

Hell is Other Girls: Teenage Girls, Identity, and Belonging
in Three Plays by Joan MacLeod

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There have been a good number of books published around the turn of the millennium that attempt to address the complexities of feminist identity for young women, suggesting that girls have a wider array of possible identities and empowering identifications than ever before.¹ Yet we live in a time when there is a great deal of tension between the variety of role models available to girls and the stultifying restrictions of a culture which still makes them unable to value and emulate any but the most conventional and beautiful of those models. For some unpopular and unconventional girls, it is possible to embrace their distance from the ideal and to experiment with potential identities, to find a supportive alternative community, even to take pride in being a lone “body outlaw,” to quote the title of Ophira Edut’s inspirational collection for girls.² But for some misfit girls, the desire to conform is too desperate and the stakes are too high: belonging to a group, any group, and having an identity, are one and the same. This vulnerability leads to bullying and violence by other girls.³

In this paper, I will discuss the representation of teenage girls in three plays by Canadian playwright Joan MacLeod, including *The Hope Slide* and *Little Sister*, and focusing in particular on her most recent work, *The Shape of a Girl* (2001). This one-woman show deals with the 1997 murder of fourteen-year-old Reena Virk in Victoria, B.C., by a group of teenagers, mostly other girls. Joan MacLeod is one of Canada’s most important contemporary playwrights.⁴ Five of her seven published plays, which span the time period from 1985 to 2001, feature a teenage girl.⁵ MacLeod explains: “I always enjoyed writing about teenagers and the bigness of their emotions and how everything is so important to them. I think those same things back them into a corner sometimes and they

feel isolated” (Clark B6). Theatre has the potential to act as a kind of public forum, to allow the playwright and audience a means by which to explore difficult current issues. By drawing on current research about teenage girls, especially the issue of bullying and violence, I will show how MacLeod’s characters reflect their real-life context in a fictionalized microcosm and, most importantly, allow the audience member to reflect on their own relationship with the larger implications of the subject matter. As Jerry Wasserman has said of MacLeod, “She vividly reconstructs ... terror and loss, then tries to make sense of the experience and the lives affected by it, including her own” (Wasserman 7). There is always a sense in these plays that MacLeod is figuring out her own response to her world, and thus the audience is invited to do the same.

The Hope Slide, first produced in 1992, features fifteen- year-old Irene, who considers herself and her gay friend Walter to be members of a “persecuted tribe” (28). Here we see the first, and most positive, instance of MacLeod’s treatment of teenage friendship and the importance of a sense of belonging to the formation of a healthy identity. As with all of MacLeod’s teenage girls, Irene is in search of a community. Irene is a fierce non-conformist who is frequently absent from school and feels completely unlike the other students. But because she has a specific subculture with which she identifies, (in this case a religious minority called the Doukhobors), Irene is not afraid to give voice and even physical expression to her rebellion and outsider status. As Celeste Derksen has observed, in some ways Irene is privileged in that she can willingly choose to be different, unlike the members of the sexual and religious minorities she admires who do not have that choice (Derksen 52). As much as we may want to celebrate those girls, like Irene, who are able to embrace their outsider status, MacLeod reminds us that “choice” isn’t a possibility for everyone.

MacLeod’s next play, *Little Sister*, was first produced in 1994 and is her only play specifically intended for a teenage audience. The director, Joanna McIntyre, writes in her preface to the published text that the “young women in the cast were deeply affected by the

experience and went through enormous changes themselves.” According to McIntyre, MacLeod’s “gift is her capacity for an unflinching empathy with those vulnerable recesses that most of us try to conceal” (McIntyre 49). Again, the emphasis is on MacLeod’s quest to empathize with and understand the need to fit in, and again, this wish is embodied in the conflicted teenage girl.

