

THESIS

WHEN WALLS TALK:
CONSUMPTION, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS

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ABSTRACT

WHEN WALLS TALK: CONSUMPTION, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN CHILDREN'S BEDROOMS

In this thesis I assert that the discourses of both ideal and real depictions of children's bedrooms serve as vehicles for social doxa. The catalogs of Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod convey not just what an ideal boy's bedroom or girl's bedroom looks like, but what an ideal boy or girl looks and acts like. Thus, children's bedrooms operate as pedagogical sites of gender. Illuminated by Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus, furniture pieces and decorative accessories are revealed to facilitate disparate motions, lifestyles, and habits which construct disparate gender identities. In this thesis I argue that both ideal and real depictions of children's bedroom spaces function as pedagogical spaces, reflecting the doxic expectations of gender and facilitating accordant enactments of masculinity or femininity. The embodied relationship between the children and their material environment weaves the gender habitus of girlness or boyness into their performance of everyday life.

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Chapter 1

When Walls Talk: Consumption, Gender, and Identity in Children's Bedrooms

Every night, millions of children sleep wrapped in racecar sheets or under billowing canopies, lulled into slumber by a jewelry box serenade or a sky full of glow-in-the-dark planets. At the end of their beds, tea sets and action figures lie dormant on toy shelves, awaiting royal dinner parties or galactic showdowns. The toys, quilts, and walls of these childhood oases are lifeless, yet their material consequences are as real as the children to which they belong.

Children's bedrooms demand money and attention from consumers. The United States' interior design industry fuels billions of dollars of commercial consumption every year, and the rate of expenditure remains at a steady climb. In 2002 alone, \$17 billion was spent on home décor for children's bedrooms, a figure which more than doubled since the previous decade.¹ Much of this revenue is generated through new décor lines designed just for kids. For example, the emergence of children's furniture lines within well-established furniture retailers signifies the increased attention companies are giving to the interior design of children's space. Companies like Pottery Barn, Restoration Hardware, and Crate & Barrel offer catalogs and stores devoted entirely to home décor for children.

Consumers are echoing the attentiveness poured into furniture marketing by creating decorating television programs, websites, and blogs centered on the design of children's bedrooms. Bedrooms are designed as fire stations, jungle huts, and football fields, and pictured on almost every digital medium, staging the childhood bedroom as a haven of recreation and imagination. In this way, the interior design of children's rooms becomes a site of consumption of both time and money.

The billions of dollars invested in children's rooms furnish not just a home space, but also a lifestyle. Children's rooms are material and symbolic sites in which children and their parents construct, materialize, and perform gender. In my thesis, I investigate the intersections of childhood, gender, and lifestyle in the built environment. I begin this project by tracing the contours of relations among consumerism, interior design, and identity. In particular, I focus on the ways homes express materializations of gender and can be particularly important sites for children's development of their identity. Drawing on this literature, I suggest four research questions and explain both my theoretical and methodological approaches to answering these questions. Finally, I conclude this introduction with an overview of the proposed thesis chapters.

Buy for Yourself, Buy for America: Consumerism and the Home

The increasing importance of children's bedrooms in consumer culture extends the explosive growth of post WWII consumerism. More particularly, widespread consumerism was channeled toward younger and younger consumers and into the most private spaces of the home. The rise of consumer culture after WWII developed as a response to the historical context of the 1950s and continues to prosper today, despite shifting economic factors. Following the deprivations of the Great Depression and then WWII, 1950s consumerism offered opportunities to imagine a different, less difficult life. More than simply offering rising standards of living, 1950s consumer culture also connected directly to new visions of citizenship. Buying a house, a car, or even a blender became about not only your own needs, but also supporting the economic needs of the nation. Through their consumption, Americans were supporting the creation of new jobs and, thereby, the livelihood of their fellow Americans.²

Demonstrating America's newfound consumer culture, the landscape of the American housing market shifted dramatically during this time period. In fact, so many houses were built during the mid-twentieth century that about one quarter of all the homes standing in 1960 were built during the 1950s.³ Thousands of new homes meant thousands of new opportunities for consumption, as these new homes required new furniture, new appliances, and new cars to fill their garages. The drastic increase of new home construction, together with the idea that consumption was a civic responsibility, birthed a new era of marketing focused on filling American homes with American gadgets.

The rise of a more consumer-oriented culture gave way to the notion of branding. Suddenly, a washing machine was not just a washing machine, it was a Maytag washer, or a GE washer. Brand recognition became a new and important variable in a culture of consumption. In order to set themselves apart and distinguish their quality, companies began advertising not only products but also lifestyles. This process laid the foundations for the method of marketing dubbed "lifestyle branding," a technique that flourished toward the end of the twentieth century which aims to associate products with cultural and social identities.⁴ This technique imbues everything from toothpaste to high heels with a certain type of person. For example, Renzo Ross, the owner of Diesel Jeans, reported, "We don't sell a product, we sell a style of life. I think we have created a movement. . . . The Diesel concept is everything. It's the way to live, the way to wear, it's the way to do something."⁵ The hybridization of product and lifestyle facilitated by lifestyle marketing knits consumption and identity together tightly. Products are no longer defined merely by their materials or patterns, but become inextricably linked to cultural and socio-economical criteria.

Life in Context: Identity and the Home

The link between identity and consumption operates on two distinct levels within the consumption of home goods, as a representation of national identity and also as a representation of the identity of the home's inhabitant(s). Individual, family, and national identity markers are constantly informing the consumption of home good products, ensuring that every home stands not in isolation, but as a part of a local, regional, and national context. As an example, the very spaces and places acknowledged as "home" vary. National and regional codes inform whether a home consists of ice and snow, rock and grout, or wood and glass. Within the home, the design of furniture, colors, and patterns are also influenced by external codes. Codes of comfort are clearly dictated by national culture. The comfort North Americans associate with an overstuffed sofa contrasts starkly with the rope swings used to recline in Indian culture.⁶ Within American culture, hard wooden benches denote alert seating, as demonstrated by church pews or school desks. Yet, these pieces facilitate a very different pattern of behavior in Africa where wooden benches are used for lounging.⁷ Thus, the very tables and chairs of our houses gesture toward nationalized codes of lifestyle and identity.

Codes of decoration are also dictated nationally, often as a response to the trends of fashion. For instance, when national fashion trends produce shorter skirts, the lines of furniture also become thinner.⁸ Likewise, when clothing styles become more baggy and oversized, furniture silhouettes follow suit.⁹ Therefore, the same national styles governing comfort and fashion also impact furniture design. Home design is not an undertaking separate from culture, but rather one immersed within it.

More narrowly, interior design also reflects the individual identity of the one or more people who inhabit it in terms of style, socio-economic class, and also gender. Home owners use furniture to build profiles of themselves within their homes, making intentional furniture selections in order to build an environment reflective of their own style identity.¹⁰ Even second-hand furniture or inherited pieces are appropriated into the tangible expression of identity within a room.¹¹ People who may not ascribe to any one style or put much thought or consideration into the design of their home are still expressing their style identity through their lack of consideration. Mismatched, worn, or outdated furniture pieces within the home still communicate: their message is simply that interior design is not a top priority to the space's owner. In this way, every artifact of furniture reflects, demonstrates, and communicates individual style identity.

Beyond representing personal style, the home also reflects socio-economic identity. Everything from the type of artwork (or mere presence of artwork) on the walls, to a piano stationed within a living room, to antique snowshoes displayed decoratively in a corner alludes to the hobbies, social class, and tastes of the owner.¹² The materials used in a home also deposit socio-economic residue. Highly-priced materials like granite, crystal, and travertine announce expense within the home space, as well as an emphasis of aesthetics over pragmatism. Even without price tags, the material artifacts of the home enunciate socio-economic identity and once again bond identity to the home.

Finally, the home space is in relationship with the gender identity of its inhabitants. Spaces of the home are gendered in two ways, by their use and their connotation.¹³ Spaces gendered by use include dens, workshops, and garages traditionally devoted to male-gendered

activities, and kitchens, dining rooms, and sewing rooms as female-gendered spaces.¹⁴ In this case, a room is made masculine or feminine by the activities undertaken within its walls.

Rooms can also be gendered as masculine and feminine by their connotation. In this case, the colors and styles of furnishings project a gender onto a space, regardless of its use. Serious, substantial, and dark-toned design schemes are gendered as masculine rooms, whereas refined, decorative, and colorful spaces are considered feminine.¹⁵ Gender differentials within the home space have been the subject of many sitcom punch lines, as girlfriends bring teddy bears and lacey pillows into a man's bachelor pad. These sitcoms include these situations to solicit laughter, but research supports that some men really do find overly frilly or ornate home décor to be intrusive and feminizing.¹⁶ Overall, scholarship concerning gender and home design reveals that gender does filter an individual's relationship to the decoration and furnishing of the home and becomes yet another intersection of identity and interior spaces.

Keeping Up Appearances: Ideal and Real Homes

With identity so powerfully bound to interior design, shopping for home goods involves evaluating both physical products and the lifestyle ideals attached to them. Shopping is a process of purchasing items displayed in idealized environments and appropriating those items into the space of the consumer's real home. In other words, shopping for home goods is a negotiation between the ideal home and the real home. Ideal home spaces pictured in catalog pages or staged in furniture stores provide the idealized standard of interior aesthetics, and thus lifestyles.¹⁷

Ideal homes are unhindered by the constraints of budget or space, and often come accompanied by intentional lighting schemes and bountiful, color-coded accessories. Yet, even while these spaces are so picturesque and ideal, they still evoke personality. In fact, they often include water glasses perched on nightstands and half-read novels draped over ottomans, as if to testify that life is being lived in these spaces. The only thing these spaces lack are imperfections—the dirt, dog hair, and fingerprints of everyday use. Thus, displays of the ideal home live in a state of tension. Each room seems to offer consumers the opportunity to step into the pages of the catalog and into the tidy, clean lifestyle depicted therein. However, no steps can be made without the physical and psychological residue of real life following in tandem and destroying the perfection of the ideal home. These ideal depictions can only ever be rhetorical. It stands to reason, then, that the ideal home—and ideal lifestyle which accompanies it—is not an attainable goal, but an aspirational motivator.¹⁸ In other words, the notion of the ideal home is the unrealizable rhetorical standard by which all real home spaces are judged. Similar to codes of national identity or gender identity, the ideal home normalizes certain features within the home space. However, it takes the idea of standardization and normalization a step further. Rather than simply expressing how things are (how Americans perceive a comfortable chair to look, or the color associated with a masculine space), the notion of the ideal home is infused with a value judgment. For example, take the issue of a home's size. Because ideal homes are free from financial or physical burdens, real homes that are bigger and more expensive become more closely aligned with the ideal home, and thus become more desirable. More than anything, it is important to understand that the notion of the ideal home, which is created by the lifestyle marketing of home goods retailers, has significant implications on value judgments cast upon real homes. Homes are not just different from one another, they are more or less desirable than

each other, and are ranked according to the standards set by the advertisements of home good retailers.

A Billion Dollar Allowance: Children and Consumption

Notions of the ideal home, identity, and gender all manifest in residential interior design. However, my specific project entangles one more criterion: childhood. In order to explore the impacts of the material home space on children, I turn first to the important and unique relationship between children and consumption. Consumerism intersects with childhood in two ways. First, consumerism affects children independently, as a consumer demographic directly targeted by marketers. Second, consumerism affects children dependently, via conditioning by their parents.

Children experience consumerism as a demographic separate from their parents. With increasing regularity, adult-focused brands are developing products that are “just for kids.” Everything from toothpaste to fruit snacks boast kid-friendly packaging and advertising techniques reaching out directly to children, often with bright colors and cartoon characters. Consumer research supports that these efforts to target children are not misplaced. Studies show that kids as young as two and three are able to recognize cartoon characters¹⁹ and that by the time children reach pre-school age they can already identify brands.²⁰ The economic reward of pursuing children as independent consumers is lucrative. On average, children between the ages of 4 and 12 spend over \$24 billion in direct purchases and influence another \$188 billion in purchases for the family or household.²¹

Billions of dollars of economic investment by children is also accompanied by an emotional investment, as children form brand loyalties early and use their purchases to build their own identities.²² The relationships children form with brands continue to influence their consumptive practices as they mature into adulthood, so the incentive for companies to hook children remains hefty. In all of these ways, consumerism relates to children much like it relates to adults: as a primary marketing demographic, as a group capable of spending billions of their own dollars, and as an audience whose identity is invested in consumer goods.

Still, as much as children are growing as an independent consumer group, a significant portion of their relationship to consumerism is still mediated by their parents. First, children learn their patterns of consumption from their parents. From the time they are carried in their mothers' arms, children are acclimated to the consumption process through their mothers.²³ Every trip to the grocery store or outlet mall children take with their mothers impacts how they view shopping and consumption. The amount of time and money a mother—and attendant child—spent at different retailers conditions her child to expect that, for example, grocery store trips are long and boring but toy store trips are brief and exhilarating. Beyond the passive conditioning of children when they are very young, mothers also take an active role in teaching consumption to their children.²⁴ In fact, many mothers view the instruction of consumption practices to be an important facet of their motherly duty as it prepares them for long lives of wise consumption.²⁵

Within the home, parents operate as the primary agents of socialization for their children.²⁶ Thus, the second role parents play in mediating the relationship between children and consumption is dictating the physical environment to which their child is exposed. The physical environment surrounding a child has been linked to life-altering personality development

including cognitive development, exploratory behavior, language development, and social interactions.²⁷ Additionally, the physical environment with which a parent surrounds a child has powerful normalizing potential. The environmental conditions normalized for the child construct the child's expectations of what a home looks, smells, and sounds like.²⁸ Parents' control over the physical space in which their child is raised awards them a large mediation role in the relationship between children and consumerism. It also offers them an important role in the identity construction of their child because by regulating children's consumption practices, parents are also regulating the construction of identity which is so tightly connected with home design.

When Walls Talk: A Context of Communicative Space

The enormous impact the physical environment has on children, together with the strong relationship between the home space and identity, make the site of children's bedrooms a powerful nexus of study. Communication scholars have studied coffee shops,²⁹ shopping malls,³⁰ grocery stores,³¹ and public memorial sites,³² seeking to expose the communicative nature of everyday spaces. My study continues this trend to interrogate the banalities of everyday life, this time investigating the gender messages woven into children's bedspreads and pasted into decorative wallpaper. I view children's bedrooms as a powerful site of identity construction and communication, especially regarding gender norms and expectations. In order to operationalize children's bedrooms as my "text" of study and extract the potent communicative messages, I turn to the vocabulary provided by Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, including his ideas of habitus, taste, and fields of capital.

