

Awakening

Challenging the Culture with Girls

Janet Claussen

Voices:
Nurturing the
Spirituality of Girls

Saint Mary's Press
Christian Brothers Publications
Winona, Minnesota

The following authors contributed to this manual:

- Kat Hodapp, Louisville, Kentucky
- Julia Keller, Pebble Beach, California
- Danielle Rossi, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Laurel Zimmerman, EdD, Minneapolis, Minnesota



Genuine recycled paper with 10% post-consumer waste.
Printed with soy-based ink.

The publishing team included Marilyn Kielbasa, development editor; Cheryl Drivdahl, copy editor; James H. Gurley, production editor and typesetter; Cindi Ramm, design director; Cären Yang, cover designer; back cover images copyright © Rubberball Productions; manufactured by the production services department of Saint Mary's Press.

Kendra Hengel, cover artist, Winona Voices Group, Winona, MN

Acknowledgments continue on page 135.

Copyright © 2001 by Saint Mary's Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reproduce only the materials intended for distribution to the program participants. No other part of this book may be reproduced by any means without the written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Printing: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Year: 2009 08 07 06 05 04 03 02 01

ISBN 0-88489-696-X

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Claussen, Janet.

Awakening: challenging the culture with girls / Janet Kohler Claussen.

p. cm. — (Voices)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-88489-696-X (pbk.)

1. Church group work with youth. 2. Teenage girls—Religious life. 3. Catholic youth—Religious life. 4. Christianity and culture—Study and teaching. [1. Culture. 2. Teenage girls. 3. Catholics. 4. Christian life. 5. Conduct of life.] I. Title. II. Voices (Winona, Minn.)

BX2347.8.Y7 C53 2001

259'.23—dc21



To my mother, Jeanie, my daughter, Katie,
and all other blessed women
who have awakened and nurtured me on the paths of life.

Contents

Introduction 9

Part A: Challenging Negative Cultures

Voices and Choices

- Challenging the Culture of Childhood Myths 19
 - Losing Your Voice, Getting Your Man 19
 - Children’s Fairy Tales 21
 - A Hollywood Talk Show 21
 - Mothers and Daughters 22
 - Creative Voices 23
 - The Sound of Voices 24

Male and Female, God Created Them

- Challenging the Culture of Gender Stereotypes 30
 - Yin-Yang 30
 - Gender Attitude Survey 32

That Was Then, This Is Now

- Challenging the Culture of Sexism 43
 - Those Were the Days 43
 - Change Is Good—or Is It? 45
 - Changing Times 46
 - Then and Now 46
 - Inclusive Language 47
 - Gender Fairness Takes Practice 48
 - Sexism in the Scriptures 49

Media Messages

- Challenging the Culture of Media 61
 - Magazine Models and Messages 61
 - Just the Facts 63
 - Active Advertising Acknowledgment 64
 - Images of Media Women 65
 - Music Media 65
 - Monitoring the News 66
 - Pornography: The Ultimate Sexism 67

Standing Up for Yourself

- Challenging the Culture of Violence 75
 - Recognizing and Naming Sexual Harassment 75
 - Verbal Abuse and Physical Violence 78
 - Acquaintance Rape 79
 - Sexual Harassment: Assumptions and Attitudes 80
 - Reporting Sexual Harassment 80
 - Resisting Pressure 82

The Truth About Beauty

- Challenging the Culture of the Perfect Body 92
 - The Me I Am 92
 - Impossible Bodies 93
 - Beauty Shop 95
 - Steel Magnolias* 95
 - A Letter to a Body Part 96

The Color Purple

- Challenging the Culture of Voiceless Women 105
 - Lost and Found Voices 105

Part B: Promoting Positive Cultures

Pinpointing Your Passion

- Promoting a Culture of Vocation 113
 - Living Authentically 113

Circles of Friends

- Promoting a Culture of Friendship 119
 - Ins and Outs in the World of Cliques 119
 - Femi-Jungle 120
 - Surviving the Femi-Jungle and the Queen Bees 121

Transforming Women

- Promoting a Culture of Conversion 128
 - Changing the World, One Girl at a Time 128



Introduction

“You are made in the image of God.” That simple statement is the heart of spirituality—a profound statement about who we are and who we are becoming. There is no more important mantra for adults to communicate as they parent, teach, minister, and pray with young people.

