

# Art exhibit gives teen girls canvas for expression

## Show at Alverno College deals with challenges of growing up

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A group of girls at Veritas High School on Milwaukee's south side had a lot on their minds Thursday.

They wondered what to do when grown men catcall them on the streets. And whether the gyrating, barely dressed women in music videos actually enjoy their jobs. And when, they asked, had Halloween become a time for little girls to cake on makeup, shorten their skirts and look sexy?

"Whatever happened to dressing your kid up as a pumpkin?" said Rachel Daniels, a sophomore.

Daniels and her classmates will join teens from around the city today at the opening

reception for Project Girl, an art exhibit geared toward raising girls' self-esteem and expanding their definitions of beauty.

The exhibit at Alverno College includes the work of professional artists and local girls. Today's event opens with a workshop where girls can address the questions they ask themselves every day.

The key is getting teens to think about whether girlhood as it's presented on television and in magazines mirrors how they think of themselves, said Kelly Parks Snider, a Madison-based artist who helped start Project Girl three years ago.

Snider, 43, said she was flipping through yearbooks

### PROJECT GIRL

**What:** Workshop for middle and high school girls.

**When:** 4 to 6 p.m. today at the Alverno College Conference Center and Rotunda, 3400 S. 43rd St. A reception follows in the Art and Cultures Gallery from 6 to 8 p.m.

**Follow-up meeting:** A daylong Project Girl conference on identity and the media is scheduled for Wednesday at Alverno College.

**For information:** Call (414) 382-6149.

from her own school days when she started comparing her childhood with her three daughters', who were in middle school at the time.

She didn't remember feeling dissatisfied with her weight, nor did she remember having much trouble getting along with other girls.

Much of the difference, she decided, was media. Kids weren't marketed to as much in her day, Snider said.

"The advertisers have bypassed parents and are targeting kids and adolescents," she said.

Snider and artist Jane Bartell gathered a group of teens in Madison and pulled in the research of Lyn Mikel Brown, an education professor at Colby College who writes about girls and the media, and the Boston-based Campaign for a Commercial-Free Childhood.

Project Girl has since traveled around the country asking girls to reflect on their lives and make art that often ends up in the show.

"They create art that's an expression of their ideas and their culture," Snider said. "Instead of just being talked at, they're part of the reform."

Chelsey Gonzalez, a sopho-

more at Veritas, has a painted plaster bowl on display that uses the phases of the moon as a metaphor for the different stages of a woman's life. Vaniece Allen, a senior, has a

painting in the show called "Anatomy." A brain and spinal cord, not cleavage or brand names, are the focus.

"I thought it's what's inside that counts," Allen said.

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