

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: WHO AM I?: MEDIA INFLUENCE ON THE GENDER CONSTRUCTION OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

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While gender construction and identity occur across many years of childhood and early adulthood, it is in the adolescent stage when children ask the question, “Who am I?” In this study, I examine the ways media, as well as parents and peers, influence adolescent gender construction. Because of my interest in environments that seek to minimize media exposure, I situated the study in an alternative school setting. My main research question asked, “In what ways do students perform gender in a school environment that shapes interactions with media in particular ways?”

To ensure that the investigation considered multiple perspectives, I examined students’ use of media at home and at school; how parental values regarding their children’s media use related to gender performance, values, and ideals; and, lastly, how gender performance at the school compared to what we know about gender performance in traditional environments.

Previous research has examined messages students receive about expectations for gender performance in typical, media-saturated environments, but there is little on gender performance in alternative educational settings, a gap this study seeks to fill. Moreover, this study aims to advance the understanding of gender performance in a setting which encourages minimal exposure to media, defined for the purposes of this study as television, videos, movies, computers, gaming systems, radio, CDs, books, newspapers, and magazines.

I employed an embedded case study method to examine gender performance as the overarching case, situating the media habits of six student participants as well as parent and staff perspectives as the sub-cases. Data collection included interviews, document collection, anecdotal notes, and classroom observations. Findings from the research demonstrate that when students are less attuned to the societal norms and stereotypes as expressed in mainstream media, they are more apt to express their individuality and perform gender in confident, unapologetic ways that felt comfortable and natural to them. I also present findings and implications from the study with regard to the ways student participants utilize media for socialization and skill-building purposes and the ways parents and students navigate differing opinions on appropriate and inappropriate media content.

WHO AM I?: MEDIA INFLUENCE ON THE GENDER CONSTRUCTION OF  
ADOLESCENT GIRLS

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
2018

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## Dedication

To Ryan and Reagan, my heart and soul, and the reason for everything I do.

## Acknowledgements

I would not have come as far as I did without the never-ending support and encouragement of my advisor, Dr. Linda Valli. She never once gave up on me, even in moments where I had all but given up on myself.

To Ryan, thank you for enduring long nights on campus in your carrier and sleeping on the table next to me in classes. Hopefully your six-week-old-self learned something in those classes, especially feminist studies! You made me a mom and changed my life forever with your first breath.

Reagan, I still remember the feeling of you kicking as I perched my laptop on my stomach to take notes during field observations. You were with me every step of the way that year at City Waldorf, and your presence kept me grounded and focused.

Mom – you are my sunshine, always and forever!!

Sandi, I would not have been successful in this endeavor without your unwavering support and encouragement – and certainly not without you entertaining the kids so I could write! We are epic!

To my committee, thank you for your guidance and encouragement, and especially for helping me see this project through to a successful completion.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Parents and children alike rely on the school environment to provide a focused and rigorous education. School systems try to provide learning environments (e.g., qualified teachers, sound curricula frameworks, engaging materials) designed to maximize academic achievement. Many school systems embrace a hybrid learning model in which students are engaged with a balance of technology and print sources. In some educational settings, media-enriched environments and online learning modules are often utilized to enhance learning. In other environments, interactions with certain types of media are discouraged due to the belief that media is a negative force in the lives of children.

However, influences outside the classroom also affect students' learning and perspectives in addition to what is being explicitly taught. Recent research studies have determined a correlation between children's self-perceptions and the types of media to which they are exposed (e.g., Gordon, 2008; Klein, Brown, Childers, Oliveri, Porter, & Dykers, 1993). This is especially true for adolescent girls after exposure to 'perfect' bodies and sexual portrayals of women in the media. Findings in the current research led me to question the ways in which gender construction in adolescents may or may not be affected by media use. For the purposes of this study, media sources consist of print, non-print, visual, and auditory selections.

This study examines the ways in which an alternative school setting that limits the exposure to non-print media affects adolescent gender construction. In my experiences as a public school educator, students engaged with electronic media throughout their daily routines, some students so much so that they would lose all

sense of time and place as they immersed themselves in virtual gaming or social media environments. Therefore, I set out to understand the ways in which media does or does not influence adolescent gender construction, as well as to identify other outside influences that affect adolescents who live and attend school in environments where exposure to media is minimized. It is my hope that the findings from this study can help parents, classroom teachers, and school administrators understand the media's potential influence on gender construction, and to understand how gender construction might occur differently when students are not exposed to a wide variety of media sources.

### **Social Constructionism of Gender**

This study relies heavily on the concept of gender construction, specifically among adolescent girls in an alternative school setting. I examine gender through a social constructionist lens, described by Burr (2003) as the ways in which social phenomena develop within societal constructs. In this manner, I position the study within the perspective that “gender itself is constituted through interaction” (Fenstermacher & West, 2002, p. 6). Fenstermacher and West situate this concept within the very early stages of gender development, when children transition from being babies to being “big girls” or “big boys,” where being a baby means being incompetent, and it is the child's responsibility to not only be competent, but to competently “produce behavioral displays of one's ‘essential’ female or male identity” (p. 17). Fenstermacher and West term this as “doing gender,” where gender is “an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements” (p. 4). This concept eschews socialization theories and

deterministic structural accounts of gender. That is, gender is not an internalized set of behaviors or practices. Rather, gender differences arise out of the “resources to which men and women have access or the different social locations they occupy” (Deustch, 2007, p. 108).

While it is not an inherently social setting, children interact with the media in many of the same ways in which they interact with friends and family. They receive and perceive media messages in such ways that align with or oppose their currently held beliefs. They may then choose to continue or alter their behaviors as a way of subscribing to or eschewing common societal beliefs, many of which are portrayed through media sources.

### **The Waldorf Educational Model**

I knew I wanted to situate this study within an alternative educational environment, but I was initially uncertain as to which specific environment I would choose. I began to investigate several private schools and their unique ways of teaching, but I was looking for an environment that explicitly stated their beliefs on media use in schools and media in general. In my research, while several schools stated that they discourage students from watching excessive television or playing video games, the Waldorf educational model was the only one to ask students and parents to limit non-print media use outside of school and to forbid the use of non-educational technology entirely in the school building itself. This request occurred within a contract that parents were expected to sign upon enrollment, where they were directly encouraged to limit exposure to digital media and electronics. (I did not see a

copy of the parent contract firsthand, but both Mr. Fornah and Ms. Levine referenced the statement on media and electronics limitations).

Until establishing contact with those at a school I call City Waldorf, my background knowledge on the Waldorf educational model was quite limited. I had heard of it at teacher trainings and through meeting other mothers. I knew that Waldorf schools provided a unique education, in which reading and mathematics were not taught according to levels, and students did not take traditional pencil-and-paper tests. I also knew that formal reading was not taught until third grade, with the earlier grades focusing on storytelling and developing a child's imagination. Prior to meeting with the academic director and eighth grade classroom teacher at City Waldorf, I sought out texts detailing the intricacies of Waldorf Education. Just as I had found very few research studies into this method, I was able to locate only two texts that explained the development and evolution of what we know as Waldorf schools today.

Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner first developed the Waldorf method in the early twentieth century. According to Petrash (2002), Steiner began teaching the children of those who worked at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany after the conclusion of World War I in 1919. Steiner's philosophical teachings left him highly sought after by doctors, therapists, academics, scientists, pastors, teachers, and farmers, to name a few. Many people in these professions felt that Steiner's ability to "enter so profoundly and sympathetically into the minds of [those] who held radically different views to his own was something that his contemporaries found 'almost impossible to comprehend'" (Barnes, n.d., p. 52, as

cited in Nielsen & Smith, 2007, p. 56). As a result, Steiner was able to propose new ways of understanding patients, to suggest sermons that may better reach their intended audience, or to recommend ways of teaching and educating that further stimulated the mind than did the currently accepted methods. Many of Steiner's proposed methods in these industries are still in practice today, but he is most widely recognized for his work in Waldorf education. By attending a Parent Night at City Waldorf, I had the opportunity to learn more about Rudolf Steiner, the Waldorf method, and the teachings central to the preschool and grade school stages of learning and specific grade levels.

The Waldorf method is rooted in imagination and storytelling, two facets of this educational model that were evident on Parent Night. This special evening, three weeks into the school year, included descriptive presentations by each of the grade level classroom teachers. The head of academics at City Waldorf, for whom I use the pseudonym Mr. Fornah, explained that Steiner wanted to create a school that focused on the child and the child's social interactions with others, a school that was co-educational, and a school in which parents and children had a say in the types of learning that took place. The natural progression of learning in a Waldorf setting is to bring children from immediate and tangible experiences in the children's garden (Kindergarten) to readily grasping abstract concepts in the upper grades.

As I entered City Waldorf for the first time, Steiner's beliefs were evident to me on the walls and in the classroom. Each of the approximately one-hundred fifty students had work displayed on the walls throughout the building, year-round. (See Illustrations 1 and 2).





Illustration 1. Examples of student work adorning the walls of City Waldorf. This particular arrangement displayed various art techniques by first through third graders.



Illustration 2. This work, hard to photograph due to lighting, is hung in a prominent location and was part of a capstone project. The image visually represents how each of Waldorf's concepts build upon one another to create a well-rounded curriculum.

In a conversation, Mr. Fornah explained how at City Waldorf, the focus isn't to display the best student work samples; it's about displaying everyone's work (personal communication, September 12, 2012). Steiner's attention to the individual's place among nature was honored by the natural materials used in furnishing and decorating each common area and classroom space. In the lobby, natural wooden chairs were placed around a table made from a tree stump with some of the beginnings of the roots still intact. An elaborate rock formation was positioned off to the side of the administrative offices. Skylights and the huge wall-to-ceiling windows that covered the back wall of the school allowed an abundance of light to reflect off the pale sunshine-colored walls, which made me feel as if I were still outside. Within the rooms, I noticed all mission-style furniture was made from a light wood (possibly pine) that had been stained with a clear glaze.

In Waldorf education, individuality is celebrated and encouraged from the very first encounters in the children's garden (ages 3-5) through eighth grade. Teachers emphasize the talents and abilities of every child through exposure to a variety of tasks and activities, and through storytelling. During Parent Night, each teacher presented the major themes and concepts to be studied at his or her respective grade level through storytelling and analogies. For example, the children's garden teacher explained how just as plants need nourishment from the sun and from water, young children need nourishment through direct interactions with plants, flowers, and the land's natural beauty. The curriculum at this age focuses on fostering the imagination through storytelling and activities in which students role play, learn to

express themselves orally, and become aware of their basic emotions such as happiness, sadness, or fear and what events may cause these emotions. Another teacher explained how a tortoise shell is analogous to the geometry and science skills covered in fourth grade by pointing out the hexagonal shapes found on the outside of the shell and the fact that students would be studying reptiles, and amphibians that year.

At City Waldorf, students in grades six through eight receive letter grades from A+ to E, as in most schools, in order to prepare them for the more standardized grading they will encounter in high school. Students in the children's garden through fifth grade receive narrative reports documenting their progress throughout the year. Additionally, all students within the same grade level learn together and are not placed into leveled reading or math groups. As in the Waldorf model, City Waldorf does not begin explicit reading instruction until third grade. Prior to this, students focus on identifying letters in nature by creating them with sticks, tracing them in dirt or sand, or noticing them in the shapes that objects around them make. All stories are told orally, and comprehension and recall are the key skills for mastery. Additionally, boys and girls complete classes in handwork (knitting, stitching), physical education and sports, and the arts and music. The student volunteers at Parent Night were eager to demonstrate skills they had learned in the last academic year and to show their work and explain the meaning behind their creations. All of the students present seemed enthusiastic and passionate about their education.

Noticeably, televisions, VCRs, DVD players, desktop computers, tablets, and laptops were not visible within the colorful classrooms. Mr. Fornah explained that

students do not engage with technology in classrooms, but that the classroom teacher communicates about grades and classroom events with parents via a website called [teacherease.com](http://teacherease.com). Additionally, parents are strongly encouraged to limit the availability and accessibility of such devices within the home. During my first conversation with him, Mr. Fornah estimated that 90% of the parents do not allow any type of video gaming systems within the home, and that over half of the parents do not have a television within the home (personal communication, August 8, 2012). Many parents subscribe not only to the Waldorf educational method in school, but mirror the tenets of the Waldorf model in the home as well.

The characteristics of Waldorf education and of City Waldorf align well with the research goals of this study. Attention to the individuality of each child, a co-educational setting, and Steiner's desire to allow parent and student voices to help shape the way the school and classroom operate create an optimal setting for examining adolescent gender construction in a minimized media environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Several lines of thought contribute to the debate on media influence and whether or not children should be exposed to electronic devices and digital media from a young age. One line of research advocates for the inclusion of media in both the home and learning environments, due to a desire to arm students with technological skills they need to be constructive global citizens. Sawyer and Willis (2011) identify digital storytelling as a "creative counseling tool" for children to detail events throughout childhood, which can help students cope with trauma (p.

274). The authors further assert that such storytelling methods can help modify learned and adaptive behaviors in children as part of the therapeutic process.

Brennan, Monroy-Hernandez, and Resnick (2010) stress that students must have the freedom to create interactive media because life, by its very nature, is interactive and constructed of moments of interactivity with people or objects. Interactivity encourages social interaction, the authors posit, and further develops critical thinking skills. Video production was also a method utilized in some research in order for disadvantaged youth to explore and come to terms with traumatizing pasts (Friesem, 2014).

However, media by and large is not solely utilized as a method of collaboration, nor is media use by children always regulated and monitored. Levin (2010) explores the concept of a “remote control childhood” that arose out of a deregulation in marketing in the 1980s when media producers and marketers created products that encouraged an abundance of media use (p. 16). The subsequent problem, Levin (2010) argues, is two-fold: students learn sexualized and violent behaviors from the overexposure of media content, and this exposure undermines constructive play, critical thinking and problem solving, and peer to peer social development. Additionally, Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010) found that very young children “adopt the persona of attractive characters with whom they identify rather than comparing themselves to the characters” (p. 413). In this manner, children may substitute their own developing value systems with those of their media role models.

The harmful effects of media exposure are further perpetuated in adolescence, as noted by Bell and Dittmar (2011): “regardless of media type, experimental

exposure to the body perfect led to significantly higher body and appearance dissatisfaction...primarily amongst those girls who strongly identified with media models” (p. 478). In her study of Black women as sex objects in the media, Gordon’s (2008) found that “both exposure to and identification with portrayals of Black women as sex objects contribute to African American adolescent girls emphasizing the importance of appearance in their own lives and for girls in general” (p. 245).

Leander, Phillips, and Taylor (2010) explored the social spaces of learning through the “cultural flow” of a “networked society,” examining the ways in which media, fluid by design, influences students as they learn and interact socially, specifically “learning-in-place, learning trajectories, and learning networks” (p. 329). The authors explored the current research with regard to media’s influence on “how youth and learning resources move, how these movements are changing, and how they might be studied in relation to learning” (p. 381). These examples are a small sampling of the research that has been done to examine the many facets of media use and the implications on the developing personalities of youth throughout the stages of childhood.

### **Rationale**

Stake (1995) likens the research question to “a puzzlement, a need for general understanding” (p. 3), and I would use these terms to describe my interest in my own research questions. I entered the teaching profession as a self-contained second grade classroom teacher within a moderately-sized Title I school located in a suburban area. I began to wonder where my students received messages about what it means to be

male or female and all of the expectations – both familial and societal – that accompany their status as boys or girls.

First and foremost, I noticed that my students embraced the values and ideals of their favorite singers, musical groups, actors, or actresses. My students felt these individuals were sages who guided them on how to act, demonstrated how to socialize with others, and taught them what was or was not valuable and important. My seven-year-old students dressed after their favorite role models from music and television, had dramatic relationships with one another, and often referred to others in the class as their “boyfriend” or “girlfriend.” Many of these boyfriend/girlfriend relationships lasted only a few hours or days, and students would grow concerned at being paired or placed in a group with someone with whom they had “broken up” on the bus that morning. I was shocked at the fleeting childhoods my students had, as they chose to jump instead into very early adolescence.

There were a few students in my class who did not identify with famous individuals, who were not aware of the most popular singers or actors at the time, or who chose hobbies other than listening to music or watching TV, such as gymnastics, tee ball, or art classes. The perspectives of these students centered on practice and competition, the desire to perfect one’s ability through a concerted routine or weekly regimen. While all of my students enjoyed a particular hobby or sport, these students lived them, choosing to wear clothing that displayed prominent sports figures, bringing in sports equipment or a prize painting for show and tell, or sharing the news of a local event highlighting their interest. While I was not aware of what my students did at home other than what I heard from them, I noticed that these students

often remarked that they didn't have time for television or an interest in it. They were usually the ones who hadn't heard about a particular new album or movie and, instead of spending recess performing songs "on stage," they chose to engage in physical activity on the playground.

These observations led me to return to my question about the ability of my students to differentiate between their own capabilities and the actions of their own idols which they sought to replicate. How much of their actions were carefully copied from role models in their lives, both physically present and observed through media? My classes had their share of "popular" or "unpopular" students; no one seemed to be judged when his or her interests differed from those of the crowd. They were simply seen as different. Different, but accepted.

This awareness, I concluded, revolved around gender identity. My students were suddenly extremely aware that they were either male or female, and thus what Inness (1998) describes as a concerted effort to be sexy and participate in the "sexification" of their lives began (p. 271). Suddenly, males were expected to display stereotypical masculine behaviors of men as dictated by the media, while females were usually taught more traditional feminine, subordinate behaviors. If young children learned to emulate the behaviors of their media idols, what would happen, then, if they had not been exposed to these individuals at all? What values might they hold as important with relation to one's sex or gender identity? Moreover, I wondered if such environments even existed where students did not attend to media influences at all, or at least on a minimal basis. This led me to begin researching different schools of thought on the best way to educate young people.



These are the personal reasons I have chosen to develop this study. Along with these experiences, I feel that the media continually seems to encourage girls to embrace a sexualized sense of self from an increasingly earlier age, while males are expected to focus on muscularity and aggressiveness. I am more aware of this and the implications it has on our nation's children now that I am a parent with children of my own. As my son ages, he is in danger of incorrectly interpreting these messages as a guide on how to treat girls and women and how to present himself as a man. Furthermore, how will my daughter perceive herself in comparison to men? Will she feel subordinate due to socially normative gender roles or will she embrace feminism and feel empowered in her own skin?

After leaving public school teaching and transitioning to curriculum development within the private sector, I returned as a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) instructor within the largest Title I school in the same district, which also services a large number of English Language Learners who are bussed in from various neighboring areas regardless of their assigned school. Within this position, I served students in pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade in the development of critical thinking skills through a student-driven, project-based learning method. Students regularly utilized technology to identify current trends in STEM, determine real-world problems that they would like to solve through extended inquiry in the classroom, and engage in 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that will enable them to become global citizens, such as programming, collaboration, and systems design.

I have seen the effects of digital media on my students' critical thinking skills, their ability to work in peer groups in order to construct solutions to self-generated

driving questions, and the intrinsic motivation they have to solve such problems due to the relevance to their own daily lives. The research findings on the media's influence on children, from all avenues, are something I have experienced in my own teaching experiences. It is a fine line to walk; when is media harmful and when is it helpful? The argument for media in the classroom is compelling and the ability of technology to enhance instruction cannot be denied. However, how much daily media exposure is too much? How much should youth media usage be monitored and in what situations should students be able to freely explore digital communities through collaboration and social interaction?

This study is an attempt to educate teachers and parents about the media's influence on our children at home and in the classroom. It is my hope that this study will help adults who work with children to monitor more carefully the media to which they are exposed and the perceptions of self that emerge and evolve throughout childhood. I plan to use its findings, as well as the findings of similar studies, to serve in an academic role where I can continue to draw attention to the fragile constructs of gender development in children and adolescents. I would like to help future K-12 teachers arm themselves with the knowledge and sensitivity they will need to address these issues in their own classrooms and educational roles.

### **Statement of Purpose and Research Questions**

The focus of this study is on the ways media affects adolescent gender construction. Specifically, the research focuses on the interactions of students with print, visual, and auditory media (specifically music, movies, magazines, video games, and the Internet). I have chosen to focus on a Waldorf school environment,

which encourages parents and students to restrict non-print media use in daily life. Through a series of one-on-one and group interviews with staff, student, and parent participants; a student participant written response; and a series of media log entries in which students detailed their daily interactions with media, I investigated the ways in which interactions with media influenced gender construction.

In an essay on performative acts and gender constitution, Judith Butler quotes Simone de Beauvoir as saying, “one is not born [a woman], but rather becomes a woman” (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Butler further posits that gender is time-sensitive and remains fluid throughout a lifetime as a constructed identity and a way of acting that has societal repercussions. As I pondered the exact nature of my research questions, I considered defining my study as one on “gender construction,” “gender formation,” or “gender development.” However, I found that I was most interested in the ways in which adolescent girls construct their identities through gendered performances – ways of enacting gendered behaviors within and among society. Therefore, my main research question and subparts are:

*In what ways do students perform gender in a school environment that shapes interactions with media in particular ways?*

- a. To what extent are there differences in students’ use of media at home and at school?*
- b. How do parental values regarding their children’s media use relate to gender performance, values, and ideals?*

*c. How does gender performance at City Waldorf compare to what we know about gender performance in more traditional media-saturated environments?*

In addressing these questions, I assume, agreeing with Burr (2003), that gender is socially constructed, which aligns with the current research on gender construction in adolescents. I address the above research questions through observations as a non-participant observer and through unstructured interviews within an eighth grade Waldorf classroom. Due to the nature of my position as researcher, I was mindful that my presence could inadvertently affect the observed behaviors of the students. Because it was my intention as an observer to cause as little change or disruption to the flow of the classroom as possible, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible.

The data I collected were used to construct an embedded case study based on the experiences of each individual within this eighth grade classroom environment. I chose the embedded case study approach so that the study could best “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). Additionally, constructing an embedded case study was appropriate for organizing the “different types of knowledge” that emerged among a group of adolescents (Tietje & Scholz, 2002, p. 4). Although I originally hoped for six to eight student participants, with a balance of males and females, all six of my student participants were female, as I explain in Chapter 3. At the conclusion of my field research, I compared what we know about gender construction in more traditional environments to gender

construction at City Waldorf, highlighting the ways in which an absence or minimization of media affects this construction.

### **Significance of the Study**

The students I studied for this embedded case study were selected because of their placement in an alternative school setting in which the use of non-print media is minimized. Gender construction begins at a very young age, well before most children start school. We see this, for example, in the ways little children classify by gender—boys as firefighters, girls as dancers, and so forth. However, by examining this unique type of educational environment, I hoped to provide valuable insight into the ways in which gender construction in this setting is similar to or different from the ways in which gender is constructed in a more normative educational setting.

Additionally, I hoped to understand the parental and familial values that may have influenced the choice to enroll in an alternative school, specifically, one that follows the Waldorf model and how these values contributed to each student's gender construction.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss the current literature that has shaped and influenced this study and my research interests. I examine digital media use both in and out of the classroom. While I am most interested in the ways, if any, that media influences gender performance in adolescence, I also consider the many facets of adolescent social spheres on identity development. This includes motivation, communal goals in peer groups, exclusion and inclusion of peers within groups, and the ways that familial and environmental factors influence identity construction. I then shift the focus to an introduction to Rudolf Steiner and Anthroposophy. I explain the tenets of this philosophy and the eventual application of it in the Waldorf educational model.

Common terminology across research includes the following terms and definitions:

- a. Adolescence – Begins at thirteen (Chango, Allen, Szwedo, & Schad, 2014) and includes increasing risk-taking behavior (Buckley, Chapman, & Sheehan, 2010; Eaton et al., 2006)
- b. Gender Identity – “reflects the intertwined influences of nature and nurture... individuals’ self-definition as female or male, which is based on their biological sex as interpreted within their culture” (Eagly & Wood, 2017).
- c. Gender Performance – the complex components and actions in accord with one’s adherence to a given gender (Butler, 1988).
- d. Peer Relations – typically broken into three categories: individual, dyadic, and group (Cillessen, 2007). Until recent years, studies have

often focused on the individual and dyadic interactions, though many studies over the last decade sought to close the gap in the exploration of peer groups (Closson, 2009; Coplan, Ooi, & Rose-Krasnor, 2014)

- e. Intimacy – “closeness to another person and as openness in describing and sharing thoughts and feelings” (Bauminger, Finzi-Dottan, Chason, & Har-Even, 2008)
- f. Media – “television, video tapes, movies, computers, video games, radio, compact discs, tape players, books, newspapers, and magazines” (Roberts, 2000)
- g. Digital Media – media found through accessing the Internet (Williams & Merten, 2011)

### **The Research**

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which students view themselves and their gendered identities in a home and school environment where exposure to non-print media is minimized. In addition to examining the themes that emerge from the research, I also compare my findings to those within the current research on this topic. Within my investigation, I explore the ways in which media-enriched environments and online learning modules are utilized to enhance learning, while also considering why learning environments may encourage or discourage interaction with certain types of media. While addressing the body of research regarding the ways media may negatively influence adolescents, I also attend to the social and moral panic that may result through assertions that the media is a direct

cause of certain social concerns such as teenage pregnancy, increased violent behavior and the correlation of violence to violent video game exposure, drug use, and sexual activity.

In addition to the ways media is embraced or eschewed from the educational landscape, I would be remiss in exploring identity development in adolescence without considering the multiple ways that peers, peer groups, classroom teachers, and familial structures can contribute to, affect, enhance, and hinder adolescent identity and gender performance.

The Waldorf educational method intimates the need for a minimized media environment to continue at home as well. Therefore, a close look at media and home use rounds out the bodies of research which underlie this study.

### **Media-Positive Research**

In recent years, digital media has become an integral part of our culture. Children have grown used to mimicking the behaviors of adults through digital media by playing similar video games, using smartphones, creating social media accounts, and developing relationships that originate in digital worlds. These behaviors, both positive and negative, largely occur at home, but appear in the school environment as well.