The journey to adulthood has always been a time of transition. Those who walk with adolescents know that the journey is also unique for each person. In fact, recent studies confirm the age-old intuitive sense that girls and boys experience life in ways that are unique to their gender. If gender differences affect physical, emotional, and psychological development, then certainly, spirituality is shaped as well by feminine or masculine perspectives.

For girls in this country at the turn of the millennium, opportunities for equality are greater than for girls in any previous generation. Still, psychologists, educators, ministers, and parents know that the risks and issues that confront young females seem rooted in a different reality than those that face young males. Brought up in the crucible of a media world, girls continue to receive messages that beauty and body are more important than mind and spirit. Told that they can do anything, they too often engage in behaviors that endanger them more than empower them. In the interest of “being nice,” they abdicate their voice to males, exhibiting a dramatic drop in self-esteem in their adolescent years.

Girls experience life in terms of relationships. While their male counterparts charge headlong into separation and independence, young women, by nature and nurture, seem predisposed to connectedness and intimacy. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) have brought attention to the life of girls, spawning an entire genre of literature aimed at addressing the phenomenon of the female adolescent experience. Addressing young women’s psychosocial world is a good beginning, but few experts in the field of girls’ development have ventured into the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality is about relationship—relationship with the One who created us. It is about loving and living out a call to become the kind of person God created us to be. Girls need to hear this message, embrace it, and live it. They need guidance to challenge a culture that contradicts their sacredness; they need adults who will listen to them, relate with them, and walk with them, reminding them of their destiny, reminding them, “You are made in the image of God.”

“Herstory” of the Voices Project

The Voices Project is the realization of the dream of a national team of female educators, youth ministers, parents, and mentors who have a special concern for the spirituality of girls. They envisioned a multifaceted initiative that would bring together the energy of the girls’ movement and the wisdom of women’s spirituality. Their dream was a convergence of the work of psychologists Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan with the work of Catholic writers like Maria Harris and Elizabeth Johnson. As a result of listening sessions with girls from around the country, the team identified the need for resources for adults who work with girls in Catholic school and parish settings. One response to that need is the Voices series.

Overview of the Voices Series

The Voices series consists of six manuals that present strategies to use with adolescent girls in schools, parishes, and single-gender settings. The authors and consultants in the series have extensive experience working with girls in both coed and single-gender situations. The manuals they have produced are different from one another in content and focus, yet all share the same purpose: to help girls embrace the true meaning of the phrase “created in the image of God,” a profound statement about who they are and who they are becoming. This manual, *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls*, is one of the results; the other manuals in the series are as follows:

- *Retreats: Deepening the Spirituality of Girls* presents seven retreats on themes such as friendship, media, and childhood myths. Also included is a retreat for mothers and daughters.
- *Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls* provides ideas for community prayer services and suggestions for enriching girls’ personal prayer life.
- *Church Women: Probing History with Girls* outlines strategies for discovering the richness of women’s contributions to the life of the church.
- *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls* suggests ways to help girls get to know the women in the Scriptures and examine the roles they played in communities of faith and the beginnings of the church.
- *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* offers methods for exploring and discussing theological and moral issues from the perspective of women.

Where and When to Use the Voices Series

The Voices resource manuals can be used in a variety of settings, though they are intended for use with girls in single-gender groups. The rationale for meeting in single-gender settings is particularly compelling for young women. Numerous studies indicate that girls are much more likely to speak up, express their opinion, and be genuinely heard in “just girl” groups. Some topics related to growing up and finding one’s way in society are difficult for females to discuss in the presence of males. Imparting the particular wisdom of women to girls, and of men to boys, is a time-

honored practice that can be highly effective when used occasionally in educational, church, and social institutions.

Finding opportunities for single-gender gatherings can be a challenge; consider these suggestions:

- Offer gender-specific electives within a school or parish catechetical setting.
- Work with Scout groups, which are already gender specific.
- Form “just girl” groups that meet beyond the typical school day or parish youth night.
- Establish weekly or monthly sessions within the school or parish schedule, at which girls and boys discuss related topics separately. Subsequent discussion with both groups together can lead to greater understanding between the sexes.
- Create mother-daughter or mentor-mentee discussion groups.
- Organize diocesan days for “just girls” or “just boys,” or both.
- Arrange retreats and youth rallies that have gender-specific components or workshops.

