which remained strong through shifts in American culture

across 87 years, clearly contrasts with the fluctuation in mentions of the Emotional and Ornamental traits.

Nearly four dozen less-mentioned traits and just over a dozen less-mentioned roles reveal a wide range that girl readers could have seen. But the dominant, enduring and consistent traits and roles seen in the selected periodicals likely match dominant, enduring and consistent traits and roles in other aspects of American culture. More research is needed to explore the extent to which this may be true.

Girls would have seen many contradictory messages about whom to be and when to be that way. Yet the contradictions and mixed messages, while messy, also indicate choice. Most readers likely focused on the dominant and consistent roles and traits, but readers had the opportunity to connect with others if they chose because of the relatively wide range of traits and roles available for girls to read about.

The boundaries of girlhood were relatively broad during the time span covered here. The range is important since Lamb and Mikel Brown have written of two kinds of boundaries for girls: 1) those that constrain what girls can do, and 2) those that separate girls from boys. Girls in the years considered here could read about traits and roles that indicated girls are either "for boys" or are "one of the boys," as articulated by Lamb and Mikel Brown (Lamb and Mikel Brown 8). These choices indicate girlhood boundaries without addressing any variations between behaving like a boy and behaving like a girl.

Nevertheless, the research showed that girls had some choices about whom they wanted to be and how they wanted to be; and they had increasing opportunities over time to participate in making those choices. Radway said that "it is very important that we not assume that we know what will be made, or is being made of any particular story, book,



or object we provide for young girls" (quoted in Greene, Strange and Brock 196). What Davies said about structuralism and post structuralism also provides a useful perspective against which to view this concept of girls' choice during the 87 years. Davies wrote: "Structuralism recognizes the constitutive force of discourse and of the social structures that are constituted through those discourses. Post structuralism opens up the possibility of agency to the subject through the very act of making visible the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves is being woven" (Davies 12).

Study of the same content in the selected periodicals to identify discourses of girlhood in three eras (1865-1893; 1894-1923; 1924-1953) showed a proper-sphere discourse dominated. The dominant way girls were talked about across all 87 years was as being in-training-to-be-women. Themes of four supporting discourses, or discursive formations, centered on homemaking, dependence, family, nurturing, friendship, courtship and appearance. Those four supporting discursive formations are: Girls are Daughters Who Play with Dolls; Girls are Compliant Homemakers; Girls Are Friends with Crushes; Girls Are Smart Shoppers. Pervasiveness of these in the roles and traits identified tend to confirm the discourses—as expected since discourses are embedded in a ways of talking about subjects in a culture.

### **Implications of the Research**

What does the research—about what reading material aimed at girls through approximately four generations—imply for the present and future? What does it suggest about progress in gender norms or conditions under which change in norms may occur? The following summarizes a few issues that the research seems to underscore:

First, given the finding that a proper-sphere discourse dominated across the 87 years, the research bears out that change comes slowly, at least in ideas about gender. If a survey today asked everyone to write down what women and men are like, Cordelia Fine suggests, the traits "compassionate, loves children, dependent, interpersonally sensitive, nurturing" would be listed under women, and "leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical competitive, dominant, independent and individualistic" would be listed under men (Fine 43). The research here indicates that the same survey results could well have been seen in the 19th century. Fine calls the traits she listed "communal personality traits," which have been crafted by the coordination of many cultural influences and not one influence alone. Many of the influences to which she alludes have origins in traditional 19th-century notions about gender.

Second, the research re-affirms the power of reading for children. Concerns, overt or implied, about what girls (and children) could and could not read, made clear that adults recognized such power. For example, Irene Bowman, a member of the American Library Association, wrote in 1918 that if a "child persists in reading a set of books [she] has the same ideas presented again and again often in an identical setting" (Tarbox 46). Librarians, as experts in reading in the early 20th century, opposed particular types of books based on their sense of how powerful reading could be in the process of sense-making.