A plethora of studies exists that details the ways digital content and social media enrich the classroom experience (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Davidson, Goldberg, & Jones, 2010; Rivoltella, 2008; Tapscott, 2009). Within the first decade of the new millennium, P21's Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning (2007) established the skillset necessary for individuals to be successful in all areas of life



such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. The Framework argues that without these skills, students are not set to function well in the technological and media-driven world we find ourselves in today. Further analysis led to the assertion within the Framework that students must be able to process an abundance of information, remain current on the swift changes in technology and the digital tools that exist, and possess the ability to collaborate and contribute across a global scale in ways that remain unprecedented when compared to previous decades.

To this end, lines of research have recently been devoted to social software and virtual gaming as learning tools and ways to further these skills in K-12 students (Fuchs, 2008; Shuler, 2009). The argument for the presence of digital platforms and social media within the classroom finds that students currently view technology as an integral part of their lives, that it allows individuals to pursue their own goals and interests, and that digital learning enables students to encounter knowledge, assimilate that knowledge into their current understandings, and then offer contributions toward the growth and expansion of the knowledge base.

Like the current best practices in education, digital learning thus becomes a communal experience, one that draws learners together in collaborative forms that bridge ethnicity, race, geographical location, gender, and social status. In a 2010 study conducted by the Kaiser Foundation, findings noted statistically significant increases in video game, computer, television, and, most notably, music use among eight- to eighteen-year-olds between the years of 2004 – 2009. Several sources identified the increased mobility of media through cell phones, tablets, and other portable media devices as the reason for these findings (Gentile & Walsh, 2002;

Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Roberts, 2000). Whereas cell phones used to be a way to talk with others on the go, they have now become media portals, allowing youth and teens access to media in ways that were not available just a few short years ago. As Rosen (2010) noted, technology aligns with the current student lifestyle; students are learning much in the same way that they are living – in a technologically-rich world that capitalizes on the availability of online content, applications, and learning platforms.

Over the past several decades, our fundamental understanding of ‘literacy’ has evolved from print sources to print, visual, and fluid resources where multimodal literacies now encompass the digital world. O’Byrne and Murrell (2014) studied the ways that blogs both contributed to and recorded student learning as it evolved. A blog becomes an example of an accessible and highly social system that can exist simultaneously in many digital arenas, a type of “plural literacy” (p. 936). Plural literacy uses multi-tasking to the advantage of the learner, which aligns with the way we as people currently live our lives – generationally speaking, today’s students are able to focus on many things at the same time in ways that previous generations were not inclined (Liu, Horton, Olmanson, & Toprac, 2011).

In addition to multi-tasking, Neiburger and Gullett (2007) argue for the positive social attributes of video games: “mental stimulation, solid entertainment, attainable mastery, and most importantly, the possibility of proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are better than your friends” (p. 34). Video games allow for a positive and rewarding arena in which peer interaction can take place. The authors further describe the ways that video games can provide useful life skills, “unlike

Trigonometry and Calculus” (p. 34). When peers are working toward a common cause, they are bridging connections that transcend academic ability, ethnicity, geographical location, ages, and cultures in a way that promotes what the authors term as “intergenerational socialization” (p. 35). Schools across the country are slowly beginning to capitalize on game platforms as learning devices, which allow teens to create their own games or virtual worlds.

However, social media platforms, digital learning communities, and increased mobility across digital content does not mean that all venues are used for good. While the evidence that digital learning can add a rich dimension to the classroom environment and augment student successes in ways that are unparalleled to print sources, there are always scenarios that present the characteristics of digital media in a very different light.

### **Media-Negative Research**

A decade or so ago, a family might have had one personal computer for everyone in the household to use, located in a central area of the house that was visible and accessible to all family members. The very nature of the cellular phone as a small, portable device now means that many children can access media content in the privacy of any room of the house where parents cannot easily moderate. In addition, as Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) point out, the quality in Internet speed has improved, allowing students to access media content more quickly, and to do so from their bedrooms “where the added element of privacy may affect the types of content in which youth and teens choose to engage while on the Internet” (p. 3).

Further privatization of media access in recent years affects the physical spaces that media occupies. The family that used to gather around the television in the living room is now accessing media in different areas of the home on an individual basis. How might this privatization affect the adolescent population? While most children spend a good deal of their day engaging with media, adolescents spend more time engaging with media on a daily basis than any other youth age group (Gentile & Walsh, 2002). Interestingly, puberty may be the cause for the increased engagement.

The documentary *Let's Talk About Sex* discusses the ways in which the Internet becomes a portal for adolescents to understand what they can't talk about at home with regards to puberty, bodily and emotional changes, and an increased interest in sex and sexuality (Weisman & Houston, 2009). As I will discuss in greater detail, several studies show that adolescents obtain most if not all their information regarding sexual activity, protection, and STDs from fellow peers and the Internet, preferring these sources to their parents (Brown, Halpern, & L'Engle, 2005; Durham, 1999; Epstein & Ward, 2008). Media is so influential that Epstein and Ward (2008) liken media to a "super peer;" a close personal friend through which to obtain information (p. 420). Media content, then, requires a closer look. To what types of content are our youth exposed? How is that content presented, and how accurately is the information presented?

### **The Changing Landscape of Media Content**

Media presence in the lives of adolescent youth is a very real and pervasive subculture. More than any other demographic, adolescents rely on media content

(Rideout et al., 2010). Arnett (1995) provides further insight into the socialization of adolescents via the media: “when [adolescents] use media materials towards identity formation or coping, when they participate in a media-based youth subculture, adolescents are also, in a larger sense, participating in activities that are part of their socialization” (p. 7). How might adolescents view themselves as a result of the information they receive on the Internet? Research that situates digital media as a central danger to adolescents establishes the following:

- Women are consistently underrepresented across a wide variety of media types and settings (e.g., Collins, 2011; Hether & Murphy, 2010; Schwartz, 2010; Smith, Pieper, Granados, and Choueiti (2010).
- Women are portrayed in traditional female roles and often stereotyped and sexualized (e.g., Glover, Garmon, & Hull, 2011; Mager & Helgeson, 2011).

This issue is not localized to the United States, however, and affects many other countries. Paek, Nelson, and Vilela (2010) determined that South Korea was the only nation in which women were not underrepresented, but are still presented in traditional female roles.

One media type that has permeated the American landscape is advertising. Both print and non-print methods of advertising are geared toward the adolescent audience in magazines, storefronts, television commercials, and online ads on popular social media sites. Mager and Helgeson (2011) analyzed the content of advertisements specific to US magazines over the fifty-year period from 1950-2000. Now more than ever, it is clear that in advertising, sex sells. As the authors posit, “there is an increasing correlation between sexuality and the purchase and possession

of products” (p. 249). Of the people portrayed in a suggestive pose, 88.4% were female and 11.6% were male. The authors further postulate that women are often portrayed as dependent and in need of male protection, or as “sex objects for male gaze” and not as individual people (p. 248).

The direct effects these messages have on teens are debatable, as Strasburger (2006) noted by examining the “third person effect” in which “teens feel that the media influences everyone but themselves” (p. 1428) or, at least, that media messages have less of an effect on them than they may have on their peers or groups of people in other demographics. This effect may also create a false sense of safety where teens downgrade the severity of dangerous situations in which they find themselves.

Glover, Garmon, and Hull (2011) explored this phenomenon further. One of the reasons teens feel they are impervious to danger within the situations they place themselves is because of the scenarios present in many popular television shows geared toward adolescent viewers such as *The OC*, a drama that portrays teens exposed to drug use, peer pressure, sexual activity, and unwanted sexual advances. If teens feel that they can remain unaffected by the media’s messages, how well are they able to discern the messages they are receiving?

In their study, Glover and colleagues (2011) examine moral judgment and the ability to identify moral messages in television content. Participants were 142 undergraduate students, ages 18-30. The authors hypothesized that “moral judgment and other moral characteristics may be related to the individual’s perception of moral messages in television programming, thereby influencing the individual’s implicit understanding of the messages conveyed” (p. 92). Participants were asked to identify

the moral messages they received as they viewed a single episode of *The OC*. Regression analysis indicated that, regardless of gender, participants with a higher value and attention to morals, a higher education level, and those who were less familiar with the show more frequently identified negative moral messages within the program content. These findings led the authors to conclude that “greater moral expertise is influential in perceiving messages in television media regarding social norms related to how people ought to treat each other, particularly messages deemed negative in content” (p. 101).

From these conclusions, one might argue that the moral and value development required to identify negative messages is not yet fully present in the adolescent mind. Ward (2005) elaborates with respect to notions of race: “Repeated exposure to certain types of films, music, and video games teach white children about race. Only a small slice of African-American and Latino lives is depicted as representative of the larger group. This one slice focuses on gangster culture, crime, and sexual exploitation” (p. 66).

### **Media Content and Youth Culture**

The effects of repeated exposure to media on adolescents and the connection to female underrepresentation were key components in much of the research on media content (e.g., Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002; Schultheiss, Wirth, & Stanton, 2004). These effects can begin at a very early age with the exposure of young children to G-rated films, which, according to Smith et al. (2010) can be particularly gender biased. In their study, the authors sampled 110 popular G-rated films produced in 1990 through 2005 to assess gender role portrayals. Within the

sample, the authors found a total of 3,039 speaking characters, of which 28% were females. Put more simply, noted the authors, this means that there are 2.6 male characters for every one female character in a G-rated movie. Narrators of films are also similarly disproportionate in that over three-quarters of narrators are male. With further analysis, the authors concluded that female characters tend to possess better motives for their actions and were more intelligent than the male characters, but that the male characters were stronger, funnier, and far more likeable. The findings on females may be due to the frequency of female roles in which the characters are parents or are in a committed relationship.

In addition to female underrepresentation, males and females are also depicted in extremely stereotypical roles and settings. Ward (2005) determined that “nearly every media portrayal seen in [television, movie, or magazine] storyline[s] conveys a message about normative and expected roles for men and women” (p. 65). These stereotypical messages seem to be magnified in the video gaming world. In 2007, Dill and Thill conducted a two-part study involving a content analysis of video game characters in gaming magazines and a questionnaire where video game magazine readers were asked to describe popular video game characters. The magazines chosen for the study were the six top-selling magazines according to Amazon.com at the time of the study. Content analysis of the magazines found that 83% of male characters were portrayed as aggressive compared to 62% of female characters, 60% of female characters were sexualized (large breasts, scanty clothing) compared to 1% of male characters, and 39% of female characters displayed a mix of sexualization and aggression in stance, physical characteristics, and dress. The evidence



overwhelmingly places sex front and center in the gaming arena, which is especially concerning when considering a report by Price Waterhouse Coopers that 63% of American six years of age and older play video games and that the gaming industry is the “fastest growing entertainment segment” (cited in Dill & Thill, 2007, p. 851). Just as in other media formats, women are grossly underrepresented, with only one-quarter of the main images portraying female characters.

In the second part of this study, the authors asked participants to describe the characters in terms of physical characteristics. Male characters were described as “powerful,” “strong,” “muscular,” “cocky,” “thugs,” and “athletic” while adjectives chosen for females included “provocatively dressed,” “thin,” “sexual,” “hooker,” “slutty,” “easy,” “bitchy,” “helpless,” and “subservient” (Dill & Thill, 2007, p. 860). As the authors point out, since video games are popular with American youth, it is important to consider them as major agents of socialization. Just as many music videos and songs project the gangster culture as normative behavior for African-Americans and Latinos, video games promote a certain style of actions and dress that many youth may mistake for normative behavior in society.

Many young children – both girls and boys – find enjoyment in online environments such as *Minecraft* and *Roblox*. However, as children age, play incorporates sexualized roles in which girls and boys find themselves situated in contexts that adhere to socially acceptable gendered norms. For example, despite the number of female video gamers, which much of the research has determined is roughly equal to the number of male players, gaming is traditionally considered a male space with an increased presence of female objectification (Fox, Bailenson, &

Tricase, 2013). Furthermore, this objectification can lead to diminished self-efficacy and a diminished sense of self for female gamers.

Downs and Smith (2010) found that digitalized portrayals of females most commonly include princesses who need rescuing or a highly sexualized dominatrix. Dill, Brown, and Collins (2008) additionally note that game play involving sexualized characters causes a normalization of sexual harassment, which, during the crucial brain development that occurs during adolescence, can cause skewed formations of the understanding of gender roles and behaviors.

Thus far, the studies I have explored focus largely on a content analysis of a variety of media sources. Most notable is the ways in which media outlets have consistently underrepresented females while gravitating toward the sexualization of models, products, and topics. One major limitation to these studies is that the studies do not dig into the ways in which the content affects media users, specifically, our youth.

### **Summary**

As indicated by the literature, strong arguments can be made for both increasing and decreasing the use of technology in the classroom. Digital media can be both positive and pernicious. Understanding the current contextual landscape of media is integral to the design of my study. This research lays a strong foundation for comprehending the types of media to which adolescents are exposed today and how this content affects their navigation of gender identity.

As much as the media plays a central role in my research, my study itself is focused on gender identity and performance. As I began my research, I wondered

about the ways identity is created, influenced, and refined. I tried to consider the primary ways that adolescents are positively and negatively influenced in their everyday lives. As my knowledge of this topic increased, two main themes emerged: the individual and peer perspectives on adolescent social interactions and how peer relationships are established on common interests – who is included and who is excluded. The literature on those themes is explored below.

### **Adolescent social interactions**

Adolescents receive feedback from a variety of sources that confirm or refute internal belief structures, but no source is as highly regarded by the adolescent as peers with perceived popularity (Jong & Drummond, 2016; Kilford, Garrett, & Blakemore, 2016). I chose to begin my investigation into the current research at the foundation of adolescent identity construction – to what extent, if any, peers influence the identity construction of adolescents. Within this investigation, I considered peer interactions both online and offline. Studies into online peer relations examined benefits and potential ramifications.

In childhood, peer interaction is the norm. Over 75% of time spent with peers is spent socializing (Coplan, Ooi, & Rose-Krasnor, 2015). The authors explored social functioning clues as a result of observing playground behavior in pre-teen children. Predictably, the authors found that non-social children would engage in the most solitary activities and internalize issues to a greater extent than more social peers. However, while females tend to value intimate connections, only 14% of playground interactions were “intensive dyadic exchanges” because the students report that the playground itself is not the best place for this (p. 642). The authors

further suggest that a greater intensity of interactions on the playground indicates that the student has a “limited social sphere” and perhaps not many close friends (p. 643). This occurred more frequently in female interactions rather than when males socialized.

When females do desire greater intensity of interaction, these interactions are not without the potential for conflict. However, Crothers, Field, and Kolbert (2005) note that females prefer to handle conflict more indirectly than males. This indirect approach to conflict can result in a greater amount of alliance building and rumor-spreading. This can be seen as passive aggressive, but, the authors argue, in society the expectations of femininity and subtleness in female relations can restrict the options that young girls feel they may have for conflict resolution. Males are more apt to “pursue power and assert control [while females] meet the prevailing expectations of adults that girls don’t contribute to conflict or have wants and needs... that result in emotional intensity and confrontation” (p. 353).

Elementary- and middle school-aged children tend to spend the largest part of their day within a classroom setting. Psychologically, children at this age are refining their ability to “mentalize” – to make attributions about the mental states of other children and peers that relate to beliefs, desires, interests, feelings, and thoughts (Kilford, Garrett, & Blakemore, 2016, p. 108). This ability is rudimentary in early childhood but increases with age. Peer influences also begin to weigh heavily on students as they age. This difference is notably observed when females performed a task with and without peer presence. The authors reported that the presence of peers during highly cognitive task performance caused boys to function no differently than

when the peers were not present, but for females, performing in front of others caused marked difference in their ability to complete a difficult task. In some cases, the ability to complete the task became almost debilitating to the students who had to perform in front of peers. When we consider that students spend their day continuously performing tasks in front of peers, we begin to see how much pressure females may feel within the classroom setting.

The classroom context also has the potential to influence social goals. For boys, dominance goals rule the types of interactions that occur and for girls, establishing solid, intimate relationships is a key focus (Kiefer, Matthews, Montesino et al., 2013). Elaborating on this point, Lansu (2018) states that male aggression is associated with how other students feel about the student. In many social scenarios, boys are more apt to utilize aggression as a defense mechanism. Boys tend to notice non-verbal cues they consider to be negative. Shin and Ryan (2014) note that teacher behavior is the single greatest predictor of overall classroom climate. This places pressure on the teacher to establish a classroom environment that allows students to feel comfortable expressing their evolving identities.

Although I have reviewed the research on the positive and negative aspects of media in general, certain studies within the research on peer interactions and identity formation in particular are highly relevant to my study. Cyr, Berman, and Smith (2015), for example, established that there were “no significant correlations between technology usage and identity exploration, commitment, or status” but that when identity struggles ensued, there was a “significant correlation in regard to the time

spent using communication technology” and that technology “exacerbates the level of anxiety over the identity development process” (p. 89).

Adolescents with poor social skills often utilize online resources to compensate for the lack of skills (Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012). This is especially true of males with social anxiety. Online interactions between females were not as compensatory for a lack in social skills, but with all individuals suffering from low self-esteem, “chatting online with people not known in face-to-face contexts can increase self-esteem and decrease depressive symptoms” (Reich, 2016, p. 294).

The two studies drew divergent conclusions – Cyr et al. (2015) that there are negative ramifications to technology use, whereas Reich et al. (2012) frame their findings in a more positive light. Ultimately, though, the social skills needed to be successful in offline interactions are also necessary for successful and quality online interactions. For many adolescents, online resources are a conduit to enhance offline peer friendships that have already been established.

Dolcini (2014) identified a third focus of technology use by postulating that being online may not necessarily increase adolescent risk behaviors, but that once adolescents see images of their peers partying or drinking alcohol, they are more likely to respond by engaging in risk behaviors themselves. Dolcini introduces the concept of “normative truth” – when photos are more powerful than friends’ reported behavior in shaping norms (p. 497). In other words, adolescents may not actually be drinking, but the mere suggestion of risk behavior occurring and the perception of adolescent behavior are more powerful in shaping adolescent norms than the behaviors in which they are actually engaged. Huang et al. (2014) examined this

phenomenon and discovered that peers are more likely to smoke and drink like peers who they think are engaging in this behavior even if the peers on which they are modeling their risk behaviors don't actually engage in the risk behaviors themselves. As a result, seeing behaviors online makes adolescents think that the behaviors themselves are more normative than they truly are. What adolescents do or do not make visible has a huge impact on peer perception, or, as Dolcini (2014) stated, "when youth interact in multiple domains, they have more than one 'window' through which to view friends" (p. 497). All of the above research noted the ease with which adolescents share aspects of their lives with one another. However, do adolescents feel at ease in the same way when sharing their online activities with parents?

Davis and James (2013) addressed a gap in the current research: the ways middle school students view privacy online. The authors found that teens desire access to peer spaces where they can freely share information and be themselves, but without adult monitoring (teens in the study noted Facebook as one such venue). Teens want control over their information and to feel safe while going online, but feel that the best way to do this is to create false identities and misleading online profiles. This can create further problems such as harassment and unwanted attention by adults within the online spaces.

Research indicates that teachers need to spend more time directly instructing students how to protect themselves in arenas that teens consider impenetrable by adults, such as peer-only spaces, not just through email, texting, and online messaging. Teachers must "develop a student repertoire of privacy strategies" across grade levels (p. 21). Unfortunately, the students interviewed in this study did not see

teachers as individuals who could help them navigate these privacy issues. The students identified peers with whom they shared common interests as their first and foremost reliable confidantes and trusted advisors.

### **Establishing peer relationships based on common interests**

Poulin and Chan (2010) note that “friendship centralizes as a critical component” in adolescents’ psychosocial development” (p. 563). Adolescents are initially attracted to friends with similar backgrounds, interests, or shared experiences as them because “similarity implies trustworthiness and predictability” (p. 564). However, over time as adolescent friendship groups strengthen ties, individuals will slowly begin to take on the characteristics of the group. From this perspective, gender identity then, is closely related to the identity of the peers with whom adolescents socialize.

The construction of peer relationships markedly differs in adolescence than in the elementary years. Within mainstream elementary education, it is easier to find a comfortable position within a peer group than in middle and high school, where tracking often occurs and peer groups become divided (Nichols & White, 2014). The division of peer groups in the elementary setting is not as debilitating to identity development as concerted exclusion that tends to occur in middle school environments.

A child’s decision to exclude peers from their playgroup is rooted in the moral consequences that the exclusion may cause when the child is young. As the child matures, exclusionary practices become a result of social functioning concerns and the desire to align with individuals who possess a similar degree of social functioning,



thus exhibiting similar social behaviors. “Exclusion experiences occur not as isolated incidents,” Recchia, Brehl, and Wainryb (2012) note, “but rather in the context of ongoing relationships with others and reflect children’s awareness of the potential fragility of these ties” (p. 201). While exclusionary behaviors may not necessarily stem from aggression, these behaviors do fall along the continuum of passive versus aggressive interactions in adolescence. Throughout my observations and conversations with all participants in this study, overt bullying was something notably absent from daily life at City Waldorf. However, bullying was often the center of many studies I encountered in identity construction – more specifically, that adolescents who found themselves questioning their identity did so as a result of feeling like prey for students they considered to be bullies (e.g., Nichols & White, 2014; Recchia et al., 2012).

Adolescent aggression translates to the pervasive issue of bullying that is prevalent in many educational settings, as determined by Unnever and Cornell (2003). In a survey of 2,400 middle school students, the study found that bullying occurs as a result of peers who are willing to join in and further the cause of the initial bully, and due to little to no teacher intervention. All students surveyed reported that they felt empathy toward those being bullied, that they did not engage in acts of bullying others themselves, and that bullying often occurred by a select group of students who influenced the entire population. Students further reported that they were more apt to be bullied by males, but that female bullying occurred in a more covert fashion, such as through comments regarding sexual activity, clothing choices,

or opinions regarding academic and extracurricular activities. Male bullying tended to be more direct, physical, and aggressive.

When adolescents are around other bullies and already have aggression tendencies, they themselves trend toward bullying others. Similarly, boys who are bullied may place themselves within a victimized space because they are influenced by other victims of bullying. This process is known as “social contamination” (Lodder et al., 2016, p. 140). Through this process, adolescents typically fall into one of two categories – bully or bullied. The widespread epidemic of bullying further contributes to the overarching identity the adolescent chooses to assume. As the author notes, this can lead to greater confusion because peer groups can protect bullied individuals but can also become a risk for bully victimization.

One way to counteract bullying tendencies is through play. Peter Gray (2011), an evolutionary psychologist, has concluded that in recent years there has been a decline in play, which leads to a greater presence of anxiety, depression, feelings of helplessness, and narcissism in children: “Opportunities for children to play, especially to play outdoors with other children, have continually declined” (p. 443). Gray (2011) cites both media influence as well as an increase in parental concern for outdoor safety as the two main reasons for this decline. However, the goals of play that Gray lists can happen and do happen in online spaces: “Play functions as the major means by which children (1) develop intrinsic interests and competencies; (2) learn how to make decisions, solve problems, exert self-control, and follow rules; (3) learn to regulate their emotions; (4) make friends and learn to get along with others as equals; and (5) experience joy” (p. 443). In many digital

coding, gaming, and learning platforms geared toward the appropriate age levels, children and adolescents grow in these ways.

Thus far, I have focused on research within the adolescent social sphere as well as classroom interactions. Identity is at its very core a social process, and identity socialization occurs in the home as well. Arguably, adolescent media use is at its peak when the student is at home because the school environment traditionally restricts cell phone access during the day. Parental presence can determine to what extent media use is limited, monitored, or encouraged. To this end, identity construction may be influenced by the rules and expectations set forth in the home environment.

### **Media at Home**

Adolescents engage with media content more than any other age group of youth aged 8-18 in the United States and that higher media use is correlated to lower income families, single parent households, and minority families (Gentile & Walsh, 2002). What does the literature say about the rules that parents put in place regarding media use in the home and the ways in which parents and adolescents communicate about media use, content, and its effects?

Gentile and Walsh (2002) conducted a study in which 527 parents of 2-17 year-old children were randomly sampled in the United States. Findings in this study demonstrated that parents who monitor media use have more positive interactions and engage with their children more than parents who do not have set media rules or regulations. Moreover, students who engaged minimally with media spent more time pursuing alternative and extracurricular activities than students who spent a great deal

of time with media. An increase in media usage positively correlates to poor social relationships, fewer social interactions, increased youth drinking and smoking, and fewer hobbies.

In a similar study, Padilla-Walker and Coyne (2011) surveyed 478 families at the onset of their research and again one year later. The authors' findings supported the previous findings from Gentile and Walsh (2002) and other researchers.

However, the authors noted one fact that was not discussed in previous research: both maternal and paternal authoritative parenting predicted proactive media monitoring more so than in families with only one parent present or only one parent monitoring media usage. Furthermore, parents who remained vigilant about media monitoring one year later expressed fewer behavioral issues or other negative behaviors from their children than did parents who allowed their children more independence in their media habits over time.

However, simply monitoring the media to which their children are exposed may not be enough. The results of a study from William and Merten (2011) illustrated the ways in which engagement with media as a family has the potential to create and strengthen familial bonds. Adolescents and parents who communicate about topics within the media affect the content adolescents seek outside the home. In other words, when families communicate about the appropriateness of media content adolescents are less likely to engage with inappropriate content outside the home and in scenarios involving peers. While peers do have a strong influence over adolescents, Kutner, Olson, Warner, and Hertzog (2008) concluded that when parents express their beliefs and concerns over media content, adolescents are ready and

willing to listen. There is even a chance they may adopt those beliefs for themselves, as the authors discovered in an interview with one 11-year-old participant: “Being around [my mom] so much has told me which games not to even ask her to play. And those games, I now don’t even like... So really, it’s like she’s given me the image of what to play, what not to play” (p. 88).