Who Might Use the Voices Series

The six resource manuals in the Voices series may be used by coordinators of youth ministry, directors of religious education, teachers in Catholic schools, campus ministers, youth ministers in parish settings, Girl Scout and Camp Fire leaders, parents, mentors, and other adults who work with girls ages ten to nineteen. Flexible enough for single-sex groups in any setting, the manuals’ ideas are designed to engage girls in both headwork and heart work, challenging them to think while nurturing their spirit.

Overview of This Manual

Providing the foundation for all the other manuals in the Voices series, *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls* focuses on opening the eyes of girls to recognize elements of the culture that keep them from fully becoming the persons God created them to be. Raising their consciousness can empower girls to resist negative pressures while developing healthy relationships with their self, others, and God.

How to Use This Manual

The themes in this manual can be used interchangeably and in any order. However, we strongly suggest that the first theme, “Voices and Choices: Challenging the Culture of Childhood Myths,” be used as a foundation for the others. Likewise, the last theme, “Transforming Women: Promoting a Culture of Conversion,” can provide a powerful conclusion and much food for thought at the end of a series of meetings or classes.

We do not expect that you will do all the material in every theme. Each theme is extremely flexible, providing a buffet of optional servings rather than a formal multi-course meal.

The first seven themes of the *Awakening* manual focus on challenging particular aspects of the prevailing culture, while encouraging countercultural ways of thinking

that nurture the spirit of girls. The last three themes focus on promoting healthy attitudes about self and relationships. Each of those last three themes is based on a full-length feature film available at most video stores; the film and activities can be used over several group or class meetings, or for half- or full-day sessions or retreats. All the themes are formatted as follows.

Springboard Activities

Each theme contains one, two, or three springboard activities, designed to take 40 to 55 minutes each. These fully developed activities use a reflection method that begins with personal experience, progresses through analysis and critique, and closes with further action or exploration.

Additional Activities

Most themes include one or more additional activities outlined in detail. These activities provide good follow-up for the springboard activities and allow for age-appropriate assimilation of the material.

Actions and Options

Each theme also includes quick ideas for follow-up activities, adaptations for different age-groups, multigenerational interaction, service options, and social action.

Reflection and Discussion

Each theme presents suggestions for writing in journals, connections with the Scriptures, and quotes by and about women.

Prayers

Each theme offers one or two prayers related to its topic, which can be used to begin or end the theme.

Resource Materials

Most themes provide a list of resources—print, video, and Internet—for more exploration.

Background Information

The first six themes provide background information on their main issue. This material is based on research in the subject area and is given to help you guide the girls in their discussion and exploration of the topic.

Notes

Space is provided for you to jot down ideas, reminders, and additional resources as you use the theme materials.

Handouts and Resources

All the necessary handouts and resources for a theme are found at the end of the theme.

How to Get Started

Know the Material

Read each theme or activity before you facilitate it, and use it creatively to meet the needs of your particular group of girls. In particular, look for ways to make the material most accessible for the girls' ages and for the size of the group. Most of the suggestions in this manual can be used with girls ages ten to nineteen. Some material is most appropriate for a specific age-group within that span; in many cases, we have included recommendations for adapting such material for older or younger adolescents. Most of the activities in this manual are designed for groups of twenty to thirty young people, but can easily be adapted for any size group.

Know the Young People

When you have a wide variety of ages together, keep in mind the following differences between young adolescents and older teens:

- Young adolescents think in concrete terms and may not yet be capable of considering some topics abstractly. For example: Older adolescents will probably not have any difficulty recognizing the ambiguously subtle-but-transforming presence of the main character in the movie *The Spitfire Grill*. Young adolescents will have a much easier time recognizing the obvious effect of the main character on other characters in *Beauty and the Beast*.
- Young adolescents generally need more physical movement than older teens do. You can address that need through simple activities such as forming small groups for discussion and moving to different halves of the room to indicate the answer to a yes-or-no question.
- When they are working in small groups, young adolescents do better with an adult or older teen leading them. Groups of older teens can often be left alone for discussions.
- Older teens can usually handle open-ended assignments, but young adolescents respond better to writing exercises and discussions if they are led. For example, a junior in high school can be expected to write a letter to God about a certain topic on a blank sheet of notebook paper, whereas a sixth grader will be more focused with sentence-starters to guide different parts of the letter.

Create a Welcoming Environment

When possible, adapt the physical space to allow for open discussion and sharing. Consider moving chairs into a circle or inviting everyone to sit on the floor, at times. Groups that meet regularly may want to create a sacred space for ritual, using candles, fabric, music, favorite statues, sculptures, and images. Encourage the girls to be involved in creating that space and keeping it special.

