

“I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!”: The Bedroom as a Leisure Site for Adolescent Girls

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This paper explores the importance of the bedroom as a leisure site for adolescent girls. It builds on an earlier study in which girls rated their bedrooms as the recreational space where they felt least self conscious and most chose to be (James, 1998). The intensely positive way in which most girls described their bedrooms triggered the in-depth follow-up study reported here. Interviews with girls, aged 15-16 years, found their choice of public or private recreational space, at a particular time, was related to whether they desired activities that were shared or solitary, active or passive. One of the factors affecting these choices appeared to be girls' "situational body image," defined as a modification of their overall body image in relation to a particular audience and place, and the perceived potential for ridicule in that situation. Others were physical factors, such as a need for security and desire for exercise, and control factors, such as a need to control their own space. Whether girls have real or forced choices is questioned. Factors that render many girls invisible from active recreational spaces in our community could affect their physical health and well-being, and even their leisure choices in later life.

KEYWORDS: *Adolescent gender environment recreation*

Introduction

During mid-adolescence, girls are considerably less fit than boys and are generally less physically active. Many are unhappy with their body image and a large number drop out of sport, never to take it up again (Australian Sports Commission, 1991; Feingold & Mazzella, 1998; Robinson & Godbey, 1993). A large South Carolina study found that adolescent girls spent significantly more time alone than boys did and that boys spent much more time in physical activity (Smith, 1997). A survey of 15 year old Australian girls in 1995 found that girls perceived many active recreational spaces (places normally associated with active pursuits) to be dominated by boys, and it was suggested that this may affect whether they participate in active recreation or not (James, 1998). When girls are absent from active recreational spaces, they must go somewhere. This article explores girls' use of their bedrooms as an alternative recreational space. It also questions whether a girl's decision to recreate in her bedroom is a real choice. For some it may be an act of

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resistance against societal expectations, for others it may be the “line of *least* resistance.”

The initial study was conducted in 1995, to ascertain adolescent girls’ attitudes to a range of public and private recreational spaces in the community, and whether these contexts affected their recreational participation (James, 1998). (Leisure and recreation are used interchangeably here to refer to freely chosen, intrinsically motivated experiences that may be active or passive.) The study surveyed 276 fifteen-year-old girls from 10 socio-economically diverse Western Australian high schools. They were asked how they felt about 20 listed recreational spaces in schools, the community, and the home. The findings showed that girls felt most self-conscious in the active public spaces of the school basketball courts, followed by public swimming pools. Girls claimed that they would use these spaces more if boys were not around. In contrast, they felt least self-conscious in the comparatively passive space of the bedroom, a place they most chose to be in (James, 1998). We felt it was important to explore the reasons behind these findings because of the implications for physical health and long term leisure choices. The following year, the qualitative study reported here was conducted, using a subset of girls from the original study.

The follow-up study explored the reasons for the attitudes of the girls, then 16 years old, towards three recreational spaces in particular: school basketball courts, public swimming pools, and their bedrooms. We found that many girls avoided active spaces such as the school basketball courts because of fear of ridicule due to their lack of athletic competence or fear of injury (James, 1999). Many girls also felt uncomfortable at public pools where the pressure to meet unrealistic ideals of body shape constrained or eliminated their participation (James, 2000). This article presents the findings regarding the bedroom, the third space chosen for further exploration. The bedroom was chosen because of assumed physical health implications of girls’ strong preference for this “passive space” (predominantly associated with minimal physical activity), over more “active” recreational spaces in the community.

Theoretical Considerations

This study draws on works from several disciplines such as sociology, environmental psychology, and urban geography. The literature has been clustered under three themes: situational body image, physical factors, and control factors.

Situational Body Image Factors

The works of Goffman (1959; 1967) are useful in explaining girls’ feelings about their appearance in public, which in turn may affect their desire to spend their time in the private space of their bedrooms. Goffman (1959) introduced the notion of the “presentation of self,” portraying people as

performers whose behavior forms a particular impression on an "audience." If the portrayed "self" is discredited in any way, embarrassment can occur, a scenario often associated with adolescent girls.

Adolescence refers to that turbulent time around 12 to 16 years of age when children are experiencing the physical, intellectual, and emotional transition to adulthood (Caissey, 1994). It is a critical time of identity formation (Erikson, 1968). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to embarrassment and are likely to avoid social situations or places in which they perceive a potential for ridicule. Larson (1995, p. 547) claimed that, during adolescence, children's sense of who they are begins to weaken, they "struggle with fragmentation" and their "sense of surety about who they are is thrown into question."

A girl's overall body image is formed by influences such as the media, family, and peers (Botta, 1999; Muth & Cash, 1997). The notion of situational body image was developed to explain other aspects of this study (James, 2000). The concept describes how body image is not fixed but is related to the situation at a particular time. Body image depends on the *audience* to the activity at the time and whether the physical characteristics and rules of the *place* itself affect a girl's exposure to that audience. For example, a girl may be at a public swimming pool one day and participate fully in the swimming activity, quite uninhibited about her physical appearance. The next day at the same pool she may decide not to swim because of the presence of a group of boys (audience) who make her feel embarrassed about the way she looks. The place itself can also be a factor. For example, she could swim at a different public pool and find the pool rules prevented her from wearing a T-shirt in the water, or there may be a long exposed walk from the changing rooms to the pool. Such factors could affect her situational body image and cause her to limit her active participation at that particular place and time.