Little Sister deals with teenage girls and body image. The three female characters are Tracey, a sexually active, apparently self-confident, bully; Bella, who is overweight; and Katie, who is anorexic. Here MacLeod introduces two more important themes: first, the competition and control that can be part of friendships between teenage girls, and second, the overwhelming concern with physical appearance. Tracey is particularly interesting as a portrait of the female bully: despite her genuine care for the other girls, she controls them through verbal abuse that always revolves around the limits of belonging. For example, when Bella suggests that they should welcome the new girl into their circle, (“You know, Tracey, you could at least try to be nice. How’d you like to be the new person...”), Tracey mocks her with the threat of an unacceptable label, “How’d you like to try not being a queer,” and Bella quickly protests: “I’m not!” (*Little Sister* 57). It is revealing to note that MacLeod’s female characters, confused by the intensity of their feelings for each other and preoccupied by their bodies, often feel compelled to explicitly define their relationships as non-sexual. For example, in *The Shape of a Girl*, Braidie comments of her best friend: “I love Adrienne so much I used to worry I was a lesbian and when dad would say stuff like *you two sure are joined at the hip!* I thought he was worried that I was a lesbian too” (*Shape* 24).⁶ There is an on-going tension between the overwhelming desire to possess and “belong to” the friend, and the fear of being rejected because that desire has gone too far or been misinterpreted. Even worse, the most needy girl is the one most vulnerable to having her need exploited and used against her.

The negotiation of relationships and identification is also marked by an obsession with physical appearance. While flipping through a fashion magazine, Katie and Bella are

horrified by a photograph of a woman they label “ugly,” and then are relieved to read that she is not a model but a human rights lawyer (*Little Sister* 73). The girls are seemingly oblivious to the notion that such a woman might serve as a worthier “model” for them than the models.

In an interesting parallel to the experience of her characters in *Little Sister*, MacLeod has said that when she first saw a photograph of murder victim Reena Virk, she found herself thinking that she was “one of *those* girls” -- meaning someone “ugly,” unpopular, someone she might have foreseen being victimized in some way -- and then wanted to explore that reaction. For MacLeod, playwrighting is a strategy to deal with the tragedies we all hear about through the media; as she explains, “It’s just me trying to make sense of things ... that’s what art does.” MacLeod has also said that she was “mining [her] own history” for *The Shape of a Girl*, in that she had a best friend when growing up who turned into a bully in grade nine, became a tough girl who MacLeod simultaneously loved and feared. This begins to explain her inclination to try to understand the girls who victimized Reena Virk: “I wanted to find everything that was the same about me and those girls” (MacLeod lectures). Rather than turn away from her own spontaneous reaction and dismiss the murder as an aberration, MacLeod chose to look closer at the group dynamic of girls and to relate this event to a more familiar spectrum of behaviour, attitudes, and personal experience.

At the beginning of *The Shape of a Girl*, fifteen-year-old Braidie sees an image on a television news program which she at first mistakes for herself and her friends: “... And then I realize who these girls are. They are supposed to look distorted because they are young offenders and we aren’t allowed to see who they are. They are accused of assault, accused of murder, accused of killing another girl...” (26). As the news reporter describes the background of the young offenders, Braidie disavows her initial identification with them: “... I feel stupid to have ever thought we have anything in common. In fact it pisses me off that they are trying to pass themselves off as normal. And even though it’s illegal to

do so, I can imagine their faces: slutty eyes, chapped lips” (27). But almost against her will, Braidie continues to recognize similarities and she makes a statement that could as easily be spoken by the playwright:

I don't know why I have to find out more about those girls, I just do. They are all over the news. Always in a group, always from the back or with their jackets pulled over their heads. I don't want to look at the victim, it's too depressing. But she is everywhere too -- as a baby with her dad, as a regular weird kid on holiday, then one of those blown up year book pictures that always mean someone is either a movie star or dead (27).

The monologue focuses the play on the group of friends who are always together, who Braidie wants to demonize as “other,” but in fact finds fascinating and recognizable and needs to learn more about. Eventually, their distorted faces become as clear as looking into the face of her own best friend. The victim, on the other hand, is too distant, both because she is dead and therefore a kind of celebrity, but also because, even in life, she would have been the real “other” in Braidie’s social world. Braidie has always been popular, she has always had a sense of fitting in, and her journey forces her to acknowledge the group mentality she has aligned herself with.