Third, the research calls attention to how saturated media and culture are with constructed gender roles and traits. Fine said that, even though media texts have the "opportunity to present an imaginary world that offers children a look at possibilities beyond the reality of male and female social roles, children's media often continue to

constrict gender roles, sometimes even with more rigidity than the real world" (Fine 218). These roles are perpetuated in media and other cultural institutions. As noted in the discussion of discourse (Chapter One and Chapter Nine) creators of periodicals use shared meanings because they help communicate messages more directly. When those meanings are not challenged, however, they ultimately seem natural and become increasingly entrenched in culture as common sense—making alternative meanings more difficult to see or even imagine. Even though girls begin in the early teen years to openly challenge parents and to believe older girls have much to teach them, according to Lamb and Mikel Brown, the older girls they encounter are in media sources (Lamb and Mikel Brown 7)—and likely reflect a dominant hegemonic construction of girlhood. The older girls' appearance in media is due, at least in part, to magazine editors increasingly capitalizing on the influence of girls seen in media by aiming publications to girls of a wide age range, from 7 to 14 (Lamb and Mikel Brown 193).

Fourth, the research also calls attention to the power of reading and other influences in shaping a child's (girl's) self identity. As a scholar who focuses on neurosexism, Fine wrote, "We start to think of ourselves in terms of our gender, and stereotypes and social expectations become more prominent in the mind. This can change self perception, alter interests, debilitate or enhance ability, and trigger unintentional discrimination. In other words, the social context influences who you are, how you think and what you do. And these thoughts, attitudes and behaviors of yours in turn become part of the social context" (Fine xxvi).

Fifth, the research reminds us at the same time that all girls and children do not passively receive messages from media, albeit negotiating alternative meanings is very

difficult for them. Girls' use of three types of reading—liberatory reading, critical reading and identification—means they are not passive recipients of media messages (Inness 271). Girls might read some texts as the author intended; but they might also negotiate texts to create meaning that makes sense in their lives. That said, generalizations about gender exist at an implicit level throughout culture, as Fine suggests, and can influence thoughts about gender regardless whether a reader consciously endorses them (Fine 4). So, while girls can be active readers and makers of their own meanings, they must work hard to do so. But, even when they do actively read, they may not be equipped to recognize or critically analyze images of femininity that do not accurately reflect the real females they see around them (Duke and Kreshel 50).

### **Limitations of Research**

The research is limited in scope and span. First, the research was limited to study of 760 periodicals judged to be the most relevant for the purposes of the dissertation, but generalizations from 760 periodicals to an entire culture are not possible. Further, the text of each magazine was shaped by the editors'/publishers' choices and the magazine's purposes. Obviously, a few editors' choices do not reflect the opinion and attitudes of a whole population. Still, it seems fair to say, based on circulation and popularity of the periodicals, that adult audiences shared views expressed in content and approved. Producers of content for public consumption, as noted, share culture with the content users, and the messages they transmit must invoke culturally shared meanings to be understood and be of use by receivers of the messages.

Second, the research, although covering a long period chronologically, did not examine possible trends among types of periodicals. For example, were there different trends in mentions in the children's periodicals vs. the children's pages in women's periodicals? Trends among publications were not compared, either. Except for one periodical, *The Christian Recorder*, published for an African American audience, the periodicals used as primary sources were likely aimed to urban, white and upper- and middle-class girls. Hence, girlhood of the latter group is over represented—as very likely are gender norms reflected in the periodicals.

### **Future Research**

This dissertation contributes to the field of journalism history, and specifically to the history of children's periodicals, since the content of periodicals studied here, especially that in the girls/children's pages, has received little scholarly attention. The research placed the periodicals within a broad historical context to probe what they suggest about constructions of girlhood across nearly a century of American history. The dissertation also contributes to the history of girls and girlhood. Present-day constructions of girlhood can be traced to the Victorian ideal of girlhood (and womanhood), but the meaning and boundaries of girlhood do not go unchallenged. Conditions under which change in them actually occurs is unclear, especially given that roles and traits seen here seemed relatively unaffected by cultural shifts over time. This dissertation is only a modest beginning of work in these areas; much more research is needed about the history of girlhood, girls' use of media and gender in history.