A Theory of Practice: Habitus, Taste, and Fields of Capital

French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu develops his theory of practice using three important terms: *habitus*, *taste*, and *fields of capital*. These three concepts consider the sociological contribution of even the most banal activities, and use the trivialities of everyday life to map human identity construction. More importantly, these concepts provide the vocabulary via which I will frame and execute my analysis of children's bedrooms.

Bourdieu defines the notion of habitus as “necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general, transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application—beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt.”³³ In other words, habitus involves the aspects of our everyday life which we take for granted and then seeks to expose the inner workings of our socialization. With regard to socialization, Bourdieu acknowledges the influence of *social doxa*, meaning the socially accepted norms of any given time. Via this term, he acknowledges the influence social standards have on the construction of an individual's habitus. Essentially, an individual's habitus expresses that person's condition, but every individual's condition is shaped by the larger hand of social doxa. Largely, humans take their habitus—and, thus, their social doxa—for granted. Bourdieu explains that a person “takes it [habitus] for granted, precisely because he is caught up in it, bound up in it; he inhabits it like a garment (*un habit*) or a familiar habitat. He feels at home in the world because the world is also in him, in the form of habitus.”³⁴ Habitus is an embodied phenomenon. It is deeply infused by the invisible hand of doxa and is fundamental to one's functioning in everyday life. Because doxa impacts habitus, and habitus necessitates embodiment, the gender norms of any given society become reflected in the everyday patterns of

our lives, including everything from our posture to our eating habits. Because the home space is the site in which many of our daily patterns of life play out, the materiality of the home becomes a reflection of the habitus of its inhabitants. Therefore, by examining the physical artifacts of the home space, one can infer sociological (including gender) implications about the person living there.

The second aspect of Bourdieu's theory of practice is taste. Taste becomes a tool to discern class and, like habitus, has applications to the study of the home. Bourdieu asserts that "taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others."³⁵ As a means of classifying taste, he points to distinctions in an individual's appreciation for the arts, including music, art, and food. Based on analysis of an individual's artistic preferences, Bourdieu believes it is possible to distinguish three zones of taste which roughly correspond to educational levels and social classes: (1) legitimate taste (2) middle-brow taste and (3) popular taste.³⁶ Thus, Bourdieu believes peoples' taste aligns with their intellectual and socio-economic statuses. The relationship Bourdieu constructs between taste and educational and social classes becomes fundamental to the theory of practice. Further, it is important to understanding manifestations of taste in the home as the notion of social class brings ideas of consumerism and economic consumption into play. Finally, Bourdieu's correlation between taste and social class yields implication for gender roles. Because of the power dynamics linked with an individual's sex, class categorizations become sexualized. Bourdieu argues

Sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions. This is why there are as many ways of realizing femininity as there are classes and class fractions, and the division of labor between the sexes takes quite different forms, both in practices and in representations, in the different social classes.³⁷

Once again, male or femaleness becomes an important factor in characterizing an individual's sociological condition.

The final component of Bourdieu's theory of practice is his idea of fields of capital. This final piece comes in three forms: cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital.³⁸ His theory holds that "the field is a social space which structures strategic action for control over resources which are construed as forms of capital."³⁹ Cultural capital is defined as "the accumulation of manners, credentials, knowledge and skill, acquired through education and upbringing."⁴⁰ Social capital functions on a larger level, transcending the individual and focusing on class membership, exclusive club memberships, and titles of nobility.⁴¹ Finally, symbolic capital is defined as "the symbolic component of goods which demonstrate the aesthetic 'taste' of the owner."⁴²

Symbolic capital draws attention to the goods of everyday life which are often overlooked, revealing that all objects function as tokens of distinction and ideology. In this way, the interior design of children's bedrooms becomes a perfect illustration of symbolic capital, and therefore the identity, of the room's dweller. The symbolic capital of children's bedrooms communicate clues about social and cultural capital, knitting the three forms together into one clear picture of identity. For example, the symbolic capital of a guitar lying around a living room communicates to visitors that the room's tenant possesses the cultural capital of playing a musical instrument.

Together, the embodied nature of habitus and the symbolic capital communicated by material goods combine to produce children's bedrooms as a space where identity and lifestyle are constructed, both by children and their parents and also by the influence of social doxa. As part of social doxa, gender norms are constructed nationally, embodied individually, and

communicated (both consciously and unconsciously) via the materiality of children's bedrooms. Thus, in order to understand the gender norms perpetuated by American social doxa, I used this thesis to examine the spatial rhetoric of children's bedrooms.

Research Questions and Procedures

The goal of my project was to investigate the space of children's bedrooms as an intersection of childhood, gender, and identity. I examined how ideal visions of gender are communicated and how those visions are reconciled within real American homes. Guiding my analysis were four research questions:

RQ1: How do depictions of ideal children's bedrooms communicate what it means to be a girl?

RQ2: How do depictions of ideal children's bedrooms communicate what it means to be a boy?

RQ3: How do real children's bedrooms construct gender?

RQ4: How do real children's bedrooms compare to ideal children's bedrooms?

To answer these questions, I employed Bourdieu's theory of practice as a vocabulary for recognizing and describing how children's bedrooms communicate gender. Together, these four questions guided me toward this project's thesis that the catalogs of these retailers function as pedagogical spaces, depicting for children and their parents ideal enactments of gender. The embodied relationship between the children and their material environment weaves gender habitus of girlness or boyness into their performance of everyday life. Via this process,

children's bedroom spaces socialize gender lifestyle codes, making gendered performance appear to be the innate, natural order of things.

Representing ideal children's rooms, I focused on the fall and winter catalogs of three children's furnishing retailers: Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod. I chose these three companies intentionally, as all of them have similar price points and consumer demographics and each is a distinct line of merchandise marketed for kids. All three companies have sister lines of furniture for adults which qualified them to be clear representations of adolescent design, as all adult designs have been separated out by the retailers. In addition, each of these companies produces billions of dollars in revenue annually, ensuring that these retailers are wielding considerable influence on American consumption. The popularity of each of the parent brands (Restoration Hardware, Pottery Barn, and Crate & Barrel, respectively) lends each of these children's furniture brands enhanced notoriety and name-recognition.

After requesting catalogs from all three companies, I began my analysis by coding the written and visual rhetoric of each catalog for key words and key themes. As I began coding, I realized that already at two catalogs into each free subscription I had established ample saturation of gendered themes. Thus, I established my texts to be one Fall catalog and one Holiday catalog from each retailer. With my texts in place, I scrutinized the implications of each catalog's themes in light of Bourdieu's language of habitus, capital, and social doxa. Armed with Bourdieu's language, I aimed to describe and unpack the gendered habituses created by depictions of ideal girls' bedroom spaces and ideal boys' bedroom spaces.

When it came to examining real children's bedroom spaces, my goal was to find blogs or websites which displayed pictures and comments directly uploaded by parents. My search of

cyberspace led me to two texts: HGTV's Rate My Space website and www.cool-kids-rooms.com. Both of these sources include picture uploads of real children's bedrooms by parents and are categorized by gender. Further, I chose these sites because neither one was corporately sponsored, nor did they have an expressed intent to advertise or sell the products in the room. Each cyberspace was simply a vehicle that allows parents a chance to show off their kids' rooms and get feedback from other parents. After choosing my texts, my method of analysis mirrored the technique I applied to the catalogs: first, code for key words and themes; second, construct and unpack the habituses constructed by the rhetoric of these sites and their relation to gender.

Plan of Thesis

The organization unfolds in two parts, beginning with ideal depictions of gendered bedroom spaces, moving onto real depictions of gendered bedroom spaces, and concluding with a comparison of the two as well as implications of this analysis. In Chapter Two, I explore depictions of ideal girls' bedroom spaces as displayed in retail catalogs, concluding that ideal girls' bedroom spaces display themes of fragility, self-surveillance and empathy. Together, these themes resonate other-centeredness and construct ideal girls' bedroom spaces as sites of conditioning girls to place others' needs above their own. Chapter Three takes on ideal depictions of boys' bedroom spaces. Via themes of athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism, these spaces suture boyhood to dominance and power. Directly following these chapters, I offer a sub-conclusion that contrasts the gender roles explored in Chapters Two and

Three. Additionally, this subconclusion begins amplifying the implications of gendered habitual conditioning, a topic explored in greater length in my final chapter.

Representing real depictions of children's bedroom spaces, Chapter Four presents my findings from the analysis of HGTV's RateMySpace.com and Cool-kids-bedrooms.com. This chapter begins by communicating the key themes of real girls' bedroom spaces, first independently and second in relation to ideal girls' bedroom spaces. I then repeat the same process for boys' spaces. Chapter Four ends with another subconclusion. Like the first subconclusion, this portion of my thesis aims to summarize my findings of real girls' spaces versus real boys' spaces. In both cases, the intent of the subconclusions is to compare ideal spaces of each gender to each other and real spaces of each gender to each other before adding the additional comparison of ideal spaces to real spaces, a task I engaged most fully in my final chapter. Ultimately, I conclude that the discourses of both ideal and real depictions of children's bedrooms serve as vehicles for social doxa. Catalogs convey not just what an ideal boy's bedroom or girl's bedroom looks like, but what an ideal boy or girl looks and acts like. Thus, children's bedrooms operate as pedagogical sites of gender.

Chapter 2

Princesses in Training: Ideal Depictions of Girls' Bedrooms

Amidst a sea of pink scalloped sheets and crystal chandeliers, a painting of a crown hangs regally on the wall boasting the description, "Perfect for princesses in training, our personalizable crown indicates who reigns in this castle."⁴³ A few pages later, two little girls are hard at work preparing for their tea party guests, donning cardigan sweaters, pearl bracelets, and pink aprons.⁴⁴ Crafted to be a life-size doll house, the Cottage Loft Bed will "bring her fairy tale to life."⁴⁵ Page after page of catalogs for girls' bedrooms invoke notions of make-believe and whimsy. Critical engagement of these texts reveals that the differences between boys' and girls' bedrooms run much deeper than featuring blue or pink. Symbolic capital throughout catalog portrayals of girls' bedrooms associates not only colors but also lifestyles to gendered spaces. Altogether, Restoration Hardware Kids, The Land of Nod, and Pottery Barn Kids employ a particular aesthetic of femininity which encourages vanity, fragility, and empathy.

You're So Vain: Self-Surveillance in Ideal Girls' Bedrooms

Whether it is dresser mirrors, wall mirrors, or mirrored armoires, ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms are saturated with reflective surfaces. The overwhelming presence of mirrors, along with a consistent emphasis on fashion, makes self-surveillance a significant theme in ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms. John Berger's essay "Ways of Seeing" explains female's self-surveillance as part of her human conditioning.⁴⁶ While men are seen through a lens of power, women live as objects of a male gaze. Berger explains,

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. Whilst she is walking across a room or whilst she is weeping

at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisioning herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually.

The ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms make it clear that the male gaze always rests on females. The tokens of mirrors as well as the themes of fashion shown in the catalogs demonstrate that self-surveillance is an enormous part of the ideal habitus for girls.

The sheer prevalence of mirrors in girls' bedrooms is striking when compared to boys' rooms. In girls' rooms featuring a crib, five out of twelve collections displayed mirrors. In boys' rooms featuring a crib, none displayed mirrors. Alarming, the disproportion grows with the age of the children. In girls' rooms featuring beds, thirteen of the fifteen collections had mirrors. For boys, there were no mirrors in any of the thirteen collections.⁴⁷ The disparity here is shocking: 87% of girls' bedroom collections featured mirrors as compared to no representation within boys' rooms.

The availability of mirrors in furniture collections reflects the disproportionate gender representation. Vanities, make-up tables, and mirrored armoires are only available in the Asher and Eclectic Vintage Collections in Antique White and Antique Ivory finishes.⁴⁸ No mirrors are available in dark finishes, and no mirror options are available with any of the other furniture collections.

More disconcerting than the presence of availability of mirrors within children's furniture lines is the way catalog models interact with the mirrors that are pictured. Little girls are shown practicing self-surveillance by gazing at themselves in the mirror, and are always shown doing so alone (Figure 1, Figure 2). Further, the chairs upon which both girls are sitting imply their stints in front of the mirror are not brief. Whether in the form of a cushioned seat or a chair with lumbar support, the seating options provide support for long stints in front of the mirror. These

seating options provide training for young girls to get comfortable in front of the mirror, both literally and figuratively.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

From a Bourdieuvian perspective, mirrors are a powerful source of symbolic capital within ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms. The abundance of mirrors, associated with self-surveillance and beauty, sends a clear message that the ideal inhabitant of these spaces should be very conscious of their image. The fact that these little girls are alone with their reflections reifies Berger's notion of self-surveillance within these images. The models are being looked at by themselves, yet their own surveillance disciplines their appearance. The girls shown looking at their reflections are already dressed up—some wear dresses, and others wear well-put together casual clothes—yet even after they have invested in their outfits, these girls are still spending time scrutinizing themselves. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate that the facial expressions of these girls are not signs of admiration. Rather, concentration and sobriety reverberate, expressions befitting a much older demographic. Even while so young, these girls are being prepared for a

life of being looked at and are subtly being indoctrinated into a culture of female self-surveillance.

Along with mirrors, ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms are rich with symbolic tokens of fashion. Fashion mannequins, fashion design sketches, jewelry, and dresses all contribute to the theme of vanity based on their emphasis on fashion. Fashion mannequins appear more than a dozen times throughout the three catalogs and in a variety of capacities: as a means to display dresses, as the subject of wall art, and in a scaled-down version used as a jewelry holder.⁴⁹ Each of these mannequins adheres to the prototypical feminine shape, boasting a perfect hourglass silhouette. Physically, the models of elementary-aged girls are as distant from this silhouette shape as little boys. However, symbolically recurrent representations of fashion mannequins with a wide bust, wide hips, and narrow waist visually anchor this body type to femininity. These hour-glass representations serve as a model against which girls compare and discipline themselves, and once again iterate a theme of self-surveillance. Even while these girls are built and aged as children, the image of the ideal woman is imposed by the rooms' tokens.