As a one-woman show, *The Shape of a Girl* relies on the fictional character as a means for the playwright and the audience, particularly the female spectator, to approach the real-life material on which it is based. The character of Braidie acts as a kind of conduit, negotiating the terrain between audience experience and real-life events, and is a crucial device in the way MacLeod guides the spectator toward the subject matter. MacLeod has said that she was initially very “uncomfortable with the material,” which is why the play took an unusually long time for her to write. In the program note for the first production she explained:

Braidie's voice started developing just over three years ago, not too long after the murder of a fourteen year old girl by a group of teenagers, an incident that captured newspaper headlines around the world. Writing about those sad events in Victoria was the last thing I wanted to do, so it took me another year to see a relationship between the two. I only knew Braidie had backed herself into a corner and I didn't know why. I also knew I had a play because I wanted to find out so badly (*Program*).

Both MacLeod and her character Braidie have a personal connection to a bully, and both approached the Reena Virk case in the same way, by reading about it in the newspapers, seeing it on TV, and then trying to connect it to their own lives. This was Joan MacLeod's personal process, and her way of making sense and responding was to write a play. There is a parallel between what the character does, which is watch a group dynamic as it escalates, and what we as audience members do, which is watch Braidie onstage. We are not forced to witness the violence, rather we witness one individual's confession of her part in perpetuating a situation that may lead to similar violence. Thus, through our participation in watching the theatrical event, we are continuously made aware of the danger of complicity, and reminded of the process of disenfranchisement and exclusion in all its many forms as it plays out before us in the real world.

In the course of the play, Braidie becomes obsessed with the details of the Reena Virk case. Gradually, she makes the connection with her own complicity in a case of violent bullying of a girl named Sofie in her own circle of friends. Like the character Irene in *The Hope Slide*, she has to physically leave her community and make a moral choice to reject the dominant hierarchy of her school and her peers. Anne Nothof has written that Joan MacLeod's plays are about "imagining the possibility of crossing psychological borders to effect a transformation" (Nothof 10). In *The Shape of a Girl*, Braidie must cross the border between seeing herself as someone outside the situation of bullying and

violence, to someone who is implicated and responsible. It is a perilous border to cross, because it means both a re-assessment of her own identity and of her relationship with her best friend: both her sense of self and her place in the community of girls. Braidie believes: “This is me without my friends. I am nothing, zero, zip” (43), spelling out in the starkest terms the relationship between a sense of belonging and a sense of self. Braidie is finally able to name her complicity because she recognizes the dynamics of passivity and domination in her relationship with her best friend Adrienne: “That’s the trouble with staying silent. I can’t move, even when I want to. And I start thinking Adrienne acts for me” (51).

Joan MacLeod chose not to write the story of Reena Virk from the perspective of the victim. The wisdom of this decision has to do with the problems inherent in asking an audience to identify with someone in that position, the same dangers that have been discussed by Julie Salverson in regard to her work with student performers on the issue of land mines. Salverson notes: “If we write a play that presents an uncomplicated portrayal of victims, villains, and heroes, what choices do we give an audience as to how to relate? . . . If understanding what it means for land mines to exist means I must substitute myself for either the victim or the soldier who put them in the ground, is it any wonder I will resist this knowledge?” (Salverson 67). The same can be asked of Reena Virk’s story. In *The Shape of a Girl*, it is important that Braidie does not identify with the victim or the attackers, but with the ones who watched: “Maybe they were so glad to not be that girl . . . that they don’t even know how to imagine shouting *stop*. Maybe they think that silence is the ticket, the only way to never end up like the girl” (50). It is unlikely that audience members will want to identify with Reena Virk, or with the girls who killed her. But they may very much want

to see a character onstage who is struggling with the same responses they have had to this well-known case, or others like it: the experience of learning about it in the media, of trying to make sense of it, of seeking the appropriate response. Furthermore, especially for the female spectator, there is the potential for comparing the incident to ones in their own lives, and the relief of seeing addressed onstage an aspect of female experience that has seldom been acknowledged.