Physical Factors

Adolescent girls and boys attach different meanings to the physical spaces, or contexts, in which leisure can occur, and the activities that occur in those spaces. In the mid-1980s, Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984, p. 59) found that adolescents spent 41% of their waking time at home, 32% at school and 27% in public places. At home, the largest proportion of their waking hours was spent in their bedrooms where they would "read, reflect, and practice their skills, or . . . escape demands in hedonistic or lethargic relaxation." They found that boys spent twice as much time on sports and games as girls did, with the reverse being true for music and art.

Mowl and Towner (1995, p. 112) argued that context is an integral component of leisure experience. They asserted that individuals may "withdraw into their own private space or, failing that, may create their own private place; their own center of meaning." A joint publication of the Australian Sports Commission and the National Heart Foundation (1990, p. 8) claimed that resource allocation and the use of playing space for boys' and girls'

activities were "grossly unequal" with negative ramifications for girls. McKay (1991, p. 53) asserted that historically in Australia, "men have used outright coercion, harassment and intimidation to prevent girls and women from invading male territory." The Australian Girls in Space Consortia study (1997) found that adolescent girls experienced a lack of sense of control in public spaces because of the domination of the spaces by adolescent boys. This finding coupled with fear for personal safety and risk of verbal abuse, constrained girls' participation. Griffiths (1988, p. 53) referred to the "culture of the bedroom," a term coined by McRobbie and Garber (1976), to describe how girls "resisted boys' domination of the streets . . . using their own homes as the base from which to explore aspects of teenage culture."

Control Factors

For one reason or another, access to space seemed inequitable. Some authors believe that girls are socialized to be content with unequal allocation of space. Pfister (cited in Klein, 1993, p. 7) claimed that, "the space for action that parents permit their daughters is smaller than that permitted to sons . . . [and that girls] are urged to a restrained presentation of their bodies in public." Kelly (1987) suggested that parents' concern for their daughters' vulnerability caused them to restrict their space and that this, coupled with learned inhibitions, reduced girls' leisure choices. Thus, social forces exert control over girls' leisure behavior.

A sense of independence and personal control is particularly important to adolescents. Allan and Crow (1991) found that as children's age increases, so does their desire for freedom from the authority of their parents. Presumably, if they are not permitted to leave the home physically, then they have to develop other strategies to establish their separate, albeit symbolic space. Spending more time alone in the bedroom was making a statement to parents that they were no longer needed. The bedroom door was "guarded vigilantly by adolescents because the private self is "tentative, fragile and, alas, highly vulnerable" (Larson, 1995, p. 541). This territoriality over individual and private space allows an individual to maximize the freedom of choice of behavior in a given situation (Proshansky, Ittelson, & Rivilin, 1970). Privacy can be seen as a way of "both enhancing the self and protecting the self" (Laufer, Proshansky, & Wolfe, 1970, p. 207).

Although boys do spend some of their leisure time in their bedrooms, it would seem that bedrooms are not as important to their identity as they are to girls. It would also appear that boys have a wider access to alternative public spaces than girls do. This paper explores the meanings attributed by a sample of Western Australian adolescent girls to their bedrooms, and why so many girls choose this predominantly passive space for their leisure.

Method

The qualitative study reported here, further explored attitudes of girls who had participated in the original study focussing on three recreational

spaces: school basketball courts, bedrooms, and swimming pools. The findings relating to courts and pools are reported elsewhere (James, 1998, 2000) while this article focuses on the qualitative findings regarding bedrooms. The girls were asked what their bedrooms meant to them, both at the time of the interview and over the past few years.

Sample Selection

The qualitative phase of the study began with 4 focus groups each with 6-8 of the original girls. After completing the focus groups, 16 girls were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview process. Four of the 10 socio-economically diverse schools from the 1995 study were randomly selected. These included 3 metropolitan and 1 rural school. The focus groups were then randomly selected from student lists provided by the teachers. Like the original participants from the 1995 study, the girls represented a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic groups. Although focus groups can be dominated by a few people who inhibit others (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990), this problem did not appear to be the case in this instance. The focus groups flowed well and provided rich data that allowed the researcher to purposefully select appropriate participants for the individual interviews. A trained associate assisted at each of the four focus groups and field-notes were written during and directly after each one.

In consultation with the associate, four girls were purposefully selected from each focus group using a "maximum variation sampling" strategy to create a diverse sample of information-rich cases. According to (Patton, 1990, p. 172), by including individuals who have had quite different experiences, this sampling method "aims at capturing and describing central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participant or program variation."

The resultant group of 16 interviewees was comprised of girls with a variety of sporting and academic abilities, mixed body types, assorted ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and diverse aspirations and interests. The final group of girls interviewed was approximately 16 years of age.

