Thesis Abstract

Adolescent Women Runaways: Class Factors, Prevention, and Recovery

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This thesis examines the motivational factors behind running away in working-
class adolescent women. It looks at the influences of homelife, school, and peers,
focusing on areas where class can be a contributing factor. It highlights the severe impact
that interruptions in identity development can have on the long-term psychological health
of adolescent women runaways. Using this perspective, this thesis proposes changes in
existing prevention and recovery programs to better address the needs of these young
women.

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To Eric and Shu-Shia,

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I. Introduction

Adolescent women runaways and throwaways continue to exist in significant numbers in both urban and rural areas of the United States. While “there have been no comprehensive studies of the number of runaway and homeless youth in America” (Rotherham-Borus, et. al p. 370) the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency estimates that in 1992 approximately 450,000 adolescents ran away from home, with 50 to 60% being young women. (OJJD Working Group) The majority of first time runaway girls are between 14 and 16 years old and cover the gamut of race and class backgrounds. In the limited Midwest Homeless and Runaway Adolescent Project (hereafter MHRAP) study roughly 47% of the runaway girls were identified as coming from a working class background, that is, a household where the primary caregiver had a high school education and where the caregiver was employed full time at a job in manufacturing, service, administrative, or sales. (Whitbeck, p. 20)

There is no single reason that explains why adolescents run away. While sexual abuse is a known contributing factor in some cases, there is another group for whom adolescence appears to trigger an ever-increasing pattern of “problem” behaviors that can include running away, precipitate being “thrown away”, or involve early and inappropriate sexual activity. Until recently, the few studies that exist on working class girls “have concentrated either primarily or exclusively on populations involved in high-risk behavior or have focused on only one or two components of an adolescent’s world.” (Way, 1998, p. 7) There have been few studies that looked at the developmental processes
of working class adolescent girls in an effort to understand their environment and behavior.

In studying runaway behavior it is critically important to understand the psychological impact of the stresses that can cause runaway behavior, and the stress involved in the act of running away itself and victimization that can occur after running away. Adolescence is a critical time for identity development and there are long term ramifications for interference with this process. “Although accurate diagnosis is problematic, 31.8% [of runaways in shelters] were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” (Whitbeck, p. 10) in the MHRAP study. In all 2/3 of the participants were diagnosed with at least one symptom associated with conduct disorder, trauma, or major affective disorder.

According to the MHRAP study “one of the most striking things about runaways is that most have no acceptable placement options.” (Whitbeck, p. 159) Many move between the streets and shelters or find short term accommodations with friends or relatives. Most current social policies are built around returning the youth to their homes but there is a high rate of adolescents that run away again. It is difficult to find foster placement or group homes for adolescents.

This paper focuses on working class Euro-American heterosexual girls between the ages of 12 and 16. It contributes to the understanding of this marginalized segment of the population in five ways. First is the focus on the severe impact that interruptions in identity development have on the long-term psychological health of adolescent women. The second focus is on defining a method for understanding the motivational factors...
behind running away. It takes the approach of using a framework to model the salient parts of an adolescent’s environment and decision process. Instead of trying to enumerate specific reasons for running away, this approach models behavior as a balance between stresses that push girls away from home and factors that bind girls to stay. For different girls there will be different sets of balancing forces and different thresholds at which running away occurs. Third, a social psychological framework highlights the importance of social and economic conditions in influencing the environment and stresses in each girl’s life. The fourth area of focus is on examining the effects of socioeconomic class on girls’ lives. The goal is to identify areas where class affects a girl’s life in ways that can contribute to “problem” behaviors. Finally, the paper addresses changes that can be made in existing prevention and early detection programs and proposes the creation of a long-term treatment program aimed at repairing psychological damage.

II. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five main sections. The first section introduces identity and identity development tasks and lays the groundwork for understanding the complex interactions between identity and problem behaviors. This is followed in the second section by the presentation of a framework that models the interrelated dynamics of family, community, school, and peer relationships in the life of adolescent working class girls. The third section describes how normal development processes that occur through relationships with parents, non-parental adult role models, peers, and friends are disrupted by running away. The fourth section examines how schools traditionally define students as being ‘at-risk’ and changes that can be made based on a better understanding of the
III. Identity Development in Adolescent Women

Identity, or sense of self, refers to a person's set of values and beliefs and how she views herself in relation to other people and social institutions. Identity formation is a life-long process but there are important developmental stages that occur during adolescence. These stages are thought to be triggered by advances in cognitive abilities in the areas of introspection and complex reasoning rather than from biological causes. As Elliott argues, "although hormones are essential to stimulate physical maturity, their direct effects account for few of the psychological and social features of adolescence." (Elliott, p. 15)

The mid-adolescence stage described here is what Piaget referred to as "formal operational thought" and can be viewed as a time of struggle to deal with these new cognitive abilities. Identity is contextual and interactional, "a kind of ongoing project which has to be constructed through social interaction rather than some object that can be discovered, suppressed or lost." (Davis, p. 360) An adolescent forms separate role-related identities, including an identity as a daughter and a different identity as a friend, student, and member of a peer group. Within a group, she has her own personal identity as well as the common identity that members of the group take on. It is between and amongst peers and friends that individual and collective identities are practiced, appropriated, resisted, and negotiated. Each of her identities, or selves, becomes...
differentiated into categories such as social acceptance, academic ability, and ability to make close friends.

In addition to forming role-related multiple and differentiated selves, mid-adolescents also form idealized selves and false selves. Idealized selves contain notions of who they want to become and vary in levels of reality. False selves are like masks, intentionally created personas that are not a reflection of the true values of herself. False selves are created because it is seen as the only way to fit in with a particular group, because it is the expected behavior imposed by a teacher or other authority figure, or because she is afraid no one will understand or like her true self. In this mid-adolescence stage, important developmental goals include “acquir[ing] a clear and consolidated sense of true self, that is a realistic and internalized one that will lay the basis for future identity development” (Harter, p. 354), creating a more realistic possible self and moving towards that self, and resolving conflicts between true and false selves. This does not imply creating a single self that acts the same in every role but a self that is consistent and honest within each role.