While the issue of teenage violence and bullying has been dealt with extensively by the media, the focus has mainly been on boys (Simmons 4). Rachel Simmons, in her recent study *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Aggression of Girls*, has argued that girls tend to use less overt ways of controlling one another, and thus avoid detection. However, as Simmons writes: “Girls’ aggression may be covert and relational; it may indeed be fueled at times by a fear of loss or isolation. That does not mean, however, that girls do not want power or feel aggression as passionately as their male peers” (Simmons 9). According to education researcher Sandra Boasacki of Brock University: “Girls are better ‘mind readers’ than boys – they read other people’s thoughts and emotions better – but this also gives girls the ability to be devastating psychological bullies” (quoted in *Girls* A11). This kind of covert abuse is chillingly described by the character Braidie in *The Shape of a Girl*: “... you probably didn’t notice how we sat around Sofie [on the bus]. And how still she was, with her eyes straight ahead. Behind her Jackie was kicking her calves, something was smeared in her hair. The girls across from her were chanting but you’d have to listen hard to hear it. While you boys in the back were slugging it out we were in the front, almost still, always the good little girls” (37-38). The emphasis is on appearances: the bus driver might notice the boys, yelling, hitting each other and throwing things out the windows, but he is oblivious to the

subtle, almost imperceptible cruelty of the “good little girls” sitting right behind him. The girls are perfectly aware that he is unable to “see” them, both literally, and in the sense that their aggression is culturally invisible, shielded by the stereotype of sweetness.

Rachel Simmons argues that there is a problem with the way girls are socialized to be “nice” to everyone and to avoid conflict: “when a girl isn’t nice to everyone, it’s a sign of her failure to conform to her sex role” (Simmons 236). When, as we have seen, it is crucial to have friends and be socially acceptable, there is inevitable anxiety in believing that niceness is a sign of correct gender behaviour, and in fearing that one might fail to be a proper girl. Simmons points out that this leaves girls without any sort of useful tools to communicate their emotions, leading to the use of covert and destructive methods instead: “Because girls lack the tools to deal with everyday feelings of anger, hurt, betrayal, and jealousy, their feelings stew and fester before boiling to the surface and unleashing torrents of rage” (Simmons 88). The normal range of human emotions are diverted and indirectly released, while the gender façade is maintained.

Girls who fail to master appearances, who conclude that they are not “nice” enough and therefore not successful in conforming to their sex role, may opt instead for the role of the tough girl. This was the case with Reena Virk. In a *Saturday Night Magazine* profile, Sid Tafler argued that Reena Virk was not a random victim of a crime that could have happened to anyone, but rather that her death was the culmination of a long and “futile attempt to find a comfortable place for herself within her family and her community” (Tafler 15). The Virk family is a minority within a minority: not only East Indian, but also Jehovah’s Witnesses. (16). More damagingly, Reena Virk stood out because of her physical appearance: “Tall and heavy, she towered over other girls her age. She was

considered unattractive. . . She was targeted by bullies, humiliated by her peers” (16).

According to Tafler, Reena matured at an accelerated pace and was further cursed by developing facial hair. All of these physical characteristics would have made it impossible for Reena Virk to fit into the stereotypical conventions of acceptable girlhood.

Echoing Celeste Dersken’s comment about the character of Irene in *The Hope Slide* and her choice to be a non-conformist, cultural critic Lynn Crosbie makes an important distinction when she points out that there is a big difference between playing at and genuinely being an outsider:

[the] coolest teens are always those who dress just differently enough, well within the parameters of desired acceptance. It is ultimately the genuine others who suffer as pariahs within and without high school: promiscuous girls, single mothers, the abused, the obese or disfigured, gays, racial and religious minorities: kids whose isolation usually leads them to carve out identities that are not predicated on glamour, but pain (Crosbie *So Young* 109).