Studies conducted within the United States and internationally demonstrate that families who engage with media content together also have a lasting impact on older adolescents. When parents and their children watch the news together, read newspapers, and discuss current events, these students are more likely to express an interest in civic engagement and volunteerism (Boyd, Zaff, Phelps, Weiner, & Lerner, 2011; Erentaite, Zukauskienė, Beyers, & Pilkauskaitė-Valickienė, 2012). The authors note that these studies only include exposure and engagement with news media, however, a positive engagement and interest in current events is predictive of civic duty, civic efficacy, neighborhood social connection, and civic participation.

I was, however, both surprised and disappointed that I was not able to locate a solid body of research on ways in which the use of media can bring families together. As a classroom teacher and mother, I have had firsthand experiences and heard from my students about how they spent the evening learning about something new through using the Internet with their parents as a shared activity. My son and I have spent many hours watching a YouTube video in order to learn how to construct something new or to begin a new hobby. We have also used online virtual tours to prepare for upcoming school trips and in-class research projects.

Parental media monitoring and family engagement are two effective ways of influencing the content to which youth are exposed and the content with which they seek to interact. However, as I explain through my research, some families wish to take this a step further by immersing their children in a school environment that aligns with their beliefs regarding the mainstream media. The Waldorf educational model provides one such opportunity. The Waldorf model is not a focal point of my research; rather, I chose this model for its alignment with the minimized environment in which I sought to conduct my study. Following is a brief examination of the current research on the founder, his belief system, and the Waldorf model itself.

### **Current Research in Steiner-Waldorf Education**

The research into Steiner and Anthroposophy that I was able to locate primarily deals with his life and contributions to different facets of society, not only with respect to Waldorf Education. For example, Okumoto (1999) investigated Steiner's contributions to the spiritual, mental, and physical identity development of young children. Meyers (1999) examined Steiner's contributions to religious education in Waldorf and other educational settings such as Catholic and private schools. I was able to find little information directly pertaining to Anthroposophy and the events in Steiner's life that led to this new way of thinking. For the purposes of this study, Anthroposophy is, as Mr. Fornah explained, a way of providing experiences to children through natural means in order to understand the world around them. However, the evidence I was able to locate demonstrates how Steiner utilized his own talents and life experiences to enhance the education of others.

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) was raised to simultaneously revere nature and appreciate technological advancement. Steiner's love of technology may seem at odds with the Waldorf principle that children and adolescents should be exposed to technology and media as little as possible. Vicki Lawson (2015) of Waldorf International explained this duality: Waldorf defines technology in the literal sense, derived from the Greek work *techne*, which means "making," "craft," or "art." Waldorf views technology as "the study of techniques" (n.p.). Technology is considered broadly "as a way of interacting with the world," not in a specific sense as software or technological devices (n.p.).

Throughout his youth, Steiner became increasingly aware of the "duality between nature and the city, between inner and outer life" in his personal and professional interests (Nielsen & Smith, 2007, p. 51). Encouraged by his father to study biology, chemistry, math, and physics, Steiner's career path as engineer was laid before him, as he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps. In addition to his formal studies, however, Steiner began exploring the writings of philosophers, including Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and the writings of Goethe. In Goethe, Steiner discovered the foundation for his later work as Goethe addressed the "relation between the inner world of the human being to the outer world" and the nature of social inquiry (Schaefer, 1992, p. 56).

Understanding Steiner's philosophy requires situating his ways of thinking within the current cultural tapestry of his time. Out of the Enlightenment period in Europe rose an intellectually situated way of thinking. This new material view of the world in the mid-1800s was antithetical to suggestions of a supernatural world that

transcended the physical world around us. Steiner was certain of the existence of a supernatural world, having felt a connection with the spiritual world beginning at age eight (Nielsen & Smith, 2007). The core theme of his Anthroposophical beliefs is situated in the spirituality of the self, “namely the desire to have everything and to transform what we have into a lively and evolutionary process” (Gronbach, 2010, p. 1). This foundation, then, translates into a spiritual freedom. According to Oberski (2011), “Steiner showed that in thinking we have hold of a corner of the world process in which we, as human beings, play a crucial part in its coming into being” (p. 5). These beliefs served as the foundation for Steiner-Waldorf education.

As I developed this study, I wondered at the ways in which Waldorf education has been studied. Through my investigation, I located several articles and a few dissertations on the Waldorf method. Much of the research I was able to examine dealt with a general overview of the Waldorf method or with specific facets of the curriculum and/or materials. Additionally, much of the research into these concepts has been conducted by individuals who have either attended Waldorf schools or chosen to teach/serve within a Waldorf school in some fashion. Bonnie Chauncey (2006), for example, taught in a Waldorf school for fourteen years prior to obtaining a professorship at Northeastern Illinois University. Several studies examined the importance and centralization of art into the Waldorf method (e.g., Dailey, 1997; Nordlund, 2006). Howard (1992) examined the ways literacy learning occurs and progresses throughout the years in a Waldorf education. On a similar note, Bentz (2002) drew connections between the focus of fairy tales and myths and the arts to demonstrate the way Waldorf continually juxtaposes literacy and art. Prouty (2008)



investigated the ways the Waldorf method focuses on fostering the development of intelligence and critical thinking from a neurological perspective, and Carroll (1992) shifted the focus to the Waldorf teachers themselves in order to understand the nature and beliefs of Waldorf educators.

I was able to locate only a few studies that examine the effects of the Waldorf method outside the realm of a Waldorf education. However, these studies provided insight into the growing interest and attention that Waldorf education is receiving throughout public and other educational models. Chauncey (2006) investigated public school reform efforts that included characteristics of the Waldorf model, and Ashley (2008) proposed methods for utilizing the spirituality-centric views present in Waldorf curriculum both inside and outside Waldorf schools.

### **Conclusion**

Present-day technology affords a level of media accessibility and portability that was not feasible a few short years ago. With the advent of smaller televisions, pocket-sized computers, and smartphones, media privatization is on the rise and brings with it a slew of opportunities and consequences for adolescents, the population spending the most time engaging with media content. Digital media has the power to enrich education, allows students to take virtual field trips and learn about the world in ways that were never possible twenty-five years ago. It also offers social outlets for students who may have trouble beginning friendships offline. Access to smartphones allow students a greater opportunity to interact with family and friends and keep people in close contact. This potentially provides an extra layer

of safety as parents are able to monitor their children's whereabouts and contact them at any moment.

Much of the research into media in the classroom is overwhelmingly positive and speaks to the learning growth that increases exponentially when students have access to laptops, tablets, Smart Boards, and other digital learning devices. There are also other ways the media can promote positive and supportive messages as well. Ads exposing the negative effects of media can have an immediate impact on positive body image portrayals for young girls. Parents can also have an impact on their children's perceptions of media ideals. Media monitoring is most effective when handled by both parents. Furthermore, engaging with media content together strengthens familial bonds and helps adolescents make better choices about what they choose to expose themselves to outside the home. Adolescents open to these types of discussions may even adopt the beliefs of their parents with regard to media influence. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital media truly is anywhere and everywhere. As technology becomes more streamlined into adolescent daily life, there are considerations for adolescents' well-being that we cannot ignore.

The ability to access media in one's bedroom privately has led to a decrease in media events as family activities, where the entire family would gather around the television a decade ago to enjoy a show or movie together. Additionally, the Internet has become a source of information for youth who do not feel comfortable broaching sensitive topics at home: a silent confidante where adolescents can obtain information about virtually any subject without fear of parents finding out. The Internet, then, has become a sage, of sorts, guiding adolescents toward societal norms and behaviors.

Many adolescents may feel that they have the ability to discern what is right and wrong. However, research shows that the ability to exercise the moral judgment needed to consider media content critically increases with education level and greater attention to morals and values, which are still developing in the adolescent years. Therefore, when youth are exposed to social media and the suggestions of peer behaviors, they may adopt these ideals as a way of representing society as a whole.

The current research on adolescent identity construction provides many insights into the topics that were previously studied and opens doors to the investigation of new ideas. It is clear from the current body of research that social interactions serve as the foundation for identity construction, specifically among peer groups. Surveys were overwhelmingly chosen as the primary method of data collection, with computer-assisted interviews following far behind. Focus groups and interviews were present in a small percentage of the studies, yet provided invaluable insight into the thought processes of adolescents. Media content has also been heavily examined and provided the foundation for several studies detailing the effects media had on youth and adolescents. Studies that measured data at baseline and then again at a later time further demonstrated the long-term effects of media.

In this study, I have attempted to examine the media's effects on a more personal level in order to fill in some gaps in research. For example, I was only able to locate a few studies dealing with establishing a self-awareness of the ways peers and the media directly influence adolescents and those around them. With one-on-one interviews, I am able to present these concepts from the points of view of the classroom teacher, the parents, and the students, tying together home and school

influences. Additionally, I anticipated that the media logs and a short answer response would provide a level of insight not found in previous studies; one where students can see for themselves how the media with which they directly engage can affect their perspectives on gender, sexuality, and body image. These logs can also help parents understand how and when their children engage with media, and the classroom teacher might be able to see how the students' media diets outside of school directly influence their classroom engagement, learning, and peer interactions. An additional gap this study begins to fill is insight into the world of Waldorf through an outsider's lens.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways an alternative school setting that encouraged minimal exposure to digital media influenced gender and identity construction. I relied on the research questions as a guide for collecting and analyzing data. Data were gathered through participant questionnaires, observations, interviews, media logs, and a written response to a question I posed to students after the Media Log collection about conclusions they may have drawn from their entries and how their media use might change in the future.

Structured and non-structured, open-ended interviews occurred mid-year and again at the end of the school year. Observations began in mid-September of the 2012-2013 school year and continued almost daily until mid-June. I spent approximately four hours in multiple classroom settings three to four days a week. My schedule varied based on school holidays and personal commitments. In total, I spent approximately 130 days, or 520 hours, in the classroom observing which does not include the after-school events, plays, and other activities I attended. I also observed several events out of the classroom including the welcoming event at the beginning of the school year, an open house in November, four plays put on throughout the year by Eurythmy<sup>1</sup> classes, the eighth grade play in April, and the eighth grade graduation showcase in June.

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<sup>1</sup> “Eurythmy” describes the twice-weekly class that attends to movement and spatial sense. Students complete whole- and small-group activities much in the way that traditional schooling uses Physical Education, but the movements are more dance-like in nature and do not involve sports.

The timing of each interview was deliberate. I wanted the participants to feel very comfortable with my presence in their classroom. The classroom teacher encouraged interaction from the first day of observations, so my observations varied from non-participant observer especially at the onset of the school year, to participant-observer as the students felt more at ease to talk with me. Within the eighth grade class, there were twelve girls and six boys. When I began the study, I observed for seven four-hour class sessions prior to asking for volunteers. When I first asked for volunteers, eight girls and two boys were interested in participating and went home with permission slips. The boys later told me that they couldn't get their permission slips signed because their parents were not home much.

Of the eight girls, six girls returned their permission slip the very next day after I had distributed them. While I initially desired an equal balance of boys versus girls, four of the males were not interested at all and the two who did not return permission slips were not able to be participants. Therefore, the six students who returned their slips without incident became my student participants. These six participants eagerly voiced their desire to be a part of the study. One approached me and voiced her interest in gender studies and that this was something she wanted to talk about with me.

Prior to the study, I wondered if the students' eagerness made them atypical, in some sense, in the way they would relate to gender performance or that their perspectives might be overly sensitive to gendered behaviors. As I came to know all of the students through my observations and class-wide interactions, I noted that others also shared the perspectives of the participants, but were more shy about

disclosing their feelings (I would catch snippets of conversations during observations, but non-participants did not necessarily report their feelings on gender identity directly to me). There are several sub-sets of concepts here that I wanted to explore. I had many questions about the different ways that peers interacted, the ways they assimilated these interactions into their own personal belief system, and how their experiences and perspectives shaped their sense of self. I began to explore a variety of methodological frameworks through which I might construct this study and found that embedded case study most aligned with the multi-faceted approach I wished to take in examining gender performance in adolescence.

After laying out the methodological framework for this study, I describe the research context and the selection of participating parents, students, and faculty. I then explain how the procedures and methods used in this study are the most appropriate to the investigation of my research questions.

### **The Methodological Framework and Research Design: Embedded Case Study**

Embedded case studies “involve more than one unit, or object, of analysis” and differ from holistic case studies in that hypotheses and theories are placed more at the forefront of the study (Scholz & Tietje, 2002, p. 14). The eighth grade classroom at City Waldorf provided context in order to gain insight into the effects of an educational method that has been limitedly studied in the past. I hypothesized that children who experienced limited exposure to media might perform gender in a broader sense that did not directly align with societal norms. My reasoning was that children who were not immersed in the views presented in popular television shows,

movies, and magazines aimed at adolescents would feel less pressure to conform to stereotypical expectations of male and female behavior.

The sub-cases involved in this study are adolescent girls who, for the most part, had a more limited exposure to media than adolescent girls might in a more traditional educational environment. This hypothesis guided my data collection of media logs and participant interviews where I explored the ways that each participant both attended to and relied upon the gendered opinions found within popular media outlets. Throughout my study, as the focus shifted from both boys and girls to only girls who volunteered, my hypothesis did not change because I surmised that males and females most likely would be equally as influenced by any media messages that they might encounter.

The embedded case study allows for multiple units of analysis within each case. In this study, the embedded units of analysis were the individual and peer perspectives on adolescent social interactions, the ways peers include and exclude others and how they share common interests, and the ways in which adolescent girls feel pressure, if any, to uphold specific ways of performing gender. Utilizing an embedded case study method allowed me to explore gender construction in adolescents by attending to the nuances of students' daily lives and every day behaviors. An embedded case study approach further allowed me to take into account the experiences and interactions that my participants had with a number of influences – family, peers, teachers, and the media. However, the picture was not complete without the reflection and interpretation of the students as they navigated these experiences and the ways in which they felt influenced by those around them. The



experiences of each individual student were puzzle pieces, which came together with the greater picture of all participant experiences and presented a more thorough understanding of the ways in which gender construction was influenced by a number of factors.

Whether case study is an actual research design or instead, an end product is debatable. When defining case study in terms of a research process, Yin (2009) states that case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). In this study, the phenomenon I investigated was gender construction in adolescence and the real-life context was through interactions with the adults and peers whom each participant most valued and considered influential within a Waldorf educational environment.

Conversely, Wolcott (1992) sees case study as “an end-product of field-oriented research,” not a method or strategy for investigation (p. 36). A third perspective, one that most informed my approach for this study, is presented by Stake (1995), who determines case study to be “a specific, complex, functioning thing” (p. 2). He notes further that case studies do not work well for generalizations, but that the few cases studied are examined at length. In this study, the case is gender performance. Considering the lack of knowledge of gender construction in adolescents in alternative school environments, the goal of this study was to investigate the influences on and perceptions of adolescents related to the ways in which they view gender identity. While research questions guided the investigation, the main purpose of this study was to allow the participants’ stories – constructed

from observations, interviews, and document collection – to organically drive the study toward answering these questions. Because much of the previous research into gender construction and media influences has been conducted using a survey approach, I chose the embedded case study method as a way to enter the participants' worlds in the hopes of obtaining “knowledge to which we would not otherwise have access” (Merriam, 2009, p. 46). Furthermore, the embedded case study allowed for cross-case comparison of the students, where I investigated the similarities and differences with which male and female individuals engage in media. I anticipated that there would be common and divergent themes within the data and allowed those themes to tell the complex story of the ways in which gender is constructed among adolescents with regard to a multitude of influences and points of interaction.

### **Research Setting**

Prior to beginning this study, I considered two potential Waldorf schools for investigation. I was most attracted to City Waldorf because the demographics of the school were much more heterogeneous in nature and somewhat simulated the demographics of the surrounding area. Situated near the Eastern seaboard, City Waldorf is located in a moderately large city in the northeastern United States and serves an urban population. According to the 2010 census, the racial makeup of the surrounding metropolitan area was roughly two-thirds African American and one-third white, with small percentages of Asian, Native American, and other or mixed residents. The population of this area slightly favors females, and roughly half of occupants own while the other half rents city housing.

The students hailed from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. In order to facilitate student enrollment, City Waldorf offered partial scholarships as well as financial support to families who were unable to afford the full cost of tuition. During my investigation into potential research sites, I found that City Waldorf had a large number of students whose families rely on the financial opportunities available, and that the school encouraged enrollment by families from all backgrounds.

Another reason why I selected this site was because of the quick and positive response on the part of the academic director, who indicated that the school would be open to the study and would facilitate access to key materials and individuals. My initial conversation with the academic director led me to believe that City Waldorf would do well in illustrating the ways gender construction occurred in a media-limiting environment. As a former administrator in several public school districts, Mr. Fornah noticed a marked difference in the amount of bullying, harassment, and issues regarding drugs, sex, or alcohol in the Waldorf setting versus a traditional public school environment. Additionally, he felt that the Waldorf focus of “letting children be children” keeps these issues to a minimum. He elaborated on this concept by stating that children “[grow] up very rapidly” with an “early exposure to the adult world.” The Waldorf model surrounds students with “a community of people who want to protect childhood,” to raise students in mainstream culture without immersing them in it. The result, he concluded, is that Waldorf children often seem very “young” in relation to their peers from what he called a “normative” school setting. I kept this comment in mind once data gathering and analysis began.

## **Selection of Participants**

Once I confirmed the research site, the selection of participants was a collaborative effort between the academic director and myself. After expressing interest in the adolescent age group, the academic director suggested the eighth grade class for a variety of reasons. The eighth grade teacher was in agreement with the research topic and the terms of my involvement in the class. City Waldorf's eighth grade class had the most even spread of boys and girls of the sixth through eighth grades. The eighth grade teacher also mentioned that several students and parents within the class were interested in gender construction in general or had specific thoughts about the media's influence on such development. I chose specific participants on a volunteer basis after the initial observations had taken place. I had planned to explicitly ask students to participate if I did not get enough volunteers, but this was not necessary.

During the initial exploratory design phase, I considered participants from the sixth- and eighth-grade classrooms. I wanted to get a greater sense of the ways gender identity construction changed as the participants aged. I would have analyzed data among and between individual students and grade levels. However, the academic director felt that examining gender performance across grade levels would provide an inaccurate representation since I was not able to study the same student participants as they aged. After I made the decision to focus solely on eighth grade, my faculty advisor and I determined that focusing on six-eight 8<sup>th</sup> grade students would create a well-rounded study and would yield a satisfactory amount of data from which I could draw results.

## **Methods**

The methods used in this study included observations, interviews, and document collection and analysis.

### **Observations**

The first mode of data collection in this study was through classroom observations. Upon my initial entrance to the classroom, I planned to “[sit] back and [let] the scene unfold” before focusing on specific events and interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 30). In keeping with qualitative case study traditions, I provide a “relatively incontestable description for further analysis... [to] let the occasion tell its story, the situation, the problem, [and] resolution or irresolution of the problem” (Stake, 1995, p. 62). Observations focused primarily on student-to-student interactions, student and teacher interactions, and the ways in which students interacted with the materials in the classroom. I took field notes that encompassed what I saw and heard about those interactions, and I made connections among common topics and themes to prepare for the coding that took place after data were gathered. I used analytic memos to reflect on my time spent in each observational setting immediately following each observation. These memos contained notes on participant body language, my impressions on the classroom climate and any tensions that presented themselves, and the ways student and staff attitudes affected classroom operations.

I began my time in the classroom as a non-participant observer initially and looked for ways to slowly transition to a participant-observer where it was relevant and helpful in enriching the data collection. Within the home environment, I

observed the students' actions while I conversed with the parent participants. I also closely attended to the ways the parents interacted with their children. Observing interactions in the home environment added richness to the data and allowed me to more fully understand the students' choices to engage or not to engage with specific media resources. While I drew my own conclusions from the observational data, I decided that it was impossible for me to "give meaning to action/interaction based on observation without checking out that meaning with participants [and verifying my] interpretations" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 30). Therefore, I combined observations and interviews as the primary methods through which to collect data, which created a richer sense of the participants' perspectives and attitudes.

### **Interviews**

For the intents and purposes of this study, Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) description of the interview as "a purposeful conversation ... used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world" (p. 103) was most relevant. For this study, a combination of unstructured and semi-structured interviews was used to first establish rapport with the students, then to guide the discussion into desired contexts for research (see Appendix A for Interview Protocol). Students, parents, and the classroom teacher participated in individual interviews throughout the course of the study. Some students and parents were interviewed together in a "guided conversation" format where the interview structure [was] fluid rather than rigid" (Yin, 2009, p. 106).

While a list of interview questions serves to provide guidance during periods of silence or at times when the participant is not particularly vocal, the purpose of the interview was to obtain “a description of an episode, a linkage, [or] an explanation” into the ways the participants interact with the media (Stake, 1995, p. 65). In most instances, I posed an initial question such as, “What do you like to do in your free time after school?” Participants were encouraged to speak freely and, as the conversation developed, I was able to pinpoint themes, such as each student participant’s desire to talk about how they view their classmates with respect to popularity, within the participant’s response. I stepped in occasionally to ask for clarification or further explanation, but the interview itself was always largely participant-driven. As data collection progressed and specific themes emerged, I asked questions regarding specific contexts for elaboration.

After initial interviews with students, parents and the classroom teacher were interviewed to provide a different perspective into the themes that emerged within the student interviews. I began the interview by asking the parent and teacher to describe what the student was like, his or her dislikes, hobbies, personality, etc. As with the student interviews, parent and teacher interviews began in an open-ended format, while I listened instead of speaking. As themes emerged and consistencies or inconsistencies were noted between the student and parent responses, I posed more specific questions for consideration. For example, in her initial interview, Alex used a lot of terms that may have been interpreted differently. She described herself as “omnisexual or pansexual” and I asked her to clarify the difference between the two terms and why she felt she might describe herself as either one.

When I first planned the interviews, I estimated that initial interviews would last thirty minutes, and that subsequent interviews would last forty-five minutes as specific contexts were investigated. In one case, my interview with a parent participant lasted two hours because she had many opinions on each of the topics. All interviews were transcribed immediately following the interview so that I could add notes on the non-verbal cues, facial expressions, and body language that I observed in order to further supplement data gathering. After I transcribed the interviews, I re-read my notes to check for inconsistencies and requested clarification or asked the participant to elaborate further on a specific topic within the interview. Ivy, for example, mentioned briefly that her mother often felt the need to show her off, and I asked her to elaborate on what that looked like.

### **Document Collection and Analysis**

While observations and interviews shed light into student, parent, and teacher perspectives on the ways in which media influenced gender construction, this study would not have been complete without document analysis. Document collection let me “obtain detailed evidence as to how social situations appear to actors in them and what meanings various factors have for participants” (Angell, 1945, p. 178, as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 134). The types of documents included in this study were student media logs that each participant and parent kept during the study, examples of media resources, and student work examples. With the use of interviews and observations, document analyses rounded out and completed the study, as Stake (1995) noted: “Gathering data by studying documents follows the same line of



thinking as observing or interviewing. One needs to have one's mind organized, yet be open for unexpected clues" (p. 68).

The media logs played a central role in the study. I gave students a notebook in which to record the ways they used media in their daily lives. The media log had a sample day's entry where I demonstrated how to record the type of media, the name or description of the media (television show title, magazine article, name of iPad game, etc.), how long I engaged with the media, and a quick phrase or sentence to describe the content. Students received the media logs immediately after the first interview, and I explained how to complete it. I encouraged students to complete the media log every day for one week, but let them know that if they forgot to write in the media log, it was okay, but to aim for at least eight to ten total entries over the course of a two-week period. At the first interview with the parent participants, I provided a blank calendar where he/she was able to place check marks on days where the media log had been completed. If the student completed at least eight entries in the log over a two-week period, I brought the student a book as a thank you for taking the time to complete the log. (See Appendix B for Media Log example).

The student media logs encouraged participants to investigate the ways in which they interacted with media as they never had before, "self-revealing of a person's view of experiences" (Allport, 1942, as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 134). However, in addition to the media logs, examples of the media resources themselves were also analyzed for evidence of gendered behaviors, messages, or themes. Lastly, when possible, student work examples were copied and returned to further understand such concepts as the ways in which students interpret their role in

society, their perspectives on various topics, and their depictions of the ways males and females act and exist in society. For example, students were tasked with writing an essay comparing Victorian gender roles to the gender roles of today. In their essays, every student participant made some mention of the ways Victorian women were marginalized and frequently viewed as subpar to men in both thought and physical ability.

### **Data Organization and Analysis**

As indicated above, sources of data for this study included interview transcripts, field notes from classes throughout the school day, home observations, and documents collected regarding media resources, student media use, and parental perceptions of student media use. The field notes from the initial observations served as the context for subsequent interviews with the participants, their parents, and the classroom teacher. Continued observations and document collection led topics to arise organically, thus providing further concepts to explore in the interviews. All interview participants had an opportunity to view the transcripts and clarify responses as necessary. Interviews and observations were transcribed immediately following each interview or observation session.

I compared observational field notes and interview transcripts, then identified areas for further inquiry. The major themes of study within this research were derived from all of these contexts and evolved naturally without a pre-determined set of questions or discussion points. Pseudonyms were used for all student, parent, and teacher participants. Additionally, pseudonyms were used for all site names and geographical locations. Data were kept in chronological order and organized into

files for the school, the classroom, and each student/parent participant. Classroom observations were organized into files according to the day of the visit, with information pertaining to each participant included in the participant files. All data sources were kept strictly confidential and were viewed by myself alone.

Additionally, I conducted all data analyses independently.