Data Collection Procedures

The author conducted all interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule to explore relevant issues pertaining to constraints to leisure and strategies used to negotiate them. Because of the prior exposure to the interviewer in the focus groups, rapport was quickly established in the individual interviews. Coupled with the fact that the girls had been thinking of the issues since the focus groups, thoughtful responses were provided to the questions. For ethical reasons, sensitive issues such as the impact of any physical or sexual abuse on the interviewee were not broached because the researcher was not qualified to deal with any trauma arising from such matters. Although focus groups were conducted at schools, individual interviews were conducted at a venue of the participant's choice, which for most was in their

own home. Focus groups and individual interviews each lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Strict codes of confidentiality, parental permission, anonymity and right of withdrawal were followed. All names used are pseudonyms. The word "girls" has been used to describe the participants, reflecting the way that they referred to themselves and each other during the interviews. The term "adolescent" has been used because the interviews focused on the girls' reactions to situations that they had experienced between the ages of 12 and 16 years. The term "gender" refers to the socially constructed spectrum of feminine or masculine roles. It is acknowledged that spaces are not inherently active or passive, rather, the terms "active" and "passive" recreational spaces are used to indicate the degree of physical activity that girls were likely to perform in a given space. The findings are based on the girls' expressed views and no attempt was made to measure their physical attributes or log their activities.

Data Analysis Procedures

A process of inductive content analysis was used to analyze the data (Patton, 1990). The basic unit of analysis was a quote: a statement made by a participant that expressed a single idea or feeling about an experience or an issue. This unit could be a word, sentence or paragraph and some sentences could contain more than one quote (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The quotes from the focus groups and interviews were clustered into common threads or categories by using an inductive process. Each new quote was compared and contrasted with the preceding one and either assigned to an existing category or a new category was created (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Transcripts were read and tapes were listened to repeatedly throughout the analysis phase and surprises, interesting patterns, inconsistencies, and puzzles were recorded (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). To minimize bias, a graduate research assistant independently coded a sample of interviews and these codings were compared with the researcher's until both were satisfied that the coding was consistent (Henderson, 1991).

The coded quotes were indexed using the qualitative computer software, NUD*IST. This package facilitates the creation of an index tree to organize the data for easy access while ensuring that the rich data are readily accessible in their original context. This process allows the final research report to include participants' own words (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1994). Following review by colleagues, the coding was revised, and where necessary, categories were further refined. Meta-coding was then applied to reduce the large number of categories into higher levels of explanatory themes to assist in theory building (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The three main themes to emerge related to situational body image, physical factors, and control factors that are explained further in a conceptual framework after the Findings section.

In summary, the qualitative data were collected from group and individual interviews and built on the quantitative data collected in 1995. Colleagues

had input into the coding and analysis. To add another dimension of triangulation to the process (Patton, 1990), one year after the interviews the participants were given the opportunity to read and react to the transcripts and to respond to a presentation of the findings. They appreciated this opportunity and expressed that the findings presented an accurate picture of their feelings at the time. A summary of their retrospective views at that time is included at the end of the Discussion section.

Findings

The original survey of 276 girls determined that only 37 girls (about 13%) shared a bedroom. Of these, 15 girls gave negative or neutral comments about their bedrooms, but the remaining 22 wrote that their bedrooms were a special place. One of these explained that it was occasionally possible to have precious moments of privacy when her sister was out or asleep. Most of the girls, however, appreciated having their own rooms. As one said, "I can't imagine sharing my bedroom with anybody." Another said, "I wouldn't be able to live there. I'd sleep on the couch. I've just gotta have my own space."

When asked what her bedroom meant to her, one girl in a focus group said, "I sleep in my bedroom and that's it" and another said, "Mine's just a room, it holds my clothes." These responses were extremely rare, and almost all of the girls interviewed spoke with deep feeling about their bedrooms. Their responses, reported here, have been grouped into situational body image factors, physical factors, and control factors.

Situational Body Image Factors

As stated earlier, situational body image refers to the impact of an audience and situation on a girl's overall body image at a particular time and place. This section looks at the perceived potential for ridicule or embarrassment in front of a particular audience. In other aspects of the interviews, girls had reported being ridiculed in public because of their physical appearance or their athletic competence. At the pool, girls had seen boys looking at them and laughing and making derogatory comments. On basketball courts, Sandy had often heard boys say, "you are useless" or "you throw like a girl." When asked what their bedroom meant to them, girls often referred to the way their bedroom provided seclusion from potentially critical audiences. Leonie reflected many girls' views about being watched when she said that her bedroom meant, "Privacy. It's a room where I can go, where I know that people won't be following me and looking at everything I do and watching me." Joy called it, "A place that I can be alone and be who I am and what I am and do what I want without having to worry about what anybody else thinks or says or does." Chloe echoed this saying, "You don't have to worry about other people watching you and saying, 'What are you doing that for?', 'That's stupid!' or something." As the girls' responses illustrated, the bedroom covered two situations of perceived potential for ridicule: one was for public display of physical activity and the other was for display of emotion.