The display of fashion sketches within girls' furniture collections continues the attention to clothing and appearance. Sketches of dresses are featured on bulletin boards in locations where ribbons and medals are displayed in boys' rooms. Seeing fashion sketches displayed on bulletin boards where awards or pictures of friends might have been displayed codes these fashion designs as not only a hobby, but a source of pride. In another collection, fashion sketches of pink dresses are framed and combined into a powerful fashion focal point above the bed.⁵⁰ Once again, symbols of fashion are placed on prime bedroom real estate. Together, fashion sketches and mannequin forms make some bedrooms look far more like the Project Runway studio than a child's bedroom (Figure 3; Figure 4).⁵¹ In Figure 3, this ideal bedroom

goes as far as to be staged with bolsters of fabric. Figure 4 shows a measuring tape draped around the metal mannequin frame. In these and other cases, small touches drive home the fact that fashion design is a real hobby for the girls living in these spaces. In this way, fashion is proven to be not only a decorating theme, but is also integrated into the lifestyles of these rooms' inhabitants via their hobbies and interests.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

Rounding out a theme of feminine fashion, images of dresses surface frequently in these three catalogs. More than ten times, dresses are shown on girl models in the collections, hanging on mannequins, in armoires, or on hangers waiting to be worn.⁵² The bows and lace of these dresses is echoed in the décor of the room. Bows adorn not only dress sleeves, but also sheet ties. Ribbon lines the hem of a costume dress, and also the edge of curtains. It becomes clear that the wardrobe of the little models complements the theme of the bedroom. By dressing their models in very intentional ways, The Land of Nod, Pottery Barn Kids, and Restoration Kids extend their branding to clothing styles, subtly suggesting the types of clothing a little girl should wear. The relationship between fashion and furniture design is etched perfectly through the pairings of feminine clothing with equally feminine room designs. The presence of clothing

within the furniture collections contributes significantly to the establishment of the identity associated with these brands. Catalog browsers are not required to imagine the type of girl who lives in these spaces; she is pictured repeatedly as a put-together young lady clad in pastel pinks and dresses.

To put the finishing touches on any young woman's outfit, jewelry also enters into catalog depictions of girls' bedrooms. Jewelry is shown on nightstands and dressers, hanging from miniature mannequin jewelry hangers, and on the models themselves. In addition to completing the fashionista aesthetic, these sparkly accessories are also available for purchase. Making jewelry a consumable good allows catalog viewers to bring themselves another step closer to embodying the ideal girl identity. Not only can consumers adorn their homes with symbolic merchandise, they can now adorn their bodies with it in hopes of making their bodies more enticing objects of male gaze. All three companies offer jewelry options to consumers. The Land of Nod advertises its jewelry-making kit with the tag line "Homemade jewelry is a girl's best friend."⁵³ Pottery Barn Kids invokes parents to "surprise her with jewelry" in their winter catalog.⁵⁴ One of their jewelry options is a charm necklace where parents can choose from the following charms for their daughters: a fairy, ballerina, horse, soccer ball, butterfly, bird, angel, cross, or Star of David.⁵⁵ These poignant options echo the themes of many of the girls' bedroom collections and once again extend the projections of femininity from home spaces to the bodies of little girls.

Altogether, the symbolic capital of mirrors, dresses, pearls, and fashion sketches all evoke a common theme of self-surveillance as they encourage girls to adorn themselves as objects of male gaze. Little girls, table sets, and jewelry boxes all blur together in a smear of pink satin. Mirrors become integral parts of little girls' bedrooms, and thereby, their lives. The

reflective surfaces of furniture and accessories ensure that what they look like to others is never far from their minds. Tokens of fashion—manifest in fashion mannequins, fashion sketches, dresses, and jewelry—also center image and beauty within these catalogs. Pictures of clothing, the feminine silhouette, and ornate garments train little girls for years of spotlight within the gaze of males and females alike. Girls depicted within these bedrooms appear not as users of the spaces, but as extensions of their décor patterns. Dressed in outfits reminiscent of the products they advertise, these models embody the position of female as an object of beauty on display for others.

Pretty, Pretty Princesses: Fragility in Ideal Girls' Bedrooms

Ideal depictions of children's bedrooms are a haven for make-believe worlds. Dress-up clothes, extravagant bed canopies, and crystal chandeliers help make bedrooms feel like a castle. The symbolic capital of these bedrooms alludes to an elevated social status padded with luxury and focused on fantasy. Consequently, these bedroom collections project a feeling of fragility onto their tenants. Step stools, princess-themed items, and luxurious materials each contribute to this privileged impression.

There are few things that appear less consequential to symbolic perception than step stools. However, within depictions of girls' bedrooms, step stools become an important clue to the presumed demeanor of the children residing there. There are no step stools in any of the boys' collections of Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod. Yet, in collections designed for little girls, step stools repeatedly flank beds (Figure 5, Figure 6). These two or three-step tokens suggest that jumping up onto a bed is not an option for young

ladies the way it is for young men. Due to generous mattress height and multiple layers of bedding, little girls' beds are elevated significantly from the floor, making the use of a step stool seem logical. It is only the comparison with boys' collections that illuminate the subtle gender codes at play within each step.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

On a more obvious level, capital clearly coded as princess-themed also reverberates an impression of fragility. In the Pottery Barn holiday catalog, a large spread of a girl dressed up like a princess is accompanied by a caption suggesting that winter is “the season for make-believe. From fairy-tale magic to ice-skating outings, she’ll dream up endless adventures with her favorite doll”⁵⁶ (Figure 7). Doll houses shaped like castles and wall art themed with crowns all completes the royal feeling in girls’ rooms.⁵⁷ Important to note is that role-playing and dress-up options encouraged by girls’ bedrooms imitate imaginary characters (Figure 8). The

emphasis on the imaginary exists in stark contrast to boys' bedrooms in which symbolic capital of athletes, scientists, and architects adorn the space. Rather than focusing on the practical, girls' bedroom design encourages preoccupation with whimsy and fantasy. Polka dot and butterfly wall art in girls' rooms replace baseball bats and bicycle designs in spaces designed for boys. The potential implications of fantasy-themed bedrooms are profound when compared with the realism demonstrated by boys' bedrooms. Conditioning a child to live in a fantasy world allows that child to normalize the perfection of their imaginary world. Thus, when the tyrannizing image of beauty is later applied to their life, the impossible standards are a condition with which they are well-acquainted.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

Next, princess themes within girls' rooms perpetuate the damsel-in-distress phenomenon, painting girls as the meek heroine in need of rescue by a handsome prince. With scripts of *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* so inextricably linked to the fairytale narrative, each princess pillow and piece of crown wall art displayed in home décor magazines echoes not only a style

but also a lifestyle. Dressed in long, flowing gowns and expensive crowns, princesses are depicted much more as a passive trophy to be won than an autonomous agent. The act of playing dress-up, shown frequently within ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms, suggests that the little girls in these spaces desire to become beautiful prizes by dressing themselves in princess apparel. Once again, girls are grooming themselves to be the object of men's desire.

The final nuance of fragility is generated by the use of extremely delicate materials, such as silk and crystal, within the collections. All of girls' bedroom designs in Restoration Hardware include a candelabra-style chandelier, often adorned with crystal accents (Figure 9). These delicate chandeliers are unique to girls' collections. Boys' rooms in the same catalog have cloth pendant lights, wooden lamps, and metal-clad chandeliers (Figure 10).



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

The disparity in lighting materials impacts the amount and type of light given off in the room (softer, candlelight for girls, higher-voltage white lighting for boys), but even the aesthetics of

the pieces themselves are illuminating. Fragile materials continue beyond lighting fixtures. Mirrors, lace, ribbons, and silk also contribute to a feeling of fragility. Picture frames outlined in gem stones, jewelry boxes covered in shiny capriz shards, and fresh flowers in blown glass vases all echo the fragile feeling, as they transform practical pieces for photo display or jewelry storage into pieces of art on display. Due to their fragility, these tokens require dainty handling and conditions the girls living in these spaces to handle their environment gently and with extreme care.

Functioning independently and cohesively, the symbolic capital of step stools, princess themes, and dainty materials within girls bedrooms contribute to a theme of fragility. Via the conditioning of their bedrooms, girls are encouraged to value whimsy and fantasy, aiming for beauty over practicality in both the pastimes and their decoration. It is important to note that children's decorating choices are often filtered by their parents' desires. Thus, parental participation in fantasy narratives also reveals their perception of how a little girl should look and act. Selling a canvas that states a seven year old could "reign in this castle" demonstrates a privilege unique to little girls. Still, this privilege does not come without consequences. Attached to the privilege and perfection of make-believe are the limitations of agency associated with living the life of a damsel-in-distress. Through the consistent appearance of furniture as seemingly benign as a step-stool, girls are being taught to rely on external support rather than their own strength or effort. Through consistently fragile material choices, girls are instructed to conduct themselves delicately. And most problematically, through extensive promotion of being a princess, girls are conditioned to both expect and rely on a prince. Just as the surveillance of women makes the female role passive and the male role powerful, the imposition of a princess narrative once again confers all power to men.

Playing House(keeper): Empathy in Ideal Girls' Bedrooms

The final trend of décor within girls' bedrooms is their emphasis on empathy. Ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms in Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod superimpose compassion for nature and compassion for others onto the lives of their inhabitants. Dolls, play houses, bulletin board clippings, and even fabric designs all cooperate to symbolize a lifestyle of peaceful coexistence with other creatures as well as other humans. While boys' bedrooms often emphasize tokens of travel and human-made transportation like cars, bikes, and trains, female collections consistently lack these items and instead stress the natural. The emphasis of nature founds the first strand of empathy in girls' bedrooms, specifically an empathy for nature.

On page 17 of The Land of Nod's Fall Catalog, a natural scene is set perfectly. The bedding featured is a light pink color with large three-dimensional flower appliqués and ruffled pink trim. The collection is entitled "Bedding of Roses" and assures in its description that "getting your daughter to bed is easy thanks to our lovely Bedding of Roses"⁵⁸ (Figure 11). The use of daughter explicitly codes this bedding style as feminine, and the rest of the room follows suit. The chandelier perched delicately above the bed is named "Doe, a Dear, a Female Chandelier."⁵⁹ This light fixture intertwines crystal beading with a leaf and vine motif, painted a soft minty green hue (Figure 12). Again, the description boasts its appropriateness for "a little girl's room."⁶⁰ White furniture, ruffled pink curtains, jewelry, and birds complete this room setting. Altogether, this single collection contains many of the tokens of empathy for nature echoed in the girls' rooms in all three magazines. Each of the retailers features bedding

collection blossoming with flowers, and all of these collections are displayed in girls' rooms (Figure 13, Figure 14, Figure 15).



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



Figure 13.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.

Complementing the floral bedding centerpiece are hundreds of tokens of nature, ranging from carved wooden squirrels holding a heart,⁶¹ to larger-than-life hanging butterflies,⁶² to a bird cage

complete with a singing feathered tenant.⁶³ Birds appear at least a half-dozen times in each of the magazines, surfacing in sheet collections, as wall art, and even as figurines. Combined, tokens of birds, flowers, and the repeated theme of vine-inspired chandeliers stitch empathy for nature firmly into ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms.

Tokens of empathy within these catalogs do not end with a love for nature. A second theme of empathy for others also emerges. This notion of hospitality is depicted by dolls, play houses, and kitchen sets, and it surfaces frequently within girls' bedroom collections. Dolls sit comfortably tucked into pink duvets and on toy shelves, but in holiday editions of these home décor magazines, dolls become the featured component of girls' toy sets. A four-page spread in Pottery Barn Kids' holiday catalog features multiple dolls with multiple outfits and includes the large caption, "surprise her with a new best friend."⁶⁴ The Land of Nod's holiday catalog also features a series of pictures of a little girl enjoying dolls, tutus, and doll accessories.⁶⁵ These pages, as well as the back cover of the catalog, show the girl smiling while holding her doll, but also go beyond just an enjoyment of the toy. A wooden stroller, high-chair, and crib are all for sale and are shown allowing the little girl to care for her doll, and other stuffed friends, suggesting a compassion for needs of others.⁶⁶ Pottery Barn Kids also offers a high-chair, crib, and three varieties of strollers: one for a single child, one for twins, and one that is specially designed for jogging behind.⁶⁷ In addition, Pottery Barn Kids also offer a clothesline, diaper-changing table, baby carrier, and even a scaled down vanity so the doll can gaze at herself just like her preschool-aged caretaker can.⁶⁸ Interestingly, a cycle emerges from the sale of mirrors for dolls: Mothers teach their daughters to self-survey by buying them vanity sets and mirrors. Daughters, in turn instruct their dolls to self-survey by staging them with miniature vanity sets and mirrors. Thus, women teach women strategies of self-surveillance as equipment for living.

The images accompanying these products feature a little girl in a pink cardigan sweater, shown cradling the baby and also with the baby strapped to her chest for safe-keeping while on the go. Somewhere between the cardigan sweaters, pearl bracelets, and jogging strollers, these models begin looking less like children and more like adult mothers. Only a few years away from diapers themselves, these young girls are already shown changing the diapers of their doll babies and being prepped for lives of motherhood.

Depictions of tea parties, present in the catalogs of all of the retailers, are also opportunities to attend to the needs of inanimate others. Underneath a picture of an elaborate tea party spread in the Pottery Barn Kids Holiday catalog, the caption says “She’ll love to serve up tea with one of our three elegant tea sets, alongside soft treats presented on our scalloped stand.”⁶⁹ Here, play cupcakes and bite-size sandwiches are displayed for the likes of a stuffed bear (wearing a crown) and a doll with her arms and legs crossed daintily atop a pink dining chair (Figure 16). The extensive effort put into this tea party is demonstrated clearly by the layered table linens and meticulous table setting. A third pink dining chair is left empty in the picture, undoubtedly for the hostess who is absent from the photo, assumedly attending to the needs of her guests. In Restoration Hardware Kids’ rendition of the tea party, two girls don pink and white polka dot aprons and are pictured hard at work in what appears to be the planning stages of their tea party. Once again, a stuffed animal sits as a guest of honor, and once again the models appear too busy to engage with their guest. Instead, both of their eyes are down and focused on their own tasks (Figure 17). Thirdly, The Land of Nod takes on the tea party. It follows a similar script to the other two, as a stuffed bunny once again becomes the guest of honor and the girl is shown serving the rabbit tea. The setting is much more casual than the other two catalogs’ spreads. This time, the bunny is just leaning against a toy block as a back rest,

rather than perched atop a dining chair. However, the essence of the display remains the same: a little girl has her eyes down and is attending to the needs of her guest.