Part of identity development is the creation of self-esteem, meaning being competent in those differentiated areas that are important to her and important to the people she respects and wants respect from. A girl may simultaneously have high self-esteem in one area and low self-esteem in another. Self-esteem then should be viewed as a collection of values of self-esteem in these various areas rather than a cumulative score. The areas where a girl places the most emphasis is based on her idealized self and on the feedback from people who are most supportive. If she views her parents as supportive and
understanding and her parents have high academic expectations then the girl will usually place higher value on academics. Girls enhance their self-esteem both through commitment to relationships and from standing up and being respected for their own beliefs even when in conflict with those around them. High self-esteem contributes to motivation and confidence and can act as a buffer against stressful situations.

A third part of identity development during this time is the creation of an "ideological conscience", that is the way she feels about topics from abortion to war. She listens to the voices around her – parents, friends, and teachers and then adopts and tries out different positions. Positions can change after new experiences or meeting new people. It is easy for girls to believe that their views are wrong until she meets someone who validates the viewpoint. This is particularly true if she is being pressured to adopt some position, such as against abortion, in order not to be criticized or ostracized.

Personality formation is the fourth important part of identity development. From strong relationships come an understanding of love, sharing, compassion, respect, and empathy. Feeling secure in a relationship gives the girl the strength to risk autonomy without fear of losing connection. Adolescent girls struggle to create and maintain these strong relationships. They want these relationships to be open and honest and want others to know them and appreciate them for their true self.

Adolescence is a time when girls formulate their sexual identity. Sexual roles are the area where there is the greatest double standard between men and women in adolescence. Judith Jordan phrases this as "the emergence in boys of sexual entitlement and in girls of sexual accommodation". The idea of female sexual purity until marriage is
still very strong in many cultures. It is particularly hard to deal with because much of the
pressure comes from religious authorities. Even in sexually active teenage women it is
considered proper only in the context of a long-term relationship. Girls need to be
allowed to acknowledge intense sexual desire. They need information about their bodies,
adults to talk openly with about their bodies and feelings, and freedom to decide how and
when to express their sexuality. Girls live in an environment of “silencing, denigration,
and obscuring of female sexual desire”. There is still a prevalent notion of women,
particularly in working class culture, as sexual objects rather than sexual beings.
Adolescent girls are taught to be accepting victims and to take blame for violence against
them.

The “formal operational thought” phase is just one stage in a long process of
identity development. Throughout her life, a girl is absorbing lessons about gender, class,
race, religion, ethnicity, and expectations from parents, family, and peer groups. There are
also stresses and unresolved issues that a girl can carry with her from previous
developmental stages into adolescence. According to the Oregon Commission on
Children and Youth Services, “when girls are transitioning to adulthood, unresolved
issues from earlier stages of development may come to a head. Incomplete bonding in
infancy, failed relationships with adults, sexual abuse, and other problems can result in an
inability to form positive relationships, lack of self-respect, ignorance of health or
sexuality issues, and low self-esteem.” Unresolved issues from previous stages make it
harder to complete subsequent adolescent development stages.
IV. A Framework for understanding runaway behaviors

Since much of adolescent development happens through interactions with others, "the study of adolescence cannot be taken out of the societal setting in which it occurs, especially when that society is itself undergoing change." (Elliott, p. 8) Social psychological frameworks are a good fit for this type of analysis as they look at how social forces in a particular historical context create both opportunities and constraints as well as affect social attitudes and norms. The framework models the interrelated dynamics of family, community, school, and peer relationships that occur within the context of the social environment. These dynamics create conflicting forces that push a girl from the house as well as pull her into the house. The goal of these models is to understand the psychology of how people make decisions based on internal motivations, self-perceptions, and personal constraints in response to these push and pull forces. Identifying places in this framework where stresses can trigger problem behavior might provide clues to class-specific patterns as well as lead to more appropriate directions for early detection, measures for prevention, and guidelines for care.

There are several premises built into this framework, the first of which derives from Kimberle Crenshaw’s model of intersectionality. She argues that each combination of race, class, and gender forms a unique group with unique experiences. For instance, the experiences of Black women cannot be modeled as the sum of the experiences with sexism by white women added to the experiences of racism by Black men. A person’s experience will be dictated by how they are positioned in relation to intersecting and hierarchical forms of race, class, and gender subordination. Working-class girls cannot
simply be added in to models of identity and youth culture that are created based on observation of middle class males.

The next premise is that of agency. Even though working class families still tend to be male dominated, girls are not passive victims of patriarchy. They are active agents searching for spaces in which they can define themselves. They have ideas about who they are and who they want to be independent of the images that others attempt to impose on them and find ways to push back on imposed identities. While some authors do recognize these alternative and, sometimes, subversive spaces, they are referred to as the ‘borderlands’ or the ‘underground’. This is not necessarily the perspective of the girls occupying these spaces. It is only by centering a model based in their culture and framing it as an alternative normative culture that it becomes possible to understand the complex and contradictory interactions that exist in these girls’ lives. It is always necessary to look at the experiences of people from their own perspective in order to understand the decisions they make. In addition, a useful model cannot romanticize their lives and needs to account for the divisions as well as the solidarity that exist.

Focusing only on girls does not imply that there is anything innate or essential, other than reproductive capability, in the nature of girls that allows them to be described as a coherent group. What binds them together is that they have been socialized in similar ways and have grown up subjected to similar economic and social forces. There are considerable psychological differences between girls that need to be accounted for, both across and within class boundaries, sometimes more so than between girls and boys.
Economic influences on working class families

Structural changes in the American economy over the past 20 years have caused economic hardship for many working-class families. High paying jobs in heavy industry such as auto and steel manufacturing have been lost due to overseas migration of manufacturing jobs, the diminishing power of labor unions, international competition, and efforts to downsize companies and achieve higher worker productivity. Over the last 20 years, there has been a continual downward pressure on earnings of working-class men. Adolescent girls face a decrease in jobs available for high-school graduates and a growing emphasis on technology. In addition, there is a shift from full-time jobs to a part-time labor force and the increase, by choice or necessity, of mothers in the labor force coupled with an increased divorce rate. The loss of jobs translates into less money in the community for schools, public transportation, and community programs. It can drive down property values and reduce the tax base, thus further affecting social programs. These forces can affect girls by creating conflicting and stressful kinship arrangements, increasing time spent alone as latchkey kids, adding more responsibility for taking care of siblings and household tasks, providing less economic stability, and introducing greater uncertainty about the future. Families may withdraw from social networks or move away from kinship groups to take other jobs.