Ridicule of physical activity. A few girls exercised in their bedrooms to avoid potential ridicule. As one said, "My family would probably laugh at me. . . . When I actually do exercise, my family makes a big joke." Another added, "Yeah, you get that from your family. Like 'she's on a diet, isn't that so good' or 'isn't she wonderful she's exercising for once' (heavy sarcasm in voice) and it's like you get away from them and you do it in your bedroom." Some girls liked to dance but would not dance in public. Krysta had moved to a new school when she was fourteen, where the boys used to call her, "fat and ugly and other names like that." She said, "I love dancing so I usually turn my stereo up really loud and just dance away in my room." Joy also liked to dance in her bedroom, because she had a younger brother who used to "pick on everything" that she did. She said, "I don't want to show anybody what I do."

Ridicule of emotion. The bedroom was also useful to hide public displays of emotion. Quite a few girls said that they used their rooms when they did not want others to see that they were upset. Laura said, "If I have to cry about anything, it's in my room." Beth echoed these sentiments with, "If I'm really depressed I cry there, that's where I go if I have to cry for anything. . . . Security." When asked what sort of things got her down, Beth replied, "When, like, all your friends are skinny and stuff like that . . . it just gets too much and I just go in there and bash my teddy." Joy also used her room to vent her anger as a physical attack on an inanimate object in private. She said, "It's my sanction [sanctuary] away from my brother. . . It's a place that I can go and, if I'm mad, I can sit down and scream and shout and rant and rave and whatever, and punch my pillow."

Physical Factors

Girls chose to spend time in their rooms because of the physical security provided by that particular environment. Although a few used their bedrooms for physical activity, most chose their bedrooms for non-physical activities such as relaxation.

Security or safety. Fazia said, "My room is my secure place and when I'm in my room I usually lock myself in." Joy said, "It is the one place that I can feel safe" and Julie said, "I think it's the only place I really do feel safe, in my bed, with my cat." Other girls referred to their rooms as "my haven," "my refuge" and "my little world."

Exercise or relaxation. Although bedrooms were sometimes used for exercise and physical activity, as cited earlier, most of the girls' time in their bedrooms was predominantly for passive relaxation. Laura said, "my room is my haven, I spend most of my waking hours in there, reading." Favorite pastimes were sitting or lying on the bed, reading books or magazines, writing letters or poetry, listening to music on the radio, cassettes or compact disks, or talking on the phone. Every girl interviewed regularly read magazines aimed at adolescent girls. Fazia liked to "play the guitar . . . and kind of have inspiration to write stuff." Vanessa's bedroom meant "Peace . . . Like

I don't have to worry about stuff, I can just listen to my music and just forget about everything for a little while."

Girls also seemed to enjoy the option of doing nothing in their rooms. Sadie said, "It's my little world. I can go in there, and I can sit there, and I can just stare at the ceiling if I want to. I don't have to do anything you know." For Joy, it was her "inspiration room" where she could "work out some problem" that had been "bugging" her. Laura said, "If you want to go somewhere to be by yourself and just think . . . its just good. . . . I don't know how to describe it . . . you feel better in your own bedroom."

Control Factors

At a time when many aspects of girls' lives were beyond their control, the bedroom seemed to be one place where girls could exert some authority. They could generally control access and thus restrict the audience to their activities. They could attempt to be in charge of their use of their time and they could usually control the space itself and what happened in it.

Control of audience. Most girls liked the fact that they could control access to their bedrooms. They usually had power over who, if anyone, would share their activities. They could choose to be alone or invite in family members or special friends. Kylie revealed that her bedroom was, "A space I can go to, just to be with myself, you know. . . I don't have to share it with anybody. I can do what I like in my bedroom." She explained, "It's a rule in our family that you have to have permission to enter another person's bedroom, or you have to knock and say, 'Can I come in?' or 'Are you busy?'. You're not allowed to just walk in." Beth asserted, "It's mine and if I don't want anyone in there, I can kick them out."

For some girls, if there was nobody else at home, they might entertain their friends in other parts of the house, but if there were other people around they would withdraw to the bedroom. For Laura, whose friends lived "two suburbs away," the telephone in her bedroom was a substitute for entertaining her friends directly. She could at least control the audience to her conversations. She said, "I live away from everybody . . . so I really have nowhere else to go but my room. I'm normally in my room talking on the phone."

Control of own time use. Some girls used bedrooms to evade demanding parents. Joy often spent time in her room to escape from her mother. She said, "I don't have to put up with her nagging and saying that I'm being this or that." Sasha said, "I can do what I like to do and there's no-one to bother me or nag me or anything." Girls complained that they were not always in charge of their own time as their mothers expected them to help with the domestic chores. Carolyn felt it was unfair that girls should always be the ones to help with chores:

It's how people are brought up. Like girls are in the kitchen and guys are out doing some[thing else]. I've got so many responsibilities at home. I've got to cook [dinner]. I've got to do some housework and everything and my brother's just,

like, he's so lazy. He watches TV and Mum will [say], "Oh go make yourself useful, go and do something!", and he'll go out to his friend's house and they go kick a [football] around, while *I've* got to be home helping out Mum.

This issue appeared to be common to others in the group. Another girl said:

Yeah, because there's less pressure on [boys] to actually help around the kitchen. Like if *you* don't help around the kitchen you get told off... and... [I say to my mother] "It's not *my* job! What about those two [boys], they are sitting down watching TV." But you can say that and *they* turn around and say "you can do it yourself!" and you can be standing there doing nothing and you get told off as well, so it's like "what am I supposed to *do*?"