Data analysis is “the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials” for the purpose of clarifying the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, xiii). Data analysis also offers the investigator an opportunity to more fully understand the conclusions drawn from the findings and allows the data to be presented in an organized manner. The data analysis in this study focused on the presentation of students’ attitudes, values, and beliefs toward the media and media use. Data were supplemented by analyses of the parents’ and classroom teacher’s perspectives in order to formulate a well-rounded study that encapsulated the ways in which gender construction is related to media use in an alternative school setting. The coding methods that were used throughout the analyses aligned with the nature of qualitative research, in which all participants’ stories were central to the investigation. In this study, descriptive coding most closely aligned with my desire to ensure that I initially attended to each of the topics upon which the participants touched as they spoke, thus laying the foundation for their story to be told. A second round of coding attended to the substance, or what was being said, within each topic.

I chose to code manually as data were gathered. While I created Excel spreadsheets (see Appendix C for an example) to organize my notes regarding the

data, manually coding the data led me to establish a sense of ownership over the data. I treated the findings as a puzzle to be solved, and I found it attractive to be able to spread the data out, to examine all of the pieces of the puzzle as I carefully constructed evidence that led to the findings.

The nature of this study was derived from the values and perspectives of the participants. Careful attention to each of these within the data was of utmost importance, and descriptive coding was used in conjunction with values coding. Descriptive coding allowed me to summarize the basic topic of a portion of text from an interview or observation, whereas values coding allowed me to examine each topic more deeply in order to extract the most salient values which each participant held dear. In an interview with Florentina Trujillo for example, her desire for Laura to stay true to her Hispanic heritage was often at odds with her willingness to accept that Laura was not, as she put it, a “girl who would be satisfied staying in the kitchen and raising babies.” The descriptive code that aligned with this passage is “culture” whereas the values code was “Hispanic cultural expectations”.

With regard to specific coding methods for within-case analysis, I believed first and foremost that it was important to maintain the integrity of the stories the participants told. For this reason, I chose to use “in vivo” coding as a third method of establishing codes throughout the analyses. In vivo coding directly translates to “that which is alive” and refers to a word or phrase found in the data from the actual language used by the participants (Strauss, 1987, p. 33, as cited in Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). I wanted to allow the voices of the student participants to shine, giving life to the experiences I uncovered. Notably, many “in vivo” codes were unique across

participants even when the same topic was discussed. For example, “popularity” described a topic upon which five of six student participants touched as they spoke. However, each of the five student participants addressed popularity in a different way. The five “in vivo” codes that emerged within this descriptive code were “popular girls are slutty,” “she’s popular but in a good way,” “we’re not popular,” “I don’t want to be popular,” and “Waldorf kids are okay with not being popular.” Through these codes, three of the five participants clearly viewed popularity as negative, and coding in this manner allowed me to draw this element out of the data more clearly.

Once codes had been established, I sought to summarize the codes into themed headings that allowed me to look at the bigger picture within the stories that emerged from the data. These themes, similarities, and differences as they were noted were used to guide the research and inform subsequent observations, interviews, and types of documents collected. The coding on popularity as described above, for example, comprised a portion of the bigger picture describing student groups within City Waldorf. Each of the student participants noted the distinct ways in which these groups performed gender. The student groups noted by the participants were “Popular,” “Sporty,” “Outcasts,” and “Whatever” (as in, “they’re not really in any group, they’re just whatever”).

Values coding allowed me to better represent the participants’ perspectives and worldviews. *Perspectives* are the attitudes with which an individual thinks about something, and the philosophical view of perspectivism makes an interesting point relative to this study. Philosophy stipulates that all ideations arise from particular

perspectives, and from these perspectives, we derive truth or value. Therefore, as Scott-Kakures (1993) posits, there is no single truthful way of seeing the world because all of our perspectives are not the same. I found this text extremely insightful because it helped me anticipate that my participants would see their worlds in different ways, through a variety of lenses. After reading Scott-Kakures' ruminations, I was especially interested in the hierarchy of perspectives that the participants most value. Whose opinions matter most? Matter the least? How did the participants determine this hierarchy? These were questions I kept in mind throughout my data collection.

Due to the number of anticipated participants for this study, I used attribute coding at the beginning of the data in order to organize field notes, analytic memos derived from observations and interviews, the types of documents collected and their contents, and interview transcripts. This method of coding "provides essential participant information and contexts for analysis and interpretation" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 56). For example, I asked each participant to describe the way in which they performed gender in a single word or phrase. I was very interested in how each participant (even adults) would choose to label themselves according to the ways they perceived gender constructs.

Each participant was very willing to engage with me along these lines and had no problem discerning how they would associate their own gendered behaviors. Below are two examples of attribute coding, one for a student participant and one for an adult participant:

*Participant (Pseudonym): Alex*

Age: 14

Gender: I don't know

I perform Gender as: Androgynous Goth

The world sees me as: a girl dressed in black

*Participant (Pseudonym): Mr. Fornah*

Age: 54

Gender: Male, no question

I perform Gender as: Your typical businessman

The world sees me as: an introverted thinker

Additionally, this method led to future categorization into themes, contexts, or subsets of data for “explorations of interrelationship” both within and across cases (p. 56). After the within-case analysis was complete, I used the same strategies in a cross-case comparison to identify themes, similarities, and differences in the data, such as the way popularity was discussed as illustrated above. The initial codes came out of the first month of observations that led up to the first round of interviews. Then, I analyzed and refined these initial codes into codes that guided the remainder of my investigation. After analyzing and refining these codes, Mr. Fornah and Tammi Randolph verified the themes within all adult interviews, and the student participants clarified whether the theme I assigned to a given section of the interview was accurate and representative of their intended discussion points.

Initial Codes - Student Participants:

- *I am/ am not confident in myself*
- *I spend a lot of time alone*
- *I enjoy being with friends*
- *My friends' opinions matter*
- *My parents like/ do not like who I am*
- *I get along/ do not get along with my parents*
- *I feel pressured to succeed*

- *I have to be like everyone else*
- *I can be my own person*
- *Gender stereotypes*
- *Society*
- *Acceptance by peers*
- *I believe in...*
- *My parents are aware/unaware of how much time I spend online*
- *My activities are my own to choose/ my activities are guided by my parents*
- *I have my own space/ do not have my own space*
- *What people think of me is very important to me*
- *There seems to be a lot of people dating and I am/ am not comfortable with dating*
- *My peers and I like/ do not like to be at the center of drama*

Initial Codes - Adult Participants:

- *I am aware/ not aware of how my child spends free time*
- *Gender identity is overrated/underrated*
- *I place a lot of pressure on my child's success*
- *I want my child to be free to express creativity*
- *I want my child to feel confident in his/her identity*
- *I like/ do not like my child's circle of friends*
- *We use/ do not use a lot of electronic media*
- *Video games are welcome/ are not welcome in our home*
- *We participate in a lot of activities as a family*
- *Children are growing up too fast/ are not maturing quickly enough*
- *Technology causes children to see things they shouldn't*
- *Digital media has a place/ does not have a place in the classroom*
- *There is an age appropriateness to all media*
- *It is important to nurture the whole child*
- *The Waldorf method enhances a sense of community*

Once the initial codes had been established, I placed each code on a Post-it and started sorting the codes into umbrella categories. The categories that emerged as a result of this sorting process were:



Refined codes – Students:

- *Self-confidence*
- *Parental monitoring*
- *Freedom of choice for themselves*
- *Friendship*
- *Academic success*
- *Peer influence*
- *Relationships and Dating*

Refined codes – Adults:

- *Education methods*
- *Freedom of choice for their children*
- *Parental monitoring*
- *Peer group observations*
- *Family time*

The refined codes each spoke to different aspects of gendered behaviors, gender performance, and media interaction. For example, peer influence, freedom of choice, and relationships and dating were heavily affected by gender performance and behavior. Some students felt more comfortable in their skin than others, and this was directly correlational to the positive or negative feedback (compliments, comments) that they received from their parents and their peers on a daily basis.

As I collected data throughout the study, I utilized this coding scheme to organize further my notes in a more focused way, indicating how content from the data collection pertained to each of the codes in analytic memos. For example, my interview with Vic Brennon at home allowed me to make observations on the interactions between parent and child, and then code these interactions. The second round of data collection included follow-up interviews with all participants, a writing prompt from the participants, and the media logs that students kept throughout the

study. This allowed me to “identify, elaborate, and refine analytic insights from and for the interpretation of data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 151). For example, as the participants became more comfortable with me, data collection began to exhibit a greater amount of discussions on gender and whether or not the student participants truly felt comfortable in their skin, or whether they were happy with the parental influence they experienced. In some participants, for example, this manifested as pressure that they felt to succeed in school. As the student participants in particular opened up more in interviews and general interactions, they became more comfortable with digging deeper into their assertions and explaining exactly what they meant when they stated their beliefs. Megan especially displayed a great deal of introspection during her interviews and was able to define herself as an individual as well as how she fit into her circle of friends.

### **Subjectivity and Validity**

I am a current STEM elementary classroom teacher, former curriculum developer and second grade teacher, as well as a graduate student. I realized that my own lived experiences, system of beliefs, and current knowledge base had the potential to affect the study. However, I took care not to allow my experiences to affect the process of obtaining, analyzing, and drawing conclusions based on the data gathered. My formative school years included both public and Catholic school settings, neither of which took an alternative approach to education regarding media exposure and gender construction, and which relied upon mainstream educational methods and beliefs. As I entered an alternative school setting, I anticipated that many of the experiences I observed would differ from what I considered a typical and

familiar schooling environment. This awareness led me to better identify the biases that had the potential to affect my investigation.

For qualitative research, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) assert that validity is the “fit between what [researchers] record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study” (p. 40). Throughout this study, I employed several strategies to ensure the validity of the data and findings. The study itself relied upon multiple sources of data collection: observations, field notes, analytic memos, interviews, and document collection. Triangulation, or utilizing many sources of data rather than a single source, was used to enhance the validity of the findings and my subsequent interpretations of the data. Drawing from multiple sources in a study led to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Creswell (2002) further elaborates that triangulation “encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible” (p. 280).

Classroom and home observations, interviews, and document collection provided insight into the ways in which media is used by the students in school and within the home. Interview transcripts were cross-referenced with observation field notes and document collection to determine whether the perspectives students shared in interviews aligned with what I noticed in the classroom and home environments.

In addition to triangulation within and among data, I also conducted member checks with participants to ensure that I had adequately recorded the events as they actually occurred and were intended. Member checks allow the participant to “examine rough drafts of writing where the actions or words...are featured ... for accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Through the use of member checks,

I was able to provide clear findings that convey the emotions and concepts that are closest to the participant's truest meaning. After each interview, I transcribed the audio file into a Microsoft Word document. I then printed out each interview document and provided it to the participant to read over a period of three days. Each participant would make notes in the margins, cross out irrelevant statements, or change the phrasing of a comment in order to provide greater clarity to his or her interview. Member checks were particularly useful in Ivy's interviews because she talked very quickly and found herself mixing up words or feeling that what she was saying wasn't making any sense. She appreciated the member checks because it allowed her to spend more time with her thoughts to ensure that they had been conveyed properly, and expressed this sentiment to me after the first round of member checks.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have outlined and explained the methodology and methods through which this study was conducted. In my findings, I present an overall description of gender construction in the eighth grade classroom at City Waldorf as well as themes derived from case studies of students and their parents within an alternative school setting in which non-print media use is minimized. With data collection consisting of classroom observations, interviews, and document collection, my findings provide insight to the ways in which gender is constructed when the influences of non-print media are as far removed from the classroom as possible. I monitored my subjective perspectives through reflection, triangulation, and member checks in order to increase the validity of the data I gathered.

## Chapter 4: An Introduction to the Participants

In this chapter, I provide a profile of the participants in this project that arose out of interviews, classroom observations, and document collection in the form of the students' Media Logs and the textbooks they created during each block section of their Main Lesson instruction. These profiles shed insight into how the participants view themselves as consumers (or non-consumers) of media, as well as a snapshot of the way I came to view them throughout my research. Throughout my observations, interviews, and document collection, I was able to get to know the participants and their experiences inasmuch as they desired. I was able to gain a multifaceted understanding of the student participants through the perspectives of their teachers and parents. I believe I gained a richer understanding of the students as people based on these different views. I realize that my perceptions of the school faculty and the parents are only as accurate as the information that these participants chose to share. Similarly, the behaviors I observed in the classroom may have been affected by my presence, but after spending a portion of almost every school day in the classroom, I believe that I am able to paint a fairly accurate picture of the student and faculty participants. These profiles also provide context for my analysis of gender construction and media use.

The excitement over this project was palpable from my first electronic communication with City Waldorf's Director of Academics, Mr. Fornah. I emailed him with information about my project and a request that he consider allowing me to conduct my research at City Waldorf, and I received a positive, enthusiastic reply from him twenty-four hours later. The eighth grade classroom teacher, Ms.

Randolph, was also interested and willing to participate. I spent the first four weeks at the school as an observer only, and did not present my project for the students' consideration until a month after my arrival. The six female participants expressed enthusiasm and excitement over the prospect of being interviewed and having an opportunity to share their lives and media influences with me. While I was waiting on consent forms to be returned, the participants approached me several times asking when they would be able to be interviewed. Three of the participants in particular expressed a great deal of interest in gender construction and what the concept of gender meant to them. I found myself frantically taking notes after informal classroom conversations with the participants as they revealed much about themselves in this environment, in addition to our interviews.

While this project includes thirteen formal participants, several other school faculty and staff approached me throughout the year to ask about my project and share their insight. As I shadowed the students through various subject areas, the teachers would almost always take a moment to step aside and explain to me what was going on in their classrooms on that particular day. These events allowed me to establish a connection with almost every faculty member who interacted with the student participants, thus gaining further insight into the students' personalities and behaviors. The willingness and desire to share one's self and one's views came naturally to the student and faculty participants. I suspect that this was due to the democratic nature of the eighth grade classroom and the Waldorf method itself, in which all students are encouraged to express themselves freely and without reservation, through tactfully and respectfully keeping the feelings of others in mind.

This chapter is divided into the types of participants: student, parent, and faculty. The student participants are introduced in order of media influence from the least engaged with media to the most (either by my own observations or their descriptions of themselves as media consumers). The student and faculty participants were most involved in the project while parents offered peripheral perspectives that helped round out and shed further light onto the students as individuals.

### **The Students: Plugged in**

The student participants are the focal point of this project, even though other interviews included parents and faculty members. These students had carefully considered the ways in which media permeates their lives, as well as their active and passive involvement with non-print media devices. While City Waldorf eschews media within the school environment, all of the student participants were “plugged in” outside of school to some degree, engaging with digital media on a daily basis.

#### **Katt**

After two weeks of classroom observations, I began to notice Katt because of the quiet, patient way she assisted one of the other students, Peter, who struggled in many subject areas due to a learning disability. She was a petite girl with short black hair that she often spiked and wore standing straight up on top of her head. After the classroom teacher would dictate a set of verbal instructions, Katt would quietly reiterate them to Peter in simple, straightforward terms so that he was able to stay on task with the rest of the class. Throughout my observations during the school year, I

noticed that when he became frustrated, Katt was able to de-escalate Peter's anxiety and keep him calm while tending to her own responsibilities as a student.

Katt's arms were perpetually covered in legions of insect bites, which she reported were due to stubborn infestations within her home. The other students often called her "dirty," but they said this while smiling, laughing, and teasing. Katt did not seem to mind and it was clear that everyone in the class liked and admired Katt. But this form of teasing suggests that a more subtle type of bullying (which, according to the administration, did not exist) was occurring at City Waldorf. I would witness a much more overt example of bullying later in the year, but this scenario led me to wonder about the ways bullying might be occurring under the radar of what faculty and administration at Waldorf might deem as such.

Gradually, Katt became more curious about my presence in the classroom, and it wasn't long after my first visit that she asked me about my research. After I summarized the focus, she replied, "Wow, cool! I'd like to participate. I have a lot to say about gender expression and those kinds of things."

Katt had been a Waldorf student since Kindergarten. The year of my study, her mother was the fourth grade teacher at City Waldorf. Per Waldorf's educational model, her mother would teach fifth grade the next year, and then begin the cycle of first through fifth again in the fall of 2014. Katt and her family were so dedicated to attaining a Waldorf education that she chose to commute two hours in order to remain in a Waldorf school for high school. Her mother promoted Waldorf values at home as well, where Katt helped cook dinner two nights a week, rarely engaged with non-print media or electronic devices, and was encouraged to spend mornings and

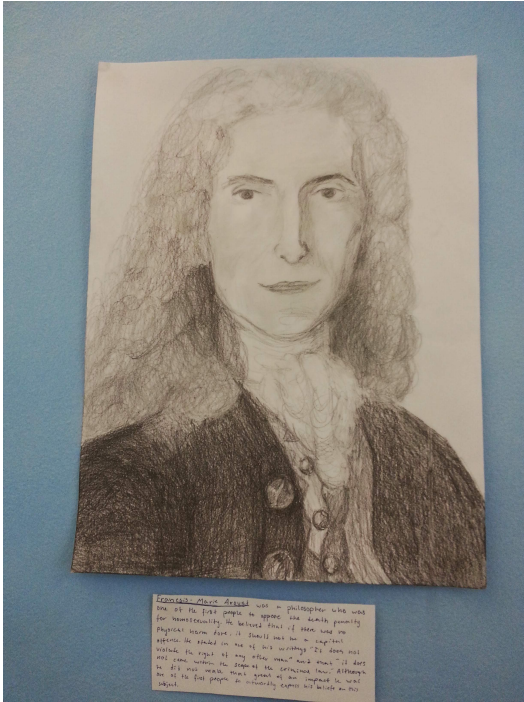


afternoons at a local arboretum for exercise and reflection. She liked to listen to the radio in the car or in her room while doing homework. She most enjoyed music from the 1950s and 60s, especially the Beatles.

I learned from my interviews with Katt that she was a highly introspective individual and was attuned to the personalities of others in ways that were not as apparent with the other participants. This was evident as Katt shared her perspectives on the girls in her class:

Some of them like to gossip more. And they hang out in different areas. I mean, it depends on the girl. I mean, Crystal is really into math and statistics... while Anna is very goofy and likes to have fun. Gabrielle and Laura are like that, too. Megan is a bit shy, but she's actually kind of opening up this year, which is really nice. She applied for acting at Carver, which is something that Megan would like, never do because she's really really shy so that's really cool.

Interestingly, while Katt was able to pinpoint areas of growth in her peers, she did not apply the same perspectives to herself. Katt was an extremely talented and accomplished artist. Throughout the year, the students had to draw several portraits of important people the class studied as part of the textbooks they made during each block period. Katt's attention to detail and artistic composition produced extraordinary work. However, Katt did not see herself as possessing artistic ability and felt that the "only reason people are wowed by my work is because they don't know art."



*Illustration 3.* Katt’s drawing of Francois-Marie Arouet, popularly known as Voltaire, for a class project on famous philosophers.

Art comprised much of Katt’s free time, and she rarely engaged with television, movies, or magazines. She found magazine articles “boring” and “dumbed down,” especially those geared toward girls her age in publications such as *Seventeen* or *Teen Vogue*. Katt would much rather read books with her friends and discuss the characters, plot, and events in great detail while hanging out at their houses or having sleepovers on the weekend. When I asked Katt to provide the title of a good book she read recently, her face lit up as she gushed about John Green’s (2012) *The Fault in Our Stars*.

Like all of the participants, Katt had strong opinions on how the Waldorf model had shaped her. She felt that even if she had attended public school much of

her life, she would still feel connected to the natural world, because it was who she was. However, she felt that the Waldorf environment, particularly Eurythmy and Art, had allowed her to more fully understand how her actions impact others as well as the ways in which she had the power to create something beautiful out of raw materials.

### **Gabrielle**

My first impression of Gabrielle came during an activity where each student was charged with describing themselves in three words or less. When it was her turn, Gabrielle pondered a moment, then firmly stated, “the quiet outcast.” Gabrielle’s fiery red hair made her immediately noticeable in any crowd, which countered her serene, subtle nature. Gabrielle was certainly quiet, but as I learned throughout the year, it was because she chose to speak and act deliberately. There were no wasted words or movements when it came to Gabrielle. Everything she did and said was with purpose and without excess. However, I found it perplexing that Gabrielle considered herself an outcast. She was well liked by all of her peers. When she came into the classroom in the morning, at least four or five of the girls rushed over to hug her and say hello. She was flocked by several seventh and eighth grade students during each recess, and was always one of the first students chosen for group activities.

After making these observations for a few weeks, I asked Gabrielle why she considered herself an outcast when, to me, it seemed as if all evidence pointed to the contrary. She seemed surprised that I would describe her as popular, and concluded that it seems anyone who goes to Waldorf was an outcast because it was an educational method that caters to “different” families than what was offered in a more

mainstream public school environment. “I know I’m not an outcast *here*,” she clarified, “but I certainly would be anywhere else.” The style of dress within the Waldorf community, for example, was noticeably different than “typical” teenage garb. Skinny jeans and black cargo pants give way to flowing linen and muslin garments that are often hand-dyed and even handmade by the students or their parents. Gabrielle handmade every item of clothing I ever saw her wear, much to the admiration of her classmates and teachers alike. While not overtly feminine in dress, many of the teachers referred to Gabrielle as the quiet, calm “mother hen” of the classroom who tasked herself with comforting anyone who was struggling with a personal or academic issue on a given day.

Interviews with Gabrielle ebbed and flowed in waves. Gabrielle was very hesitant to answer any questions in the beginning, providing very little information that required me to ask several probing follow-up questions following each initial question. Slowly, Gabrielle would begin talking, and her thoughts and words would gain momentum, coming faster and faster as the interview progressed. Then, it was almost as if Gabrielle felt that she was talking too much or that she was going off on tangents and not “going in the right direction.” Gabrielle often sought permission to talk at length about a topic of her choosing, or worried that she “wasn’t giving me what I wanted” as she spoke. During these times, the interview would stall momentarily before once again picking up.

Like Katt, Gabrielle did not find much enjoyment in television or movies. In fact, she and her family went to a movie only about once every three months, and only if it was something that everyone agreed on and had a great desire to see before

the film was released to DVD. There was a television in the home, but it was used expressly for watching the family's collection of DVDs. Gabrielle most enjoyed Audrey Hepburn movies if she was going to watch something.

Where Katt's schedule was relaxed and fluid, Gabrielle's was packed and rigid. Gabrielle took private ballet and violin lessons that filled much of her after-school and weekend hours. On Saturdays, she was at the dance studio from 8:30 AM until 5:30 PM, practicing her routines. She performed in a number of informal and formal theatrical productions and hoped to continue dance throughout high school. When Gabrielle had time to choose her own activities, she and Anna walked to a nearby café and read books for hours. Anna and Gabrielle were friends with many of the girls in the class, but they are undoubtedly one another's best friend. Anna exuded confidence and forged her own path, and Gabrielle followed in that path and emulated her to the best of her ability. During one interview, Gabrielle mentioned how other girls wanted to be like the people they see on TV or in the movies, but she just wanted to be like Anna. When I asked her what Anna had that was so appealing, Gabrielle replied, "a sense of self. She is magnetic that way."

Gabrielle liked Waldorf because she could be her "quirky self." However, as she got older she felt she was missing something within her own education. She reflected on her changing views:

I liked [Waldorf] a lot when I was younger, and I think up until sixth grade, it was really good. Waldorf is pretty different from other schools, but we learned a lot of really interesting things. We did a lot with Norse mythology in fourth grade, and I liked it a lot then. But now, I don't really like it as

much. I think it's a little bit that I'm maybe growing out of it, but then a lot of it is just that it's not as good learning-wise.

Gabrielle's concerns became more evident in subsequent interviews and discussions, and throughout the year, other participants echoed similar sentiments.

### **Laura**

Laura was so quiet in class that I didn't hear her speak until I thanked her for bringing back her consent forms. "You're welcome," she replied. She focused intently during class. No matter what was going on around her with other students, she completed her work calmly as if in her own little world. When other classmates were joking or laughing, she worked diligently without pause. Laura self-identified as Mexican and Filipino, and felt that she was brought up in a household with traditional Mexican and Filipino values. During her eighth grade year, she explained that she frequently battled with her parents regarding her desire to break away from the "feminine mold" each culture reveres in favor of an "edgier, punkier style." By the end of the school year, Laura had traded her long thick hair and feminine style of dress for a cropped Joan Jett hairstyle and an all-black wardrobe of tight-fitting cargo pants, chains, and spike wristbands. Another participant noted that Laura was "exuding her femininity in a very different way" than she had before.

Discussions with Laura began timidly with frequent probing on my part, but as she opened up and became more comfortable, Laura seemed to enjoy our discussions immensely. Like Katt, Laura possessed a great deal of insight and understanding of herself, her peers, and the world around her. Laura engaged in non-print media more frequently than her two best friends, Gabrielle and Anna. She

described the evenings as time for “homework, sleep, and YouTube videos.” Her favorite group to follow was the Vlogbrothers, who provide satirical commentary on a variety of topics. Laura had also used YouTube videos to teach herself to play the ukulele, a skill she demonstrated during the eighth grade graduation ceremony at the conclusion of the school year. She saw the Internet as a source of “enjoyment in moderation,” and felt that most people spent way too much time online. She preferred to read fantasy books, although she didn’t have a lot of extra time for reading.

Laura freely admitted to enjoying television. She had cable at home and watched television whenever she wanted. Her parents did not moderate or limit her television viewing, and Laura surmised this was due to the fact that she only watched TV for an hour or so a day. She enjoyed *Doctor Who* and *Parks and Recreation*. She was “not into” movies, and the last movie she watched was months before our interview. Laura socialized with friends on Fridays and preferred to spend time at Gabrielle’s house because her mom always bought good food and they had a cute dog with whom she liked to play. When she was with her friends, they played *Sims 3* on the computer, a reality simulation game where the player could create characters, move them into houses, engage in relationships with others, get jobs, have kids, etc. Laura and one other student participant were the only two who read magazines regularly. Laura preferred “feminist” magazines, specifically “Bust,” which the publisher describes as the magazine “BUSTing stereotypes about women since 1993” ([www.bust.com](http://www.bust.com)). Laura enjoyed these types of publications because they were not

“mindless or forcing women into pre-made boxes like all those disgusting fashion magazines do.”