Figure 16.



Figure 17.

The theme of caring for the needs of others continues with images of little girls hard at work with their kitchen sets. The delicacies used to entertain guests do not bake themselves, and thus girls within these catalogs are diligently preparing in their pseudo kitchenettes. Above a small child at work in the kitchen is the line “Inspire playful learning at every age with our classic tea accessories, retro kitchen and sweet stocking stuffers. Simply stir in a little creativity and serve.”⁷⁰ In the description of the retro kitchen set, the catalog brags “The stainless steel sink holds water so kids can scrub their dishes.”⁷¹ These home furnishing retailers even go as far as to sell play supermarket sets and shopping carts. Little girls are shown pushing these shopping carts with groceries in the basket and a doll safely tucked into the child’s seat (Figure 18, Figure 19).⁷² They equip little girls to embark upon a journey of playful learning of skills like shopping, cooking, and doing the dishes. In a very telling picture in Pottery Barn Kids’ Holiday catalog a little girl is shown in the foreground in her play kitchen, blurry from moving so quickly.

Directly behind her miniature kitchen is a full-scale kitchen with a grown woman, presumably her mother, also shown baking. This clear pairing continues to emphasize that these toys are not merely play things, but training for future activities. In fact, the feminine monopoly of the kitchen is so strong within these catalogs that Restoration Hardware Kids only offers tables for children's rooms in white finishes. Only the Adele and Asher Collections offer tables as a part of their collections, and both of these collections are finished only in white and antique white, the furniture finish feminized by its exclusive display in girls' bedroom collections.



Figure 18.



Figure 19.

The caretaking of dolls and the entertaining of guests is given a sense of place by the third trend in establishing girls' empathy for others: centering the girl within the home. Images, toys, and captions of these three catalogs link girls closely to homemaking. The sale of doll houses is the first step toward knitting women to the domestic sphere. Girls are pictured

enjoying these toys, as they are given liberties to move dolls around each of the rooms in the house. Even within the dollhouse advertisement, the “mother” doll is posed in the dining room setting the table. Thus, it stands to reason that when given the choice, little girls place women in the same roles they place themselves, as compassionate homemakers. Playing with dollhouses is definitively gendered as feminine, as the “she” pronoun is used in their descriptions. For example, Pottery Barn Kids calls their dollhouse an “heirloom-quality original that will delight her for years to come.”⁷³ Even girls’ beds, the most important feature of a bedroom, are transformed into homemaking simulators. One bedding collection designed for girls is called “There’s No Place Like Home” and consists of pink houses on a white background with a reversible option of a pink floral patterns.

Even the furniture falls prey to the establishment of homemaking skills. The Cottage Loft Bed (Figure 20) transforms a girls’ bed into a fully-functioning playhouse, making sleeping secondary to homemaking. The description of this bed reads, “Built like a storybook cottage, our magical loft bed has French white paneled siding, French green shutters, decorative window boxes and an attic window. Inside you’ll find plenty of room for an activity table, play kitchen and toys.”⁷⁴ The catalog’s image adds additional homey touches, including flowers in the window boxes, a “home sweet home” welcome mat, a mail box, and a recycling receptacle.⁷⁵ A similar play house is advertised in The Land of Nod’s catalog. Their Log Cabin Playhouse features curtains, a flower garden in front, and even a wooden dog cut-out, all tended to by a little girl peeking in the window.⁷⁶ This house is displayed as a part of many small stagings including a set to have a puppet show, a kitchen space and a circus tent. There are two children pictured in the two-page spread, one girl and one boy. The girl, as mentioned, is pictured interacting with the play house, and the boy is shown running out of the teepee wildly. The title

at the top of the page says “Let’s see a cardboard box do this. Our play spaces have realistic features that make them ideal spots for everyone.”⁷⁷ Yet, the images accompanying the text direct boys and girls to separate stations, limiting the “everyone” advertised by the text.

Restoration Hardware is not to be outdone, and also follows through on the homemaking theme within girls’ bedrooms. In their holiday catalog, three little girls are shown wrapping gifts with ribbon and bows for holiday decorations.⁷⁸ Restoration Hardware Kids does not sell wrapping paper nor ribboned bows, yet the image uses the sale of furniture as a backdrop for showcasing the homemaking talents of young girls. This activity adds decorating to the list of child care, cooking, shopping, cleaning already outlined in girls’ room collections.



Figure 20.

Altogether, the theme of empathy within ideal depictions of girls’ bedrooms implies that girls’ bedrooms serve an important pedagogical purpose. Via an analysis of the toys and images contained in these catalogs, as well as their captions, it becomes clear that these spaces are

intended to teach girls the crucial set of contours prescribed to womanhood. These spaces assign a very singular behavioral pattern to women—a pattern centered around taking care of others.

Conclusion

Empathy for both nature and other people, fragility shrouded in an ongoing princess narrative, and self-surveillance reflected in mirrors and jewelry all contribute to a very limiting depiction of how a girl should act and think. Bourdieu outlines symbolic capital as “the symbolic component of goods which demonstrate the aesthetic ‘taste’ of the owner,”⁷⁹ and the symbolism present within ideal depictions of girls’ bedroom carries heavy symbolic capital. Within these collections, the taste of girls is painted as extremely other-centered. Illuminated by Berger’s notion of self-surveillance, mirrors and the implied constant looked-at-ness of the male gaze positions women as being constantly concerned with their appearance (read: their appearance to others). Tokens of fashion mannequins, jewelry, and tutus all imply adornment and display. Whether it be a dance routine, or simply dressing up in fussy ribbons and dresses, these objects featured in girls’ rooms target the amplification of a young girls’ self-awareness. Self-consciousness follows suit, as scenes of girls taking long looks in the mirror normalize self-surveillance within ideal depictions of girls’ bedrooms.

The symbolic capital grouped broadly as conditioning fragility also emphasizes that girls be other-centered. Notions of dress-up and fairy tale escapism all involve a girl shifting focus and pride in self to pride in emulating an other, usually an imaginary other. Even the smallest detail of including step stools in only girls’ bedroom collections serves to shift agency and accomplishment from self to an external source, in this case, inanimate wooden stools.

Dress-up is also facilitated by external garments and adornments. Rather than merely imagining how a princess might live or writing a story about it, these girls are using material goods to help draw themselves closer to their goals of becoming a princess.

The empathy for nature and for others is saturated with girls being depicted as extremely other-centered. The ideal lifestyles of girls painted by the catalogs are consistently depicted as valued in relationship to something else. The distinct prevalence of tokens of nature imply that girls' tastes align harmoniously with the birds, trees, and flowers of the earth. Via these images, girls are instructed to cooperate with nature rather than overpower it. Rather than being concerned with the machinery undergirding the trains and planes and travel emphasized in boys' rooms, these ideal depictions of girls suggest a relationship of mutuality with—rather than authority over—nature. Finally, an elevation of self over others becomes pristinely clear in depictions of girls with dolls, kitchen sets, and play houses. Girls are repeatedly shown in roles of service to others, pouring tea to inanimate objects or hanging out the laundry of their dolls. As the composition and taglines of these images suggest, the service to others pictured in these catalogs are preparation for lives as adult mothers, caretakers, and home-makers. Thus, the symbolic capital within ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms emphasizes a taste of selflessness.

Chapter 3

Bigger, Faster, Stronger [Smarter]: Ideal Depictions of Boys' Bedrooms

Beneath a framed map of the constellations, a young boy sits at his desk, hard at work. With a bountiful supply of sharpened pencils, a watch, and a magnifying glass all stationed nearby, this little intellectual appears settled in for the long haul. A cursory glance of the rest of the room suggests this boy does not spend all of his time at his desk. The items showcased in his bedroom imply he unwinds by identifying the stars, memorizing the globe, playing sports, and sharpening his chess skills.⁸⁰ When night falls, this lad retires to a handsome bed patterned with aircraft engineering blueprints and flanked by stainless steel reading lamps. This scene, pictured in Restoration Hardware's children's furniture catalog, could just as easily advertise for a young man's dorm room or a bachelor's loft; the space is marketed for boys, but designed to make men. On the whole, the boys' bedroom spaces of Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod are marked with the clear pedagogical intent of training boys to be men. Further, these spaces portray a singular interpretation of manhood: a Euro-American masculinity devoted to realism, public life, domination of others, and individual agency and signified in these spaces by themes of athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism.

Most Valuable Theme: Athleticism in Boys' Bedrooms

Some may consider baseball fun; others might call it an exercise in embarrassment. Bourdieu calls it a shining example of *libido dominandi*, the socialization process by which boys are encouraged to become caught up in sports and games.⁸¹ Bourdieu also recognizes that sports and games function as more than recreation to boys; sports serve as tamed-down training exercises whose purest form is war.⁸² Viewed in the context of boys' bedroom spaces,

significations of sports and athleticism evoke the obvious implications that the children inhabiting these spaces enjoy playing sports. Simultaneously, the sociological tie between athletics and the violence and conquest of war facilitates a second message: a silent reification of masculinity's tie to violence and domination.

The theme of athleticism within boys' bedrooms is communicated in two ways. First, the baseball, basketball, and football designs stitched and stamped on every imaginable piece of décor feature athleticism as the ubiquitous boyhood hobby (Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 23). Second, the sports equipment that is not for sale yet is staged in the rooms harbors lifestyle implications. Together, these visual rhetorics tell the story of a boyhood steeped in masculine domination. The pervasiveness of sports-themed décor among all three catalogs is visually striking. Bedspreads, pillows, lamps, tables, and toys are all saturated with sports insignia. Baseball bats become lamp stands, and bicycle gears become showy accent pieces. The types of sports vary, with baseball, basketball, and football being most common, but also catering to the more niche sports realms of sailing, cycling, and cycling (Figure 23).



Figure 21.



Figure 22.



Figure 23.

Compared to girls' bedroom spaces, boys' bedrooms are far more inundated with themes. Girls' bedrooms may have small themed accessories, but the use of specific color(s) most commonly ties feminine spaces together. In the case of ideal depictions of boys' room, repeated images or designs—varying from sports to space to dinosaurs—bind boys' room designs. Interestingly, this observation seems to mimic lifestyle or identity options between the two genders. Girls can be girl-ish in a variety of ways (flowers, butterflies, princesses, horses, etc.), but boys are much more limited in their abilities to emit a boy-ish identity. It appears that athleticism is such a strong theme because the diversity of male identities featured in Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod is so limited. In light of scholarship on masculinity, this singular notion of how “manliness” is performed comes from males' interaction with other males. With masculine honor forged primarily by a man asserting his strength and dominion among his peers, athletic competitions become a site of significant gender identity

construction.⁸³ Thus, athleticism—and thereby masculinity—is glorified by powerful and repetitious displays of sports as a decorative theme.

The second dimension of athleticism communicated in these texts is embodied athleticism. The models in boys' bedrooms are shown shooting a basketball and lying on the floor with a ball nestled lovingly to their chest as they read (Figure 24). Balls and mitts and tricycles are all staged in these catalog pictures as objects of use (Figure 25). These items are



Figure 24



Figure 25

not stored on a shelf, but are distinctly placed in positions suggesting recent use. The utility of these items as recreational elements and not mere décor is fundamental to the transmission of masculinity within these bedroom spaces. Given the abundant rhetorical clues, sports equipment permeates the lifestyles of the boys who call these bedrooms home. The public nature of athletic

endeavor, as well as its competitive undercurrents, smacks loudly of Euro-American notions of masculinity.

From its colonial roots to its capitalist bootstraps, iterations of Euro-American masculinity can also be reflected in the shiny medal of trophies seen in boys' bedrooms. Trophies are common in ideal depictions of boys' bedrooms and these prizes function as tokens of social capital. The mastery of a sport to the extent that one earns a trophy suggests that the residents of these spaces are very familiar with the rules of their game and excel athletically. Both of these accomplishments lend enhanced social capital to the trophy recipient. However, the very social apparatuses which validate this capital are devices of masculinity. Underlying the value of a trophy is the victory of oneself over other competitors. Like the war scenario that sports emulate, trophies celebrate winning, domination, and hierarchy. The trophies displayed on the dressers tops and nightstands of these bedroom collections are not for sale. Their purpose is solely pedagogical, facilitating the growth of boys into masculine men.

One of Restoration Hardware's pages devoted to boys' merchandise is titled "The Hard Work of Play."⁸⁴ This tagline manifests perfectly within trophy displays. Certainly, sports are intended to be fun for boys, but the pressure to be the best makes play into work. Proud exhibitions of trophies endorse competition and raise the stakes of recreational activities. The pastimes encouraged by boys' bedrooms are real and the impact their play has on their social standing and peer group interactions is also real. For girls, the catalogs suggest play centered on fiction, encompassing everything from dress-up, to playing with princess dolls and unicorns, to playing house. All of the activities are depicted for girls are rooted in the private sphere, staged as being played out within the domestic space of a child's bedroom or playroom. Therefore, when girls leave the home and venture into the public sphere to mingle with their peer group as

well as adults, playfulness is left at home. Boys' play, on the other hand, requires an outdoor space and an assortment of other children to play with and against. The social dynamic intertwined with athleticism sharply differentiates boys' play from girls' play.

Lord of the Longitudinal Rings: Adventurousness in Boys' Bedrooms

Continuing the rugged masculine undertones from athleticism, adventurousness also becomes a trend in ideal depictions of boys' bedrooms. Images and products depicting maps, transportation, and instances of bravery pervade the room designs of all three companies. Nine out of twelve of Restoration Hardware's boys' bedroom designs incorporate an allusion to travel, including maps of Los Angeles,⁸⁵ the continental United States,⁸⁶ the solar system,⁸⁷ Italy,⁸⁸ the night sky,⁸⁹ and three-dimensional globes⁹⁰ (Figure 26, Figure 27, Figure 28).



Figure 26.