Create a Safe Environment

When involving mothers, mentors, and other adults, provide written guidelines and even training in group leadership to help them understand the process and dynamics of the group. Consider the following guidelines for any adults who work with the group:

- To hear girls at the level necessary for meaningful interaction, adults need first to listen to themselves and to remember their own adolescence (Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, p. 119).
- Girls need adults who will listen to them and affirm them even when their questions and actions seem uncomfortably challenging, and adults who will allow themselves to be questioned at deep levels (p. 120).
- Girls need confidentiality in any group that engages them in deep thinking, feeling, and sharing. Yet they and the adults who lead them also need to know when to go beyond the resources of the group to seek help.
- Girls need adults who will help them be countercultural in ways that bring animation and love to their life, their community, and their world (p. 121).
- To help girls recognize and nurture their own relationship with God, communities of faith need to listen to and learn from them and take them seriously, with engaged hearts, minds, and souls (p. 121).

Foundational Resources

The Girls' Movement

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993. This scholarly book is the foundation for Gilligan's later works, which emphasize the unique psychological and moral perspective of girls and women.

Girl Scout Research Institute, Girl Scouts of the USA. *Girls Speak Out: Teens Before Their Time*. Executive summary. New York: Girl Scout Research Institute, Girl Scouts of the USA, 2000. This publication explores issues ranging from relationships and physical development to gender roles, among girls ages eight to twelve. It is available from Girl Scouts of the USA, 420 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10018-2798, www.girlscouts.org/news/GSRINews.htm.

Phillips, Lynn. *The Girls Report: What We Know and Need to Know About Growing Up Female*. New York: National Council for Research on Women (NCRW), 1998. Commissioned by the NCRW, this text is a comprehensive summary of research that looks at almost every aspect of life for girls. Available through the NCRW, 11 Hanover Square, New York, NY 10005, 212-785-7335 (phone), 212-785-7350 (fax), www.ncrw.org.

Pipher, Mary. *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995. A clinical psychologist, Pipher uses the voices of adolescent girls to tell their stories of loss of self, depression, eating disorders, and lowered expectations.

Feminine Spirituality

Anderson, Sherry Ruth, and Patricia Hopkins. *The Feminine Face of God: The Unfolding of the Sacred in Women*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991. A landmark book on women's experience of God, faith, and religion.

Chittister, Joan D. *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. This book explores a new way of being in the world based on circles rather than pyramids, compassion instead of competition, and a new kind of feminism rooted in Gospel values.

Davis, Patricia H. *Beyond Nice: The Spiritual Wisdom of Adolescent Girls*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001. Using a base of one hundred in-depth interviews with girls from a variety of religious, ethnic, and regional backgrounds, the author conveys the deepest spiritual concerns of girls as they try to ground and affirm the women they are becoming.

Harris, Maria. *Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality*. New York: Bantam Books, 1989. This classic work about women's spirituality is useful for both individuals and women's groups that wish to engage in exercises of self-discovery that lead to transformation.

Schneiders, Sandra M. *With Oil in Their Lamps: Faith, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Paulist Press, 2000. In this text of her lecture delivered as part of the Madeleva lecture series at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, in 2000, Schneiders makes a strong case for Gospel feminism as a way to bring out the full humanity of all persons.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the Voices series. We are also interested in new strategies for use with adolescent girls. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the series editor, Marilyn Kielbasa, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at mkielbasa@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these manuals.

Part A

Challenging Negative Cultures



Voices and Choices

Challenging the Culture of Childhood Myths

Springboard Activity

Losing Your Voice, Getting Your Man

This activity introduces the psychological and social world of girls as dramatized in the Walt Disney version of the classic story “The Little Mermaid.” Through an analysis of the film, the girls learn to critique the myths and stories of the culture. The activity is designed to raise the girls’ consciousness about a culture that expects them to sacrifice their identity by giving up their voice and changing their body, as Ariel does in the film. The activity is appropriate for both middle school and high school audiences.