The restructuring of the economy affects communities as well as families. The loss of jobs in one sector has a cascading effect on other sectors. Neighborhood stores and restaurants close and some families move away. One effect of this breakdown of communities is the loss of positive interaction with non-family male and female adult role...
models. It is important for these girls to have strong relationships with adult women, either a favorite aunt, a neighbor, a friend’s parent, or teacher. In established communities this person would be part of the neighborhood, a member of the same socioeconomic class, and able to relate to the day to day life of the girl. It is also important to be able to establish trusting relationship with adult males. For some of these girls their relationships with males consist of an absent or disinterested father, and uncaring or unsympathetic teachers or counselors.

Family dynamics affecting adolescent girls

An adolescent girl’s life at home is subject to both direct interactions (parent-child relationship) and indirect interactions (marital conflict and inherent gender-based power relationships). Outside the home, important dynamics include same and opposite sex peer group interactions, friendships, romantic and sexual relationships, attitudes and interactions concerning school, and work experience.

The first set of influences to consider is direct parent-child interactions. The popular theory that identity is formed through adolescent rebellion against parental control was included in the germinal work on identity development by Erikson in 1968. Like much of the work in adolescent psychology these studies were based on observing a middle-class, white, male cohort. Erikson proposed that for identity development, “the adolescent needs a psychological moratorium, a period of time without excessive responsibilities or obligations to restrict the pursuit of self-discovery.” (Harter, p. 376, quoting Erikson) This hardly describes the world of the working class adolescent girl. For them, struggles in relationships are not about breaking away but about finding a balance
between independence and connection in family relationships. Parents who view the behavior as rebellion and either impose strict rules or remove themselves from the relationship isolate their daughter without the support and guidance she is seeking. There is a difference between the concept of independence and the concept of disconnection. The point that a teenager no longer has a right to be taken care of is different than a right to strong emotional relationships with family and an emotional safety net to protect them when needed. Adolescents need to remain connected emotionally while being encouraged and allowed to individualize.

Working class families are still largely characterized by a gender based power dynamics where the father occupies a dominant position in the family structure. This is reflected in how girls talk about their relationships with their fathers (Way, 1998)

One girls describes,

“My father and I have discussions every once in awhile. But then I don’t agree with his view so when he says something, you know, I try to challenge it. You know, find out why he thinks that way. And he’ll get mad [be]cause he doesn’t like when people try to challenge him.” (Way, 1998, p. 118)

Another girl describes a similar home situation,

“Sometimes my dad makes my mother cry and I don’t like that and every time he does that I go up to his face and tell him that I really love my mother and he shouldn’t be doing that to her....And I always get on his case real bad [be]cause I remember that he is going
to be getting on everybody’s case but I told him not on mine

[be]cause I’ve taken a lot of stuff. I’m up to my head already with all of this stuff.” (Way, 1998, p. 118)

A popular model that has been used in the literature to describe the interaction between parents and daughter’s runaway behavior centers on child rearing styles. Parenting styles were categorized (Baumrind, p. 43) as permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative. Permissive parents are non-demanding and non-controlling and children receive little guidance about friends, values, and acceptable behaviors. Authoritarian parenting values strict obedience to rules and uses punishment to enforce rules. In between are authoritative parents who are firm and demanding but equally loving. Clearly children who are abused in the name of parenting will seek to free themselves from that environment. This categorization does little to address runaway behavior in children where the families appear to fit the authoritative description. A model needs to start from the viewpoint of the adolescent and understand the causes of runaway behavior rather than looking at parenting styles and looking for correlation. A model (Crespi, p. 867) that is more consistent with the behavior of working class girls describes runaway behavior as a result of conflict-induced behavior within a system of dysfunctional parenting. In this model, adolescents try to balance the need for autonomy with the need for interdependence. This enables adolescents to gain greater control over their lives and at the same time gradually recreate a relationship with parents on a more mutual level. Crespi describes the successful adolescent as a self-differentiated person who has a clear sense of personal self, is capable of separating emotional decisions from rational
decisions, and is able to empathize with family members and help others solve personal problems while still being able to disengage and maintain emotional boundaries.

Crespi attributes the success or failure of an adolescent’s self-differentiation process to the family’s ability to provide support, that is an environment conducive to the development of an appropriate balance between autonomy and connection. If the environment is too controlling the youth may seek autonomy by running away. Likewise, if the environment neglects the need for intimacy the youth may run away to find a group which provides the comfort and approval that is missing at home. Clearly, problems with differentiation can create a push force. For the case where the adolescent is seeking connection but the home environment does not provide support for self-differentiation, it seems likely that the need for differentiation can be mitigated through interactions with other relatives or even with peer groups. The girl may spend less time at home and more time with relatives and friends but will not leave this extended network of support. If other opportunities for differentiation do not exist because of a lack of extended kin network or the girl is unable to establish close peer relationships, or the demands on her to be home to take care of siblings then there is less of a pull force keeping her at home.

Feelings of rejection create another powerful push force on the adolescent girl. One manifestation is when a girl feels that a parent rejects her regardless of anything she does. This is most common when parents are divorced and the non-resident parent cuts off contact with the child. It also occurs when the girls wants a meaningful relationship with a stepparent and is unable to establish a connection, particularly when a stepparent brings other children into the family. A second manifestation is when the girl feels
rejection for not living up to expectations or standards set by the parents. This is particularly true when the parents make their emotional support contingent on meeting expectations. Adolescents have a strong desire to fulfil parent’s expectations and to be respected by parents. The child feels accepted or rejected for what she does and not for who she is. One example is in immigrant families where children do not want to abide by cultural expectations. Another example is where parents base acceptance on a child’s grades, career goals, or choice of friends. Rejection is different than not being able to stay in connection.

Adolescent girls often begin to associate with peer groups displaying problem behaviors before running away. Hanging out with the ‘wrong crowd’ has often been blamed for running away and low self-esteem. However, recent studies have shown that feelings of failure, rather than rebellion, due to the results of inconsistent and ineffective parenting drive girls to seek out these groups. (B. Brown, p. 174) It is not as simple as the girl seeking a way to build self-esteem because the differentiated areas where her self-esteem is damaged are not those that will be elevated by problem behaviors. It is a fundamental rejection of the former true self as being unrealistic due to internalized feelings of failure combined with a feeling that she will fail at any new self that she creates based on her own motivations. She creates a new true self in line with the values of the new group. As with the creation of any true self she will then begin to build up self-esteem through behaviors that are valued by the new group. She may take this on with a great deal of passion and an accelerated path of self-destructive behaviors.
Indirect family influences such as stressful situations at home from constant arguments between parents, particularly about the child, can prevent an adolescent from being able to go through the self-differentiating process. It is particularly harmful if the child is asked to take sides in these arguments and risk rejection from one of the parents. Stress and anxiety are powerful push forces. In families that do not have good conflict resolution skills, children may not have the tools to deal with conflict or to deal with the resultant stress.