Figure 27.



Figure 28.

All of these displays of maps associate notions of worldliness and freedom with masculinity. Combined with the presence of sports materials, these two themes drive home the idea that masculinity is not confined to the space of a bedroom or even a home. Both travel and sports take place outside of the home and outside of the domestic sphere, giving masculinity dominion over the public sphere. Decorating male spaces with themes oriented toward the public sphere instills an air of colonialism, teaching boys from a very young age to venture beyond the confines of the domestic sphere and even beyond the dotted lines of tamed, civilized spaces. Beyond just encouraging the tourism of the United States and the world, the spaces of boys' bedrooms promote exploration and discovery of uncharted places. The words "Explore,"

“Discover” (Figure 29), and “Hero” (Figure 30) are plastered across pillows in two bedroom spaces. Rhetorically, these words harbor agency for boys, encouraging them to take ownership of the process of traveling as well as the locations to which their travel guides them. The nurturing, respectful relationship promoted between girls and nature is absent from boys’ bedroom décor and is replaced by a tendency to view spaces and places as territory to be conquered or claimed. Co-operation with the natural world is swapped out for a worldview privileging domination over egalitarianism.

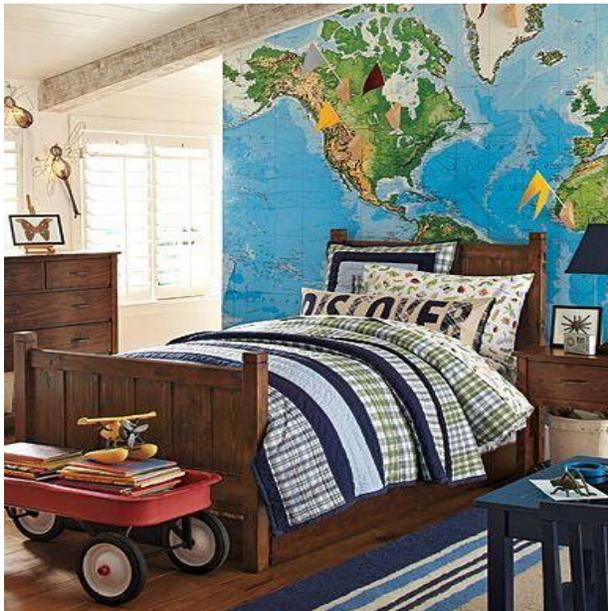


Figure 29.



Figure 30.

Continuing the theme of adventurousness and the emphasis on the public sphere, tokens of transportation surface frequently within boys’ bedroom spaces. Airplanes, bicycles, cars, trucks, trains, and ships drive the decoration of many boys’ bedroom spaces. Transportation, no matter the form, offers freedom and mobility. Therefore, boys’ bedroom designs are ripe with symbolic capital of agency of being able to move away from people or places that are no longer of interest and toward new adventures. Also, the human-made nature of the cars, trucks, and

trains celebrates the power of human invention over nature. Comforters and valances tell the story of rivers and mountains traversed via boats and airplanes with an efficacy and efficiency unmatched by natural means. Each of these visual rhetorics celebrates the ingenuity produced by human hands and once again lauds male domination over the raw power of nature. Given that the designs of the automobile, airplane, steam engine, and ship are all the product of male engineering, and acknowledgement of their value via populous visual appearances implicitly honors male engineering.

The toys offered to boys suggest that themes of travels are not confined to wall decoration but also impact the lifestyle of the boys who inhabit these spaces. Restoration Hardware's two-page spread advertising bicycles features a young boy aboard the bike and smiling like crazy.⁹¹ The transition from a bicycle design on a lampshade to a rideable toy and source of joy is made clear by this image. Still another transportation-themed product suggests masculine character traits in its description. The "We're Not Asking for Directions Rug" by The Land of Nod explains, "We've observed that even when little boys get lost driving on this map rug, they don't ask for directions."⁹² The rug becomes not merely a surface on which to sit and play, but also a statement of gendered personality traits. Making the trend unanimous among the brands, Pottery Barn also melds the theme of transportation with lifestyle on page 60 of their holiday catalog by picturing a boy riding their "Ride-On Fire Truck" and wearing a complete fireman costume (also for sale through their catalog). In this case, the objects used to decorate a child's room makes rhetorical implications about a future career path.

Complementing consistent references to maps and transportation, adventurousness can also be seen through calls to bravery. Decorative wall signs in boys' spaces highlight four words: swift, fast, brave, and valiant.⁹³ Using each word in a sentence, the wall art displays

sentences like “A brave knight defended the lady,”⁹⁴ underscoring bravery on behalf of women as a positive characteristic of masculinity. References to chivalry continue by connecting boys to gentlemen. A coffee table is referred to as “perfectly sized for the littlest of gents.”⁹⁵ In the description for a car bedding set, The Land of Nod writes, “Gentleboys, start your engines.”⁹⁶ Archaic as they may seem to a post-modern society, ideas of ladies, knights, and gentlemen live on in ideal portrayals of boys’ bedroom collections that encourage being brave when women need assistance.

Bravery in war situations is also lauded in boys’ bedrooms. The opening pages of Restoration Hardware’s holiday catalog depict two boys, one riding a stuffed lion and holding binoculars and another resting stealthily in a tent. Above their heads is a caption that reads: “Create a world of adventure with our canvas tent, faux fur sleeping bag and giant safari animals. Crafted of rugged recycled canvas, the tent assembles easily and collapses at a moment’s notice—just in case the enemy is spotted on the horizon.”⁹⁷ Although the absurdity of an occasion involving both enemy attack and faux fur sleeping bags is laughable, the casual reference to a violent attack made by a children’s furniture company is no laughing matter. A battle scenario surfaces again in The Land of Nod’s staging of their Frontier Logs play set (Figure 31). In the holiday catalog, the logs are dramatized as a fort, and cowboy and Native American figurines are shown fighting one another with guns and arrows.⁹⁸ The clear portrayal of Native Americans as the enemy is problematical enough. However, when combined with a preoccupation with battle, depictions of bravery in boys’ bedrooms quickly become conflated with violence. The recipients of the violence, Native Americans, resonate Euro-American masculinity once again. Domination, and the colonial endeavors it fuels, is proudly [re]enacted with every Frontier Logs play experience.



Figure 31.

Veneration for superheroes is apparent in boys' bedroom collections. Luke Skywalker, Spiderman, and Batman—rendered as sheet sets, backpacks, and pajamas—all pay homage to bravery indirectly by celebrating larger-than-life male roles models noted for their fearlessness in the face of danger. The catalog caption accompanying the superhero merchandise reads “Surprise Him with Action and Adventure,” clarifying not only masculinity's tie to bravery via the male pronoun, but also bravery's tie to adventure.

An Experiment in [Gender] Relativity: Intellectualism in Boys' Bedrooms

The final trend in boys' bedroom décor is intellectualism. Optometry charts,⁹⁹ chess boards,¹⁰⁰ posters of the Periodic Table,¹⁰¹ and the like are spliced into boys' bedrooms nonchalantly, giving the distinct impression these high-brow cultural capital artifacts are

accepted parts of these children's everyday life. Math equations serve as major focal points in two Restoration Hardware Bedroom Collections, both times looming over a desk to inspire academic rigor¹⁰² (Figure 32, Figure 33). Boys who are more disposed to science than math can also find their tastes reflected in boys' bedroom spaces. In addition to posters of the Periodic Table, aspiring scientists can also purchase binoculars,¹⁰³ or a room full of bedding and accessories featuring robots.¹⁰⁴ Even the smallest touches differentiate boys' spaces from girls' spaces. Pillows that feature ballerina and thread and needle designs for girls, instead feature spectacles and pencil sharpeners for boys.¹⁰⁵ Side by side, these two pillow collections sum up well the harsh disparity of gender expectations imposed on both girls and boys.



Figure 32.



Figure 33.

Conclusion

Ideal depictions of boys' bedrooms focus on three main themes: athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism. Together, these three ideas communicate that boyhood revolves around a Euro-American masculinity rooted in domination. Beginning with the first theme of athleticism, domination is glorified. The competitive group dynamics of football, basketball, and baseball surface frequently within the objects of these spaces. The adornment of the walls with famous athletes bypasses average athletic performance and instead celebrates being the best. Trophies lining boys' bookshelves and nightstands become symbols of victory, specifically victory over others.

The second theme of ideal boys' bedroom spaces, adventurousness, also encourages domination. While girls' spaces encourage reverence for Mother Nature, boys' spaces feature steam shovel bedding and duvets crisscrossed with roads, bridges, and man-made machines. Domination, this time over the feminized "Mother" Earth, once again crowns masculinity as a source of unstoppable power. Rivers, oceans, and mountains are no match for human-made machines (not surprisingly known in common parlance as *manmade* machines). Further, words like exploration, heroism, and discovery that appear frequently on pillow shams and wall hangings emphasize that adventure has a pointed goal: conquering foreign landscapes or peoples.

The glorification of masculine intellect composes the third theme of ideal boys' bedroom spaces. In this theme, domination manifests not as a physical phenomenon, but rather a cognitive one. Encouraging boys to rigorously train their minds, as the ideal boys' bedrooms do, proves the importance of cognitive capacity for boys. Not only must boys be advanced in the strength of their bodies and the courage of their character, but also in their mental aptitude.

Altogether, themes of intellectualism, adventurousness, and athleticism all emphasize a common theme of masculine power and domination.

Ideal Spaces Subconclusion

Boys Will Be Boys (Once You Teach Them How)

The division between the sexes appears to be “in the order of things,” as people sometimes say to refer to what is natural, to the point of being inevitable: it is present both—in the objectified state—in things (in the house, for example, every part of which is “sexed”), in the whole social world, and—in the embodied state—in the habitus of the agents, functioning as systems of schemes of perception, thought and action.

--Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*¹⁰⁶

The clear intent of children’s bedroom spaces shown in Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod is to market each company’s products. However, as the previous chapters demonstrate, the catalogs offer much more than furniture. I argue that the catalogs of these retailers function as pedagogical spaces, depicting for children and their parents ideal enactments of gender. The rhetoric of these catalogs helps socialize and naturalize gender lifestyle codes.

Ideal girls’ spaces are undergirded by three themes: self-surveillance, fragility, and empathy. Together, these themes resonate a fundamental pedagogical focus on selflessness. The toys, pictures, and accessories of girls’ bedrooms very clearly train girls for lives of serving others as mothers, caretakers, and homemakers. The push for selflessness is so strong that young girls are already being trained to literally lose their selves through initiation into the process of self-surveillance by which they view themselves from the outside as objects. Bourdieu writes, “Everything in the genesis of the female habitus and in the social conditions of its actualization combines to make the female experience of the body the limiting case of the universal experience of the body-for-others, constantly exposed to the objectification performed by the gaze and the discourse of others.”¹⁰⁷ The repeated images of girls in front of mirrors are the

perfect realization of the body-for-others phenomenon. Moreover, the very furniture itself supports the scrutiny of the female reflection as mirrors and jewelry hooks come built into girls' furniture pieces and en suite setting offers vanity-users a seat for extended examination of their appearance.

The very nature of habitus as a naturalized, undetected set of patterns for living allows doxic gender behaviors to seep into the lifestyle of young girls subconsciously. By merely engaging in the activities facilitated by their furniture (e.g. looking in the mirror) girls adopt habitudes and lifestyle patterns that will be cited later in life as natural tendencies. The premise of this identity production process is simple: (1) social doxa sets the norms for gender behavior; (2) home good retailers cater to consumer desires by marketing furniture and accessories reflective of normative girl behavior; (3) parents buy their daughters girl furniture that cultivates normatively feminine characteristics like self-surveillance, fragility, and empathy; (4) girls adopt doxic codes of gender behavior. Consider the following iteration of this process:

Being thus socially inclined to treat themselves as aesthetic objects and, consequentially, to pay constant attention to everything concerned with beauty, the elegance of the body, its attire and its bearing, within the division of domestic labour women quite naturally take charge of everything concerned with aesthetics and more generally with the management of the public image and social appearances of the members of the domestic unit—the children, of course, but also the husband, who often delegates his choice of clothing to his wife.¹⁰⁸

An elevated propensity for fashion is not a genetically-determined characteristic unique to females. Rather, years of pedagogical training on the part of catalogs like these and millions of other socialized conditions orient girls toward aesthetics. Thus, social doxa shapes gendered performances.

While girls are being indoctrinated with habits of selflessness, boys are being trained to embrace power and domination as aspects of their masculinity. The visual and written rhetoric

of each of the companies' catalogs communicate a singular interpretation of manhood: a Euro-American masculinity devoted to realism, public life, domination of others, and individual agency, signified in these spaces by themes of athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism. Depictions of play, centered on athleticism in ideal boys' rooms, emphasize goals of power and domination. In contrast to depictions of play within ideal girls' spaces, boys' spaces are much more serious. Bourdieu writes, "Among the games that are constitutive of social existence, those that are called serious are reserved for men, whereas women are confined to children and childish things, helps to mask the fact that a man is also a child playing at being a man."¹⁰⁹

While girls are encouraged to play dress-up and animate plush unicorns, boys' play options are serious and competitive. Participation in sports fosters a climate of competition that melds with the ideal perception of boyhood. With clear winners and losers, and with successes deemed victories, war is never far from the metaphorical allusions of athletics. The ribbons and trophies decorating ideal boys' bedrooms slyly reinforce triumph as the desired outcome of play. When moving to academic pursuits and adventures, the notion of competition remains vibrant. The clear rhetorical clues to work hard and do well emanate from every little boy staged at a desk with his pencil in hand. Winning has obvious relational implications. Winning does not occur in a vacuum, but is instead a victory of self over others. Therefore, every affirmation of winning and competition in boys' bedrooms naturalizes an attitude of domination within masculinity.

Some of the most illustrative examples of gendered attitudes in these catalogs occur when the same object (e.g. a pillow or lamp) is decorated one way for a male space and a different way for a female space. For example, girls' rectangular throw pillows feature words like "princess" and "angel." Meanwhile, boys' spaces highlight "Explore" and "Hero" on their rectangular pillows. Clearly, the two sets of pillows share a common pillow insert, material, and size. Yet,

the messages communicated by each are vastly divergent. “Explore” and “hero” represent ideas of adventure and, of course, domination. Further, they are ideas grounded firmly in the public sphere. Princess narratives and the pillow taglines supporting them are confined to the private sphere. Girls are encouraged to inhabit spaces of make-believe and bombarded with whimsicality while boys are encouraged to begin training themselves in athletics, academics, and adventure. Also, repeated princess narratives perpetuate an agency-less existence that resigns femininity to the object of masculine domination. Dependent upon men as their link to the outside world, women are reconciled to a subservient, care-taking role.