Laura was one of three participants who had attended other schools in addition to City Waldorf at some point in their childhood. Laura attended City Waldorf for grades Kindergarten through five. During that year, her sister transitioned from City Waldorf to a public high school, and Laura observed how difficult this transition was for her. As a result, she went to her parents and asked them if she could attend public middle school for grades six through eight. She explained that she did not want to encounter the same difficulties as her sister. Her parents agreed, and Laura attended the local public school nearest her home. By seventh grade, Laura found middle school too frustrating and chose to return to City Waldorf for her eighth grade year. Laura found the girls at her middle school “annoying and stereotypical.”

Additionally, Laura was bored with the academic quality of her classes and felt the work was much too easy. “Plus, I just don’t blend in with people my age,” she stated. When I asked her what she meant by this, she offered her peers’ obsessions with celebrities as an example:

When I say ‘they,’ I’m mostly talking about the people who are considered the most popular in our class. They’re mostly into guy bands that are supposed to be targeting teens, like Justin Bieber or One Direction. I think they’re awful because they don’t really have a variety. They have a similar style, and they don’t seem to have that much talent. I’m not quite sure why they’re so popular. Oh, and the obsession with celebrities! When it’s about celebrities I think it’s stupid that we’re so involved in their lives because they’re just



normal people. It's like, 'Oh, what a scandal!' But there are people who aren't rich who do [the same things celebrities do] too, so I don't think it's interesting.

Despite Laura's frustration with her peers, especially those from public school, she chose to attend one of the three public high schools considered "acceptable" to the private school community within the area. These three high schools included Central High, Tech Institute, and the Academy of the Arts. Laura attended Central High with a focus on visual and performing arts.

### **Megan**

Like a few of the other girls, Megan was very shy, quiet, and reserved, often bent over her desk so that her face was hidden by her long brunette ringlets. She largely did not speak in class unless someone spoke directly to her. She was always attentive and interested in the lessons, but rarely raised her hand to participate. Therefore, I was quite surprised when Megan approached me seconds after I entered the classroom after handing out the consent forms the day before. "Here are my consent forms," she offered. "When can I be interviewed?"

It would be three weeks before I first formally interviewed the participants on an individual basis, and I received the same question from Megan every single day, until her interview: "I really want to talk about gender roles and teenagers. When can I be interviewed?" During the group icebreaker where I initially got to know everyone over Danishes and croissants, Megan expressed frustration and disgust at the "same-ness" of teenage girls' actions and fashion sense:

I'm so glad I don't have to deal with that here at Waldorf. I think it really depends on which school you go to. I mean, people from here are a lot different than people from other schools. Like, I went to another school to take a standardized test and the girls all looked the same where one girl had her hair tied back and she was wearing a sweatshirt and skinny jeans and Ugg boots. And I was like, 'Oh my gosh, they're all exactly the same, why is this happening?' Whereas here, everyone dresses differently.

This sentiment echoed in Megan's interests as well. During our one-on-one conversations, I learned that Megan was an independent movie buff, and frequently watched and discussed movies with her father – most of them films that were not age-appropriate such as *Eraserhead* (1977) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Her parents had differing opinions regarding Megan's film interests, but Megan saw them as an extension of school: a way of learning about life from different perspectives, especially those that eschew normative societal views. She paid careful attention to the roles her favorite actors and actresses chose, and was drawn to characters that portrayed outcasts: "I absolutely love Vivien Leigh. She's a good actress. Unlike Marilyn Monroe who was often typecast in ditzy blonde roles, she was taken seriously and was careful to choose serious roles."

Other actor favorites included James Dean and Dennis Hopper because Megan felt they brought something different and unique to the screen, often going against the grain of what was popular in Hollywood at that time. While Megan had no problem opening up in our interviews, her mother, Sheralyn, wondered during an interview if Waldorf furthered Megan's propensity to retreat into herself:

Waldorf, although it's been kind of a slow process, had let her be who she is. She hadn't tried to conform to some clique of students that dress "that way" and have those interests ... I think that she wishes that more people had similar interests to her, but you know, they all appreciate each other so much, even though they have varying interests. I think that had really allowed her to grow and she's starting...to become comfortable with who she is. She's still shy... pretty shy, and if I'm out with her shopping or something, she kind of like just tags right behind me, which I find strange. I'm hoping she kind of grows out of it. But I think that had been one of the major strengths of Waldorf. I don't think it really exists, but if it were to exist, they wouldn't have much tolerance for cliques, for people making fun of you because you have different interests or different hair or whatever. The kids can really explore their interests and not have to worry about what everyone else thought.

As I reflected on Sheralyn's comments, I thought about the types of groups that the student participants themselves defined: the popular kids, the sporty kids, and the outcasts. Maybe the word "cliques" suggested defined boundaries that did not exist, but there definitely were instances of students who hung out in smaller groups or tribes within the grade level. Katt, Gabrielle, and Laura were one such group.

At the end of the year, Megan's self-portrait reflection project was a display of movie posters with quotes and lines from the movie that described Megan's view of herself as an individual as well as her view of what she could offer the world. When she presented her project to the school during the nighttime reception, Megan explained that she had seen herself reflected in certain characters, and that these

characters had helped her solidify who she is and the person she would like to become in the future. Megan chose to attend a local art high school after graduation, with a focus on filmmaking.

## **Ivy**

Ivy could unequivocally be considered the class firecracker. Her bright, bold fashion sense complemented her vivacious personality perfectly, and Ivy was often at the center of attention in and out of the classroom. She was the only student in the class who wore makeup, and cited Taylor Swift's signature red lips as her own inspiration for wearing red lipstick, a bold shade which matched her outspoken personality. Throughout the school year, I often observed the boys in the class teasing one another about having a crush on her. Ivy was at the center of the "popular" students in the class, which also included Kat, Dani, and Isaac. This group of four was extremely tight, spending most of their time together and excluding most others in the class. When I asked the other participants to define a typical teenage girl, each one of the other five student participants mentioned Ivy's name.

Ivy was described by many in the class as "high femme"<sup>2</sup> due to her love of extensive beading, lace, and intricate detail on her clothing. She always wore skirts, dresses, and high heels. Unlike all of the other participants, Ivy spoke out frequently in class, regardless of whether or not she was permitted to talk. Several of the other participants informed me that Ivy was the only one in the class to have had a

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<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, "femme" is associated with a lesbian who displays overtly feminine qualities in the way of makeup, dress, or actions. This perhaps further illustrates the students' lack of media involvement as they are not using this term in the correct sense. Here, the students – and Ivy herself – mean that Ivy is very feminine, dresses very girly, and utilizes makeup.

boyfriend, and that she had “more experience” with boys than any other eighth grade girl. When I asked Ivy to describe herself, she said, “I know what I like and I do what I want.” Interviews with Ivy were lengthy and often had to be continued at another time because Ivy insisted that she “had a lot of points” that she needed to make.

Ivy admitted that she was allowed to do as she pleased at home and chose to spend her time watching “immature” movies and TV shows such as *Wipeout* and *Modern Family*. Like Anna, another student in the class, Ivy loved to read. When I asked her if she and Anna discussed books, she laughed and replied that Anna used to try, but once Anna realized that Ivy loved “fluffy, brainless” books, she became disgusted and refused to speak to Ivy. Ivy felt that media had a large influence over her life. She perused fashion magazines such as *Teen Vogue*, then emulated the designs and styles within. She desperately wished to pursue a career in modeling when she turned eighteen so that she could “wear bikinis without people thinking [she’s] perverted.”

Ivy attributed her personality to her cultured and varied upbringing. Ivy attended a music school from Kindergarten through fifth grade when she lived in New York City. The summer after fifth grade, her family relocated to the area, and she attended the most prestigious all-girls private school in the area for sixth grade. After sixth grade, she told her parents that she wanted to be in a different environment, so together, they toured several schools and decided upon City Waldorf. Ivy’s world was media-saturated and, interestingly, Ivy did not think that the Waldorf environment had influenced her views on media:

Everyone says Waldorf supports the absence of electronic media, but to me, it's all about the people. I mean, I hang with Isaac and Tyrell because I like video games and I'm good at Call of Duty. They like that. I like that. You can go anywhere and find anyone with interests similar to you even if the educational model directly opposes those interests.

Ivy also expressed the opposition she felt in her relationship with her mother. Earlier in the year, Ivy's mom felt that she and her daughter needed something to do together; a bonding experience. Together, they chose a mother/daughter book club run by a neighbor. However, she and her mother had regular arguments about the book selections that were chosen:

[My mom] is kind of really immature about it. She'll be like [gasp] 'You're reading this?? I didn't know about it! This is so inappropriate!' We're in this mother-daughter book club and one of the books that we just read was *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012), which like, everyone in our class is crazy about, all the girls at least. There's a sex scene in it, and it's not graphic, but she's like, 'I just skimmed through the book and I totally missed that part! This book is not appropriate!' and I just think "Come on!"

Ivy admitted that her easygoing attitude makes it hard for people to take her seriously when she chooses to be serious. I often noticed Ivy cracking jokes and making sarcastic, cynical comments in class. When others rebuffed her views, Ivy would get visibly frustrated that no one was taking her seriously and actually listening to what she had to say. As we discussed this in one of our interviews, Ivy concluded that she was the type of person who responded similarly whether she was joking or

not, and that others might not be able to differentiate between expressions of humor versus those of genuine interest. Ivy reflected on an incident that occurred earlier that day to illustrate this point:

Right now, Mrs. Silver is teaching the math block. It's platonic solids. I asked her what that means and how I will use it in real life, and she said, 'I don't like your sarcastic attitude, Ivy.' And it was a serious question. I was like, 'Why do we need to know this, this is so stupid.' I don't like her.

While Ivy was very popular with her peers, her mother was concerned that she was not able to relate to or really connect with others: "There's an aloofness, a disconnect with Ivy. I look at her and sometimes she doesn't seem to be all there emotionally. It's as if she's detached and in her own little world." Ivy's mom feared that this disconnect was how Ivy was choosing to hide her disappointment that she did not get into a high school to further study her passion, dance. "Ivy isn't a good enough dancer, and unfortunately, that's just the fact. She is a good singer, and that's safe for her, so she's going for singing instead."

### **Alex**

Like Ivy, Alex was very outgoing and bold. From the second I entered the classroom, she demanded to know who I was and what I was doing there. I learned very quickly that the other students were put off by Alex's brash attitude. Another participant noted that Alex's black, baggy clothing with her skull and crossbones accessories "wiggled everyone else out."

When she learned I was exploring gender representation in adolescents, Alex begged me to "use her" for the project, because she had a lot to say. Indeed, much of

Alex's input occurred outside of our individual interviews. She would talk to me in between subjects, follow me down the hall from one class to another, and corner me at recess, where she would engage in a thirty-minute diatribe regarding her many opinions on gender and gender expression. Almost immediately, her views married gender and sexuality, even though I reminded her several times that I was exploring gender independent of sexuality and sexual expression. This did not deter Alex from explaining how she chose to label herself. Often, Alex's comments tumbled out one after the other, zigzagging between several topics:

I would describe myself as Omni sexual. It's kind of like where gender doesn't matter as long as you're attracted to the person, or like, that's Omni sexual. Pansexual is any gender, not just male or female but sub-genders like hermaphrodites and intersexed and transgender. I think I'm ... I don't know if I'm pansexual or Omni sexual, it's kind of like I'm not gender blind, I can tell if it's a girl or a boy or whatever. I can tell. I had a girlfriend and Colton bullied me a lot for that and that's what drove me to start to cut at one point where I just couldn't do it anymore. He's a seventh grader, he stopped bullying me so it's all good now.

Alex's candidness often broached inappropriate topics. During these times, I would firmly remind her exactly what I was studying for this project and would tell her that certain topics were inappropriate and of no interest to me whatsoever. An especially memorable discussion took place during a one-on-one interview in which Alex asked me if I was going to ask her any questions about masturbation. "That is



irrelevant to my study,” I replied. Still, she insisted that I should place sexuality at a more central focal point in relation to gender.

When I first approached Ms. Randolph about the project, she informed me that there was a student in her class who was “drowning in a media-saturated environment.” It did not take me long at all to realize that she was referring to Alex. Alex spent all of her time outside of school with media. She frequently stayed up all night chatting to young adult men whom she met through Tumblr, a social networking blog site that draws much of its audience from the teenage crowd. She also used Skype to live video chat with these men, and considered them her best friends. Alex described herself as “obsessed” with Anime, a specific style of Japanese comics. I observed her at least five times reading the pornographic versions of these comics, known as Hentai, in the classroom. On these occasions, Ms. Randolph would approach Alex, quietly remove the material from her hands, and lock it in a desk drawer for the remainder of the day. At the end of the day, she would attempt to contact Alex’s father regarding the incidents, but she stated that he very rarely acknowledged her calls and concerns.

In addition to her interaction with electronic media, Alex stated that media helped her understand what it meant to be gay or lesbian, thus providing her with an identity:

I was eleven. My parents had to explain it to me after someone told me that Justin Bieber was gay. And as soon as I found out about it I was like, oh. Oh. Okay. At first I thought it was odd, but then I realized there is nothing wrong with it, and I try to argue with people about it who say that it’s just not right,

and I just look at them and say “What?” And then I realized that I liked girls, and now I knew that there was a word for it. I was completely freaking out, I couldn’t tell anyone about it, not even my parents. I ended up obsessing over her because my feelings were so repressed. I ended up stalking her. She told me she was uncomfortable and I got upset and threatened her, and got in trouble.

When I asked Alex why she chose Waldorf, she said that her parents forced her to go there because they thought it would calm her down a little. As described in Chapter 5, an incident happened later that year that resulted in Alex’s departure before she completed eighth grade.

### **The Parents: Clued in**

Shortly after the first round of student interviews, I contacted the parent participants who had agreed to be interviewed via email or phone, depending on their preference. I was able to successfully interview four of the six parent participants. Though Alex’s father had signed the consent form, he did not respond to my communication requesting an interview and was, therefore, unavailable for comment. The parent participants see a balance between use of digital media and engagement in other non-media related activities and events. They also demonstrated an acute awareness as to the dangers of cell phones and internet devices as ways to access an online world that might not be so easily monitored by parents. In this fashion, they established digital media guidelines for device usage and remained “clued in” to their children’s online habits.

When I asked the participants about how much parents were involved in their children's lives, everyone responded that the Waldorf environment gave more opportunity for parent involvement than a traditional school did. Mr. Fornah, the Director of Academics, felt the reason was that many of the families had at least one parent who stayed at home or worked from home, allowing them to pursue volunteer opportunities within the school building during and after school hours. The school relied almost entirely on parent volunteers and connections throughout the year. For example, parents volunteered to run the school store, to lend their instrumental talents during assemblies, or to demonstrate their artistic abilities by constructing the sets for the eighth grade play. Even though the school relied on parent volunteers, Mr. Fornah noted that it was many of the same volunteers from a small pool of parents who remained perpetually involved throughout the school year. He wished that more parents would be involved, especially in the upper grades.

One of the parent participants provided insight as to why parent volunteerism in the upper grades might not be as frequent as school staff would like:

This school isn't cheap. I mean, it's one of the cheapest private schools in the area, but it's \$18,000 a year, and I think part of the reason why the school is struggling is because there are so many students who are on financial aid and not paying full boat. So then the school relies on parent volunteers because they don't want to hire any more staff than they need to but let's face it. This school demands a lot from families. There are fundraisers. There are field trips. There are extraneous activities and they all cost extra and it all adds up. So then, by the time the students are in middle school, their parents are just

burned out. Everyone's tired of being nickel and dimed and no one wants to offer more, so by eighth grade, there's very little outside participation.

While volunteerism inside the school was low, the focus and attention that parents applied to their children's academic success was not. This was very evident in the interviews with the parent participants.

### **Vic Brennon**

Katt's mother taught fourth grade during this project, and her father felt that he would be able to provide an unbiased view. I met with Mr. Brennon for two interviews inside his home, located two blocks from City Waldorf. The Brennons lived in a tiny condo bursting at the seams with books, newspapers, and knickknacks. Vic, Marta, and Katt had two cats that remained indoors at all times. As I walked to the kitchen where we sat at the counter to talk, the cats helped themselves to dinner via an open bag of cat food that spilled onto the floor. The house was heavily infested with ants, and once I returned to my car, I picked ants off my jacket and satchel. Mr. Brennon reported that the upkeep and cleaning of the house largely fell on him because his wife was occupied with several after school commitments. Katt was expected to keep her room clean and to cook dinner two nights per week.

Although Katt felt that Waldorf perfectly fit her personality and her academic goals, her father was not so sure. As a software engineer within a male-dominated profession, Mr. Brennon said he would like to see his daughter pursue a lucrative career within the science field. Katt was interested in the sciences, particularly marine biology. She had the opportunity to attend a marine biology camp during the summer before eighth grade, and this helped to solidify and hone her interest.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Waldorf educational model was not as rigorous as Mr. Brennon would have liked for Katt due to the lack of technological focus:

I guess I'm not a big Eurythmy fan, so I would get rid of that, and just the extra subjects. They do both handwork and art and they have quite a bit of, I guess, math classes. It seems like they're really into the arts. Katt kind of likes it though, I mean, she likes that, and the social action groups... some of the social aspects that I just don't understand. I don't really get the Eurythmy stuff. It's okay... the only complaint I really have is that the expectations for Katt at times are not very good ... The students tend to perform to the teachers' expectations, and I think that's a problem in public schools also, so I don't think that's worse at Waldorf. I think some of the grade schools and high schools and middle schools use computer-aided learning, but not the Waldorf school.

Marta and Katt subscribed more fully to the Waldorf model, and this was evident in the home environment where Katt was encouraged to spend time outside and TV was of very little focus.

### **Lilly Horn**

Gabrielle's mother, Dr. Horn, taught Kinesiology at Wheeler State University, located just down the street from City Waldorf. She made it clear from the beginning of the project that she did not have time for a face-to-face interview, but agreed to a phone or email interview. Although five further attempts were made toward this goal, we never spoke one-on-one. I did not have the opportunity to formally interview Dr. Horn, though she and I had a face-to-face conversation during the

eighth grade art presentation and again at the graduation ceremony. When I congratulated her on Gabrielle's incredible art presentation, she replied, "I wanted Gabrielle to dig deep and demonstrate her understanding of herself. Not everyone takes this project seriously, as you'll see browsing the other projects."

During another presentation, in which the student had constructed a boat out of Xbox 360 video game cases, Dr. Horn expressed her distaste to her husband and a few parents around her: "That is deplorable. How embarrassing, though considering who it is, I'm not surprised." Gabrielle frequently noted her mother's concerted efforts to keep Gabrielle "as far away from mainstream media as possible." Gabrielle felt that her mother was extremely intimidating to her, and she felt a constant need to please her as much as possible: "My mother had very strict and rigid ideas of what is acceptable and not acceptable. I kind of wish she'd loosen up as I get older, but it hadn't happened yet."

### **Florentina Trujillo**

Laura's mother, Ms. Trujillo was the upper Spanish teacher during the time I spent at City Waldorf. Laura was in her class, but it was clear during my observations that she received no special treatment and was held to the same high standards as the other students. Ms. Trujillo felt very strongly about the Waldorf model from the teaching and learning perspective, as well as her role as the parent of a student:

I like the Waldorf model. I think it had been a great, great influence because it fits very well with our beliefs and our cultures [and] it had been very efficient for my girls [Laura, aged fourteen and Valerie, aged eighteen]

because they have learned how to be compassionate from a very early age. They have an appreciation for everything that is around, not just their own perceptions. They have been able to listen to other people with other points of view and to know that there is more than just me. It's been eye-opening for everybody.

Ms. Trujillo is originally from Mexico and relocated to California when she was twenty-six. Very shortly after her move, she met her future husband where they worked at the same hospital. After the 1993 earthquake, she begged her husband to move to Maryland so that they would be out of harm's way and closer to his family.

Ms. Trujillo had always been a very independent person, which goes against the grain of the traditional expectations for females of Mexican descent. However, as the only daughter with three brothers, Ms. Trujillo's mother placed her in charge of their care. This gave Ms. Trujillo the opportunity to play the same games her brothers did, wear pants, and hang around with the boys. She felt that this largely contributed to who she is today, an independent, intelligent, career-minded woman. Her husband's Filipino upbringing included the expectation that when a man and a woman marry, they establish a partnership where caring for the home, the family, and the finances are truly divided equally. This is why Ms. Trujillo felt that she and her husband make a good match. Even though each culture had different gendered values, Ms. Trujillo's upbringing was parallel to her husband's. She and her husband were raising their daughters to be independent and to speak their minds without fear or reproach. While Ms. Trujillo did not expect Laura to adhere to gender stereotypes, she was concerned about Laura's intensity and how this could appear to others:

Laura is very inquisitive and sometimes when she is in class and she is listening and she knows that what is presented is not exactly true or that there might be another version of the information, she goes and does her own research. And then she says, “Ha! This is the way it really is!” Sometimes, it’s just the way that she delivers herself, it sounds like she’s fighting, because her voice is a certain way. I tell her, she had to moderate that tone of voice because it felt like she’s attacking people.

### **Sheralyn Ewing**

As a child, Ms. Ewing considered herself a tomboy. She excelled at sports and coached soccer in her twenties. She was a little disappointed that her daughter, Megan, didn’t like sports and had tried to expose her to numerous options to no avail. Ms. Ewing grew up with the expectation that she would attend college, attain a lucrative career, and then focus on marriage and family. At the time of this study, she was working in drug development within the pharmaceutical industry. The gender struggle within her occupation could be frustrating at times, especially if you were a woman who wished to move up the career ladder:

Well, I guess you feel [the gender disparity] when almost all of the senior managers and VPs are men. Plenty of them are qualified to be in their jobs, some of which, you’re just as experienced as... or more experienced as... having more knowledge in the job than they are... but they’re whatever level VP and you’re not. That’s not really the issue, it’s just trying to get there, and I’ve found it very hard. I’m director level, and it’s very hard to get beyond that level.



Ms. Ewing further elaborated on the importance of keeping up appearances so that others see you working hard. In her industry, “being seen” is important to obtaining a promotion:

I leave work by five o’clock every day. If I know I have long hours, I’m going to come in at six in the morning, but no one sees you there at six in the morning. Are you still sitting there at six or seven o’clock at night? It’s that appearance of working hard. And I find that men are able to do that more easily than women in general, when you have a family.

Within her own family, the care of the children fell on Ms. Ewing if her husband needed to work late. She frequently did all of the cooking and cleaning, although Megan and her brother, aged nine, were responsible for cleaning their rooms. Ms. Ewing noted that if she wanted her husband to contribute, she needed to ask him to complete a specific task. She worried that her son was starting to see this because he often would not take initiative to start homework or to clean his room unless he was asked. Megan, on the other hand, was a natural self-starter with a knack for organization and often tried to help her brother with his own chores so that he wouldn’t get in trouble. Ms. Ewing hoped that Megan would eventually overcome her shyness once she felt more confident in her abilities. She hoped that Megan’s high school experience and being surrounded by others her age who shared in her interests would help Megan find more solid footing in her opinion of herself and her self-worth.

## **Ariadna Levine**

Ivy's mother, Ms. Levine, met me at a favorite coffee shop of hers not far from City Waldorf. She motioned for me to sit next to her, then proceeded to have a 15-minute phone conversation with a friend of hers regarding her friend's son's problems in school. After the conversation, she apologized and explained that she had been acting as the child's advocate because her friend "isn't ballsy enough to do it herself, and this kid really needs someone with a voice." I soon found that Ms. Levine took on this position with Ivy and her younger sister as well. She and her husband frequently disagreed on her parenting style, where both girls were heavily involved in activities so that almost every spare moment of their time was filled with something until bedtime. "My husband wishes I'd just let the girls be, but I'm ADD so it's not in my nature."

Ms. Levine admitted that she was not a "typical Waldorf mom." Therefore, she found it difficult to fit into the Waldorf crowd and felt that she was often ostracized from parent or family activities. Fortunately, her daughter Ivy did not experience this type of treatment. Ms. Levine felt that her views were largely colored by her experiences living in China for four years when she held an international business position. Since returning to the United States, she met her husband, got married and, when Ivy was ten, decided to leave her career to focus on her children full time. Her parents were very disappointed at this decision, and felt that it was much more important and lucrative for her to work full time and to focus on her career just as much as she focused on family:

I don't work anymore. Now I'm just 'momming.' I have very torn feelings about it. Now that I'm just doing kids? I definitely have some self-doubt issues. I was on a track where I did Chinese studies, learned to speak Chinese, spent four years in China... you know, there were expectations by my parents, by my dad especially, to become a China businesswoman or a China policy analyst. China something... and I did that for a while. I feel a little bit like, in this society, you're definitely made to feel like a failure when you just decide that you're done with [your career].

When she was growing up, Ms. Levine's Jewish heritage was a non-issue. Her family were not actively practicing Jews, and they did not attend synagogue with the exception of their friends' weddings. However, during her tenure in China, her religion defined her first and foremost, even above her identity as an American woman:

'Oh you're Jewish,' they would say. 'No wonder you speak such good Chinese,' because in their mind, once they find out you're Jewish, that means you're highly educated and you're smart. In their minds, that's the natural trait of every Jew. That's the stereotype. I got a Jewish identity from living in China, and it was wild because I grew up in Washington, D.C. I grew up in the city; I did not grow up in a Jewish community or go to the synagogue, or services. And so it was funny that it took me living in China before it would even be of interest to be Jewish.

As a result of her choice to focus on home and family, Ms. Levine's relationship with her father suffered greatly. Her face darkened as she recounted a

painful conversation with him anytime there was a prominent businesswoman on the cover of the Princeton Review who had worked in China policy. He would clip the story and mail it to her with the same note each time: “Why can’t you be like that?”