Reena Virk fit into most of these categories of otherness, yet she was still determined to be accepted, to have a group. That was why she was drawn to the “bad girls,” thinking that their otherness might be able to accommodate hers, not understanding how much glamour still had to do with their group image.

In her quest for acceptance amongst her peers, at the age of thirteen Reena Virk began hanging out at a neighbourhood park with a group of teenagers who were in foster care. She admired their freedom and picked up their vices, including smoking and, eventually, heroin use. The group of teenagers who she thought were her friends would eventually be her killers. According to Sid Tafler, “The motives were petty, related to boyfriends and gossip” (Tafler 15). While spending a Friday evening with her family, she was called to meet her friends at the nearby Wal-Mart and never returned. Eight days later, on Saturday, November 22, 1997, police spotted her body a few feet off a beach in Saanich,

Victoria's biggest bedroom community. Police arrested eight suspects, all of them teenagers between fourteen and seventeen, seven of them girls. In 1998, six of the girls were convicted of assault causing bodily harm and received sentences ranging from two months to a year. Warren Glowatski, eighteen, was convicted in 1999 and Kelly Ellard, seventeen, was convicted in 2000, both of second-degree murder, which carries with it an automatic life sentence (Armstrong A2).

Reena was attracted to this group because they rebelled against the mainstream experience of the teenagers who had rejected her. At the same time, they represented a group with which she could identify and belong. According to her uncle: "I told her I wouldn't hang out with those people - they're a bunch of losers. But she thought these kids were cool. She just wanted to be accepted so badly. She was lost. She didn't know her place in the world." Another relative recounted that Reena wrote the gang name "Crips" on her hand and "all over the place. She thought it was cool" (Tafler 18). As suburban teens emulating the glamourized urban gang, group identity was of overwhelming importance. Journalist Jane Armstrong states that they were part of a circle in which loyalty was a "paramount virtue ...When she was first arrested, Ms Ellard warned police that she would not say anything because she did not want to rat on her friends. In a statement, which was videotaped, she threatened to kill anyone who told on her" (Armstrong A14).

What made the case stand out in the media was the gender of its players. One of the defense lawyers commented on the intense public interest in the case: "It caught the public's attention because of the group aspect of it, and because it was primarily a group of girls. And a group of girls that were completely atypical of sugar and spice and everything nice" (Mark Jette quoted in Armstrong A2). The image of the sweet and innocent

schoolgirl is replaced with another image, one that the girls have consciously chosen for themselves. All the girls involved with the case seemed to thrive on their tough girl image, and were particularly drawn to one girl, identified in the media as “N.C.,” because they were impressed with her looks, tough image and criminal record (Armstrong A14). As one writer commented: “We usually hear stories about high-school girls drawn to the wild, dangerous bad boy. But here, the charismatic rebel is a young girl” (Rebecca Godfrey quoted in Armstrong A14). Some of the girls, including Kelly Ellard, apparently participated in the attack on Reena Virk in an attempt to win favour with N.C.. Their parents had not recognized their daughters’ behaviour as abnormal. The mother of one of the girls testified that her daughter loved the tough girl image of the girls’ group, but that she believed this “rough-and-tumble demeanour was just an act. She was shocked, she said, when police came to her door a week after the killing” (Armstrong A14). It remains unthinkable that every girl is not essentially nice, even underneath an appearance calculated to announce otherwise.