Much additional research is needed, in particular, to expand knowledge about the role of media in purveying and defining gender notions. Also, the idea of challenging the notion that girls are a definable group could be explored by study of regional girlhood cultures. Further, other resources, children's books in particular, need more study in relation to gender constructions and children's views. What might be learned from a study of girls' discourses in what they wrote, especially about what they read?

Incorporating narratives in journals and letters, and in autobiographies written by girls of each era could illuminate findings here. The narratives might reveal how aware girls were of the limitations in their lives. Examining narratives of girls from a wider range of races and classes would provide a fuller picture of girlhood as well, at least from the girls' perspectives.

Developing a history (or histories) of power based on gender could be also useful. Jenkins emphasizes that, while children actively participate in the process of defining their own identities, they do so from a position of unequal power (Jenkins 4). Gender has long been a signifier of unequal power. Such a history of African American women would be of special interest since they have generally experienced a dual discrimination—race and gender—that reduces power or actively works to disempower.

Expanding the research reported here beyond 1952 would likely prove fruitful, given the spread of television use and the Second Wave of the Women's Movement. For example, have traits like Emotionalism and Dependency diminished in media since enactment of civil rights policies and laws like equal opportunity employment? What do women's and girls' roles and traits in television programs suggest about who girls can be

and how they can be? What would television programming over time show about gender norms?

Since the Dependent trait, which at the outset was expected to rank high in mentions of traits in the periodicals, ranked near the bottom of the list, Dependence may not have been affected by cultural influences over time. Research probing whether this trait continued after 1952 might be enlightening, considering the numbers of girls now participating in sports, doing construction work, and serving in what were once men-only roles—in the military and other sectors.

Future research could explore ways to assure that media and culture as a whole offer girls a broad range of discourses to read about themselves, expanding, as Linda Christian-Smith describes, the "repertoire on which they draw in constructing their femininity" (Christian-Smith 141). The purposes and interests of the publishers, editors, and authors associated with the publications also need study. As Jenkins points out, "children's culture is shaped by adult agendas and expectations at least on the site of production and often at the moment of reception, and these materials leave lasting imprints on children's social and cultural development" (Jenkins 26).

Girls' read stories that tend to be about whom they can become (roles) and how they can be (traits). But, without expectations or guidance, these stories alone don't clearly show a girl how to see herself. They don't help her see how to be herself. The choices are there but are hard to see. As long as traditional notions of gender continue to obscure a girl's view of herself, the women that girls become in society will be limited.

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## **Primary Sources**

### **Children's Periodicals**

Youth's Companion (1865-1929)

St. Nicholas (1872-1940),

### **Children's Sections and Girls' Pages**

The Delineator (1873-1937)

Good Housekeeping (1885-1952)

Ladies' Home Journal (1883-1952)

Christian Recorder (1865-1894)

Woman's Journal (1895-1923)

Country Gentleman (1924-1952)

### **Children's Books**

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), Lewis Carrol

Elsie Dinsmore (1867), Martha Finley

Lorna Doone (1869), R.D. Blackmore's

What Katy Did (1872), Susan Coolidge

Heidi (1885), Janna Spyri



## Discovered Roles and Discovered Traits

### Discovered Roles

Socializer  
 Independent Woman  
 Weaker Sex  
 Athlete  
 Scout  
 Creative Artist  
 Leisure Girl  
 Entertainer  
 Thinker  
 Hero  
 Patriot

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### Discovered Traits

Strong	Whimsical
Caring	Thoughtful/Attentive
Proper	Improper/Dangerous/Impulsive
Intelligent	Athletic/Healthy/Active
Confident	Precocious
Fun	Burdened
Reliable	Eager/Earnest
Selfish	Talented/Creative
Spiritual	Catty/Bossy
Entertaining	Thankful
Embarrassed	Dedicated
Vain	Indifferent
Motherly	Talky
Self-Sacrificing	Addicted
Competitive	Young
Distracted/Bored	Spontaneous
Awkward/Odd	Interesting/Well Rounded
Reserved/Careful	Depressed
Content	Anxious/Worried/Nervous
Innocent/Pure/Naïve	Lonely
Lovelorn	Careless
Pleasant	Happy/Cheerful/Joyful
Ignorant/Unintelligent	Rude/Cross/Inconsiderate
Affectionate	Modest
Apologetic/Regretful	Challenging
Disappointed/Frustrated	Helpful/Useful/Efficient
Independent	Simple
Honest/Fair/Sincere	Contrary
Excited	Hesitant/Unsure