The differentiation model also needs to be extended for the important case where the girl rejects connection, not as a way of seeking autonomy but because she has decided that connection to anyone is too painful. Adolescents who run because of lack of support for differentiation will usually not run away from home unless they have somewhere to run to, that is some person or group that can provide the attachment or independence the youth is seeking. There needs to be some other culture that appears to supply the support that the girl is looking for. For the girl running as a rejection of connection she needs an example to follow, that is someone who validates, at least in her mind, that she can survive on her own.

Any change in living situation that causes a girl to lose connection to friends and other adult role models, or to switch schools can cause stresses that can lead to running away. On the other hand, job market changes for working-class families can also have a positive influence on daughter's lives. Gerson (Gerson, p. 100) proposes that as women work more hours and take on more responsibility for the family's earnings they use that...
leverage to push back on traditional gender relationships to gain more autonomy for themselves at home.

For the purpose of discussing gender relationships and the impact on working class adolescent girls, Mann (Mann, p. 3) makes the distinction between ‘traditional’ working class and ‘transitional’ working class families. Transitional families are in the process of redefining gender relationships. She notes that mothers who are gaining autonomy and control in their adult relationships demonstrate less power-assertive mothering towards their adolescent daughters. They are less likely to allow the father to make the parenting and discipline decisions, encourage their daughters to stand up for themselves at schools and in all relationships and provided more independence and support for their daughters. Daughters started taking the mothers’ opinions more seriously. Where previously, mother’s pronouncements that education was important were subordinated to father’s view that girls did not need education. She proposes that mothers and daughters developed autonomy in parallel. Girls who flourished were ones whose mothers made strong demands on them for maturity and self-reliance while providing emotional support and supporting their wish for a good education. She found that girls who reported poor relationships with their mothers often displayed anger and bitterness and also were suffering academically. One explanation for this is that there is a special bond between a daughter and the parent she most relates to.

In working class families where there has been a more traditional gender based division of labor and power, the mother and daughter are both living under the same sets of constraints. Particularly if the mother is working to remove those constraints at the
same time the daughter is searching for autonomy there is a natural alliance. In many of these working class transitional families, fathers spent more time with the children and achieved a greater understanding about current youth culture and the needs of their daughters. If there is a full transition to gender equality and sharing of child raising responsibilities, it is likely that daughters will develop strong relationships with either or both parents.

There is conflicting information on the effect of the growing divorce rate on working-class girls. Mann reports that in her study 30% of the girls now live in single-parent mother headed households. For some of the girls, divorce was a very difficult time and they reported a sense of loss, possibly more over their parent’s unavailability and emotional preoccupation with their own situation that over the divorce itself. Many girls reported that seeing their mothers as independent gave them a sense of what was possible for them. There is no information on how many of these mothers were able to support the family on their own income or what other benefits they received or how much disruption there was in the family. A Canadian study (English) reports that 67% of the runaway girls came from parents who were divorced.

Relationships between daughter and parents can be strained by the daughter making value judgements about the parents and then rejecting the connection. A girl may look down on her mother for not standing up for herself or for having given up her own goals to support her husband. This family stress through loss of respect adds tension and also removes a force pulling the girl to stay at home.
Extensive writings on middle class girls have led to a better understanding of the ways that these girls are socialized to emphasize relationships over autonomy and how they develop *different voices* of moral reasoning. More recently, this body of work has begun to expand to include girls from working class backgrounds. Working class families foster strong feelings of independence that is passed on to daughters as well as to sons. This independence, self-reliance, and attitude of standing up for beliefs is based on class identity. These girls, who live at this intersection of class and gender subordination, are taught to push back against class subordination but at the same time taught to respect gender subordination. Peer groups formed along class and gender boundaries. Within these groups, girls displayed and valued autonomy as well as connection. Way (Way, 1995, p. 113) found through her interviews that the ability to be outspoken and honest, to express care and affection, but also to express anger and disagreement were valued.

However, this ability to “give voice to her opinions, thoughts, and feelings” did not develop until the girls were 16 and 17 years old. (Way, 1995, p. 119) Prior to that age they described their role in peer relationships as “remaining quiet” or “giving in” to the older and more dominant members of the group. It is not clear whether this ability is the result of having successfully completed the mid-adolescent developmental processes or whether it comes about from being one of the older members of the group and asserting dominance. It is also not clear if it provides a stronger connection of the girl to the peer group and a greater incentive against running away. Does the ability to speak up at home develop at the same age as the ability to speak up in peer relationships? Is one a precursor
to the other? Are the skills needed to form these strong interconnections created as a result of or a necessary predecessor to the differentiation process? Without the willingness to speak up, it may be harder for parents to understand the depth of stress and anxiety in their children and to address issues before the girl runs away.

The differentiation process happens with peers as well as with family. Girls create individual identities and group identities that are practiced and critiqued amongst the group. Girls see how much independence and autonomy they can have and still be accepted as a member of the group. Can they choose a boyfriend that no one else approves of but remain in the group? Valerie Hey describes the youth culture of working class girls at school. (Hey, 1997) She notices how many middle-class girls are more willing to subordinate their own identity to that of the group than are working-class girls. Consistent with the premise of intersectionality, she also found that peer groups were segmented along race, sexual preference and sexual activity boundaries as well as class. One group used “mandated forms of social control” to maintain their group as “sexy but not sexually active” girls. This is different than peer pressure to act in a certain way as a price of membership. It is using the group to provide validation and support for the shared objective of wanting to be in control of their sexual choices. In spite of the dominant male discourse of casting girls as sexual objects, these girls created their own discourse. They cast themselves as the normative group and created a vocabulary of derogatory words for the ‘others’, that is the girls who (from their viewpoint) allowed themselves to be sexually manipulated as the price of having a boyfriend. They also protected each other as much as possible from sexual harassment or violence. She characterizes many girls’
overall experience at school as a feeling of rejection and disappointment and “girlfriends were ideal for handling the pain of rejection.” (Hey, p. 127) Strong friendships can act both as a pull force keeping a girl from running away in regards to certain stresses at home and also provide a temporary shelter when home is too stressful to deal with. For girls who are not connected to a friendship group there is no counterbalancing force for the feelings of rejection at school, additional feelings of rejection for not being part of a group, and no additional incentive for staying at home.