Patricia Pearson has written extensively on violent crime, and particularly on women who murder. Her fascination for the subject, she writes, came about because she identified lawlessness with a degree of personal agency previously denied to her as a woman (*Death* 86). Pearson argues that this kind of freedom is increasingly attractive and available to young women. She writes: “Girls today not only live in a generally more violent society, but their models are more assertive, in every realm from female rock to primetime TV to movie stars. The capacity to be physically forceful and volubly angry is much more evident in these girls, as it is to young women in other Western nations” (*When She Was Bad* 229).⁷ One theory used to explain male criminal behaviour is the idea that

criminality is a response to thwarted, frustrated ambition. The theory has been that women do not resort to crime because, unlike men, their goals (home and family) are easily attainable (Pearson *When She Was Bad* 103). But as Patricia Pearson reminds us, patriarchal social arrangements do not erase a woman's will to power, they just shape and redirect her efforts (*When She Was Bad* 103). Perhaps their thwarted ambition leads girls to take out their rage on other girls. One could argue that the phenomenon of the overtly tough girl is an attempt to claim a new identity, an unconstrained and willful self, and that the mark of this freedom lies in the ability to disavow conventional female morality and aggressively engage in the "political, violent male-defined world" (Jeffner Allen quoted in Hart 137).

Lynn Crosbie argues that this is nothing new, and that the problem with the current interest in female bad behaviour is that it ignores "the simple truth that girls' and women's unbridled nastiness has always been a fact of life, literature, and pop" (Crosbie *Review* 65).

⁸ It is an aspect of female experience that co-exists uneasily with more flattering images of femininity; as writer Claudia Casper observes: "Among women writers there has been a discourse about the experience of being dominated, and of evading domination, but rarely of being dominant" (85). This silence leads to the conventional notion that violent behaviour is a solely masculine activity; after a research study on violent girls, Sibylle Artz was forced to conclude with apparent surprise that: "...females who engage in violence, despite showing some similarities with their male counterparts, are still more like girls who don't engage in violence than they are like boys" (Artz 28). And this is the point at which Joan MacLeod enters the forum, using Braidie to speak to the female spectator and to acknowledge that bullying is a part of female experience.

In *The Shape of a Girl*, Braidie addresses the process by which girls determine who belongs and who will be excluded. MacLeod gives Braidie a powerful monologue in which she talks about how girls judge one another:

... eighty percent of the female brain is pure crap. We're constantly checking each other out, deciding who goes where, who's at the bottom. When I look at her picture, when I look at the picture of the dead girl in the paper, part of me gets it. And I hate it that I do; I hate to be even partly composed of that sort of information. But right now, if you put me in a room filled with girls, girls my age that I've never seen before in my life - I could divide them all up. I could decide who goes where and just where I fit in without anyone even opening their mouth. They could be from this island, they could be from Taiwan. It doesn't matter. Nobody would have to say a word.... I could have divided up a room like that when I was in grade two. Grade fucking two (33-34).

This is a blunt statement of how early and thoroughly girls are trained to be conscious of their appearance and to judge and compete with each other, how automatic and hegemonic this stratification becomes. It alludes to Reena Virk as a girl ostracized by her size and her failure to be sufficiently feminine, and acknowledges the playwright's own response to her photograph. Furthermore, Braidie mentions that she could divide up girls from a different racial group as easily as her own, suggesting that if Reena had been beautiful, her colour alone would not have made her a target. But because she was not, it became one more thing held against her.

At the end of the play, the stage directions indicate that Braidie steps into a bright spotlight and makes a confession to her old pre-school teacher, Annie and, of course to us, the audience: "I wish to report the behaviour of I fear for I'm scared. Scared for the safety of another girl. That she might do something crazy. Her name is Sofie. She has been treated in a despicable way by many people... including me" (58). Braidie tells us that Annie nods and embraces her. MacLeod wants this to be a moment of redemption for Braidie, and for us, since as her confessors it is implicitly understood that we too forgive

her, and perhaps ourselves, for sometimes failing to respond as we know we should to the harm around us. Braidie is amazed to notice that: “[Annie’s] arms still fit around me,” as if she feels distorted or deformed by her guilt. The fact that she can still be embraced by her pre-school teacher reassures her that she still retains some connection to the girl she once was.