This prompted another girl to say, "It's like you have to hide in your bedroom so that they won't see you and [then] they'll get someone else to do it."

Control of the space itself. Girls also liked being in control of their own space, whether it was the mess, the memorabilia or the music. Sadie said, "I can do what I want in it. I can put things on the wall and stuff like that and re-arrange it the way I want . . . that's *my* room and I can do what I want with it."

Mess —As well as nagging girls to do chores, some mothers also nagged girls to tidy their rooms. Kaye's mother was "a real neat freak . . . [In] the rest of the house you could eat food off [the floor], polished and everything . . . she just goes off at me, 'Just clean your room!' all the time." Other girls, however, were in total control of the state of their rooms. Leonie said she was "a very clean person," who liked "everything to be nice and neat and straight." Another enjoyed being able to, "do what I want with it. I can put a piece of clothing on the floor and that's fine with me; it can sit there." Jean, who used to share her room with a tidier sister, said, "Now I've got my own room, I can be as messy as I want because it's *my* room."

Memorabilia —Girls could also control the memorabilia in their rooms, which gave them a sense of security. Kaye said, "I spend basically all my time at home in my bedroom . . . I'm surrounded by all my favorite things . . . that are *me* basically and that's the place I like to be." Fazia's memorabilia also contributed to her wellbeing. She said, "It's *your* place, where you just feel safest, the most comfortable, with all *your* stuff around."

Most girls' memorabilia represented a mixture of their present and past identities, emphasizing the transitory nature of adolescence. Vanessa had modern posters of pop stars on her walls, which contrasted sharply with the frilly white bedspread, teddy bears, Mickey Mouse, and junior netball trophy of her past. She had a framed photograph of herself and a partner at a school dance, alongside photographs from her childhood. Kylie had a stack of "teenage" magazines, alongside pictures of horses, and her dolls. Sasha said, "I really, really, really like my bedroom. . . . I renovated [it] and it's just full of all the things that I like. . . . I really like the look of my room and I like being in it."

Music —In their bedrooms, girls could also control both the volume and choice of their music. When Krysta was angry with someone she would go to her room and turn her music “up loud and try not to think about it.” Erin saw the bedroom as a place to listen to *her* kind of music, “Yeah, I spend heaps of time listening to music. . . . I listen to it loud as well, and my parents don’t like the [choice of] music, so the only option is the bedroom.”

Discussion

The interviews showed that, for a variety of reasons, girls spent a lot of time in their bedrooms, usually alone. An emergent conceptual framework follows and then the findings are discussed.

Conceptual Framework

The themes that emerged from the study have been organized into a conceptual framework to aid understanding (see Figure 1). The framework indicates the factors that affected the girls’ decisions to recreate in their

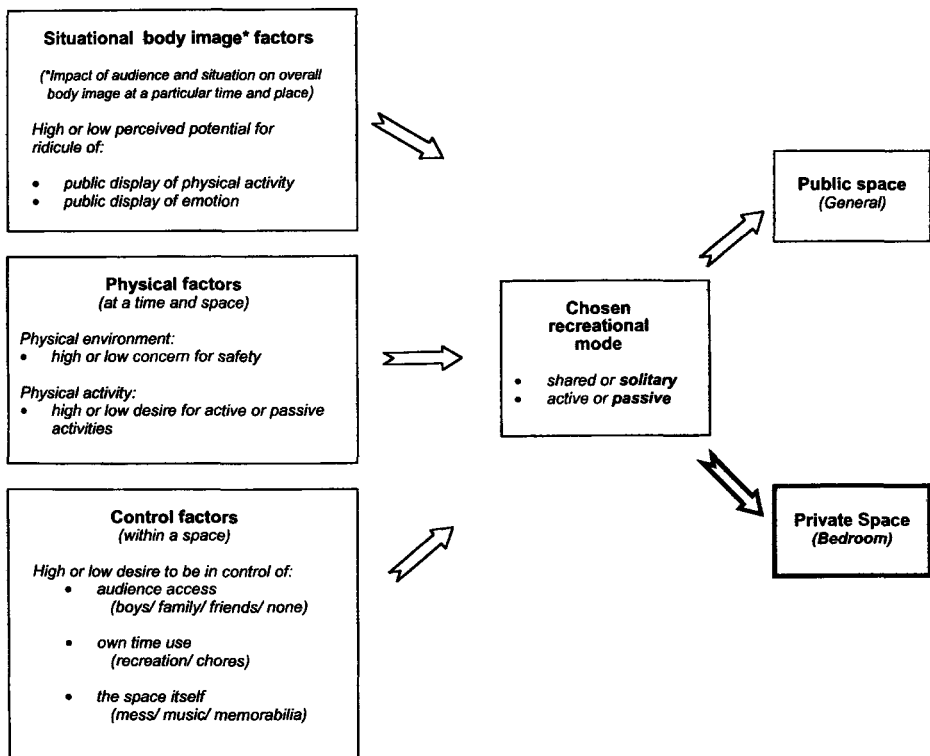


Figure 1. Emergent Conceptual Framework Indicating Factors Affecting Adolescent Girls’ Choice of the Bedroom over a Public Recreational Space.

bedrooms rather than more public recreational space. The framework is dynamic and suggests that girls' choice of recreational space depends on an interplay of body image, physical, and control factors according to the audience and the situation at the time. For most of the girls, most of the time, activities in the bedroom were passive and alone. Adolescence is a time of emotional and physical turbulence, involving changes over which some girls may feel little control. The influence of situational body image factors, and control factors appear to be heightened at this time, compared with before or after adolescence. In other aspects of the interviews relating to basketball courts and swimming pools, many girls had reported experiencing embarrassment due to either their physical appearance or lack of perceived athletic competence in certain situations.