Preparation

- Review and bring in the Walt Disney film *The Little Mermaid* (1989, 83 minutes, rated G).
 1. Divide the girls into small groups. Tell the groups each to list on a sheet of paper their five favorite children’s animated movies. When they are done, gather everyone and create a Top 5 list by writing down all the movies identified by the small groups, using slash marks to note how many lists each movie appeared on, and circling the five movies that were included on the most lists. You can hold a vote to break a tie if one occurs.
 2. Introduce *The Little Mermaid* by asking one of the girls to summarize its plot. Identify the following main characters: Ariel, the fifteen-year-old mermaid; Eric, the human prince she loves; and Ursula, the evil sea witch. Invite the girls to share any special memories of watching the movie as a child. Then show the clips described below.

- *Clip 1 (about 20 minutes into the movie, about 3 minutes long).* Following an argument with her father, Ariel brings a fork to her secret cave to add to her treasures, and sings “Part of Your World.”
- *Clip 2 (about 37 minutes into the movie, about 10 minutes long).* After angry words with her father, who has forbidden her to go near the land where Eric lives, Ariel is upset. Ursula lures Ariel to her cave with the help of Flotsam and Jetsam, her accomplices. Eventually, Ariel emerges from the water to begin her quest for Eric.

3. Lead a discussion around questions like these, comparing the first and second clips:

- ☉ What changes about Ariel’s appearance? personality? interests?
- ☉ Why does Ariel change?

4. Ask the girls to recall the lyrics to “Poor Unfortunate Souls.” Consider dividing them into small groups again and seeing which group can come up with the most accurate lyrics, recording them on newsprint. Check the recalled words against the lyrics in the film. Post the lyrics; clarify any words or phrases that raise questions.

5. Discuss the song lyrics in one large or several small groups, by posing questions like the ones that follow:

- ☉ What lines does Ursula use to convince Ariel to give up her voice? Do her words disturb you? Why or why not?
- ☉ Is there any truth to Ursula’s arguments?
- ☉ Is it true that men do not care about what a woman has to say?
- ☉ Do you think that girls change in order to attract boyfriends? If so, what are some ways that they change?
- ☉ Do girls and women talk too much about silly things?
- ☉ Ursula tells Ariel that life is full of tough choices. What are the pros and cons of Ariel’s choice?
- ☉ What do you think of Ariel’s decision? Do you think that most girls would have made the same decision if, like Ariel, they did not know how it would turn out? Why or why not?

6. End the discussion in a large group with questions like these: “Do girls in middle school or high school change when they are around boys in the classroom or in social settings? If so, in what ways?” Use the background information near the end of this theme to report what some experts say about the topic.

7. Close the activity by asking the girls what God might say to Ariel about her situation. Light a candle and invite the girls to take turns giving Ariel one bit of advice in the name of God. You might also have them each write a letter to Ariel from God.

Additional Activities

Children’s Fairy Tales

This activity works with middle school and high school girls as long as the level of discussion is age appropriate. Younger girls may have some trouble with the last step; if that is the case in your group, provide examples to get them started.

Preparation

- Bring in the original Hans Christian Andersen story “The Little Mermaid.” Ask a librarian to recommend other children’s stories that have strong roles for girls, and bring in those as well.
- Ask the girls to bring in books and stories that they enjoyed as children.

1. Conduct this activity as a story hour. If possible, have everyone sit on the floor, and invite the girls to remember childhood experiences of story time. Read Andersen’s version of “The Little Mermaid” aloud to the group, showing them any illustrations.

2. Compare the Disney animated version of the story with the original Andersen fairy tale. Then pose questions similar to these:

- ☉ Is the mermaid’s decision in the Andersen story more difficult than the choice that Disney’s Ariel has to make? Why or why not?
- ☉ What kind of sacrifices do traditional gender roles ask women to make? What kind of sacrifices do men make?

3. Invite the girls to share the books and stories they brought and what they liked about them. Examine the following issues:

- Invite the girls to point out the books and stories that have girls as main characters. Then ask them to describe the personalities or characteristics of any girl protagonists in those works.
- If there are few young heroines in the books and stories, discuss why and explore how the girls feel about that.
- If time allows, ask volunteers to read from their books and stories selections that portray strong role models for girls.

4. Close the activity by asking the group how they think society would be different if most little girls heard stories about young women who are strong and independent, instead of weak and dependent as they are traditionally portrayed in most fairy tales.

A Hollywood Talk Show

In this exercise, the girls act out a talk show episode in which movie studio executives explain their positions to an audience that asks pointed questions about the roles of women and girls in animated movies. This activity works best with high school girls.