Ms. Levine was very concerned over her perceived disparity in academic rigor of the local private schools versus those in Manhattan. She worried that too many “Average Joe” families surrounded her children:

The working class, they’re kind of closed in by just trying to get through the day. So the choice or to even know to think about whether their kids’ senses are fired up or are being stimulated, they don’t even know. And because they’re coming from let’s say, a socioeconomic environment where they don’t even have the exposure to find out that there is this other avenue for education... so that I’m kind of bummed about.

Furthermore, Ms. Levine did not feel that the money she paid for her daughter’s schooling was commensurate with the quality of education that she would prefer, although she did not feel that this could be generalized to include all Waldorf schools. She felt that the quality of education was a product of the locale, not the educational model itself. For this reason, Ms. Levine hoped that her daughters would pursue their college careers in New York City or Philadelphia, both of which she felt provided more opportunities for higher quality universities than those in her area.

### **A Note on Parent Involvement**

As indicated in the descriptions above, one of the parent participants, Florentina Trujillo, and Vic Brennon’s wife were both employed as full-time teachers at City Waldorf. I was mindful of this throughout the interviews and observations,

and asked direct questions about positionality as both a City Waldorf parent and employee (or related to an employee). Similar to other parent participants, both Ms. Trujillo and Mr. Brennon expressed certain hesitations regarding tenets of the Waldorf model. Ms. Trujillo believed in the Waldorf model but also thought that the development of her daughters' individual personalities and fostering such individuality were paramount. Mr. Brennon felt that some of the Waldorf requirements, such as Eurythmy, didn't necessarily directly contribute to what he felt were necessary life skills for his daughter. In this respect, all parent participants saw, in some way, both pros and cons of a Waldorf Education.

### **The Faculty: Pulling the Plug**

From the moment one enters City Waldorf, the gentle flowing colors on the walls seem to exude warmth and energy. The faculty of City Waldorf brought those feelings to life by treating every person who entered their offices and classrooms with warm greetings and a palpable enthusiasm to share their views on the Waldorf model and City Waldorf's mission. I never felt like an outsider and was invited by every subject area teacher and office assistant to pull up a chair and stay to visit and observe the students' activities. Although I only formally interviewed the Director of Academics, Mr. Henry Fornah, and the eighth grade classroom teacher, Ms. Tammi Randolph, I had conversations with every subject area teacher who came into contact with the middle school students, as well as some nursery and lower school teachers. Each of these conversations sheds further light into the intricacies of the Waldorf model and why technology was seen as a hindrance to the psychosocial development of children, thus "pulling the plug" on the students' abilities to connect to the digital

world during school. Each faculty member provided insight into the path upon which Waldorf students embarked as they moved from grade to grade.

### **Henry Fornah, Director of Academics**

Mr. Fornah is a quiet, contemplative man whose presence instantly commands your attention. He visited the eighth grade classroom frequently, in addition to teaching the Language Arts block. As the Academic Director of City Waldorf, Mr. Fornah had an office but rarely used it. I almost always saw him in the hallways chatting with parents, in the classrooms discussing learning with students, or teaching in the eighth grade classroom. The eighth graders enjoyed bantering with him, as he had extremely witty replies for any questions they asked. It was also clear that the students could speak freely around Mr. Fornah, and he encouraged them to say exactly what was on their minds at all times, as long as the students voiced their opinions respectfully.

By the time I sat down with Mr. Fornah for our first interview, I already felt as if I knew him because he revealed so much of his perspectives and beliefs to the students during their in-class discussions. Mr. Fornah came from what he described as a very traditional background. He attended public school in Kindergarten through twelfth grade, then went to college to study finance. For ten years he worked in the banking industry, but felt as if he still hadn't found his true calling until reading an article about the Waldorf model:

When I was in school, I was labeled as the smart kid, so that came with certain expectations. While I was in the finance world, I didn't find it very stimulating. It didn't vary from day to day. Once you understood the basic

foundations of banking, the job itself remained very stagnant with regard to the work I was doing. And so, I began thinking about where I wanted to be and what I wanted to do. I read that article about Waldorf education, and it helped me to realize that I wanted to teach.

After exploring his options, Mr. Fornah chose to attend a one-year training institute in Toronto to become certified as a Waldorf instructor. After he graduated from the institute, he taught for five years at a Waldorf School in New England. After leaving that school, he came to City Waldorf where he picked up a fifth grade class and graduated it through eighth grade, then started with a first grade class and graduated them as well. During this time, an intensive search for a new, permanent middle school instructor began. During the summer prior to his students' seventh grade year, Tammi Randolph would fill that position. Mr. Fornah taught the current eighth grade participants two and three years ago, when they were in fifth and sixth grades, one year before becoming the Director of Academics. At the time of the study, he was in his 15<sup>th</sup> year at City Waldorf.

Mr. Fornah reported that he treated the students at City Waldorf with the same respect and love as his own two boys, who were grown and had their own families. Mr. Fornah's dedication to the school was evident throughout the year, but his overt display of affection and emotion during the eighth grade graduation ceremony cemented that fact. During the ceremony, each of the students stood up and said a few words to Mr. Fornah, many of them calling him their friend and thanking him for his "dedication, passion, wit, and wisdom" which they would carry with them after they leave City Waldorf. Alumni were always encouraged to return to the school to

say hello or for volunteer opportunities. During my year at City Waldorf, there was no shortage of former students hugging Mr. Fornah and thanking him for caring about them as individuals.

### **Tammi Randolph, Classroom Teacher**

Unlike Mr. Fornah, Tammi Randolph had a very traditional Waldorf upbringing. She attended a Waldorf school one state away that catered specifically to students with special needs, where her parents were both teachers. As she decided upon which career path to embark, Ms. Randolph realized that she felt “indebted to society” for the quality education she received during her thirteen years in Waldorf and wished to bring that experience to students who had not had it. She chose to pursue art education and spent a few years teaching public school in an urban environment in Louisiana and in the city of Wheeler. Ms. Randolph chose to pursue her Master’s degree in art education at the local college for the arts and then remained in the area to begin her family. She and her husband had two young daughters. The younger daughter was in the nursery class at City Waldorf, while her older daughter attended their neighborhood public school. Ms. Randolph wanted both children to receive a Waldorf education but noted that her older daughter preferred very rigid and structured education and did not mesh well with the easygoing nature and fluidity of the Waldorf model.

Ms. Randolph was enthusiastic about this project from the moment I met her and was available for questions, informal chats, and interviews throughout the school year. All of the parent participants maintained that she was a very warm and caring teacher and they feel that she did her best to serve her students and provide them with



a quality education. However, the parents noted that Ms. Randolph was not Waldorf certified, and concerns about her ability to cover the wide range of content necessary in the middle school curriculum surfaced frequently during interviews. By the end of the school year, Ms. Randolph had to decide if she wanted to repeat a middle school loop – taking a class through the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades – or accept an open position as the second grade teacher. She chose to take the lower school position for the 2013-2014 school year, citing a level of comfort with the elementary curriculum that she did not feel in the middle school environment.

### **Conclusion**

After having the opportunity to speak with each participant individually, I stepped back and looked at the participants in a broader sense in order to understand their issues as a group. After coding and analyzing the interviews, I noticed that the student participants most focused on the messages that are received from the media, and the ways they view the benefits and uses of media versus how their parents feel about media use. Some student and parent beliefs align, while in other cases, the perspectives diverged. The concerns over media messages were not unexpected as many of my interview questions focused on media and media use. Additionally, every participant but one saw several inherent benefits to receiving a Waldorf education, and several participants felt that the Waldorf method enriched them as individuals and as part of the greater whole in their communities.

In the next chapter, I delve into the ways in which gender expression is present in the Waldorf environment and how technology is both utilized and minimized. I explore the spectrum of technological immersion that was evident in the

participants' lives and how technology influenced their perceptions of gender and gendered behaviors. I also examine the parent role in monitoring student access to technology and electronic devices.

## Chapter 5: Media and Gender Performance

Chapter Five presents the findings of the study. This study asked, “In what ways do students perform gender in a school environment that shapes interactions with media in particular ways?” More specifically, “To what extent are there differences in students’ use of media at home and at school? How do parental values regarding their children’s media use relate to gender performance, values, and ideals?” and “How does gender performance at City Waldorf compare to what we know about gender performance in more traditional media-saturated environments?” I begin by presenting my initial impressions of gender expression and technology use in the Waldorf environment. In doing so, I deconstruct my observed disconnect between the sporadic technology use that occurred at school and the range of technological immersion that took place in the participants’ lives outside of school. Next, I examine parental perspectives and influences on the participants’ gendered behaviors and familial and cultural ideals. In the following chapter, I discuss the current body of knowledge on gender performance in other schooling environments with regard to how the current research relates to this study.

### **Gender Performance at City Waldorf**

With a gardening club, a woodworking shop, and three hours per week devoted to crocheting, knitting, and sewing (known as Handwork), the Waldorf method focuses on sustainability and relying on the environment to satisfy one’s needs, as well as the connection between the natural world and the spiritual self. City Waldorf emphatically supports these tenets of Waldorf education and the excitement is palpable from both male and female students. In the paragraphs below, I describe

how City Waldorf created this environment, one in which students were encouraged to be themselves, felt accepted by and safe with one another and school personnel, and did not experience a need to conform to traditional gender roles.

I arrived early to school one morning, fighting a downpour as I ran toward the double doors. To the left of the entrance, I noticed Darius carrying a bag of leftovers to the compost pile. I watched as he carefully divvied up rotten tomatoes, apple cores, orange rinds, and other vegetable scraps into six compost buckets. Later that day, the students had Handwork, where they were making a pair of lounge pants from scratch using sewing machines. During this particular session, the students were attempting zigzag stitches in order to demonstrate their ability to alter stitch settings on the machine. At one point, Ivy stands up and stomps her feet several times in place.

“Look at how much room is in the crotch! How did that even happen?” Chris takes his foot off the pedal of his machine and glances over at her. “My pants are going to fit the same way.” She rolls her eyes and sighs. “Yes, but you actually have a reason to have extra room. I don’t!” A few of the boys and girls nearby respond by snickering at her statement. Chris smiles broadly and returns to sewing.

This exchange is illustrative of the type of witty yet respectful banter that I encountered throughout the school year. Another pattern I noticed as I observed the students’ interactions was that everyone chatted with everyone. Even students who would not describe themselves as “good friends” at least said hello to peers as they entered the classroom each morning. Students routinely rotated groupings for projects and assignments, and there was almost a complete lack of friction or tension

among any of the students as they worked together. In one instance, Ivy and Darius had a slight disagreement as to how to organize the information on an outline.

“Darius, imagine that someone said to you ‘Explain this to me in sixty seconds.’ How would you do it?” Instead of expressing any negativity toward Ivy’s point, Darius carefully looked at both of their proposed outlines for several minutes quietly. “You’re right,” he concluded. “Your structure captures the bigger picture better.”

In a later interview, I asked Ivy about this exchange. “I just know Darius, I mean I’ve spent three years with him, right? So Darius isn’t a hothead but I am, so when I get heated he’ll just sit there contemplating. I knew I had to give him a few minutes to think about what I said and then he’d answer. He always does if you just give him time.” Several other peer exchanges such as this occurred during classroom work time, and showed how deeply the looping factor had allowed these students to establish solid relationships with one another on both personal and professional (peer-related) terms. Even if students didn’t hang out together, they all knew how to work well with one another.

In addition to co-ed small group pairings in the classroom, boys and girls remain together for all subject areas and are expected to complete given tasks with equal success. It is almost as if gender performance is a non-issue, and any type of gender expression is a demonstration of uniqueness and individuality. Throughout the school year, there was no greater example of this than in the pinnacle project of the eighth grade year -- the art exhibition -- and in the performance of a play based on Michael Ende’s *Momo* (1985). In the story, Momo is a homeless girl with no family, no means to support herself, and no friends. However, she uses her compassion and

intuitiveness to help others and to rescue the world from the stealers of time known as the Grey Gentlemen. The greedy Gentlemen wish to keep time for themselves so that they never run out of it; ultimately the moral of the story is that time waits for no one and one has to seize opportunities when one has them instead of letting life pass one by.

There are multiple complex roles in the play, and many students have more than one role, with costume changes and in most cases, changes in gender expression as well. For example, Katt plays the lead character of Momo throughout the play, but Laura played one of Momo's female friends as well as one of the Grey Gentlemen. During an interview, I asked her how she felt about her roles in the play.

I'm really excited because I get to wear a button up shirt and a tie and a suit. That's my fashion style; I'm edgy like that. I do crazy stuff like that anyway. I'll pair a tie with a blouse and skirt. It's a blast. And then I get to do it in a play so in a way I'm still being me, which is cool.

Mr. Fornah elaborated further on the ways in which students "do" gender at City Waldorf:

I think that the kids here feel a freedom to kind of try on whatever they need to. There's not a lot of pressure in terms of how you dress or not dress; what you wear and what you don't ... there are some very strong feminists in the [eighth grade] that keep the boys in line ... I see the strength of the individual relationships. In my last class, I had a girl who basically hung out with the boys all the time because they wanted to play football and that's what she liked to do during recess. She was totally accepted by her peers. There was

no ‘what’s wrong with you?’ It was fine; she was all ‘This is what I like to do’ and no one told her she couldn’t play.

This theme of acceptance was readily and easily acknowledged by every participant in the study: students, parents, and faculty alike. From Gabrielle’s perspective, this is a direct benefit of the looping factor – where teachers often stay with a group of students through several grade levels before circling back to teach a new round of students – that is a foundational principle of the Waldorf method:

I really like being able to stay with the same people, because I really get to know them. I think it’s good that I’m with the same people, because I can get to know people better. Maybe for some people, they need somebody new and they can make friends really fast, but for me because I was kind of shy, it’s definitely better.

Ivy’s mother appreciated the teacher’s ability to recognize student progress and growth over the years, and to cater to the ways each student acquired knowledge as they matured:

Ivy is a very critical thinker, and her teachers know that, but she is also very outspoken and opinionated. This puts a lot of people off, but because her teachers know her so well, they know that she only has the best of intentions and is not as aloof and harsh as she sometimes appears to be. [Her teachers] really know how to handle her huge personality, and that makes her learning so much more effective.

The intimacy that comes with relationship building over a period of years instead of one school year is most apparent in the absence of a behavioral plan at City

Waldorf. When I asked Mr. Fornah about the protocol for handling behavioral problems, he replied, “We don’t have any.” I asked him to clarify – no protocol or no behavioral problems? “Both,” he chuckled. “I’d like to think that students don’t act out here because there’s no friction, no struggle. We’re a peaceful bunch.”

Another aspect of gender performance at City Waldorf includes what Mr. Fornah termed “the intensity” of middle school: the need to conform, fit in, and perform according to your sex, not necessarily your preferred gender expression. Mr. Fornah felt that City Waldorf was a “breath of fresh air” for students who transitioned into the Waldorf setting from a public school environment. The peer pressure that existed in mainstream educational settings was, in his opinion, largely absent from City Waldorf. The light that shone in Mr. Fornah’s eyes as he talked about Waldorf education was undeniable, but I could not help but think of Alex’s experience, described below, while wondering how this might have been handled in a different school environment. As if reading my mind, Mr. Fornah continued:

We’ve also had students who have continued to behave in the way that they were at their other middle school, which has created conflict because that’s not how we relate to one another here. By and large, we are nice to one another here. The middle school stuff that goes on in other schools does not go on here, so I think for those students, it’s hard to get them to understand that this is a different place. You don’t have to have your guard up. You can wear what you choose to wear and you aren’t going to be socially ostracized for your differences.



Although Mr. Fornah indicated that bullying was almost non-existent at City Waldorf, an incident occurred late in the year that involved Alex and a seventh-grade girl. In April, I entered the classroom one morning to find Alex's teacher, Tammi Randolph, visibly emotional. Apparently, an incident had occurred a few days before where Alex was in the bathroom after school and a seventh grade close friend entered the bathroom, pressed her up against the wall, and kissed her on the lips. Three days after the incident, the student went to administration claiming that she had been "assaulted" by Alex. The school responded by suggesting that Alex move to another school, which outraged her parents and Tammi. Tammi's fury was obvious as she quickly recounted the administrative decision and shared her feelings:

Alex is a lot of things but she is not a liar. Personally, I think the [other] girl felt weirded out by it and is struggling with her own comfort level about her sexuality, so that's why it turned into this. Alex said to me that she thinks the girl enjoyed it more than she did. And the thing is, Alex's just doing things that typical teenagers do. This other girl – even if it had been her and a guy, she'd still be crying assault because it's happened in the past. However, because this girl is someone who has brought allegations against students who she has disliked in the past, and maybe even a little bit who her parents are, it's escalated quickly from an incident between teenagers to Alex being thrown out with the possibility that she cannot come back.

Tammi elaborated on her statement regarding the other student's parents:

They have a lot of money, and they donate a lot of money to this school. I think it's the administration attempting to please them because [the school]

does not want to lose such a valuable funding source. And that's another disgrace in and of itself; that Alex is not being treated fairly. Alex is fragile. She's tried to commit suicide in the past. She felt safe here, accepted. She was an outcast, but at least people didn't bother her and just left her alone. And now this.

Alex and her parents ultimately chose to leave the school and complete her eighth grade year at a city public school. Tammi kept in contact with Alex and feared that she was slipping further into isolation and despair because she had a great deal of trouble making friends at her new school environment, already months into her last year of middle school when everyone would be separated once again for high school. This was, in fact, the only overt bullying incident I witnessed, but other subtle and underlying pretexts had occurred in the classroom which could also be construed as bullying, such as the incident where Katt was "affectionately" called dirty.

By and large, however, students avoided bullying and harassing behaviors, embraced one another's individual differences, and chose to view these differences as learning opportunities rather than obstructions. Ivy's experiences aligned with Mr. Fornah's feelings about the lack of pressure to conform. In our second interview, Ivy talked about how City Waldorf was unique from most adolescent social networks. Dating was present but not prominent. "I am friends with almost everybody in class," Ivy proclaims. She elaborated:

We like a lot of the same things but we're also really different too. I notice boys but I don't like any of them, like as in *like* like. But there are two people

in our class who are quietly dating. They don't talk about it at school but everyone knows, but they're not into making it public. It's no big deal.

However, some activities remained stereotypically gender-based, such as sewing and video games. For example, Megan often made her own clothing, which she wore to school on a regular basis. Many of the girls would compliment her on the pieces and ask her to make them things. Over the course of a few weeks, Megan invited the girls to her home where they had a sewing party. One Monday, the girls wore their skirts to school ("Skirts are easy to teach," Megan proclaimed. "Thank God for elastic! It lets you be less precise") and most classmates remarked how unique and cool they looked.

For the boys, activities were quite streamlined and included basketball and playing video games. While technology was limited in school and for many participants, most of the boys in the class had access to video game consoles, smartphones, tablets, or laptops through which they engaged in multi-player games with friends.

In most respects, though, gendered behaviors were not prominent in student interactions, as Ivy's affinity for video games highlights. Since everyone liked and admired her, the boys thought she was extra cool because she could not only play video games, but was actually good at them. This added facet of her skill level led the males in her class to view her with a reverence that went above and beyond any type of admiration that I noticed them having for other females in the classroom. I asked Ivy how people treated her as she was playing the games, or what others thought of her affinity for video games.

It's something I enjoy, and I'm good at it. I feel like the boys don't treat me any differently than they do each other. I'm just there doing something fun like they are. No one ever said anything about how I like [these games] or that I'm a girl. I'm just someone on their team, helping them win. We all just help each other win. We're like an alliance.

Ivy's parents did, however, closely monitor her online worlds and she was not allowed to converse with other players on any personal topics beyond game strategy. She had no problem with this and viewed their perspective as valid and meant to keep her safe. Student media use in out-of-school settings is further explored in the sections below.

### **Media Use at Home**

All participants utilized media outside of school to some extent. The role that media played in their lives, however, took on different roles for each participant. Media was a way to socialize, to learn new skills, to engage in intellectual discussions, to stay abreast on current events, and, in one participant's case, as a way to fill the void she felt in her life through her perceived alienation by her peers.

"I don't spend much time online," Katt stated early in our first interview. "I'm not sure what I'll be able to tell you." Through our first interview and subsequent conversations, Katt largely discussed her affinity for art and nature, and how she felt that since these were natural-born interests for her, a Waldorf education model was a good fit for her. Her mother taught 4<sup>th</sup> grade and often discussed classroom events and curriculum studies that were occurring in both the fourth and eighth grades. "I don't have much of an opinion on whether or not we use technology

in school, since I'm so used to doing my work by hand anyway. It's fine, it doesn't bother me."

In a later conversation, Katt explained the one way she felt technology was useful: in producing more complex drawing pieces. "The only thing I really use YouTube for is to watch videos on how to draw better. My friends and I like to get together to watch shows on Netflix, but that's about it."

Gabrielle experienced a similar disinterest in the online world, only using the television to watch an occasional Audrey Hepburn movie, however as we talked throughout our interviews, I wondered if Gabrielle's "disinterest" in technology was rooted in her own interests or if her packed schedule did not allow her to spend time online. Portions of our conversation confirmed to me that it was the latter:

I don't really watch shows much, but my family and I like watching movies on DVD at home. I don't sit around much, like on the couch or whatever, because my mom will start bugging me about homework or dance practice, those things. So I try to use my free time to work on my skills. If it's a nice day out and I'm inside, my mom tells me to go walk to the nearby arboretum to get some exercise. Sometimes my dad walks with me, but usually it's by myself.

Where Gabrielle spent time alone more often than she would have preferred, Laura actively sought out solitude. For her, media provided an outlet through which she could enjoy entertainment, acquire new skills, and when she preferred, to socialize with friends:

I know I use more media than my friends do, and I anticipate that my Media Log will reflect that. But my parents don't outright monitor me because they trust me. We talk openly about everything, and we don't hold back, so there's nothing I'd hide from them and I'm pretty sure they know that. I like sharing what I learn online, what I'm watching, or songs I like at the moment, so we talk about that stuff almost every day. Still, even though I'm [engaging with media] every day, it might only be a few minutes here and there – it's not like, for hours and hours on end.

Megan, like Laura, viewed media for both enjoyment and educational purposes, because her interests in films and filmmaking intersected with her desire to formally study film in college.

To me, media is like, a way of opening up an entirely different world. Like, when people go to the movies, they want to escape, go on a vacation for a bit. That's what I feel like I do when I watch a super good movie. I forget where I am. I'm pretty passionate about films and I know my parents don't quite get it, but they let me watch the movies that I'm interested in. Sometimes my mom or dad will watch a movie with me especially if they don't think it's appropriate but as I get older I think they get that I really do watch this stuff just to understand the cinematic aspects. Like, how the directors do what they do and what they choose to include in the frame or not include. It's an art form and I don't pay any attention to anything that they would consider inappropriate like language or violence. It's fake anyway, and it's all just art.

Ivy sees media as inspiration and immerses herself in a variety of media whenever possible, especially fashion magazines, books, and video games. Her mother outwardly expressed in our interview that she does not like the type of literature Ivy reads because of sexual innuendos. Ivy argues that this literature is simply art:

[My mother] gets so upset when I read books that she deems ‘inappropriate.’ It’s just perspectives and learning about different ways that people interact and react. Same with fashion magazines. It’s my way of expressing color and texture and design. There are fashion designers out there that I don’t get at all and fashion designers that I think are simply brilliant (Who do you think is brilliant? I asked). Alexander Wang is one amazing dude. I mean, I’ve never seen anyone do so much with black. He can make black look cool in a million different ways but in the end it’s just black, but until him I didn’t realize how fabric and texture can alter your perception of a color. So I wear a lot of black and my mom’s like ‘Oh my God, Ivy, you’re like those troubled depressed Goth girls and she’s all worried that I’m going to start smoking and try to kill myself.

Throughout our interview, Ivy often made air quotes with her fingers to express words borrowed from her mother, and rolled her eyes extensively any time she shared one of her mother’s opinions with me. I asked Ivy if her love of media created tension between her and her mother. “All the time! Like ALL. THE. TIME. I always tell her mom, your biggest issue with me is that you don’t like what I read or watch or play. It’s not like I’m skipping school or doing drugs.”

I often thought of that statement from Ivy as I observed my final student participant, Alex, the participant who arguably consumed the greatest amount of media of all the student participants. Ivy knew where to draw the line between the media world and the real world. After my discussions and interactions with Alex, I wasn't so sure that she had the same ability.

Unlike these other students, Alex engaged with media on a daily basis, far more than any of her peer participants. Where Alex often felt isolated and ostracized to some degree among her immediate peers, she found comfort in several online social media communities such as Facebook and Tumblr, a blog/social media hybrid, in which she could portray herself as, in her words, "characters or versions" of herself. On one community, for example, Alex testified that she had over 400 followers, or people who were subscribed to her blog feed. In this way, she was apparently able to find the acceptance that she was not getting from those around her.

Her Facebook account was monitored by her grandparents and because of that, Alex chose to utilize Tumblr on a more regular basis to connect with others who "understand how she feels."

I have a lot of long distance friends ... Almost all of them are male. I think the only female friend I have is in real life. They're like brothers to me. I can be myself around them. I'm also friends with two F to M transgenders [sic]. I know a twenty-four year old, he's the only one that age that I haven't scared away!

Alex's media use was a covert affair, one that she felt she was not able to share with her family members because they would disapprove of her talking to



several men on a nightly basis. In a discussion with Tammi prior to Alex's interview, she noted that Alex's father was grateful for joint custody of his daughter because "it gives him someone to talk to when he comes home from work." She feared that the appropriate boundaries of what was and was not acceptable to talk about between father and daughter were often crossed in Alex's home, as evidenced from some disturbing conversations that Tammi and Alex had together. Alex stated that she had a good relationship with both her parents, but preferred being at her mother's home because she felt more comfortable there and had greater freedom to access media through her laptop, cell phone, and iPad. While she did not feel that she led a media saturated life, Tammi disagreed:

Alex knows way too much for a thirteen year old. She knows disturbing terms and vocabulary related to sexual activity, rape, incest, and death. To me, it clearly demonstrates the way media can influence and affect children in a very negative, adverse way. While I don't believe in sheltering children, there are elements from which we as parents and teachers should be protecting them.