The framework depicts a girl's possible choices in relation to her needs and the potential audience at the time. A girl may choose an activity to be carried out in company (*shared*) or alone (*solitary*), that is *active* or *passive*. For example, if a girl has a high desire for physical activity and she perceives a low potential for ridicule in a particular place at a particular time, then she may be happy to use a public recreational space (*shared/active*). If, however, she perceives that the risk of being ridiculed or teased is high, she will more likely opt for the privacy of her bedroom to reduce potential embarrassment (*solitary/active*). In a further example, a girl with a high desire to relax or do nothing may opt for the bedroom to decrease the chance of her parents demanding her time for family chores (*solitary/passive*). Another girl may choose to relax by chatting to a friend. She would probably choose the bedroom so that she could control the audience to her conversation (*shared/passive*).

The girls interviewed were very good at juggling the different factors impinging on their leisure choices, although they seemed unaware of the complexity of their decision-making process. They were adamant that they alone chose their leisure activities and places. While they believed they were in charge of the decision, however, for many of them the choice to use their bedrooms or other more public areas for recreation may not have been a *real* choice. It may have been a forced choice from a limited range of options narrowed down by factors, such as potential audience, that were often beyond their control.

Situational Body Image Factors

Girls were concerned about how their actions might appear to others. They reported enjoying being in their bedrooms because they could "be themselves." This implies that many girls portray a "self" that is not their real self when in public. It would be interesting to know if boys are as concerned with how others perceive their developing identities. Boys' identity formation has been described as intrapersonal (Erikson, 1968). Girls' identity formation has more recently been seen as broader, with a blend of both intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions, or "separation and connectedness" (Lytle, Bakken, & Romig, 1997, p. 183).

A few girls used their rooms for physical recreation. This finding was not surprising as, in the same interviews, these girls had reported being ridiculed about their physical appearance or their athletic competence in public recreational spaces (James, 1998; 1999). They were also concerned about potential ridicule from their own family members. Parents should be made aware of the potential negative impact on the physical and emotional health of their daughters from what they might perceive as innocuous familial teasing.

Girls often used their rooms to express their emotions out of the public eye. Increased emotionality of adolescence can come at a time when adolescents are trying "to distance themselves from identification with their parents and increasingly attempt to regulate their emotional life, however precariously, without parental scaffolding" (Larson, 1995, p. 537). Larson asserted that adolescents spend more time alone than pre-adolescents do because they are less inclined to turn to their parents in times of stress.

Siegel and Shaughnessy (1995) found the intensity of adolescents' emotions (as they experience events such as falling in love for the first time) to be much greater than those of adults, who have learned to see the transience of emotional highs and lows. Expression of emotions can also be a function of gender. Garton and Pratt (1995) found that girls reported experiencing a greater number of stressful events than boys did and that these events had a greater impact on them. Bronstein and colleagues (1996) found adolescent girls were more likely to report a higher level of emotional expressiveness than boys were. Compared with boys, girls generally cried comparatively easily with most reporting at least one incidence of tears in the previous week.

They also found gender differences in reports of what triggered anger. Issues of personal control provoked adolescent girls to anger, whereas boys were more likely to flare up at personal mistreatment or disrespect. Perhaps personal control was less likely to provoke the boys in the study to anger because they generally had more autonomy than girls did. Adolescents usually use withdrawal rather than negotiation as a strategy for overcoming arguments with their parents and siblings (Montemayor, Adams, & Gullotta, 1994), which could also explain the high use of the bedroom at this turbulent time.

In a world where male expression of aggression may be considered "macho" and quite acceptable, a girl may be reluctant to express anger in public, as this behavior may not be considered "ladylike." This could explain the transfer of physical release of anger to the pillow or unsuspecting teddy bear. At the same time, crying in public may be perceived as weak. As indicated by the conceptual model, the relative privacy of the bedroom may be the option least likely to bring ridicule of either public display of physical activity or public expression of emotion.

Physical Factors

That girls should say that their bedrooms were refuges, or that they were the only place in the world where they felt safe, begs the question, "Safe

from what?" For some, it would appear to be safety from ridicule, but for others, perhaps it was physical harm or even sexual assault or abuse. It was not clear whether girls' perceptions were based on real or perceived danger, and further research in this area is indicated. Many girls may spend a lot of time in their bedrooms because they are restricted from certain places by their parents, particularly after dark. In the original survey, girls were asked how safe they thought each of the 20 listed recreation places was after dark. In order, parks, streets, public transport, beaches, amusement halls, active areas of recreation centers, and public swimming pools were considered as not being safe after dark by the majority of girls surveyed (James, 1995). It would be interesting to see how boys feel about these places, and whether it affects their active participation. A need also exists for further research into differences in parental restriction of adolescents from recreational spaces outside the home, especially after dark. Gender, class, and ethnic differences would be expected.