Preparation

- Post the group's Top 5 animated movies from the springboard activity for this theme. If you did not do that activity, complete just step 1 of it and post the resulting Top 5 list.
- Gather the video covers from as many of the movies on the Top 5 list as possible, and use them to decorate the meeting space.
- Arrange four chairs in the front of the room.
- Make four signs that can be worn around the neck and label them, "Host," "Director," "Producer," and "Screenwriter."

1. Recruit four girls who are familiar with most of the movies on the Top 5 list, to be a host and a panel of Hollywood movie moguls on a TV talk show. Assign each person one of the roles identified on the signs you made; give each recruit the appropriate sign to wear and a copy of resource 1, "Talk Show Scripts"; and allow the four girls a few minutes to prepare their parts.

Tell the rest of the group that it will be the studio audience. Provide seven members of the audience each with one of the questions from resource 2, "Talk Show Questions." Explain that those questions may be used to start the discussion or move it along, and that anyone in the audience may also ask their own question whenever the host invites discussion.

2. Call the host to begin the discussion, and help her keep the show moving until all the guests have made their introductions and everyone has had an opportunity to ask questions.

3. Ask the group to comment on how they feel about the way that girls and women are portrayed in children's movies. Extend the discussion to the portrayal of girls and women in movies for teens and adults.

Mothers and Daughters

As part of this gathering, you may want to show all or part of the film *The Little Mermaid II*, in which the theme of mother-daughter relationships is prominent. However, the activity does not rely on the film; if you choose not to use it, skip step 4 of the activity procedure.

This activity is appropriate for both middle school and high school audiences. Middle school girls are more likely to be able to engage in a discussion of the topic after seeing the film, so if your group consists of primarily younger teens, be sure to include the movie.

Preparation

- Ask the girls each to invite to the session their mother, a grandmother, an aunt, or another woman they admire and consider a mentor.
- Review and bring in the Walt Disney film *The Little Mermaid II: Return to the Sea* (2000, 75 minutes, rated G).

1. Gather the girls and their guests in separate groups. Be sure that each group has a sheet of newsprint and some markers, or paper and pencils. Challenge the groups to see which one can list the greatest number of pairs of famous mothers and daughters from world history, the Bible, church history, movies, television, and literature. Allow about 10 minutes for this task.

2. Invite each group to share its list with the other. The groups may need to explain some of the pairs. They may also want to describe the kind of relationship each mother-and-daughter pair had.

3. Discuss questions like these:

- ⊗ How easy or difficult was this task?
- ⊗ Would it have been easier if you had been asked to list famous fathers and sons?
- ⊗ What have you learned about women losing their voices and about the roles of women in society and history?

4. Show *The Little Mermaid II*. Afterward, offer the following comments in your own words:

- ⊗ At the beginning of the film, Ariel, now a human mother, saves her daughter, Melody, from the clutches of Morgana, Ursula's sister. [Point out some important elements of the dialogue in the story, such as mothers not understanding their daughters and mothers wanting their daughters always to be a part of them.] The climax of the movie centers around Ariel's decision to rescue the adolescent Melody from the perils of evil lurking in the sea.

Discuss the role of mothers in helping girls avoid the dangers and pitfalls of growing up, when it might be appropriate for mothers to rescue their daughters, and when parents should let girls make their own mistakes.

5. Invite insights and affirmations about the power of mother-daughter relationships. Conclude with a blessing service of the girls and their guests.

Creative Voices

This activity can be done with girls in middle school or high school. Younger girls may need a little help getting started, but once they have an idea, they will find a way to work it out. The projects may be completed in small groups, as described, or assigned to individuals or pairs.

Divide the girls into small groups. Assign each group one of the following media, or invite the groups to choose one for themselves: skit, video, children's book, music, and dance. Explain that each group is to use its medium to tell girls ages six to nine about the importance of using your voice and staying true to yourself. When the projects are completed, invite each group to present its creation to the others. You might also arrange for the girls to present their projects to younger girls.

The Sound of Voices

This activity works best with groups of eight or more girls. It can be used as an ice-breaker or within a session, to help the girls get to know one another as they focus on the importance of their voices.

Preparation

- Ask the girls each to make a 1- to 2-minute audio recording describing their voice—that is, their power to influence others. You might want to set up a tape recorder in another room, give each girl a blank tape, and send the girls in one at a time to make their recording. Emphasize that they should not identify themselves in any way on the recording, but they should write their name on the cassette.