The play ends with two visions of redemption. The first is a dream, that Reena Virk somehow got away and floated off to some place safe, although Braidie admits: “... I don’t know where her safe place might be” (59). Her final vision is of a more inclusive time, when she and her friends were eight years old and had their lives and all their possibilities before them: “We are brave, we are perfect - girls” (60). Joan MacLeod has said that she “... feel(s) an obligation to be hopeful” (Much 202), and her ending leaves us with the hopeful possibilities inherent in female friendship.

In reality, however, Reena Virk was doomed by her outsider status, and the other outcaste girls she banded together with victimized her as much as mainstream culture. She had no sense of identity as separate from a group, and no space to search for a more supportive alternative community; Reena Virk just had the blinding need to belong, and that need was used against her. I think the value of MacLeod’s play is that it allows us as audience members the distance, not necessarily to look at “one of those girls,” but to look at ourselves and ask how we can help them not to fall through the cracks. And thus we return to hopeful, interventionist feminist initiatives, like Nightwood’s Busting Out program. *The Hope Slide*, *Little Sister*, and especially *The Shape of a Girl*, allow the audience to position themselves in relation to the difficult issues of identity and belonging, issues which, of course, have global consequences, but which here are most intimately

embodied in the dilemmas of the contemporary teenage girl.

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¹ A small sampling of titles includes *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (2000);

Body Outlaws: Young Women Write About Body Image and Identity (2000); *Ophelia Speaks: Adolescent Girls Write About Their Search for Self* (1999); *The Bust Guide to the New Girl Order* (1999); and *Girls Speak Out: Finding Your True Self* (1997). Even more recently there has been a wave of books which address stereotypes of good and bad girl behaviour; in addition to the works by Rachel Simmons and Sibylle Artz cited in this paper, one might look to *The Secret Lives of Girls* by Sharon Lamb, *Fast Girls: Teenage Tribes and the Myth of the Slut* by Emily White, and *Queen Bees and Wannabees* by Rosalind Wiseman, all published in 2002.

² In her Introduction to *Body Outlaws: Young Women Write About Body Image and Identity* (Seattle: Seal Press, 2000) editor Ophira Edut writes: “We live in an age where the mere idea of ‘liking your body the way it is’ is so uncommon that the women who do so are considered freaks... Body outlaws are the escaped convicts, their only crime a desire to live free from the confining pressures to achieve a beauty they didn’t imagine themselves” (xviii).

³ In *Odd Girl Out*, Rachel Simmons compares girls who are victims of bullying by their female friends to adult women who stay in abusive relationships: the victims believe they must maintain the relationship at any cost out of fear of being alone (32, 267).

⁴ All of her plays have been performed extensively across Canada, Britain and the U.S. and her work has been translated into five languages. Her plays have won Chalmers Canadian Play Awards, the Dora Mavor Moore Award for best production, and the 1991 Governor General’s Literary Award for Drama.

⁵ The one-woman play *Jewel* (1985/87) begins with a Prologue in which 30-year-old Marjorie vividly recounts incidents from ages six, thirteen, fifteen and her early twenties. *Toronto, Mississippi* (1987) features a mentally challenged eighteen-year-old named Jhana.

⁶ When speaking of her best female friend, even the adult Marjorie in *Jewel* feels the need to

specify: “We sleep in the same bed and hug and that but it’s not gay or anything” (*Jewel* 76).

⁷ Certainly the statistics seem to indicate an increase in violent behaviour; according to Sibylle Artz: “In 1986, females accounted for 26% of all assault charges laid against youths in British Columbia. By 1993, this had risen to 42%. [Across Canada] from 1986 to 1993, the number of female youths charged with assault increased by 190%, rising from 1,728 charges in 1986 to 5,096 charges in 1993...” (15).

⁸ In a piece published in *Dropped Threads: What We Aren’t Told*, Claudia Casper sums up the tone of much media coverage:

Recently the media have been focussing on the so-called new phenomenon of increasing violence among girls. Subtextual questions lurk in these pieces: Is this what feminism has brought us? Are girls today adopting male behaviour? Et cetera. Whenever the media begins discussing a behaviour as new, I suspect it’s something old in a marginally new form (85).