The interviews for this study indicated that a few girls exercised in their rooms, but generally, most bedroom activities were passive. Kleiber, Caldwell & Shaw (1993) found that social activities were the most popular amongst both males and females; however, physical activities were next in popularity for boys, while relaxation activities were next for girls. The researchers found that girls considered relaxation for leisure to be three times more important than boys did.

The girls in this study enjoyed listening to music, and reading books and magazines. These activities are not just time-fillers but are integral to identity formation. This trend was also found by Steele and Brown (1995, p. 553) who claimed that adolescents "appropriate and transform media messages and images to help them make sense of their lives." Arnett (1995, p. 521) identified use of the media by adolescents for "entertainment, identity formation, high sensation, coping and youth culture identification." He also found reading magazines to be a popular leisure pursuit for adolescent girls, where they can be seen as a medium for gender role identity development. McRobbie (1994, p. 164), however, found that girls' magazines no longer portray girls as "victims of romance." She claimed that more emphasis is placed on pursuit of identity and autonomy, although success is still equated with physical appearance. A study by Moffitt and Wartella (1992) found that 85% of adolescent girls as opposed to 65% of boys identified themselves as leisure readers. Of books read, female adolescents favored romance novels, while male favorites were more diverse and included fantasy/myth, science fiction and sports.

Many girls just enjoyed doing nothing. Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1984) referred to this as "idling," or unstructured, usually passive activity that can preoccupy leisure time. In relation to the conceptual model, it would appear that girls who fear for their safety or who desire passive activity are likely to choose their bedrooms over more public recreational spaces.

Control Factors

The girls interviewed expressed the importance of being able to control their own bedrooms. Ability to control access, either through physical locking of the door or rules of entry, was considered important. Allen and Crow (1991) also found that adolescents need to develop a separate space. The girls interviewed enjoyed being able to spend time with close friends in their rooms, something that Larson (1995, p. 545) said was important when adolescents were upset, as it provided feelings of "connectedness and human solidarity . . . and a validation of the private self." Interestingly, though, this did not seem as important to the girls in the study as the special time that they spent alone.

Another issue of control regarded domestic chores and their intrusion into leisure time. An unexpected finding from the study was that girls often used their bedrooms to avoid chores, believing that the domestic demands on them were greater than on their brothers. This belief is supported by Shaw, Caldwell and Kleiber (1996). Coakley and White (1992) found that the working-class girls in their study generally did more chores than their brothers did. If both parents worked, however, then both boys and girls were expected to help (Banks et al., 1992). Peters (1994) found that adolescents perceive that parents generally hold females responsible for doing inside chores and boys for outside chores. As outside chores, such as mowing lawns and chopping wood, are more easily postponed than indoor chores, such as washing up and preparing meals, chores tend to impinge more on girls' leisure time than on boys' time (Dempsey, 1989). Parental awareness of demands on children would be an excellent topic for action research. Some may be concerned that they might drive their sons outside to be active, but confine their daughters to the passivity of their bedrooms. Action research is a dynamic form of research in which a group with a particular problem become active participants in a change process in collaboration with a researcher (Patton, 1990). It was used in an Australian primary school where the students were extensively involved in the creation of a more gender balanced playground environment (O'Hare, 1998). It would not be difficult to set up similar research with adolescents.

In addition to the audience and their use of time, the girls were also keen to control the bedroom space. The girls clearly relished the right to keep their own rooms messy or tidy according to their taste. They also had an interesting mix of childlike, adolescent, and adult artifacts, as if the bedroom was a secure base from which they could advance and retreat between girlhood and womanhood according to the demands placed on them. Larson (1995) believed that decorating a room with posters of role models or idols gave young people examples of how to think and feel in a range of situations. One girl had "renovated" her room, a term usually associated with adults. Steele and Brown (1995, p. 553) claimed the bedroom was "a private, personal space often decorated to reflect teens' emerging sense of themselves and where they fit in the larger culture."

Music was another control issue, and girls particularly enjoyed being in charge of the volume and choice of their music. Larson (1995) saw this as part of establishing a separate identity, suggesting it was a statement that their emerging tastes were distinctly different from their parents. It was also a way of marking territory. Thompson and Larson (1995, p. 742) analyzed gender differences in music itself. They found that soft rock, with its themes of love and romance, was preferred by girls, whereas, hard rock/heavy metal was preferred by boys. They suggested that the privacy of the bedroom was conducive to girls' appreciation of their preferred soft rock music. In contrast, they indicated that hard rock/heavy metal might be used by boys to provide mastery over environments outside the bedroom, which are not normally under adolescent control. This study did not explore the actual choice of music or its relationship to context, but this notion would be interesting to research in the future.