Clearly, home goods catalogs are not solely responsible for the construction of a child’s habitus. Innumerable forces influence how a child enacts its gender. However, my argument holds that the messages these spaces communicate which attempt to outline ideal gender performances are not benign. Bourdieu points out that men and women’s behavior is grounded in the market of symbolic goods.¹¹⁰ By understanding the discourses embedded within these texts, consumers can better understand the social doxa driving them. As femininity is revealed to emphasize submissiveness and selflessness and masculinity becomes conflated with domination, a lop-sided equilibrium of power emerges between each gender. Capitalizing on this interplay, Bourdieu writes,

If the sexual relation appears as a social relation of domination, this is because it is constructed through the fundamental principle of division between the active male and the passive female and because this principle creates, organizes, expresses, and directs desire – male desire as the desire for possession, eroticized domination, and female desire as the desire for masculine domination, as eroticized subordination, or even, in the limiting case, as the eroticized recognition of domination.¹¹¹

The discourses of these catalogs frame desire for boys and girls. The “eroticized recognition of domination” surfaces in every girl admiring herself in the mirror. Even at a young age, girls are

accustomed to being objects of gaze, a clear position of subordination. Boys' training as conquerors equips them to fulfill the opposite position as the "opposite" sex.

The social construction of genders and gender enactments is not limited to furniture retailers' catalogs, but it is also not absent from it. By illuminating the habits and identities encouraged by these texts, the social doxa fueling the system is brought to light. The prevalence of social doxa in these catalog pages reveals their purpose to extend beyond merely retail motivation to serve as rich pedagogical sites.

Chapter 4

Let's Get Real: Real Bedroom Spaces

Leaving the world of commercial staging and hefty price tags behind, the next phase of my analysis breeched the doorways of real children's bedrooms. These spaces lack price tags and product descriptions. Nevertheless, the themes present within these bedrooms strongly echoed those of their ideal counterparts with girls' rooms emphasizing self-surveillance, fragility, and empathy and boys' rooms featuring athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism. In this chapter I will briefly review the specifics of my methodological approach, explicate the themes of real girls' bedrooms, explicate the themes of real boys' bedrooms, and propose a second subconclusion contrasting the two.

Laying the groundwork for my analysis, I carefully selected two texts for this portion of my study, making sure each fit my criteria of (1) being popular sites that featured user-uploaded images and descriptions and (2) existing without affiliations to any specific retailer. With so many images available on both sites, I developed a protocol for narrowing down the scope of my texts that catered to the specific layout and content of each site. On HGTV's RateMySpace.com, I choose the ten most popular girls' bedroom uploads and the ten most popular boys' bedroom uploads as their popularity granted them consented representation of hundreds of users' opinions. On Cool-kids-rooms.com, I narrow my sampling down to the top five girls' rooms and the top five boys' rooms. In order to ensure the real rooms I analyzed were as comparable to the ideal rooms I chose as possible, I bypassed any room uploads whose title included "teen." The rooms in the three catalogs were pre-pubescent environments, and would, therefore, prove less comparable to teen's bedroom pictures uploaded online.

A Dream Come True: Real Girls' Bedroom Spaces

In the foreground, the romantic glow of multiple paper lanterns bathes an overstuffed comforter in warm, inviting radiance. Behind the whimsical bed, a wall-sized mural transports viewers into its serene scene: a stately castle on the night of a glowing lantern release. Closest to the viewer, a plush chartreuse area rug beckons the tread of a dainty foot. As I recorded these notes on my fresh notebook page titled "Real Girls' Bedrooms," I couldn't help but acknowledge the irony. After clicking through all of the images, the trend continued: real girls' bedroom spaces were just as unrealistic as their ideal counterparts. The three trends present in real girls' bedroom spaces mirrored the catalog themes exactly, communicating themes of self-surveillance, fragility, and empathy.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall: Self-surveillance in Real Girls' Bedrooms

As in ideal rooms, real girls' rooms prominently feature mirrors and emphasize self-surveillance. Ranging from small oval designs¹¹² to an adult-sized full length mirror,¹¹³ these artifacts surface seven times in real girls' bedroom designs, while only one real boy's bedroom displays a mirror.¹¹⁴ The mirrors are mounted to the walls at heights that can accommodate small girls, but also adults, allowing their functionality to extend beyond childhood, into adolescence and beyond. The transitionality of these pieces ensures that the training to view oneself in the mirror begins early and lasts into adulthood. From a pedagogical perspective, these mirrors speak to the ongoing training of girls to become women, women who have become indoctrinated with habits of self-surveillance.

In addition to mirrors, a fashion mannequin,¹¹⁵ repeated features of feminine silhouettes,¹¹⁶ and a seductive photograph of Marilyn Monroe¹¹⁷ (Figure 34) round out femininity's status as a state of looked-at-ness. Given a sample size of fifteen real girls' bedrooms, the fact that all of these themes of femininity surface speaks to their prevalence. The imposing representations of women as curvaceous and sexual reify that the strong theme of self-surveillance seen in ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms is not an isolated nor unrealistic phenomenon. With hourglass silhouettes saturating real girls' bedrooms, feminine beauty becomes one-dimensional. Female bodies are on display to discipline girls to fulfill their idealistic proportions. Also, the voyeurism inherent in displaying images of sexualized women silently instruct girls that the female body is an object to be displayed and exposed to the gaze of male and female viewers alike.



Figure 34.

Handle with Care: Fragility in Real Girls' Bedroom Spaces

An average of 5.8 pillows adorn each bed in girls' bedroom collections. Compared to the 2.5 pillow average of boys' spaces, these fluffy tokens of comfort demonstrate the perceptions of delicateness assigned to femininity. These pillows—combined with glittering chandeliers, crystal accents, and princess motifs—are symptomatic of a theme of fragility within real girls' bedroom spaces. Alluding to the Princess and the Pea narrative, the excessive quantity and overstuffed quality of these pillows stage a scene conducive to the realization of a fairytale. While ideal bedroom spaces glamorize narratives of luxury and excess, the real spaces pictured on RateMySpace.com and Cool-kids-rooms.com literally realize them. This realization process moves bedroom spaces from sites of pedagogy to physical environments which facilitate lifestyle processes and a girl's habitus. In this way, gender moves from a solely mental state to a physiological, embodied experience. The physical stimuli of luxurious feather-down shams and silky duvets facilitate a corporeal manifestation of femininity.

Likewise, femininity is realized through the plush area rugs found in real girls' bedrooms. Suggesting the fragility of girls' feet, thick, deluxe area rugs cushion more than half of real girls' bedrooms.¹¹⁸ While inhabiting these spaces, real girls are physically conditioned to naturalize softness, as their major paths of travel are paved with plushness. When compared to the floor coverings of real boys' bedrooms, the disparity is clear. Only one instance of an area rug surfaces in real boys' rooms, and the excepted rug is a low-profile rattan material, the polar opposite of comfort.¹¹⁹

While girls' sense of touch is being stimulated by the soft fibers of area rugs, their sight is bombarded with delicate, dainty choices of material. Sleek furniture lines swoop and twirl into

canopy beds (Figure 35, Figure 36),¹²⁰ willowy chandeliers dangle from the ceiling (Figure 37, Figure 38),¹²¹ and faux crystal lamps glisten under the soft light of their bulbs (Figure 39, Figure 40, Figure 41).¹²² Just as the ideal room collections did, these spaces utilize fragile materials in very gendered ways. Boys' bedrooms house hand-hewn wood bedroom furniture and bend thick metal piping into bed frames, embodying strength and resilience. The stark contrast between the materials illuminates the lifestyles assigned to each gender. Expected to embody finesse and grace, glass and crystal lamps and accents teach girls gentle handling techniques. Contrarily, hardy materials utilized in boys' bedroom spaces allow them to embrace roughness without consequence. In the ideal rooms of catalog pages, material choices wield only aesthetic consequence. However, in real spaces, fragile materials condition the behavior patterns of little girls through the imposing threat of shattering a lamp if ample delicateness is not used.



Figure 35.



Figure 36.

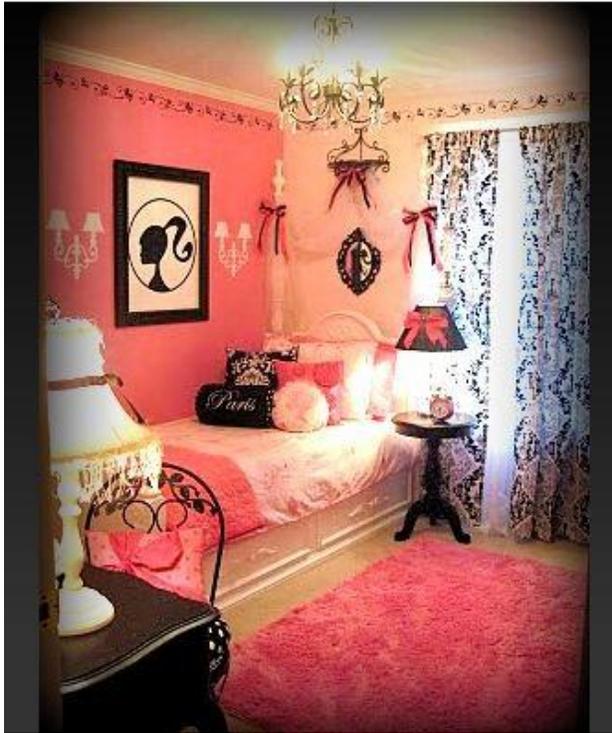


Figure 37.



Figure 38.



Figure 39.

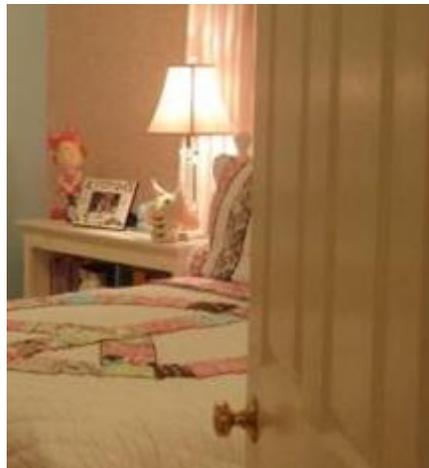


Figure 40.



Figure 41.

In a final reification of fragility, allusions to princesses surface within real girls' bedrooms. One of the bedroom collections is named a "Rapunzel Themed Bedroom" (Figure 42).¹²³ With a large wall mural narrating the romantic lantern release scene, and the warm glow of a lantern collection adding dimension to the scene, this bedroom is transformed into the

backdrop for a princess. Aiding the process of the princess getting into bed is a step stool, an item regularly featured in ideal bedroom spaces and seen in two real girls' bedrooms.¹²⁴ The storyline of Rapunzel hinges on a working-class little girl discovering she is a princess. In the same way, the spaces of these real girls' bedrooms help transport ordinary little girls into the enchantment of a fairytale. Princesses are referenced explicitly in one real girl's bedroom via a wooden "princess" sign, rendered in pink sequins and hanging from the post of a canopy bed.¹²⁵ Presumably labeling the bed as the resting spot of royalty, this sign once again realizes a fairytale narrative. The construction of real girls' bedrooms as fairytale scenes imposes serious gender implications, as it encourages girls to situate themselves in imaginary lands. The spaces conjured by princess nametags and murals of make-believe places are incongruent with the reality functioning outside these bedrooms' walls. Steeping girls' bedroom spaces in these themes creates environments that can only exist within the confines of the private sphere.



Figure 42.

Altogether, the theme of fragility within real girls' bedroom spaces impacts the habitus of their residents in two important ways. First, the sensory stimuli of delicateness lend fragility an embodied dimension. Via a physical experience of fragility, girls are conditioned to normalize gentleness. Second, fairytale themes orient girls toward life within the private sphere. By focusing only on the public sphere, girls are left under-conditioned for life in the public sphere, especially in comparison to their male counterparts. With performances of fragility infused into their very bodies and lifestyles, girls are trained by their physical environment to adopt passivity. Constrained by the newly-oriented meekness, the comfort and safety of the private sphere become the space where girls are conditioned to feel most comfortable. Pinned to the domestic sphere and naturalized into a docile role, these girls are being prepped for lives of submission at the very same moment boys are being groomed into dominators.

Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor[ly Dressed]: Empathy in Real Girls' Bedroom Spaces

Consistent with ideal girls' bedroom spaces, a theme of empathy permeates real girls' bedroom spaces. The repeated use of hearts as decoration provides the first clue that compassion is valued within these rooms. Second, the thoughtful placement and display of stuffed animals and dolls suggests that these items are well cared for and allotted human-like considerations. Together, these rhetorical clues allude to the personality conditioning occurring within these spaces.

Hearts litter girls' bedrooms on pillows,¹²⁶ on wall border patterns (Figure 43),¹²⁷ and in framed pieces of art.¹²⁸ The obvious connotation of hearts is such that these bedrooms radiate love. Perhaps inspired by this emotion, the dolls and stuffed animals of real girls' bedrooms are

treated with great care. Sometimes propped up on a bed amongst a pile of pillows (Figure 44),¹²⁹ sometimes nestled gingerly into a bean bag chair (Figure 45),¹³⁰ these plush critters are clearly well-loved. Dolls shown sleeping in a crib in one girl's bedroom are very reminiscent of the mothering scenes depicted in catalog images (Figure 46).¹³¹ In all of these instances, empathy for others (in this case, inanimate others) is made a prominent part of girls' personal spaces.



Figure 43.



Figure 44.



Figure 45



Figure 46

With no commercial motivation to advertise dolls or stuffed animals, the presence of these items within these spaces appears to be a genuine reflection of the lifestyle practices of the girls which inhabit them. At a young age, these girls are already demonstrating the care-taking tendencies that are attributed to femininity by social doxa. The performance of care-taking requires that girls' bodies interact with their physical spaces. Dolls and stuffed animals are decorative aspects of children's bedrooms. However, through the process of caring for these toys, girls are touching, interacting, and treating these objects as much more than pieces of fabric. By embodying care-taking practices, girls are adapting and adopting other-centered lifestyle patterns into their everyday repertoire. Thereby, care-taking tendencies become adopted into everyday aspects of feminine existence.