Influence of School

School is the most salient institution in most adolescents’ lives. It is the primary site for interaction with non-parental authority figures, with peer groups, and friends. It is where they are supposed to be receiving the education that will prepare them for college or jobs. Exploring how working-class girls view and interact with their school reveals additional forces and mitigating factors in their lives that can affect decisions about leaving home. Understanding the dynamics, power relationships, and conflicts that working-class girls face at school is valuable when designing recovery programs or alternative educational environments for these girls.

Working-class girls can feel trapped in a school environment designed to control them rather than educate and support them. Schools still promote middle class, mostly male, values and aspirations. Working class girls have often lead less sheltered lives than their middle class counterparts but their real-world experiences are not recognized or valued. They can feel ignored and dismissed by teachers and are more willing to speak out or act out their frustration. Their anger is less likely to be hidden and tends to be more
sustained, intense, and physical and their behavior is viewed as disruptive to classes or delinquent. There is a particular anger towards teachers who are expected to understand them but instead try to impose on them the prevailing middle class mores.

School personnel make an assumed connection between 'well-behaved' and 'good student'. Behaviors such as smoking, fighting, swearing or ridiculing and questioning authority should not be viewed as necessarily bad or as roadblocks to education and high levels of achievement. They may be the means by which a girl maintains a connection to her culture, her self-perception, or her peer group. It may actually enable her to work harder at academics because she is not sacrificing her self-image in order to study hard. Being perceived as the toughest member of her peer group may compensate for her loss of standing resulting from a high attachment to academics and allow her to remain connected to a group she values. This position requires a strong sense of autonomy or a strong connection to a family member who places high expectations on her achievements. School policies that impose punishment and try to alter behavior without accounting for these dynamics will have the opposite effect of their intentions. They will be viewed as an unjust use of authority, equate authority with education, and be viewed as devaluing the girl's culture and denigrating her ability to make choices about her lifestyle. It is important for the school to view the behaviors from the perspective of these girls.

Valerie Hey(Hey, p. 140) argues that because girls spend a lot of time together, teachers and administrators are less likely to see each girl as an individual. In the eyes of the teacher, the girls take on the characteristics of the group as perceived from the outside and interpreted through an analytical framework designed for studying middle-class boys.
The fact that a girl has an individual identity, even when participating as part of a group, is often missed entirely. Teachers also fail to see the differences between the dynamics of groups of middle-class girls and working-class girls and don’t see the complexity and conflicts that occur within each group. The girls as a group are categorized as “trailer park kids” (Finders) or seen through a lens of “assumed academic underachievement.” (Hey, p. 9) Particularly when faced with large class sizes, teachers often choose a few students, whom they perceive as being good students, to focus attention on. Working-class girls do not fit the stereotype of the good (passive and obedient) student and don’t receive the personal attention in spite of their equal desire to learn and succeed. Even though cultural ideas about middle class is expanding to include women, stereotypes of the working class are still very much built around men.

Studies by Lyn Mikel Brown point out class-based differences amongst girls in their expectations for school, in their interactions with each other and with their teachers. (Brown, 1998) She argues that middle-class girls have a fundamental trust in authority and a system based on meritocracy. They come from families that live the American dream and they believe that they will grow up to have the same position and rewards. They are more likely to be trained to follow rules and not to assert their own personalities in order to get through school. Working-class girls do not share either a relationship with or basic trust in authority, particularly at school. They do not share a belief that they will ever have enough money to achieve middle-class standing or that good jobs will be available to them following graduation. They do not have the experience of upward mobility so in the absence of role models who have succeeded through education there is
a general disbelief that this educational system will benefit them. Nor do they have the
‘cultural capital’; the style of speech, behavior, attitudes, or rote learning study skills
needed to succeed in this environment. These girls rarely have a tradition of academic
achievement within their family to serve as a model.

Working-class girls generally leave school directly after classes are over and have
low participation rates in school sports and clubs. This is partly due to the need to work
after school or help out at home, partly due to a lack of connection with the school, and
because the focus and projects of groups do not reflect their interests or take advantage of
their experiences. (Hey, p. 127)

Many working class families rely on social networks for sharing transportation,
childcare, and other services. Socialization at school may serve to build equivalent social
networks for these girls as well as the networking skills that they might need later on.
Sharing clothes and jewelry is a way to deal with the middle class pressure to look good
without each girl trying to save enough money to buy all her own clothes. These girls do
not have the expectation of being supported by a boyfriend or husband.

Schools teach about sexuality as violence, sexuality as victimization, and
sexuality as morality but not, for girls, sexuality as desire. Men are the initiators and girls
learn how to defend themselves. The consequences of sex are taught as disease and
pregnancy rather than equality, passion, and intimacy. For girls from religious families
where sexual discourse does not occur at home, school is the place they turn to for
information and discussion but little information is available other than from friends.
Society’s deeply ingrained views on sexual purity contribute to its inability to deal with
prostitution and the labeling of teenage prostitutes as “morally corrupt”. Teenage prostitution has more to do with violence and control than with sexuality and needs to be addressed in those terms. When schools do not provide a structure for their success, the girl’s desire to meet her expectations of herself and her parents turns into disappointment, rejection, and feeling of failure and hopelessness for the future and damages her self-esteem in a number of differentiated areas. If she feels like a failure at home and a failure at school, running away removes her from both stressful situations.

Influence of work experience

Work experience is another important aspect in the life of adolescents and another place where gender and class differences exist. Most working-class adolescent girls still envision their future as getting a job when they graduate from high school. Limited family resources, self-perception, lack of role models who went to college, and their belief in what kinds of jobs they can get discourage many girls from continuing their education past high school. Hamilton studied patterns of employment both during and after high school and attitudes about employment in working-class adolescent girls. (Hamilton, et. al, 1990) 80% of the girls in their study had worked part time during the school year or in summer jobs while in high school, all in the food service and retail markets. They note that while many middle-class girls view summer employment as a way to make spending money before going to college, working-class girls were more likely to need the income and perceived the jobs as a way to gain training, experience, and references to enable them to get a full time job after graduation. There is definitely a correlation between amount of work experience in high school and employment rates after high school. It
would be nice to believe that this is due to an increase in the human capital of these girls that would have long term benefits in employment. Hamilton proposes that it is most likely that these girls took the same job after high school that they had while in high school. The more years they had worked part-time at that job, the easier it was to get a permanent position there. They also propose that girls might have gotten full time jobs because years of work experience is viewed by employers as dedication and commitment rather than because of any real skill they had learned on the job. This was echoed in responses from the girls that while they believed they had learned responsibility and maturity at having a 'real' job, there wasn't anything new to learn after the first month of work.

Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) noted that over time these low paying part time jobs led to cynical attitudes about work, reinforcing previous beliefs about what working would be like the rest of their lives, and in some cases provided less incentive for even finishing high school. They attribute these attitudes to the low demand for skill, the lack of adult supervision, arbitrary rules, and the attitudes of others workers. The jobs were highly routinized and provided little or no opportunity for decision making. Girls who were able to assist customers with purchase decisions or display talents that received positive customer feedback had a higher impression of the job experience. Few of the girls interviewed had raised their expectations about their career possibilities as a result of their summer jobs. Hamilton concludes that while middle class girls move from high school to college to careers, working-class girls still move primarily from high school to low-paying, low-skill jobs. By providing such limited job choices, I believe we are
missing a chance to provide girls a valuable connection to the community, an opportunity
to achieve autonomy, raise self-esteem, and provide impetus for interest in academics.
Jobs should provide a way to expose girls to new experiences and to see new possibilities
for careers. Low-paying, low-challenge jobs provide nothing that could contribute to a
girl’s decision to stay at home or run away. Hamilton advocates the creation of long-term
apprenticeship programs. These would provide increasingly challenging jobs and be for
two or three years during high school and summers.

Understanding Running Away behavior within the framework

The decision to run away is not something that an adolescent takes lightly. While
the act of running away may be triggered by one emotional confrontation, it is not a
decision that is made quickly or easily. An adolescent girl will use running away as an
adjustment strategy to remove herself from a situation that is too stressful to handle. The
stress may only be indirectly related to home but being at home would force her to face
the situation. An example would be not wanting to face a situation at school that is
particularly stressful. Running away may start as a short-term strategy for stress relief but
the patterns of behavior during her absences, such as drinking, drug use, theft, and missed
school create additional direct stresses that may cause her to leave permanently. For other
girls, running away is seen from the start as a solution to long term and seemingly
unresolvable stress at home. Parental expectations and continuous criticism for not
meeting them can cause the girl to internalize feelings of failure. Even though she may
blame herself for not being good enough and not see fault in her parents, running away
provides relief from the constant reminder of her failure. When a girl feels that she will
never be the person she wants to be or has always expected she would be, running away provides an adjustment strategy by removing her from the situation that constantly reminds her of her academic or social failure. Not attempting a particular task by withdrawing from a situation in which there is too much cost for her in failing is both stress relief and provides an alternative rationalization for not meeting her goal. There is significant literature on problems due to a girl’s lack of connection to family and institutions. However, running away can also be the result of a strong connection to parents where the girl is so invested in having the love of parents but believes she cannot achieve it. It can also be the result of rejecting connection because she perceives the price of connection is too high or that anyone who gets to know her will not like her or see her as a failure. When a girl rejects connection, she may reject connection with all adults and even with friends. Once a girl has run away, she develops adaptive strategies for finding shelter and food and coping strategies for dealing emotionally with the negative psychological effects of the decision.

V. Effects of interrupted development on identity

Running away disrupts normal development processes that occur through relationships with parents, non-parental adult role models, peers, and friends. In the absence of these developmental processes, “adolescents are at particular risk for developing inaccurate self-concepts which in turn lead to a variety of maladaptive behaviors.” (Harter, p. 356) This girl will be more vulnerable to stress, may develop violent physical or emotional symptoms when having to deal with a stressful situation, and may take a long time to recover from stressful situations. This can include refusal to
accept authority, paranoia, lack of ability to differentiate between positive and negative influences, and the lack of ability to control the display of false selves. She may have conflicting feelings of love and mistrust, of attachment and anger, as well as guilt and anxiety. She may have trouble developing the interpersonal skills needed for serious adult relationships in the future. She may seek to build self-esteem with groups who value delinquent behaviors. This can lead to alcohol and drug abuse, pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease, or criminal activity. In the long term, however, the greatest danger is not the delinquent behaviors but the inability to create a consistent sense of self.

“Operating in an environment almost exclusively made up of young people with conduct problems, runaway youth are at a severe disadvantage in this crucial developmental process.” (Whitbeck, p. 73)

Stressful and traumatic events can also interfere with the ability to trust and to value oneself, both of which are necessary in order to form the relationships needed for normal development. It also creates fundamental difficulties with autonomy and initiative and creates an overwhelming feeling of being alone. Some girls conclude that her own internalized failure is the cause for the family problems. This sense of failure becomes the core around which her identity continues to form. Traumatized adolescents are often filled with rage and sometimes aggressive. They lack verbal skills for resolving conflict and approach interactions with adults with the expectation of criticism. They may not have the skills to resist or avoid unwanted relationships and may make bad choices in romantic partners that leads to domestic violence. An adolescent struggling with perceived rejection develops her own value system and way of looking at the world. Since
every mistake can be a traumatic reminder of her perceived failure, she may cope by blaming her mistakes on any convenient target or on the world in general. Making this step of not accepting any responsibility opens the door for more and more outrageous actions. Recovery programs that stress girls being accountable for her own actions need to understand this dilemma.

VI. Implications for Detection, Prevention, and Recovery

School Detection and Prevention Programs

The conditions that lead to a girl running away may build up over several years. Prior to running away, girls can display detachment from their schoolwork and academic goals. Falling grades reinforces their feelings of not being good enough. Although it is less common, they may also become obsessive perfectionists driven by a desperate need to find favor in parent's eyes. Early detection of symptoms can lead to interventions. How do schools currently identify students with potential problems and what other approaches are possible? Traditionally, schools categorize a set of students as being “at-risk”, meaning that a youth is exhibiting some behavior that is considered detrimental to herself or to others around her and was 'at-risk’ of getting into more serious trouble. It focuses on acting-out behaviors and not on quietly disturbed behaviors that are equally valid predictors of problems and often harder to notice. Also, this type of definition focuses on problem behaviors and ignores or marginalizes positive or resilient characteristics of the youth. An alternative definition of risk, based on the notion from the framework that it is always necessary to examine balancing forces, is that it is the difference between the strengths, competencies, and protective factors of the individual and her vulnerabilities.
Improving the strengths and reducing the vulnerabilities in each of these influences reduces the risk that the child has of developing problem behaviors. There may that indicate signs of difficulties and provide an opportunity for early intervention. These indicators, or markers, include poor school performance, inability to form strong peer to peer friendships, unable to find a place to belong or fit in, no strong ties to an ethnic or religious group, lacking non-parental adult role models, associating with 'delinquent' or older youth or spending large amounts of time alone. These girls can also exhibit symptoms including depression, aggression, resignation and dissociation. Cognitive learning ability rather than grades appear to be a more accurate measure of school performance. (Trickett) These girls may have to deal with teasing or criticism from other students. Different markers will show up in different youth. A girl could be doing exceptionally well academically but be totally withdrawn and depressed. These students are often overlooked when a single factor such as grades is used as the primary indicator of future problems. While all of these problems may be indicators of problems that are occurring at home, they can be detected at school and trigger a program including family therapy.