Instead of seeing media as a way to fit in, the other participants viewed media as a way to engage with their real life friends through shared interests. Katt explained that she and her friends liked getting together and watching Netflix shows.

I like mystery shows like *Psych* and *Monk* and my friends like them too.

We'll get together and watch them and have sleepovers. We also read books together. Like, not together but we'll read the same book and then talk about it. And when I'm by myself, I listen to music a lot. I like older songs from

the 50s and 60s. I really like ‘These Boots Are Made for Walkin’ and The Beatles.

Megan took a keen interest in film production and watched films on the weekends so that she could study their cinematic elements as well as the styles and forms of her favorite actors and actresses.

I like older movies, especially intense ones like ‘Apocalypse Now’ and movies with Dennis Hopper, James Dean, and Vivien Leigh ... the older movies are definitely more believable. My parents are supportive; they encourage me to stay away from mainstream movies like ‘Transformers’ or chick flicks because they know it’s not what I’m into. They’ll also take me to the Albert [Theatre] because they show a lot of old movies there on weekends.

Laura utilized media to educate herself and to learn new skills:

I taught myself to play the ukulele by watching YouTube videos. I also like to practice my Spanish by watching videos and listening to others talk. When Gabrielle comes over, we usually figure out what we want to learn about – a dance style, a craft, how to play an instrument, for example – and then we watch videos on it for hours.

The media’s influence on the student participants extended into the classroom environment as well. By eighth grade, every participant in the study owned their own personal cellphone and utilized the phones to talk and text with friends and family as well as to engage with applications and websites. However, as Tammi noticed throughout the school year, media can confuse the line between digitally constructed worlds and the real world:

Media has a very severe effect on two of my students right now. In one instance, [Alex's] line between reality and cyberspace is pretty blurry, and things that exist in cyberspace seem pretty real even when they don't exist in regular reality. When she's falling asleep in class I'm like, 'how late were you up texting last night?' For a male student in my class, he constructed his entire eighth grade capstone project out of video game cases. The purpose of the project is to artistically represent your identity. He'll even write the name 'Marcus Maxwell' at the top of his papers, which is a character he plays in one of his games. The way both of these students confuse cyber reality with the real world is scary to me. The students don't even realize the hold it has on them.

### **Media Logs**

The Media Logs were an additional way to determine media use outside of school. At the onset of the project, I asked the students if they felt they spent too much time with media or on electronic devices. Each one of the participants felt that they did not. As part of the project, I asked the students to record their daily activity in a Media Log for a period of one week, three times throughout the school year for a total of three weeks' worth of recording (see Appendix A for example). Media Log entries were completed the week of September 24-28, 2012, the week of January 21-25, 2013, and the week of April 29-May 3, 2013. Every time students completed an entry, they recorded the type of media with which they engaged (television, radio, computer, etc.); the duration of time for which they engaged with media; the name of the program, recording artist, song, video game, etc.; and any general observations

they wished to note. Three of the media logs (Gabrielle, Megan, and Laura) came back fully completed with all three weeks of data recorded, two logs (Katt and Ivy) came back at least 75% complete, and one log was not returned (Alex).

As I predicted, Katt used the least amount of media throughout the week, followed by Gabrielle, then Laura, then Megan. Ivy used the most media of the five student participants who returned logs, and guessed that over half of her media usage was perusing fashion magazines and planning outfit combinations. Although Alex didn't return her log and could not be included in the averages, she did reflect on how much media she used:

“Katt said she was using media for six hours total the first week. I almost started laughing because I am online six hours on a slow day.” I asked Alex what a “slow day” was, and she elaborated: “Like if my friends are busy and not online much, then maybe I'll only be on for six hours or so. But once I get home, I'm online from about 4 PM until 3 or 4 AM the next morning. Then I might sleep for two hours before I get up for school.”

When I asked Alex to provide a definitive number of hours she would say she spends online each week, she replied without pausing, “At least forty or fifty. It's like a full-time job for me. I have a lot of sites that I need to keep up on and a lot of friends so it keeps me busy.”

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Hours of Media Consumed in One Week (averaged from 3 weeks of Media Logs)</b>
Katt	6 hours
Gabrielle	7.5 hours
Laura	8 hours
Megan	10 hours
Ivy	12 hours

*Table 1. Average weekly media usage by participant*

The data from the Media Logs led to several interesting findings. Most notably, engaging in digital media was a social affair for all five participants who returned logs, but a solo way to learn and acquire new skills as Laura did when she engaged in media use by herself to learn how to play the ukulele. For all five participants, any time they watched a show or listened to music it was always with a friend, parent, or sibling present. For example, Gabrielle watched Doctor Who with Katt and Megan roughly three times per week, and this was reflected in all three logs. Megan liked to watch shows with her mom, and Laura and her sister enjoyed listening to music in the car when they went to run errands (Laura's sister had a license and drove independently).

Secondly, all five participants noted that they spent more time with media than they originally thought because some of that time was passive. After the first week of Media Log recording, Laura asked me if they should record any media with which they engage passively, such as music that their parents turn on in the car or a

TV show that is playing while they are in the same room but aren't necessarily watching. I responded that all media interactions were worth noting, so yes, these should be included. During the January and April-May collection weeks, the amount of passive media surprised the participants, but they also noted that if the show or music wasn't something they were interested in, they were easily able to tune the media out and stay focused on their own activities. I asked the student participants if they felt compelled to watch a show if it was on, or to stop and listen to music if it was playing. They all responded no. Gabrielle lent some insight to this discussion point: "I think one thing I've learned in school is to focus. I mean, I know there's stuff like ADHD out there and that there are people who literally can't focus, but it's never been a problem for me. I can make the world go away."

Katt agreed and expanded upon this point further: "I feel the same way. The only time I notice TV that I'm not actually watching is if someone [in my family] laughs really loud or if the sound gets really loud all of a sudden. But I feel like that makes sense to happen. Who wouldn't look up?"

By the third week of logging, Laura found herself getting exasperated at the amount of passive media she had to record:

I've been trying so hard to limit my media use by now! I know I do it too much and honestly I have to write it down even if I'm not using it which no offense, can be annoying." ("None taken," I replied. "Go on"). I just got to the point where I was like come on guys you're making me do extra work here!

Laura laughed, and concluded that having to record media definitely made you notice it more in your environmental surroundings.

After the experience, each of the participants noted that they spent a lot more time with media than they had originally thought and that this assignment opened their eyes to how much time they invested into media interactions. As Megan noted, “I guess that writing it down makes you realize the amount [of time you spend] rather than just sitting down and doing it. I couldn’t believe how much media I used.”

Three of the six participants noted that they took immediate action to decrease their media exposure and found themselves turning off their cell phones in the evening or choosing to read, take a walk, or chat with friends instead of watching Netflix. Neither of the remaining two participants was surprised at their level of media use and described it as “moderate.”

At the conclusion of their time keeping the Media Logs, students responded to a writing prompt. The prompt asked: “Describe the content in a TV show, movie, video game, or other type of media you watched or engaged in this week. What did you think of it? How often do you like to watch TV shows, movies, or play video games such as these?”

Gabrielle and Laura described an episode of *Monk* they had watched together. While Gabrielle recognized the show as a form of media, she did not feel that the show’s intent was to influence certain gendered behaviors or norms:

I like Monk because it’s quality television. It is a good show with an interesting story every episode. I don’t feel like any of the characters are

stereotypical or trying to get watchers to act in a certain way like other shows.

So for that reason, I don't feel like it's a bad thing to watch.

Laura described an episode of her favorite YouTube stars, the Vlogbrothers and compared it to, in her opinion, shows that capitalize on people's weaknesses:

In this episode, they were talking about why vegetarians make no sense. It's not super educational, but in this case they did present facts as to why the arguments supporting vegetarianism aren't entirely accurate. They're so witty and funny and they think of things that other people don't, which is why they're unique. I like watching them because it's good clean humor and they actually do have a point. And that's so different than most media today.

What is the point of American Idol? It just makes fun of people who can't sing but who are genuinely trying. How is that quality? It just makes people feel bad. If you're not super hot and a great singer, you have no chance.

Ivy, Gabrielle, and Katt expressed a desire to scale back on the amount of electronic media to which they expose themselves, but maintained that the media content itself was not "trashy" or "mindless." Ivy admitted that she found these "mindless" shows entertaining, citing shows such as Wipeout and Project Runway as "simple, fluffy fun" that does not contain any real educational value. Katt summarized, "I think I need to get away from the screen a little bit more but at least the stuff I watch does not have violence or bad language in it. I don't think it's harmful." Ivy shared a similar sentiment:



I use my computer and my phone a lot to communicate with friends and listen to music, but also to do research on fashion trends because that is something I am really into. Since I can't drive and go to Barnes & Noble to graze fashion magazines, viewing them on the Internet is an easier option. So yes, I browse fashion websites a lot but if I want to be a designer or merchandiser, that's what I need to do. I feel like my media use is career oriented and that's not a bad thing.

Since Laura also used YouTube to teach herself the ukulele; she too saw her media usage as something that furthered a talent she would like to utilize in the future:

If I want to be a musician, I need to understand the inner workings of instruments and how all the instruments work together in symphonies and bands. I do that by watching a lot of instructional videos on YouTube so for me, that's something that is going to help me in my career down the road.

Throughout the interviews and Media Log collection, student participants expressed satisfaction when they viewed males and male TV characters exhibiting what they defined as stereotypical female behaviors. This suggests a progressive view of gender norms and societally acceptable behavior. Gabrielle felt this way after a specific episode of *Doctor Who*:

I feel like the female characters in the show are badass, you know? Like they do this physical stuff and they're super intelligent and I think everyone expects that of the men but not the women. And in this episode, *Doctor Who* was kind of at [the female character's] mercy and that showed me that he

wasn't afraid to show weakness. But in most shows like *Criminal Minds* and stuff, if the woman is badass then the guy has to be badass too. I don't watch *Criminal Minds* but I've seen advertisements for it and clips of it when my parents are watching and that's what it seems to me.

Every one of the student participants expressed similar sentiments. Many parent participants expressed valuing confidence and competence above all, as evidenced in many of the parent interviews. Sheralyn Ewing summed up this point nicely: "I don't mind what Megan does with her life or what she is, as long as she is smart, confident, and happy." This leads us to the discussion of the values that City Waldorf parents had about media and gender.

### **Parental Values, Media, and Gender**

When I spoke with the parent participants about societal norms regarding gender, everyone responded that they did not have a strong opinion regarding their child's gender self-expression or the occupations they would choose in the future. Four out of five parents did note that they hoped the occupation their child chose would be one that allowed for growth, opportunity, intellectual challenge, and financial security. At the time of the interviews, marriage equality had not yet become a reality across the nation, but it was on the horizon. Vic Brennon, Katt's father, reflected on his changing opinions of gender roles and behavior:

When I was a kid, women barely worked out of the home, and now people can pretty much live and love as they please. When I was younger this may have seemed shocking to me but as the years pass, I have come to realize that nothing is out of the ordinary anymore, and there really is no more 'normal' or

‘abnormal.’ Everything just is what it is. People increasingly do what they want. Sometimes that’s a good thing and sometimes it’s not. Sometimes I want Katt to see that she can do what she wants and other times I worry that she’ll be more affected by the extreme [behaviors of those in the media].

Many of the participants were unaware of the extent to which media played a key role in their daily lives, but this was an overarching concern for parents across the board. Many parents viewed media in two categories: as a way for their children to further their interests and interact with content that aligns with what they are learning, but also as something that can harm their identity development and negatively influence their societal perspectives. Ivy’s mother illustrated this bifurcation in one of our interviews:

Ivy likes fashion magazines. There’s a part of me that doesn’t want her to continually expose herself to an unhealthy portrayal of women, but at the same time, I know that she genuinely appreciates the clothing and is interested in the marriage of color, pattern, and texture. So why would I hold her back from exploring those concepts? I wouldn’t. She wants to be a fashion designer. Ivy lives and breathes fashion. She puts together complex outfits and fully accessorized ensembles. Just recently, she’s begun exploring red lipstick because she likes Taylor Swift and she read somewhere that it makes Taylor Swift feel empowered. I’m okay with that because Taylor Swift isn’t someone bad to emulate.

I asked Ms. Levine how she might feel if Ivy saw the red lipstick trend on Rihanna or any other scantily clad artist. She admitted it would be more difficult for

her to embrace Ivy's desire to wear the lipstick. "Yeah, I guess it depends on where she gets it from. I'm just glad she has no idea who Rihanna is. She'd wear a bikini to the beach no problem but otherwise she thinks showing your skin is gross." Ivy expressed a similar, yet naïve, sentiment in one of our interviews. "I see so many people in Hollywood or on the red carpet thinking [more] skin is better. Hello... clothes are so much fun, why would you want to take them off?"

With regard to monitoring media use, all parent participants felt that monitoring occurred related to how interested their children were in content that was not meant for pre-teenagers. For example, Florentina Trujillo felt that monitoring was unimportant because Laura was only interested in viewing ukulele lessons on YouTube and did not watch television shows regularly. However, Mrs. Trujillo did random spot checks where both her daughters (Laura's sister was eighteen) were required to hand her their phones whenever she asked for them so that she could scroll through text and social media content. She noted that occasionally she would find foul language or heated conversations between peers regarding school or home culture, but nothing of a sexual nature.

Katt's father would ask that Katt watch her shows in a public area of the home, but did not regularly check in to see what she was watching because he was familiar with the shows she watched most frequently. Many parents stated that cell phone use would require far more monitoring than computer, music, or television use, especially for female children. "I think girls are exposed [to] so much more inappropriate commentary than boys are, and especially over Internet chat or text messages," Sheralyn Ewing ruminated:

You're not often going to have a boy get harassed by another boy or be told that he's hot and sexy. Yet I worry about guys saying that to my daughter on a regular basis. It's different at City Waldorf because these kids have looped together since they were young so most have what is akin to a sibling relationship. However, Megan makes friends outside of Waldorf with kids who share her interests and I worry more about them because they are probably exposed to mainstream media far more often in the other schools. I worry about bullying and I worry about objectification. Luckily she's a little pistol and she'd tell someone off if they said something rude to her, but she has peers that are super shy and would never say a word because they don't want to get in trouble. I'd be really worried about what was being said to them because I don't think as their parent, I would ever know.

Four out of five participants cited online social interactions through Facebook, Tumblr, and online chats as their single greatest concern with regard to the ease in which children can access technology. Every parent felt that online bullying was a far greater concern to them than the bullying their children may encounter in real life. Ariadne Levine, Ivy's mother, felt that to be a part of the Waldorf environment required a greater degree of parental responsibility than in a public school setting. As a child, she felt that she was largely responsible for her own self-care and did not want that for her daughter.

As a little girl, Ms. Levine said she would take the bus to and from school, and once she was old enough, she would let herself into her home with a key instead of remaining with a babysitter.

My parents worked late and by the time they got home I had usually eaten and done my homework so we'd talk for a little. You can't do that here [at City Waldorf.] There are no buses for transportation, so we are responsible for getting our kids to and from school and any extracurricular activities. There are plays, celebrations, parent nights. It's actually pretty impossible to *not* be involved. So in a way, this type of environment caters to a specific personality. You have to want to do this.

When I asked her how this translates to the values established within the home environment, she noted that many parents also subscribe to the Waldorf beliefs, such as limited technology, a focus on nature and the outdoors, and a strong sense of spirituality and faith-based beliefs. "City Waldorf doesn't do a lot of advertising, in my opinion. You don't just happen upon this place. You have to research it, find out on your own. And isn't the best thing when my child's education can be an extension of our beliefs and family practices?"

I was struck by the concept that Waldorf caters to certain personalities, as Ms. Levine stated. Throughout my observations, I found it to be more like a unique consortium of families adhering to similar values and educational mindsets. When they are at school, children are doing, learning, and experiencing. The Waldorf environment sets forth a set of values that are reflected in every minute of the school day. These values include an emphasis on similar experiences, where all students are expected to perform the same tasks and assignments, regardless of gender or ability. However, within each project, students are encouraged to make their finished products their own, to find subtle ways to express individuality and personal belief

systems while still fulfilling the requirements of the assignment. Competition and aggression are frowned upon; compassion and teamwork are nurtured. The City Waldorf campus has fields for soccer and field hockey, and a lone basketball hoop is tucked into a corner of the play area. However, students who enjoy sports and video gaming may not find their needs met in a Waldorf environment.

### **Conclusion**

Waldorf's values permeate every subject, lesson, written product, and finished product that the students complete throughout the year. What was most noticeable about gender performance in the Waldorf environment was the lack of peer pressure to conform to any specific iteration of gendered behaviors. Furthermore, there was a complete lack of school-wide societal expectations that boys and girls should carry themselves in a certain way or dress in a certain fashion. Media use outside of school was clearly representative of two functions: as a way to socialize with friends, and as an opportunity to gain new skills based on participant interests. Only one student participant, Alex, had social media profiles and various online friends. The other student participants socialized with friends in real life with media providing a common form of entertainment.

Parental values regarding media use were mixed. Some parents felt at ease with their children's choices regarding media exposure, while others were concerned about the degree to which the media content was age- and subject-matter appropriate for the student participants. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the initial research questions, discusses differences in gender performance between City Waldorf and

more traditional school environments, and concludes with implications for research and practice.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications

Supporting adolescent gender construction is imperative for a positive, nurturing experience in emotional, mental, and physical development. To support this development, it is important for teachers and parents to foster adolescent development in a way that bolsters student confidence, intellectual competency, and an ability for the child to introspectively evaluate his or her emotions and how these emotions directly impact peer and adult relationships. The apparent lack of research into alternative educational settings and their influences on gender construction established the goal of this study, which was to help fill the gaps in this area.

Throughout the investigation, as I revisited the research goals and the questions I posed at the onset of this study, I noticed the research itself taking a slightly different shape and encountering new turns along the way. This did not surprise me, especially when students are actively engaged in telling their own stories through open-ended interviews and casual conversations that occur in natural settings. I found that the student participants in particular possessed a great deal of self-awareness and the ability to examine aspects of themselves objectively. This fell in line with the adolescent development of a Waldorf student, given that students at this age are both encouraged and expected to examine themselves introspectively within the Waldorf curriculum. As Mr. Fornah had pointed out in our first conversation, the seventh grade year is an examination of the physiological self, while the eighth grade year turns inward to the mind and spirit. I am convinced that the research findings and overall experiences were made richer due to the fact that the participants were so

attuned to their own emotional and spiritual development and growth over the course of the year.

## **Discussion**

Within this chapter, I discuss the big ideas and themes that emerged from the research as they relate to the students, parents, teachers, and future research in the field, as well as the more far-reaching connections between gender and the media. In addition to the introspective nature through which the students were able to examine the concepts of gender and media influences, they attempted to discern the ways in which they would or would not allow media messages about gendered behaviors and societal expectations to affect them. Throughout the research, I noticed the students continually monitoring the messages they perceived and the level of importance and influence they chose to assign to such messages. However, Strasburg's (2006) third person effect begs revisiting along these lines, and I wonder if the student participants were truly able to identify media influences, or if they too, like the participants in Strasburg's (2006) study, also felt that the media was more influential on others than on themselves.

### **Gender Performance at City Waldorf**

My primary research question was: *In what ways do students perform gender in a school environment that shapes interactions with media in particular ways?*

For many of the participants, gendered behaviors and societal norms became a suggestion rather than an edict. In this respect, four out of six of my student

participants felt that gender performance was simply them being who they were: unapologetically individual and unique. These four, Katt, Gabrielle, Laura, and Megan did not feel that their gender performance created friction in any areas of their lives. Each of the six student participants fell in a unique position along the gender performance continuum, but only Alex as the “androgynous goth” felt the need to label herself, while Ivy had been described as “high femme” by Katt, Gabrielle, Laura, and Megan. During interviews, the other four participants did not prefer to label or describe themselves along the continuum.

This was not so for Alex and Ivy, who applied labels to their gender performance and felt that who they were was, in some ways, not acceptable to their adult family members. In Alex’s case, her way of performing gender put her peers off as well, but this was not the case with Ivy, whose gender performance actually helped her forge deeper relationships with her peers and obtain respect from those around her (by playing video games, for example).

The ways in which students both embraced and eschewed aspects of normative gendered behaviors and presentation was evident throughout the year, as described in Chapters 4 and 5. I observed a variety of gender fluid behaviors and styles of outward physical presentation in the form of clothing, hair, and makeup choices. Although print and pop culture characters are not allowed on clothing worn in the Waldorf environment, students further eschewed the typical offerings of clothing stores, preferring to remove stitches and create their own wearable masterpieces both in and out of Handwork classes.

The academic setup of the Waldorf environment embraced individual offerings and focused on the unique abilities of each student, rather than attending to their nature as male or female, boy or girl. All students took the same classes and were met with high expectations by every teacher to which they were assigned. There were no excuses made for possessing an innate talent for a given task, or struggling with something that required much practice and repetition in order to master. Students were expected to carefully thread a needle prior to picking up where they left off in sewing their handmade pants, just as they were expected to use a plane and sandpaper to create silky smooth stool legs that would not snag the skin or clothing threads when sitting upon them. In a way, throughout the school year I noticed that the more students were expected to perform the same tasks and learn the same academic content, the more they were encouraged and able to bring their unique talents and abilities to each academic forum in which they found themselves engaged. All students were expected to sew a pair of pants. However, by the end of the year, these pants had evolved into a myriad of lengths, colors, and styles, all with unique features and attributes that spoke to the vast imaginations of their creators.

### **Media Use**

My first sub-question was: *To what extent are there differences in students' use of media at home and at school?*

The depictions of students' home lives and school lives clearly present a disconnect between the ways media is used at home and at school. At school, print media prevails through the ways students create their own textbooks. Students take ownership of their learning and the knowledge they acquire becomes a living work

that they add to throughout the year. Students have access to trade books, but as the research showed, textbooks were not regularly used in the classroom. The method of acquiring skills at City Waldorf was through the exchange of knowledge from teacher to student, and then disseminated among the students as they worked through the concepts in peer groups.

As with the trend in most Waldorf environments, City Waldorf eschewed the use of technology on a daily basis within academics, although as I noted, each teacher utilized technology to the degree they saw fit. Tammi Randolph supported her class discussions with short audio or video clips when she deemed them an appropriate enhancement to the delivery of her content. As previously discussed, Ms. Randolph was the only teacher with whom the students interacted during the day where technology was a common element to her instruction. Her goal was to deliver content utilizing a multi-sensory approach through which students immersed themselves in a variety of facets relating to the concept itself, and from a variety of perspectives such as the points of view of key players, cultural connections, clips of famous speeches, etc. Ms. Randolph felt this was the only way her students could not only learn about a given subject but experience it as well. Tammi Randolph's views on media align with the media positive research that situates media as a method for creating richer instructional opportunities (e.g., Boyd et al., 2011; Brennan et al., 2010; Leander et al., 2010).

Many of the participants viewed media in much the same way as Ms. Randolph; as a conduit for furthering knowledge, exploring concepts through a variety of senses and perspectives, and as a way to interact with the hobbies and

experiences they truly enjoy. However, acquisition of skills occurred very differently at home, often through YouTube videos as in the way Laura learned to play the ukulele (a talent which she was able to show off during eighth grade promotion) or through Megan's intensive study of film and cinematography by watching and studying the effects in old movies. At home, students also used digital media to bond, such as when Katt and Gabrielle liked to lie on Katt's bed and watch *Doctor Who*. Students at City Waldorf bonded over media use at school as well, but the difference here is that at home, the bonding was over common interests whereas at school, peer groups worked together to complete a common task or assignment.

Alex seemed to engage with media in completely different ways from the other student participants. Where other participants engaged with media in bits and pieces, Alex literally consumed media whenever and wherever she could. Tammi Randolph noted on several occasions that she was concerned Alex did not seem to comprehend what Tammi described as "the line between real life and online experiences". For Alex, there was no line. These online experiences and her online "friends" and blog communities were her reality. As is now common in the technological age in which we live, Alex sought, and was able, to develop relationships with people near and far, and to utilize social media and other digital worlds to stay in touch with them. The ways in which people express themselves online and in person are just that – different ways. Individuals also have different personas that are displayed to others depending on their relationship with that person. As adults, who people are to their closest friends are not who they are to their bosses, for example.

Even with these stark differences among participants, utilizing media at home was a unanimously positive decision for all of the student participants. Five of the six student participants felt that media served two purposes: to draw the participants together through common interests, and to acquire new skills. These purposes for use align with the research of Fuchs (2008) and Shuler (2009) in which students utilized social software and virtual gaming as learning tools and ways to further student skills. Through the Media Logs, students identified what they described as using media “too much,” as detailed in Chapter 5.

Keeping the media logs enabled all student participants to see areas of their lives where they could cut down on media, and several participants had taken active steps toward this by the end of the school year. Alex was the exception to these findings. Media, for her, was a way to feel understood and connected in a world where she felt very much the outcast, misunderstood by family, peers, and teachers. Media, in a way, was Alex’s lifeline. She looked forward to her all-nighters with her online friends and forging relationships with those who had similar interests whom she met in online communities. For the other participants, media was a side dish. For Alex, media was the entire meal, every meal.