Real Girls' Bedrooms: Conclusion

Highlighting the same themes as ideal girls' bedrooms, real girls' spaces feature ideas of self-surveillance, fragility, and empathy. The material manifestation of each of these themes makes girls' bedrooms a site of learning and embodying gender roles. The materials, themes, and objects composing the physical space of real girls' bedrooms also create a place a gender conditioning. With each of the three themes intersecting beneath an umbrella of other-centeredness, this place trains girls to let their lives be molded by the needs of others. Additionally, girls' gendered lifestyle is sutured securely to the private sphere. In these ways, the materiality of real girls' bedrooms function not only aesthetically, but also anthropologically. Girls' real bedroom spaces communicate codes of gender normality. These messages render children's bedroom spaces as sites of pedagogical training for adulthood.

I'll Make a Man Out of You: Real Boys' Bedroom Spaces

Light sabers, jousting shields, and a paddle all pass for decoration in real boys' bedroom spaces. A far cry from the lace and silk drapings of girls' rooms, a canopy in a boy's room is composed of a red camping tent perched atop his bed frame. Overall, real boys' bedroom spaces find remarkable contrast against girls' bedrooms and remarkable homogeneity among the boys' room designs featured in retail catalogs. Once again, boys' rooms are associated with themes of athleticism and adventurousness and once again gesture to academic discipline.

We Are the Champions: Athleticism in Real Boys' Bedroom Spaces

The themes of real boys' bedroom spaces may as well be pages from a furniture retailer's catalog. Strong, unified gestures toward athleticism mimic the themes of sportiness found in ideal depictions of boys' spaces. Footballs surface in stuffed toys, as bean bag chairs, and as wall placards. Wall art features sayings like "Play Ball" and "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (Figure 47). All of these material goods represent the presence sports should play in a young boy's life. The bedspreads and wall décor available for purchase from home furnishing retailers appears in boys' bedroom spaces as blueprints for behavior patterns. Baseballs in a basket on a bookshelf are not only decorative, but also proscriptive of leisure activities. Imagination and make-believe are absent from these spaces, relegating boys to pastimes rooted in competition and domination.

Serving as proud tokens of athletic success, trophies also find a home in the bedrooms of real boys (Figure 48, Figure 49). Trophies' prominence in places of honor and attention in these spaces suggest that the shiny accomplishments are large sources of pride for the boys who earned them. In one of the collections, a solitary trophy and small bed lamp are the only decorations accessorizing the furniture tops. The scarcity of small accessories emphasizes the importance of the two items that were chosen to grace the bedside table: a reading light with obvious pragmatic benefits and a trophy whose value lies in its representation of athletic prowess (Figure 50). Like ideal boys' bedrooms, trophies in real bedrooms valorize domination within the realm of athletics. However, the distinct difference with real bedrooms is that real trophies displayed in these spaces are not props, they had to be earned. Thus, the trophies are extensions of these boys' selves. Like real girls' rooms, the integration of the self and the physical body that earned

the trophy tightens the relationship between identity and room design. These objects represent real boys' own sweat, struggles, and accomplishments.



Figure 47.



Figure 48.



Figure 49.



Figure 50.

In the first apparent divergence from ideal bedroom collections, real boys' rooms include a skateboarding theme as well as a surfing motif. Expanding the traditional football, baseball, basketball trifecta, as the new bedroom themes do, offers a heightened breadth of activities in which boys may invest their identities. Still, these new options only serve to widen slightly a narrow view of masculinity being linked to athleticism. Thus, real bedrooms remains a close reflection of the push for athleticism shown in ideal boys' spaces.

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Adventurousness in Real Boys' Bedroom Spaces

With room collections featuring beds shaped like camping tents (Figure 51)¹³² and faux cement-block walls (Figure 52),¹³³ a theme of adventurousness is not difficult to detect in real boys' bedroom spaces. Like their ideal counterparts, real boys' bedrooms are rich with depictions of adventure. Symbols of transportation shown in a Cars bedroom set,¹³⁴ hubcap wall décor,¹³⁵ sail boats,¹³⁶ and a fire-station themed bedroom (Figure 53)¹³⁷ all herald a freedom of movement and exploration tightly woven to masculinity, domination, and the public sphere. All of these decorative elements encourage real-life actions. These items encourage travel, exploration, and movement about the public sphere. By their very nature, images of cars and trains encourage the extension of masculinity to the world outside the bedroom walls. These vehicles represent a freedom of movement unique to boys' spaces and lifestyles. Paired with machines, boys' bodies can traverse cities, countries, and oceans, dominating any obstacles of nature put in their path.



Figure 51.

Continuing the trend of domination, the male body itself is also depicted as a machine. Once again displaying man as powerful, one room features a poster of an excessively muscled man in minimal clothing adjacent to the tagline “Tonight we dine in hell.”¹³⁸ The imposing depiction of a man ties physical stature to the power of command. The commanding tagline is not a request but an order, made non-negotiable by the strength of the speaker. This dominating image, together with murals of light sabers¹³⁹ and warriors’ shields (Figure 52),¹⁴⁰ render the reverence of domination a degree of explicitness not found in furniture retail catalogs.



Figure 52.



Figure 53.

Not Just a Pretty Face: Intellectualism in Real Boys' Spaces

Displays of books occur in approximately one-third of real boys' bedroom spaces.¹⁴¹ Conversely, out of a total of 15 girls' real bedrooms, only one space showed books.¹⁴² This disparity is symptomatic of a larger aesthetic trend of academics unique to boys' bedrooms. While real boys' rooms do not go as far as to frame the Periodic Table as ideal rooms did, these spaces are not free from academic pressure on boys. Bedding patterned with numbers and letters does manage to sneak into the collection¹⁴³ as the material which literally surrounds the boy as he sleeps. The specific instance of sheet patterns serves as an illustrative realization of gender expectations. Boys' sheets boast letters and numbers, symbols of real-world phenomena. Girls' sheets, however, feature polka dots and lace ruffles, neither of which can be related to activities valuable in the real world.

Altogether, the sampling of real boys' spaces does not exemplify the theme of intellectualism to the same degree as ideal spaces. Scenes of little boys in little cable-knit sweaters hard at work on their homework exist only in the pages of Restoration Hardware and not in the real lifestyles of these boys. Still, even with the prevalence of intellectualism diminished, the relationship between displays of academic intensity in real boys' spaces and real girls' spaces is consistent in its gender inequity.

Conclusion

Resonating loudly with depictions of ideal boys' bedroom spaces, real boys' rooms are associated with themes of athleticism and adventurousness and once again gesture to academic

discipline. Together, these themes glorify domination and a self-centeredness revolving around masculinity. Everything from posters of bulging muscles to rugged camping tent canopies ensures that these spaces foster masculine development that values strength and power. Unlike the home-oriented themes of girls' rooms, these spaces encourage exploration and conquest within the public sphere.

Real Bedrooms Subconclusion

Every Action [Figure] Has an Equal and Opposite Re-Action

The real bedroom spaces pictured on HGTV's RateMySpace.com and Cool-Kids-Rooms.com did not appear on their host sites by accident. All of the images on these sites are uploaded by users and provide a sampling of children's bedrooms from all across America. It appears that the primary motivation for uploading pictures to these online galleries is pride, as users often collect dozens of positive reactions to their spaces thanks to the sites' comment feature. When these images are viewed against the backdrop of ideal children's bedroom spaces, I contend that the pride which prompts the upload is rooted in these spaces' conformity to the spatial gender expectations carved out by social doxa and circulated via Restoration Hardware, Pottery Barn, and The Land of Nod's subscription lists.

The pedagogical functionality of ideal bedroom spaces, as seen in furniture retail catalogs, has real implications on the lifestyles and conditioning of children. Considering, once again, Bourdieu's theory of habitus, the objects surrounding these children in their foundational years of identity and lifestyle development actively and powerfully impact their performances of gender. It is not merely the themes that these objects represent which mold the way children enact their gender, it is their very materiality right down to fabric choice or thread count.

Thanks to the power of habitualization, the application of ideal themes to real-world spaces impacts the fundamental gender identity construction process for the children inhabiting these spaces. More than anything, an analysis of these spaces testifies that ideal depictions of children's bedrooms are closely correlated to the look and themes of real children's bedrooms. In other words, the look and feel imbued into furniture by social doxa when it dictates how girl

furniture and boy furniture should look has potent, real-world ramifications. So, as an example, if hyper-patriarchal values pollutes social doxa, that pollution gets reproduced first in furniture styles and designs and again in the lifestyle patterns of the furniture pieces' adolescent users. By these processes, children are trained to conform to doxic standards before they can even understand the profundity of the process, and whatever values are lauded by the doxic majority of a given society are reproduced, conditioned, and naturalized as the genetic order of things. Within this progression, ideal depictions of bedrooms serve pedagogical roles, instructing little girls and boys about how society believes boyness and girlness should be enacted.

Chapter 5

Identity for Sale: Conclusions and Implications

In 2010 alone, Pottery Barn Kids generated more than \$8.5 million in sales.¹⁴⁴ Together with other Pottery Barn affiliates, 2010's revenues netted more than \$3.5 billion.¹⁴⁵ The numbers testify that Americans are seeking out children's furniture retailers for their decorating needs, buying not only beds, dressers, and desks, but also the ideal gender performances entwined with each. In this conclusion I will return to my four research questions, answering them with insights from my texts as well as Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice. Next, I will explore the larger implications of these conclusions for children, their parents, and our society as a whole. All of these analyses support my overarching thesis for this project. I argue that the catalogs of these retailers function as pedagogical spaces, depicting for children and their parents ideal enactments of gender. The embodied relationship between the children and their material environment weaves gender habitus of girlness or boyness into their performance of everyday life. Via this process, children's bedroom spaces socialize gender lifestyle codes, making gendered performance appear to be the innate, natural order of things.

RQ1: How do depictions of ideal children's bedrooms communicate what it means to be a girl?

Ideal depictions of girls' bedrooms communicate girlness as a state of other-centeredness. Empathy for both nature and other people, fragility shrouded in an ongoing princess narrative, and self-surveillance reflected in mirrors and jewelry all contribute to a very limiting depiction of

how a girl should act and think. Bourdieu outlines symbolic capital as “the symbolic component of goods which demonstrate the aesthetic ‘taste’ of the owner,”¹⁴⁶ and the symbolism present within ideal depictions of girls’ bedroom carries heavy symbolic capital. Within these collections, the taste of girls is painted as extremely other-centered. Illuminated by Berger’s notion of self-surveillance, mirrors and the constant implied looked-at-ness of the male gaze positions women as being relentlessly concerned with their appearance (read: their appearance to others). Tokens of fashion mannequins, jewelry, and tutus all imply adornment and display. Whether it be a dance routine, or simply dressing up in fussy ribbons and dresses, these objects featured in girls’ rooms target the amplification of a young girls’ self-awareness. Self-consciousness follows suit, as scenes of girls taking long looks in the mirror normalize self-surveillance within ideal depictions of girls’ bedrooms.

The symbolic capital grouped broadly as conditioning fragility also brings other-centeredness to the forefront in ideal depictions of girls’ bedrooms. Dress-up and fairy tale escapism all involve a girl shifting focus and pride in self to pride in emulating an other, usually an imaginary other. Even the smallest detail of including step stools in only girls’ bedroom collections serves to shift agency and accomplishment from self to an external source, in this case, inanimate wooden stools. Dress-up is made possible by the use of external garments and adornments. Rather than merely imagining how a princess might live or writing a story about it, these girls are using material goods to help draw themselves closer to their goals of becoming a princess.

Thirdly, empathy for nature and for others communicates other-centeredness. The ideal lifestyles of girls painted by the catalogs are consistently depicted as valued in relationship to something else. The distinct prevalence of tokens of nature imply that girls’ tastes align

harmoniously with the birds, trees, and flowers of the earth. Via these images, girls are instructed to cooperate with nature rather than overpower it. Rather than being concerned with the machinery undergirding the trains and planes and travel emphasized in boys' rooms, these ideal depictions of girls suggest a relationship of mutuality with—rather than authority over—nature. Finally, an elevation of self over others becomes pristinely clear in depictions of girls' empathetic interactions with dolls, kitchen sets, and play houses. Girls are repeatedly shown in roles of service to others, pouring tea to inanimate objects or hanging out the laundry of their dolls. As the composition and taglines of these images suggest, the service to others pictured in these catalogs are preparation for lives as adult mothers, caretakers, and home-makers.

Ultimately, the clear pedagogical intent of ideal girls' bedrooms ensures that their communication of what it means to be a girl is inseparable from a communication of what it means to be a good woman. Formative childhood years spent tending to the laundry needs of dolls and practicing being beautiful for the male gaze condition lifestyle habits that set the cadence for a lifetime of gender performance.

RQ2: How do depictions of ideal children's bedrooms communicate what it means to be a boy?

Ideal depictions of boys' bedrooms communicate that boyhood revolves around a Euro-American masculinity rooted in domination. Three major trends saturate ideal boys' bedroom collections: athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism. While girls' spaces emphasize other-centeredness, boys' spaces feature the domination and valuation of the masculine self.

In his book *Masculine Domination*, Bourdieu cites colonialism and conquest as influences on masculinity. He writes, "The conquest and settlement of America in the 16th

century was infused with complex and exaggerated constructions of masculinity....These actions translated into an ideology of triumph and masculinity as a politics of extermination and exclusion.”¹⁴⁷ This rhetorical connection between historic colonialism and modern masculinity illuminates the role of Whiteness within ideal boys’ bedroom spaces. Whiteness, as theorized by Nakayama and Krizek, exists in a state of presumed invisibility.¹⁴⁸ The children’s furniture catalogs certainly demonstrate a presumed White mentality with regard to their treatment of domination. The idealization of domination, exploration, and conquest as themes within these spaces make sense only in the context of the colonizer, not the colonized. Thus, the constant repetition and valuation of domination filters all of the spaces’ ideal masculinity through a lens of Whiteness.