### List of Roles: Total Mentions

<u>Roles</u>	<u>Total Mentions</u>	<u>Percent of Mentions</u>
Socializer	763	26
Keeper of the Hearth	438	15
Looking Good	427	14
Learner	252	8
Nurturer	168	6
Independent Woman	161	5
Weaker Sex	151	5
Child	133	4
Femme Fatale	110	4
Athlete	96	3
Moral Authority	76	3
Scout	54	2
Creative Artist	34	1
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Leisure Girl	22	0.7
Tomboy	19	0.6
Entertainer	17	0.6
Thinker	17	0.6
Challenger	13	0.4
Hero	7	0.2
Self/Introspective Girl	6	0.2
Patriot	6	0.2

**List of Roles: Trends Across Eras**  
*Percentage of total mentions within each era*

<b>Roles</b>	<b><u>1865-1894</u></b>	<b><u>1895-1923</u></b>	<b><u>1924-1952</u></b>
Socializer	12	31	25
Keeper of the Hearth	16	14	15
Looking Good	4	14	20
Learner	9	9	7
Nurturer	12	5	3
Independent Woman	7	5	6
Weaker Sex	13	5	1
Child	7	6	1
Femme Fatale	1	1	9
Athlete	4	2	4
Moral Authority	7	2	0.6
Scout	2	2	2
Creative Artist	0	0.8	2
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Leisure Girl	0.2	0.6	1
Tomboy	0.2	0.8	0.5
Entertainer	0.8	0.6	0.4
Thinker	2	0.3	0.4
Challenger	0.6	0.3	0.5
Hero	0.2	0.3	0.2
Self/Intropective Girl	0.2	0.06	0.4
Patriot	0	0.3	0.2

### List of Traits: Total Mentions

<u>Traits</u>	<u>Total Mentions</u>	<u>Percent of Mentions</u>
Emotional	98	13
Ornamental	95	13
Weak	86	11
Strong	47	6
Passive	40	5
Caring	38	5
Proper	33	4
Intelligent	31	5
Dependent	23	3
Confident	16	2
Fun	15	2
Reliable	14	2
Selfish	14	2
Spiritual	13	2
Entertaining	11	1
Embarrassed	9	1
Vain	9	1
Motherly	9	1
Self-Sacrificing	8	1
Competitive	8	1
-----	-----	-----
Distracted/Bored	7	0.9
Awkward/Odd	7	0.9
Reserved/ Careful	7	0.9
Content	7	0.9
Innocent	6	0.8
Pleasant	6	0.8
Lovelorn	6	0.8
Ignorant/ Unintelligent	5	0.7
Affectionate	5	0.7
Apologetic/ Regretful	5	0.7
Disappointed/ Frustrated	5	0.7
Independent	5	0.7
Honest//Fair/Sincere	4	0.5
Excited	4	0.5
Whimsical	4	0.5
Contemplative/ Thoughtful/Attentive	4	0.5
Improper/Dangerous/ Impulsive	4	0.5
Athletic/Healthy/ Active	3	0.4
Precocious	3	0.4
Burdened	3	0.4
Eager/Earnest	3	0.4
Talented/Creative	2	0.3
Catty/Bossy	2	0.3
Thankful	2	0.3
Dedicated	2	0.3
Indifferent	2	0.3

