

Adolescent Girls' Body-Narratives and Co-Constructed Critical Interpretations

by

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Abstract

Narrative analysis, a form of narrative inquiry, uses stories to frame and describe how people interpret and construct the meanings of their lives. Stories connect us with our past, help us to understand our present, and offer vision of possible futures. People live and create their lives through the stories they see, hear, tell, internalize, and hope for. The interpretation of narrative is not about certainties or standards, but rather about the multiplicity of perspectives and possibilities that can be constructed to make experience understandable. Critical interpretation of narrative can thus be a transformative process; a process being so crucial to the health of adolescent girls in Western culture. This study explores how four adolescent girls, and one researcher, together, interpreted and constructed the meanings of their bodies. The journey connects the researcher's struggle to find more democratic and empowering forms of inquiry, with the stories four eighth grade girls, diverse in race, social class, religion, and skin color, tell about how they experience and see their bodies in culture, in relation to others, and as them selves.

All four girls are learning to create and desire an "image" of an ideal woman, and thus are beginning to objectify their bodies to be "looked at" by others. Image was a predominant interpretive frame for constructing meaning of the body for all four girls. Yet race, particularly visual racial representations, was also a predominant interpretive frame for the two African American, and one African American-Indian girls.

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