With the domination of colonialism still undergirding modern masculinity, it seems no surprise that the bedrooms which serve as training grounds for manhood would be ripe with symbolic domination. A clear theme of athleticism within ideal boys’ bedrooms reveals the first laudation of masculine dominance. The competitive, group dynamics of football, basketball, and baseball are infused into their symbolic representations within these spaces. The adorning of the walls with famous athletes bypasses mediocrity in athletics and instead celebrates the best of the best. Trophies lining boys’ bookshelves and nightstands become symbols of victory, specifically victory over others. The very nature of competition requires that for every winner there are losers; for every domination there is a party who is dominated.

The second theme of ideal boys’ bedroom spaces, adventurousness, also encourages domination. While girls’ spaces encourage reverence for Mother Nature, boys’ spaces feature steam shovel bedding and duvets crisscrossed with roads, bridges, and man-made machines. Domination, this time over the feminized “Mother” Earth, once again crowns masculinity as a

source of unstoppable power. Rivers, oceans, and mountains are no match for human-made machines (not surprisingly known in common parlance as *manmade* machines). Further, words like exploration, heroism, and discovery that appear frequently on pillow shams and wall hangings emphasize that adventure has a pointed goal: conquering foreign landscapes or peoples. The self-glorification in the rhetoric of these decorations is in direct opposition to the other-centeredness of ideal girls' spaces.

The glorification of masculine intellect composes the third theme of ideal boys' bedroom spaces. Wall décor displaying the Periodic Table and repeated portrayals of boys working feverishly behind desks exists in stark contrast to the light-hearted, whimsical positionality of girls in their bedroom spaces. This difference reveals a rhetorical depiction of the presumed academic vantage points of boys and girls. Stripped down to their essence, these images show boys enacting academic discipline and girls enacting aesthetic discipline.

Physically, boys' bedroom spaces are private sphere phenomena. However, the themes present in ideal depictions of boys' bedrooms resound loudly of public life. Sports are valued as a competitive, group experience. Adventure is deemed successful by its conquering of otherness. Intellectualism is career training, a very public-sphere undertaking. All of these themes condition relationships with others to operate according to a dominator:dominated script. Fundamentally, masculinity is cast in the domination role, relegating femininity (whether in the form of women or the Earth) to a state of subordination. Thereby, women are defined by their relationship to men, as the gender dominated by men. Overall, the bedroom spaces of Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod are marked with the pedagogical intent of training boys to be men. These spaces depict a Euro-American masculinity

devoted to realism, public life, domination of others, and individual agency through themes of athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism.

RQ3 and RQ4: How do real children's bedrooms construct gender? How do real children's bedrooms compare to ideal children's bedrooms?

By and large, real bedroom spaces closely mirror the ideal bedroom spaces constructed in the catalogs of Restoration Hardware Kids, Pottery Barn Kids, and The Land of Nod. The major themes of real girls' spaces and real boys' spaces are identical to their ideal counterparts. Though some of the nuances of each theme vary in real bedroom spaces, the overarching similarities remain strong and constant. Real girls' rooms once again exhibit fragility, self-surveillance, and empathy, combining to emphasize other-centeredness. Real boys' rooms valorize domination through themes of athleticism, adventure, and intellectualism.

The striking resemblance of real rooms to ideal rooms lends validity to this project, as the relationship reveals how the powerful force of social doxa dictates gendered expectations of children's bedrooms in ideal and real spaces alike. The hyper-masculine and hyper-feminine characteristics of ideal spaces cannot be written off as exaggerations of gender doxa used to sell furniture, because real bedroom spaces demonstrate the very same qualities. As sites of pedagogy, both ideal and real children's bedrooms subtly instruct real parents and children what gender should look like and how it should be performed.

Bourdieu's theory of practice recognizes that things create us as much as we create things. Everything from skinny jeans to hair scrunchies regulates children's bodies. However, even items that are not a part of the physical body discipline its performance, and bedroom

spaces fall into this category. Bourdieu's idea of habitus holds that the types of furniture pieces, artwork, materials, and colors of the physical environment teach the codes of comfort, gender performance, and attitudes that shape a child's identity. If a little girl is socialized to surround herself with lace and pastel colors, and her brother is taught to favor sturdy, neutral fabrics, these preferences do not end at the threshold of their bedroom or their home, but become naturalized into everyday patterns of behavior. Therefore, by studying the symbolic capital of the homespace, one can begin to see how the seemingly banal physical environment of everyday life can exercise powerful metaphysical conditioning.

The consistency present within ideal and real boys' spaces and ideal and real girls' spaces reveals that the gendering of these spaces is not merely a strategy to sell more bed frames and lamps. Rather, both these ideal and real spaces serve as manifestations of a larger phenomenon, social doxa. Social doxa governs the performance of everyday American life; however, in its theoretical form it is immaterial. Like the image produced when a person looks in a mirror, social doxa can only be seen by its reflection in material goods. Therefore, by studying the nuances of gender in the material space of children's bedrooms, the contours of American social doxa are revealed.

Ideal and real children's bedroom spaces both resound clear and consistent gender codes that perpetuate the socialization of other-centeredness in females and self-centeredness in males. Themes of fragility, self-surveillance, and empathy represent expectations placed on females not only in their childhood bedrooms, but throughout their participation in U.S. American culture. Similarly, boys' childhoods are forged in expectations of athleticism, adventurousness, and intellectualism that continue to direct their adult lives. In the grand scheme of American social

doxa, children's bedrooms serve as sites of learning and training where girls are ushered into the socially doxic patterns of womanhood, and boys into manhood.

Certainly, Restoration Hardware, Pottery Barn, and Crate & Barrel release catalogs with the intention of boosting sales revenue, not as an attempt to perpetuate gender expectations. At the bottom line, these furniture retailers' primary concern is to sell the products that consumers want to buy. Like social doxa, the perception of what consumers want is best reflected in the material goods they buy. Billions of dollars of revenue from these companies announce clearly that what sells in America is a pattern of frilly girls' rooms and serious boys' rooms that social doxa has defined as comfortable and natural.

In real bedrooms spaces, social doxa is affirmed by instance after instance of masculine dominance and feminine subservience. Regardless of whether the furniture in the bedrooms featured on HGTV's RateMySpace.com or Cool-kids-rooms.com was actually purchased from any of the catalogs I examined, the doxic implications are the same. Whether from Target, IKEA, or any of the retailers I interrogated, the real bedroom spaces surfaced the very same themes. Therefore, I can conclude that the distinct gender expectations for boys and girls are bigger than any website or retailer; they are physical manifestations of larger social doxa.

Addressing this phenomenon, Bourdieu writes,

The schemes of the sexually characterized habitus are not 'fundamental structuring alternatives,' as Goffman would have it, but historical and highly differentiated structures, arising from a social space that is itself highly differentiated, which reproduce themselves through learning processes linked to the experience that agents have of the structures of these spaces.¹⁴⁹

Here, Bourdieu acknowledges that gender is socially constructed and creates doxic norms.

These norms are revealed in depictions of children's bedroom spaces. By examining what sells in catalogs and in real American homes, it becomes clear that American consumers are buying

not only lamps, linens, and dressers, but also sharp prescriptions of gender identity. Once in the home, these items transmit doxic codes into the very objects and spaces which help shape our habituses and our lives.

Catalogs in Context: Situating My Project in Communication Studies

Building upon multiple strands of communication research, my project intersects theories and theorists in novel ways, allowing for expanded understanding of current research as well as the foundation for a new direction of communication studies. Contributing to communication studies' understanding of spatiality, my project builds on studies of public memorials as well as investigations of the rhetoric of everyday life. In both of these cases, scholars seek to uncover implicit communicative messages and ascertain their ideological implications. Likewise, my investigation of children's bedrooms sought to uncover surreptitious gender expectations in texts that may not traditionally be deemed communicative. Further, my study brings previously public-sphere centered research into the space of the home. Everydayness seems very well-situated within the context of the home, as the walls, hallways, and closets of our houses and apartments facilitate the enactment of our daily lives. To me, children's bedroom spaces provide a particularly rich and unique locus of study, as they represent a conglomeration of parents' desires and the desires of their child. Considering the doxic pressures surfaced earlier, gender expectations define how a boy and girl should act and also how a parent should act with regard to their child's cultivation of appropriate gender traits. With social doxa making it clear that a boy should perform one way and a girl another, parents are responsible for creating an adequately girly or boyish space. With this rich interplay informing children's bedrooms, spatiality takes on

an added dimension. Whereas an adult is wholly responsible for the design of their own bedroom or living room spaces, children do not possess the same degree of control over their spaces in the home due to obvious financial constraints. For this reason, the potential for future research into identity and children's home spaces promises unique perspectives on identity negotiation between parents and their children.

In addition to my text, my employment of Bourdieu's theory of practice as my theoretical touchstone is a departure from past communication studies research. Bourdieu's focus on the everyday as well as his frequent interrogation of the home space makes his theories a valuable addition to the study of space, especially a study of interior design spaces. His ideas of symbolic capital and taste provide an excellent vocabulary for doing the work of rhetorical analysis, as they facilitate an investigation of messages functioning below the surface level.

Finally, this thesis contributes to communication studies' examination of gender. By analyzing the reflection of social doxa in depictions of children's bedroom spaces, I was able to illuminate the American social doxa guiding gender performances. Via this illumination, the undertones of Euro-American colonialism begin to emerge in a deep conflation of masculinity with power and domination. Further, the construction of femininity as other-centered and submissive and masculinity as self-centered and dominant paints male and female as social counterparts. This doxic pairing fuels an American culture of heteronormativity, and subsequent homophobia.

Altogether, my project serves as an intersection of space, gender, and the home which complements existing research and opens up avenues for new research. My thesis expands the scope of spatial rhetorical criticism by moving from the public sphere to the private sphere. Second, my analysis entangles childhood as a new, unexplored dimension of the scholarly

conversation surrounding rhetoric and everyday life. Third, I introduce Bourdieu's theories of habitus, capital, and taste into the repertoire of critical tools available to rhetoricians. Finally, my project enlightens the scholarly understanding of gender and gender relations, revealing America's prevailing state of heteronormativity.

Limitations of this Study

As with any study, some limitations apply to my current study and offer rich opportunity for future research. One significant limitation of my study is that the "real" spaces I analyzed were still images of spaces, rather than the actual environments themselves. In future research, having the researcher be present in random selections of real children's bedrooms would offer a more pure picture of real children's bedroom spaces. Also, my study does not take on the socio-economic residue attached to these bedroom spaces or catalogs, as each of these retailers come with hefty price tags. An interesting continuation of this study would be to give in-depth consideration to socio-economic status and its role in shaping these pedagogical spaces of gender.

Conclusion

The discourses of both ideal and real depictions of children's bedrooms serve as vehicles for social doxa. Catalogs convey not just what an ideal boy's bedroom or girl's bedroom looks like, but what an ideal boy or girl looks and acts like. Thus, children's bedrooms operate as pedagogical sites of gender. Furniture pieces and decorative accessories facilitate disparate motions, lifestyles, and habits which construct disparate gender identities. In this thesis I argue

that both ideal and real depictions of children's bedroom spaces function as pedagogical spaces, reflecting the doxic expectations of gender and facilitating accordant enactments of masculinity or femininity. The embodied relationship between the children and their material environment weaves the gender habitus of girlness or boyness into their performance of everyday life. Via this process, children's bedroom spaces socialize gender lifestyle codes, and perpetuate the dominant social codes of gender. These spaces are not benign backdrops for life; they are fundamental contributors to the construction of young people's identity. Children's bedrooms are sites of learning—learning where the Tooth Fairy collects her loot, learning ghost stories from neighborhood sleepover parties, and most of all, learning how to be a boy or how to be a girl.

Notes

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- ¹⁰⁷ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 63.
- ¹⁰⁸ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 99-100.
- ¹⁰⁹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 75.
- ¹¹⁰ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 42.
- ¹¹¹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 21.

¹¹² “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” HGTV RateMySpace. Picture 9.
<http://www.roomzaar.com/rate-my-space/Girls-Rooms/gallery.esi?sortOrder=4> (accessed January 12, 2012).

¹¹³ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7.

¹¹⁴ “Your Designs [Boy].” Cool-Kids’-Rooms. Picture 13. <http://www.cool-kids-rooms.com/decorating-ideas-for-kids-rooms.html> (accessed February 15, 2012).

¹¹⁵ “Your Designs [Girl].” Cool-Kids’-Rooms. Picture 11. <http://www.cool-kids-rooms.com/decorating-ideas-for-kids-rooms.html> (accessed February 15, 2012).

¹¹⁶ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 6; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 11.

¹¹⁷ “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 11.

¹¹⁸ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 3; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 4; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 6; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 9; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 11.; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 14; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 15.

¹¹⁹ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” HGTV RateMySpace. Picture 8.
<http://www.roomzaar.com/rate-my-space/Boys-Rooms/gallery.esi?sortOrder=4> (accessed January 12, 2012).

¹²⁰ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 1; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 13; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 14.

¹²¹ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 2; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 5; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 6; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 9; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 12; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 14; “Your Designs [Girl].” Picture 15.

¹²² “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 1; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 2; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 6; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 8; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 9.

¹²³ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 3.

¹²⁴ See also: “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10.

¹²⁵ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10.

¹²⁶ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 1; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 4; “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10.

¹²⁷ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 10.

¹²⁸ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 9.

¹²⁹ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 5.

¹³⁰ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 4.

¹³¹ “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7.

¹³² “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 9.

¹³³ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7.

¹³⁴ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 2.

¹³⁵ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 2.

¹³⁶ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 6; “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 8.

¹³⁷ “Your Designs [Boy].” Picture 15.

¹³⁸ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7.

¹³⁹ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 5.

¹⁴⁰ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 7.

¹⁴¹ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 3; “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 4; “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 8; “Your Designs [Boy].” Picture 11.

¹⁴² “Top Rated Girls’ Bedrooms.” Picture 4.

¹⁴³ “Top Rated Boys’ Bedrooms.” Picture 5.

¹⁴⁴ Retail Sails, Williams-Sonoma, Inc. Profile, <http://retailsails.com/monthly-sales-summary/wsm/> (accessed March 1, 2012).

¹⁴⁵ Retail Sails.

¹⁴⁶ Dovey, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 135.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 81 (1995), 300.

¹⁴⁹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 104.

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