1. Collect all the tapes and, without identifying the speakers, play them for the group. Lead the girls to identify the speaker in each case. You might encourage the speaker to keep a low profile while the others are trying to identify her.

2. When every voice has been identified, offer the following sentence-starters and invite the girls to share their responses:

- ⊗ Something I learned about myself by doing this activity is . . .
- ⊗ Something positive I learned about someone else is . . .

Options and Actions

- Suggest that the girls commit to reading regularly to a group of children in their school or parish. Help them select books and stories that have strong girls in leading roles.
- Education gives people a voice and control over their choices. Nearly 54 percent of girls worldwide will never enter primary school, and of those who do, fewer than half will stay in school through fifth grade (Education Now, Oxfam America). Find out more about the status of girls and women in the global community through resources like the Girls Global Education Fund, www.ggef.org/issues.html.
- Find out what Catholic church leaders say about the role of women, by reading some of the resources listed at www.nccbuscc.org/opps/current/women.htm.
- Encourage the girls to check out Web sites that promote healthy self-esteem. These sites have links especially appropriate for middle school girls: www.girlsinc.org, www.health.org/gpower, and www.newmoon.org. The site www.smartgirl.com is more appropriate for older adolescent girls.
- Play songs from animated movies and critique the lyrics with the girls. If any concerns surface, as a group, write an article about them for your school or local paper, and send a copy to the music publisher and movie studio.
- Form a support group for girls to help one another maintain a positive self-image, use their voices, and make good choices.

- Assign each girl to write a review of a children's book that illustrates a positive role model for girls. Send the reviews to local elementary schools, libraries, and newspapers.
- Provide art materials and encourage the girls each to make a poster that shows who they are right now—using only pictures and symbols, no words except their name. Invite everyone to share their completed posters and explain the symbolism. Decorate your meeting space with the posters.

Reflection and Discussion

Journal Questions

- ⊗ What movies, books, or toys were your favorites when you were growing up? Which influenced you? How did they affect your sense of the way girls live?
- ⊗ Describe a time when you chose silence in the face of strong pressure from others. Also describe a time when you chose to speak out in the face of strong pressure.

Scriptural Connections

These passages from the Gospels offer examples of women with strong voices:

- Matt. 15:21–28 (the Canaanite woman)
- Luke 10:38–42 (Mary and Martha)
- John 4:7–30 (the Samaritan woman at the well)
- John 20:1–18 (Mary Magdalene)

WomanWisdom Quotes

'Tis woman's strongest vindication for speaking that *the world needs to hear her voice*. It would be subversive of every human interest that the cry of one-half the human family be stifled. (Anna Julia Cooper)

Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent. (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Human rights are not worthy of the name if they exclude the female half of humanity. The struggle for women's equality is part of the struggle for a better world for all human beings, and all societies. (Boutros Boutros-Ghali)

It was Christ who discovered and emphasized the worth of woman. It was Christ who lifted her into equality with man. It was Christ who gave woman her chance, who saw her possibilities, who discovered her value. (Arthur John Gossip)

Too many women in too many countries speak the same language—silence. (Anasuya Sengupta)

To validate a young girl’s voice, it is essential that we make the act of listening to her a conscious, significant act. How we listen and attend to her will help shape her own sense of significance. (Tim Hinds Flinders and Carol Lee Flinders)

Prayer

Jesus, strong and gentle friend, you treated everyone with great love and respect. In a time when women were supposed to be silent, you talked with them, you healed them, and you encouraged them to use their voices. You even chose them to spread the good news of your Resurrection. Empower us to use our voices in ways that will help all people to become the persons they were created to be, made in the image of God. Amen.

Resource Materials

Print

Golden, Stephanie. *Slaying the Mermaid: Women and the Culture of Sacrifice*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998. The author uses the Hans Christian Andersen story “The Little Mermaid” to critique the culture in which women have been taught to sacrifice themselves for others at great expense to their own well-being. An adult resource, this book poses challenging questions about age-old assumptions of gender roles.

Kolbenschlag, Madonna. *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye: Breaking the Spell of Feminine Myths and Models*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979. This work by a Catholic sister surveys old myths to break the spell of feminine myths and models. The author chooses Belle of the fairy tale “Beauty and the Beast” as a model for today’s authentic heroine.