### **Parental Values and Media Use**

My second sub-question was: *How do parental values regarding their children’s media use relate to gender performance, values, and ideals?*

In Chapter 5, I described the ways that City Waldorf, by its very nature, caters to a specific type of parental group. Without school-provided transportation and with an emphasis on fundraising, volunteering, and organizing yearly school events,

parents are tasked with taking a great deal of interest in their child's City Waldorf education. City Waldorf does not work as an educational method for a parent that is unable to be involved with getting his or her child to and from school, at a minimum. Parents at City Waldorf must embrace this deep level of involvement in order for their children to be successful. For some of my student participants, involvement translated to a greater amount of acceptance for the students' preferred methods of gender performance, for the ability to express themselves in unique and individual ways, and for collaborative decision making regarding choosing City Waldorf as an educational setting, as well as consistent check-ins and monitoring when it came to digital media use.

In analyzing the research, I found that the degree to which the student participants' gender performance aligned with the values of their parents corresponded to the level of understanding the students felt that their parents had toward their desired gendered expressions. Vic Brennon, Lilly Horn, and Sheralyn Ewing made clear that while there might be aspects of their children's personalities and interests that they did not understand, ultimately, their children's happiness was of utmost importance. These three parents were open-minded about their children's gender performance and technology use throughout our interviews. Florentina Trujillo expressed a degree of concern regarding safety when it came to Laura, but also expressed her desire for Laura to ultimately be happy in whatever she did. Ivy's mother, Ariadna Levine expressed strong opinions throughout our interactions. Ivy felt tension with her mother because of her strong opinions and, therefore, may not have felt that her gender performance was as accepted. Parent values also translated



to the ways in which City Waldorf became the chosen school for their children's education.

For Laura, Ivy, and Alex, deciding to come to City Waldorf was a family decision well into the elementary school years, in which each student participant played a part. However, these students demonstrated the effects of media monitoring in three very different ways. Laura's parents did not feel the need to monitor or restrict TV viewing because Laura, as she noted, only viewed TV for an hour a day at most. Interestingly, Laura felt free to be unapologetically "Laura" – in other words, her own unique individual self. Ivy's media use was monitored because her mother felt her interest in "inappropriate" subject matter could be detrimental, and this created a rift between Ivy and her mother. Ivy felt that her mother was trying to shelter her, which Ivy had interpreted as a way of suggesting that Ivy's mother thought she couldn't handle mature subject matter.

Reflecting on our interviews, I wondered if perhaps Ivy's mother didn't think she could handle such mature subject matter because Ivy often approached situations with humor, whether humor would be appropriate for those situations or not. Alex's media use was monitored by her grandparents but Alex found several ways around their monitoring and maintained several online personas of which they were not aware. Alex had reached the conclusion that her family did not understand her or her way of performing gender; specifically the ways she chose to express her sexuality. For these participants, monitoring occurred in different ways – passive, aggressive, and moderate – which presented in very different ways for the students themselves.

Katt, Gabrielle, and Megan were enrolled at City Waldorf by Kindergarten. These participants experienced commonalities surrounding their family values and the ways these values directly aligned with City Waldorf's values. Various art forms dominated each of the three girls' interests, and the Waldorf model was as important at school as it was at home, where connections to the natural world were nurtured and encouraged and media engagement was either discouraged (Katt), minimized (Gabrielle), or heavily monitored (Megan). I cannot say for certain that the adherence to Waldorf standards directly impacted the ways in which media was monitored in these three households as that is outside of the scope of this study, but I did note the stark difference in the approach to media monitoring that the parents of students who entered City Waldorf at a later age took as compared to the parents whose children entered City Waldorf at a very young age.

### **Comparing Gender Performance**

My final sub-question was: *How does gender performance at City Waldorf compare to what we know about gender performance in more traditional media-saturated environments?*

My observations on gender performance in public and private educational settings are situated within my experiences as a public school student, a Catholic high school student, a private school substitute, a substitute for two different public school districts, and a classroom teacher in a very diverse suburban school district. Within the public school setting, there is a great deal of pressure to conform to societal expectations; an "intensity" as Mr. Fornah named it, unspoken guidelines for popularity and acceptance. In the Catholic school setting, uniforms help to alleviate

the pressure somewhat, but it arises in other forms, such as the car you drive, the jewelry and makeup you wear, and most importantly, with whom you choose to date or spend your time. Social acceptance transcends culture, class, race, and age. From the early elementary years through high school, students gauge their own status and success on who talks to them, who includes them in inner circles, and the approval or disapproval they receive from others.

Unlike traditional schools, as detailed in the previous chapters, the very nature of Waldorf education forces both boys and girls to engage in roles that are traditionally reserved for one gender or another. For example, since all students take handiwork classes, boys and girls emerge from a K-8 Waldorf education quite skilled with a sewing machine and able to hand weave and dye their own fabrics. In the outside world, males would most likely balk at such classes, but in the Waldorf setting, based on the responses of the participants, the expectations for learning are not questioned. Students and parents enjoyed exposure to such unique experiences as sewing, harmonizing, co-ed sports (which are not commonly found in traditional education settings), yoga, gardening, and music.

Like traditional educational settings, some of the student participants did prefer to label themselves along the gender identity continuum. Alex placed a label upon herself that she undoubtedly had encountered in some way, then felt that that label ('androgynous goth') applied to her. I wish now that I had had the foresight to follow up this discussion by asking them whether they felt that such labels were simply explanatory or whether these labels placed confines on their gender performance and if they felt expected to perform to the parameters of the labels.

As an elementary STEM public school teacher, I found these gender performances quite striking in their contrast to my students and expectations for them. I see 368 students throughout the week. The desire to conform to gender stereotypes, behaviors, and clothing choices is prominent in my classroom setting and around the school building. After spending extensive amounts of time both in and out of the classroom with the research participants, I found that gender performance seems highly connected to the level of comfort and trust that had been established within the school community.

In addition to my own observations, I compared the literature on technology and adolescent conformity to my findings from City Waldorf. Through the analysis of current research in positive and negative uses of media, students' attitudes and behaviors toward gender performance, traditional gendered roles, objectification, social interactions and peer relations, and the use of media at home, I am able to draw several comparisons to City Waldorf.

While the student participants saw media use as positive outside of school, five of the six participants did not question the decision of City Waldorf to minimize media and technology exposure within the building. One participant, Alex, saw the absence of technology as not allowing students to find ways to understand aspects of themselves that they might not want to address with their parents. This finding aligns with Weisman and Houston's (2009) finding that the Internet became a portal for adolescents to gain knowledge about issues such as puberty and sexuality, which they may not feel comfortable addressing with their families. Alex is exposed to the attitudes and behaviors of the older men in her online blogs and chat groups.

Throughout our interviews and discussions, Alex clearly situates herself as a follower, one who emulates the perspectives and behaviors of those she respects. Therefore, Alex's methods of performing gender are a conglomeration of the individuals she idolizes. Ms. Randolph expressed concerns about Alex's online activity. In this way, Alex's behaviors support Arnett's (1995) findings on the ways adolescents socialize through media materials regarding identity formation and coping mechanisms.

In these scenarios, media access and content drew negative feelings from the parent and staff participants because they worried that students were accessing content that was not age-appropriate, such as Ivy's mother's concern over her literature choices. In a traditional school, faculty and staff may very well feel the same way about media content as the adults within this study. However, the main difference between traditional environments and City Waldorf is that traditional environments do not make a concerted effort to reduce the amount of media to which students are exposed. In traditional environments, we see 1:1 laptop use as a goal and something that strengthens learning. In Title I schools such as the one in which I teach, we aim to provide students with as many digital platforms as possible through hardware such as tablets, Chromebooks, calculators, iPods, and desktop computers and through software utilized for publishing, presenting, and organizing student work. In traditional educational settings, we rarely attend to the ways females are represented in the media to which our students are exposed, or whether or not such media exposure affects gender performance. It simply isn't a school-wide priority.

Katt, Gabrielle, Megan, and Laura did not directly address female representation in their interviews and discussions, but Ivy's interest in fashion magazines directly situates her in the midst of the ways females are portrayed in these publications due to her passion and interests. Therefore, Ivy undoubtedly came across images that align with Mager and Helgeson's (2011) analysis of magazine advertisements that sex sells and that females are overwhelmingly placed in suggestive poses, performing a specific version of what it means to be female. With regard to gender performance, Ivy was the exception at City Waldorf. In a more traditional school, she would most likely be more the rule. In this way, students who subscribe to more traditional gender roles were more uncommon at City Waldorf, according to the student participants' descriptions of themselves in relationship to their peers and how their peers acted as well. Only Alex and Ivy felt the need to describe themselves according to labels we might see utilized more often in traditional school environments.

While gender performance at City Waldorf seems to be more of just a thing the students do rather than feeling the need to attribute labels and descriptors to themselves that might place them in stereotypical boxes, I did still note that the student participants defined themselves as "sporty," or "whatever," which was previously noted in Chapter 3. These labels did not, however, primarily convey stereotypical gendered expectations.

The literature points to other ways in which gender performance at City Waldorf compared to gender performance in more traditional school settings. As we have seen, although City Waldorf minimized the use of digital and social media,

some teachers, such as Ms. Randolph, used it to enrich the classroom experience in ways that correspond to the literature (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Davidson, Goldberg, & Jones, 2010; Rivoltella, 2008; Tapscott, 2009). However, students who are presented with minimal opportunities to engage in collaborative forms of problem-solving using technology could be at a potential disadvantage as they move through their K-12 career. This limits multi-modal literacies and technological awareness.

The lack of bullying, central to many studies of adolescent identity construction, was another way in which City Waldorf seemed to differ from traditional schools. As reported in studies such as Unnever and Cornell (2003), adolescent aggression often translates to the act of bullying in many educational settings, but not City Waldorf. This can potentially be attributed to the notion that City Waldorf students view their classmates as a family, not just a peer group, because they have looped with these classmates across multiple grade levels, growing and maturing together. Additionally, gender expression is encouraged and welcome across all areas of the spectrum and students do not feel pressured to label themselves.

### **Implications**

Understanding the inner questioning that accompanies the early adolescent years requires educators, paraprofessionals, parents, and school administrators to be attuned to the many messages adolescents receive from social norms, media representations that, in turn, can influence their gender construction and identity. A detailed analysis of the ways in which gender is constructed when media is taken out

of the equation, and how this compares to the ways in which gender is constructed in the media-intense world to which most students are exposed sheds light on the most influential aspects of non-print media and how those messages are both received and perceived by our adolescent students.

### **For Teachers**

Findings from observing students in the classroom with a focus on the gendered interactions among students could help classroom teachers in the future. By noting the common themes that emerge from these observations, classroom teachers could better understand how their actions establish an environment that is along the spectrum from gender-blind to gender-neutral to gender-focused, and how establishing such environments affect student socialization and learning. Additionally, the interviews help pinpoint the direct media influences felt by students, and can provide insight into how adolescents take in and interpret their interactions with media.

Minimizing technological exposure is a facet of Waldorf education, but I was struck by the lack of attention on technological safety. Since adolescents are so attuned to the messages located within media content, I still believe that it is imperative to teach students how to be safe online and how to exercise caution when interacting with others in an online setting. As Shin and Ryan (2014) noted, teacher behavior and the establishment of a safe and secure classroom environment is the single greatest predictor of classroom climate. The classroom teacher, then, is charged with modeling behaviors that demonstrate an awareness of the potential risk factors that adolescents may encounter when using technology.



City Waldorf maintained that it was responsible for educating the whole child, as Mr. Fornah noted in our first conversation. Should fulfilling this responsibility include attending to all areas of the students' lives including outside of school, even those that are not supported by the in-school educational model? I believe that if Waldorf situates itself within the context of an educational model that includes the whole child, they must then address all aspects of that child's life, including how they can be smart both in and out of school, in all scenarios. This goal is easily attainable through open-ended conversations, hosting a series of student-led discussions involving real-world issues which students face, and utilizing current research in aspects of education – such as gender performance and media use! – in order to identify direct classroom lesson content.

### **For Parents**

Media logs, similar to those used in this study, could enable parents to estimate how much time their children are engaged with a variety of media sources. By including a brief description about the most potent messages they received while interacting with each source, the logs can help parents to more fully understand the media messages to which their children most attend. Parents of all adolescents can benefit from these findings in order to more closely monitor and examine in-home media use. The media logs could also raise awareness for the students, enabling them to more closely examine the amount of time spent engaging with media and how this engagement affects their relationships with family members and their self-perceptions.

Parents also need to consider how the educational frameworks and models of their children's school align or differ in any way with home values. An environment that encourages the minimization of media may not address technological safety and digital citizenship, as is the case of City Waldorf. Understanding the limitations of the real-world skills that may or may not be addressed in the child's school environment can open the door for the opportunity to engage parents and children in robust dialogue at home to ensure that children truly are becoming global citizens through correct technology use and etiquette.

### **For Future Research**

This dissertation extends research on gender construction into an alternative educational setting with marked differences when compared to a traditional school setting. This study focuses specifically on an educational setting that subscribes to the Waldorf method as established by Rudolph Steiner. While the original Waldorf model has evolved some over the years and incorporated cultural considerations due to global expansion from its origins in Austria, City Waldorf sought to maintain the foundations of this model and to ensure that students were educated according to basic Waldorf principles. Since there are few research findings on studies conducted within Waldorf settings, this study sheds light on a type of schooling with which many parents, educators, and administrators may be unfamiliar. Anyone who interacts with children in any context could benefit from examining the differences in gender construction between normative and alternative school settings. Those who interact with very young children may find this study informative in establishing the

foundations upon which gender construction occurs and how gender construction might present in adolescent age students down the road.

Throughout data collection, I found myself drawn to Alex's case and the implications for students who received much of their education in a traditional public school environment, then transition to a school such as City Waldorf later. Darius was another student in the classroom who had transitioned to Waldorf in seventh grade, but was not a participant in this study. Therefore, his experiences were not a part of the cases and beg further investigation. How do students who find themselves transitioning into a different educational method see that method influencing the gender constructs they have already begun to create? As I analyzed the data, I found myself wishing I could study cases like Alex further, which in itself would fill even more gaps in adolescent development and the influence of multiple educational settings. Instead of examining cases where media is minimized, how could media saturation affect or influence gender performance? How does the ability to participate in online social environments through blogging or gaming encourage adolescents to "try on" different gender roles, if at all? Such research would be very important in our current and future society, where the increase in mobile technologies has allowed adolescents to be plugged in and online every minute of the day through portable devices.

Further research is also needed into the ways that adolescent development occurs in students who attend alternative educational environments like City Waldorf from the onset of their K-12 school experience versus those who transition to Waldorf from any other type of educational setting. Longitudinal studies would enable us to

see how persistent conformist and non-conformist gender performances are over time. Research into the ways that alternative settings are chosen by parents is also needed, because this was an area in which I was unable to find research. Although I found myself wanting to delve more deeply into school choice with parent participants, that was not the focus of this study.

This study involved a very select group of students within the chosen alternative education model. While the construct of the study allowed me to examine the values, perspectives, and beliefs of the participants, I did not have a broad range of participants through which to draw conclusions. Adding quantitative components through the use of surveys and questionnaires would allow researchers to address more concrete aspects of motives and intentions and create a wider pool of data into this subject.

### **Limitations**

This study examined gender performance through several sub-cases within a Waldorf setting. Gender performance means just that: that people perform gender in an outward, visible manner. Therefore, students' true gendered beliefs may be somewhat different from how they chose to perform gender within the walls of City Waldorf, since this was where the majority of student interviews, observations, and anecdotal notes took place. The ways students might perform gender outside of their school environment were not within the scope of this study.

Other limitations included my inability to recruit boys for participation in the study, and the fact that only five students completed their participation efforts throughout the duration of the study. Additionally, these students were self-selected

and very enthusiastic about participating, which led me to conclude that they had strong opinions and/or interests in gender performance and behaviors. The study also examined gender performance across one school year, so this time limitation did not allow me to investigate the ways students maintained or altered their gender-related values, attitudes, and performances over time. I also do not know how students' gender performances evolved as they grew older.

As with any study involving human subjects, there is always the possibility that the students were showing me or telling me what they thought I would want to hear or see because they didn't want to disappoint me or demonstrate a lack of knowledge or opinions on media and gender. I found it interesting that each of the student participants was surprised at the amount of time they actually spent engaged with digital media – regardless of how much media they thought they actually used. In other words, Laura, who reported using a very small amount of media was just as surprised at how much she used as Ivy, who was aware that she engaged heavily with media even prior to completing the log. Does this mean that the student participants exaggerated their lack of media use because they knew I had chosen City Waldorf due to the discouragement of media consumption? The fact that the students knew exactly what concepts I was studying may have caused them to censor ways in which they actually used media. However, as I described in Chapter 5, four of the five student participants who completed logs took immediate and intentional measures to cut down on their digital media consumption as a result of their Media Logs.

City Waldorf provides a very unique educational setting with an exclusive set of values that most likely align with the family values of those who choose to enroll

their children. In this respect, City Waldorf could potentially only attract families that have the time, financial capabilities, and geographical closeness to the school, which means that in my study, the participant perspectives stem from a more homogenous value system within the participant group than I might have encountered in a traditional educational setting. Even though I do not conclude that City Waldorf caused any non-traditional gendered behaviors, City Waldorf families might be predisposed to the values of the school. Either way, the school clearly reinforces, values, and validates such non-traditional foci.

However, this study is not illustrative of the ways in which any alternative educational method might address media influence on students. The Waldorf model is unique not only in the limitation of media and electronics exposure, but also because the school environment itself caters to a smaller population of students and teachers loop with their students from year to year, for example. Due to the limitations of this study, I do not know if the results of any other alternative educational environments would have mirrored my own results. Additionally, the volunteers themselves seemed more fluid and willing to discuss gender and media.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to fill gaps in the research regarding gender performance in a minimized media environment. The student participants demonstrated that gender performance can be influenced by media content, but that peer influences and family values are also important. As current research demonstrates, technology has continued to influence adolescent daily life to a greater extent than ever before. Even when an educational model eschews technological use in school, adolescents continue

to use technology to socialize, learn, communicate, collaborate, and to gain insight into topics that they might otherwise feel uncomfortable discussing with family members. Therefore, teachers, parents, and other adults are responsible for ensuring that students are aware of precautions they can take to stay safe online.

This study is important because it opens the door to dialogue between parents, families, and teachers of any alternative educational environment so that even if students are not utilizing technology within a school setting, the key adult role models in their lives are still demonstrating ways to ensure technological safety and security because, as we saw in this study, some students see technology as a way to communicate with others, acquire new skills, and bond with peers.

# Appendices

## ***Appendix A: Initial and Final Interview Questions***

### Interview #1

#### Potential Interview Questions for Student Participants

1. What types of things do you do after school?
2. What are your favorite [books, movies, TV shows]? Who are your favorite characters? Why do you like that [book, movie, TV show]?
3. How often do you [read, watch TV, go to the mall, go see a movie]?
4. Who are your favorite [actors, actresses, bands, authors]?
5. How do you relate to them? Anything about them remind you of yourself—or what you'd like to be?
6. How would you describe the characteristics of boys your age? What about girls your age?
7. How do your parents feel about your favorite [hobbies, music, movies, sports, TV shows]?
8. What do you think about the ways people act on TV, in books, or in the movies? What do these boys and girls do that you think is admirable? What do they do that you don't like?

#### Potential Interview Questions for Parent Participants

1. Do you monitor your child's media use, TV time, computer time, etc.? How?
2. Do you discuss with your child what s/he sees on the Internet on TV, or reads about in books or magazines? Could you describe those conversations for me? Does anything in particular evoke them?
3. What do you expect of your child and his/her siblings? (If applicable)
4. Do you think your gender played a role in your occupational choices? In what way?
5. What types of occupations would you like to see your child(ren) enter and why?
6. How has the Waldorf environment stimulated your child's development?
7. In what ways does the Waldorf educational model influence your home environment, if at all?
8. What are the most important lessons you would like your child to learn about life? Why are these important to you?



### Potential Interview Questions for the Classroom Teacher

1. How did you come to choose teaching as a profession?
2. What expectations did your family have for you as you grew up?
3. How did you find out about the Waldorf educational model? Is there something in particular that drew you to this model?
4. Describe your experiences thus far as a Waldorf educator.
5. How would you describe the types of interactions among the students in your classroom?
6. Do “typical” adolescent issues such as bullying, dressing sexily, language, etc. present themselves in your classroom or the school? Could you describe?
7. How do you feel the minimization of media within the Waldorf setting has affected your students? Has it benefited them in any way? Hindered their development?
8. How does gender present itself in your classroom? What gender-based issues or topics come up on a somewhat regular basis?

### Potential Interview Questions for the Director of Academics

1. In what ways does the Waldorf method differ from that of a traditional public school setting?
2. Describe your own educational background as a former student.
3. What is your background in school administration?
4. How did you arrive at the decision to leave the public school arena and transition to an alternative setting such as City Waldorf?
5. Describe your administrative duties and the most salient issues within the public school environment. How do these duties compare to those within the Waldorf environment?
6. How do the parents of City Waldorf students participate in and inform the current educational climate?
7. Bullying is one issue that faces almost all schools. How is bullying addressed within the Waldorf environment? In what way does this compare to that of the public school environment?
8. In what ways do you notice media use among City Waldorf students?

### Interview #2

#### Potential Interview Questions for Student Participants

1. How did you feel about keeping the media log?
2. What did you notice about the types of media you use on a daily basis?
3. What were some trends that you noticed in the media that you used this week?

4. What are some likes and dislikes you have about media in general?
5. What did you notice about the way males and females are portrayed in the media?
6. How do you think technology can affect you?
7. How do you use technology in school? How do you use technology at home?
8. What kinds of media and technology are most popular for people your age? Why do you think they are popular?
9. Tell me about a recent classroom event or discussion you and your classmates had. How did you feel about this as it was happening? How do you feel about it now?
10. What did you learn about yourself through the media log and by thinking about the media you use on a daily basis?
11. How might you change your media habits from now on, if at all?
12. Do you think your use of media is any different because you go to a Waldorf school rather than a public school? What do you think about that?

#### Potential Interview Questions for Parent Participants

1. How did you feel about your child keeping a media log?
2. What did you notice about the types of media your child used on a daily basis?
3. How do you feel about the ways males and females were portrayed in the media that your child engaged with this week?
4. What do you like and dislike about your child's media habits?
5. What did you learn about the way your child interacts with media through this project, if anything?
6. How might you encourage your child to use media in the future?
7. How might you change the way media is made available to your child in your household?
8. What do you like and dislike about media use in your home?
9. How do you think technology can affect your child?
10. Do you think your use of media is any different because your child attends a Waldorf school rather than a public school? What do you think about that?"

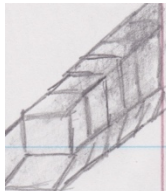
#### Potential Interview Questions for the Classroom Teacher

1. How do you think classroom technology can affect students?
2. How has the media influenced your students this year?
3. In what ways have your students become more self-aware as the year has progressed?
4. What are some of the most notable changes in your students with regard to gender expression and gender behaviors that you have noticed this year?
5. Do you think your use of media is any different because you teach in a Waldorf school rather than a public school? What do you think about that?

## Potential Interview Questions for the Director of Academics

1. How do you think classroom technology can affect students?
2. How has the media influenced students and parents this year?
3. What are some of the most notable examples of gender expression and gender behaviors that you have noticed this year?
4. Do you think your use of media is any different because you teach in a Waldorf school rather than a public school? What do you think about that?
5. As media and technology continues to shift and change, how do you foresee their influence on the students shifting and changing as well?
6. How might City Waldorf address media use in the future? How does this compare to current protocols?
7. What are some common misconceptions regarding the Waldorf method and the relationship to media and technology?



**Appendix B: Media Log Entry**



Wednesday, September 26


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8:00 am: my sister was listening to the radio when she was getting dressed in her room. I think it was rock FM.

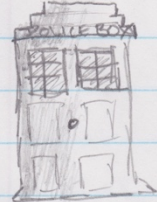


8:45 am: Walking to school, a car drove past us and rap or something was blaring out of the car. It was annoying!

3:40 pm: I listened to music in the car when my dad and I drove to the grocery store. It was some kind of rock.



4:20 pm: I watched an episode of Doctor Who with  as we laid on my bed.



6:40 pm: My mom let me watch an interview with John Green on YouTube.

## Appendix C: Coding Example from Raw Interview Data

Respondent ID	Interview Excerpt	Themes	Codes Applied
7	I have a tough time with Julie sometimes because we are always banging our heads. Sometimes, she thinks she is an adult and is in charge of things, and she likes to do things because that's a part of her convictions.	disconnect, parent/child relationship, identity	identity, confidence
7	And a few years ago, there was this boy who was tall and had somewhat of a body builder's physique. He was always pushing her around and knocking her down. One day she said to me, "Mama, Jeremiah is really bothering me." I told her to talk to the teacher, and she went the teacher who would give him time outs, but it didn't seem to work. Well guess what? She took things into her own hands. She bit him. She bit him so hard that she almost took a chunk of his arm right off.	Bullying, harrassment, peer interactions, aggression, identity	bullying, peer interactions, adolescent aggression, identity
7	In the Waldorf school, I should let you know, we do try to limit the exposure to media. We don't banish it completely, but it is our understanding that the students need to be exposed to media. They can use it as what they are, as tools. Not to live by every single thing that hte media shows them, not to let the media dictate our life and our behaviors, but to use it as a tool.	media content, Waldorf model, minimization of media, media use at home vs school	media content, media influence, home media use, minimization of media
7	We have been lately discussing the media because if we think about it, books are media. If you really look at Waldorf, we do not use textbooks in the lower grades. The children don't have textbooks; they create their own textbooks out of the stories of their own writings.	Waldorf education model, what is media?, minimization of media, textbooks	media influence, minimization of media
7	I don't think [the media] has been a very important part of the students' lives here. They're fine and they're happy the way they are and we have had many students who at early ages have had certain types of games that you might think 'oh, that's for a girl, that's for a boy'. But in reality, students will expose themselves to every single activity that they want to do and that they like to do regardless of what gender it is for.	gender performance, media use, boys vs girls	gender performance, media use

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