As indicated in the conceptual framework, the control factors were an important part of the complex decision-making process that girls used, consciously or subconsciously, to choose their recreational space. It is interesting here to look at the views of the girls who took the opportunity to respond to the findings of the study over a year later. They still weighed up the same factors of situational body image, physical factors, and control issues, but the influence of various factors had changed. Because of this change, their bedrooms had become a little less important to them as they had grown older and left school. They claimed that they were less self-conscious and felt more comfortable around boys than they had in mid-adolescence. Those young women who now drove cars were less reliant on their parents for transport and had more freedom to leave the home at night. As they had more autonomy, control was less of an issue. They acknowledged that the bedroom was still an important haven when they were upset, but they now felt a little less alienated from the world beyond the bedroom.

Conclusion

This paper has focussed on adolescent girls' attitudes towards their bedrooms as one aspect of a larger study that also explored their participation in basketball courts and public swimming pools. In all three areas studied, girls appeared to make their recreational choices based on a complex interplay of factors. While some girls were active in courts and pools, many girls weighed up possible negative impacts of the audience against the potential enjoyment of an activity and their desire to be included. They consequently limited their participation or avoided active areas altogether because of a sensitivity to their potential audience at the time.

The emergent conceptual model suggests that girls choose the bedroom as a leisure site by balancing three factors: situational body image, physical factors, and control factors. Although the girls believed that they freely chose active or passive, solitary or shared recreation, they seemed unaware that their choices were limited by factors over which they had little control. From

past experience, many girls choosing active spaces such as basketball courts and pools, had learned that this choice also meant being the objects of ridicule. By "choosing" their bedrooms instead and making themselves invisible, these girls had learned to avoid the distress that such ridicule can cause. If, for these reasons, girls' chosen recreation is predominantly passive, it is not surprising that they are not as physically fit as boys.

Girls' choice of the bedroom as a leisure site is not necessarily a harmful one. Even very active girls expressed positive feelings about the importance of their bedrooms in their lives. It is a matter of balance. In an ideal world, all adolescent girls would be able to ignore potentially negative audiences to their actions. They would resist the narrow range of acceptable activities and body images prescribed by gender stereotypes. They would be as fit as boys are. They would freely choose and feel at ease in a range of public and private recreational spaces in their community. Their recreational experiences would be selected from a broad spectrum of active and passive activities that would lead to good all-round health and wellbeing. Leisure encounters at this time would give them a wide array of options on which to build future leisure experiences throughout their lives.

This situation is not the case for all girls. Many girls in this study saw their bedrooms as a refuge from the critical gaze of others where they could come to terms with their emerging identities and developing autonomy in relative privacy. For some, to retreat into the comparative security of their bedrooms was a line of least resistance. These girls are the ones rendered invisible from active recreational spaces in our community during adolescence. When their metamorphosis to womanhood is complete they may emerge with a reduced repertoire of leisure experiences on which to build their future choices.

Without casting these girls as victims, strategies need to be developed and tested to redress these imbalances for the mutual benefit of both girls and boys and a more equitable society at large. Although steps were taken to minimize bias in this study, as always, care should be taken when generalizing from the findings. Like many studies, more questions have been raised than answered, but hopefully the issues have been illuminated. Heightened awareness of girls' perceptions of both public and private spaces could lead to modification of public environments to enhance the chances of girls participating in active recreation pursuits. By knowing why private places are so valued by girls, recreation programmers could incorporate some of the desirable characteristics into more active settings.

The study has also highlighted areas for further research. The focus is on action research involving a range of parties. Community planners and programmers, school authorities, and parents should all be concerned that girls often choose comparatively passive recreational space such as bedrooms, over active spaces that girls perceive to be dominated by boys. In brief, intervention strategies should be aimed at the three main factors indicated in the conceptual model. For example, negative situational body image factors could be tackled at a societal level, through the media, or at a micro level,

through schools and families who should make it clear that ridicule of others is not acceptable. This action would reduce the negative impact of these factors on girls and increase the likelihood of them choosing active, shared recreation. As a byproduct, efforts in this area should also benefit boys who do not conform to predominant male stereotypes in the community.

Physical factors relating to security can also be tackled at a societal level (e.g., urban design), or a family level (e.g., car pools). Desire for physical activity could be improved if schools increase their efforts to make it more attractive to adolescent girls (James, 1999). With regard to control factors, parents could be made aware of their daughters' needs to control their own space and consider whether domestic duties are equitably distributed between girls and boys. If the first two factors can be improved, girls should gain a greater sense of control in other spaces in their community and the importance of control factors in the decision-making process may decrease.

If adolescent girls freely choose to spend time in the privacy of their bedrooms, then this choice should be respected and supported. If, however, their choice is limited by fear of ridicule, concern for personal safety, or because the bedroom is the only place in the world where they perceive they can "be themselves," then it is a matter for concern. Girls should not feel alienated from active recreation spaces in the community and in schools, that are technically half theirs. The ultimate aim is for a society in which an adolescent girl's choice of the bedroom as a leisure site is a real choice and not the line of least resistance. Until active public recreational spaces become more "girl friendly," bedrooms will be important to girls as a site of resistance and the refrain will continue, "I just gotta have my own space!"

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