Background Information

Studies of the psychological and social world of girls—such as *Reviving Ophelia*, by Mary Pipher, *In a Different Voice*, by Carol Gilligan, and *Girls Speak Out*, by the Girl Scout Research Institute—indicate that girls experience a significant drop in self-esteem beginning with preadolescence. Those studies confirm that the identity work of adolescent girls differs from that of their male counterparts. Girls often undergo a transformation from being strong, capable, and happy with themselves to being insecure about self-expression, body image, and leadership abilities.

The “loss of voice” combined with the pressure to conform to the norms of a sexual culture often result in eating disorders, depression, lowered expectations, and increased sexual activity among girls. Several studies from the 1990s indicate that girls

receive less attention in the classroom than do boys, and that during the middle school years, there is a significant drop in self-esteem among girls. According to one study: “Girls aged eight and nine are confident, assertive, and feel authoritative about themselves. Yet most emerge from adolescence with a poor self-image, constrained views of their future and their place in society, and much less confidence about themselves and their abilities” (American Association of University Women, *Shortchanging Girls, Shortchanging America*, p. 7). According to Pipher, “Girls have long been trained to be feminine at considerable cost to their humanity” and “everywhere girls are encouraged to sacrifice their true selves” (p. 44).

Children’s movies illustrate the reality of expected gender roles that contribute to this loss of identity. Boys and men are often cast as authority figures or as romantic love interests to be pursued at the cost of self. Girls and women are seldom portrayed in roles that exhibit their intelligence, leadership, or strength. Beauty and charm are more important than intelligence and independence. Strong older women are often portrayed as evil, and there is generally an absence of relationships with mothers, mentors, friends, or sisters.

Romantic infatuation generally drives the story line, and the heroine finds fulfillment in living happily ever after with her man. Because girls are naturally inclined toward forming close relationships, they are more prone to stereotypical messages that are often unhealthy for the development of their own identity.

The concern about girls is not limited to the psychological and social worlds. Their spirituality, the very essence of their person, is affected by this culture that encourages them to be silent and passive. However, it is in the realm of spirituality that girls can be nurtured and empowered to address issues of self-identity. By introducing girls to the Gospel message that both men and women are made in the image of God, we can promote healthy attitudes of self. And we can encourage girls to speak up and speak out, knowing that Jesus affirmed the power of women’s voices through his conversations and interactions with women in a time and place that often silenced them and put them on a par with animals, property, and slaves (Exod. 20:17).

Notes

Use this space to jot ideas, reminders, and additional resources.

Talk Show Scripts

Host

Your job is to introduce the topic and guests for the episode “Girls’ Voices in the Movies.” Also, you are to call on the audience to ask your guests questions. Feel free to ad-lib and be creative with your role, while keeping the discussion going like a professional talk show host.

Use this script to introduce yourself, your guests, and the topic of this episode:

My name is _____ [name]. Today, on my show, *GirlPower Talks*, I have with me three media experts from Hollywood: Director _____ [name], Producer _____ [name], and Screenwriter _____ [name]. They are going to address our questions about male and female roles in children’s animated movies.

Now, my guest experts will tell the audience a little about what they do, and perhaps pick their favorite children’s movie from your list of Top 5 favorites.

Select one of the three experts to go first. After the expert’s introduction, choose individuals from the audience to ask any of the questions your leader passed out or questions of their own that relate to today’s topic.

Director

Read the following introduction when you are asked to do so:

My role in moviemaking is to direct the voices, the facial expressions, and the body language of the characters. I determine how sweet, mean, silly, serious, or intelligent a character might come across as to the audience.

Producer

Read the following introduction when you are asked to do so:

My role model was Walt Disney himself. Now, I decide what movies are worth making and which ones I think will sell in the marketplace to kids and their families. I control the money and resources to make the film.

Screenwriter

Read the following introduction when you are asked to do so:

I make up stories, or adapt fairy tales or popular stories, for animated films. As the writer, I usually have the freedom to change a story to make it appeal to today’s audiences.

Talk Show Questions

.....
On the Top 5 list created by your group, which movies involve an absent mother and a young adolescent girl?
.....

Are there any animated movies that show a strong, supportive human mother or other woman who is a positive role model in a girl’s life?
.....

Are there any animated movies in which girls have strong friendships with other girls? If so, how significant are those friendships?
.....

How are older women portrayed in the movies listed?
.....

How are boys and men portrayed in the movies listed?
.....

Where do most of the ideas for those movies come from?
.....

Can you think of any children’s stories of strong girls?
.....