Talky	2	0.3
Addicted	2	0.3
Young	2	0.3
Spontaneous	2	0.3
Interesting/ Well Rounded	2	0.3
Depressed	1	0.1
Anxious/Worried/ Nervous	1	0.1
Tomboy	1	0.1
Lonely	1	0.1
Careless	1	0.1
Happy/Cheerful/ Joyful	1	0.1
Rude/Cross/ Inconsiderate	1	0.1
Modest	1	0.1
Challenging	1	0.1
Helpful/Useful/ Efficient	1	0.1
Simple	1	0.1
Contrary	1	0.1
Unprepared	1	0.1
Hesitant/Unsure	1	0.1

## List of Traits: Trends Across Eras

*Percentage of total mentions within each era*

<b>Traits</b>	<b>1865-1894</b>	<b>1895-1923</b>	<b>1924-1952</b>
Emotional	20	13	5
Ornamental	9	11	20
Weak	13	13	8
Strong	9	5	5
Passive	5	6	5
Caring	7	5	2
Proper	2	5	5
Intelligent	3	4	6
Dependent	3	3	2
Confident	3	1	2
Fun	1	1	4
Reliable	0.8	2	3
Selfish	4	0.3	2
Spiritual	3	1	1
Entertaining	1	1	2
Embarrassed	0.8	2	2
Vain	0	1	2
Motherly	0	1	3
Self-Sacrificing	0.4	2	0
Competitive	1	0.6	1
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Distracted/Bored	0.8	1	0.5
Awkward/Odd		0.6	0.5
Reserved/Careful	1	0.6	0.9
Content	0.8	0.3	2
Innocent	0.8	1	0.5
Pleasant	0.4	1	0.9
Lovelorn	0.8	1	0
Ignorant/Unintelligent	1	0.3	0.5
Affectionate	0.4	1	0.5
Apologetic/Regretful	0	2	0
Disappointed/Frustrated	0	0.6	1
Independent	0	1	0.5
Honest/Fair/Sincere	0.4	1	0
Excited	0.4	1	0
Whimsical	0	1	0.5
Thoughtful/Attentive	0.4	0.6	0.5
Improper/Dangerous/Impulsive	0	0.3	1
Athletic/Healthy/Active	0.4	0.6	0
Precocious	0.4	0.3	0.5
Burdened	0	1	0
Eager/Earnest	0	0.6	0.5
Talented/Creative	0	0.3	0.5
Catty/Bossy	0	0.3	0.5
Thankful	0	0.6	0
Dedicated	0	0.6	0
Indifferent	0	0.6	0
Talky	0	0.6	0
Addicted	0	0	0.9
Young	0	0	0.9
Spontaneous	0	0	0.9
Interesting/Well Rounded	0	0	0.9
Depressed	0.4	0	0
Anxious/Worried/Nervous	0.4	0	0

Tomboy	0.4	0	0
Lonely	0.4	0	0
Careless	0.4	0	0
Happy/Cheerful/Joyful	0.4	0	0
Rude/Cross/Inconsiderate	0.4	0	0
Modest	0	0.3	0
Challenging	0	0.3	0
Helpful/Useful/Efficient	0	0.3	0
Simple	0	0.3	0
Contrary	0	0.3	0
Unprepared	0.4	0	0
Hesitant/Unsure	0	0	0.5

## Children's Periodicals and Children's Sections and Girls' Pages Totals

### I. Children's Periodicals

	<b>Totals</b>
Number of Periodicals Selected	
Era One (1865-1894)	43
Era Two (1895-1923)	46
Era Three (1924-1952)	22
Number of Articles Read	
Era One (1865-1894)	73
Era Two (1895-1923)	67
Era Three (1924-1952)	37
Number of Mentions Recorded	
Era One (1865-1894)	416
Era Two (1895-1923)	319
Era Three (1924-1952)	122



## II. Children's Sections and Girls' Pages

**Totals**

## Number of Children's Sections and Girls' Pages

Era One (1865-1894)	147
Era Two (1895-1923)	381
Era Three (1924-1952)	311

## Number of Articles Read

Era One (1865-1894)	28
Era Two (1895-1923)	273
Era Three (1924-1952)	456

## Number of Mentions Recorded

Era One (1865-1894)	156
Era Two (1895-1923)	1125
Era Three (1924-1952)	745