There is greater risk associated with youth who initiate antisocial behavior early in adolescence. They may have low expectations for their education, have low resilience to negative peer pressure, poor support from parents and poor relationship building skills. Children who internalize criticism at home may also accept and internalizes criticism and teasing at school. In the absence of sufficient protective factors or intervention there is an increased likelihood that youth who exhibit early problem behavior will experience
negative outcomes. Some common attributes of existing at-risk programs are that they focus on changing a certain behavior of the individual. This approach tends to ignore the underlying causes, focuses attention on a particular, narrow problem, and attempts to address an issue only after it has become serious enough to cause antisocial behavior.

Looking at risk does not have to identify risk as pertaining to a specific end, such as alcohol abuse, dropping out, or running away. The end result can take many different forms. Even ‘low-risk’ children need support and guidance and connection in order to bolster strength. Establishing a sense of caring and being connected are important deterrents to high-risk behavior. A belief in the fairness of social institutions helps to create a bond to school, belief in conventional social rules and a commitment to conventional goals. Adolescents who are living in a stressful home environment and decide that connection is too painful may reject attempts from teachers or counselors to establish connections. At the time when these girls most need connection, they are most apt to reject it. Teachers may then ignore the student when overtures of connection are rejected instead of seeing this as a sign for concern. For some youth, there is a feeling that it is better to be alone than to risk being criticized. Children in stressful home environments may also not have close friends. They do not want other children coming to their homes nor do they want to talk about what their home life is like so they isolate themselves. In young adolescence, as peer groups become more important, these girls may find that they do not fit with any group nor have the relationship skills that other girls have developed over time.
This paper proposes that programs specifically designed for young working class women should be incorporated into existing public schools that serve this population. While all adolescents deal with issues of identity development, these girls' face the additional challenge of dealing with institutionalized gender and class subordination. It may be difficult for them to find role models, male and female, who resist the gender and class stereotyping. As long as different development paths exist, different programs for strengthening protective factors and minimizing risk factors are needed. Girls' groups (Ford, p. 1) provide a safe environment where working-class girls can get together with a counselor or social worker and share concerns about their lives. Groups can be held outside of the school at a place where the working-class girls feel comfortable. This has to be done in an atmosphere of confidentiality and respect. These groups probably work best for dealing with relationship and school issues as girls are unlikely to discuss their home lives in this setting. However, such a group can establish a relationship between a girl and a counselor that can be extended on an individual basis.

It is important for adolescent women to have adults other than parents who play a positive role in their development. Validation from adults is a strong protective factor. In schools, this is often left to the initiative of a teacher or guidance counselor rather than being institutionalized as a formal program.

Pressure for early sexual activity is present in representational systems, in relationships with boyfriends and even from peer competition or desire to be seen as grown-up or daring. Belonging to a group with healthy peer relationships can be a positive protective factor while criticism, teasing, being left out of activities, being
ostracized can be negative influences. A strong ethnic identity and verbal assertiveness are needed. Teachers should be trained to understand assertiveness, anger, and fighting as they apply to girls.

Several foundations have published recommendations for gender-specific school programming. These guidelines, though, do not include a perspective that reflects how working class girls live at the intersection of both gender and class subordination. For instance, the Valentine Foundation proposes that effective gender-based programming for adolescent girls include the following elements (Valentine Foundation):

1. Spaces that are physically and emotionally safe, removed from the demands for attention of adolescent males.

2. Opportunities for girls to develop relationships of trust and interdependence with other women.

3. Programs that reflect and strengthen girls’ cultural identities and strengthen ties to cultural groups in the community.

4. Mentors (not tutors) who share experiences that resonate with the reality of the girls’ lives and who have achieved their goals.

5. Education on women’s health and sexuality.

6. Opportunities for girls to create positive change in the school and the community.

7. Giving girls a voice in program design and implementation

8. Curriculum at schools that reflects and values experiences and contributions of women

9. Staff that reflects the diversity of the student population.

10. Classes should include group assignments as well as individual assignments and promote and reward both cooperative effort and individual effort. However, teachers must train students on effective-group interactions and how to handle conflicts in groups

11. Programs should promote decision-making skills in girls and positive relationship building skills

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12. Family, school, and community need to work together to form a comprehensive network of programs with a consistent message.

While these recommendations may help achieve gender equality, they reflect a middle class perspective. Working-class girls do not generally have a problem finding 'emotionally-safe' space. Opportunities to make connections to adult women is only valuable when there are women present that these girls want to make attachments to. School curricula, teacher's attitudes and training, and standards of behavior and appearance are based on the dominant ideology of achieving the American dream through class mobility. The 'working-class' is taught as something to strive to escape from. This inherent degrading of the working class and working class values affects girls' attitude about school and about themselves.

Sports programs are held after school when many working-class girls have family or work responsibilities. Clubs, art projects, and even yearbook fees have a built in assumption that families have enough money for these activities. Computer equipment present in many middle-class homes is not affordable to working class families. Working-class parents often do not have the background to help children with schoolwork and tutoring programs are also after school when many girls can not participate. A 5-year high school program that allows students to take fewer classes each semester would leave time within each class for tutoring, homework, and computer use. There should be two sections a day rather than individual hour-long periods. One section would cover English, and Social Science and the other Math and Physical Sciences. This would allow for longer projects or a focus on a particular subject with time for questions.

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Programs also err on the side of having women’s programs run exclusively by women. Both male and female teachers and counselors have unique life experiences that can be shared positively in their interactions with young women. Many girls have not had positive experiences with adult males or only interact with males who are in an authoritative position. Male teachers can provide positive role models as well as demonstrate appropriate interaction and conflict resolution methods and provide an alternative model to what the girls may see at home. Students need an environment where they see adults of both genders working together as equals in a positive, cooperative relationship. Such programs would provide connection to social institutions and provide a pull force that contributes to a girl’s decision not to run away.

Recovery Programs for Runaways

Girls who do run away need special programs to help with physical and psychological recovery. Often girls who run away become involved with alcohol and drug abuse and the first steps must be recovery from these problems. Following that is a program that starts to address the effects of stress and trauma. An effective guideline proposed by Judith Herman (Herman, p. 133) include three main steps of establishing safety, understanding and reconciliation, and starting to build new relationships. When this is applied in cases of rape, child abuse, or war veterans, the source of the trauma is obvious and reconciliation is a matter of learning to deal with the anger and pain while moving on with one’s life. For cases of runaway girls, the source may not be apparent to them or they may think their own failure to meet their parent’s expectations is the source. Each of the stages can take many months. A patchwork of one and two week programs is

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not going to help girls deal with emotional and identity problems caused by trauma and exacerbated by running away. Programs need to be designed and funded with the understanding that one or two years will be necessary. A residential program, which isolates the girl from outside influences, provides an effective environment for starting the recovery process. A girl who feels that running away gave her control over her life or psychological control over her parents will be reluctant to give up that control and may keep running away from any program. In addition, girls who rely on running away for stress relief will have a difficult time dealing with any stressful situation as part of recovery. The girls I spoke with at halfway houses identified being incarcerated in a juvenile detention center, being assaulted, becoming pregnant, or becoming very ill as their reasons for deciding to seek or agree to an alternative program. These girls could be considered ‘voluntary’ participants although failure for some meant going back to a highly undesirable place. Certainly physical measures such as lockdowns and 24 hour supervision could alleviate further running away problems but creating a controlling environment is not the goal. I think that giving the girls some say in the programs and running of the facility, recognizing conditions that can prompt running away, and providing positive reward for staying gives added incentive to stay. Situating the facility on a large piece of land in a rural setting would provide an ability to create safe havens on the property for stress relief. It might also discourage running if there is no place to run to. Girls need to view the program as an alternative lifestyle rather than punishment. For the first phase where the girl is dealing with physical recovery the only rules that are needed are safety rules, such as no weapons or drugs. It is unrealistic to expect that the girl will
want or even be capable of developing a close or trusting relationship with others at this time.

Recovery needs to be done through a collaborative psychological effort between girl and caregiver. The girl’s lack of trust in authority figures may be displayed as toughness, hostility, or aloofness and progress will be slow at the beginning. The process will be carried out through a combination of individual meetings with a primary counselor and through group meetings. Groups provide a sense of support and understanding, belonging, acceptance for who you are, giving and receiving.

After the girl is comfortable in the environment and has worked out issues of control, the second phase of recovery is understanding and reconciliation. This involves exploring with the girl the different reasons that might be responsible for the way she feels and acts. This will be a stressful process and might cause a resurgence of running away or hostile behavior. The girl may not want to accept that there has been any psychological harm. People, in general, do not want to admit that there is something wrong with them. The caregiver needs to frame the discussions that acknowledging one’s condition and taking steps to fix it are signs of strength. During this phase will be the first limited contact with family members, preferably at the school. Slowly moving into family therapy can rebuild relationships with family members and give girls a sense of whether they want to eventually move back home. If nothing else, it allows the girl to express her feelings in a controlled situation without confrontation.

The third stage of recovery focuses on the present and on the future. It is a time for rebuilding damaged identity and personality, learning techniques for managing stress,
and starting to create strong relationships. The school is a place to experiment with identity in a safe environment. Girls can let go of the aspects of their personalities that were formed during traumatic experiences. It is a time for reprogramming the self. The girl becomes a person who can make rules rather than automatically follow other peoples’ rules. She has regained or created a capacity for trust and can both feel, give, and withhold trust as appropriate. She can maintain her own point of view while respecting those of others. It is “a second childhood and a second adolescence”. She might experiment with social action, which provides an alliance with others based on cooperation and shared purpose. Girls might want to volunteer at a day care center or nursing home to achieve a sense of connection with others. Another step is what I call recreating one’s life. Trauma, whether physical or mental, traps people in time. For instance, reading bedtime stories to an adolescent, starting with children’s stories, can provide the missing pieces for someone who never had that experience and allow that person, at an accelerated pace to build trust and therefore build relationships. Damaged self-esteem has been built or restored. Living skills need to be taught to girls who wish to live independent of their families. Runaways do not have the experience of living in an apartment, finding a job, and balancing expenses and income. A sense of self can only be rebuilt as it was (or needed to be) built in the first place – in relationship and connection to others and through experimentation with autonomy.

Education needs to restart during this third stage of recovery as well. For girls who did not do well in school or who do not see the relevance, placement into a traditional school environment may be unproductive as well as stressful. I believe that
distance learning programs that result in an accredited high school degree are a valuable addition to this type of program. They give each girl a measure of control to create her own set of courses and allows for extended periods of time to finish each course. Missing a week while dealing with a particularly hard issue in her life does not put her behind in her work. It also provides an opportunity for remedial or refresher courses. The school should emphasize taking the initiative and working hard to solve problems, either individually or as a group, without a predetermined right or wrong answer. It needs to emphasize how to tunnel anger and frustration to work constructively on issues.

Regaining control and autonomy is an important part of recovery. Physical exercise, self-defense, leadership training, and job training programs should be provided to aid in building self-confidence and provide a sense of accomplishment and control. In addition, simple ideas such as having the girls provide all the maintenance and repair at the school and learning skills traditionally reserved for men in the high schools provide potential job skills, independent living skills, and reduce the girls’ perceived need to be taken care of.

**VII. Conclusions**

This paper has attempted to present a view of adolescent working-class girls that may be unfamiliar to parents, teachers, counselors, and care providers. It has shown some of the forces that operate on girls’ lives and shape their experiences and has drawn attention to the importance of class as a salient parameter in this discussion. By achieving a better understanding of why girls run and the symptoms preceding it, schools can add to their early detection programs for ‘at-risk’ youth as well as start to correct some of the gender and class biases in education. Family counselors can become involved in an effort...
to improve the girl’s life at home and at school. Government agencies and care providers can provide programs that reflect the depth of psychological damage rather than focusing on short-term behavior modification and reunification with the family.
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